



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND  
YOUTH AFFAIRS**

(Reference: [Future use of the Fitters Workshop, Kingston](#))

**Members:**

**MS A BRESNAN (The Chair)  
MR J HANSON (The Deputy Chair)  
MS M PORTER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2012**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Mr A Snedden (Ph: 6205 0199)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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*Amended 9 August 2011*

## **The committee met at 2 pm.**

**ALDER, MS ALISON**, Artistic Director and Chief Executive Officer, Megalo Print Studio + Gallery

**SECCOMBE, MS ERICA**, Megalo Print Studio + Gallery

**THE CHAIR:** I would like to welcome Ms Seccombe and Ms Alder to this hearing of the education, training and youth affairs committee inquiry into the future use of the Fitters Workshop in the Kingston arts precinct. Thank you for coming in today. Just to let everybody know, we will be holding hearings today, tomorrow and later in February as well; we will be hearing from a number of groups and individuals associated with this issue. People have, obviously, made submissions.

Before we proceed with the hearing, I would like to advise that the committee has commissioned two studies of acoustics at the Fitters Workshop which the committee received earlier today. The committee will publish those reports. They will be published and they will be available from the committee website tomorrow morning. I just want to make people aware of that.

There are a couple of housekeeping things before we proceed. I draw your attention to the privileges card that is in front of you and need to make sure that you have read that and are aware of the implications and what is on that card. Yes? Excellent. And I want to say that the proceedings are being broadcast on the website so that you are aware of that in terms of any statements that are made and the like.

Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite you, representing Megalo here today, to make an opening statement to the committee.

**Ms Alder:** Thank you very much for giving Megalo Print Studio + Gallery the opportunity to present its case to this inquiry. As I am sure you know, Megalo is a locally, nationally and internationally renowned art organisation which has been operating for 32 years, with a demonstrated track record of artistic excellence, responsible financial management and governance, substantial economic and cultural contribution to the ACT and, of particular relevance to this inquiry, a 12-year history of negotiating with successive ACT governments for a permanent home that acknowledges its activities, standing and contribution to the ACT's reputation for excellence in contemporary visual arts.

Former Chief Minister Kate Carnell is recorded in *Hansard* in 1998 as commenting:

The visual arts are the ACT's strongest arts sector.

She went on to say:

The need to relocate ... Megalo—

amongst others—

has been recognised for some time ...

The suspension of Megalo's relocation to the Fitters Workshop has had a considerable negative impact on our organisation. The campaign waged by some members of the musical fraternity, combined with the resulting media storm and the inquiry, have thrown planning for 2012 and 2013, the centenary year, into disarray, causing the cancellation or suspension of significant artistic programs.

I would like to formally acknowledge the significant and ongoing support of the staff, board and members of Megalo, plus the support of many other people dismayed and distressed by this debate.

The Megalo studios are currently used every day 49 weeks of every year, being open for classes, a print club, studio access, residencies and exhibition openings, night and day. We anticipate that this level of activity will increase once we are relocated to the Fitters Workshop. The demographic of young people accessing the studios to make art is primarily young; 72 per cent are under 44 years of age.

Megalo has a significant connection with the heritage of the site. The conservation management plan states that the Fitters Workshop values are inherent in its architectural style as a workshop; design and setting as a workshop; and experience and understanding of its significance as a workshop. Mrs Dunne, you noted yourself that the synergies and the narrative of putting an industrial-style visual arts facility in an industrial facility next to another industrial-style visual arts facility—the Canberra Glassworks—are very strong.

And as Roger Butler, Senior Curator of Australian Prints and Drawings at the National Gallery of Australia, states:

It is evident that the histories of the foreshore precinct and print production in Canberra are closely entwined. The Fitters' Workshop, once the source of objects of mechanical excellence produced by skilled workers, would once more house mechanical equipment, in this case the presses from which prints are created.

The Fitters Workshop has a history of presses, aprons, boots and work, as does Megalo.

The architectural plans developed for Megalo by leading Canberra architect Alistair Swayne are in sympathy with the building's heritage and Megalo's activities. Leading print studios around the world are housed in similar industrial spaces, as you can see from the images presented here for your information. The volume, space and light are retained and enhanced in these plans. Visitors will be able to both enjoy the ambience of the building and see the studios at work. The most recent iteration of the plans increases the public space and amenities: 82 per cent of the Fitters Workshop building proper is designated as studio, gallery and public space.

Megalo has a five-year business plan, including the provision of annual revised programs of activity and budgets. This is in contrast to the individuals and groups lobbying for the Fitters Workshop, who have no demonstrated art facility management experience. As demonstrated in *Hansard*, December 2009, when the government was seeking an organisation to manage the Ainslie music centre, Pro Musica and the various choral groups in this instance have put forward an unrealistic,

uncosted and unviable proposal. A simple refit—and I should add that there is no such thing—would cost at least \$1.5 million, not including an extension. The government will, should the building become another multipurpose facility like the Albert Hall, find itself with a white elephant—expensive for users to hire and expensive for the government to maintain.

Despite Pro Musica claiming to present a business case, no such case is made. The dollar amounts estimated have no discernible basis and fail to take into account the ongoing whole-of-government administrative cost for such an undertaking. The submissions state that successful concerts were held in the Fitters Workshop for two weeks in each of the past three years. There is no evidence that the demand put forward in the submission exists or that demand would sustain it for 50 weeks a year. The suggestion that one person with a salary of \$50,000 per annum would be able to manage the proposed 63 events per year is, to be frank, ludicrous.

Megalo has prepared a revised financial plan in preparation for its relocation to the Fitters Workshop. This financial plan includes, amongst other entries, rent and utilities for the Fitters Workshop. Megalo understand its business. It has a five-year business plan and a competent, responsible board and staff with facility management, financial and programming experience.

Megalo has at all times acted within the processes and policy framework of successive territory governments in regard to its accommodation needs since 2000. I would like to table the following documents: Chief Minister Kate Carnell’s comments regarding co-locating visual arts organisations; letters from a visual arts coalition to Chief Minister Carnell and the Kingston Foreshore Authority; and minutes of the Megalo board meeting in 2007. And the best example of a precedent for government awarding tenancy of a heritage building is the Canberra Glassworks.

I have been asked if I accept the claims of the unique acoustic qualities of the Fitters Workshop. I am not a sound expert. However, I am able to assess the information provided in submissions presented to this inquiry based on that information. Acoustic assessments are demonstrably subjective. The oft-quoted composer Mr Peter Sculthorpe resiled from his purported statement of “perfect acoustics”, stating that his assessment was of resonant acoustics. The right conditions for perfect acoustics are not able to be met unless the building is a completely empty shell with an audience of 400 patrons.

The Pro Musica proposal for multi-use goes against the purported requirements necessary for perfect acoustics due to the inclusions of exhibition furniture. Musicians have told me that the acoustic qualities enhance the performance of music by amateur groups, giving the music a full sound, masking errors in timing, tone and pitch. It is not excellent for professional musicians who, due to the long reverberation time, are not able to hear themselves play or sing. As Mr Chris Latham states in his submission, the acoustic qualities preclude many activities, as in a meeting hall. I also note from appendix A in the Pro Musica submission that there are currently 13 venues in the ACT with excellent acoustics.

When I graduated from the Canberra School of Art in 1980, Canberra may have been justifiably described as a cultural joke or “island Canberra”. Most artists left the city,

as I did in 1983, to find greener pastures and opportunities elsewhere. However, over the last 20 years, Canberra has come of age as a city with a reputation for excellence in the visual arts. As residents of this city, we can feel justifiably proud of the depth and breadth of talent and work that emanates from this city, as demonstrated in the wonderful exhibition *Something in the Air*, recently exhibited at the Canberra Museum and Gallery. Canberra is now home to, and a destination point for, international and national artists vying for residencies, for example at, amongst other places, the Canberra Glassworks and, of course, Megalo.

Megalo will, in the Fitters Workshop, be a world-class destination point for people to both view and create contemporary art, art that is created within both a community and professional framework. Megalo has a proven track record of arts facility and program management, financial responsibility and community support. Megalo will bring youth, creative collaboration and a national and international reputation to the Fitters Workshop in the Kingston arts precinct. The heritage connections are significant and worthy of recognition. Megalo print studio will restore the sound, atmosphere and life of a working building to the heritage fabric of the Fitters Workshop on Printers Way.

In conclusion, Megalo trust that the standing committee will be prompt in its deliberations, presenting its recommendations to the Legislative Assembly next month. I also trust that the ACT government will be prompt in its response to those recommendations and make a decision in a timely manner. Megalo will abide by the ACT government's decision—the elected representatives of the Canberra community—no matter what the outcome. I sincerely hope that the other parties involved in this debate will do the same, ensuring that Canberra's reputation as a mature, cohesive and cultured city is not further compromised. I also hope that from this point on all of the arts community will work together, enabling cultural activity in Canberra to grow from strength to strength, as art, after all, should not divide us but should be, has been and is what makes our city great.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Alder. Before I go to questions, I will just address a couple of points you have made. We have sought a written statement from Mr Sculthorpe clarifying this matter, because there are a number of comments made in some of the submissions about his statements being retracted. We have had a written statement from him that he stands by the comments he made on 8 May. So I think it is worth pointing that out to everyone. There have been a number of claims made about that and we, as a committee, sought to get that clarified. So I think it is important to point that out.

I speak for myself as chair of this committee but this committee is, as with any inquiry, committed to achieving a timely outcome. But we also come to this—we are in parties—as committee members and make our decisions based on all the submissions that come before us. I think that is worth pointing out as well.

I have a number of questions. My first question is: obviously there has been a lot of discussion in your submission about the decision to go to the Fitters Workshop and that being the best fit for that building. My question is this: is this seen as, and at what point was it seen as, the only location that will be suitable for Megalo to go to? There seem to be a couple of statements made about that as well in various submissions. I

guess I wanted to get clarity from you. Is this seen as the only suitable location for Megalo in terms of anything else in the ACT or is there the issue of being a purpose-built facility?

**Ms Alder:** We certainly feel that the Fitters Workshop alongside the Canberra Glassworks will really make a fantastic linchpin of activity in the Kingston arts precinct and that the building itself is beautiful for a workshop. It was built as a workshop, and we feel that we will fit into it very well. No matter what happens to the building, it is going to need some adaptation and it will need some extension work, because at the moment it has no amenities or other facilities. So we feel that the extension to the eastern side of the building is still in line with its heritage, as there were other buildings there before.

We are really excited about the potential that the Glassworks and Megalo can have in this industrial precinct, making work that has a prior industrial past, that people will have an opportunity not to be passive but to see, look and make work in both of these facilities and that, as a linchpin of the whole precinct, it will really be a dynamic destination point.

**THE CHAIR:** I understand that is the future you are talking about but is this the question: is this the only location that is suitable for Megalo, as opposed to the issue of having a stand-alone, purpose-built facility? Is this the only place that you can see, apart from all those other issues you have raised?

**Ms Alder:** I think there are other issues as well. We had a meeting with Purdon Associates, with a few other art organisations, in December. And from what I understand from the plan of the precinct, if Megalo moves into another location in the precinct, that is going to take up space that would have been earmarked for other organisations and there is a flow-on effect. Craft ACT, Canberra Contemporary Art Space and other organisations are thinking of moving there or are hoping to move there. So if we make a land grab for that space, it is going to disadvantage other art organisations.

Of course, should the outcome of this inquiry be that it is deemed that the Fitters Workshop is not suitable for Megalo print studio, we will actively start lobbying for a purpose-built facility but I think the Fitters Workshop will make a world-class destination point, like other studios around the world—Glasgow, and you saw the images there, londonprintstudio, Open Studio in Toronto; they are dynamic places where work is made and where people can see work being made—and it just goes so beautifully with the Glassworks in a workshop.

**THE CHAIR:** I was going to ask about the issue of costs but I will go to Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Thanks very much for your submission and your passionate opening statement. I think that if you looked at this in isolation, what you are suggesting seems quite reasonable and there are some synergies there. The problem is that this is not in isolation.

**Ms Alder:** That is right.

**MR HANSON:** There are other groups that are equally passionate.

**Ms Alder:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** I accept that each group will have its own views and so on and see it perhaps from their own perspective, but the reality is that it seems that if you are to occupy the Fitters Workshop there are going to be losers in this situation, and significant losers. You probably think less so; they will think more so. But there are winners and losers out of this. And it seems that if we were to say that you have got the \$4 million or thereabouts, that would build, I would have thought, a very good purpose-built facility in the same vicinity. It might not be quite there but it would certainly be adjacent to the Glassworks and the rest of the area. Are there any other groups that are thinking that in the future they might move to the precinct?

It just seems to me that we have reached a stage where you are locked into a position, other groups are locked into a position and there is no room for compromise. If you were to say, “A purpose-built facility would provide us with the things that we need,” and certainly I understand your historical linkages to the building are an argument, it would seem that compromise whereby you went to a purpose-built facility—and I would have thought you would get a pretty good one for \$4 million—should then allow the Fitters Workshop to be used as a community space for choral activity and for Megalo or for the Glassworks to display their wares or for future creative arts organisations to display their wares. It would be a compromise solution but it would then, I guess, look to what you are looking for, which is to unite this arts community that has reached a division. If we were to continue with the plan as is, it will be divisive and wounds will be created that will not be healed shortly.

I am just wondering whether you, as an organisation, have thought about that, that this is an opportunity to compromise, and it may not be the 100 per cent solution, but certainly a \$4 million purpose-built facility in the Kingston foreshore is not a bad option either, I would have thought. Would you comment on that? It just seems that is the nub of the argument.

**Ms Alder:** Sure. There are a few strands to that answer. First of all, as a general exhibition facility, it has severe limitations. Megalo had an exhibition in there in 2010. We purpose-built three boxes that were 3.6 metres high by 4.8 by 3.6, which enhanced the space. It needed something really grand. It needed something really big. It needed to be tough and strong. If you are thinking about having exhibitions there and one of the things is that you can hang the picture wires off the gantry, the gantry is eight metres high. You would need a cherry picker just to adjust your wires that are going to be hanging eight metres, to hang a little painting like that on the wall space. As an exhibition venue, it is incredibly problematic. I am speaking very honestly here. It is very difficult. Not to mention the cost!

So who is going to be paying the government rent on this facility? Who is going to be managing it? Do we already have key arts organisations that are being funded to manage exhibition spaces? Pro Musica’s submission suggested \$1,500 a week and had Megalo down for four slots—without consulting Megalo whether we would like to be included in that, I might add—at 4½ thousand dollars each, \$18,000 a year. Frankly, it is ludicrous. Nobody could afford it. Plus we have our own exhibition

program which we manage for 10 to 13 exhibitions per year in our own space. So it has really got big drawbacks.

As to the cost, you are still going to have to find at least 1½ million dollars to bring basic services to the building. You are still going to have to build an extension with a green room. You are still going to have a concrete floor that is going to be cold to sit on in winter when you are having a concert. Do you move the exhibitions on the partitions that are in there in and out every time there is a performance? How many people would you need to manage that sort of workload?

There are other examples. In Brisbane, I think the Brisbane Powerhouse has a staff of about 20 people. It would be so expensive. It just is not a feasible option. So you either need to have it as a concert venue that is empty most of the time where, maybe occasionally, somebody might want to get some funding to build something like what we did for our exhibition there in 2010, which, I might add, cost \$12,000 to mount. So, really, no.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** I want to go to the nuts and bolts of Megalo's relationship. There was a letter that you wrote to the previous Chief Minister where you suggested that, in the context of developing Kingston as a visual arts precinct, you should occupy the Fitters Workshop, and that letter was in some FOI documents that I have received. All the FOI documents have been passed on to the committee. There was never in the FOI documents a response. Did you receive a response from the Chief Minister to that letter, or how was that letter responded to?

**Ms Alder:** No, we spoke to public servants who said that the government was considering whether we would be appropriate for the scoping study that the government had funds for.

**MRS DUNNE:** So there was no formal response from the Chief Minister?

**Ms Alder:** Not from the Chief Minister himself, no.

**MRS DUNNE:** But the response was in the form of discussions and negotiations?

**Ms Alder:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** And did those discussions and negotiations include discussions about the leasing and rental arrangements with the government and the cost of those leasing and rental arrangements?

**Ms Alder:** When we put in our financial plan, we put in an ambit plan, which every good, financially managed organisation should do, seeking free rent for the first two years. That was rejected, and Megalo will be paying the community rental rate, the standard community rental rate for facilities.

**MRS DUNNE:** Which is?

**Ms Alder:** It is \$55 per square metre, from the top of my head.

**MRS DUNNE:** From day one?

**Ms Alder:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** And that is agreed between Megalo and the government?

**Ms Alder:** We do not have a written agreement, but that is the discussion.

**MRS DUNNE:** Does Megalo receive government funding?

**Ms Alder:** Yes, it does.

**MRS DUNNE:** Through key arts organisation?

**Ms Alder:** Yes, key arts organisation funding.

**MRS DUNNE:** And how much is that?

**Ms Alder:** \$200,000-odd per year.

**MRS DUNNE:** For five years, of course.

**Ms Alder:** That is roughly 50 per cent of our income, and we make the rest of the income ourselves.

**MRS DUNNE:** And how much rent are you currently paying at Watson?

**Ms Alder:** We are currently paying \$127.50 per square metre, going up to \$140 per square metre in July.

**THE CHAIR:** Anything further on that?

**MRS DUNNE:** Not for the time being, thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** I just want to go back, if I could, to some of the costs that you have discussed in here. You have mentioned in your statements transforming the Fitters Workshop into whatever it might be transformed into. One of the points you have made—and this is in your submission—is that regardless of what sort of purpose it is used for, it is going to require transformation because there are no amenities in there currently. The electricity, gas, water, all those sorts of things will have to be connected. There may even be—I imagine, I do not know—if you were to go in there, some sort of heating required as well. There are none of those sorts of things in there. I am just making the point that, whatever sort of use it is, it is going to require some of those modifications. You have made the point too that the costs for Megalo would be modest compared to some others.

What sorts of works would be required for you to go in there, apart from those basic amenities which would be required for whatever would go in there? Is there also a

possibility that the actual size of the Fitters Workshop will not be big enough for Megalo? Is that correct?

**Ms Alder:** It is big enough with the extension. If you see the plans, there is an extension.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, I have seen that.

**Ms Alder:** So, combined, it—

**MRS DUNNE:** What is the floor space of the Fitters Workshop and the floor space of the extension?

**Ms Alder:** The floor space of the Fitters Workshop, I think, is about 550 square metres and combined with the extension, it will go up to 900 square metres.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of the modifications that would be required, apart from the amenities, the annex would be required. What other modifications would be needed?

**Ms Alder:** In the interior of the building?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, and overall. If the annex is there, that is a modification and a cost as well. So what are the main things that would be required?

**Ms Alder:** When you walk inside the building there will be a pod to the eastern side of the building. I think 11 per cent is office reception area and seven per cent is a meeting room-common room for artists and Artist Talk. Members of the public will be able to walk upstairs from that pod and look down into the studios and the gallery space. There is a considerable amount of public area down the western side of the pod so that people can walk freely through the space. We have experience already of how that looks when we built the boxes for the Print Big exhibition.

**THE CHAIR:** Obviously there is a whole lot of different information in these submissions. Is there also going to be a type of walkway constructed in there, like a mezzanine?

**Ms Alder:** No, you will just walk up some stairs. You can walk up to the mezzanine and you will be able to look down from that simple floor to the studio.

**THE CHAIR:** One of the things you have said is that the modifications that are proposed for Megalo fit best within the heritage setting. Do you see those things, including the modifications for putting up walls for offices and putting in a mezzanine, all fitting in with retaining the character of the building?

**Ms Alder:** Absolutely; yes, I do, because the building is such a grand space. The height of the pod that is inside does not impact on the scale of the ceiling. In fact, it enhances the scale, in my opinion. We know that from when we installed our boxes for Print Big. I cannot say any more. I feel very happy with the plans. Should, in 50 years time, Megalo kick the bucket, the project manager assured me that it would be a matter of just dismantling those walls. They are not attached to the walls of the Fitters

Workshop, I should add. It is a stand-alone structure inside. Should Megalo bite the bullet in 50 years time then that can be dismantled and the building will be as is.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have just a couple of things. I meant to ask before: what is your current floor space at Watson?

**Ms Alder:** It is nearly 600 square metres.

**MRS DUNNE:** On the subject of restoring the building as is, the extension that goes off to the—

**Ms Alder:** East.

**MRS DUNNE:** The east, yes—I was just orienting myself. How is that connected to the Fitters Workshop?

**Ms Alder:** There is an existing area where the building had had an extension on it in the past and that will be reopened.

**MRS DUNNE:** I noticed in the FOI documents there was discussion about the process that was gone through in the Conroy consultation. It was noted in that, Ms Alder—there is an exchange of emails—that you were unsettled following the stakeholder workshop that was held at the beginning of early 2011. What were your concerns about the stakeholder consultation that made you unsettled? Have your concerns been allayed about the stakeholder consultation that took place in 2011?

**Ms Alder:** At that meeting Robyn Archer was asked to speak. She described Megalo as the elephant in the room. I took umbrage at that description, so I took that up with Ms Conroy. There was also an assumption there that Megalo was not written into some of the documents that were being presented with regard to the future use of the Fitters Workshop. We were not put in as a key stakeholder.

**MRS DUNNE:** You were written out or you were not—

**Ms Alder:** We were not noted as a stakeholder in the interests of the building.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can you elaborate on why that caused you concern?

**Ms Alder:** My main concern was being publicly embarrassed by being called a white elephant.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you are saying that a direct quote was that Megalo was the elephant in the room.

**Ms Alder:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** And you say that that is the same as saying that you are a white elephant?

**Ms Alder:** I am sorry, not white elephant; elephant in the room.

**MRS DUNNE:** Okay. The other thing I would like to know is your view on the construction of the building within the Fitters Workshop. You said that in your view it enhances the ceiling structure and so on. Can you elaborate on your view that the extension and the pod will enhance the architecture of the Fitters Workshop?

**Ms Alder:** The scale of the building is not diminished by the pod. The scale of the building is a nine-metre high ceiling. The pod—I am not an architect, and I cannot recall the elevations, but it is no higher than 3.6 metres at the most. Because we have already installed structures like that in the building, we know that it does not diminish the scale of the building. The extension is that when you walk into the building you will be able to see down to your left, down through a public access open to the windows on the west, and see down into the studio. As you walk into the front, you will be in the gallery area and then you will be able to see through the extension into the other studio.

**MRS DUNNE:** Is the gallery area that part of the pod or is that—

**Ms Alder:** No, it is full height. The whole building is full height, except for this pod, which is down one side of the building, slightly away from the wall to enable access to the back of it. In my opinion and the opinion of others, it is not intrusive.

**MRS DUNNE:** When you described it before you talked about a meeting space. Then you said that people could have access to the studios. Are there studios in that area?

**Ms Alder:** In the Fitters Workshop?

**MRS DUNNE:** In the actual Fitters Workshop.

**Ms Alder:** Yes. The screen printing presses are down this end, and all of the last third is studio.

**MRS DUNNE:** You envisage that will be used for?

**Ms Alder:** That is what artists working—

**MRS DUNNE:** Which element would it be used for?

**Ms Alder:** The screen printing studio. It has got the screen printing presses, tables for artists to work around and the long fabric printing room.

**MRS DUNNE:** So it is big enough to take the long fabric printing table?

**Ms Alder:** Yes, that is it there.

**MR HANSON:** Was that diagram in your submission?

**Ms Alder:** I received that latest iteration of the plans just before the inquiry was held.

I did not actually think to insert it into the submission.

**MR HANSON:** It would be quite useful for us, because a picture is worth a thousand words.

**Ms Alder:** I will provide that.

**THE CHAIR:** That is obviously the annex there.

**Ms Alder:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** You have included some data in the submission. It is looking at art gallery attendance as opposed to music performance attendance. Did you look at the details in here of what was actually included, what art galleries were included? I imagine it would include the National Gallery.

**Ms Alder:** Yes, it would.

**THE CHAIR:** From my perspective, when I looked at the time period, I thought it could potentially be slightly skewed or probably significantly skewed by having a major exhibition at the National Gallery. That could actually impact on the data.

**Ms Alder:** It is what people attend. We run significant programs at the National Gallery, for example. I do not think that data is skewed.

**MRS DUNNE:** These are ACT residents only?

**THE CHAIR:** That is what I was wondering—if it is ACT residents only or if includes—

**Ms Alder:** I will have to look at the submission. I think we included national and ACT. In fact, the ACT figures were higher than the national average, which may be because places like the National Gallery get higher attendances.

**THE CHAIR:** If you do have a large exhibition—just looking at including this data—it could potentially impact on that.

**Ms Alder:** But you can look at the national figures as well and see similar statistics. That would include performances at the Opera House, for example.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Seccombe, you were going to say something?

**Ms Seccombe:** I think the Art Gallery of New South Wales gets a higher attendance than the National Gallery. I am not sure, but it could be true.

**THE CHAIR:** Those major exhibitions would probably attract people who would not normally even go to an art gallery and would have an impact on this sort of data. I imagine it would be quite significant in terms of the numbers. Even though you said there is that comparison there, I imagine it would have quite a big impact on it.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could I just go back to the floor plan. I presume the pod is in the fitters area. It is the bit which is essentially in the middle, which is outlined in dark lines.

**Ms Alder:** That is right.

**MRS DUNNE:** The area between the end of the pod and the lake shore end, which is the screen printing area—have you had any discussions with the architect about the reverberation and the impact that the reverberation will have in there?

**Ms Alder:** We feel quite confident that with the furniture in there, the pod and people it will not be a problem.

**MRS DUNNE:** Because that is full height, is it?

**Ms Alder:** Yes. But also there is a misconception that print making is inherently noisy. I think they are thinking of those great big images on Rank movies of the huge newspaper presses clunking. We do not have mechanical presses that make noise like that. The most noise it makes is a “Zzssh”. There is one little soundproof room, which is the washout, which houses a high pressure work hose which is the one noisy piece of equipment that we have.

**MRS DUNNE:** And that is in the pod?

**Ms Alder:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** That leads me on to the other question I had. There is no plumbing currently in the fitters area. I was wondering why. You are proposing to put loos in there and I cannot see them on there. Are there still loos in the—

**Ms Alder:** They are in the extension.

**MRS DUNNE:** They are now all in the extension, but there still has to be some plumbing for the high pressure area.

**Ms Alder:** You might need to question the architect and the hydraulic engineers about how that occurs. I cannot speak to that level of detail about the plans.

**THE CHAIR:** It is a good question in relation to costs as well—how much it will cost to make modifications not just to the actual Fitters Workshop itself but also to the annex, because that will have an impact on the overall costs. In terms of some of the points that have been made about the costs being modest, these will also, I imagine, have an impact on the overall cost. You mentioned the reverberations—obviously this might be a detail, again, that is not possible to provide—and said that you are confident that any noise impacts can be reduced by putting the furniture and those basic things in there. Is that something which has been tested at all?

**Ms Alder:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Have there been any discussions about further insulation or that sort of

thing that would be required?

**Ms Alder:** We held a meeting in there a couple of years ago—there were about 25 people in there, sitting by themselves—and it was almost impossible to hear anybody. It was quite remarkable how loud it was and how difficult it was to hear. According to my information—I can only go on what the builders tell me—it should be fine.

**MRS DUNNE:** There are some questions about costings which may be something that is probably better asked of the government. Are the architects coming?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, we have got the architects. Did you have anything further, Mrs Dunne?

**MRS DUNNE:** Just a quick query on the extension. This is a different iteration from the version that was in the development application, I presume?

**Ms Alder:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Has the size of the extension changed, the actual footprint?

**Ms Alder:** I think it might be slightly larger to include the amenities so that they are a more useful thing for groups of people to use. I think that central part may be slightly larger, the bridging part between the studio and the Fitters Workshop, to fit the amenities. I will need to double-check that.

**MRS DUNNE:** It would be useful if you could.

**THE CHAIR:** I probably should have asked this earlier: talking about the site location, one of the points you have made is that this is probably the best location in terms of increasing visibility and enhancing your programs. Is this going to be the best location for that, that there would not be any other location or any other building, if it was on that site, that would actually assist with that?

**Ms Alder:** You have to admit it is a fantastic location for people noticing, especially people coming out of the Bus Depot markets. They will be walking right past it. We will be right next door to the glassworks, so there will be a fantastic crossover between people milling around between the three. To be honest, if we do not get the Fitters Workshop and we have another building built elsewhere then we will cross that bridge when we come to it, but we hope it is not out the back.

**Ms Secombe:** Also, it is supposed to be a visual arts precinct, so obviously we would want to join other arts organisations in that area. If we are sent out to another suburban school then we are going to be in the same situation that we have been in since going from Hackett to Watson, which is being in a location where we have very few passers-by.

**THE CHAIR:** Just on that visual arts precinct—this might be something we have to ask the government about as well—I think in May 2008 a scoping paper was prepared which looked at that, and it did actually identify all art forms being considered, in terms of it being an arts precinct overall. That is correct, I think.

**Ms Seccombe:** I do not know. I have always known it as a visual arts precinct.

**THE CHAIR:** It is a point that was made in one other submission. Are there any further questions?

**MRS DUNNE:** Not at this stage.

**THE CHAIR:** We are out of time, and it looks like we have come to the end of the questions. I want to thank you—

**Ms Alder:** Could we table these documents as well?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, absolutely. Give them to the secretary. Thank you for that.

**MR HANSON:** I echo that. Whichever way this goes, good luck. Whether it ends up in the Fitters Workshop or not, I think that you are obviously a very valuable organisation in Canberra. I hope that the animosity settles down and that, whichever way it goes, you can get on with your important creative business.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Seccombe and Ms Alder, for appearing before the committee today. A copy of the transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you and you will be able to check it for accuracy.

**BUTLER, MR ROGER AM**, private capacity

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Butler, for joining us here today. I will quickly go over the information I went through this morning, seeing as you have just joined us. I would like to welcome you here today to this hearing of the inquiry by the education, training and youth affairs committee into the future use of the Fitters Workshop, Kingston arts precinct. We are having hearings today and tomorrow, and we will also be having some hearings later in February. The committee has commissioned two studies of the acoustics at the Fitters Workshop, and they will be published on the committee's website. So they will be available for everyone to look at.

I draw your attention to the privilege statement that is in front of you, just to make sure that you are aware of it and its implications. I also want to let you know that the hearings are being broadcast today on the internet. Mr Butler, before we go to questions from the committee, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Butler:** From my position as senior curator of Australian prints, I get to look at people producing Australian prints in all sorts of situations, from schools to private studios to community workshops to print workshops like Megalo. I have been in that position for the last 30 years, and I think I have visited every print workshop in Australia over that time. I think I have visited some of the most renowned print workshops overseas. So in talking about Megalo print workshop, I have a vast knowledge of how these work overseas, how they work in Australia and how Megalo sits within that whole range of things.

Megalo is a unique workshop. It is different from a great many. Megalo is, of course, an amalgam of Studio One and Megalo. Both started in the early 80s. Both started off from a community basis, and that is very different from something being planted down, as so many of those workshops are. Megalo was to give printed information to the community. Studio One was created originally to give an opportunity for graduates from the Canberra School of Art, as it was then known, to continue their professional life.

I think this is very important, because it goes back to the Canberra School of Art as being the place where it all started. Back in the 1950s, the commonwealth printing unit was based in Kingston, very close to where the Fitters Workshop is now. And it was here that classes in printmaking were first taught in Canberra. So there is a long lineage going back.

When the Canberra technical college was formed, where they started to teach printmaking in the 1960s, this is where printmaking was taught. Of course, eventually the technical college moved into the Canberra School of Art. The Canberra School of Art was set up as, I guess you would call it, a utopian school when it started. It had a philosophy which was very much about art, community and artists working together. The person who started it, the person who was the first director, was a printmaker himself, so he had a very strong print interest. More than that, he had a workshop philosophy. He organised the school around workshops, not around individual studios where people worked independently, but as workshops. Of course, amongst the workshops there was the print workshop and also the glass workshop. The glassworks obviously is an extension for people who have come out of that glass workshop where

they work. Studio One, as it was then, became that place where graduates went to continue their life as professional artists.

That amalgamation of both of those two slightly different workshops, coming from different angles, has created a unique workshop in Australia. If you are thinking about the workshops around Australia, there are very few large workshops. The biggest one, Australian Print Workshop in Melbourne, is the only one that comes close to Megalo, and that does not have screen printing facilities at all. So it has a different philosophy. There is hardly any access to it either. You have to be a professional artist to get your foot in the door, more or less. It does have some scholarships for younger people but there is no access or community usage like there is at Megalo. So Megalo is in a fairly unique position.

Print workshops around the world tend to be in old buildings—buildings that have been converted. I could not help hearing those remarks about the large building of the Fitters Workshop. This is not unusual. There are print workshops like this all around the world which are tucked into large, disused industrial buildings. It is pretty much the norm rather than the exception. Very few print workshops around the world have custom-made facilities or custom-built buildings. They are almost always amalgamations.

The present workshop is a workshop that is good. It runs really well, and that is obvious from the community usage it gets. The National Gallery uses it as an educational facility as well. We do educational programs there. It is producing good work. We have acquired works that have been produced at that workshop. So it is very good, but it could be better, and one aspect of that is about location. It is not just about an art precinct; it is about a precinct where there are people. If you look at where print workshops are around the world, the Australian Print Workshop is in the middle of Fitzroy, right there in the hub in an old building which was an industrial building and which has now been taken over by the workshop. The workshop at Cairns which has just been opened, called the Canopy, is in a disused building and is part of an arts precinct which is a very popular tourist destination. With all of those things, it is part and parcel of being a destination to go to.

**THE CHAIR:** As Mrs Dunne has limited time with us today, if it is okay with you and with the committee, I will go to a question from Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** There is one question that I wanted to ask, which I wanted to clarify, and I do apologise to members that I have to leave. Mr Butler, you made a submission. Is this a private submission or does your submission represent the view of the National Gallery of Australia?

**Mr Butler:** It is a private submission. That is my position.

**MRS DUNNE:** I wanted to clarify that, because I was surprised to see it on NGA letterhead. In discussions with your director, Mr Radford has told me on a number of occasions that he did not get involved in ACT arts politics, and I just wanted to clarify that. Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Butler, is there anything further that you wanted to say?

**Mr Butler:** With respect to the history, again, Canberra has not got a lot of heritage works, heritage buildings, and these are two of the most prominent industrial heritage buildings in the place. There were very few people living in Canberra at all until the 1950s, and a lot of our heritage in terms of housing stock and buildings is already gone.

As well as the heritage of the buildings, I think traditions are something we should be aware of as well—the fact that this was an area of art production. We know that back in the 1940s this is where art was taught. This is where the Canberra Artists Society had their lessons. This is where—

**MR HANSON:** In Kingston or at the Fitters Workshop?

**Mr Butler:** In printers row. You can see where the building has been taken off the side of the Fitters Workshop. There is a whole row of buildings that went right along there towards the far end of what is now the bus shelter. So there was a row of buildings all the way along there. There are only a couple of buildings left out of that whole complex. Where the actual art lessons were held was in part of the buildings which were formerly occupied by the commonwealth printing workshop.

**MR HANSON:** Thanks. I just wanted to clarify that and enhance my understanding.

**Mr Butler:** So it is more the precinct that I am talking about. Where we have those traditions, it is good to enhance them, to try to remember them, to try to give Canberra more history rather than take it away.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I might go to questions. You mentioned in your opening statement that there are similar workshops across the world located in these sorts of locations, but, as you said, there are other arts precincts that are also located in such buildings. So it is not always limited to visual arts. Probably the Powerhouse in Brisbane, which was mentioned this morning, is a good example of that, where it is actually a performance venue. You said that these sorts of print workshops are typically located in such buildings. Is it the case that there are other forms of arts that are also located in these sorts of buildings that you might be aware of?

**Mr Butler:** Yes. The glass workshop is obviously a prime example. If you go to Adelaide, there is the JamFactory workshop. If you go to Hobart, the IXL workshop houses now the school, but it is in an old apple canning or jam making factory. So they are all old buildings which have been put to the use of art.

**MR HANSON:** Do you think it also might be the case that a lot of these organisations are in old, disused buildings because they had no alternative, because they did not have a \$4 million grant and the gift of land that would enable them to build a purpose-built facility? They are there in many cases because that was the cheapest available alternative, not necessarily because it was the most suitable place.

**Mr Butler:** That is usually the way they start off. But in lots of cases they gradually acquire the building. The Australian Print Workshop was in their building for nearly 20 years before they actually managed to acquire it. So often these things do happen.

The other thing about heritage buildings is that if they are not used and they are not used a lot, they tend to run down. In Newcastle there is the great problem of wonderful groups of heritage buildings along the foreshore for which they had great plans for community things. Not used, and now they are white elephants, and the upkeep of those buildings is very high because they are not being used day in, day out. They are not part of a regular usage.

**MS PORTER:** I am sorry I was late; I had another meeting that, unfortunately, I had to go to and could not get out of. My questions are around your comments about the use of the building as a place where this type of activity should happen, I guess. I am still trying to get some clarification around why particularly a heritage or an older building and why particularly this particular activity. It appears to me from what you are saying and from Mr Hanson's question that, if you believe heritage buildings should be used for arts activity and continual use and be live places that the community use, then it is not specific to a particular kind of arts activity. I think the point that I am hearing from you is that you think this heritage building needs valuing, that it needs activity around it and that an arts community or several arts communities are important in actually valuing that building and attracting people to it. It needs to be something that is in line with other activities that are happening in that precinct. Is that the kind of things you are saying?

**Mr Butler:** Yes, I am. The glass workshop is obviously the case in point in that it is based on a very similar philosophy, where you have got people who are coming in after they have done their education and they continue to use those kilns and things like that to produce glass. It is a workshop where people can go and see production. It is an educational institution as well as a place of production. This would be exactly the same as a print workshop.

To me, they are very, very similar types of organisations. They have a very similar educational function. They both produce works of art for exhibitions. They both welcome in day-to-day passers-by to see how it happens. There are very similar functions like that in how they would work together in that one region.

My other point is that it is a workshop—it is a print workshop going into a workshop. The building was originally a workshop, where there was machinery in there. There have been comments about noise and vibrations. This was a fitters workshop. Imagine the noise in there then. I do not know if you know what fitters do, but they make a hell of a lot of noise. They are making pipes, they are threading things, they have got machines, they have got great big thumping things for doing metal work. The printing presses are very, very quiet compared to the original noises that would have been in that building.

It is nice that you could have a workshop replacing a workshop. A different kind of workshop, as we would now be producing fine prints, and before that we were producing fine metal work. But, still, it has that same kind of professional expertise, the same idea of making things. I think that is an important aspect of it.

**MS PORTER:** I just will make a quick comment. I am sure it was not something you meant when you said that hardly anyone lived here before the 1950s. I am sure you

did not mean that the Indigenous people did not live here, because they did.

**Mr Butler:** No, I did not mean that at all.

**MS PORTER:** You mean the European settlement?

**Mr Butler:** Well, I mean that in 1950 the population of Canberra—I know the Aboriginal people were not counted in 1950—was very, very small. That is the point I was making.

**MS PORTER:** Yes. But certainly we had a population here for whom art was and is very important.

**Mr Butler:** Yes, that is what I said. They were starting to teach art in Canberra in the 1940s. I think it is wonderful.

**THE CHAIR:** You have just made points about noise. We obviously know what the Fitters Workshop was used for previously, but we are actually talking about it being an arts precinct, and that is why we are asking questions about noise. A number of comments have been made about the reverberations and noise in the Fitters Workshop now. That is why we are asking about it and what is the best use for the building and all those sorts of things. We are talking about a very different purpose for that precinct than in the past.

You have made the point about this being the ideal location for such a form of art and having printing works there. While it may be an ideal location, is it the only location that would be suitable for this sort of art form?

**Mr Butler:** It depends on how many precincts you want to establish in Canberra. Once you start distributing your art in different places, you break up art precincts. You do not have art precincts unless you band things together. That is the problem. At the moment we have got lots of really good art happening in Canberra, but there is nowhere where you can see it all together. You have to move around a lot from Hackett to one area to another. It would be very good if it could be consolidated and in close walking distance to the National Gallery, the National Library, the Archives and things like that. You have already got a cultural precinct starting there on the shores of the lake, and it is a very short walk away to the workshop.

**THE CHAIR:** You are talking about an arts precinct, but do you think something like choral music or performances would not fit in well within an arts precinct? I am thinking of Brisbane as an arts precinct where you have performance art plus you have got the library plus you have got art galleries. Would that not also be something that would fit in well with an arts precinct?

**Mr Butler:** Of course, yes. We need more theatres, we need more movie houses. It is going to be interesting to have another arts precinct with the arts cinema in the Nishi building.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Butler:** So, again, you have got these little fragmentations happening all around the place in Canberra. It is nice to distribute art, but if you want people to come and look at it and to have one place where they can walk leisurely around, it is good to have them closer together.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Butler, for appearing today and for putting in a submission as well. We do appreciate it. A transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you so you can check it for accuracy.

**Meeting adjourned from 3.05 until 3.30 pm**

**MOORE, MS HELEN**, private capacity  
**COLE, MR TOBIAS**, private capacity  
**PAGE, MS LOUISE**, private capacity

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to this hearing of the inquiry by the education, training and youth affairs committee into the future use of the Fitters Workshop in the Kingston arts precinct. I would like to advise you that we have commissioned two studies of the acoustics of the Fitters Workshop, and they were received earlier today. They will be published on the committee website, and they will be available for people to see.

I draw your attention to the privilege statement, which is on the table in front of you. Are you aware of that, the implications in that statement and have you all read it? Yes? Excellent. The hearings are being broadcast on the web today, so just keep that in mind when you are giving evidence as well. Before we go to questions from the committee, I invite you to make an opening statement.

**Ms Moore:** Thank you very much, and thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak to you. My name is Helen Moore. I am the immediate past president of the ANU Choral Society. Given the limits on our time, because I made a very detailed submission—I actually have more material I would like to put before the committee, but it is not quite ready yet—and also because it is a great privilege to have Louise and Toby here, I have decided to let them speak to you, because they were not able to make submissions. If there is time, I will also make some points. I have couple of preliminary points to make.

I also have to convey to you apologies from Graham Humphries, who was to be part of this group. I just had a text from him and he is stuck at Brisbane airport. So he has asked if he can be heard at one of the later hearings.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Moore:** I would like to bring the committee's attention to the fact that I have been working on the documents obtained through freedom of information, and I would like your permission to finish writing up the work I was doing on that and to send it to you hopefully later this week or certainly early next week. I will, if I get time, indicate what I am looking at in that material.

There are only two things that I would like to say in introduction, and the first one is this: in my view, and many other people's, this is not an argument at all about whether or not Megalo should move to the Kingston arts precinct. I think most people take that as highly desirable and a given. It is not a question about Megalo's standing in the community. I think people are very happy to accept that. I do not know of anyone who has questioned that.

I think in the submissions before the inquiry there is some major confusion around that first issue as to whether or not we are talking about whether Megalo should be part of the arts precinct. It should be a central part of the arts precinct. It should be a key part of the arts precinct. The issue is what to do with the second most important building in that precinct and what is the best use of that building.

In response to a couple of things Ms Alder said—I do not know if this has been changed since—but in the development application for the Fitters Workshop, it indicates quite clearly that the building will close at 5 pm. The plans that I saw in the development application have only two unisex toilets. I think some of the talk about how many people are going to be streaming through that building needs to be tested a bit more.

The other point I make in relation to the best use of that building is that only one organisation has ever had the opportunity to put forward a business plan. The indications in my submission and also in the Pro Musica submission—I am sure Chris Latham will make that clear later—are simply indications. No-one has had the time to or seen the possibility of working up a full business plan.

The second thing I want to make really clear is that this argument is about subdividing this building into offices, a workshop and installing a mezzanine floor. That is what the argument is about. It is not about visual arts versus music; it is about what is proposed for that particular building. And the criticism of what is currently proposed, at least in the development application, comes from architects and planners. You will hear from Colin Stewart and you will hopefully hear from Graham Humphries as well.

Others have been in correspondence with me who are not prepared to come forward, but I can assure you that there is concern in that community. I do wish people would stop talking about this building as a place for choirs. The argument is that it is a suitable venue for a huge range of music—classical music, folk music, basically anything that is not amplified, and even Chris Latham does not agree with me on that point.

There are visual artists who are supporting the initiatives that I have taken. I got 1,600 signatures on a petition, including lots of people from the general public. My mailing list on this is so big that I have suddenly discovered Optus keeps blocking me sending out letters because they think I am a spammer. It is not just a few choristers.

I got involved with it as the President of the ANU Choral Society, partly because I am also a gold pass holder for the music festival and partly because it just turns out from all the people who have spoken to me that the ANU Choral Society is one of the very few arts organisations in this town that is not beholden to the ACT government for its livelihood and grants. Other people feel very threatened about making overt criticisms of plans that the government has so clearly endorsed.

With that, I suggest that we hear from both Toby and Louise and then the committee can ask questions, and, if there is time, I will make a few more points.

**THE CHAIR:** The committee would like to ask questions, so if you could keep your statements as brief as possible.

**Mr Cole:** I am a Canberra-based professional opera singer who sings principal roles and concerts with most major Australian performing arts organisations and festivals, most recently with Opera Australia, Victorian Opera, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra—last weekend at the Dr Who extravaganza—and the Queensland music festival. I have also performed internationally in Europe, New Zealand and the USA

and have experience of singing in many different spaces around Australia and the world.

In Canberra I am the Musical Director of the Canberra Choral Society, which, as Canberra's longest-running choir, celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. Historic for Canberra. I have performed in the Fitters Workshop as a soloist and as a member of the Song Company, a professional Sydney-based vocal ensemble. I have also prepared choirs for performances there.

I feel I am qualified to judge acoustics. A basic requirement of musical performance is a good acoustic. Ideally, you want all of the audience—whether they are near the front, to the side or at the back—to be enveloped by the music. Expensive home sound systems aim to achieve this in your living room.

Currently, the main performing venues for acoustic music in Canberra are Llewellyn Hall, Albert Hall and various churches, church halls, school halls and school chapels. From my experience, the acoustics of these places vary from ordinary to pretty good, but not one is exceptional. The Fitters Workshop has an extraordinary acoustic and is thus exceptional.

As Canberra approaches its centenary, people around Australia and the world are discovering Canberra's extraordinary and exceptional features. I want to point out here that Megalo is one of those. Let us not destroy something that has already given us international renown.

**Ms Page:** I am also a performer, a singer. First of all, I would like to address Megalo just to say that the diverse music community apologises for this seeming aggression. It is not. We are all, I hope, trying to benefit the arts community. It has always been a strong supportive community, and we are sorry that this has happened in such a way. Most of us, from the music people's point of view, would not be doing this if we did not feel that we had discovered something rare and beautiful that we do not want destroyed.

We congratulate you and rejoice with you that you have \$4 million for your organisation, which is fantastic, and all power to you. We are hoping that the best outcome would be to preserve that acoustic, as Toby said, which is quite extraordinary, and have you in a building right next door in the precinct itself. That would be the win-win situation for everybody, I think.

I am no expert as to acoustics or to architecture, but all I can say as a performer is that some of the most wondrous and joyous music that I have been involved in was in my experiences in the Fitters Workshop over the last few festivals. I cannot say what it is about that acoustic, but it really feels as though the audience and the musicians are part of one sound. I have had people say that to me in the audience, that they have never felt so much part of a sound as they have in that building. As far as a performer goes, it is the unique opportunity of the performer not having to watch the conductor so much as listening to the sound we are all producing.

We spend a lot of time blending sound, colours, all sorts of features that go towards making a beautiful performance. It was brought home to me how unique the Fitters

Workshop was when I sang the four last songs there with a chamber orchestra in 2010. I am judging that it went well by the reaction of the audience. Certainly it was the most joyous performance I have ever been involved in, the sound. The next year I went up to Townsville to one of classical music's premiere festivals, the Townsville chamber music festival, and sang the same arrangement and same performance there, but everything was adjusted electronically for broadcast and for the sound of the hall. That was one of the most disappointing performances I have ever been involved in. The musicians behind me were having to judge how I was singing by my body movements rather than the sound they were hearing. The people listening on the radio said it sounded as though I was singing under a doona. All the work that we had had put into rehearsing to get the sound and the colour and the balance and the blend right was then overridden by technicians.

It is wonderful to find a building like this one with such a golden acoustic. The more energy, the more sound you put into it, the more it responds. In some ways, when it is empty, that can be devastating for a meeting or even for a rehearsal. To get so much sound back at you can be awful. But when there is an audience in there and using that colour and the shape of the building then, it was something really magical and something I have never experienced before.

As performers, I always think we are like trained athletes. That is what I equate ourselves to. We put so much physicality into it as well as mental work. It is though you are a sprinter or a tennis player. You train yourself for an event. You get yourself to a level of fitness and a level of preparedness. You get out there for a performance, and then to have a poor acoustic is like having to run in slippers or army boots or something like that. You are suddenly hampered.

A dry acoustic can be something that kills you. It can be actually damaging to the voice. You are straining. It feels almost like you are shouting because you are getting nothing back from the acoustic. If you have not experienced it yourself, it is very hard. You are putting out and out and out and getting nothing back. But in an acoustic like the Fitters Workshop, you put out and you get the energy of the sound and it all comes back to you, to the musicians behind you and to the audience. I have never experienced anything like that.

I have had five performances there and been part of the audience as well. I do not know, but it is something extraordinary and exceptional. We really hope that the win-win situation is that Megalo can have a fantastic purpose-built, state-of-the-art building and that that acoustic, that building, could be preserved for music, for theatre, for dance, a multiple arrangement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Page. I will go to my first question. One of the things that has been discussed in a number of submissions, including yours, is about, if it were to be a multi-use venue, having enough events to run year round. You have provided some information on estimates as to what you think it would be. Are you confident, in terms of what you have looked at, that there would be enough use made of that building and that it would not become something that sits idle and is not actually used for its full purpose?

**Ms Moore:** All I can say is that since it was discovered, when SCUNA was planning

its concerts, for every concert that we have thought of we have said, “Oh, wouldn’t it be great to have it in the Fitters Workshop.” We would not have every concert in the Fitters Workshop, but we have three public concerts a year, so I think we would be looking at it for one of those, at least, a year. And if you think about how many choirs there are in Canberra, there are quite a few. I do not think anybody knows how many choirs there are in Canberra.

The point has also been made that it is not just for classical choral music. The folk festival is looking for an outreach venue. Somebody might consider calling Sebastian Flynn. They are one of the groups that are not prepared to put their heads up and make submissions because they need to stay on the right side of their funders. But I think it is on the record that they are looking for outreach. Folk music would be perfect in there. One of the people who has been very active with me in collecting signatures is part of a small Spanish group who busk outside the markets. She tried several times to get that venue and could not do so. I think Chris Latham will be making the point, probably more persuasively than I. He believes that it would be oversubscribed.

**THE CHAIR:** With respect to how it would accommodate other forms of arts, if we did want to make this a multi-use facility that everyone can use, including visual arts, the point that has been made as well is about managing that, the costs involved in managing that and how that would actually be done, because we are talking about a very different thing rather than having someone like Megalo occupy the building. I appreciate that, as you said, it involves significant resources to look at that, but that is an issue that has been raised.

**Ms Moore:** Yes, it has. I think Chris will address that. My background is in applied linguistics, not music, not managing music festivals, not even managing a choir. All I can say is that it would seem on the face of it to be feasible. I think it does need to be explored quite carefully with people who know how to do these things. As to how you would manage music and exhibitions, I think that needs to be tested.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Thanks for your good submission. We have seen some very good submissions from Megalo and other groups. It is very useful for us when we have such comprehensive submissions put forward. The point that you make about other groups being intimidated about coming forward is a reasonably serious allegation to be making. Have you had conversations with a number of other groups that have intimated to you that they have been warned off? What has happened?

**Ms Moore:** I can think of two people, who I will not name, who have told me that if it was known that they had spoken to me, they would lose their livelihoods.

**MR HANSON:** Right. And that is what they suspect, or are you aware that anything—

**Ms Moore:** I know second hand of one person who was told that her contract would be torn up if it was known that she had said anything.

**MR HANSON:** That is extraordinary. Who told that person that? So the ACT

government made that threat to somebody that if they came out in support of the musical groups they would have their contracts torn up?

**Ms Moore:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** And that is at least two groups that you are aware of?

**Ms Moore:** No, that is one—

**MR HANSON:** One group?

**Ms Moore:** No, that is one other person. So two people have said quite explicitly to me: “You cannot name who I am. I am telling you this in confidence.” And the third person I heard about second hand. The third person was told, I understand—this is hearsay—by a minister’s staffer.

**MR HANSON:** A minister’s staffer?

**Ms Moore:** Yes. But aside from that, you can name any number of organisations who are funded from the ACT government who have said to me, “I’d prefer not to be seen high profile in this.”

**MR HANSON:** Because they are concerned that it might affect them when they are coming up for the next round of funding, if they are seen to be on the side of the debate that is not siding with the government?

**Ms Moore:** Yes. Seen to be criticising something to which the government is so clearly wedded.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** I want to get some clarity around that, too. Is the person who allegedly had the comment made to her about her contract a public servant who works in the ACT government and in the arts field?

**Ms Moore:** I really do not want to go any further with it.

**MS PORTER:** No. I think it is important that we understand whether or not she is a public servant.

**Ms Moore:** She is not a public servant.

**MS PORTER:** So she is an independent person working for a not-for-profit organisation or something like that?

**Ms Moore:** Yes.

**MS PORTER:** Or a private industry or something. So the person who would be tearing her contract up would not be the ACT government. I just want to make that clear.

**Ms Moore:** Yes, it would be.

**MS PORTER:** Well, if she does not work—

**Ms Moore:** She is contracted to the ACT government. Well, she has been.

**MS PORTER:** So she is no longer working for the ACT government?

**Ms Moore:** I cannot go on, I am sorry.

**MS PORTER:** No. I think it is probably better, Helen, that we do not. I agree with you that these kinds of things, being hearsay, are probably not something for this discussion. But it is important, I think, that when we explore these kinds of things, we actually know what we are talking about and, if we do not know what we are talking about, we probably do not raise them.

**Ms Moore:** The reason I raised it—well, I did not raise it—or the reason I said that it was me that was leading the charge here in some fashion is partly because other people have said to me, “I can’t do this.” It is also because I have made the time to do it. Mr Hanson, you said to me, “Why is it you?” Well, the answer is because I found myself out the front there.

**THE CHAIR:** We do need to be aware of the privilege statement with respect to anything you are saying here. In light of that, I just remind you of that.

**Ms Moore:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of statements, we do need to be careful.

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry, I missed that. Are you implying that Ms Moore has said something that is untrue?

**THE CHAIR:** No, I am not implying that at all.

**MS PORTER:** No, you did not say that.

**THE CHAIR:** I am just saying that that is on there—the privilege—

**MR HANSON:** What that means is that you do have privileges that allow you to say certain things, and we are not saying that you would name anyone, but it does allow you to. I think that with what you have said, you have not gone beyond any privilege at all.

**MS PORTER:** No-one is suggesting that.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter, did you have any further questions?

**MS PORTER:** No. I was just trying to clarify the matter. But I understand why Ms Moore is uncomfortable about going any further.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I put on the record, Madam Chair, that members of the public have said to me that they are not putting in submissions because they fear that their government funding would not be forthcoming in future. And some people who have had government contracts feel that they would not get any more.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mrs Dunne. Did you have a question?

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, there are a couple of questions. There was some discussion in the Megalo submission and evidence today that the music groups had not put forward a coherent business case. Do you see that the music groups would be the only users of this space and that it is incumbent upon the music groups to put forward an alternative business case for the use of Fitters?

**Ms Moore:** No; that is to say, this argument is not just on behalf of music groups. I think other groups would be able to use the space. The music groups have not been given the space to put forward any kind of business plan. I think that it could be done. But one of the problems is that there is no group that speaks on behalf of music groups. I am not representing an organisation in that sense. I note that the Childers Group has just been set up, and maybe we could work something through them, if they were interested. But, in fact, there is no organisation on behalf of music groups. So if a business plan were to be invited, I think you would find that various people would attempt to put one up that could be examined, but so far nobody has been invited to give one.

**MRS DUNNE:** I am going to put a suggestion to you, and give me an answer as to whether you think this is a reasonable characterisation: the position put forward by many in the music fraternity is that there should be a more democratic use of the space. Are you aware of anyone in the music fraternity who is saying that there should not be a role for Megalo at Kingston or that there should be, in a sense, such diversity of what is done at Kingston as to limit the development of visual arts at Kingston?

**Ms Moore:** Not at all. Actually I led off my statement by saying this is not an argument against Megalo playing a key role in Kingston. Louise made the same point. We would be delighted if Megalo was given \$4 million in a purpose-built building. The issue is around giving access to this building to the widest possible number of people who could make use of it. The Pro Musica submission, I think, goes into that more than I have. In a way, Chris Latham is more competent to speak on behalf of music groups and performers in Canberra because he runs the festival and deals with all of these groups. I do not. I was just president of my choir.

**THE CHAIR:** You raised the issue of having a purpose-built facility for Megalo in the precinct. One of the issues that has been raised is that there is quite a demand for space in that area. So it is not just Megalo that is looking at occupying space there but other arts organisations in the ACT as well. Would you see that as having an impact on what sort of use is made of the Fitters Workshop if it were to be a music venue? Would that have any impact on those other arts groups in terms of being able to be located at the site and have that as an arts precinct? Is that something that has been considered?

**Ms Moore:** Sorry, I do not quite get your question.

**THE CHAIR:** You raised in your submission the building of a purpose-built facility for Megalo on the site in the Kingston arts precinct. One of the issues that has been raised in a number of submissions is that there is already quite a demand for other arts groups, other visual arts groups, to go into that precinct, so that they are part of that as well. Have you considered what impact it would have if the Fitters Workshop were used as a multipurpose venue or for music?

**Ms Moore:** I attended the final public open house that Purdons had in the Kingston markets, and I was assured at that consultation that there was plenty of room in the master plan that Purdons was working on for a multipurpose space as per the Fitters Workshop, for a purpose-built workshop for Megalo and for loads of other organisations.

**MR HANSON:** Who advised you of that? Purdons?

**Ms Moore:** Chris Purdon. They had their draft master plan, and I said to them, “Well, where is Megalo if they are not in this building? Chris Purdon said: “There’s plenty of room there. We have made that perfectly clear.”

**MS PORTER:** I just wanted to ask—and any of you can comment on this—about the quality of the productions that you were talking about. Obviously I have only had the opportunity to go to one performance out there. At that time the chairs had to be brought in and taken out, and I presume they still would if it was a multipurpose building. There was no proper lighting. The lighting was on the floor. It had to be laid in and taken out. I think there was a stage put in and taken back out. I cannot recall, but I know there were a lot of things that had to be done. We have, obviously, expert advice about acoustics and things like that. In all of the locations where you have had experience, how does it affect what happens when giving a performance—the quality of your performance—when a building is not designed, but rather, has to be retrofitted every time you do something?

**Mr Cole:** I find it is an opportunity to rethink, depending on the time of the day and depending if there is natural light, where your stage will be. You can relocate it to being a concert on the side performing to an arc of people or at one end. That is another remarkable thing about that acoustic. A number of concerts exploited that; they had singers scattered throughout the building and singing and it still was a magnificent sound. It takes time to set up, of course.

**MRS DUNNE:** The Albert Hall takes time to set up. You have got to put the chairs out—

**MS PORTER:** I know. I am just asking the question about this particular venue. I have experienced the Albert Hall on a number of occasions.

**Ms Page:** I was just going to say the same thing. The notable thing about that hall is that no matter where you are standing, no matter where you are singing, the audience seem to have a perfect auditory experience. That is one of the unique features of it. As far as having to move the equipment in and out, it is the setting up of it and actually

putting in the audience which makes the final gloss on the sound. As many people have attested, bare it is quite painful. But as soon as you get the chairs and the audience as well, that is when the acoustic becomes perfect.

**Ms Moore:** Maybe I could table this photo taken at a performance. It shows you the audience in one configuration. I have been a gold pass holder for the festival for two years and one of the things I just love about the fitters is that you never know how it is going to be set up when you walk in there. It can be any old way. It is mostly like that. I think it is that sort of raw character, and I love the fact that the heating is not standard heating. That is also a point that needs to be made about all the other music venues, aside from the Albert Hall, I think, that have been listed—that is, all the other venues have got fixed seats. They are set up as theatres in some way or another. What we are talking about for this space is a flexible, open space that you can do all sorts of things with. We do not even know all the sorts of things that can be done with it.

**THE CHAIR:** It is probably worth while having a look at the acoustics report too once it is published. That is quite interesting in terms of some of the points you have raised—and I appreciate you have not seen this—because they have tested the sound in different positions in terms of a stage and I think it has a slight impact on the percentage of sound that people can hear. One of the things it does say—and you have probably already commented on this anyway—is that the room would be good for slower forms of music. It mentions, I think, those sounds where there are not so many layers. It says that some music, potentially more complex music, may not be suitable for that sort of venue because of the reverberation.

**Ms Moore:** From the things people have said to me, there is the most disagreement around amplified music. As I say, I have been to almost every concert for the festival for two years. The only concert I really did not like—but if you talk to Chris Latham he will tell you he loved it—was a jazz group that was really highly amplified. But for anything that is not amplified—anything at all that is not amplified—down from a guitar to a huge choir that we sang in to a small choir to the soloist to the performance that Toby was in where there were groups of three all the way down the aisles, it is gorgeous.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** One of the other flexible spaces that have been touched on is the Albert Hall. I would not mind Mr Cole's and Ms Page's experiences to compare and contrast, because it has been said to me that since the retrofit it is hard to perform music there because the air conditioning is a bit on the noisy side. This was reported after the aria competition. I was just wondering what your views were on the flexibility and the acoustic and how they compare.

**Mr Cole:** The Albert Hall has a history—it is interesting you mention air conditioning—of being very, very cold and of sopranos standing on stage with fur coats and a radiator nearby. There have been many problems with it because it has a stage that does not work acoustically. You cannot perform on that stage. The sound just goes up into the flies and out into the wings. It does not travel into the hall. The best places musicians have found to perform is on the floor and at the side, usually getting in, I think, about 250 seats there. The acoustic is, I would say, okay. It is not

remarkable. You can play fast notes. You can play all your Bach and your Mozart there, but for broader spectrum, slower sound, it is embarrassing, it is difficult, it is a challenge for the performer, whereas the performer is totally empowered in the Fitters Workshop.

**MR HANSON:** I once opened an antique festival at the Albert Hall. The microphone broke, so I had to yell at the audience. I did it from the stage. Now I know, the next time that happens, to get down to the floor.

**THE CHAIR:** Or the side.

**MR HANSON:** I will know what to do. I have just got a question about the toilets at the Fitters Workshop. There are none. What do people do?

**Ms Moore:** For the music festival people either go across to the glassworks, which have very civilised toilets, or they tend to use the portaloos that are hired there. The proposal that we are making is that, there being no toilets put in that building, possibly it should be looked at to see if the toilets in the bus depot could be upgraded. They need upgrading anyway, and expanded. Whatever toilet facilities you put in, it would mean people would have to leave the building.

**MR HANSON:** Yes, so external, but at the moment they are going to the glassworks. Is the glassworks always open when the festival—

**Ms Moore:** It is open till the interval at night. It has been, in my experience, yes.

**MR HANSON:** Thanks.

**Ms Moore:** Could I just say something more about the Albert Hall? The problem with the Albert Hall is its sight lines. You cannot use the balcony upstairs. Chris Latham can explain this better. The balcony was built up to make it suitable for showing movies. It is pitched so that you get the bottom of wherever the screen was. But if you sit there and you want to look at people performing that are not on the stage, people in the first three rows cannot actually see them. To actually retrofit the Albert Hall to make it really suitable for music would probably cost a hell of a lot more and run into all sorts of heritage problems.

**THE CHAIR:** One of the things you have mentioned in your submission—I think this is in relation to some of the FOI requests you have made about a briefing paper to the Minister for Economic Development dated 23 May 2011—is the scoping study. It says:

In May 2008 the ACT Minister for the Arts announced a scoping study to identify cultural uses for the Fitters' Workshop. Investigations considered options to retain the building as a venue for multiple uses such as exhibitions and concerts, and to adapt it to the specific requirements of Megalo.

You have mentioned here that you could not find anything else which mentions that announcement or that, as the briefing says, other options would be considered.

**Ms Moore:** This is the material that I am working on at the moment, and I would like to present it to the committee. There are three things. First of all, it seems to me—and I am only saying “it seems”; it needs to be checked and I do not know what documents I do not have—that ministers have actually been briefed inaccurately about the process. As to the scoping study that was announced in 2008, there is no documentation at all about that. The only scoping study for which I have documents is what May and Russell brought out in October 2009. That was specifically directed to describing how Megalo could be moved to the Fitters Workshop. It had no brief to consult with the community at all, as far as I can see from that document.

The thing about that document is that first of all they said it was impossible to fit Megalo into the Fitters Workshop. They then set out two options. One was to put most of what Megalo wanted in the Fitters Workshop and have a small annex. The second option, which is what they said—I cannot remember the exact word, but something like “preferable”; I think I have quoted it in my submission—was to leave that space empty as an exhibition space and for other community uses. That is the only scoping study that has come forward from the documents.

The real problem with that is that in the decision made on the development application the notification I got back from ACTPLA is word for word what the briefing paper to the minister has been. As far as I know, that 2008 study did not happen. It is really quite complex going through these documents. I am sure you appreciate that. I want to make sure that I have got it really right. I have got all the information. I just want to put it in a form that you might find readable. That is what I am working on at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Because we did start early, we are pretty much out of time. Are there any further questions?

**MR HANSON:** I am good.

**MRS DUNNE:** I am pretty good, thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you very much. We really appreciate—

**MRS DUNNE:** Except that Ms Page did not give her experiences of the comparison between the Albert Hall and the fitters.

**Ms Page:** I have not performed there since the retrofit. I know it has always had an acoustic problem, but there is also a sight line problem. The stage is tiny. Most performance has to happen on the floor, as Toby said, which means that a guitarist or someone like that sitting down cannot be seen. Opera—anything like that going on, where you want to actually sit down or lay down—of course cannot be seen. Several of the pieces that I have performed in the Fitters Workshop maybe required 20 instruments or instrumentalists on stage. They would not fit on the stage of the Albert Hall with maybe two pianos and percussion et cetera. There just is not room for that sort of thing. Acoustic-wise, I cannot comment, but I know that—I have been performing a lot this year for Musica Viva and trying lots of different halls out—any time there is air conditioning involved it is very detrimental to the sound. I can understand what the complaint is there.

**MRS DUNNE:** Why is that?

**Ms Page:** It is just a constant humming as though you are—

**MRS DUNNE:** It is the hum?

**Ms Page:** Yes, just white noise in the background. You always need a clear acoustic.

**THE CHAIR:** That is great. Thank you, Ms Page, Ms Moore and Mr Cole, for appearing before the committee today. We appreciate your submission and also taking the time to appear today. A transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you so you will be able to just check that for accuracy if there are any issues in there. Thank you for appearing.

**LATHAM, MR CHRIS**, Artistic Director, Canberra International Music Festival

**Mr Latham:** I just gave out a copy of Peter Sculthorpe's comments on CD.

**THE CHAIR:** Great, thank you.

**Mr Latham:** And a complete listing of all the concerts. We have done about 30 concerts at the Fitters Workshop, and they are the details.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**MRS DUNNE:** So it is not all the music from the 30 concerts?

**Mr Latham:** No, it is just a very short listing.

**THE CHAIR:** We will start. Thank you, Mr Latham, for appearing before the committee today. Even though I have been over this information three times already, I will go over it again so that you can hear it. Obviously I welcome you here today to the education, training and youth affairs committee inquiry into the future use of the Fitters Workshop in the Kingston arts precinct. Just so you know, we are holding hearings today, obviously, and tomorrow and then further in February where the government will appear.

As we have let everyone else know, the committee did commission two studies of acoustics of the Fitters Workshop, and they will be published on the committee website. I appreciate that you have not seen them at this stage, but they will be published and everyone can see those reports.

I draw your attention to the privilege statement, which is the blue card. I think it is under your purple folder there. I will give you a few seconds just to read through that so that you are aware of what is in that statement and any implications in that. You are aware of that?

**Mr Latham:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Fantastic. I also let you know we are being broadcast today on the web so that you are aware of that when you are giving evidence.

**Mr Latham:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Before we go to questions from the committee, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Latham:** Yes, I would like to say thank you very much for the invitation to speak. I would also like to welcome all of our colleagues from Megalo, and I appreciate the difficulty that we are all facing in this process.

I am very conscious about a larger view that does not seem to have been put. It has been framed very much as print versus music, which is not accurate. I wish my colleagues at Megalo all the greatest success. I consider them a major, important

stakeholder in Canberra in the success of the Kingston foreshore. They will also play a major role. They will probably be the second most important role, behind the Glassworks. They may even eclipse the Glassworks. I see them as absolutely part of the success of that space.

What I would like to talk about is just the problems of activation. The Kingston foreshore is quite clearly a very key asset for the ACT government. We cannot compete with the Sydney Harbour. It is unlikely that we are ever going to have the budget to build an architectural-statement building like the Sydney Opera House, and I think the best chance to reposition the lake's prominence, especially within the context of the centenary of Canberra, is actually for the Kingston foreshore to be that place.

It is also extremely important historically, because it is the beginnings of Canberra, and the actual building that we are discussing is probably the fifth or sixth building that was built after they decided to establish Canberra. And it was built by an iconic architect.

If we talked about the Kingston foreshore as the crown jewels in the development of Canberra in the next little while, I would describe the Fitters Workshop as the diamond in the centre of that crown. I think it has a really key strategic role to play in the activation of that precinct. One of the difficult things about cultural precincts is that everybody knows they are very helpful.

Quite clearly, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide have been rather defined by their cultural precincts. The South Bank centre is an enormously important part of Brisbane for the people there. The Circular Quay cultural district is important for Sydney, between the Opera House and Walsh Bay. Melbourne is largely defined by Federation Square, Riverside and the Victorian Arts Centre, and the Adelaide Festival Centre is an important part of Adelaide's identity.

Once you start moving out of the absolute centre of the public transport grid, the success rate of cultural centres is actually much less guaranteed in Australia and around the world. Some of the ones that were probably equivalent to the Kingston foreshore are things like the CarriageWorks in Sydney, which is actually next to a major station. It is next to Redfern station, probably the third largest station in Sydney. It probably would not have survived if it had not been able to secure lucrative TV contracts with *MasterChef* and the like. It is finding it difficult to get enough people through the area.

Another one that I know a lot about is the Powerhouse in Brisbane. That is in New Farm, which has about the same relationship in terms of distance as the Kingston foreshore from Civic, and it also is not on a major transport grid. The way they have gone and got around it is that they have a major programming budget so that they can attract people through unique events. I do not think that scenario is possible in what we are describing for this cultural hub. So from my point of view, I look at it and I worry that it will not work or it will not generate visits by people in the short term, and we have specifically got this issue about the centenary of Canberra coming.

I will also talk about the exposure of Canberra-based artists, but essentially my

proposal is about the idea of trying to bring everybody who makes art at a high level in Canberra to the Fitters Workshop to work the venue as an activation space, in order to bring as many unique visitors in as possible. One of the problems we all have in the arts is that when we actually measure our visitation, we cannot distinguish between the same person walking through the door 100 times and 100 individuals walking through the door. Admittedly, that is the same problem that sport has. Sport will say, "We had 100,000 people this year." They may not tell you it was 5,000 people that went to 20 events. I think the reality is that, because of that, we have to be very careful about visitation numbers. I think that to get this precinct to work, we are going to need everybody to bring all their audiences to that place.

One other thing we noticed just in terms of the ticketing data was that when we presented in the Albert Hall versus when we presented in the Fitters Workshop, we sold more tickets for the Fitters Workshop and we also sold more tickets to people who had postcodes outside the ACT. It was about a four to one ratio.

This dispute has been extremely bitter and very painful for everybody and I really do apologise to everybody, including all members of the Legislative Assembly. It is extremely vexatious and the only possible outcome about this that I think has been a positive to date is that it has created an enormous brand awareness around the idea of the Fitters Workshop. There are many people in Canberra who have never been there, have no idea really what the Fitters Workshop is, but have some idea that there is this thing there. So whether we like it or not, we have created this thing that now has great value.

I think that probably also speaks to why it has been so bitter. I think people realise it is a very rare asset. It has been there since 1916 and it is a continuous line throughout the entire history of Canberra. It would seem that it would be sensible for it to be used in some way in the centenary.

I have argued in the proposal—and I would ask you to ask questions from that—that if there were some way to combine visual arts exhibitions and activating performances at night, that would probably be the most efficient use of the space. The difficulty you have generally got is that visual arts usually runs between 10 and 5 and you do not get evening activity. There would be some exceptions to that. Performances also have a weakness, because they are largely in the evenings or on the weekend days.

We also have this issue that on Sundays we have great access through the Old Bus Depot Markets, which can bring about 2,000 to 5,000 people through the site. However, it is quite notable that the Glassworks visitation is about 100 to 120 on a Saturday and it is over 1,000 on a Sunday. So it is actually the other six days that we have to really be concerned about. And I see that the Fitters Workshop is an opportunity basically to try to create some kind of display cabinet for the best of what is made in Canberra across all genres. In actual fact, I suspect that what we will find is that, if it was ever opened for proposals, the proposals would be very surprising. They would come from sectors that we do not imagine right now.

I think, for example, the NFSA is looking for an external place to have a film festival. We have not had any dance in there yet. Yet it would be possible to put a sprung floor

in there as a temporary stage. There has been a limited amount of design, but I think design and fashion might be something that might go in there. It could even be opened up, for example, for people to hire for weddings. In the end, the most important thing is that an enormous amount of people go through that space and activate the businesses that are going to be around that sector.

I am very conscious that it would not be a music venue. I am not suggesting that at all. I am suggesting that it would be largely a visual arts exhibition space that would actually have the opportunity also to be shared occasionally for performance, and this combination would create a very active centre in the middle of a precinct that will need a lot of activation.

There is one other issue I would like to speak to, and it is that I talk about the island Canberra problem a lot, and that is that if you live here and you are an art creator or maker, you basically live underneath this enormous canopy of the national cultural institutions, who may have marketing resources of 1,000 or even more times what you have. They have programming budgets that dwarf you. The last Canberra artist to get a retrospective at the National Gallery was Rosalie Gascoigne and I think that was more than 15 years ago. It will probably be another 15 years before we see that again. Most of those institutions are very focused on national and international bodies of work.

I think that the real problem is that you cannot get national coverage in print. The *Sydney Morning Herald* will only take reviews of blockbuster exhibitions from the major national cultural institutions. The *Australian* now has pretty much gone behind a firewall. There also are not a lot of stringers who write about the arts in Canberra. So you live in this vacuum of coverage. In my own field, someone like Larry Sitsky basically is almost unknown in terms of what his activity has been for the last 20 or 30 years, because there is literally no coverage of it.

So one of the things I would suggest is that if the building could be used as a display cabinet, if there could be some way it could be over time wired for broadband so that you would be able to broadcast from it and it could become part of the NBN delivery of cultural content to regional and rural Australia and ultimately international, I think that would be a great advantage. But I think that there is a distinct disadvantage to being a practitioner or a maker of art in Canberra right now, because it is simply hard to get a large enough audience to be able to make a living. And part of the problem is that we live in a town of 350,000 people but we also have this incredible array of national cultural institutions that soak up an awful lot of their discretionary income.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. My question relates to a question I asked of Ms Moore and something you have mentioned about that issue of making sure you would get enough people through the venue and enough people to use it. You have outlined a bit of a plan in your submission, as has the choral societies' submission. That is the issue I want to ask more questions about. You have mentioned your concern about that and that you do not want the venue to be there and then not be used and become something which is not used enough by people and then may not be used for any purpose because of costs associated with it. Will we be able to address that adequately by having it as that sort of multi-use facility?

**Mr Latham:** Ultimately the proof would be to open it to submissions and see the response that you got. I talk to a very wide degree of people who actually make work, largely because I am trying to figure out what is the best of what is going around to put in the festival. I think there would be a very strong response. Every time I talk to people, they usually ask me, “How did you get permission to get inside?” And one of the things that we had to be quite honest about was that in 2009, in my first discussions with the LDA, the person who was there—I cannot remember his name—said that I would not be successful. He then got replaced by a man called Jeremy Morris who said if I was to fill out all the forms that were required, I would eventually get to the end of the process and they would be able to approve me.

I remember that when I mentioned it to my board, Don Aitkin said: “It won’t be worth while. Basically they have given you a signal that you will waste your time.” So I did not tell my board the amount of time I spent. I spent six weeks with two people working on the application full time. The second time we did it, it took us four weeks. The third time we did it, it took us three weeks, because we were able to duplicate some of the work. The process was labyrinthine and the amount of people who asked me, “How did you manage to succeed?” The only answer I could give was: “We chose to invest very heavily.”

The reason I wanted to do it originally was that I had a piece, the *Rights of Passage* by Peter Sculthorpe, that had been commissioned for the opening of the Sydney Opera House and I wanted a specific place to put it in that would respond, that the piece would work in, and I just felt that the acoustic would do very well. I had at that stage done a site inspection and so I was motivated by that reason.

**THE CHAIR:** And you have mentioned that point that art exhibitions might typically be through the day and then you would have a music performance at night. One of the issues which were raised by Megalo was the process that has to go into actually installing an art exhibition as well and if you have to actually put installations there to require art to be shown. Are they issues you have thought about in terms of those sorts of complications? You might have an exhibition there but then what do you do if it has to be constantly moved, and what are the costs involved with that?

**Mr Latham:** I thought that the major idea would be to actually construct the schedule with the understanding that there would be an interest in trying to create these abilities to coexist. So part of the design from the visual arts point of view, and there was someone who was tasked with that, was that they would actually match like components that could coexist and there would be some cases where it would not be possible. The proposal I put was that if you had a flat rental which would be beyond what some visual arts organisations could bear by themselves, there would be an incentive for people to cooperate.

But the basic idea was to find ways that the exhibition could accommodate performances in some cases. There may also be times where there are enough performances that you could actually just run a period of concentrated performances like a mini festival. During the festival—we could probably afford to run it for two weeks solid—most of the activity, I thought, would be actually layered.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Helen Moore, who was the previous witness in this inquiry, said that she is aware of groups who had essentially been intimidated from putting in submissions and talking about this. On page 8 of your submission, you talk about how essentially Pro Musica was advised not to speak publicly. I will just quote from that:

... President ... Don Aitkin ... wrote to the Chief Minister acquainting him with the success of the Festival and what he called 'the amazing musical space' that we had unearthed. It is accurate to say that this letter was not well received. Explicitly in reply to the letter and indirectly through other channels, Pro Musica was strongly advised not to proceed with further public or private comment ...

**Mr Latham:** That is accurate; I stand by that. I also say that I am a great supporter of what John Stanhope did for the arts. I would consider it rude to speak against him. Yes, he has got a clear position on the matter after he had shown loyalty to our sector. I also do not think it is appropriate to be funded by an organisation and then to also criticise. It is not my right to expect to be funded by the ACT government and then to criticise their actions. So I think part of it is appropriateness. My board suggested that I am in a position where I am the caretaker of the wellbeing of my organisation. It is not for me to put my personal agendas or my wishes about this building ahead of the wellbeing financially of my organisation.

**MR HANSON:** Sure, but you said in your submission that your organisation was advised not to speak and not to advocate or make further public or private comment and advocacy regarding the building's future use.

**Mr Latham:** That is an accurate statement.

**MR HANSON:** So who said that to the organisation? Who made that comment to the organisation?

**Mr Latham:** I do not want to disclose that, because I think we were told that as friendly advice. I do not have any problem with that actually. I think some part of that makes sense. The government had a strong point of view; we clearly were not in step with that. There was the suggestion of "let the process take its own rhythm". I remember when, before this festival, we asked to use the Fitters Workshop one time and Shane Breynard—because he is not in this position now, I think I will say his name—called me to let me know that in actual fact the decision had sort of been made and this would be the last time we could use it. I promised him I would make no public comment, but I said that I would not be able to control my audience, who would have their own reactions. In actual fact, they were very vociferous and I wish I could have produced a calmer outcome for everybody so that we could have this discussion in a less volatile environment.

**MR HANSON:** But don't you think it is extraordinary—you obviously put it in your submission—that an organisation that has a view, whether it received some grants from the ACT government or not, is basically told: "Don't comment. Don't tell us what you think. Don't make those public comments." I just find that extraordinary—that, as this process is ongoing, organisations who have an interest are told essentially to shut up. I do not understand how you would consider that appropriate.

**Mr Latham:** I do not think this process has been elegant, and I have been distressed that I have been part of something that has caused distress and division within my industry, which is extremely vulnerable at the best of times. There must have been a smarter way to do this than we have done it. It has gone the way it has gone, but it would have been much better if we could have had more educated discourse about this. It seems to have become extremely bitter and corrosive, and I do not think that has been helpful. But that has not been our wish. We wanted to somehow let people think rationally and clearly about this. We were trying to demonstrate what could be done.

Clearly I had a vested interest. I cannot speak in this matter without declaring the fact that I would like the Fitters Workshop to be able to be shared. But the organisation that I work for, Pro Musica, has to maintain good relations with all parts of government and it is important that we are seen as—we are public servants; we are trying to do good work for government and we are funded to do that. We should trust that process as well. It is not our job to comment on that.

**MR HANSON:** All right.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Porter?

**MS PORTER:** I do not have any questions at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne?

**MS DUNNE:** Mr Latham, you said that you did a site inspection; you were looking for venues for particular pieces of music. When you went into the empty Fitters Workshop, what made you think that it would work as a concert venue? I am not a music person, but the first time I went into it after this became an issue I went in with someone who is a musician and he said, “I cannot see how it works.” What made you think that it was worth pursuing and putting six weeks worth of work into?

**Mr Latham:** I do not know how many concerts I have played in my life, but over 1,000 in various places around the world. For seven years I was a full-time violinist in the Australian Chamber Orchestra. We used to always go in and play singing chords with an empty hall, and then we would play concerts. So I am very aware of the way that acoustics will be modulated by people. In the end, the thing that absorbs sound most efficiently is the human body. Some halls now have seats that mimic the effect of the human body, but every hall that I have played in largely has an empty sound and a full sound. You make those kinds of calculations because you have done it so many times. So I knew that 400 people in there and a lot of seats would take a huge amount off it.

The extraordinary quality that I would describe about the acoustic is its efficiency. I would describe it as an acoustic space that is extremely efficient. There is very little energy that is lost, because there is no absorbent material and the proportions of the building are such that it amplifies the actual energy that is going out. Once you take one of those planes out, you do not have a complete box that it bounces around in; it dramatically changes the nature of the acoustic. That is something I have a lot of experience with.

There was obviously a risk. We were not certain until the first night of the performance of *Rites of Passage* whether or not the percussion, which was fast and loud, would be clear enough. The thing that I cannot explain to you acoustically is why we can achieve both of the two things that usually are in inverse proportion—one is clarity and the other is warmth—in there. I think that it will be very difficult to get that out of an acoustic report; that seems to be a very specific anomaly.

One of the other things that are very curious is that it does not have a resonant frequency which would cause an unsightly bloom around certain frequencies. If I sang one note, it would be like a hot note, a hot spot. Another thing is that it is very even across all frequencies. I could determine that by singing. There I sang a number of different things for about 15 or 20 minutes and I realised that basically it took all the keys and all of the harmonics very well. When I sing, I often sing harmonics; that means that essentially you sing a fundamental and then you let the various harmonics above that sound; that will determine the colour of the sound by the nature of the richness of the harmonic sound. I could tell from doing that that it would be very clear.

**THE CHAIR:** Just on that point that Mrs Dunne has raised, I appreciate that you have not seen the acoustics report. One of the things it says, and this is based on an initial judgement, is that the venue would be good for slower forms of music but that music that might be more complex or have speed or detail would possibly not be suitable.

**Mr Latham:** That is logical.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that something you found from being there?

**Mr Latham:** As a general rule, that is absolutely true. I have been more surprised by what actually has worked. There has been a lot of music that does not fit that description that has worked very well. We have recorded all the concerts and I can make them available if people wish to hear a wide variety of different styles of music. There was only one time when I heard something which I thought was an acoustic problem, and that was when a soprano had a trill on a certain note. But when I heard her do it in a different acoustic, I realised that it was the actual note itself. I just find that it is surprisingly versatile, but it does require a certain audience to be able to modulate it. The acoustic drops dramatically; it is about a 15-second echo empty. It is not more than seven or eight seconds once you get those people in there. That is quite typical; that is about the Sydney Opera House.

**THE CHAIR:** When you say a certain audience, do you mean in terms of numbers? Is that what you mean?

**Mr Latham:** Yes. I think under 100 it starts to get a little bit lively. Going towards 400, it starts to dry up quite considerably. By the time you get beyond 400—you literally almost have people hanging from the walls—you are getting to the absolute capacity and then it becomes quite normal. One of the curious things is that because you have this arched structure to the roof, it seems to transmit the sound very quickly down the length of the building. There are also a number of support structures underneath the gantry crane frame and there are enough angles in that to stop us from

having what are called standing waves that occur when, if you clap, you hear a very unpleasant sound. It seems to be a strange accident as to why it works well.

At one stage when we were wondering whether it would be possible to open the building up for shared use, we were even considering whether the building could be built elsewhere, given that we had blueprints for it.

**THE CHAIR:** I appreciate that you have not seen the acoustics report, but you will probably be able to answer this anyway. They have also tested having the stage at the end or in another form and having different points where audiences might be. And there are some differences there in terms of where people might sit. Is that something that has been found as well?

**Mr Latham:** I would expect, from my experience, that it would work best from both ends, the stage at both ends, and that if you put a stage in the middle it would be less efficient. That is largely because you are under the focal point of the arch. Once you are off centre and against a long wall, you will not be under the focal point of the arch and the building will not be as efficient.

**THE CHAIR:** And also in terms of different positions where audiences might be sitting. Have you had any feedback about that in terms of the quality of the sound that the people might be hearing?

**Mr Latham:** The main feedback we have had—

**THE CHAIR:** I appreciate that that is a subjective thing as well.

**Mr Latham:** The main feedback we get is that people are obviously very enamoured of the sound. I am sure you will have had a fair amount of feedback on that level. I find it surprising that it is not louder in the front seat than the back seat. I do not quite understand why that is possible, but it is surprisingly even. When I walk with my eyes closed away from the stage, I do not hear a great change in the sound. But it is only a 40-metre building, so in a weird way it is a pocket-rocket-like little space; it is not very large. The air space you might get in Llewellyn Hall would be something like 20 times as large. That is probably why it is quite contained in its own way.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Hanson?

**MR HANSON:** I do not actually have any more questions, but I would like to make the comment that I was really quite taken by the six weeks of effort that you put in. To actually go through that process with the sort of passion, vision and determination you have shown, I would like to congratulate you on that, regardless of the outcome of this inquiry. I think that, as an individual, it is a remarkable effort and I would like to say well done.

**Mr Latham:** The one thing I have learnt about Canberra is that if you can learn the language of bureaucracy, many things are possible.

**MR HANSON:** It is disappointing that it has to be like that sometimes.

**Mr Latham:** Well, it is the nature of reality. I do not hold it against anybody.

**MS DUNNE:** I do not want to end on a sour note, but what made Pro Musica come to this inquiry, if you had taken the view that the whole process was pretty unedifying until now and that Pro Musica had been advised not to make statements?

**Mr Latham:** I have a personal thing about this building. I am really quite struck by it. I have to speak about that as a person. I also work for Pro Musica, which serves artsACT, the government and the people of Canberra as best it can. There is an opportunity in 2013 to have a display case for the best of Canberra arts practice. I identified that back in 2009. I always thought that, because of the historical importance of the building, because Murdoch is basically the architect of Canberra that defines its style, you had a space there that is pristine and that is a white canvas. For every artist, the greatest thing you could ever give them is possibility. The fact that there are not limitations to it that are built into the spaces is the greatest gift. If it was possible for submissions to be made, people would be quite struck by how artists would respond to the space. We are incredibly inventive, creative people. I think it is an unusual resource to give someone a blank piece of paper and say, “Draw anything you can imagine.”

In the end, the only limitations to participation in that space should be about quality. It should be a competitive environment to be able to get in there. I do not have any ill will against Megalo. I will spend time after this inquiry building bridges between the organisation and mine. But I do not think that anybody should lock up that space. I think there must be a smarter way to do it.

**THE CHAIR:** I want to ask a couple of other questions on some of the other points that you made in your submission. You mentioned that since late 2008 you have expressed an interest in this as a public building. What has been the response to that, whether it be from government or from other organisations—the fact that you have had that interest? I want to know whether or not it has been accounted for.

**Mr Latham:** One of the things that was very notable from the very first concert we did there was that people immediately began to speak about it. We had something like 260 people for *Rites of Passage*. It was undersold; I wish it had sold slightly better. But for the next concert we had, we could not have got one more person in. The word of mouth was like wildfire.

I will give you some very raw numbers. In 2009 we did 13 concerts in the Albert Hall and three concerts in the Fitters Workshop. Each of those concerts sold more and we sold overall \$110,000 in tickets. In 2010—I am going to have to check it exactly—we did something like 14 or 16 concerts in the Fitters Workshop. We have done 30 altogether. Maybe it was slightly less, maybe 13 concerts, and we sold \$155,000 worth of tickets. In 2011 we did a similar number in the Fitters Workshop and we sold \$211,000 worth of tickets. It is own-phenomenon: people are engaging in this space.

It is not because we spent more money. In fact I think our marketing last year was quite inept at times because we did not hire a good person. There were some internal problems. But it is word of mouth. There is something here you can promote. You are not going to find it that easy to create a space that will have this kind of buzz. It is

largely because it is very un-Canberra. It has been spoken about that it is atypical. It is industrial; it is pristine industrial. You do not have a lot of it in Canberra. There is the possibility that the adaptive reuse could go on and on and not just be locked into one adaptive reuse. In actual fact, perhaps every two or three weeks there could be a chance for an arts organisation to see what they could make of the space. It is an extremely exciting proposition and I think it will drive cultural tourism. In fact, I am employed largely to pick those trends. I am certain it can drive cultural tourism.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned the interest that has been expressed to you from various organisations. You mentioned some of the concerns with the conservation management plan as well and that it was not incorporated. What were your principal concerns with that in terms of the interests that you have been representing and the views that you have presented?

**Mr Latham:** Sorry, could you rephrase that question.

**THE CHAIR:** I did not phrase that very well. You have talked about some of the misrepresentations in the conservation management plan. You talked about the substantial interest in the future of the building that others have expressed to you. You mentioned some comments about that not being accounted for in the conservation management plan or that it would not be useful for a multi-use building. What were your primary concerns with the conservation management plan in terms of those interests you represent?

**Mr Latham:** There is an enormous body of agreement in the world I live in. I appreciate that this is a dichotomous situation and I do not represent all views, but within the world I work in, everybody thinks the strength of the building is its emptiness and the negative space or the hollowness which cannot actually be heritage listed. It is a strange thing; even though one of the greatest aspects about the building is its height, it is very difficult to actually protect that. It was not originally designed for cultural use, so really the only thing that can be talked about is the actual physical structure.

I spend a lot of time with architects. I was given the Clem Cummings Medal last year by the Australian Institute of Architects for services to architecture by a non-architect, which is a mouthful, but it is because I am interested. Canberra has amazing architecture. The proportion of good buildings here is greater than in any other city I have ever been in. Architecturally, there is a very widely held opinion that this is not the optimal use of the space. Duplicating a plant room, using all of that height to put a second plant room in, when the other building will have a plant room, does not seem to make sense. There are a number of ways that the building seems to be adapted against its basic nature. Architects are similarly frustrated, I think, because it is a very small community and they need to be able to access work from the ACT government. They are all colleagues with the people who are making the work. There are sensitivities to this that are just normal.

I think everybody keeps saying that the beauty of the space is its pristine emptiness, this fact that it is just a box. If there could be any way it could be retained largely as a box that could be then opened up to a lot of uses, so that everything that was brought in—stages, chairs, plinths, artificial walls for hanging things, whatever it is that is

used—could be stored externally, people think that that would be the ultimate use of the building. It is just about preserving its very unusual nature.

**THE CHAIR:** There being no further questions, thank you, Mr Latham, for appearing today before the committee. We appreciate your putting in a submission and taking the time to see us. A copy of the transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you. We are adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 4.51 pm.**