

Submission to the Enquiry on the National Cultural Policy

Cobar is a mining town in the far west of New South Wales. It is one of the few towns in Australia with an historic and on-going role in mining. The first discovery of copper was made in 1870, leading to the establishment of the Great Cobar Mine, which became one of the biggest industrial businesses in Australia. Further exploration led to the development of other mines and the foundation of smaller outlying towns and villages.

The Great Cobar Museum, which is operated by the Cobar Shire Council, is on the site of the old Great Cobar Copper Mine. The building, completed in 1912, was once the administration offices for the mine. It also functions as the Visitor Information Centre. It is staffed by council employees, including a Tourism and Events Manager, and a professional curator. The exhibitions tell complex, multi-stranded stories of Cobar's history and community, starting (and continuing) with the traditional owners, the Ngiyampaa Wangaaypuwan people. As well as mining, the museum speaks of the pastoral industry and of the lively times and people of the area. A highly significant item is the Royal Far West Children's Health Scheme Mobile Baby Clinic, the last survivor of the railway carriages that operated throughout the state to provide much-needed health services to families.

Our area is classified as remote. This classification is a label for the suite of conditions under which we live and work that have many ramifications for our museum. In considering the National Cultural Policy in relation to museums such as ours – small, remote, but with significant collections and history that speak not only to our local community but are of interest and importance to the state and the country, I would like to make the following points:

- There is a need for funding for safe, secure and appropriate storage facilities for collections in smaller and regional museums, together with the need to provide access to the storage and to build in on-going maintenance and any necessary expansion and up-grading of such storage facilities. In our situation, we have extremes of weather with sub-zero temperatures in winter and maximums over 45°C in summertime. The humidity is usually low, but may become high at times. Buildings that can control or at least moderate the effects of such extremes to protect the collections are needed, with particular consideration given to the fact that collections such as ours are made up of a wide variety of materials with differing storage concerns
- The need to provide an appropriate way for smaller and rural/remote/regional museums to have items on long-term loan from larger institutions, for example: the National Gallery has an item in its collection that is of great significance to Cobar, but enquiry has shown that having it on loan is very difficult with insurance, secure long-distance transport and on-site security plus the cost of these being issues
- The need for a program of insurance, resilience and disaster recovery. While we are not prone to flooding, we inhabit an older building that has vulnerabilities, including proximity to active mine sites and effects of other adverse weather such as sudden, violent storms, dust storms, drought (aridity)

affects objects and also affects general environment and can increase the risks of pest activity)

- The importance of collections such as ours that tell not only our local and shire story, but connect in meaningful and complex ways to the wider story of the region, state and nation, together with the importance of our collection and museum in our community in building, reflecting and sustaining identity while also responding to on-going changes in identity. We are and always have been a highly transient multicultural community with a mix of people who move on and those with more permanent residency; our museum speaks to this
- The need to address environmental and climate change issues in a multifaceted way, both through the fabric and practices of the museum and through the way we interact with our community. Funding for change in both physical structures and in education for museum staff, plus funding for creating programs to communicate with our diverse audiences is needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I hope that these comments are of use.

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