

## **DISCUSSION PAPER**

**Issued by Museums Aotearoa**

29 September 2008

### **2008 Election Policy for the Museum Sector – questions for political parties**

Museums Aotearoa is seeking responses on cultural policy from all parties contesting the forthcoming general election.

*What should central government's role be in supporting our public museums and art galleries?*

Museums Aotearoa is New Zealand's independent museum sector professional peak body. Members are museums, public art galleries, historical societies, science centres, people who work within these institutions and individuals connected or associated with arts, culture and heritage in New Zealand.

New Zealand museums are actively focused on enriching their communities by enhancing the quality of their facilities, collections, programmes, products and services. The past decade has seen unprecedented growth in the establishment and development of museum facilities and services in most regions of New Zealand as their role in regional and national community and economic development is increasingly recognised. Over 3500 people are currently employed in New Zealand museums, and around three times that number of volunteers.

In July, the National Party released a one-page Arts, Culture & Heritage policy. This outlines 'business as usual' with a few reviews and question marks. Labour responded with criticism that National had refused to commit to maintaining funding 'in real terms'.

*What are each party's views about funding priorities for this sector?*

### **funding sources**

Both the current Labour-lead government and the National Party favour 'arms length' funding for public cultural institutions. The government directly funds Te Papa, and a few others such as service museums (Army, Police etc) through their government departments. All the other public museums depend primarily on local government funding for their core operations. However there are huge variations:

- approximately 60% of operational funding for medium and large museums is from local councils
- the proportion of rates revenue directed to cultural organisations by local councils varies from under 1% to over 8%
- the proportion of public museums' operating budget provided from local council sources varies from zero to over 90%

Clearly some local councils take their responsibilities for cultural heritage far more seriously than others.

Some museums receive support for their education programmes through the Ministry of Education. This LEOTC funding pool has not increased since 2002, is now more likely to be a financial contribution than funding for a whole museum education programme, and is supporting an increasing range of providers other than museums – an example of funding to museums decreasing 'in real terms'.

The government's Regional Museums Policy provides capital funding for museums with collections of national significance – but the limited amount available means that only a few communities can benefit.

Other funding sources on which museums and art galleries depend include local trusts and philanthropic organisations (ASB Trust, Pub Charities etc), admission charges, activity revenue (e.g. shop, café, venue hire), Creative NZ and Lotteries grants, private donations and volunteer resources.

### **national collections widely distributed**

There are collections of New Zealand's arts and cultural heritage material, and institutions which care for, exhibit and interpret this material, spread throughout the country.

The location of these collections does not necessarily correlate with the capacity of the local community to provide for them. For example, there are areas which have rich historical heritage from colonial or gold rush times, but are now less populated and struggle to allocate resources to maintain established museums. And areas which are experiencing growth are stretched to provide for infrastructure, often deferring investment in cultural amenities as 'niceties' rather than necessities.

### **risks of current models**

Reliance on local councils for primary funding puts museums at risk from local politicians' agendas. While the LTCCP process should provide a greater element of certainty, there is wide variance in its application, and this has not proven to be effective in several cases. After every local body election there is an education and relationship-building process needed to gain support from new councillors.

Most museums spend enormous amounts of time and effort applying for funding. This reduces the resources available for their mandated activities, and if unsuccessful puts the entire operation at risk. Strategic planning and long term initiatives are severely hampered by uncertainty of future funding.

Private patronage is a vital source of funds and influential support for museums and galleries. Recent changes to the tax laws allowing greater relief for donations should encourage more charitable funding for museums. However, such sources are often reliant on prevailing economic conditions. There is a risk that discretionary funds will be less forthcoming in leaner times, and that income from endowments and investments will be reduced.

There is also a long term reduction in capacity when finite funding is allocated. Unless inflation-adjusted, the real value of dollars available can fall significantly over time.

In addition, our collecting institutions must continue to acquire material from the present and recent past in order to ensure representative collections are preserved for future generations. While some rationalisation of existing collections is always necessary, our national collections will continue to grow. So while the value of funds is reducing and the costs of operations are increasing, the collections in our museums are also increasing, widening the gap even further.

### **questions and answers**

*How can central government ensure the collection and preservation of the irreplaceable treasures of our nation, and continuing public access to them?*

Some possible reforms/actions:

- increase funds available from central government for capital projects
- provide central government operational funding for regional museums and art galleries (a national network of museums and/or collections)
- establish a Collections Council to allocate contestable funding for the collecting sectors (a parallel to Creative NZ)
- fund a national conservation service for all public cultural heritage collections
- standardise local council processes to ensure that statutory responsibilities are being addressed
- establish regional percentages for council rates contributions for cultural amenities similar to those already in place for the major metropolitan museums, and in the new Auckland Regional Amenities legislation
- increase support for museum education programmes

Our museums and art galleries fulfil essential roles in building community, preserving our cultural heritage, providing access to the public, being a forum for exploring our evolving national identity, and attracting domestic and international tourists.

*How will the next government improve support for the museum sector's vital contribution to New Zealand's cultural capital?*

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### facts about museums in New Zealand

- there are around 500 public museums and art galleries in NZ, ranging from local historical societies to Te Papa
- estimated 3,500 paid staff and over 10,000 volunteers\*
- 77% of New Zealanders experience at least one heritage activity a year\*\*
- nearly 50% of New Zealanders aged over 15 visit an art gallery or museum each year\*\*
- over 50% of overseas tourists visit museums\*\*\*
- overseas tourists who visit museums stay longer and spend significantly more than general tourists\*\*\*
- virtual visitation of museum websites is growing exponentially (and a high proportion of virtual visitors become actual visitors)
- nearly 60% of operational funding for medium and large museums is from local councils\*

### other resources

*A Strategy for the Museum Sector in New Zealand*, Museums Aotearoa, 2005  
*New Zealand Museum Sector Web Survey*, Museums Aotearoa and NZ Tourism Research Institute, March 2007  
*New Zealand Museums Barometer No.2: 2007*, Museums Aotearoa and NZ Tourism Research Institute, March 2008  
*New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015*, November 2007, [www.nztourismstrategy.com](http://www.nztourismstrategy.com)

See [www.museums-aotearoa.org.nz](http://www.museums-aotearoa.org.nz) for details and downloadable publications.

- \* *New Zealand Museums Barometer*, Museums Aotearoa, 2007 and 2008
- \*\* *A Measure of Culture*, Statistics NZ and Ministry for Culture & Heritage, 2003
- \*\*\* *Tourist Activity: Museum Tourism*, Ministry of Tourism, Tourism Sector Profile, Series B2, April 2008