

12 August 2020

The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP
Premier of New South Wales
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Cc: The Hon. Don Harwin, MLC
Special Minister of State, and Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts

Dear Premier

We are writing to raise our concerns regarding proposed changes to the role, purpose and future of the State Archives and Records Authority (SARA) and Sydney Living Museums (SLM, formerly the Historic Houses Trust) in the wake of the Legislative Council inquiry, through the Standing Committee into Social Issues, into the *State Records Act* 1998 and the Policy Paper on its review.

Much of the Inquiry and the submissions to it are focused on a proposal that SARA and SLM amalgamate with a single director, and that the acts governing the two agencies be brought together.

This is a very surprising development from the review of the *State Records Act* 1998, which comes at a critical juncture in the digital transformation of the work of the NSW government and its public offices. We are concerned that with the attention on storytelling and exhibitions, the Inquiry has been drawn away from reviewing the key records management provisions of the *State Records Act*. We seek the Premier's reassurance that these provisions are in no way compromised through the proposed merger of SARA and SLM or any administrative reorganisation within SARA.

Further consultation and more robust business cases are required before any decisions are made. As it stands, we encourage you to support a strong, independent and properly funded records and archives statutory authority. The proposed amalgamation of SARA and SLM will dilute and confuse the critical recordkeeping standards-setting and compliance role of SARA, presenting a serious risk to NSW's digital government agenda.

We are concerned that the amalgamation proposal poses a danger to the statutory role of SARA and SLM because:

1. The policy outcomes are not supported by a business case and can be achieved by other means;
2. The amalgamation proposal suggests superficial similarities between the agencies, even though both agencies have vastly distinctive roles;
3. The proposal focuses primarily on exhibitions in the various premises of SLM, and neglects to address and strengthen the regulatory and monitoring role of SARA;
4. It purports to achieve savings which threaten the loss of professional staff expert in recordkeeping and management of digital records;
5. It risks downgrading the preservation and management of the valuable digital data sets and supporting documentation which are being generated by government programs today;
6. It risks diluting the mission of SLM to manage, maintain and interpret buildings and places of historic importance for the education and enjoyment of the public.

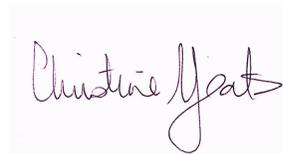
We are calling on your support to:

- consider granting SARA Executive Agency status and resource it appropriately as the State's key memory and accountability agency;
- maintain the independence of SLM and retain the Trust structure;
- seek an appropriate legislative mandate for SARA to ensure that digital evidence of the NSW Government is made and properly managed to meet citizens' expectations today and into the future;
- develop an overarching state strategy for museums and galleries which includes a coherent approach to the roles and relationships between all the state collecting institutions, as well as with the regional and community museum and gallery sector. This is particularly pertinent to the SLM which manages, curates and presents a number of heritage sites and historic house museums across regional NSW;
- explore options for a state strategy for history, which could assist all public offices and cultural agencies to further value our history and cultural heritage, that makes use of existing government resources and services, without the need for legislative or institutional mergers.

Thank you for your consideration of the points we have raised.

Yours sincerely

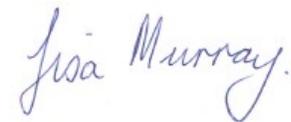
Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS)
Christine Yeats, President



Records and Information Management
 Professionals Australasia (RIMPA)
Anne Cornish, General Manager



Professional Historians Association (NSW & ACT)
Dr Lisa Murray, Chair



Australian Society of Archivists Inc (ASA)
Julia Mant, President



Museums and Galleries Association of Australia (AMaGA)
Alex Marsden, Director

