

ITEM 5: LMM 14/03/17 - NEWCASTLE ART GALLERY

PURPOSE

That:

Council continues to support the Newcastle Art Gallery Redevelopment and leverages available funding from the NSW Government.

MOTION



That Newcastle City Council -

1. Note and reiterate Council's commitment to the redevelopment of the Newcastle Art Gallery
2. Meets with incoming Arts Minister Don Harwin to investigate opportunities for joint support of the redevelopment of the Art Gallery. Noting the recent announcement of a commitment to prioritise NSW Government Cultural Infrastructure Funding in regional NSW.

BACKGROUND

Sydney Morning Herald article attached.

The Sydney Morning Herald

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Don Harwin's arts start has been a relative breeze

Peter Munro

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Now, Voyager is a flowery film about an ugly duckling come good, starring Bette Davis as a hand-wringing spinster in a high-lace collar, who blooms after meeting an unhappily married Frenchman with good hair. She finds love, heartbreak and love again with her leading man, before settling for something in between.

"Will you be happy?" he asks her. "Don't let's ask for the moon, we have the stars," she replies.

The 1942 black-and-white drama – a romantic comedy without chuckles – is NSW Arts Minister Don Harwin's favourite film. "You've got to see it," he tells me. "The total transformation of this totally withdrawn person into someone who just blossoms is just brilliant."

It's tempting to draw a parallel with the career politician's own rise to a starring role in state politics after 18 years in the wings.

He's been a minister for such a short time that he's still counting. "Twenty-six days. No, it's 24. Or 25," he says, while touring Carriageworks arts centre in inner-city Sydney last Friday.

Today is his 31st day as State Minister for the Arts, Resources, Energy and Utilities. His first month in cabinet has been dominated by heatwaves, electricity shortages and suggestions people turn down their airconditioning to 26 degrees.

By comparison, his arts role has been a relative breeze. We meet for coffee at the end of his first sitting week in Parliament as a minister. He's wearing a baggy blue checked blazer and oversized mustard-yellow chinos – testament to his recent weight loss regime.

"It is a very exciting time to be the Arts Minister," he says repeatedly, echoing Malcolm's Turnbull former catchcry.

Harwin is in the happy position of being a man with money to spend and no shortage of takers. The government promised \$600 million in cultural infrastructure funding before the 2015 election and still has about \$250 million in the kitty (after allocating \$202 million to the Sydney Opera House and \$139 million to the Walsh Bay precinct).

He says he will make an announcement about funding before the June budget, but cites Western Sydney and regional NSW as "high priorities".

"There are a few areas where we need to do better and I think there has been, frankly, under-investment in our cultural infrastructure."

He backs the government's controversial plan to move the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta – despite [reports that the relocation could cost up to \\$2 billion](#).

"We are absolutely committed to having an iconic cultural institution in western Sydney and the one that makes sense is moving the Powerhouse," he says. "It's a collection that appeals to many audiences and it should be at the heart of the city, in Parramatta."

Harwin, 52, grew up in Peakhurst, some 21 kilometres south of that heartland. His father, Don snr, was a high school maths teacher and headmaster. "He would always come home at night and read me a story," Harwin says, his eyes filling with tears. "I have always had a love of reading, from the earliest age."

Growing up gay in south-west Sydney in the 1970s made him the target of bullies at the local public school ([a topic he spoke about in parliament in 2014](#)). "It was a difficult experience for me," he says now. "But I got through it and it made me a stronger person, and it probably helped equip me for what I am doing now."

He studied economics and law at the University of Sydney, while dabbling in amateur theatre – including a rendition of "Tit-Willow", from *The Mikado*. In 1987, he went straight from university to a research job with an MP and has been working in the Macquarie Street precinct ever since, including a stint running a consultancy business.

In late 1998, he was preselected by the Liberal Party to stand for the Legislative Council – forcing him to abandon a lively thesis on an "historical institutionalist interpretation of how political parties develop".

Much of his time in politics has tended towards seemingly mundane matters, such as electoral boundaries. He is said to be very good at interpreting lines on maps. His library of political and historical tomes rivals that of federal Attorney-General George Brandis ("They're all my books – and my shelves," Harwin notes.)

He was credited with helping secure the numbers for Gladys Berejiklian to become Premier in January, prompting suggestions that his elevation to cabinet was designed to reward as factional ally.

Indeed, his time in office offers few hints of an arts pedigree – apart from hosting exhibitions of the parliament's art and cultural artefacts, while president of the Legislative Council.

Under "special interests" in his parliamentary biography, he lists (in order): political history, psephology (the statistical study of elections and voting), film and rugby league (his maternal grandfather once played for St George).

But he's keen to talk about his new arts role and so we do.

"The arts inspire us to do great things," he says. "To listen to a beautiful piece of music or to look at a magnificent painting or to read a great work of literature just uplifts you."

He nominates literature – particularly, historical non-fiction – as his favourite art form and notes that he has written chapters for several titles, including books on social justice and state elections. He also likes opera and regularly buys Australian Ballet subscriptions for himself and mother Evelyn, who took dancing lessons when she was young.

His Spotify playlist is a love ballad to 1980s and 1990s pop music, including Pet Shop Boys, Elton John and Freddie Mercury (his favourite Queen song is *Radio Ga Ga*).

He's spent much of his first month as a minister tramping about Sydney's arts institutions to find out where funds are needed most. Among those in the queue is the Art Gallery of NSW, which wants some \$450 million to build its Sydney Modern extension.

"There's no doubt they have got a strong case for consideration," he says. "They're in the mix, as are many other people. I have got many people knocking on my door right now."

On Friday night, he revisited the gallery to open its Andy Warhol exhibition and was welcomed like an old friend. Board of trustees president David Gonski, who has seen several arts ministers in his time, told the crowd that "*this one* loves the arts".

Harwin's own gushing speech about the arts went down well with attendees, particularly when spruiking this Saturday's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. "Happy Mardi Gras to all of those present who are looking forward to a big week, including me," he said.

But he tells me that his ideal Friday night is staying at home in Vincentia, on the South Coast, and walking by Jervis Bay in the evening, before watching a film. "Politics is a pretty hectic life, so a good Friday night when you haven't got something on is to just do nothing," he says.

"But there won't be too many of those for the next little while."

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/don-harwins-arts-start-has-been-a-relative-breeze-20170228-gun3je.html>