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Submission:

Dear Minister

Of the \$42 million to support creative industries in NSW announced by Minister for the Arts, Virginia Judge recently as part of the State Government's \$42.7 million 2010 Arts Funding Program, very little funding was allocated to NSW museums and their programs.

Museums and their collections are a significant financial, community and cultural asset that require active management, maintenance and investment to sustain their value into the future. Museums are an important cultural and educational resource, and a repository of family and community memories. They are a legacy for the next generation and they are places that tell unique stories and reflect the distinctive identity of their community. With good planning, museums can play a dynamic role in the economic development of their region, underpinning tourism and new education and creative enterprises.

There are a number of issues preventing museums and collections fulfilling their economic and cultural potential. Museum developments are not coordinated across a region, new museums are opening without expert advice, perhaps incurring liabilities in the future, collections are not well documented or accessible, collections are growing without regard to their sustainability, and the distinctive themes and stories of each museum are not coordinated or linked to tourism marketing and the needs of visitors. Museum buildings need investment and volunteers need training and professional support. Small museums lack the resources to prepare competitive grant applications. And councils need expert advice and assistance with strategic planning for museums and collections to understand the sometimes-competing needs and priorities of their various museums.

Orange City Council in conjunction with Cabonne and Blayney Councils recently conducted an audit of the museums in the region. Here are some of the findings:-

- Ø Limited or non-existent collection documentation; less than 20% of the collections are catalogued and some have virtually no records
- Ø Collections are largely unprovenanced
- Ø Lack of storage and collection working space
- Ø Some collections at risk of theft in poorly designed exhibition areas, exacerbated by incomplete collection records
- Ø Exhausted and ageing volunteers, 45% of volunteers are over 70 and only 4% are under 45
- Ø Not enough volunteers to make up the backlog in collection documentation work, or even sustain museum operations
- Ø Some museum buildings are in a poor state of repair and many offer few amenities to make volunteering in the museum more comfortable
- Ø Competition for volunteers with other community groups that can offer a more rewarding volunteer experience with less responsibility
- Ø Poor museum environments are damaging collections through exposure to dust and light, and lack of suitable storage to enable rotation of organic items
- Ø Lack of space and resources to change and

update displays Ø Most of the historical societies are operating on very small budgets raised from membership fees and admissions Ø Lack of basic research on objects, despite the good record of museum volunteers in local history research Ø With a few exceptions, most of the museums have limited opening hours, restricting public access and service to tourists Ø Duplication of collection themes, due to the ad hoc accumulation of collections without planning, policies or coordination Ø Substantial numbers of objects in poor condition, incomplete, lacking a provenance or story relevant to the district, and generally unworthy of being in a museum, meaning the museums need a careful program of deaccessioning Ø Most museums lack phone and internet connections at a time when the web is changing museum practice and marketing. An enormous amount of museum advice is only available on-line Ø Lack of resources and skills to properly present and interpret collections, meaning that visitors and the community do not appreciate the significance of the collections

Regional museums work collaboratively with community museums in its region, complementing their collections and providing advice and support. Regional Museums are able to fulfil the three key themes for the National Cultural Policy; 1 - Keeping culture strong; 2 - Engaging the community; 3 - Powering the young.

With little funding, this work is unable to be completed and fully documented and the stories of our pasts significant objects will be lost forever. Museums and funding for these establishments and their programs need to be considered in the National Cultural Policy.