COLLECTIONS AND GALLERY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2004-2008

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Museum of Australia seeks to inspire interest and reflection in the nation's history. It combines contemporary museum practice, storytelling traditions and a spirit of social inclusiveness that is characteristically Australian.

Visitors – whether they come through the door, visit the website or read its publications – are at the heart of the Museum's business. The Museum is committed to delivering programs that engage and stimulate people of all backgrounds. It is a forum for ideas, a place where people may reflect upon and discuss the past, present and future.

Two foundation documents, the *Pigott Report of 1975* and the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980*, have guided the Museum in developing its mission, as well as Federal Government policy documents, such as *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity* (2003) and *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* (1998).

The Review of the National Museum of Australia: Exhibitions and Programs (2003) makes the point that the National Museum of Australia must be seen as an evolving 'work-in-progress'. The Museum is working to assess and implement changes that address the Review Panel's recommendations.

This document outlines a strategy for change and recommittal of exhibitions and other programs in the short, medium and long-term. Timing of the work schedule will depend on the availability of funds.

1.1 The National Museum of Australia

The National Museum of Australia aspires to be one of the world's great museums. It aims to celebrate the distinctive characteristics and history of the nation.

The Museum is a place for all Australians and visitors to these shores. A place of education and discussion – where we enjoy the nation's successes and consider its challenges, where we are reminded of the familiar and contemplate the novel, where we are stimulated to thought and reflection.

Collections of the real things of everyday life and events are central to the Museum's role. These artefacts animate and convey the history of Australia and its people. They are tangible reminders of what has gone before and of what is to come. Though our lives are increasingly mediated by digital technologies, the Museum believes that artefacts convey a unique sense of our creative human spirit.

The *Pigott Report of 1975* and the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980* identified three themes for the Museum to research, collect and represent:

- The history of indigenous Australia;
- The history of modern Australia since British colonisation;
- The history of human interaction with the Australian environment.

In April 1980, the then Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon R.J. Ellicott, committed the Museum to integrating these core themes:

The national museum...will have three main themes – the history of Aboriginal man, the history of non-Aboriginal man and the interaction of man with his environment in Australia...will not be three separate museums on the one site. To be effective the three themes must be inter-related and complement each other.²

These themes are as relevant now as they were three decades ago. Today, the Museum represents them as *Land*, *Nation*, *People*. Simply expressed, the themes are a strong mission for the Museum and a powerful method for examining the nation. Also, they are easily understood and recognised in the Australian community, as qualitative research has shown.³ In light of the review panel's recommendations, the Museum is now looking to enhance the theme of *Land* in its permanent galleries.

In representing these themes, the Museum's practice is organised around three key principles:

- Developing the National Historical Collection in perpetuity;
- Fostering the best research internally and externally that examines Australian history and its material culture;
- Representing the history of the nation in state-of-the-art exhibitions and related public and schools programs.

The review panel has recommended strategies for strengthening the capacity of the National Museum of Australia to realise these principles.⁴

2. THE REVIEW

The Museum accepts the thrust of the review report and its vision.

While the Museum notes the panel's approval and recognition of its achievements in the two years since opening, it also acknowledges the substantial criticisms, especially those related to *Circa*, and the *Horizons* and *Nation* galleries.

It will move as quickly as possible to make necessary changes to address these concerns.

However, not all suggestions of the panel can be implemented: some will be too costly while in other cases the desired outcome will be achieved more effectively by means other than those suggested. The report itself is careful to note that its suggestions were not meant to 'indicate commitment to a particular course of action'.⁵

The Museum considers that changes and redevelopment of galleries and other installations can be staged over four years, depending on the availability of resources. Work to improve narrative coherence and navigation, and preparation of functional briefs for major redevelopments, has already begun.

The following proposals are structured in three stages:

- Stage 1 work commenced and delivered in 2004/05;
- Stage 2 work to be delivered in 2005/06 and 2006/07;
- Stage 3 work to be delivered in 2007/08.

Note that this document outlines a conceptual framework for the proposed redevelopment of *Horizons* and *Nation* galleries. This work will be underwritten by comprehensively researched, planned and documented exhibition briefs, in line with best museum practice. It is an established standard that these briefs are developed in consultation with intellectual and design expertise, and subjected to front-end audience evaluation and testing.

Also, there is an opportunity to develop new products that address some review panel recommendations across the Museum. These proposals are listed below, before each gallery is dealt with in turn.

2.1 Gallery guides

Key action

Develop chronological and other guides to gallery highlights.

The exhibitions of the National Museum of Australia are suited to navigation guides that incorporate elements from each gallery. These guides will help audiences tailor visits to their own interests and knowledge. A museum-wide chronological guide, picking out key moments in Australian history represented in each gallery, will be particularly useful. The Museum is developing the following visitor guides as publications and for installation on computerised kiosks:

- From Deep Time to This Time: A Chronology of Australian History;
- Ten of the Best: Great Australian Stories;

- Colours of Australia: Australian land and landscapes;
- Australian Traditions: Folk Life and Popular Experience;
- Understanding Australia: Science and Scientific Endeavour.

2.1.1 Virtual Discovery Centres

Key action

• Establish 'discovery centre' computer kiosks networked throughout Museum galleries.

The review panel makes several suggestions for the provision of additional information to support the Museum's permanent exhibitions. Some of these proposals – such as making the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* accessible online – are best committed to computerised kiosks.

The Museum is moving to redevelop the existing visitor kiosks throughout its permanent exhibition galleries to serve as virtual discovery centres. Using new media technologies, these interactive kiosks can provide visitor access to:

- Online resources related to exhibitions and artefacts;
- Online resources on Australian History for further research;
- A range of Information Sheets detailing artefact histories, downloadable to home PCs or to a printer, for hard copy collection on exiting the Museum;
- Access to the Collections database for self-driven learning;
- Virtual exhibitions that represent the Museum's research and collections activities.

While a Discovery Centre/Infozone was an element of early planning for the Museum, the proposal was dropped due to lack of funding. However, updating visitor kiosks in permanent galleries as outlined above will address that need.

2.1.2 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Develop chronological and other guides to gallery highlights.
- Establish 'discovery centre' computer kiosks networked throughout Museum galleries.

3. THE EXHIBITIONS

Key actions

Stage 1: Improve narrative flow and coherence of existing galleries.

• Stage 2: Redevelop Horizons as Australian Journeys.

• Stage 3: Redevelop Nation as Creating a Country.

The Museum is taking immediate action to improve narrative coherence in *Horizons* and *Nation* and address identified concerns, such as the representation of Captain James Cook. It is also planning to fully redevelop both galleries in two stages over the next four years – *Horizons* on the theme of *Australian Journeys* and *Nation* as *Creating a Country*.⁶

Horizons will be recast as Australian Journeys to represent the journeys of discovery, exploration and settlement of the Australian continent. This will include the settling of Australia by migration waves from Britain, Ireland and elsewhere and the journeys of Australians to other parts of the world.

While the review suggested *Horizons* represent these themes from colonisation to Federation, the Museum will extend this timeframe to show the success of 20th century migration and the growing presence of Australians on the international stage. These stories will be linked to representations of Australian places and locales, and the ways in which Australians have claimed places overseas as their own.

The *Nation* gallery will be recast as *Creating a Country* to represent the development of Australia and its economic, social and political conditions. It will also document the innovative and enterprising spirit of Australian responses to this continent's distinctive environments and landscapes.

The review advised that the *Nation* gallery might usefully represent stories of Anzac, of national development, of communications and transport, of science and technology, sport, leisure and the arts, and cities and towns, from Federation to the present. It was ambivalent about the presentation of Federation itself in the gallery. The Museum believes it can best represent these stories by exploring them through the lens of people's interactions with the land. This approach is consistent with the review's suggestion that the theme of land be enhanced in permanent exhibitions. Moreover, the Museum considers that the gallery's time-span should cover the colonial period, to show the early histories of key themes in national development.

There are other reasons why both galleries should span chronologies that extend from the 18th-21st centuries:

- The physical separation of the galleries within the Museum is not conducive to each gallery telling half of a single narrative. Each gallery should be selfcontained and coherent experiences for visitors;
- The themes identified above stretch across pre- and post-Federation eras. It is best to develop chronologies of each theme in a single location.
- There are physical constraints that make it difficult to display large or heavy items on the mezzanine that gives visitors access to *Nation* from *Horizons*.

The proposed redevelopment addresses the review's finding that the two galleries should present convincing stories related to primary themes in the national story. It also responds to the review's call for the theme of land to be strengthened throughout the Museum as an overarching concept.

These redeveloped galleries will be linked by multimedia stations/terminals that reinforce the theme of land by focusing on specific places and regions. Through the *Always Online* project, these media stations will provide another layer of information and link each gallery's representation of distinctive Australian locales.

3.1 Proposed Australian Journeys gallery

Key actions

- Commission front-end evaluation and audience testing for gallery redevelopment, consult with external stakeholders and expertise.
- Prepare exhibition brief and commence redevelopment of *Horizons* as *Australian Journeys*.

Australia's greatest asset is its people. And one of its greatest achievements has been resolving the diversity of its people in a stable and democratic state.

This gallery will present the history of peopling Australia – from Indigenous Australians, through European exploration to those who have settled here over two hundred years. It tells the story of convicts and their keepers, the early British migrants, and the successes of the post-World War II migration boom.

Migrants and travellers often express surprise at the physical expanse of this continent. Therefore, unlike other migration exhibitions, this gallery will reveal how waves of immigrants made places for themselves in Australian landscapes. In doing this, the gallery embraces the review panel's suggestion that *land* become a unifying theme throughout the permanent exhibitions.

Australia has been an emigrant nation, too, as the Australian Bureau of Statistics has shown.⁷ This exhibition will also tell the stories of Australians who have left these shores and made history round the world: young Australians pilgrims at Anzac Cove, painters and writers in Europe, and scientists in Antarctica. Australians have also fought two world wars, supported small nations in the Asia-Pacific and administered territories such as Papua New Guinea. Significantly, the National Historical Collection also has strengths in material culture related to Australian involvement in Melanesia.

The aim is to present the experiences of explorers, travellers and migrants in Australian landscapes, counterpoised with the stories of overseas places that have been incorporated in the national imagination – places such as Gallipoli, London and Bali. While accenting the theme of *land*, this gallery also responds to the call of the Humanities Research Centre, at ANU, for the Museum to have an international focus:

[The Museum]...should continue to work...in the national interest to educate Australian audiences about our own country, the dynamic region in which we live and to educate those audiences to create a better understanding of Australia in the context of our changing world. In other words the National Museum should have an international focus not necessarily so appropriate to State and regional museums.⁸

3.2 Proposed Creating a Country gallery.

Key actions

- Commission front-end evaluation and audience testing for gallery redevelopment, consult with external stakeholders and expertise.
- Prepare exhibition brief and commence redevelopment of *Nation* as *Creating a Country: Land and People*.

Our cities, towns and bush are not just places – they are ways of being Australian. While most people live in urban areas, regional Australia is a continuing source of wealth and inspiration for the nation.

This gallery will look inside the country to reveal the distinctive communities and practices that have developed in Australian places. In part, this story is about the character of regional towns and the people who have worked the land for generations. It acknowledges the role of natural resources in economic development and the efforts of people who farmed, grazed and mined the land. However, the gallery will also reflect upon the commerce and culture of our cities – places that reach back to the bush and look out across the oceans. As an example, photographer Rex Dupain's *From Bondi to Broken Hill* captures the narrative sweep that is possible.⁹

Creating a Country will be an exhibition of the nation's development marked by the interactions of people and landscapes. It will consider the challenge of overcoming distance and isolation through transport and communications, as Geoffrey Blainey has argued. The form and texture of Australia, its architecture and buildings, the tenor of everyday life, faith and political culture are also strands of this story. Yet another facet is the cost the country exacts – the tragedy of personal failure and loss.

The gallery will also examine Australian invention and innovation in response to the land. For example, John Flynn's foundation of the Flying Doctor Service to meet the medical needs of outback settlers separated by vast distances, the solar powered satellite telephone that connects a remote community to the world, and the development of mechanical wheat harvesters in the late 19th and 20th centuries can all be represented.

Creating a Country aims to tease out the character and distinctiveness of Australian experience. These histories, located in cities, towns and bush, have clear connections with the 'located' experiences of migration and emigration represented in Australian Journeys. The stories in Creating a Country will also complement the environmental histories of landscapes represented in Tangled Destinies. Moreover, the 'dialogue' between the galleries will be made explicit through linked interactive media stations, as suggested below.

3.3 Proposed Always Online multimedia project.

Key action

 Develop multimedia resources that link Australian Journeys and Creating a Country.

Imagine multimedia experiences that provide virtual connections between common display elements in *Australian Journeys* and *Creating a Country*. For instance, when a visitor uses an interactive in *Australian Journeys* that details the impact of migrants

on the Barossa Valley, they will also be 'linked' to a relevant display in *Creating a Country*.

These media points will also link visitors to experiences outside the physical space of the galleries – in *Australian Journeys* an interactive takes them overseas, via the web, to a museum in a city from which migrants came; the *Creating a Country* interactive takes them to a regional town to consider that community's history and experience.

This strategy exploits digital technologies for their benefits in compressing distance. Using multimedia interactives, the galleries will reach inside the country, through the regions, and extend round the world. *Always Online* allows the Museum to connect to institutions overseas – the Smithsonian Institution or the British Museum, for instance – comparing Australian conditions to global circumstances. The Museum is physically and virtually 'always connected' to people, places and ideas.

3.3.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

Horizons

- Introduce new 'front page' text panel and gallery organisers to enhance storytelling. Announce the key themes of the gallery to visitors and explain its historical sweep and ideas.
- **Develop Convicts module with new artefacts and storylines.** The introduction of new material will improve narrative coherence in this area.
- **Include other migration stories.** This will expand the cultural diversity of the stories represented in the gallery.
- Include archival film footage in Visions Theatre. The connection of post-war migration drives to nation-building projects, such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme, will be represented in the theatre.
- Enhance clarity and coherence of the story of European discovery. Changes will be made to the content and design of the display depicting Dutch, British and French journeys of discovery.

In 2004/05:

Nation

• Introduce new 'front page' text panel and gallery organisers to enhance storytelling. Reorganise the key themes of the gallery and explain its historical sweep along the following lines:

Exploring Australia – Examines the history of exploration and will include new components on Cook and Flinders on the big map multimedia. **Creating Australia** – Examines the development of Australia as a nation state and national identity. It will explore the central role of transport and communications in building Australia.

Being Australian – Examines ways in which people experience being Australian in daily life. This will be achieved through representations of popular culture and social history.

- **Install module detailing sporting history.** This module, presently in development, will broaden the historical sweep of the gallery.
- Provide contextual information for Transport and Communications, and Suburbia sections. Noting the suggestion of the review panel, these areas will provide additional information and context for visitors.
- Commission research on visitor response to key exhibits to better inform storytelling techniques. This research will be qualitative and focused on specific learning outcomes.

Stage 2: Redevelop Horizons as Australian Journeys

- Commission front-end evaluation and audience testing for gallery redevelopment, consult with external stakeholders and expertise.
- Prepare exhibition brief and commence redevelopment of *Horizons* as *Australian Journeys*.

Stage 3: Redevelop Nation as Creating a Country

- Commission front-end evaluation and audience testing for gallery redevelopment, consult with external stakeholders and expertise.
- Prepare exhibition brief and commence redevelopment of *Nation* as *Creating a Country: Land and People*.
- Develop multimedia resources that link Australian Journeys, Creating a Culture, and Tangled Destinies.

3.4 Gallery of First Australians

Key actions

- Extend coverage and representation of regional Indigenous communities in the gallery.
- Explain and better articulate curatorial processes in the Contested Frontiers module.

The *Gallery of First Australians* explores the history of Australia and its colonisation through the experiences, stories and images of Indigenous Australia. The Museum notes the support of the review panel for this gallery:

It is conceptually forceful and coherent – indicating a firm curatorial hand. It excels at representing some of the regional and lifestyle diversity of Aboriginal culture...[o]verall, there is a harmony of lighting, space and well-balanced and focussed modules that is both uplifting to the visitor's spirits, and conducive to study and reflection...¹¹

The Gallery of First Australians is presently engaged in changeover and module redevelopment that will extend its regional coverage of Indigenous Australia. It is developing new modules on communities in Tasmania and Victoria, and will relocate the Broome module.

In the short term, the Museum will develop new text panels that explain the debates related to the Contested Frontiers module. In discussing the complex character of this history, and the differences of opinion on the nature of historical sources, the Museum will be supporting continued public debate of key issues. This is an approach that has won the endorsement of the review panel.

3.4.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Address issues of sound spill in the Gallery of First Australians. This is
 part of a process throughout the Museum to address acoustic issues in
 several galleries.
- Investigate the availability of artefacts related to the Contested Frontiers module. This area will benefit from changeover of artefacts and storylines.
- Explain curatorial decisions associated with stories in Contested
 Frontiers and Country modules. The Museum considers it appropriate to foster broad discussion of differences in historical perspective and evidence.¹²

Stage 2:

- Develop changeover stories for Contested Frontiers module. As the review panel suggests, this area will benefit from the inclusion of other stories of frontier conflict.
- **Develop multimedia presentation on oral/written evidence.** The Museum will represent the debate that surrounds the issue of oral testimony, examining contrasting views of evidence and history.
- Develop new content on community and individual relationships to 'country'. The Museum intends to further develop the theme of 'country', as suggested by the review panel, through a new exhibition on native title. 13
- Install case study modules on regional communities in Tasmania and Victoria. Also, the module on Broome will be relocated and expanded to include more content and greater audience participation.

Stage 3:

• Introduce contact histories where appropriate in other galleries. The review panel suggested that the complex conditions which prevailed on the Australian 'frontier' might usefully be presented in other permanent exhibitions. This will include, for example, a display in *Tangled Destinies* on the role of Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry.

3.5 Tangled Destinies

Key actions

- New gallery organisers and text panels to improve narrative coherence.
- Improve narrative clarity of Deep Time module.
- Develop new module on environmental ideas linked to ecology and sustainability.

Tangled Destinies is an environmental history of Australia. It explores the idea that Australia has been shaped – perhaps even defined – by the way it has responded to the challenges and opportunities of its environment.

The review panel praised the 'wonderful beginning' the gallery had made in representing the intersection of a deep time perspective of the Australian continent with its more recent social history. However, the Museum notes the panel's recommendation to improve the gallery's narrative structure. It will move to develop new introductory 'front page' and thematic organiser panels. The panels will also articulate the premise upon which the gallery is based – a history of ideas about how we have come to understand Australian environments since the colonial era.

Narrative clarity in the module that examines development of a deep time understanding of Australian environments will also be improved. In the medium term, the Museum will begin work on a new module to explore the rise of ecological ideas in Australia, and the connection of these ideas to contemporary issues such as sustainability. This responds to the review panel's call for the gallery to connect its histories more closely to contemporary environmental concerns. ¹⁶

3.5.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Introduce new 'front page' text panel and gallery organisers to enhance storytelling. These panels will better explain the gallery's central premise of a history of ideas about human relationships to Australian environments.
- Ensure that panels and texts are all well-lit and legible. As conservation requirements of the objects allow, improve the lighting levels to aid legibility.
- Address issues of sound spill and noise. The gallery faces acoustic challenges that will be addressed as part of a museum-wide approach.

Stage 2:

- Integrate and better explain the Deep Time module. The labels for artefacts in the Deep Time module will be made more informative and provide additional context for visitors.
- Extend the gallery's history of ideas to include recent development of ecological knowledges. The gallery will benefit by showing the recent development of environmental management practices and sustainability strategies.

Stage 3:

Redevelop film presentation in the Deep Time theatrette. Content for this
presentation will be redeveloped to explain the connection between social
history and deep time environmental perspectives.

3.6 Eternity

Key actions

- Address sound spill problems in the gallery, as part of a Museum-wide approach to acoustic issues.
- Develop strategy for providing additional biographical information within the Museum.
- Research the connections between individual stories and broad themes of Australian history.

The Museum acknowledges the review panel's commendation of its innovative *Eternity* gallery. In particular, it notes the panel's view that this gallery

...is a remarkable achievement. It shows a strong curatorial vision, which is executed with consistency and flair. In its overarching concept it is original, which may contribute to the liveliness of its presentations...It is good a modulating stories and their presentation, with thought given to sequencing, and varying dramatic presentation styles from one story to the next.¹⁷

However, the Museum recognises that during periods of high traffic through the gallery the numerous audio components, combined with surrounding hard surfaces, create a noisy atmosphere. It has initiated a re-calibration of sound to provide immediate improvement for visitors. A longer-term strategy will be part of a museum-wide approach to acoustic issues in all galleries.

Relocation of the introductory signage will also be useful. The Museum will investigate provision of additional biographical information related to the stories featured in the gallery, as recommended by the review panel. This material might usefully be included in mini-discovery centre kiosks throughout the Museum.

One of the key strengths of *Eternity* has been its representation of the diversity of the Australian people and their experiences.¹⁹ The Museum will analyse individual profiles and their connection to broad themes in Australian history. This work will inform changeover plans to ensure the exhibition's continued strength and relevance.

3.6.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Develop and relocate new 'front page' text panel for the gallery. The improved signage will announce the gallery's location and its underlying curatorial vision.
- Continue re-calibration of sound levels in the gallery to address acoustic problems. This work is already under way and will improve the gallery experience for visitors.

Stage 2:

- Continue program of story changeovers as established by the Museum. Eternity has been regularly updated since opening and plans are advanced for the next group of story changeovers and gallery refreshment.
- Provide additional biographical information on individuals profiled in the gallery. This will be incorporated in mini-discovery centre kiosks that are to be updated throughout the Museum.
- Develop Eternity component of an acoustic master plan for the Museum. This is part of the Museum's consideration of acoustic issues across all galleries.

Stage 3:

- Commit content from *Eternity* to the Museum website, as appropriate. This is part of a museum-wide strategy of re-purposing content to other applications or media where possible.
- Undertake analysis of individual profiles and their connection to broad themes in Australian history. This research will directly inform gallery changeover and be used in planning exhibition modules.

4. CIRCA

Key actions

- Develop Circa content brief for a new production on themes of Land, Nation, People.
- Investigate costs and options for new technology infrastructure and production.

Circa introduces contemporary Australia through the key themes of *Land, Nation, People* in a staged film experience.

The Museum notes the concerns of the review panel and will implement a process of content review and redevelopment, while retaining the *Land, Nation, People* structure. It will also examine the technical capabilities of the theatre and investigate options for new hardware.

The redeveloped *Circa* theatre will act as an introduction to the Museum's galleries and its artefact collections. As suggested by the review, *Circa* serves as a transitional zone, connecting the world outside the Museum's walls to expressions of the Australian past which visitors experience in the permanent exhibitions.

4.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Develop Circa creative brief for a new film program on Land, Nation, People themes, and engage production team. The Museum's curators will develop the brief with staff in the Content Services area.
- Engage multimedia consultants to evaluate *Circa* theatre infrastructure and its possible redevelopment. The consultants will examine comparative use of multimedia and digital technologies in museum galleries, in Australia and overseas, and make recommendations.
- Research interpretative possibilities for the corridor from main hall to exhibition galleries. This corridor can preview Land, Nation, People themes through images and illustrations, helping guide visitors to the galleries ahead.

Stage 2:

- Develop and install new film production in line with the creative brief developed in 2004/05. This production is to be installed in late 2005.
- Implement key recommendations of the consultant's report on infrastructure redevelopment of *Circa* as appropriate. This decision will depend on the availability of resources.
- **Develop a strategy for regular changeover of** *Circa* **content.** The Museum will continue to review content and technology of the theatre over time.

5. BALANCE

Key action

• Introduce new panels that explain curatorial practice and historical method involved in representing controversial or contested histories.

The National Museum of Australia's handling of controversial issues was endorsed by the review panel. The panel found that the Museum's approach to debate surrounding the Contested Frontiers module, particularly in stimulating public discussion through conferences, served as a guide for future practice:

The Panel regards the NMA's method in relation to this issue, in both the overall conception of the exhibition and the scholarly conference that followed, as a model for approaching such controversies.²⁰

Suggestions of political bias will be addressed by doing more to explain the complex historical arguments that surround controversial issues. In this regard, the Museum notes the submission of the History Trust of South Australia:

Some of the perceptions of 'bias' in exhibitions might, in fact, stem from a failure to spell out the nature of historical debates, rather than a determination to push a particular interpretive line.²¹

The Museum will include panels that explain the curatorial practices and intentions involved in representing sensitive historical issues in galleries. These panels will represent cases in which significant differences of opinion exist.

At a wider level the Museum's own charter of historical interpretation, developed by Council Members and leading Australian historians, continues to guide its approach to questions of balance and representation:

... Visitors to an Australian national museum located in the national capital expect to see exhibits that present an inspirational engagement with the national past...Its exhibits should employ the best educational and communication techniques and reflect the highest standards of historical accuracy.²²

5.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

 Introduce new panels that explain curatorial practice and historical method involved in representing controversial or contested histories throughout the Museum.

6. GARDEN OF AUSTRALIAN DREAMS

Key actions

- Publish visitor guide and install new signage that explains design of the *Garden of Australian Dreams*.
- Examine issues raised by the panel in relation to the *Garden of Australian Dreams*.

The review panel suggests that the *Garden of Australian Dreams* should 'be made inviting and educational'. This suggestion evoked a spirited response from designers and landscape architects who noted that the *Garden of Australian Dreams* was an architectural and design feature, though it included interpretative and symbolic themes.

Attempting to redevelop the *Garden* along the lines suggested by the review panel may be possible. However, issues related to the architectural integrity of the building and surrounds, and the intellectual property of the designer, must be addressed through a consultative process in accordance with moral rights legislation. As controversy over the National Gallery of Australia's proposal to redesign its front entrance has shown, any attempt to modify monumental Canberra buildings provokes strong professional and public reaction.

The review panel's suggestions for the *Garden of Australian Dreams* also raise technical challenges, particularly in relation to drainage and potentially significant and additional ongoing maintenance costs. Because of these issues, substantial cost implications and the difficulty of costing the panel's recommendations, more time is required to adequately explore the recommended changes.²³

In the short term, a pamphlet guide and new signage can better explain the *Garden of Australian Dreams* to visitors.

6.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Publish visitor guide and install signage that explains design and architectural thinking behind the Garden of Australian Dreams.
- Consult with the landscape architects on improving interpretation and visitor experiences in the *Garden of Australian Dreams*.

7. TRAVELLING AND TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

Key actions

- Improved signage in Open Collections and installation of database.
- Museum to investigate options for improving public access to the area.
- Further integrate strategic planning for temporary and travelling exhibitions with Museum's long-term objectives.

The review panel has recognised the Museum's role in developing and touring exhibitions throughout the country. Since opening in 2001, the Museum has toured exhibitions and smaller works to venues in major State and regional centres. These include *Gold and Civilisation* (with Art Exhibitions Australia Ltd.), *Stories of Australia* (to the Guangzhou Museum of Art, China, and Adelaide), and the current tours of *Rare Trades* and *Outlawed*.

Two major projects – *Extremes* and *Beauty* – are currently in staged development. *Extremes* will be delivered in 2004/05 and *Beauty* in 2005/06. These projects represent substantial investments in expertise, time and financial resources. They have involved consultation and research internationally and the last, *Beauty*, is a joint project between the Museum and the National Gallery of Victoria.

The Museum is reviewing its approach to temporary and travelling exhibitions. Specifically, it aims to develop a varied program that reaches out to regional and remote areas, as well as State capitals. The Museum also regards collaborations with other institutions and organisations, such as Art Exhibitions Australia Ltd, as valuable in extending the range of available exhibitions.

There is also an emphasis on enhancing visitor access to collection treasures and new acquisitions. The Open Collections area, which presently features the Museum's remarkable Indigenous collection, will be made more accessible. Also, the temporary exhibition area and main hall present opportunities for the display of large collection items, such as cars and other vehicles.

- **Sustainable budgeting.** The Museum's strategic objectives determine the temporary and travelling exhibitions in any given year. Schedules for exhibition projects are developed with regard for balancing the Museum's work programs and other obligations.
- **Visitor evaluation and market testing.** The Museum conducts front-end evaluation, and reviews major exhibition projects after tours are completed.
- Collaborative and private sponsorship. The Museum forms partnerships and collaborations where possible to develop major projects, such as *Beauty*. Extremes has also been supported by external interests, among them the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University.
- Negotiate partnerships with institutions for loans and other support. All
 major exhibitions are dependent on extensive loan arrangements. The
 Museum has agreements with all major State Museums and is an active
 participant in the national museum community.

The Museum is moving to improve access and interpretation of Open Collections, with regard to conservation needs. A database offering visitors additional information

on objects in Open Collections is in development. Also, signage to the area will be improved.

7.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Improved signage in Open Collections and installation of database.
- Further integrate strategic planning for temporary and travelling exhibitions with Museum's long-term objectives.

Stage 2:

Investigate options for improving public access to the area.

8. SIGNAGE, LIGHTING and ACOUSTICS

8.1 Signage and way finding

Key action

Address issues of way finding identified in the 2002/03 study.

The review panel identified a number of problems in relation to signage and way finding in galleries. In particular, it noted that clear and succinct signposts are necessary to locate the visitor and that a consistent approach is needed.

Areas for improvement in signage and way finding were identified from the opening of the Museum. Despite improvements made to way finding, visitor feedback continued to indicate it as an area affecting visitor experience. The Museum commissioned a study in 2002/03 to improve its visitor information service and help visitors better navigate to, from and around the Museum.

The study noted that some visitors gave little importance to navigation and enjoyed a leisurely passage through galleries. Those who sought particular galleries or exhibits, however, saw navigation as an issue. The study identified specific areas for improvement, which were noted by the 2003 review. These concerns are now being addressed by the Museum.

8.1.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- New visitor maps will be published to improve navigation.
- New information hub staffed by hosts will be installed near the main hall entry to act as a welcome point for visitors.
- New navigation signs will be installed throughout permanent galleries to direct visitors to exhibitions and amenities.

8.2 Lighting

Key actions

- Continue program of assessing and improving light levels while maintaining appropriate conservation standards.
- Monitor improvements in museum lighting techniques and hardware to increase light levels while maintaining appropriate conservation standards.

The Panel identified a number of problems in relation to lighting in galleries.

Unsatisfactory lighting levels are often identified by visitors as a problem in museums because levels set to world standard conservation requirements are lower than the commercial and domestic lighting to which visitors are accustomed. A balance must be struck between the conservation standards with which any museum aspiring to

professional acceptance and national leadership must comply, and lighting levels that maximise comfort for visitors and public access to displays and exhibitions.

The Museum is still seeking to achieve the right balance. It has progressively examined the overall lux levels and light distribution within showcases and public areas. The *Eternity* and *Torres Strait Islander* galleries have been completely relamped. Improved light fittings have been installed in stairs and walkways in some areas of the *Gallery of First Australians*.

Re-lamping has also occurred in the *Tangled Destinies* and lower *Nation* galleries. New dimmer control units have been purchased for selected showcases. These units will produce better lighting within showcases and, with the movement and redesign of text panels, will make information and objects more visible.

8.2.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

 Continue program of assessing and improving light levels while maintaining appropriate conservation standards.

Stage 2:

 Monitor improvements in museum lighting techniques and hardware to increase light levels while maintaining appropriate conservation standards.

8.3 Acoustics

Key actions

- Reduce sound spill between exhibits through application of acoustic treatment on walls, ceilings and floors.
- Replace audio hardware with more targeted equipment chosen for each exhibit.
- Use white noise to reduce impact of sound spill. Investigate use of soundscapes to mask residual sound spill.

The review identified a number of problems in relation to acoustics.

The Museum commissioned an audit of acoustics in the permanent exhibition galleries and the accompanying multimedia installations. This audit made a number of recommendations that will result in significant improvement in gallery acoustics. The improvements will reduce sound spill between exhibits through acoustic treatment of specific walls, ceilings and floors; replacement of some sound domes and loudspeakers with more targeted equipment chosen specifically for each exhibit; use of sensors to reduce volume when visitors are not present at an exhibit; and use of 'white noise' to reduce the impact of sound spill.

The audit also recommended investigation of the use of soundscapes to mask residual sound spill and review of individual exhibits to identify where re-recording would improve acoustic levels.

8.3.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Reduce sound spill between exhibits through application of acoustic treatment on specific walls, ceilings and floors.
- Replace some current sound domes and loudspeakers with more targeted equipment chosen for each exhibit.
- Use presence sensors to reduce volume when visitors are not present at an exhibit.
- Use white noise to reduce impact of sound spill. Investigate use of soundscapes to mask residual sound spill.

Stage 2:

- Examine exhibits to identify where re-recording of sound or variation in sound levels would improve acoustic acceptability.
- Implement recommendations of acoustic audit.

9. RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS

9.1 Research

Key actions

- Implement strategy for visiting Museum Fellows that enhances research culture.
- Implement scheme for staff fellowships that deepens disciplinary expertise.
- Review the Museum's research strategy to identify a suite of projects that make an important contribution to knowledge or practice of Australian history and museology over the next five years.
- Investigate possibility of establishing a cooperative research centre devoted to material culture and museology.

The Museum is committed to a research program that is integrated with its collections, exhibitions and public programs. It recognises a responsibility to support and foster research, internally and with external partners, that develops new understanding of Australian history and its material culture.

Tom Griffiths, Senior Fellow at the Australian National University, argued in his submission that:

... it is greatly to the credit of the Museum that it has quickly built such a positive and creative relationship with scholars...They have established an enviable record with ARC grants, secured enduring and meaningful research partnerships with academic and other institutions, and have encouraged an open and stimulating environment for research and debate.²⁴

Presently, the Museum supports a wide range of research activities on the National Historical Collection, on museology and material culture, and on Australian history and society. Since opening, the Museum has emphasized collaboration with outside interests. It is a partner in ten ARC linkage grants and regularly develops programs with a research component in partnership with other institutions. This includes projects on:

- Activating and maintaining community participation in natural and cultural resource management in the Murray Darling Basin. This will lead to an online interactive website for public access.
- Aliens and others: representing citizenship and internship in Australia during World War II. This will lead to a focus gallery exhibition in 2006.
- Ethnographic collecting by Australian administrators in Papua New Guinea and their contribution to museum collections. This project relates directly to a material culture strength in the National Historical Collection.
- Managing the volunteer workforce: flexible structures and strategies to integrate volunteers and paid workers. This addresses how the Museum might better use volunteers.
- The human elements: a cultural history of weather in Australia. This will lead to a scholarly publication between the Museum and a commercial press.
- The other within: visual culture through indigenous, tribal, minority, 'subaltern' and multicultural displays in Asia-Pacific museums today. This project further develops understanding of museological practice.

9.1.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Implement a strategy for visiting Museum Fellows that enhances the research culture of the institution.
- Implement a scheme for staff fellowships that provides opportunity for staff to deepen disciplinary expertise through a research project tied to the Museum's core business.
- Review the Museum's research strategy to identify a suite of projects that make an important contribution to knowledge or practice of Australian history and museology over the next five years.

Stage 2:

 Investigate the possibility of establishing a cooperative research centre devoted to material culture and museology, in collaboration with other museum and higher education institutions.

9.2 Collections

Key actions

- Establish an annual acquisitions fund for an active collection program that strengthens the National Historical Collection.
- Establish a dedicated Collections Development unit in the curatorial team to coordinate a proactive acquisitions program.
- Develop a targeted acquisition program to address collection gaps and better represent colonial history, and pursue items at auction and sale.
- Refine and develop research strategies to enhance knowledge and understanding of the National Historical Collection.
- Begin development and distillation of strategic goals for the next fiveyear Collections Policy and Framework.

The National Historical Collection has strengths in 20th century Australian material culture, but relatively modest holdings related to colonial history. This is a function of its youth as a collection, the relative scarcity of 19th century material culture, and limited financial resources for acquisition. It was also the result of a previous policy of not competing with other institutions for artefacts.

A new Collections Development Policy and Framework, adopted by the Council in 2002, guides collecting activities, identifies collection interests, sets the National Historical Collection in a policy framework and establishes a collecting agenda in line with Museum objectives. ²⁵ In the past year under this framework, the Museum has collected artefacts related to Sir Douglas Mawson's famed 1911-14 Antarctic expedition, a cigarette case given to Charles Ulm by Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and personal items of cycling legend Sir Hubert Opperman.

The Museum has also moved to collect more assiduously in new areas, such as European voyages of 'discovery', early colonial life, and continental exploration. It is now developing a targeted acquisitions strategy to address specific shortfalls in these

and other categories of colonial Australian history. An annual acquisition fund – in the order of \$1 million – will enable the Museum to act on this strategy and the review panel's recommendations.

The Museum has de-accessioned artefacts in the past and its approach is outlined in its De-accessioning and Disposal Policy document, in line with the major report of the Australian National Audit Office *Safeguarding our National Collections* (1998). The ANAO advises Commonwealth collecting organisations to incorporate disposal or de-accessioning of collection material, as a healthy part of normal collections management good practice.²⁶ It regards disposal as an integral part of collection management and suggest de-accessioning:

- Duplicates and inferiors
- Non-authentic material
- Degraded or deteriorated objects
- Items which have not retained their significance or relevance

The ANAO recommends that national collecting institutions place a high priority on disposal activities, especially as they free valuable storage space, and help refine and target collections.

Targeted collection projects offer an opportunity for simultaneous collections management activities such as stock-take, barcoding, hazard and pest checks, conservation assessment, as well as addressing collection needs. The projects allow for review and possible disposal of unneeded items as gaps are filled by acquisition.

9.2.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Establish an annual acquisitions fund for an active collection program that strengthens the National Historical Collection.
- Establish a dedicated Collections Development unit in the curatorial team to coordinate a proactive acquisitions program.
- Develop a targeted acquisition strategy to address collection gaps and better represent colonial history, and pursue items at auction and sale.
- Refine and develop research strategies to enhance knowledge and understanding of the collection.

Stage 2:

- Publish artefact notes related to specific elements of the National Historical Collection for the general public.
- Enhance researcher and public access to the Collection database through new web technologies.
- Continue to review and de-accession items in line with ANAO guidelines, as required.

9.3 Collaboration

Key actions

- Develop policy that outlines collaboration objectives in the long-term, integrating them with research and collections goals.
- Continue to pursue fruitful collaborations with international, State and regional and remote organisations.

The review panel recognised the performance of the National Museum of Australia in developing 'highly fruitful partnerships' with other institutions and interests. Submissions reiterated the active approach the Museum has taken to forging partnerships. The Humanities Research Centre, at ANU, submitted that:

Our joint projects with the Museum all indicate a great desire on the part of the Director of the Museum to bring in scholars from around the world who are experts in their field and in particular to work with Australian scholars to develop exhibitions, conference and public programs...The Museum's development of a style of scholarly consultative committees for Exhibitions is extraordinarily wide ranging and effective in bringing together scholars and experts with a wide range of backgrounds and knowledge.²⁷

9.3.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Develop policy document that outlines collaboration objectives in the long-term, integrating them with research and collections goals.
- Continue to pursue fruitful collaborations with international, State and regional and remote organisations.

10. PROGRAMS

10.1 Public Programs

The review panel endorsed the Museum's public programming and was impressed with 'the volume, depth and range of public programs'. The review noted 'highly qualified participants' were attracted to the Museum through the reputation it had established in its focus on programs designed to 'have a direct link to the permanent exhibitions and...to inform and inspire learning, scholarship and debate'. Key points include:

- programs are 'topical, challenging and innovative' and conferences which have focussed on current and sometimes controversial topics have 'contributed to a wider public consideration of the issues'
- programs are audience-driven with some 'intended for a national audience, while others have a more local focus' – facilities and programs for children and young people being particularly impressive

The review panel commented on the merits of the children's interactive area, kSpace, and recommended that 'it could be used to engage [young people] on issues that will face Australia in the future, for example, sustainable development'. The Museum is planning for the second version of kSpace for anticipated launch in mid 2005.

The Museum's commitment to outreach and public access was supported by the review panel, and projects such as Year of the Outback and the Museums Australia conference were highlighted. While applauding the Museum's use of the Internet, which 'adds another dimension to public access to the Museum', the panel encouraged the Museum to 'use its resources judiciously to marshal creativity and innovation' to achieve 'depth' in the website. The Museum's new website was launched in late 2003 and further development and upgrade of online content, interactivity and service provision is planned.

10.2 Programs for Schools

The review panel commended the programs and resources developed for schools audiences. This was supported by a range of submissions to the panel.

Joan Warhurst, Executive Director, Australian Curriculum Studies Association, submitted that:

What the Education Program Section offers is more than the sum of the parts. Teachers value these programs because they inspire students to want to know about their heritage. They provide both a starting point and a place of extension for the study of Australian History.²⁸

In the particular the review panel noted:

 Innovative use of new technologies, especially in relation to the 'Talkback Classroom' project which utilises the capacities of the Museum's broadcasting facilities.

- Emphasis on collaborative projects, mentioning explicitly its partnerships with the ABC and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.
- 'High quality resources for teachers and students who visit the Museum, or who want published and online resources'.
- Role as both a provider of high quality programs for students visiting the Museum, and as a producer of programs and resources for schools unable to visit Canberra.

The review panel found that the Museum's schools programs 'are designed to inform and inspire learning, scholarship and debate', are curriculum relevant to all States and Territories, and 'have the potential to influence curriculum development' in Australia. The Museum believes it can complement the work of curriculum developers in States and Territories and support innovative classroom teaching.

10.3 Audience Surveys

Key actions

- Continue general exit interviews using satisfaction measures.
- Incorporate additional qualitative measures into exit interviews.
- Continue study of learning in museums and incorporate findings in visitor evaluation.

The Museum agrees with the importance that the review panel gives to audience research and in particular to the need to understand more about the learning outcomes of visitors to the Museum.

It does not agree that the present exit interview strategy is misdirected or that its methodology of using satisfaction as a measure is inappropriate.

Museum visitors are interviewed in order to provide information of specific value to a number of work areas including Content Development, Marketing, Programs, Retail, Sponsorship, Visitor Services, Programs and Content Development. 'Success in marketing terms' is an essential, not a trivial, measure. Measuring the success of the Museum's marketing initiatives is necessary to demonstrate that resources have been effectively allocated. Using general surveys to establish quantitative data (numbers, percentages, choices, yes/no or agree/disagree responses) is standard museum practice.²⁹

Visitor satisfaction is specifically recommended by the Australian National Audit Office as a performance measure for Commonwealth collecting institutions. Among 'higher level indicators which can be applied within all the collecting institutions', the recommendations include 'percentage of on site visitors satisfied' and 'percentage of visitors to travelling exhibitions satisfied'.³⁰

Although exit interviews are an ideal tool for collecting quantitative data, and they do allow for some qualitative responses, qualitative research to elicit more profound emotional or intellectual responses to specific exhibitions is more effectively carried out using depth interviews or focus groups. The Museum has conducted these, or commissioned them from consultants on a number of occasions. ³¹

Educators have devised a number of theories or models to explain how learning occurs, and how it may be measured. Tests can readily be done to see whether individual facts, dates or names have been learned, but testing broader subject awareness or even attitudinal change is extremely complex.³²

Measuring learning, especially in non-science museums, is still at the experimental stage. Useful information about museum learning has already been obtained from two audience research studies on older visitors (2002) and family visitors (2003), both in collaboration with the Australian Museum and involving studies by Environmetrics Pty Ltd. A promising recent development is the Australian project MARVEL (Museums Actively Researching Visitor Experiences and Learning). Its recent pilot study established that learning in museums can be demonstrated by combining existing techniques (observation, recording, interview) in a way which enables each method to check the accuracy of the others.

10.3.1 Schedule of works

In 2004/05:

- Redevelop exit interviews. Incorporate qualitative questions and questions
 eliciting emotional responses from visitors as well as asking whether or not
 visitors would recommend the Museum to others.
- **Continue study of learning in museums.** Continue the study appropriate collaborators in the museum and university sectors.
- Incorporate findings of study of learning in museums in visitor evaluation. Ensure that the results of the study are used to inform the redevelopment of audience research and evaluation programs.

* * *

Professor Ann McGrath, Director Australian Centre for Indigenous History, ANU, 'Submission to the Review of the National Museum of Australia', March 2003.

¹ Review of the National Museum of Australia: Its Exhibitions and Public Programs, Canberra, DCITA,

² House of Representatives, Hansard, 2 April 1980.

³ Evaluation undertaken by Colmar Brunton for the National Museum of Australia. The themes were considered, especially among young people, to be 'expansive' and 'inclusive' of all Australians, including people from non-English speaking backgrounds. 'Evaluation of creative concepts for a brand awareness campaign', National Museum of Australia, 2003.

⁴ Review, pp.11-12.

⁵ Review, p.2.

⁶ These suggestions have been developed by staff at the National Museum of Australia and through consultation with outside interests and a panel of historical advisers. After internal and external consultations, a panel of historical advisers met with NMA staff to further refine and distil the curatorial concepts for this redevelopment proposal - Professor Ien Ang, University of Western Sydney; Professor Graeme Davison, Monash University; Associate Professor John Hirst, La Trobe University; Professor Kay Saunders, Queensland University; Associate Professor Tony Taylor, Monash University, 22 August

^{2003. &}lt;sup>7</sup> 'There is a tendency for Australia to be categorised as a purely immigration country; in fact it is also a country of significant emigration.' Professor Graeme Hugo, 'A Century of Population Change in Australia', Year Book Australia, Canberra, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002.

⁸ Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, 'Submission'.

⁹ R. Dupain, From Bondi to Broken Hill, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1998.

¹⁰ G. Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, Melbourne, Macmillan, 1968.

¹¹ *Review*, p.21.

^{12 &#}x27;...in the Gallery of the First Australians, a module might be devoted to explaining the different uses and techniques of historical presentation - the commonalities and differences between indigenous and non-indigenous methods, traditional and modern. Misunderstandings abound about 'oral history', yet there is no one tradition of 'oral history' or 'memory'; these traditions and innovations differ amongst communities and cross-culturally they have very different meanings.'

Review, p.22.

¹⁴ Review, p.35.

¹⁵ *Review*, p.31.

¹⁶ Review, p.32.

¹⁷ *Review*, p.33.

¹⁸ *Review*, p.33.

¹⁹ Review, pp.32-3. ²⁰ *Review*, p.34.

²¹ History Trust of South Australia, 'Submission to the Review of the National Museum of Australia', March 2003.

²² 'Statement of Aims and Objectives for Historical Interpretation in the National Museum of Australia', Approved by the Council of the National Museum of Australia, 1 December 2000, Version 2, 7 April

²³ *Review*, p.70.

²⁴ Tom Griffiths, Australian National University, 'Submission'.

²⁵ See the 'Collection Development Policy and Framework', National Museum of Australia, December

Australian National Audit Office, Safeguarding our National Collections, Canberra, AGPS, 1998, p.46. Humanities Research Centre, ANU, 'Submission'.

²⁸ Joan Warhurst, Executive Director, Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 'Submission to the Review of the National Museum of Australia, Schools Programs Section, March 2003.

²⁹ Lord, Gail Dexter and Lord, Barry (eds): *The manual of museum planning*, HMSO London, 1991, p.35. ³⁰ Document developed in 1999-2000 by the working group of the Commonwealth Collecting Institutions Forum in response to recommendations by ANOA in Safeguarding Our National Collections, 1998: see http://www.anao.gov.au/WebSite.nsf/Publications/4A256AE90015F69B4A256904000048C1 p.7 See note no.8.

³² Falk and Dierking, *Learning from museums*, p.13.

³³ *ibid*, pp.11-12.