

Museums & Galleries NSW

M&G NSW Response to the Review by the Productivity Commission on the contribution of the not-for-profit sector 29 May 2009

Introduction

Museums & Galleries NSW is the leading agency to develop, support and promote regional, community and public museums and galleries across NSW. Our focus is on increasing community participation and engagement with NSW museums and galleries to promote lifelong learning, improved environments and build harmonious communities.

M&G NSW presents strategic programs, provides ongoing advocacy and develops services which play a pivotal role in nurturing sustainable museums and keeping places within their community.

M&G NSW's submission to the Review is from the perspective of a not-for-profit organisation. Working with museums, galleries and ARIs in NSW, this small organisation of 15 paid staff is able to undertake a wide and responsive range of activities because of the support it receives from government to do this. Many of these staff are able to gain training in the sector from working in the organisation and the younger staff particularly benefit from the knowledge, skills and experience they transfer in career development from this organisation to other organisations and into the sector.

As an apolitical not-for-profit organisation M&G NSW is able without bias to represent its stakeholders, the museums and galleries in NSW. It is nimble and flexible enough to partner diverse and relevant organisations to carry out a wide range of activities for maximum impact on the sector. It is able to undertake a significant amount of work to support government initiatives and to do so without the complexity of being part of a larger structure such as government.

M&G NSW advocates the many benefits of not-for-profit organisations particularly those run by volunteers in the museums and galleries sector. The organisation is concerned about sustainability in the sector and the impact of changes in state and local government funding. It suggests that the efficiency and effectiveness of the sector can be improved by clearly articulating the value of the assets which make up the sector, in the case of museums and galleries, the material culture and the people who care for that shared heritage at every level of government. This articulation at federal level can be through developing and maintaining a dedicated and viable stream of resources in terms of recurrent and consistent funding, by supporting strategic sector focused tertiary education, including curatorial and conservation training, and by incentive driven encouragement for continued volunteer and community participation in not-for-profit organisations in the museums and galleries sector. Trends and developments impacting

on the not-for-profit sector are clearly increased competition for government assistance, the impact of the global financial crisis and its implications in terms of government priorities in allocating resources.

Most significant in terms of the contribution of the not-for-profit sector is the increasing number of small volunteer run not-for-profit organisations which means that their ability to really progress and develop is limited. The current operational environment is unsustainable at a high quality level.

Response to Issues on which the Productivity Commission is seeking comment:

1. Measuring the contribution of the not-for-profit sector

Museums and Galleries in NSW

Museums & Galleries NSW has undertaken surveys of the museum and gallery sector on an annual basis since 2004. Key information, such as visitor numbers have been collected each year. Other information, which is less time sensitive, such as collection size, funding sources and policy development has been gathered through a series of targeted questions that change each year. An average of 400 surveys are distributed across the sector each year (an average of 50 to galleries, 50 to museums with paid staff and 350 to volunteer managed museums) of which on average, 150 surveys are returned. This breaks down as an average return rate of 70% from the galleries, 60% from museums with paid staff and 25% from volunteer managed museums.

Museums and galleries are integral components of sustainable communities. Their role as keepers of material culture for their region, as meeting spaces for a diverse local population, as employment for paid and volunteer staff and as a focus for the conservation and interpretation of community cultural heritage, cannot be underestimated. Whilst these are actions which are difficult to measure, the general health of the community is clearly reflected in the state of its not-for-profit sector, of which an integral component, particularly in the regions, is the museum and gallery.

Our records indicate that there are **621 museums and galleries in NSW**. Australian Bureau of Statistics information indicates that over 31% of museums and galleries in Australia are located in NSW. Thirty five of these are state or federally funded organisations. **Thirty seven are regional galleries** managed by local government, with a further **24 professionally staffed galleries** (including university funded galleries) across the state. There are **38 museums managed by local government** with a further **59 professionally staffed museums** including those managed by Trusts, universities and community groups. There are over **59 community galleries and artist run initiatives**, **349 volunteer community museums** and **20 Aboriginal keeping places and cultural centres**. Approximately 34% of these are located in greater metropolitan Sydney with 30% in coastal regional areas and 36% in non-coastal regional areas of the state.

Visitor numbers to museums and galleries in NSW are estimated at 7-7.5 million per year. An average of **1.5 – 2 million people** visit museums and galleries outside the CBD per year. These organisations are managed by **3-400 staff** and **3,500 – 4,000 volunteers**.

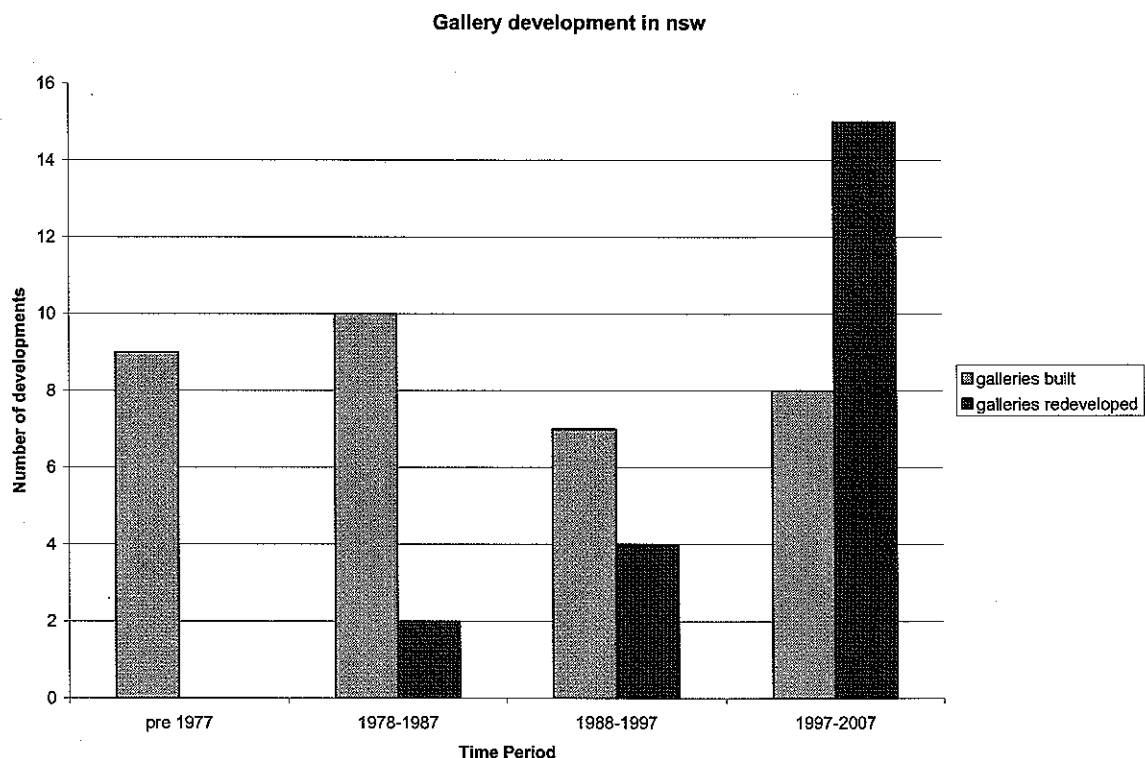
Volunteers in the not-for-profit organisations make up a significant component of the sector workforce and their highly valued contribution is essential to the sustainability of both volunteer run and professionally run not-for-profit museums and galleries. More than 8.5 million collection items are currently housed in museums managed by organisations. In regional NSW, these are primarily not-for-profit organisations such as historical societies or other groups of volunteers collected according to a shared interest, to manage cultural heritage.

Since 1999 there has been significant development in terms of infrastructure and positions at the regional museum and gallery level. During this period there have been **eight new galleries** established and **thirteen redevelopments** involving either a new building or extension to an existing structure.

In the same period there have been **eleven new museums** established and **fifteen redevelopments**.

Outline of Local Government gallery developments in NSW

The graph below outlines regional gallery developments and redevelopments in four key periods, pre 1977, 1978-1988 and 1997-2007.



Museums & Galleries NSW would be interested in the opportunity to make a more detailed submission in response to the draft report in September.