



Advocating for the people of Western Sydney

WSROC RESPONSE TO:

FRAMING THE FUTURE: DEVELOPING AN ARTS AND CULTURAL POLICY FOR NSW

DISCUSSION PAPER

DECEMBER 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Discussion Paper *Framing the Future: Developing an Arts and Cultural Policy for NSW*.

This response has been prepared by WSROC in consultation with its member Councils. WSROC member Councils will also have made their own submissions, which should be considered separately and in addition to this response.

The Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils Ltd (WSROC) represents 10 local government areas, including Auburn, Bankstown, Parramatta, Holroyd, Blacktown and Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool and Penrith. It also takes in the Blue Mountains which is also well known for its strong artistic and cultural community.

The cultural diversity of the region is unique to Australia. More than one third of the Western Sydney population has been born overseas and half of the world's nations are represented among its residents

With a current population of 1.9 million people and another 1 million expected to settle in the region in the next 20 years, the social, economic and cultural importance of Western Sydney is widely recognised. However, despite former initiatives to develop a strong and vibrant artistic industry in Western Sydney, there remains a worrying inequity between Western Sydney and other regions (NSW or Sydney) when it comes to arts employment, infrastructure, audience building and funding.

WSROC strongly supports the development of a NSW Arts and Cultural Policy as we hope this will be an important step towards a more strategic approach to arts and cultural development for the region. However, we do want to express our deep concern regarding some major gaps in the paper, mainly regarding the lack of recognition of Western Sydney and the role of Local Government.

Our more detailed response is set out in this submission.

- **RECOGNITION OF WESTERN SYDNEY AS A PRIORITY AREA**

WSROC is very concerned with the fact that the paper does not recognise Western Sydney as a priority area for arts and cultural development.

With over 1.9 million people in the Greater Western Sydney region – and a further 1 million expected over the next 20 years, encompassing the North-West and South-West growth centres, the region is a social and economic powerhouse which presents great opportunities.

The region's population makes up one third of the total NSW population. However, looking at recent state government spending on Arts in Western Sydney, the inequity of funding is very clear: of the \$311 million being spent on the arts in NSW this financial year, Western Sydney will receive \$3 million - less than 1 per cent.

Further, there is an increasing trend to assume that Western Sydney audiences are adequately serviced through the provision of activities in inner-city based organisations, for example bringing in schoolchildren from Western Sydney to a major cultural institution. This attitude denies Western Sydney audiences the opportunity to experience quality arts and culture in their own communities, including locally developed arts experiences. Funding is directed to major cultural institutions in inner Sydney to deliver to Western Sydney rather than funding being used to support and grow already established Western Sydney arts institutions and organisations. Our community wants arts experiences that are locally relevant and which are presented where they live.

The arts and cultural content developed in Western Sydney is highly diverse and of great quality, including in particular a sophisticated engagement with Pacific-Asian content. The region has also long been a producer of quality artists and cultural content. However, the region's audiences are diverse in age, culture and language – and therefore services provided at the local area often have a very specific focus on social and economic outcomes. Without the much needed support and strategic direction led by Arts NSW, the potential of the region will not be fully realised.

Without a proactive strategic focus of Arts NSW on Western Sydney, with a dedicated position and strategically directed funds, there will be no strategic approach to Western Sydney's arts and cultural development. There will also be no well-informed ongoing dialogue with the region or advocate within Arts NSW to ensure that one third of the population of NSW receives its fair share of funding and support and that those funds are spent in accordance with identified priorities.

WSROC would like to see Arts NSW commit to Western Sydney by recommitting Western Sydney as a priority area, and reflecting this in resources, funding and support. This will go some way towards redressing the imbalance of funding in the Sydney metropolitan area and will progress the development of arts and culture in Western Sydney.

WSOC recommends that the NSW Arts Policy reflects:

- Western Sydney as a key-priority area.
- Commitment to more proportional funding for Western Sydney.
- Commit to representation of Western Sydney at major NSW Arts institutions (E.g. a Western Sydney representative on their Board).
- Commit to a dedicated Western Sydney regional co-ordinator funded by Arts NSW, which would enable State Government to:
 - Better understand the role played by local government in the arts sector in the region; and
 - Provide valuable support and advice to Councils and arts organisations.
- The paper currently seems to be disproportionately focussed on CBD arts organisations and does not recognise Western Sydney arts facilities, work programs and artists. The paper should acknowledge Western Sydney arts achievements and should recognise that Western Sydney is a producer as well as a consumer of new arts experiences and creative industries

• **SUPPORT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

WSROC would like to strongly express its concern regarding the paper's lack of adequate recognition of Local Government's role in arts and cultural development.

While the paper references Councils as mainly responsible for cultural planning, arts venues and libraries, WSROC would like to stress that this vision grossly understates the important role Local Government plays in this sector as well as the limited resources local government has for investment in the arts.

Also, the focus on the six statutory cultural institutions is worrying for Council supported regional arts facilities and smaller suburban Arts organisations. WSROC would like a clear commitment to the ongoing support of regional facilities and organisations.

Local Government's crucial contribution towards the arts sector is evident in its support of purpose built arts facilities, community facilities, community cultural development and grass roots arts development – with the majority of Council's arts and cultural expenditure generally directed towards operational costs of arts facilities, arts projects and programs.

However, Councils face enormous challenges in their arts and cultural development work:

- Conflicting priorities and agendas and stretched resources make funding for the arts at Council level very vulnerable.
- In addition, those stretched resources and limited funding makes finding and applying for external funding a struggle.
- Because of the region's diversity, arts and cultural development at a grass roots level is an ongoing challenge and extremely labour intensive.

- Many Western Sydney arts institutions and Councils struggle with a shortage of suitably qualified and experienced staff.
- Adding to these pressures are our chronically under-resourced Local Government arts departments and institutions, and a lack of support from State and Federal Government.

The paper does not demonstrate a genuine commitment or recognition from NSW Government to support Local Government. Support and assistance is desperately required to maintain Council spending on cultural activities so that all the great work achieved over recent years is not lost.

WSROC recommends the discussion paper reflects:

- Genuine recognition and support for Local Government's role in arts and cultural development. Councils operate across all the priority themes listed in the Discussion Paper, therefore we recommend Local Government is given a separate category in the paper.
- To genuinely capture Local Government's needs, proper and extensive consultation with local government is needed. The current level of consultation lacks depth and breadth and will not deliver the best outcomes for the sector.
- Cross-agency collaboration is key to making arts and cultural development a success in Western Sydney. There is a role for Arts NSW to assist in brokering partnerships between the tiers of government and other organisations (establishing services, networks and relationships).
- The diversity of Local Government operations in the sphere of cultural development and areas where the sector is struggling, for example:
 - Support for grass roots arts development / Cultural Development / Arts Officers.
 - Limited internal Council support, funding and resourcing available.
 - A push from the State (e.g. incentives and rigour) might be needed to secure long term outcomes at Local Government level (look at examples from other states).
- Structural resourcing is needed to create a sustainable arts environment. There needs to be guaranteed long term funding and support for organisations; local government looks for surety in funding from the State Government for its cultural institutions as this builds confidence in service delivery and sustainability. It also needs to be recognised that the development of audiences and artists requires pathways, development and sustained financial support across the creative ecology – which requires a multi-tiered approach.
- Comprehensive qualitative and quantitative research on arts in Western Sydney is desperately needed. WSROC recommends research to include:

- A strategy for cross-sector data collection which enables users to drill down to LGA specific data, including roles for Councils and state agencies in evaluation of the Arts.
- Councils' best practice and Councils' expenditure on arts.
- Visualisation of the Western Sydney arts "eco system" (artist and audience development, including education, perception, job creation, etc.).

• **ROLE OF ARTS NSW**

Arts NSW has an important role to play in making explicit links between cultural development and broader development agendas within the State public sector with the potential to bring more funding to the cultural sector. This includes:

- Planning
- Regional development
- Infrastructure
- Health
- Education

The cultural interfaces of these state agencies are currently under-developed. Clear points of contact within these agencies are needed to interface with Arts NSW and to mirror the increasing level of integration within Local Government of cultural development and planning with processes of urban development and regeneration, economic and employment development and environmental sustainability.

The Federal Government's Australia Council for The Arts should be a key partner in the policy, however, the paper does not make mention of strategic collaboration with this agency. As stated before, establishing good partnerships across the three tiers of government is crucial to achieve the best possible strategic outcomes.

WSROC recommends:

- Arts NSW to take on a brokerage role and be the driver of strategic cross sector collaboration of the three tiers of Government. For example through:
 - Establishing multi-disciplinary teams across governments and within government.
 - Development of clear communication strategies between Australia Council for the Arts and Arts NSW.

• **ARTS EDUCATION & TRAINING (AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE)**

WSROC finds it worrying that the paper does not mention Arts education and development which should be at the core of the development of a sustainable and viable arts sector.

It is not just funding which is needed to develop the arts sector; support, training and mentorship for young people and artists are crucial. There is ongoing ramifications from the loss of Visual Arts Courses at the University of Western Sydney and the current changes in TAFE and University arts courses. The responsibility for delivering artist support often comes down to Local Government, who are already under pressure because of limited resources.

Therefore, WSROC strongly stresses the need for genuine partnerships between arts education and other sectors (e.g. Trade and Investment, Health and Education) – with arts being entrenched across all sectors.

WSROC recommends:

- Training and education in arts needs to be re-investigated – new engagement model needs to be established.
- Support and mentoring for young people and artists needs to be included in the paper and policy.

• **RECOGNITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

The discussion paper does not make mention of young people. The engagement of children and young people in the arts and as artists is a critical aspect of the work that many arts organisations do, and the fact that the discussion paper does not mention them is a serious omission. It is also critical to acknowledge that young people engage with the arts beyond the classroom as audiences and as producers.

WSROC recommends:

- The paper to acknowledge young people and include strategies for engagement of young people.

• **OTHER COMMENTS ON THE PAPER**

- The focus of the discussion paper seems to be unbalanced; the emphasis seems to be on business, marketing and tourism with a disproportionate weight given to simple audience numbers instead of audience development and artist support.

The measures of success for cultural institutions, each referred to numerous times in the discussion paper are:

- Quantitative rather than qualitative audience numbers.
- Capacity to strengthening NSW economy.
- Situating NSW as the cultural leader in Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

These goals do not encourage the NSW population to engage with the arts in a

meaningful way. These goals have very little to do with the role of artists in communities or the many community development benefits the arts can bring.

- The paper displays a shocking lack of recognition of artists and arts workers. The policy should start from the arts workers and the artists and lead towards the institutions.
- There seems to be a lack of consultation on this paper; the timing for feedback and notice for workshops were much too short.
- The paper displays a lack of depth in understanding about the complexity and diversity of arts practice and institutions in NSW.
- The paper seems to display little long term vision and cultural development strategy. It is more descriptive of the current situation, than visionary or aspirational in nature.
- The vision seems inappropriate: Why separate Sydney and NSW? Isn't Sydney part of NSW? The focus on competition with other states also seems misplaced and a poor focus for activity. Arts and culture by and for the whole of NSW would be a more sustainable vision.

CONCLUSION

WSROC commends the development of a NSW Arts policy, however, the current discussion papers shows major gaps which should be addressed to be able to develop the sector across the state.

The main points of recommendation are:

- Western Sydney should be a priority area.
- Local Government's role needs to be recognised and supported and ongoing commitment to support and funding should be stated.
- A proper strategy for Arts Education and Training needs to be included.
- Engagement of young people in the arts needs to be included.

WSROC strongly recommends Arts NSW conducts a comprehensive consultation with Local Government on the paper to determine the needs of Local Government in terms of arts and cultural development.

Clr Tony Hadchiti



WSROC President