

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria

Melbourne – Thursday 13 March 2025

MEMBERS

Georgie Purcell – Chair

Richard Welch – Deputy Chair

John Berger

Katherine Copsey

Moira Deeming

Bev McArthur

Tom McIntosh

Evan Mulholland

Sonja Terpstra

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Gaelle Broad

Georgie Crozier

David Davis

David Ettershank

Michael Galea

Renee Heath

Sarah Mansfield

Rachel Payne

WITNESSES

Dr Ashley Robertson, Executive Director, and

Anthony Camm, President, Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the land we are gathered on today and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I also welcome any other members of the public watching via the live broadcast.

To kick off, committee members will just introduce themselves, starting with Mr Mulholland.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Evan Mulholland, Northern Metro.

Richard WELCH: Richard Welch, North-Eastern Metro.

The CHAIR: Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria.

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copsey, Southern Metropolitan.

John BERGER: John Berger, Southern Metro.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for appearing before us today. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during his hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you both please state your full names and the organisations you are appearing on behalf of.

Anthony CAMM: Anthony James Camm, President of AMAGA – the Australian Museums and Galleries Association, Victorian branch.

The CHAIR: Wonderful.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Ashley Robertson. I am the Executive Director of the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. We now welcome your opening comments but ask that they be kept to around 10 to 15 minutes to ensure plenty of time for discussion and questions.

Anthony CAMM: My name is Anthony Camm. I am the President of the Australian Museums and Galleries Association of Victoria, and I am here today with Ashley Robertson, the Executive Director of the organisation. We are here to address the committee on the state of Victoria's cultural and creative industries.

Since 1994 the Australian Museums and Galleries Association, which is known by its acronym AMAGA, has served as the nation's peak body for museums and galleries. AMAGA Victoria is the largest membership branch of this national body and we represent more than a thousand collecting organisations across Victoria, from small community-run museums to large state-funded institutions.

I think it is an opportunity here to say it was really great that we could follow the Public Galleries Association of Victoria because we work very collegially with PGAV and Anne has very clearly articulately represented the needs of the public gallery sector specifically. They also form part of our membership. But we are here today specifically to shine a light on the situation around museums and particularly those that are small to medium size and community run because we feel that there is an opportunity for us to advocate for and to share information about that specific cohort.

Our purpose as an organisation is to strengthen museums and galleries by sharing knowledge, connecting expertise and building networks. We support the sector with evidence-based programs and services that respond to its evolving needs, enabling the long-term preservation and public access to Victoria's cultural heritage. In our submission we address points 1 and 5 of the terms of reference. To summarise point 1, the *Revive* cultural policy offers a road map for Australia's cultural industries, yet museums and galleries find themselves on the periphery of its vision with only limited references, most notably under pillar 4, 'Strong Cultural Infrastructure', which is on pages 74 and 77. Here we see mention of First Nations repatriation efforts and digitisation of at-risk cultural material, the Sharing the National Collection program, which is the initiative that is being delivered through the National Gallery of Australia, and a review of *Significance 2.0*, which is a really vital resource for our sector that establishes best practice around collection management and more.

Beyond this, the policy's scope and relevance for museums and galleries remains limited. It is the view of AMAGA Victoria that *Revive*'s focus on larger organisations is an unfortunate oversight, leaving thousands of small, medium and community-run institutions without recognition or direct support. This lack of commitment undermines the essential role in preserving and showcasing collections of local, state and national significance. While the policy acknowledges challenges for community-run museums on page 12, describing them as 'an army of ageing volunteers working tirelessly to bring collections to life and to safeguard ageing physical infrastructure', it stops short of providing concrete actions or funding to address these challenges. For a policy intended to revive the sector, its omissions are concerning. Without targeted investment, the very institutions that ensure all Victorians are afforded with broad public access to culture and history remain vulnerable. The museum and gallery sector needs more than recognition. It needs meaningful funding and support to sustain communities, places and collections that keep Australia's cultural heritage alive and accessible. Over to you, Ash.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: I will pick up from point 5 now. Over the course of this process the committee has heard extensive evidence on whether *Revive* and state government policies provide sufficient support for Victoria's cultural and creative industries. The reality is that funding for the museum and gallery sector, and you would have heard quite a bit of that from Anne just before, across the board has not been able to keep pace with rising costs and growing workforce needs, increasing storage demands and the urgent need for infrastructure development and equipment renewal that is being driven by the effects of climate change.

Rather than focusing on the wider sector today, as Anthony mentioned, we would like to take the opportunity to highlight a particularly vulnerable subset, which is the community-run museums and the aforementioned ageing army of volunteers. The distinction between professional and community museums is not as clear cut as it may seem. Many committee-run museums have demonstrated their commitment to professionalism by achieving accreditation through AMAGA Victoria's community museum accreditation program. This is the gold standard for our sector for best practice. Furthermore, museums thrive on collaboration, so paid museum professionals contribute specialised expertise, while volunteers bring deep local knowledge and community connections. This interdependence strengthens the entire sector, ensuring that collections are cared for and stories are shared with our communities.

Despite this, community-run museums continue to face significant challenges. They have been left without the security of funding pathways for infrastructure development and renewal, without opportunities to upskill and grow their communities and without the support of dedicated networks and policies. For AMAGA Victoria these compounding factors represent the greatest threat to the future of the state's distributed collections. For clarity of the committee, the term 'distributed collections' encompasses all cultural heritage material that sits outside of the state-owned collections. These include collections that are held by public museums and galleries, RSLs, Aboriginal keeping places, sporting clubs, churches, schools, historical societies and many other community groups.

Two-thirds of Victoria's collecting sector is made up of community-run organisations, and that is more than 750 groups across Victoria, largely sustained by volunteers, who are responsible for anywhere between 10 million and 15 million collection items, which comprise more than a quarter of Victoria's cultural heritage holdings. These largely unsung collections serve as repositories of our collective memory, deeply connected to specific regions, communities and moments in time. They educate and inspire, they strengthen community identity and they serve as a foundation for historical research and artistic creation. They actively contribute to the broader sector through object loans to larger institutions, and they reinforce the interconnectedness of Victoria's cultural heritage. While less conspicuous than major institutional collections, they do play a significant part within our shared history. Yet many small to medium organisations operate in ageing buildings, lack essential equipment and face ongoing uncertainty about their future. Community-run organisations are often reliant on legacy lease agreements that are in place with local government, which are vulnerable to change. In addition, state and federal support for distributed collections has decreased over the years, with cultural policy shifts privileging economic impact over cultural benefits.

What we do not know about this subset of distributed collections far outweighs what we do know about it. However, what we do know is that organisations such as the Golden Dragon Museum in Bendigo, the Maldon museum, the Australian Queer Archives in St Kilda and the Benalla Migrant Camp each hold collections that are recognised on the Victorian Heritage Register as being of state significance, to name just a few. Yet many of these minimally staffed or entirely volunteer-run organisations continue to face significant challenges, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, as funding opportunities shrink, costs rise and volunteer numbers decline. This is the reality of what is at stake here. Without intervention, irreplaceable histories and cultural heritage are at risk of neglect, dispersal or loss. We ask the committee to consider: when these community-run organisations that care for more than 25 per cent of Victoria's cultural heritage wind up and disappear, how will these stories be told and where will the collections go? The scale of what is at risk within the distributed collections is enormous, and the disparity in resourcing is glaring.

Investing in places, communities and collections today is the only way to ensure that they survive for tomorrow. What does this look like? We have given you quite a problem. AMAGA Victoria has provided several recommendations to the Victorian government as part of the *Creative State* submission, and we will summarise a few of those for you now. Victoria needs to invest in sustained funding pathways for infrastructure development and renewal. The Regional Infrastructure Fund once provided grants that stimulated economic and community development in rural Victoria, which currently are not available. The regional collections access program, which Anne spoke about earlier, enabled vital equipment and infrastructure upgrades, preserving collections and increasing cultural access and tourism. As a one-off program it too is gone. Without the security, where do they go? Victoria needs to invest in strategies and programming to develop and grow a skilled community of volunteers into the future.

The impact of COVID-19 has accelerated the decline of volunteerism – we know this – and as a result the biggest issue is building capacity to sustain community collecting organisations. Without action, cultural collections risk being lost and local governments may ultimately bear the responsibility for preserving these significant historical materials. Without strategies, where do they go? Victoria needs to invest in dedicated networks, such as what PGAV has suggested about the arts and cultural position at Local Government Victoria, as well as policies at all levels of government to support community-run museums to achieve organisational sustainability. Some councils do engage meaningfully with their local community groups; many do not, largely due to a lack of dedicated specialist staff, organisational capacity or even industry knowledge.

Fewer still have formal policies in place, and as a result, volunteers struggle with strained relationships with their councils and a lack of trust. Without support, where do they go? With Creative Victoria's investment AMAGA Victoria has made progress in addressing some of these challenges, namely within capacity building and infrastructure support – a standout example being, among others, Victorian Collections, which is a free collections management system and public website as well as a training program that was developed in partnership with Museums Victoria. Currently over 600 organisations use VC to document, digitally preserve and share their collections, with more than half a million collection items having been catalogued in total, and a percentage of those are available to the public. However, our ability to meet sector-wide demands remains constrained by limited resources, leaving many organisations without the critical support that they need. So we ask the committee to please consider these points that we have raised here today, knowing that the survival of Victoria's community-run museums and distributed collections really does depend on sustained government

funding and support. Investing in this sector now is not just about preservation for collection items, but it is also about ensuring a vibrant, connected and diverse cultural landscape and community. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you so much. I will go to members for questions, starting with Mr Berger.

John BERGER: Thank you, Chair. I might start with you, Dr Robertson, or would you prefer Ashley?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Just call me Ash.

John BERGER: No problems. You spoke at length about Victorian Collections. I just wonder if you are able to share with us what you have been able to achieve through the support of the Victorian government.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Sure. It started back in 2009, actually, in response to Black Saturday. What ended up happening is some of these historical societies were at risk of losing not only their physical collections but also the digital records of their collections, which would have left them without any information that was once held within their institutions. With Victorian government seed funding, the museum came together with us to think about a cloud-hosted, in a way, system that would allow for these groups to digitally preserve them by photographing them and documenting them into a system that was then backed up onto servers at Museums Victoria. All these collections are being held there, backed up there, but are able to be accessed onsite at the historical societies as well while they are doing the cataloguing work. The public-facing part has allowed us to be able to publish information about the collections that these organisations hold. Prior to this, we really did not know much at all about the distributed collections, and I would say that even today this is the best view into what is out in the distributed collections for us.

Half a million items, not all publicly available, have been catalogued since 2011 really, when it kind of got up and running, and it is growing exponentially, so much so that it is hard for us to keep up. We are constantly being contacted by organisations, as a free resource as well, for them to be able to transfer their data onto the site. It is more than just a repository for their items; we also provide the migration service. It is really hard for volunteers sometimes to get their heads wrapped around 'How am I getting data off of my computer into this thing called the cloud?' We are able to work with them one on one, get their data, and then position them where it is ready to be migrated over. We then also provide upskilling in the form of staged training courses, which we can do onsite or online to be able to offer the training more broadly. That is in the areas of how you use the system, how you properly catalogue and document collection items, then we go into access and how that works: operating a camera to make sure that you are getting really nice photos so that you are not putting in blurry images that are at high resolution into the system. It has worked brilliantly to this point, and the relationship with the museum has been fantastic. They have got that really rich knowledge about the digital infrastructure and how to best manage that, and then we get to be the boots on the ground, working with the communities and translating it into a way that is accessible for them.

John BERGER: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Great. Thanks, Mr Berger. I will go to Ms Broad.

Gaëlle BROAD: Thank you very much for attending today. You talked about preserving collections of local, state and national significance, and you said 750 groups. Is that across Victoria?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: That is across Victoria, and that is a rough estimation based on the figures that we have collected. Was that the end of the question?

Gaëlle BROAD: I am interested in whether there any gaps that you see more in terms of museums, like preserving the history side? Are there any particular gaps? I cover the northern Victoria area, as does the Chair.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: For the organisations that are volunteer run and using the system?

Gaëlle BROAD: Yes.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: That is interesting. We have got users of VC across the board. We do have them more in clusters in and around more active council areas or areas that have more groups available, because they tend to work together. Of course you have quite a few groups in and around the Ballarat region and around the north-east around the Indigo shire – there are quite a few there as well. Down through Gippsland we are getting

more and more as time goes on. It was a difficult area for us to move into, but we are getting more of that onto the system now. I could not say if there is one particular area where we cannot move into.

I think some of the barriers to access have to do with internet connection, if it is not available. You have to have that in order to use Victorian Collections. There are some areas further towards the west of Victoria that we know are having difficulties getting reliable access. What we were happy to see within the *Revive* policy were discussions around the NBN and having those infrastructures put into place to reach regional and remote areas. We have worked directly with some groups where there is one individual whose job it is to have the dish, and they are on the top of the hill and cataloguing the items. Hopefully with this infrastructure investment we will be able to see more users in those areas as well.

Gaelle BROAD: In other areas we have seen funding go to the larger organisations and not necessarily trickle down to the smaller groups. I have met a number of smaller groups that do rely on volunteers; they are very passionate in regional areas. Wedderburn has got like the old coach house area. There are historical societies around the place that have passionate volunteers, and the steam engine display at Bendigo Showgrounds. There are quite a number, but can you talk about the grant process? Is there money filtering down to those groups? Are they completely volunteer run?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Most are completely volunteer run. I can say that from the groups that we accredit at least half of them are volunteer run out of the 85 that we have accredited. When you are dealing with volunteers, yes, it is about a lack of capacity, but sometimes it is about a lack of skill as well. When you are looking at some of these grants that are available for equipment purchase or infrastructure development, it is one step too far in a lot of ways, and some of them are not really accessible for them anyway because there is a matched dollar for dollar expectation or a cash contribution, which they do not have.

At AMAGA we run a quarterly grant showcase, and this is free for our members. We oftentimes have these groups coming to us and saying how much money they need for a particular project, and we will work and see if we can find a grant that matches that, where they do not have to do the dollar for dollar. A lot of these might be a quick grant fund, if it is a one-off equipment purchase. But many of these groups are needing to bolster or improve their collection storage, the conditions in which their collections are being held, which oftentimes requires some type of climate – they are not going to do a full HVAC system, but we are literally looking at maybe an air conditioning unit or something that can keep it a bit more stable in their space. But they do need a little bit of hand-holding in that area of applying for grants.

But there have been success stories. We were discussing RCAP (Regional Collections Access Program) before. And we did have a historical society in Benalla that was successful at the highest tier of that level and were able to undergo a redevelopment project with the Costume and Kelly Museum in Benalla, but that was also with support through council.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you. Part of the terms of reference for this inquiry is looking at the share of funding going to regional areas, and I am interested from a museum perspective. I know in Bendigo there has been talk over the years. It has a very rich history, but it does not seem to have a key museum. Like Golden Dragon, yes, but there has been talk about the old Bendigo law courts. I have raised it in Parliament, but a year later I still not have not got a response as to what the future use of that building is. But what are your thoughts on the share of funding? Is there enough going to regional areas from what is there in the pie at the moment?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: For the museums in particular?

Gaelle BROAD: Yes.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Look, I would say some of the larger museums are able to achieve success with grant funding. When you are looking at the community run in particular, they are not really in the game for that, and when you are talking about the use of other buildings, there is interest. We know that there is interest in historical societies or community run museums to transition into a space where they may be supported by councils, let us say. But I think it is that lack of visibility and the different avenues of support and how they can professionalise more, like accreditation or going through the training available that we have, to be able to get to that space. Councils have very successful museums and libraries, and these are all supported, but it is really difficult to get a museum up and running in that space, and it has not happened in the time that I have been with AMAGA. You might have more to say.

Anthony CAMM: Well, I just want to add something to that, because when you talk about I guess the entire ecosystem of galleries and museums – and you mentioned Bendigo museum, but of course you have got the art gallery that has received multiple grants, has grown substantially and is getting that funding because it is an attractor of visitation so it makes a massive economic impact. In one sphere of the sector you have got a lot of growth and a lot of funding being directed, say, through Regional Development Victoria using these kinds of economic imperatives, but then you have got the smaller museums that still might attract good visitation, they are certainly strongly connected to their community and they are custodians of these really vital community stories and objects that tell those stories – they just cannot compete against a gallery that can attract a blockbuster exhibition or an event that might attract 100,000 people. There is a little bit of a gap there in funding because there has always been, I guess, a bit of a tension between the intrinsic value of art and culture and then the economic drivers. They certainly work hand in hand, but I guess for some of the smaller museums, they have got less of an economic selling point. I would suggest that there is a gap in funding presently around the smaller sector that could be filled.

Gaelle BROAD: Can I ask one more?

The CHAIR: Yes, one more quick one.

Gaelle BROAD: We had an earlier witness say the cultural scene in 40 years will not exist. But just with museums I guess with AI and different technologies – I know Swan Hill had that light show – can you talk about the industry itself and how perhaps it is changing or evolving. I remember seeing years ago Werribee Mansion like a 3D image, so museums can be a static display, but they can also be very engaging. What does it look like when you look forward as to how we are going to be capturing that?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: I think you will get a different response depending on who you ask. They all have their space and place. There is that drive towards the big buzzword of immersive experiences and all the digital content. There is something to be said as well about the old-style tactile versions of having the object just there in front of you with some interpretations for you to consume within a quiet space. But I do not see in the near future this idea of moving towards AI and 3D renderings of items on catalogue systems happening for historical societies anytime soon, or even the small museums. I think the reason there being that they are dealing with so much else, or other barriers that they first need to be able to rise above before they can even think about future practices and what the newest thing is within museum practice. They are really great and have a huge appetite for wanting to adhere to best practices and do what is right by the collections. They are the most dedicated group of people that you will ever meet: constantly showing up, cataloguing all day in front of computers, doing really deep dives into a particular object. For Victorian collections alone, if we were to think about that in terms of volunteer hours, it is something like 1.5 million, and that is probably conservative, for time spent in trying to get these objects online. Yes, there are a lot of shifts happening in the museum and it is very exciting, but for this particular subset that we are referencing, the regional groups, at least the smaller, volunteer-run regional groups, that is going to take some time.

Gaelle BROAD: Actually, I should say the military museum is excellent in Bendigo too.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: We have worked a lot with the RSLs and the military museums as well. It is great.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Broad. I will go to Mr Mulholland.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Thank you. Thanks for coming in today. We really appreciate it. A lot of the focus is on the *Revive* policy federally. Where does it work, where doesn't it meet the mark and what are the options for improvement in terms of advocacy?

Anthony CAMM: We support that there is federal and national cultural policy. It is a great thing. It has a five-year duration. We do not feel that the small-to-medium and community-run museums are given enough respect in the document. I think even the language they use around that, about 'an ageing group of volunteers' and 'crumbling infrastructure', is a little bit dismissive and quite patronising. We know how dynamic the sector is, and as Ash said in our introduction, there is a really strong interconnection between the professional sector and even the smallest museum. You will find big institutions will sometimes draw objects and loan from the

smallest institution. So I do not think we can just easily write it off, and I think that the national *Revive* does that. However, we are hopeful that, given it has a five-year timeframe, it will be renewed in five years and our advocacy and the advocacy of others will ensure that museums and galleries are more fully represented in the future.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Can I add that that is something that is so important to the community sector, that recognition. I think that there is a lot of disappointment within the groups that are working so hard to do what is right and protect their community collections and histories, but they just feel like they are constantly running into a wall and being placated with ‘This is really great work that you’re doing’ but then nothing happens after that. We do what we can to fill the gaps, but even we are incredibly limited in our scope to be able to service all of Victoria’s 700-odd organisations.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I was not planning on asking this, but a consistent theme across the different galleries and institutions that have spoken to us is asking for just one staff member within Local Government Victoria to be able to cross-coordinate between local government areas. Could you talk us through how much of an assistance a role like that would be?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: We were actually discussing this. For us to be able to connect in with the communities in a meaningful way where we know what is happening, what they have, what they are struggling with, what elements of significance they might want to be preserving and conserving and what have you – that is incredibly difficult for us. But if you can imagine there being a role within government that could, as Anne was talking about, collaborate with other mandated roles or established roles within the LGAs, whose job was to just network with those groups within their LGAs, that would improve relationships. I think that there is a lot of frustration with turnover in these types of roles when they do exist. Some are more engaged than others. There is a lot of momentum and excitement when someone who knows what they are talking about and knows the sector is in that role. And you know when that is happening. We know when it is happening. There is a lot happening in that space. Digitisation is happening; they are contacting us and they are getting programs deployed out in the regions on a regular basis so that there is this constant upskilling, they are feeling really cared for and the collections are then going to be more accessible to the wider public in that way. But then when that individual leaves and if someone else who is less qualified or who might not be in their area of focus comes into the role, that connection drops out, and then we have to try as best we can to be that conduit between these regional groups from our office spaces in Melbourne. It is incredibly difficult.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes, and often that collaboration can be a bulwark against any lack of funding you might have. It can actually be quite helpful in cross-pollination. When I ran a theatre company we often used to work with all the other theatre companies in terms of costumes, sets and everything else, so you were not getting things new and you were sort of working together. It creates that real community spirit. Have you advocated to the Victorian government or had any conversations with them about your funding challenges?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: In respect to the distributed collections in the small museums, yes.

Evan MULHOLLAND: And I assume that was of a similar nature to what you have outlined.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Yes.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Did they have any particular response to that?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Oh, there is always interest. And I think that we can all feel for these organisations. I do not think anyone looks at what they are doing and thinks it is not worth anything. But I am going to be generous in saying that there are difficulties across the board.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes. We had some organisations state that they were blankly told there was no money for any increases. So we were wondering whether you guys had had any similar feedback.

Ashley ROBERTSON: Yes, we do. I mean, people that we are working with are really invested and understand the importance of the work, and I think are equally as frustrated, to be honest with you. But yes, I think we are all having, as we have been discussing, the not being able to keep up with rising costs, and capacity is low. This is across the board for government as well. But we are still advocating for it as much as we can.

Anthony CAMM: I just wanted to add to that. I think it is really vital. I mean, a great way for the government to invest in arts and culture is to invest in peak bodies. We are a peak body. We are well supported, we have a longstanding relationship with Creative Victoria and we are really funded to deliver services to the sector. So we are filling a lot of those gaps. There is still the infrastructure gap, which I think we spoke about at some length, but in terms of training, support, policy development, Victorian Collections and museum accreditation, that comes strongly out of our relationship with Creative Victoria, and so I would certainly encourage the committee to just think about the importance of peak bodies and the value that the investment in peak bodies makes in creating a really dynamic and sustainable arts and culture sector. We really appreciate that relationship and we have a great dialogue with Creative Victoria about the needs of the sector. But yes, we also see that there is need for further investment in specific areas.

Evan MULHOLLAND: No worries. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Mulholland. I will go to Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Thanks for being here and for your submission. It is much appreciated by the committee. I wanted to go back to the issue that you highlighted around the funding gap and just delve into that a little bit more and hear ideas around how that could be rectified in an ideal world. I am aware for some types of organisations there is multiyear organisational funding provided. In your view what kind of balance between project funding and organisation funding would suit the cohort of organisations that you represent and you as a peak body as well? And if you can, can you articulate what you think you see working at federal and state levels that might provide a model?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: This would be something that we would have to look into, and in order to do that we would also need some funding to be able to engage with the number of organisations we are talking about. I am not sure of the percentage that would want to professionalise to the point of having ongoing core funding in that way as much as getting them up and running. We are not talking about necessarily paid staff in historical societies. The majority of them are pensioners. I do not think they are looking for that. But when we are talking about the project-based level – and this is different from the small museums; I am going to preface it there – what would be beneficial, again, when we are talking about the connection to community, is instilling some type of ongoing structure within regional hubs where it is a touchpoint for these organisations. I think where we struggle, and where Anne was talking about with the flying conservators, is being able to get a lot of the services that are happening, usually in the metropolitan areas, out into the regional and remote areas as well, but also establishing those relationships with the knowledge-holders and the people who are helping them along the way. If there was sustained funding that would be able to establish these hubs – I am talking blue-sky now – that could represent a space where organisations would have access to infrastructure and digitisation equipment, for example, professionals who understand it and maybe some of that open storage that Anne was talking about. We could have a call where people might want to come to the regions to look at these distributed collections that are all stored together in a collaborative way, having maybe both council and volunteer-run distributed collections that reside within these spaces as well to address the issues of infrastructure, of support and contacts, but also for storage. That is just one thing that we are talking to government about as well, that model of having the people that you know are going to always be there that you can reach out to when you have a problem and just establish that sense of trust and comfort, knowing that there is that support there – if that helps to answer the question.

Katherine COPSEY: Yes, it does. Correct me if I am wrong, but I am sort of seeing that there are a distinct couple of types of organisations that you represent and serve. And speaking about the smaller community-run museums, for example, are those sorts of organisations also going to benefit from that type of model, or is that more one that volunteer-run organisations are likely to access? In terms of organisational funding, I am sort of passing around career pathways and professional development opportunities as well, which I think would be difficult if you only were relying on project-based funding, for example, to create that organisational sustainability, to have confidence to invest in you employee over time.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: That is right. This is just coming to the fore as we are discussing things here, but it is about being able to have a position. A lot of recent graduates that are coming out do get a lot of their experience in historical societies. It tends to be an easy place for them to be able to dabble in collections management, and there are plenty of them to select from. But you can imagine that idea of succession planning for these groups as well, to be able to have some sort of repository for the information about what is happening

within the institution, the systems and how they are working. If that was to reside in something like a supported role, I could see that as being beneficial, not only for the organisations but also as a stepping stone between that point of graduation and then moving up into the professional sector. It could be an idea, but this is just throwing things against the wall.

Katherine COPSEY: Totally understand. I think you have referred to it and covered it, but I just wondered if you would like another opportunity to speak about the impact of indexation and what is happening for your organisation and those you represent.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Sure. Do you want me to speak to that one?

Anthony CAMM: You do that one.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Like others have said, we have not had any increase in funding for over 10 years now. Of course that has a massive impact on any organisation, but for a small one that is dealing with a community as large as the ones that we are servicing, we have felt it quite hard. As a result, we have had some really great programs that, whilst they were valued by community, you have to make the tough decisions. So for us that meant a reduction in staffing and a reduction in the programs that we offer. Most of the team, except for maybe one, are part-time. We are doing the best that we can. You will find this across the board for the arts industry: you do it for the passion for the sector, how much care that you put into it. With those reductions, the demands from the sector are still there. We are kind of a victim of our own popularity and success with Victorian Collections and other programs. We are having more and more interest in migrating over to the system, which means that is going to take more and more resources for us to properly staff it and to ensure that everything is moving along smoothly for them. Without that additional investment in the future, we will probably be facing more difficult decisions and conversations. Do you want to add to that?

Anthony CAMM: No, no. I think you have covered it.

Richard WELCH: What sort of timeframe do you mean by that, though – ‘in the future’?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: For AMAGA Victoria this is the final year of our current funding cycle, so we are funded up until December. There will be, we are assuming, another release of the Creative Enterprises program or some iteration of that this year that we will be applying for. That will set us up for the next four years, so it is really hard for us to do that forward planning when we are operating on a four-year cycle, when we are actually not sure if we are going to be able to invest in new programming and if we are able to take risks. I would say that we are less likely to take risks now, just to ensure the survival of the organisation and that we can continue doing these really foundational programs that the communities rely on. Having more clarity around funding and maybe a slightly longer cycle for applying for them would allow us to think outside of the safe spaces and do a lot more of the work that we want to do and we have had plans to do, but it requires more investment. It is as simple as that.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Copsey. Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you for coming in. It is very educational. One quick question: under the heading of museums, do you also cover historical societies?

Anthony CAMM: Yes.

Richard WELCH: Is that just a semantic difference in a sense?

Anthony CAMM: Collections is really I guess the thing that brings most of our members and those we serve together. They are all collecting institutions.

Richard WELCH: As well as objects, you may be collecting records and minutes of meetings and old budgets and all sorts of other paper documentation.

Anthony CAMM: Yes, and archives and even some library collections. There is a lot of crossover. I mean, we talk about the GLAM sector – galleries, libraries, archives and museums.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Have you heard of this?

Richard WELCH: No. I have now.

Anthony CAMM: So there is definite crossover. There is collaboration. There is the interrelationship between all those different types of institutions, but I guess we have a much broader base than, say, the PGAV, which is very much focused on public galleries. We certainly have public galleries as part of our community, but we work with even the smallest, poorly resourced and poorly equipped little collection somewhere the Mallee or somewhere in Gippsland. We also see and join in with those communities in celebrating their growth and their milestones, because through connecting with AMAGA Victoria they get to be skilled up. Then they do the museum accreditation program, and then all of a sudden they have got a volunteer who is passionately driving an institution. There are some real success stories around the state. I am from Ballarat and I work at the Eureka Centre, and one of our community museums – I am not sure if anyone knows it – is the Ballarat Tramway Museum. This is an extraordinary volunteer-run institution –

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: And accredited.

Anthony CAMM: And accredited – that has just grown and grown and grown, driven by a couple of leading lights within that community. There are many, many other success stories, so we very much help those organisations grow from sometimes being quite small to being very well equipped and very well supported and, importantly, much loved by their community and cherished by their communities.

Richard WELCH: I think like anyone who has grown up in the regions – and I grew up in the country – you have got the Anzac monument, you have got the pub and you probably have the local historical society. I was so pleased to hear that you are focusing on that, because I think it is at an incredibly fragile part in its arc of existence. We have gone past noon, and we are over that way. I had a couple of other questions, but while we are on that, in the 80s in particular one of the strategies seemed to be that we would relocate the historical society to one of the historical buildings in the town that we have now. I think that was a wise thing to do. That was a quick and dirty way to also preserve the historical building – that we did not have to spend money on doing that as well. Is that coming to a historical point in time now where you have got the double jeopardy of those issues?

Anthony CAMM: Yes, I think you have got the infrastructure challenge because they are old buildings, they are not fit for purpose and perhaps those funding streams have dried up. We are talking about the need to fund those smaller – it could even be just a small infrastructure project, storage equipment or materials – things like that just to create a better environment. Even a split system can help in some of those buildings. But I also think it is about the relationships that these organisations have, particularly with local government, which can be quite tenuous. All you need is a new CEO with a particular view on that building, looking to use it for a different purpose, or just the culture within a local government organisation. I think that is a real vulnerability. Where a council has a strong advocate even within the organisation – perhaps a dedicated arts, culture and heritage officer – sometimes you find that those museums are quite well supported. If you do not have that person, you just do not have the advocacy to the CEO and the councillors. I think that is an issue too.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: I was going to say in addition to that, these older buildings, whilst they are beautiful, a lot of them have access issues.

Richard WELCH: And toilet issues and all sorts of issues.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Yes. Then you are dealing also with heritage overlay. You cannot just barge in and make changes without going through several areas of red tape and approvals. The historical society would need to collaborate with council to then try and get those changes made, and that is not necessarily easy to do.

Richard WELCH: It is going to be rarely at the top of anyone's priorities, to be fair, unfortunately.

I was slightly heartbroken to hear that we are way too early to be talking about 3D scanning of collections.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Not too early.

Richard WELCH: I can see from a realism point of view you just cannot say, 'Hey, here's a 3D scanner, go scan your collection.' This would be something perhaps that the hubs could address.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Possibly, but what I was going to say to you is you will be excited to know that it is on your phone these days. You can also do it on your phone. It is just about having the digital infrastructure to be able to read that image. Most of the groups are using Victorian Collections, for example. You are talking about priorities – getting 3D-rendered images onto the system is probably at the very end of the priority list. But it is something that has been talked about, so it is not saying that it is not possible. The technology that you would think would need to be this incredibly complex thing really is not that difficult to manage, so I think as time goes on these types of things are going to be easier for individuals to be able to pick up and do with no issues.

Richard WELCH: To the economics of it all, which is really what we are trying to address and investigate, you are talking about the importance of peak bodies. Are the peak bodies a mechanism by which we could help with the insurance costs of these places and the shared services element or dimension of all these individual entities having to replicate costs on things? How can we economically improve the fundamentals and the sustainability of the organisations?

Anthony CAMM: RAV, Regional Arts Victoria, has provided a lot of support to different organisations around insurance.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: You are going down a different path than I am, so maybe you speak about that.

Anthony CAMM: No, you go.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Insurance obviously is an issue for all organisations. At AMAGA we offer or suggest certain insurers that we have discounts through, but it is still really difficult. As Anne was talking about, this is a really difficult cause for them to take up. I would say yes, any support that they get is going to improve their current conditions, but the areas that I think they are struggling with the most are what we were talking about – their tenancies. A lot of these groups are at risk. Even just in my time with AMAGA we have been in conversations with a number of historical societies – we will call them discussions – and councils about where they are residing, where they are going to go next, who is going to cover those costs and all of that. So I think in our submission you will see we are talking about that idea of having policies in place at all levels of government; it is about that. What kind of assurances can we give them at a bare minimum to say, ‘You’ll have a place to be where you can work and your collections can reside without feeling like you could be kicked out the next month.’ That kind of thing, I think, is at the forefront of their mind, rather than insurance – even though it is a cost that they have to incur.

Richard WELCH: Do you have something to add on that?

Anthony CAMM: I was going to mention there is an organisation, Regional Arts Victoria, which I know has provided affordable insurance to different members through their membership, so that is a model. But of course that needs to be funded as well. I am not sure exactly how that works –

Richard WELCH: I am just conscious of time, Chair. Maybe you can just take it on notice, but I would be interested to know how, as a peak body, you would be able to make it more efficient for the industry – just your contributions on that.

Anthony CAMM: We probably would take that on notice and we would certainly look at that.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, both.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. I just have one really quick question before we finish up. In your submission you talk about how 99 per cent of Victorians actively engage with the arts. We have heard from other witnesses at other hearings about how there seems to be this sort of lack of understanding from people engaging with the arts that they are actually engaging with the arts unless they are physically doing something like going to a gallery or attending a show or a concert or a gig. From your perspective as well obviously funding is a big issue and support for small and medium organisations seems to be a big thing, but do the government and we as politicians need to do more to actually help consumers of the arts understand that they are doing that and to value that? Obviously politicians act on what people are telling them to do, and I think there seems to be this information gap of people not realising the people behind these things that they are constantly consuming. Does that make sense?

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: To make it more front of mind that what you are doing is actually part of the arts sector? Is that what you mean?

The CHAIR: Yes. It has even been an eye-opener for me, I think, in our everyday activities how often we are engaging with arts and cultural and creative industries and not even being fully conscious of that.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: The passive consumption on your commute to work and things like that that you are encountering – that kind of thing? I do not know if it is something that needs – for us, it depends on what you value –

The CHAIR: We have a slightly different view, because yours is probably much more conscious.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Yes, it depends on what it is that you value. I suppose it is for me knowing that this thing that I am doing and I am enjoying – that is the arts. I do not know if that is an important element of it, but for you, as someone who is interested and hearing about what investments are required, I can see that being of benefit.

Anthony CAMM: I think what is funded speaks to what government values, in a way.

The CHAIR: Exactly, yes.

Anthony CAMM: If you look at the shift in funding over the years, in the past collections used to get a lot of funding – even acquisitions used to get funding. We do not have that so much. We have more about community connection to the arts or participation in festivals. For example, popular music, contemporary music, rock music or hip-hop or dance music was never funded by Creative Victoria. It was eventually. It used to be more the high arts. So I think that politicians are constantly shifting what the community value and may be reflecting what the community feels is important. If you look at what is funded, it is so much broader. Even if you look at the *Revive* policy – the investment in gaming, for example – we probably would not have done that 20 years ago or even considered the term ‘creative industries’. So I absolutely think in politics you are very much driving the agenda and probably always have.

The CHAIR: Yes. It just makes me wonder if there is also a bit of an educational piece around it as well as the –

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: I am curious what it was that you have encountered that you were not necessarily aware was you engaging with the arts.

The CHAIR: I guess I am conscious about the arts. We had a witness come and say that when you commute into work and you have got your AirPods in and you are listening to Spotify – your daily sort of activities – you do not stop and sit back and appreciate everything behind it.

Dr Ashley ROBERTSON: Like ‘This is a creative production.’ Yes, okay.

Anthony CAMM: Then there is also the idea that the consumer is now the creator because there are so many interactive devices and people are creating content. So it is a very interesting time to be in this space.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much. That is all we have time for. That concludes the public hearing.

Witnesses withdrew.