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# Future Frameworks: Towards a Strategic Plan for the Visual Arts and Museum Sector in NSW

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# **FUTURE FRAMEWORKS**

**TOWARDS A STRATEGIC PLAN  
FOR  
THE VISUAL ARTS  
AND MUSEUM SECTOR  
IN NSW**

**RESEARCH REPORT 2011**

**Amanda Lawson  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2009 review of Museums and Galleries NSW (M&G NSW) recommended the development of a strategic plan for the sector. Implementing this key recommendation, Arts NSW commissioned Professor Amanda Lawson to undertake strategic research, a needs analysis and external consultation to inform the planning process.

The research was underpinned by a set of principles that reflect current trends and best practice in museum and gallery management. These emphasise the significance of living collections and heritage, creative programming, community engagement, technology and the importance of multiple interpretations and perspectives coexisting and breathing life into collections.

The research methodology included a desk review of state, national and international trends, issues and best practice, commissioned research on information communication technology as well as an extensive consultation process with sector stakeholders (including the use of electronic and hardcopy survey, key interviews with sector experts, a dedicated strategic planning workshop).

The findings highlight the need to develop the strategic plan within a management framework that prioritises sustainability, cultural innovation, and community participation, especially in regional and remote NSW. Further, stakeholders consistently articulated a vision for the sector that would ‘inspire, engage and connect communities through arts, culture and heritage’.

Seven areas of priority were identified by the research and it is recommended Arts NSW consider these when developing the strategic plan for the sector. These areas generally fall within three categories: policy and planning; key operational principles; and strategic approaches for the practical advancement of the sector.

The view that broad, government-led cultural policy, which provides an overarching vision and holistic approach across arts and heritage, will benefit the museums and galleries sector underpins this report. Such a policy should build on the current Arts NSW Corporate Plan and its key goals of cultural leadership, participation, innovation and place-making. Further, the development of a strategic plan for the NSW museum and gallery sector is widely supported. This strategic plan for NSW should fit into such a state-wide cultural policy and, to be an effective foundation for the future, will need to encompass the whole sector – from the large cultural institutions, to regional museums and galleries, to smaller local museums or keeping places. A specific monitoring and evaluation process for the implementation of the plan will provide credibility and some surety to the sector.

There are three key principles that need to be practically supported within the strategic plan: community engagement and social inclusion, professional development and Aboriginal culture and participation.

The NSW museum and gallery sector’s perception of itself in the early twenty-first century is strongly aligned with contemporary international theories of social inclusion and interactive and collaborative relationships. Many of those consulted during the research phase emphasised the need for community engagement, access, diversity and social inclusion. As such, it is currently an ideal time to prioritise creative approaches to access, equity and diversity in the sector. At the same time there is an extremely high number of volunteer managed museums. This reflects an important component of community engagement and important contribution to Australia’s social capital. Consequently, the volunteer-run community museums and galleries need to be imagined and managed within a new context: one of *community engagement and social inclusion*.

Professional development is the backbone of a healthy sector and its ability to sustainably manage living collections and cultural heritage, foster innovation, support artists and ensure community participation. There are also several components of professional development support that require development. In particular the need to balance the geographical spread of professional resources across the state and boost reciprocal partnerships between the major cultural institutions and regional museums and galleries is of high importance. A similar importance is the development of explicit career development pathways. The positive impact residencies, fellowships and mentorships can have on an individual's career and the culture of an organisation is recognised and valued across the sector. These tools, alongside a culture of experimentation, cross-fertilisation and creative curatorial programming and general professionalism within and across the sector all need to be valued and fostered. Artist-run initiatives (ARIs), a significant part of the sector which is also volunteer-driven, but which fosters early career artists and arts managers, and provides important professional development opportunities, need to be supported within this context. ARIs are also an important source of innovation in artistic practice, creative programming and community engagement; their operations require continued support if they are to be sustained, while recognizing that they may be fluid and changeable entities.

The NSW museum and gallery sector operates in Aboriginal Country and every institution, no matter how large or small, has local Aboriginal cultures and histories as a result of its position in a specific cultural landscape. It is vital then, to recognise the current and potential role of keeping places and museums and galleries to NSW Aboriginal communities and how the sector can support and demonstrate the value of Aboriginal cultural development. In addition, the participation of Aboriginal people through professional development opportunities, cadetships and career pathways are a high priority for Aboriginal communities and consequently should be for the sector as whole.

The proposed strategic initiatives identified by the museums and galleries community are: ICT, the development and support of regional centres of excellence and the mapping, assessment and valuing of living collections.

Technology is vital to the future of the NSW museum and gallery sector and requires both strategic prioritisation and new investment in regional areas, in particular. For a 21<sup>st</sup> century museum, gallery or creative arts sector to be successful, it requires a strong technological infrastructure, an understanding and acceptance of the central role of technology in our society, and a culture of experimentation and early adaptors. The sector must act swiftly to take up the new opportunities and tools presented by the Australian Government's major infrastructure investment and rollout of the National Broadband Network. In addition, the sector needs to maximise technological opportunities to develop new and innovative models for providing long-term collections management and access as well as the creation, attraction and retention of new global communities and audiences through on line and interactive engagement platforms.

Creating a strategy and future for the sector based on a 'sustainable management and community innovation and participation framework', requires a structural re-think of local government, state and federal relationships to NSW museums and galleries. Although regional centres and hubs have long been discussed and have considerable support, including one or two key examples already in place, the practical and systematic implementation of this idea *across the sector* has not taken place. This report discusses how a commitment to supporting regional and remote NSW galleries and museums to develop to realise their full potential as creative, cultural and economic forces might include support for a network of regional centres of excellence. The centres should be tailored around strengths in each region and focus on capacity building in the delivery of services in collection management, curatorial, Aboriginal cultural heritage, conservation, community engagement and audience development. This network would facilitate a coordinated approach to the sector from a range of bodies and agencies including funding sources thus ensuring regional

and remote communities have viable access to cultural heritage, professional services and programs. It builds on, rather than replicates, the current Regional Museum Officer and Regional Arts Development Officer structures.

The final area of strategic importance is the concept of *living collections and heritage*. Key principles of this concept include: the preservation, conservation and curatorial interpretation of collections and heritage are inter-twined; the sometimes-conflicting views of preservation and continued use of an object by an individual or community are managed through an established and accepted standard; collection growth occurs at a sustainable rate; and multiple interpretations and perspectives are encouraged through a range of programs, including the work that artists and creator communities can initiate in. While there are various other important issues facing the sector, the need to identify, assess and locate significant collections and heritage through a coordinated strategy is a fundamental and preliminary step in securing the sector's future.

## **Conclusion**

This report provides not only a set of analytical proposals and recommendations to assist Arts NSW in developing its strategic plan for the museum and gallery sector in NSW, but also valuable research data, both statistical and qualitative. These data may now be considered by the sector as a resource as it works with Arts NSW to shape its future. M&G NSW has a key role to play in partnership with Arts NSW in developing and implementing any new strategic direction for the sector; equally important are the major resources of the state cultural institutions. Capacity building approaches for these entities is an important part of shaping the future of the sector. There is no doubt that the museums and galleries of NSW have extraordinary potential to develop their already considerable place in the Australian cultural landscape: the challenge now is to work strategically and in collaboration in a framework that acknowledges the opportunities and possibilities that are available in the current climate to achieve that potential.

## INTRODUCTION

The museums and galleries of NSW represent an extraordinarily diverse and diffuse sector, one that is almost impossible to capture in any one snapshot. Setting out to undertake the broad range of research which forms the basis for the recommendations and analysis in this report, it seemed initially that to find common ground might be an impossible task. Indeed, long-held views that one or another aspect of the sector receives more support and patronage were articulated at the start by various people. However, by the end of the process it has become clear that no matter the size, ambitions, activities or location of the museums and galleries of the state, they are united in a passionate commitment to the arts and culture of NSW, a commitment that encompasses equitable access, sharing resources, valuing innovation and securing history – a commitment that has communities at its heart, however those communities might define themselves. This was evident in the many consultations and planning sessions that were an integral part of the research process.

In keeping with these views, and with current trends and best practice in Australia and internationally in the museum and gallery sector, the recommendations of this report are underpinned by a set of principles emphasising the importance of:

- Living collections and heritage
- Curatorial interpretation as the key to collections management
- Creative programs driving audience development and being critical to sustaining artists and a culture of innovation
- Multiple interpretations and perspectives coexisting and breathing life into collections – for example, artist residencies, museum theatre, personal memories
- Arts NSW having a sophisticated understanding of the key differences and similarities between museums, galleries and heritage sites, and understanding how the sector intersects with visual arts, heritage and a range of other disciplines.

The implementation of these principles is reflected in a management framework that prioritises sustainable practice, and community innovation and participation. Within this framework seven areas have been identified as having strategic importance and this report considers them a priority. They are:

1. Cultural Policy and Planning
2. Community engagement
3. Professional development
4. NSW Aboriginal cultures and Indigenous participation
5. Information and Communication Technology
6. A network of regional centres of excellence
7. Living collections and heritage

The analysis and recommendations or proposals suggested in each priority area have been mapped against a future vision framework, as a means of testing the ideas that the report was putting forward. This will form a valuable checklist for the next stages of the strategic planning, implementation and review.

## Background

Arts NSW proposes to develop a strategic plan for the Visual Arts and Museum Sector in NSW. In doing so, Arts NSW is implementing one of the key recommendations of the 2009 review of Museums and Galleries NSW (M&G NSW) conducted by Peter Watts and Leapfrog Research. The review noted that: given the growth of the sector and changes in its environment in the past ten years; the increasingly strategic approach of Arts NSW to arts and cultural development in the state; and the substantially increased engagement of local government, it would be appropriate to develop a long term strategic plan for the small to medium museum and gallery sector throughout NSW.

In order to inform the strategic plan, Arts NSW commissioned Professor Amanda Lawson as a consultant to undertake strategic research, needs analysis and external consultation in the sector. This information would underpin preliminary recommendations about how the sector can best be supported. Professor Lawson and a project team conducted this consultancy between February and August 2011.

## Acknowledgements

The project team acknowledges the extensive and invaluable support of M&G NSW throughout the project, particularly Mr Michael Rolfe, Mr Michael Huxley and Ms Sarah Jane Rennie. M&G NSW gave us access to its research materials, key sector contacts and advisory groups, communication via its email and mailing lists, and advised on the survey. It also hosted the Strategic Planning Workshop and various other consultative events. Ms Alex Bowen, Ms Grainne Brunson and Ms Gabrielle Eade from Arts NSW provided advice and valuable feedback at every stage. We thank the many individuals and organisations connected to the sector that have made written contributions, attended the Workshop and other events, completed the survey and participated in telephone interviews. The passion, commitment and skill of these individuals and their colleagues across the state are what drive the sector forward, in all its diversity.

## Project team

<b>Project leader</b>	Professor Amanda Lawson
<b>Project team</b>	Ms Deborah Ely Professor Shirley Leitch Ms Amanda Reynolds
<b>Project management</b>	Ms Sally Stevenson
<b>Research assistant</b>	Ms Eliza de Vet
<b>Expert contractors</b>	Ms Alice Davies Mr Peter Goodall

## Project Approach and Data

### Literature review

A literature review was undertaken exploring issues and trends impacting on the sector in Australia and internationally. The results of this review, taken in conjunction with M&G NSW's report *Identified Issues for the Museum and Gallery Sector in NSW*, were used to develop a Summary of Issues, which formed the basis for the survey questionnaire.

### Survey

An electronic and hardcopy survey was conducted via Survey Monkey and mail, with 600 surveys sent out via M&G NSW. The survey was developed and analysed in consultation with Ms Alice Davies, Marketing Consultant, who provided a qualitative Survey Report on the results, which is published alongside this report on the Arts NSW website.

## **Strategic Planning Workshop**

In order to ensure that broad consultation took place during the consultancy process, a Strategic Planning Workshop was held on 20 June at M&G NSW, attended by thirty five participants from across the sector and facilitated by Professor Shirley Leitch. The Survey results were presented and ideas for the future development and sustainability of the sector were canvassed via a process that developed shared goals and priorities and focused on strategies for a sustainable future.

## **Small Galleries and Museums of NSW: Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Assistance**

ICT has had an ever-growing and rapid impact on the sector over the past ten years and this will continue into the foreseeable future, both for collection management and accessing audiences. Taking into account evidence from the Survey that shows that this is an area that smaller museums and galleries are grappling to come to terms with fully, the project team decided that ICT required special attention. ICT expert Mr Peter Goodall was commissioned to analyse and advise on possible approaches to ICT assistance for the sector, with a particular focus on collections management.

## **Expert Consultation**

A list of key individuals was drawn up for one-on-one expert consultation. Selection was on the basis of either strategic sector positioning or expert knowledge. Sixteen telephone interviews were conducted, the majority by Amanda Reynolds and each focused on three main questions:

- what are the key issues facing the sector?
- what are the key qualities of a healthy sector?
- what are your ambitions for the future? (if no resource constraints existed what would you want to see happen?)

Contributions from the following individuals were an important aspect of the development of the initiatives proposed in this report:

Lesley Always, Director, Asialink

Anthony Bond, Assistant Director, Curatorial Services, Art Gallery of NSW

Dawn Casey, Director, Powerhouse Museum

Ross Gibson, Professor of Contemporary Arts, Sydney College of the Arts

Liz Gilroy, Regional Museum Curator, Glasshouse Arts, Conference & Entertainment Centre

Lisa Havilah, Director, Carriageworks

Frank Howarth, Director, Australian Museum

Jonathon Jones, Curator, Art Gallery of NSW

John Kirkman, CEO, Penrith Performing and Visual Arts

Elizabeth Ann Mcgregor, Director, Museum of Contemporary Art

Dr Jude Philip, Senior Curator, Macleay Museum

Rebecca Pinchin, Regional Services Coordinator, Powerhouse Museum

Steve Pozel, Director, Object: Australian Centre for Design

Aaron Seeto, Director, 4A Centre for Contemporary Art

Dave Sherley, General Manager, Bathurst Regional Council

Maisy Stapleton, Principal, Maisy Stapleton Projects

## **Case studies**

Six case studies were undertaken to map, in detail, how diverse organisations across the sector have approached issues that have emerged as key areas for development on a broader scale. These valuable exemplars from the field are:

1. *Lake* – Debbie Abraham, Director Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery
2. *International exchange through fellowships* – Sarah Johnson, Curator/Programs Coordinator Manly Art Gallery and Museum
3. *Professional development for Indigenous Arts Workers* – Art Gallery of New South Wales
4. *The Dead Bones Society* – Penny Packham, Public Programs Officer, Australian Fossil and Mineral Museum
5. *Sustainable Collections Project Central NSW* – Alison Russell, Community Liaison Adviser Orange City Council
6. *Berrima District Museum* – Bob Williams, Hon Curator, Berrima District Museum

## **National and State Sector Overviews**

This part of the research process focused on support for the arts and culture, and particularly for visual arts and museums, at state and national levels. Following a national overview, we reviewed the current climate in NSW and then examined in details services provided in Victoria and Queensland. These two states were identified as having the most comprehensive and clearly structured range of support services to the sector in Australia, on a scale translatable to the NSW level of activity. Both states offer approaches which are also competitive internationally.

## **Other contributions**

Views from the sector were sought in a range of forums during the course of the consultancy, and various individuals and organisations contributed ideas and thoughts on the future of the sector. Their names are listed in the appendices of this report and the contributions have been provided under separate cover to Arts NSW on a CD.

## **Ten Years On**

In mapping analysis, priorities, proposals and recommendations from the research, as a working document we developed a matrix which scoped the impact of likely outcomes into the future as a means of testing the approaches suggested in the report.

## PRIORITY AREA 1

### CULTURAL POLICY AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Cultural policy and strategic planning limitations were frequently cited as preventing the sector from realising its full potential and being able to progress with clarity and unity of vision. Leadership, advocacy, implementation and the long-term commitment to initiatives were also raised as issues. Whilst there are good examples of effective strategic planning and strong leaders with excellent policy and advocacy skills across the sector, there is a strong consensus that this is a priority area to address, via both professional development and through enhancing the strategic capability of M&G NSW. This priority area, however, focuses on cultural policy and planning.

The research undertaken for this report confirms the importance of the initial recommendation to ‘prepare a long term Strategic Plan for Development of the Regional Museum and Gallery Sector in NSW’ made by Watts and Leapfrog Research<sup>1</sup> and revealed overwhelming support for Arts NSW initiating a strategic planning process. Further, it was seen that development of ‘a strategic plan for the visual arts and museum sector in NSW’, the central brief of this consultancy, should fit into a state-wide policy that encompasses all the creative arts and as well as cultural heritage.

The sector is overwhelmingly in favour of working together through a visionary cultural policy, effective strategic planning with implementation and review cycles, and importantly, with a long-term commitment to initiatives and programs.

#### Cultural policy

The concept of a statewide cultural policy goes beyond the visual arts and museum sector to embrace all NSW creative arts and cultural heritage organisations, activities and businesses. The recommendation that NSW commences work on an overarching cultural policy is supported by direct requests from stakeholders, analysis of two case studies (Victoria and Queensland), the development of a new national cultural policy for Australia, and evidence that shows different understandings about who and what the sector includes.

When asked what the ‘greatest imaginable challenge’ facing the sector in the next five years might be, participants at the June Strategic Planning Workshop were overwhelmingly focused on government policy as a means of improving recognition, viability and resources in the sector. The participants called for:

*A visionary cultural policy for the State that supports equitable funding, participation and access to our heritage, arts and culture; that recognises their important role in community well-being and fosters government and philanthropic investment to this end.*

Preliminary research and analysis of the cultural policies, strategies and programs of several other states indicate that *Creative Queensland* (2002), a whole-of-government state policy for the sector, is seen as an exemplary model. Combined with a suite of policies and sector plans, notably the *Queensland Arts and Culture Sector Plan 2010-2013*, Arts Queensland provides a strong and holistic framework for the broad sector, including organisations, individuals, businesses and investors. With a decade of tangible results demonstrating innovation, growth and creativity in metropolitan, regional and remote areas, the policy leadership and strategic framework have transformed and extended arts, culture, communities and economies in Queensland and Australia.

Key interviews also emphasised the benefits of a strategic cultural policy framework to support the many sectors and encourage relationships between them. Director of the Museum of

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<sup>1</sup> Watts, P. and Leapfrog Research, 2010 *Review of Museums and Galleries NSW*, p. 81.

Contemporary Art, Liz-Ann MacGregor, expressed this drawing attention to the existence of a wider ecology around the visual arts, including individuals and businesses:

*A healthy sector is a holistic sector where every part of the ecology is linked so we have an overall understanding and vision – including artists, big galleries, regional galleries, commercial galleries, artist co-ops and art centres. (Phone interview 22/6/2011)*

Regional museum curator, Liz Gilroy, identified the need for clarity of language, purpose and an overarching framework that supports the various sectors:

*A healthy sector is one that understands itself. The language issues around the terms arts, heritage, museum and culture are resolved and programs analysed to support the various sectors. (Phone interview 7/6/2011)*

The view that broad, government-led cultural policy, which provides an overarching vision and holistic approach across arts and heritage, will benefit the museums and galleries sector underpins this report. Such a policy should build on the current Arts NSW Corporate Plan and its key goals of cultural leadership, participation, innovation and place-making.

### **Recommendation 1**

**Arts NSW commences work on a comprehensive cultural policy for the various sectors, organisations and constituents of the arts and heritage in NSW.**

## **Strategic Planning**

The development of a strategic plan for the NSW museum and gallery sector is widely supported. To be an effective foundation for the future, the plan will need to encompass the whole sector – from the large cultural institutions, to regional museums and galleries, to smaller local museums or keeping places.

As well as their considerable collections, leading public programs and internationally recognised professional expertise and connectivity, the large cultural institutions also possess high level skills in policy, leadership, advocacy and planning. In contrast, the Survey suggests that other parts of the sector are struggling with strategic planning:

*There seems to be recognition of the importance of strategic planning even though only around half of all respondents are doing it. The high number of respondents that skipped this question suggests a level of discomfort with the issue, so organisations may need to know more about the benefits of strategic planning to be convinced of the value of this kind of work, and training and assistance with where and how to start. (Appendix 5.3, p. 13)*

Regardless of the individual organisational situation and skill level, a sector-wide strategic vision, particularly if combined with an over-arching cultural policy, will have many benefits. Most importantly, the leadership and strategic approach it will demonstrate will enable the sector to speak with a united voice to all levels of government, to industry and philanthropic organisations, to potential partners and to the community about its aspirations, needs, contributions and opportunities. As Director 4A Gallery, Aaron Seeto, commented:

*A healthy sector is thinking strategically about culture and how it fits into the rest of society. (Phone interview, 15/6/2011)*

A strategic plan also offers the advantage of a strong framework for cross-fertilisation, reciprocal partnerships and collaborative programming both with organisations and/or between states, regional and local structures.

The Strategic Planning Workshop held in June identified the following Vision and Goals, arriving at consensus on them relatively quickly and straightforwardly. As the key themes were also consistently emphasised during stakeholder interviews, they form an important statement of the values and shared ambitions of the sector.

**Vision**

To inspire, engage and connect communities through arts, culture and heritage

**Goals**

Lead with creative vision and clear strategic direction

Reflect and transform communities

Sustainably manage tangible and intangible cultural assets

Foster reciprocal partnerships and networks

Attract, support and retain innovative and resourceful professionals

***Planning proposal***

***Arts NSW and the NSW museum and gallery sector consider this long-term strategic vision and these goals as a guide for developing individual strategic priorities.***

## PRIORITY AREA 2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Communities have been at the heart of Australian museums and galleries since the establishment of such organisations during the early colonial period. Whether it be community members and societies lobbying for the establishment of museums and galleries, patrons such as George McCulloch's bequest triggering the establishment of the Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery in 1904, or the advocacy of friends' organisations and the contribution of volunteers: Australians love art, history and culture and love supporting and visiting their museums and galleries<sup>2</sup>.

Museums and galleries maintain and display a diverse range of collections – from visual art traditions to the material representations of human endeavors such as automobiles, musical instruments and fashion accessories. The relationship between and shared focus of museums, galleries and various audiences or community members changes over time and an organisation's policies, programs and archives are themselves records of Australian society and culture – 'reflecting and transforming communities'. Perhaps the greatest evidence of this has been in the turn-around of policies and practices relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains and Repatriation during the late twentieth century.

The NSW museum and gallery sector's perception of itself in the early twenty-first century is strongly aligned with contemporary international theories of social inclusion and interactive and collaborative relationships<sup>3</sup>. For example, participants at the June Workshop broke into four groups to discuss the question 'what are the sector's beliefs and what do we stand for?' The responses were as follows:

- cultural custodians – past, present and future;
- community engagement – diversity, equity, connectivity, relevance, well-being;
- cultural identity – knowledge, understanding, forum, debate;
- transformation – dynamic living cultures and communities, social change and inclusion.

The emphasis on community engagement, access, diversity and social inclusion was also expressed by many of those consulted during the research phase. For example, Director of the Australian Museum Frank Howarth said:

*By far the biggest challenge and issue for the future of the sector is relevance – the community and not just the sector needs to see us as relevant and important. Engagement with the whole community – across age groups, cultural groups, the diversity of the Australian community – recognising we need to be some things to all people not all things to all people. Knowing community, their interests, and their thoughts on engagement. [Phone interview, 24/6/2011]*

Another defining issue of the present era that relates to community engagement is the development of ICT. It has transformed the notion of a local community in a globally connected world, facilitated the development of new online communities and generated new technological platforms that can potentially support improved access, interactivity, pluralism, and linguistic and cultural diversity.

As a consequence, community engagement is now conceived as the major platform for the role and function of museums and galleries in contemporary Australian society. Community

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<sup>2</sup> Guess Who's Going to the Gallery? A Strategic Audience Evaluation and Development Study series M&G NSW (2008 – 2010)

<sup>3</sup> Sandell, R. (ed) 2002 *Museums, Society, Inequality*, Routledge: London and New York.

Sandell, R., 2003 'Social inclusion, the museum and the dynamics of sectoral change' in *museum & society*, 191: 45-62.

engagement is also defined through, and reflected in, the focus of curatorial and audience approaches that develop a collaborative, participatory framework for museums and galleries<sup>4</sup>.

## **Access, equity and diversity**

It is currently an ideal time to prioritise implementing creative approaches to access, equity and diversity in the sector. The conceptual and technological tools of the early 21st century are ripe with potential for creating bridges with non-traditional audiences, encouraging cultural and linguistic diversity in the development and delivery of programs, and removing barriers for the members of our community who require alternative solutions.

However, the peak bodies, associations or member groups of the sector comprising people or communities are not currently engaging in new partnerships and networks to optimum levels, and a more active approach to establishing functional and creative alliances is called for. Possible new partners might include:

- Visions Australia, enabling the sector to work collaboratively to create various online and physical products and programs that could remove accessibility barriers.
- Men's Shed Movement, which could document and preserve this important part of our cultural heritage whilst engaging its members in broader museum and gallery programs.

The potential of the sector to promote greater social harmony and understanding across cultural and linguistic groups has also not been fully realised. There is a great need for spaces in our community where people from various cultural backgrounds can share their culture, learn about other people's cultural traditions and participate in important community gatherings and debates. The role of museums and galleries in reflecting and acknowledging cultural identity should be expanded to be more inclusive of the great diversity of Australian people. There are a variety of partnerships that could facilitate this. For example, a relationship with SBS could lead to the development of linguistically and culturally diverse content and programs, and improve the reflection of cultural diversity within the Australian population.

Incentive-based funding for programs developed and delivered through partnerships with agencies, representative bodies or community groups that increase sector networks and deliver improved access and engagement with specific target groups would increase the continued relevance of the sector. Such funding would create pathways to improve social inclusion and community well-being. Reciprocity would be at the heart of such programs assisting the community and sector to work collaboratively towards shared goals.

### ***Planning proposal***

***Arts NSW, in collaboration with the sector, introduces an incentive-based or partnership funding stream that prioritises programs which increase access, equity and diversity.***

## **Volunteers**

Data compiled by M&G NSW in 2008 shows there are 621 museums and galleries across the state, of which 349 are volunteer-run community museums. Sixty six percent are located outside greater metropolitan Sydney with a total of 300-400 staff and 3,500-4,000 volunteers<sup>5</sup>. The Survey confirms the high number of volunteers and volunteer-run museums in NSW. The sheer number of volunteers engaged with museums and galleries is testimony to the nation's culture of volunteering and active citizenship, and the value and significance of the museum and gallery sector to the community. It is important to note that Australia has a strong tradition of

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<sup>4</sup> Reynolds, A.J. (ed) 2006 *Keeping Culture: Aboriginal Tasmania*, NMA Press, Canberra.

<sup>5</sup> Watts, P. and Leapfrog Research, 2010, p. 11.

volunteering and leads international comparative lists of membership and active membership in voluntary organisations, indicating a high level of social capital:

*In recent years there has been considerable commentary on the importance of social capital in explaining the vibrancy of communities and the resilience of societies and democratic politics. Participation in voluntary organisations, in so far as it reflects civic engagement and individuals' feeling of efficacy, is one indicator of social capital.<sup>6</sup>*

In this context, there are two or three significant aspects of the visual arts or gallery element of the sector that bear further consideration: firstly, the volunteer sector in the visual arts is extensive, but rarely discussed. It includes the extensive volunteer-run arts and crafts societies throughout the state; the network of gallery guides and other gallery volunteers, again a statewide movement; and the ARIs, a vibrant and vital part of the visual arts ecosystem in metropolitan Sydney and several major regional centres, which is almost entirely volunteer-run. This report contends that, while the first two categories of volunteers can be considered as part of arenas such as community engagement and lifelong learning, the ARIs should be addressed and supported through professional development and creative programming strategies, in keeping with the support that Arts NSW and other agencies such as NAVA and M&G NSW have provided in the past.

The report also proposes that the volunteer museum sector may be best supported in future through a community engagement model. The NSW Government Office of Communities is at present engaged with the 'Developing a NSW Volunteering Strategy' and this provides a significant opportunity to further explore this approach. In considering this approach to the volunteer museums, a further parallel with the visual arts is worth noting: neither of the market research reports cited above provides statistics on the number of commercial galleries operating in NSW. General knowledge and impressions of the NSW museum and gallery sector indicate that just as there are far more volunteer-run museums than galleries in NSW, there are far more commercial galleries than museums. Public institutions, commercial institutions and volunteer-run institutions – whether museums or art and craft societies – all form part of the cultural economy and ecology of the industry. Just as the number of commercial galleries is sustained by a market economy, the number of volunteer-run community museums can be understood as being sustained by a form of social capital (volunteering). This is an important shift in thinking about a 'sustainable management and community innovation and participation framework' for the NSW museum and gallery sector.

Given the high number of volunteer managed museums, the question: 'do we have too many museums?' is often raised. However, as the social capital of volunteering will naturally either sustain, lessen or increase the current number, the more critical and important questions for all levels of government are:

- How do we best support a committed and passionate group of volunteers and volunteer organisations across NSW?
- How do we move to a model that understands and supports the state's significant collections and heritage and which acknowledges their dispersal throughout regional and metropolitan NSW and the complexities of their ownership, preservation and interpretation?

It is recommended that support for volunteer-run community museums and galleries and volunteers across the sector remains a priority but is delivered through a *community engagement and social inclusion* model rather than a professional development model.

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<sup>6</sup> R Tiffen and R Gittins, 2004 *How Australia Compares*, Cambridge University Press, pp 246-47

M&G NSW has delivered extensive and expert support to this element of the sector. However, in order to improve sustainability of sector, it is vital to consider the volunteer model in this new context of social inclusion. In addition, and on a functional level, collection needs should be addressed at a regional level rather than from a small, central service organisation perspective. This second conceptual shift leads to a further recommendation: that the state, in partnership with local governments, invests in technological and professional infrastructure in regional NSW (in particular) that will support the identification, preservation and interpretation of the most significant (not all) collections and heritage as guided through relevant collection development and collection management policies. Strategies to address the second issue are discussed in more detail under priorities 3-7.

***Planning Proposal***

***Arts NSW works with the sector to form partnerships with the Office of Communities, local government councils, federal agencies, M&G NSW, Volunteering Australia and other relevant bodies to develop a suite of programs and services for volunteers and volunteer-run museums and galleries through the proposed network of regional centres of excellence (Area 6), and using a community engagement and social inclusion model.***

## PRIORITY AREA 3 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is the backbone of a healthy sector and its ability to manage living collections and cultural heritage sustainably, foster innovation, support artists and ensure community participation. Investment in a range of targeted programs and partnerships which support: career development pathways; greater professionalism within and across the sector; regular participation in forums, conferences and debates; and a culture of experimentation, cross-fertilisation and creative curatorial programming is vital for the future of collections, cultural industries and the sector's international position.

Preliminary analysis indicates that the sector currently includes internationally recognised professional knowledge and expertise, creative and innovative staff across the spectrum of large and small organisations, and several strong professional forums and networks. The NSW museum and gallery sector workforce makes important contributions to both the global profession and to the development of uniquely Australian national, regional and local identities and cultures.

Although various programs by state and national funding bodies, member organisations, peak bodies and tertiary institutions have supported the sector, this report recommends that professional development remains an important strategic priority to ensure an ongoing ethos of excellence and innovation. There are also several components of professional development support that require new funding, development and incentives. Supporting these will assist in balancing the geographical spread of professional resources across the state and boost reciprocal partnerships between the major cultural institutions and regional museums and galleries.

The shortage of professionally trained staff in many regional areas is of concern. General Manager at Bathurst Regional Council Dave Sherley noted the difficulty in attracting professional staff to the regions and then offering them the required support and appropriate remuneration. He also pointed out that as most senior staff in local councils with portfolio responsibilities for museums and galleries don't have qualifications in the industry, professional development of senior management needs to be encouraged. Mr Sherley recommends:

*The industry and universities need to organise themselves to offer more scholarships for students, develop more short courses for staff, senior management, local councilors and volunteers ... and put more effort into developing career paths within fields and [supporting] interchange. (Phone interview, 9/6/11)*

The heavy management and operational reliance on volunteers by the small and medium museum sector (in particular) was almost unanimously identified as unsustainable, negatively affecting the professionalism of the sector and in some cases exposing items of great cultural and heritage significance to a high level of risk.

This report recognises and applauds the significant and extensive contribution volunteers have made and will continue to make to museums, galleries and the cultural life of their communities. As previously discussed however, adopting a sustainable management framework across the sector requires several re-adjustments of current definitions and program responsibilities. The sustainable management framework classifies volunteers and volunteer programs under 'Community Engagement' and recommended this as a new approach to supporting the volunteer museum sector going forward. Strategies for supporting the transition and establishment of the small and medium sector within a professional framework are included under *Area 6: A Network of Regional Centres of Excellence*.

## Career development

The positive impact residencies, fellowships and mentorships can have on an individual's career and the culture of an organisation is recognised and valued across the sector. Those who have received support from their institution, state or national funding body or philanthropic organisation to participate in a program speak highly of the unique professional development experience it offers.

There are several programs currently available including the M&G NSW international fellowship and mentorship program, Arts NSW quick turn around grants (for artists and arts workers – museums are usually ineligible), and Australia Council for the Arts grants (for artists and arts workers – museums are usually ineligible). Asialink grants are also available and supported by Arts NSW. The proposed strategic goal to 'foster reciprocal partnerships and networks' provides a mechanism for the sector to build on these existing programs.

There is potential to enhance the range and number of residencies, fellowships and mentorships through the development of new partnerships and identified funding streams. Programs supporting professional residences and reciprocal staff exchanges in and out of the regions and the major cultural institutions will strengthen and support the growing professionalism across the sector. The adoption of the proposed network of regional centres of excellence will assist in the viability and operation of a reciprocal scheme.

Access to international programs is also a priority as this assists Australia in its interaction with, and increases its relevance to, the global environment. As Asialink Director Lesley Alway advised:

*The quality of a healthy sector is when staff and curators have opportunities to get international experience and develop and build international networks.* (Phone interview, 27/6/2011)

The sector should investigate developing partnerships with the Churchill Foundation, the Endeavour Awards, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Asialink and others to support sector specific fellowship and mentorship programs and broaden the professional networks in and out of the sector.

### **Planning Proposal**

**Arts NSW in association with M&G NSW, the major cultural institutions and the (proposed) regional centres of excellence work together on strategies to**

- **deliver expanded fellowship and mentorship programs which include more participants and reciprocal programs**
- **develop partnerships with existing international programs to create sector-specific opportunities**
- **create new leadership program opportunities**

## Greater professionalism within and across the sector

A number of large and medium NSW museums and galleries are operating at a high level, meeting national and international standards and contributing to innovation. However, a lack of regional infrastructure and professionally staffed organisations, particularly in the museums is preventing the NSW museum and gallery sector as a whole from meeting professional standards and benchmarks.

While this issue is addressed in detail under *Priority area 6: a network of regional centres of excellence*, it is noted here as it has an impact on the professionalism of the sector. The major new investment outlined under this priority area will not only ensure that regional and remote communities have

viable access to cultural heritage, professional services and programs, but also that the NSW sector is able to report an overall excellent score-card against national and international standards into the future.

For planning purposes, it is important that an analysis of current tertiary programs, short-courses, training programs and cadetships is undertaken to ensure the right balance of knowledge and skills is continually refreshing the workforce. Partnerships between the sector and universities should be identified and encouraged to develop: cadetships for Indigenous peoples and regional representatives; internships for different stages of a career; and scholarship-supported programs to encourage graduates into the regions. This analysis should also consider current and potential programs that tap into the overseas students industry. The NSW sector has considerable potential to collaborate with the tertiary sector and to create new markets for Australian educational and cultural heritage products and services.

### ***Planning Proposal***

***A review of tertiary programs in NSW is commissioned with a view to establishing scholarships and cadetships, ensuring the professional development needs of the sector and Indigenous peoples are being supported, and identifying opportunities for growth and investment into the future.***

## **Innovation: a culture of experimentation, cross-fertilisation and creative curatorial programming**

An important aspect of the professional development of the museum and gallery sector is providing support for the experimentation and development of new ideas and collaborations. To foster a culture of experimentation, cross-fertilisation and creative curatorial programming, there is a need to maintain and create new, explicit, funding pathways that focus on the inter-relationship between curatorial development, creative programming and audience engagement.

The sector also needs to encourage active participation and engagement beyond state borders and beyond disciplinary ‘silos’. The involvement in multi-disciplinary forums, conferences and debates will also develop the professionalism and social value of the sector. As Director of Carriageworks, Lisa Havilah advised:

*A healthy sector reflects Australia within an international conversation ... [we need to] broaden our conversations so that arts practice is more multi-disciplinary, and visual arts and culture has an infrastructure that crosses disciplines rather than silos through arts. (Phone interview, 9/6/2011)*

This type of sector development is best supported through rewards and incentives for collaborative development, experimentation with ideas and/or engaging new audiences and partnership programming inside and outside the sector.

Future support for the ARIs should also be considered in this context – the culture of innovation. Although it must be said that the ARIs form a very important platform in the sector for professional development, fostering curatorial and creative development, enabling access in a very competitive real-estate and funding climate which tends to prohibit the emergence of new organisations and structures in key areas of the state where many new cultures and practices emerge in close proximity to tertiary institutions and alongside the innovation economy – major regional and metropolitan centres. Arts NSW has taken the opportunity presented by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy 2004-2009 to provide significant funding support to the ARIs over the past five years, and the impact of this has been discernible, with the ARIs becoming important crucibles of contemporary creative life and increasingly assumed contributors to a dynamic and creative future for the visual arts and culture more broadly. They remain, however, fragile in that

they are volunteer run and work in highly volatile contexts. They deserve due support for their role in the overall ecology of the sector.

***Planning proposal***

***A priority in funding support for creative programs is curatorial experimentation that encourages multi-disciplinary conversations or community participation.***

***ARIs receive flexible funding support which acknowledges their distinctive modus operandi and is designed to sustain their operations.***

## **PRIORITY AREA 4**

### **NSW ABORIGINAL CULTURES AND INDIGENOUS PARTICIPATION**

For tens of thousands of years Aboriginal peoples have expressed their laws, history, spirituality and scientific knowledge through oral and creative traditions. The thoughtful interpretation and preservation of cultural knowledge and traditions across generations has been a human endeavour long before British colonisation and the establishment of the first museum in 1827 – the Australian Museum. With just over two centuries of shared history between the First Peoples and the new populations, we've had ample time to identify and understand the similarities and differences between various Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and cultures living in Australia.

While there are many examples of people creating respectful spaces for cross-cultural understanding, there are also many examples where the sector's activities have acted to erase and/or damage Indigenous values of cultural preservation and interpretation. As we move forward together into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the sector has both opportunities and responsibilities to interpret, celebrate and preserve some of the world's oldest living traditions alongside some of the newest cultural innovations.

The importance of community engagement, professional development, regional infrastructure and a philosophical commitment to *living* collections and heritage, to Indigenous cultures is recognised under the respective priority areas. Other specific challenges include prioritising the visibility of NSW Aboriginal cultures; increasing Indigenous participation across the sector; and respecting and supporting the cultural objectives of Aboriginal peoples and communities in relation to their cultural heritage.

#### **NSW Aboriginal cultures**

The NSW museum and gallery sector operates in Aboriginal Country and every institution has local Aboriginal cultures and histories because of its position in a specific cultural landscape. The visibility of local Aboriginal peoples and cultures across the NSW sector is a key issue requiring strategic priority. The following principles could assist in improving visibility:

- acknowledgement of Country, Ancestors, Elders and community is an important cultural practice that should be recognised by all institutions;
- inclusion of local Aboriginal cultures, including traditional practices, contact history and contemporary stories and cultural practices needs improvement; and
- the involvement of Indigenous personnel and communities is essential for the program's success.

The Survey indicated that this is an area which remains unevenly addressed in the sector. Although a number of respondents indicated good relationships with lands councils and with Aboriginal cultural organisations, a high proportion thought the survey questions regarding Indigenous people were irrelevant to their organisation and a significant number (in some cases 20%) did not respond at all. Positively, a high number of respondents thought that they understand cultural sensitivities around Aboriginal issues, and almost half agreed they were actively building and maintaining relationships with Aboriginal communities. Respondents were less confident with supporting and nurturing Aboriginal artists, with many disagreeing, unsure or again, thinking this didn't apply to them. Finally, almost one quarter of all respondents disagreed that their organisation offered training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people, with a further 21 percent thinking this was not applicable to them.

**Improve the inclusion of local Aboriginal cultures by funding practical assistance and capacity building programs such as cross-cultural awareness training, visiting curators or Elders-in-residence programs.**

## **Indigenous participation**

Professional development opportunities, cadetships and career pathways, and opportunities for Indigenous peoples to participate in the sector are a high priority for Indigenous communities. The *NSW Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Strategy 2010* prioritises jobs and increased participation and Museums Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies have advocated for roles in governance, staff and consultation for at least fifteen years<sup>7</sup>. Art Gallery of New South Wales Curator Jonathon Jones noted:

*The sector needs to seriously invest in skills and ongoing career development for Indigenous peoples – particularly in the regions. Within communities there are fantastic people with projects waiting to happen and who want to do more and be more involved – but the support and opportunities don't meet their or their communities needs ... so as a sector we need to create a support network for Indigenous staff to achieve their goals, and this type of industry environment would further foster and develop new people, skills and knowledge within the sector. (Phone interview, 11/7/2011)*

Previous programs that have explicitly funded Indigenous cadetships, positions, fellowships or residencies have yielded good results. The establishment of an Indigenous Trainee Curator program by Wagga Wagga Regional Art Gallery has provided career training for an individual and supported the development of a major cultural renewal and creative arts program in weaving. Similarly, designated funding for an Indigenous Curator at Campbelltown Arts Centre provided a career opportunity for an individual who then delivered a significant body of Indigenous exhibitions and programs. The Art Gallery of NSW has recently commenced an internship program for Indigenous people and it will be interesting to see how this program, based on capacity building and reciprocity between large cultural institutions and regional centres, unfolds. Preliminary feedback suggests the program will have a real impact.

### **Planning Proposal**

**Arts NSW and the sector develop Indigenous cadetships, set employment targets and introduce a funding stream to encourage Aboriginal curators, artists, Elders, storytellers, writers-in-residence.**

## **The cultural objectives of Aboriginal peoples and communities**

The current and potential role of keeping places, museums and galleries to NSW Aboriginal communities and cultural development is significant. The art centre network – the major infrastructure for skills development, industry participation and artist/practitioner support prevalent in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland does not exist in New South Wales<sup>8</sup>. While there are some individual art centres, some keeping places and some clusters around TAFE, a statewide network of organisations to support the cultural objectives and creative development of local Aboriginal peoples and communities requires support and investment.

The potential of keeping places, museums and galleries to employ Indigenous staff across the board should be utilised. Visible and active staff, visiting fellows and resident artists or Elders will improve the sector's ability to support the cultural objectives of Aboriginal communities, lead to improved engagement with local communities and stimulate new audiences.

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<sup>7</sup> Museums Australia 2005, *'Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities': principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage*, Canberra, Australia.

<sup>8</sup> Commonwealth of Australia 2007, *Indigenous Art – Securing the future: Australia's Indigenous visual art and craft sector*, Canberra.

It is expected that the upcoming two-day symposium *Keeping Places and Beyond: Building cultural futures in NSW* to be hosted by M&G NSW in September 2011 will provide key recommendations and future directions for the sector. In addition, organisations attracting high levels of Indigenous staff and participation such as the Koorie Heritage Trust in Victoria and the Office of Environment and Heritage (NSW), could be examined to assist in developing a flexible NSW program.

***Planning Proposal***

***Support development of M&G's Aboriginal Cultural Program, including a network or annual meeting of Indigenous staff in the sector to support, share experiences and discuss sector wide issues from their local or regional perspective.***

## PRIORITY AREA 5 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Unlike previous eras, great museums and galleries of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries will not be defined by the quality, depth and breadth of their collections alone, but also by the quality and agility of their accessibility and engagement platforms. Investing in technology is about infrastructure, hardware, software, collection management tools, online content, and perhaps most importantly for the current generation, interactivity. Technology is vital to the future of the NSW museum and gallery sector and requires both strategic prioritisation and major new investment in regional areas, in particular. Professor of Contemporary Arts at Sydney College of the Arts, Ross Gibson, advised:

*A healthy sector is one where technology is accessible without infrastructure barriers for regional areas; good understanding of the relationship between technology and culture, particularly in relation to the way we learn and understand the world; robust, adventurous and sophisticated relationships between online and physical experiences with objects. (Phone interview, 7/6/2011)*

The Information Age has also introduced new paradigms for understanding, defining, constructing and accessing knowledge. Many of the state's museums and galleries are working with communities, which have a generation gap in terms of understanding intersections between information and communication technology and documenting or framing knowledge and accessing audiences. As discussed in *Priority Area 2: Community Engagement* the notion of a local community has a different meaning in an online environment.

For a 21<sup>st</sup> century museum, gallery or creative arts sector to be successful, it requires a strong technological infrastructure, a philosophical understanding and acceptance of the central role of technology in our society, and a culture of experimentation and early adaptors. As Museums Australia (NSW) advised:

*Future solutions will depend on the degree to which governments, institutions, agencies and other organisations have the authority, resources and skills to lead or contribute to programs and services in a world radically changed by technology.*

### The National Broadband Network

The sector must act swiftly to take up the new opportunities and tools presented by the Australian Government's major infrastructure investment and rollout of the National Broadband Network. As the goals outlined in the National Digital Economy Strategy include a strong focus on education and online learning resources, the sector has the potential to expand its current participation in a digital environment. In addition to the infrastructure investment, the Australian government is also offering a number of new funding initiatives to support communities and organisations transition to the digital economy, including those targeting not-for-profit sector, education and learning services, seniors and regional areas. For example:

***Digital enterprise:*** *To enable more Australian businesses and not-for-profit organisations to leverage the benefits of broadband-empowered online engagement, a Digital Enterprise initiative will provide \$12.4 million over three years to provide advice and support services to small and medium enterprises and not-for-profit organisations, including local cultural institutions, in communities which will first benefit from the NBN. This initiative will assist these organisations to achieve cost savings, productivity enhancements and improved marketing through greater online engagement.*

***NBN-enabled Education and Skills Services.*** *To promote innovative education uses of the NBN, the government will establish an NBN-enabled Education and Skills Services program over four*

*years that will fund, source, develop and implement projects to trial improved online and interactive education and skills using the NBN.<sup>9</sup>*

The adoption of a visionary cultural policy and sector-wide strategic plan that includes the large cultural institutions and regional and small museums and galleries discussed in Priority area 1 along with establishment of regional centres of excellence discussed in Priority area 6 will position the sector to engage in negotiations to attract funding and support from areas outside the traditional state and federal arts and culture funding channels. To capitalise on and complement the NBN investment, the state should adopt a holistic long-term state of the art technology policy for the sector and provide dedicated funding streams for hardware, software, and interactivity platforms. This investment will open up new global communities and audiences for the creative and knowledge industries and breathe life into the collections, creating a flourishing and dynamic relationship between tangible and intangible cultural assets and positioning the sector to take a leading role in the digital economy.

### **Planning Proposal**

**Arts NSW works in partnership with the museums and gallery sector to:**

- **commit to a long-term state-of-the-art technology policy and introduce funding streams that support participation and leadership in the digital economy, with particular emphasis on regional Australia, online-learning and education initiatives and medium-sized museums and galleries.**
- **commence negotiations with the federal government to secure investment that will enable the sector to transition and capitalise on the NBN and digital economy.**

### **Collection management, access and interpretation**

Concepts and processes around managing collections data during the past thirty years of the Information Age have transformed from predominantly paper-based systems to digital systems. Digitising records to internal catalogues, migrating catalogues to an online environment and creating access to both digital representations of collections and their records have become standard practice.

In more recent times, systems supporting interactivity in online collections and records have revolutionised the industry and set new standards. Programs such as the National Library of Australia's Digitised Newspapers and Trove have not only expanded the tools for collection management, access and interpretation but also harnessed new online communities of volunteers busily creating newspaper transcripts. The British Museum and BBC partnership to create *The History of the World* provided a platform for connecting citizens with their national collections and for engaging global audiences in the tools and methods of museums by inviting them to add their own objects and stories and reflect upon human relationships with objects in past and present times.

Assessing how the NSW Museum and Gallery sector measures up in the Information Age is both inspiring and disheartening. There is an awareness of the importance of digital tools and a vision for the future, for example Director Object Gallery, Steve Pozel said:

*My ambition for the future is that the museum sector is a prominent provider of content. Collection access and interpretation fully utilises digital forms and capacities, and audience engagement methods are rich, layered and interactive. (Phone interview, 7/6/2011)*

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.nbn.gov.au/the-vision/government-initiatives/>

The Powerhouse Museum's suite of digital programs ranging from online collections to an affiliation with Flickr (which engages online community volunteers and harnesses their knowledge) is providing excellent leadership for the NSW sector. There are also several examples of medium-sized galleries and museums managing good websites and products. Overall, however, the sector lags behind the library sector and is a long way from being a major contributor, innovator or user in the digital economy.

Progress for the regional and medium-to-small sized sector has been seriously jeopardised by the introduction of several different digital collections projects that had short life spans – AMOL and CAN are prime examples. Regional areas and the small-medium sized museums and galleries have been greatly affected by this lack of long-term commitment and commented vigorously on their disappointment and frustration about this issue.

The research undertaken for this report included exploring models for providing long-term collections management and access. This issue is one for the whole sector and requires a taskforce to guide it into the future. Particular attention should be paid to analysing strengths and weaknesses of previous models, scoping existing models such as the Powerhouse Dress Register, Victorian Collections: the Community Collections Management System, and the library models based on partnerships between federal/state institutions with regional and local libraries. The taskforce should also examine the effectiveness of current standards, training and familiarity with legislative responsibilities around copyright; and consider ways to improve take up of interactive systems encouraging audience engagement.

### ***Recommendation 2***

***That Arts NSW, in partnership with M&G NSW and the cultural institutions, establishes a taskforce to advise on long-term strategies and initiatives for collection management, access and interpretation through contemporary ICT platforms.***

## PRIORITY AREA 6 A NETWORK OF REGIONAL CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

While there is an established network of professionally operated regional galleries across the state, museums are not the same position. Further, hundreds of museums and historical societies are volunteer-managed. Creating a strategy and future for the sector based on a 'sustainable management and community innovation and participation framework', requires: a structural re-think of local government, state and federal relationships to NSW museums and galleries; a philosophical shift that positions volunteers in 'community engagement' models and programs rather than 'professional staff' models and programs; and a major new investment in the regions.

### Regional investment

Although regional centres and hubs have long been discussed<sup>10</sup> and several different galleries and museums operate through various models, Regional Services Coordinator at the Powerhouse Museum, Rebecca Pinchin's call for excellence is an important point to emphasise:

*[My ambition for the future is for] regional centres of excellence with a mandate to support and assist the smaller surrounding communities (regional hub concept). (Phone interview 9/6/2011)*

The vital complementary concept in this proposal is the idea of a *network*. While the regional centres of excellence will have important benefits for regional and remote NSW, they will also support state and national cultural institutions to: develop reciprocal relationships and programs; strengthen region-to-region and medium-to-medium collaborations; and provide a platform for the provision of a diverse range of government and other programs targeting social inclusion, life-long learning and community wellbeing. Importantly, the network concept will enhance the preservation and interpretation of significant cultural heritage and assets (discussed in more detail under *Priority area 7: Living Collections and Heritage*).

For all of these reasons, the importance of major new investment in regional centres has been a consistent message throughout the consultation and research phase. Support comes not only from the regions, but also from the large cultural institutions. For example, Assistant Director Curatorial Services, Art Gallery of NSW, Anthony Bond, identified one of his future ambitions as:

*The medium-sized gallery sector have top class museum spaces in regions able to both host or develop and tour a range of national and international exhibitions; to continue the good work regarding community engagement; and consolidate good relationships between major cultural institutions and regional galleries. (Phone interview, 15/6/2011)*

Representatives from the medium-sized galleries and museums in western Sydney also acknowledged the regions required investment so that the geographical spread of the sector supported a framework where large cultural institutions can collaborate and partner with medium-sized institutions in both metropolitan and regional areas. CEO of Penrith Performing and Visual Arts, John Kirkman advised:

*Shift the paradigm so that there is a philosophical commitment to arts in and from the regions. The government focus and support for western Sydney in recent times has been great for western Sydney and this should spread to all the regions. This can partly be achieved through grant/funding structures and language. [And partly by introducing a] framework and network for partnerships where the big cultural institutions and regional and medium-sized institutions partner to produce programs. (Phone interview, 7/6/2011)*

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<sup>10</sup> See Winkworth, K, 2011 *Let a thousand flowers bloom: museums in regional Australia*, (forthcoming) for an overview of the sector's call for regional hubs.

The network of regional centres of excellence will ensure regional and remote communities have viable access to cultural heritage, professional services and programs and foster innovation and participation in regional and remote NSW. They will also improve advocacy and leadership for the whole sector as strong professional voices from the regions are heard in decision-making forums. The network will also bring the museum and gallery sector, and the programs associated with the sector such as visual arts, scholarship and conservation, into a service delivery model that has greater philosophical alignment with other NSW industries such as health and education, i.e. viable access for regional and remote communities.

***Recommendation 3  
Arts NSW commits to providing major new long-term funding for a network of regional centres of excellence with incentive to leverage support from local and regional governments, and a view to attracting federal funding and other support.***

## **Models**

Developing the right model for the network and the centres will require further analysis and consultation in partnership with regional and local councils and existing regional organisations. It may be that the model varies from region to region, depending on pre-existing facilities, resources and partnerships. The network, formed through state, regional and local government partnerships, should aim to attract federal, philanthropic and business support, and provide a mechanism for a coordinated approach to the sector from a range of bodies and agencies. The establishment of a taskforce to develop models and open conversations with various levels of government should include representatives from the sector and various government departments.

The centres should be tailored around strengths in each region and focus on capacity building in the delivery of services in collection management, curatorial, Aboriginal cultural heritage, conservation, community engagement and audience development. As such, the staff profile of a centre might include roles such as Manager, Curator, Aboriginal Cultural Officer (identified), Collection Manager, Conservator, Community Engagement Officer and Administrative Officer. The centres would have access to IT support and a residency program of visiting fellows for historians, artists, cadets and interns.

As a priority the professional body of staff should commence cultural mapping and significance assessment of local and regional cultural heritage with a view to determining which material should be listed and/or managed as part of Australia's cultural heritage (local, regional, state and federal governments potentially have obligations). The process for this activity is addressed in more detail under *Priority Area 7: Living collections and heritage* and would be strongly guided by a sustainable collections philosophy. The role of Community Engagement Officer is essential in supporting and continuing programs for volunteers and volunteer-managed museums that have been dedicated participants in the sector, and for engaging new audiences across the diversity of local and online communities.

The relationship of the network with M&G NSW and the large cultural institutions is an important consideration for the proposed taskforce. Several comparative models should be examined for their various qualities: Regional Arts Australia (NSW) for supporting a network of creative arts workers with a central head office for advocacy and leadership; Aboriginal Rangers (Office of Environment and Heritage) for their Aboriginal staff profiles which enables Aboriginal people to work in meaningful ways in Country and supports a relationship to Aboriginal cultural values; Museum of the Riverina (Wagga Wagga) for its approach to coordinating museums services to many smaller local museums; Regional Public Galleries of NSW for their knowledge around maintaining a regional gallery network that includes metropolitan and regional areas; the

Regional Services Program at the Powerhouse Museum for the relationship between large cultural institution and regional and remote museums; and the Australian Museum for their cultural loans program for Aboriginal Keeping Places and communities.

***Recommendation 4***

***Arts NSW establishes a pilot project for the regional centre of excellence model***

## PRIORITY AREA 7

### LIVING COLLECTIONS AND HERITAGE

The notion of *living collections and heritage* as presented in this report has been conceived as a way to assist the NSW museum and gallery sector design and implement a ‘sustainable management and community innovation and participation’ framework. The phrase is also used as a philosophical approach to NSW collections and heritage that is inclusive of Aboriginal cultural practices; traditional museum, gallery and heritage practices; creative arts practices; International Council of Museums and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization’s approaches to tangible and intangible cultural heritage; contemporary museological trends of community engagement and life-long learning; and cultural tourism.

Key principles of the living collections and heritage philosophy include:

- Significant NSW collections are identified, assessed and accessible through online catalogues and interactive platforms, exhibition, scholarship and education programs;
- Preservation, conservation and curatorial interpretation of collections and heritage are inter-twined;
- The sometimes-conflicting views of preservation and continued use of an object by an individual or community are managed through an established and accepted standard (e.g. Using Aboriginal materials during important ceremonies, or wearing/carrying Anzac medals on Anzac Day, or housing collections items *in situ* at historic houses);
- Collection growth occurs at a sustainable rate with careful consideration of the future long-term costs and commitment involved in acquiring and preserving materials and with an awareness of existing holdings across the state and nation;
- Multiple interpretations and perspectives are encouraged through a range of curatorial programs, artist residencies, museum theatre, scholarly research and community engagement platforms;
- Significant NSW collections and heritage are managed and accessible through a networked sector of large cultural institutions (located in inner Sydney) and regional museums and galleries spread across the state, and a sophisticated online platform that supports audience interactivity;
- The NSW Government has a sophisticated understanding of the key differences and similarities between museums, galleries and heritage sites, and a whole-of-government approach to supporting the sector develop and maintain partnerships within the associated disciplines of visual arts and heritage and with other agencies working in education, cultural diversity, social inclusion and life-long learning.

Many of the above principles are currently being trialled or practiced in various ways and/or sector representatives are working towards theoretical and practical approaches at a local or institutional level. For example, Senior Curator, Sydney University Museums Jude Philp identified a framework for *living collections* as a key future ambition:

*When appropriate, the possibility of collections outreach and support where items can be borrowed by communities for continued use, for example, Indigenous collections and ceremonies. (Phone interview, 15/6/2011)*

Manager, Museum of the Riverina Madeleine Scully identified one of her big ambitions for the future of the sector in terms of a framework for managing collections and access:

*[Let's] make some big decisions around collections management and access – including considering accessible collections through digitisation and decentralised collections and de-accessioning. (Phone interview, 29/6/2011)*

Art Gallery of New South Wales Curator Jonathon Jones emphasised the cultural, historical and social significance of Aboriginal collections and heritage to NSW Aboriginal people and the broader community by calling for a searchable digital catalogue:

*Having the ability to search collections digitally will mean our regions are networked and wider sharing of knowledge throughout the regions can occur. This would include regional and state collections and improve dialogue between metropolitan and regional collections. (Phone interview, 11/7/2011)*

The *living collections and heritage* philosophy also seeks to ensure the physical, technological and professional infrastructure for museums and galleries exists in both regional and metropolitan NSW. The philosophy assumes state collections and heritage are viewed within a sustainable management framework using cultural mapping and significance assessment tools and community innovation and participation are enabled through the establishment of a network of regional centres of excellence. A fundamental aspect of this approach is that the vast numbers of volunteer-run organisations are supported, engaged and developed through community engagement programs coordinated through the regional centres. Further, that collections and heritage items deemed to be of special significance to the state are acquired and/or managed in regional NSW as well as the state collecting institutions and are accessible through a range of physical and virtual programs.

In terms of commitment to regional NSW, this shift would bring the museum and gallery sector in line with other government programs such as NSW Heritage Office, Regional Arts NSW, Tourism NSW and various service delivery agencies such as health and education. In terms of national and international theories of culture, arts and heritage, a shift would position the NSW sector to provide leadership for local, regional and international communities. *Living collections and heritage* and its various methodological tools forms both the philosophical and management framework for the state collections, and also provides set of tools that can be used by a range of volunteer museums, commercial galleries and individuals engaging with art and objects. The focus on multiple interpretations and multidisciplinary perspectives also fosters a culture of creativity, debate and interest around collections and heritage that paves a future for attracting local communities, visitors and tourists.

## **Cultural mapping and significance assessment**

Cultural mapping and significance assessment tools have been well developed and applied by the Australian museum and heritage sector<sup>11</sup>. Through the work of Museums Australia, Collections Council of Australia, Museums and Galleries NSW, the Australasian Registrars Committee and other peak bodies, Australia has a very good national standards framework for museums and galleries. Legislative guidelines such as Movable Cultural Heritage and the State Records Act also provide good bases for sector responsibilities.

As outlined throughout this strategy, moving towards the ‘sustainable management and community innovation and participation framework’ requires setting as a priority, and investing in, regional centres, technological infrastructure, professional development and NSW Aboriginal culture and community engagement. While there are various other important issues facing the sector, such as storage and energy efficiency for buildings, the need to identify, assess and locate

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<sup>11</sup> For example see: Clark, I., Sutherland, J., & Young, G. (1995), *Mapping Culture: A Guide for Cultural and Economic Development in Communities*, AGPS, Canberra; and Russell, R. & Winkworth, K. (2009) *Significance 2.0: a guide to assessing the significance of collections*, Commonwealth of Australia.

significant collections and heritage through a coordinated strategy is a fundamental and preliminary step in securing the sector's future. Cultural mapping and significance assessment tools are ready and available, technology is available but needs investment and commitment, the network of regional centres of excellence needs to be created and the State and sector need to adopt a united policy and strategic plan.

The initial priority activity for the regional centres of excellence would be to engage in cultural mapping and significance assessment of local and regional collections using the integrated *living collections and heritage philosophy* outlined above, so that further planning, collection management and interpretation strategies can be identified, communities can be engaged and involved, and the sector has an awareness of the scope and strong regional representation.

***Planning Proposal***

***The museum and gallery sector in NSW adopts and commits to the Living Collections and Heritage philosophy.***

***Arts NSW works with the sector to apply cultural mapping, significance assessment and online cataloguing tools to identify, assess and locate important NSW cultural heritage with a view to acquiring and/or managing through a network of Regional Centres of Excellence.***

***The proposed technology taskforce adopts the Living Collections and Heritage philosophy in developing strategies and initiatives.***

## CASE STUDY 1 – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### Lake

Debbie Abraham, Director Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery professional staff pride themselves on fine contemporary curatorial practice supported by artists residencies. *Lake*, curated by Meryl Ryan and Malcolm Smith, is a perfect example.

As a metropolitan/regional curatorial collaboration, *Lake* drew together exemplary multi-disciplinary work including photo media, film, sculpture, painting and sound by artists based overseas and throughout Australia. As a significant component of the project, Macquarie-born and New York-based artist Ian Burns was invited back to the region as an artist-in-residence, to create two new assemblage works for the exhibition, *Pond* and *Martha's Shadow*. He and two other artists, GW Bot and Tobias Richardson, were in the gallery throughout installation and the opening. The curatorial rationale firmly placed the exhibition within the gallery's unique regional site – on the shores of the largest coastal saltwater lake in Australia. The community's reaction to the exhibition was overwhelming with 5,000 visiting the gallery to view it. Comments included: "Really in-depth exhibition"; "Very thought provoking"; "Very impressive especially the hammerhead! [*Pond*]"; and "Perfect atmosphere of the [children's] workshop in the background".

*Lake* featured GW Bot, Ian Burns, John Conomos, Nici Cumpston, Murray Fredericks, Louise Hearman, Catherine Nelson, Tobias Richardson and Troy Ruffels and was made possible through Arts NSW Triennial Program Funding.



Children viewing 'Pond' by Ian Burns with 'Martha's Shadow' in the foreground. Photo courtesy Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, 2010.

## CASE STUDY 2 – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### International exchange through fellowships

Sarah Johnson, Curator/Programs Coordinator Manly Art Gallery and Museum

In 2010 I was awarded the Museums & Galleries NSW Asia Pacific Fellowship to explore what Singapore and its cultural heritage is and how this is presented to the local and international audience. The fellowship explored the programming and exhibitions presented and developed by key cultural institutions in Singapore such as The National Museum of Singapore and Asian Civilisations Museum as well as other key institutions in the city state run by government and private sources. One of the key areas of investigation was how such programs and exhibitions in these cultural institutions resonate to a small regional art gallery and museum such as Manly Art Gallery & Museum that houses a fine art, decorative art and beach culture collection including swimwear and beach paraphernalia. The two weeks spent in Singapore were extremely inspiring and professionally invaluable in terms of networking and expanding my knowledge of the international museum and gallery sector.

One of the primary aims was to actively seek and research innovative programming. The National Museum of Singapore, Asian Civilisations Museum and the smaller community based Peranakan museum became interesting models for how exhibitions can be curated and displayed; how collections can be interpreted creatively; and especially how children can be engaged with accessible, creative and fun programming that connects them with the collection. Key exhibition 'hooks' such as the Peranakan Museum's 'telephones through the ages' interactive where you can listen in on a conversation between Peranakan women in different times in Singaporean history utilize oral history sources in a new way. The National Museum of Singapore's 'dress up' session in the 'My 60s wardrobe' program for primary school aged children is a feasible way that fashion (and in Manly's case swimwear collections) can be interpreted creatively for young children.

The following key ideas will be explored back in Manly as a result of the international exchange:

- create programming to engage more children to the gallery and collection
- address staffing shortfalls by engaging consultants to develop programming
- peer to peer guiding program
- exhibition design options



*My 60s fashion workshop session for children at the National Museum of Singapore. L- R Workshop facilitator Betty introducing concept of textiles and fashion collection to students; Dress up session for students; craft making exercise in the study lab.*

## CASE STUDY 3 – NSW ABORIGINAL CULTURES AND INDIGENOUS PARTICIPATION

### Professional development for Indigenous Arts Workers

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Four young emerging Indigenous arts workers from across New South Wales commenced a professional development program at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2011. The program is designed to integrate Aboriginal concepts, perspectives and cultural practices within mainstream arts institutions; to increase the number of Indigenous Australians in professional roles; and to develop the next generation of Indigenous Australian leaders in the visual arts.

The innovative new program provides trainees with a two-week intensive residency at the Gallery and the opportunity to develop and deliver a community-based project under the guidance of an Indigenous mentor currently practicing in their area of professional interest. The successful arts workers for 2011 are Kylie McNamara (25), a curator at the Moree Plains Gallery, Tahjee Moare (19), a second year arts student at the University of New South Wales, Clive Freeman (28), a freelance curator and project officer from Illawarra, and Rachel Piercy (37), a Public Programs Officer at Manning Regional Art Gallery. Response to the program thus far has been very positive:

*The Art Gallery of New South Wales is amazing and the past four days has been really good for me personally because I've been able to meet other curators, I've been able to meet artists, [and] look at different aspects of the whole industry. I'll be able to take it back home and do great things in Manning Valley.*

Rachel Piercy interviewed by Rhianna Patrick, ABC *Speaking Out*

Hetti Perkins (Senior Curator), Jonathon Jones (Curator) and Amanda Peacock (Education Coordinator) from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Department, Art Gallery of NSW run the professional development program initiated by the Australian Government's Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office for the Arts and Arts NSW, as part of the National Arts and Craft Industry Support Professional Development Fund.



Rachel Piercy. Photo: Scott Calvin, courtesy Art Gallery NSW.

## CASE STUDY 4 – INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

### The Dead Bones Society

Penny Packham, Public Programs Officer, Australian Fossil and Mineral Museum

The Dead Bones Society is a group of young writers inspired by the bones and stones of the Somerville Collection at the Australian Fossil and Mineral Museum in Bathurst NSW. In the company of Australia's only complete *T.rex* skeleton, young writers aged 9-14 attend regular writing workshops with author Paul Stafford in the eerie atmosphere of the museum after dark and create funny, spooky, weird and wild action packed stories about science, fiction and the realms of possibilities in between.

#### Living in the Dead

Author - William - Year 3 Hill End Public School

One night there was a noise in the backyard. It woke me up.

I looked out of the window and there was a DINOSAUR! In the backyard. It was a T-REX.

It was really big and it had red eyes and it was digging up the garden.

It was coming to the house to eat me and the dog.

Then I saw a hole in the sky so I went into the hole and it took me into a new world and I got lost.

News of the Society's adventures travelled fast and so we formed *Scattered Bones* – a series of dinosaur themed writing workshops delivered via video conference technology to regionally isolated schools across NSW. It is a fun and interactive combination of paleontology, creative narrative and persuasive text writing hosted by Paul Stafford and myself, supporting isolated schools to meet and work together writing dinosaur stories.

Bathurst Regional Council funds the ongoing operational costs of the Museum and our staff support the physical and virtual visitation thousands of school children. We have developed these two innovative collection-inspired and curriculum-based programs in partnership with a talented creative artist and the support of NSW Department of Education and Training, Arts NSW, Copyright Agency Ltd, Charles Sturt University and many others along the way. Through our colleague David Foley (Department of Education and Training) we recently facilitated climate change sessions between NSW schools and remote schools in Alaska.

After six years of creative writing, our Museum is thriving. Although, the latest stories from our young writers do have us wondering what our *T.rex* sometimes gets up to? ***Mum, a T-Rex followed me home – may I keep it?***



*T.rex and Paul Stafford. Photo courtesy Australian Fossil and Mineral Museum*

## CASE STUDY 5 – REGIONAL NETWORKS, CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

### Sustainable Collections Project Central NSW

Alison Russell, Community Liaison Adviser Orange City Council

The Sustainable Collections Project (2007-2011) is a joint initiative of Orange, Cabonne and Blayney Councils, administered by Orange City Council with funding support from Arts NSW, Museums and Galleries NSW and the participating Councils. The project is designed to assist community museums with the documentation, assessment and interpretation of collections; support councils improve the strategic planning and coordination of museums and collections; and work collaboratively towards the shared goals of sustainability, increasing and diversifying funding, supporting volunteers, improving standards and skills, developing technological infrastructure and targeting education, community and tourism objectives.

The Sustainable Collections project is currently in its fourth year and key achievements thus far have included:

- significance assessment and the development of coordinated collection development and management plans;
- enhanced community engagement and awareness of local collections;
- establishment of a local network to encourage external alliances and funding opportunities;
- employment of professional staff and contractors to work alongside volunteers;
- informed and considered advice to councils about museum and collections needs, opportunities and directions; and
- integration of strategic planning and policies with local council cultural plans to include alignment across various sectors, i.e. tourism, cultural, economic and development plans.

Through this project, the small museums of the Orange, Cabonne and Blayney local government areas have entered a dynamic new phase and we are actively planning for a thriving future.



*The Sustainable Collections project organised a conservation assessment for Stoke Stable and collection at Carcoar, 2011. Photo courtesy Orange City Council.*

## CASE STUDY 6

### Berrima District Museum

Bob Williams, Hon Curator, Berrima District Museum

Berrima District Museum seeks to collect, preserve, display and interpret the heritage of the Berrima District and the Wingecarribee Shire. Volunteer members of Berrima District Historical & Family History Society operate the Museum. The Society was founded in 1960 and the Museum shortly thereafter.

Financial support received from Museums & Galleries NSW over the past ten years has contributed greatly to the operation of the Museum. Through the VIM (Volunteer Initiated Museums) grants, we have been able to introduce Mosaic Collection Management software; refurbish showcases; convert a storeroom to a showcase room; and purchase archival boxes. The Leg Up grant program has provided our volunteers with several bursaries to attend the *Working Spaces* program and we have received several curator bursaries to travel and participate in conferences and symposiums.

The small grants program and standards program run by Museums & Galleries NSW have also invested in the capacity of the Berrima District Museum volunteers to develop exhibitions and programs. We have been recognised as a first class small museum through the following awards:

- 2008 Southern Highlands Business Award for Excellence in an Attraction
- 2009 iMAGine Award, exhibition by a volunteer run museum in NSW/ACT
- 2010 NSW Heritage Office Heritage Heroes Award for Bob and Gloria Williams

The support of Museums and Galleries NSW has enabled the Berrima District Museum to undertake many initiatives over the past ten years that would not otherwise have been possible.



*Winner of the 2009 iMAGine award – Prisoners in Arcady: German Mariners in Berrima 1915-1919. Photo courtesy Berrima District Museum.*