



Government
of South Australia

30 July 2014

Hon Jay Weatherill
Premier
Office of the Premier
15th Floor, State Administration Centre
200 Victoria Square
ADELAIDE SA 5000

Received.....	31/7/14
Physical ID.....	PREMIUM 03937
File No.....	PREMIUM 0049
Action Officer.....	MArt - Direct
Draft Due.....	
Previous Corres.....	

Dear Premier

Re: South Australian Government Boards and Committees

We applaud your resolution to improve the way Government engages with the citizens of our State and, in this regard, to examine the role and performance of government boards and committees.

The Board of Trustees of the History Trust of South Australia (operating as *History SA*) consider there is a case to be made for the retention of the boards of cultural institutions. It is worth observing that throughout decades of legislative and administrative change, eminent cultural institutions around the world have retained board members, whether as regents, trustees, governors or other. Even though one cultural institution may differ from another in terms of the collections it preserves and exhibits, there does tend to be commonality between effective boards of these institutions in that they are composed of serious members from diverse backgrounds who address the strategic, fundraising and advocacy needs of the organisation. Most also act at arms length from government though they are in no way independent of oversight and regulation, an arrangement that has been considered desirable to avoid the possibility of undue political influence on the collections held by cultural institutions or in their interpretation. This is a live issue at present at the Federal level, where the actions of the current Federal government highlight the need to preserve independence at the state level. It is a model that has been followed by successive South Australian governments, as well as those of other Australian States. This degree of separation can also work to the benefit of government, insulating the government of the day from the controversy that can occasionally accompany challenging presentations at cultural institutions.

Public trust in the stewardship by boards of beloved cultural agencies has remained high over these many years, as is evidenced by the extent to which those Boards attract philanthropy and the support of volunteers. Various studies on the governance of cultural institutions recognise indeed that the overall performance and health of cultural institutions can be raised when their boards are able to lobby government and industry effectively, to raise funds and gain support for their

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institution. Cultural institutions may, in their composition and goals therefore be distinguished from many other boards and committees which have as their primary – and sometimes, sole role – that of lobbying government to achieve a specific outcome in a fairly narrowly-defined area. Those boards do not have the same level of public trust as those of cultural institutions and, accordingly, are not subject to the same degree of public accountability. Without wishing to denigrate the importance of industry or interest-specific boards, it is apparent that the breadth of their scope does not generally include seeking outcomes beyond the borders of the jurisdiction in which they operate. Here, we would argue is another argument for retaining the boards of cultural institutions such as our own. All of the initiatives of our Trustees are taken not only with a view to providing a valuable resource for all of the citizens of our State, present and future, but are also aimed at inspiring visitors from interstate and overseas with South Australia's impressive heritage and with its contemporary innovations, be they social, political, artistic or scientific.

The Trustees of History SA have been cognisant of the need to broaden engagement with the community of the State, as well as nationally and internationally. Alongside the more traditional means of exhibiting the State's historical treasures and stories through its three museums, the Board appreciates that information technology and social media tools now provide a vast platform for extending the reach of cultural institutions like History SA. Given that the core business of the agency is to safeguard and celebrate the innovations and contributions of the State, it is evident that the wider the audience, the stronger is the reputation of South Australia as a vibrant and distinctive place.

With these considerations in mind, the Board has spearheaded a campaign for a Museum of Adelaide. Efforts around this initiative have involved the creation of a support group of well-known South Australians of different talents and backgrounds, who are all committed to raising the profile of the State. Consultation of this type has resulted in a more robust consideration of the issue and accords with the Government's intention to give organisations and individuals more direct access to decision-making processes.

In terms of value for money, our Trustees are the cheapest ambassadors and publicists within the sphere of government. The cost of honoraria meeting fees (for 8 Trustees attending 10 board meetings annually) is \$14,600, although the amount is usually less, due to occasional absences of Trustees. For some time, there have been 2 vacancies on the Board and activities have been undertaken with only 6 Trustees, which has lowered the cost even further. The above sum does not, of course, take into account the staff costs of servicing the Board with information papers, reports and the like but technology will also probably serve to reduce that cost over time.

Requirements for reporting and compliance can be onerous. While it is imperative that organisations in receipt of public funds demonstrate and conform to a high degree of audit and other accountability, there are some legislatively-mandated functions that could be reviewed. Among them, is the requirement to produce, submit and table before Parliament an annual report. We would be pleased to consider other ways to reduce administrative tasks and thus contribute to streamlining operations.

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Finally, it is important to highlight the existence of the *History Trust of SA Foundation*, for which the Board has responsibility. It is the intention of the Board to further supplement the funds held by the Foundation to advance the organisation's capacity to further its work. We consider there is value in having the Foundations linked with the Board because that model enables an efficient gateway for collaboration and partnerships with donors. The reputation and authority of the Board will, we hope, continue to attract philanthropy to the organization and enable it to expand its influence and expertise. A Migration Museum Foundation, set up in 2000 to support the Museum's programs, is managed by a committee of ten people including a member of the Board of History SA. We do not believe that donations, bequests and other gifts, in cash or in kind, would continue to be forthcoming were the present structure replaced with a government entity.

I will be happy to meet with you to provide further support for continuing the work of our Board which I am convinced is critical for the success of our existing museums and for broadening opportunities to showcase the unique features of our State.

An Executive Summary is attached for easy reference.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Crafter".

Sue Crafter
Chair
Board of Trustees of the
History Trust of South Australia

(Encl.)





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South Australian Government Boards and Committees

Executive Summary

- The Board of Trustees of the History Trust of South Australia (*History SA*) supports the retention of Boards of cultural institutions, and supports reforms that improve their efficiency and effectiveness.
- Leading cultural institutions globally have retained boards of management in some form comprised of diverse experts in the relevant fields.
- Importantly, the Board acts at arms length from government to ensure against political influence on collection policies, interpretation and scholarship. Successive South Australian Governments have followed this policy and public trust in the institutions and their work has remained high. The present actions of the Federal Government highlight this need to preserve independence at the State level.
- The Board of History SA is different from industry or interest-specific boards which tend to focus on achieving specific outcomes in a fairly narrowly-defined area. Those Boards do not have the same kind of public face as cultural institutions and are not subject to the same degree of public accountability. The History SA Board is focused not only on providing a valuable resource for the present and future citizens of our State, but also on inspiring visitors from interstate and overseas with South Australia's impressive heritage and its social, political, artistic and scientific innovations.
- The History SA Board recognises the need to broaden engagement with the community, as well as nationally and internationally. To that end, the Board has driven the increasing use of technology and social media to extend the Trust's reach. It has spearheaded a campaign for a Museum of Adelaide and convened a diverse support group of well-known South Australians who are all committed to raising the profile of the State. It is unlikely that any governance structure other than a Board of passionate and committed Trustees could have conceived and implemented these initiatives.
- The Board created and has responsibility for the *History Trust of SA Foundation* to help advance the Trust's capacity to further its work. The reputation and authority of the Board is important in continuing to attract philanthropy to the organisation.
- History SA's Trustees provide extremely good value for money as ambassadors and publicists, the annual cost of honoraria meeting fees being only \$14,600.
- The Board of History SA acknowledges that organisations in receipt of public funds must demonstrate a high level of accountability. However, there are some legislatively-mandated functions that could be reviewed. We would be pleased to consider other ways to reduce administrative tasks and thus contribute to streamlining operations.
- The History Trust of SA Foundation and the Migration Museum Foundation have been established to further the work of the agency. We do not believe that donations, bequests and other gifts would continue to be forthcoming were the present structure abolished and replaced with a government entity.



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Hon Jay Weatherill MP
Premier of South Australia

Ms Sue Crafter
Chair
Board of Trustees of the
History Trust of South Australia
GPO Box 1836
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Ms Crafter

Thank you for your letter of 30 July 2014 to the Premier of South Australia, the Hon Jay Weatherill MP, about the Boards and Committee Reform.

Your letter has been sent to the Minister for the Arts, the Hon Jack Snelling MP, as he has been asked to provide advice to Cabinet on the future of your board or committee.

Should you have any queries about your letter, please contact the Minister's office on telephone 8463 6270.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "Jay Weatherill", written over a horizontal line.

**Premier's Correspondence Unit
Office of the Premier**

31 July 2014

cc: Office of the Hon Jack Snelling MP, Minister for the Arts