

# Collections – deaccessioning and disposal policy

POL-C-035

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## 1. Title

Deaccessioning and disposal policy

## 2. Introduction

The National Museum of Australia (the Museum) is a major cultural institution charged with researching, collecting, preserving and exhibiting historical material of the Australian nation. The Museum focuses on the three interrelated areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, Australia's history and society since European settlement in 1788 and the interaction of people with the environment.

Established in 1980, the Museum is a publicly funded institution governed as a statutory authority in the Commonwealth Arts portfolio. The Museum's building on Acton Peninsula, Canberra, opened in March 2001.

## 3. Scope

The Museum recognises that the ability to deaccession and dispose of historical material is an essential part of an effective collection management program. This policy covers the deaccessioning and disposal of historical material from the National Historical Collection (NHC) and other collections of the Museum.

### 3.1 Purpose

The objectives of this policy are to enable the Museum to:

- dispose of historical material that is not required as part of its collections, in accordance with the guidelines set out under 4.1 below;
- transfer historical material which by virtue of its subject focus may be better placed in another museum or similar public collecting institution; and
- exchange historical material with another museum or similar public collecting institution, where this will result in the mutual enrichment of both collections.

### 3.2 Rationale

Under section 9 of the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980*, Council is empowered to dispose of historical material forming part of the NHC. Similar powers are conferred on Council in relation to historical material which is not in the NHC. Council has delegated its powers to dispose of historical material not in the NHC to the Director and Assistant Director, Collections, Content and Exhibitions.

To effect disposal of historical material the Museum requires a policy to ensure that such disposal is neither unwarranted nor haphazard. The guidelines in this paper provide the basis upon which responsible deaccessioning and disposal of objects may be undertaken.

## 4. Principles or guidelines

### 4.1 Categories for deaccessioning historical material

The following classes of objects may be considered for deaccessioning from the Museum's collections:

- a) objects that do not fall within the Collections development policy of the National Museum of Australia;
- b) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human remains and secret/sacred material;
- c) objects and human remains identified and/or required to be returned to the country of their origin;
- d) objects of a particular genre of which the Museum possesses better examples;
- e) objects which are so degraded or irreparably damaged that they are no longer recognisable or restorable;

- f) objects that are so degraded that the cost of restoration is disproportionate to the significance of the object;
- g) objects in the possession of the Museum about which no documentation of their acquisition or provenance is available;
- h) objects that have been incorrectly identified or attributed, or are forgeries;
- i) duplicates of objects in the collection; and/or
- j) objects of a hazardous nature which may pose a serious occupational health and safety risk to staff and visitors.

## **4.2 Assessment of historical material for deaccessioning and disposal**

### **4.2.1 Curatorial assessment**

Historical material proposed for deaccessioning and disposal will be assessed by the relevant curator. The assessment will be conducted with reference to the Collections development policy and the condition of objects. It should include the market value and the proposed method of disposal. In some cases material recommended for deaccession from the NHC may be retained for another collection of the Museum.

### **4.2.2 Procedures for deaccessioning and disposal of NHC historical material**

Proposals for deaccessioning and disposal of historical material from the NHC should be submitted to the Assistant Director, Collections, Content and Exhibitions. If accepted, such proposals will then require the Director's endorsement before being referred to Council for decision.

If the proposal is approved by Council, and the value of the historical material is less than or equal to \$250,000, the material will be retained by the Museum for a period of not less than one year. After one year, the approved documentation will be returned to Council for final endorsement. Upon final endorsement by the Council, the historical material may be disposed of in accordance with the provisions of 4.3 below.

Where the historical material exceeds \$250,000 in value, permission for deaccessioning and disposal must also be sought from the Minister. In such cases, disposal arrangements in accordance with the provisions of 4.3 below may be implemented after ministerial approval has been received.

### **4.2.3 Procedures for deaccessioning and disposal of non-NHC historical material**

Proposals for deaccessioning and disposal of historical material not held in the NHC should be submitted to the Assistant Director Collections, Content and Exhibitions, with the relevant decision-makers being as follows:

- historical material with a value of \$100,000 or less may be disposed of with the approval of the Assistant Director (or, if the Assistant Director considers it appropriate, the Director);
- disposal of historical material with a value exceeding \$100,000 but less than or equal to \$250,000 will require the approval of the Director; and
- disposal of historical material with a value exceeding \$250,000 will require the approval of the Council and Minister.

Disposal in all such cases should be implemented in accordance with the provisions of section 4.3 below.

## **4.3 Disposal of deaccessioned objects**

### **4.3.1 Donor legal rights**

The donor retains no legal rights in objects donated to the Museum without restriction.

### **4.3.2 Disposal options**

Depending on the nature of the deaccessioned object and the rationale for removing it from the collection the following provisions for disposal of material should be followed.

- a) Objects that were donated, and where the original donor is still contactable, may be returned to the donor.
- b) Objects that have a significant cultural value, but which do not conform to the Collections development policy should, wherever possible, be placed with the most appropriate public institution, by means of gift, sale or exchange.
- c) Objects that do not have a significant cultural value but do have a market value may be disposed of by public auction or tender.
- d) Objects whose trade and movement are governed by any applicable laws or agreements, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), or the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, should only be disposed of in accordance with such laws or agreements.
- e) Objects that are degraded to the point where they are no longer recognisable or restorable, and which do not have any saleable value, may be destroyed or recycled for materials or components if all other avenues for disposal have been exhausted.
- f) Objects that cannot be disposed of in any other way, and which do not have any saleable value, may be destroyed.
- g) Where the object was gifted under the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, formerly the Tax Incentives for the Arts Scheme, it cannot be returned to the donor as the donor has received the benefit of a tax deduction for the gift. Therefore, under these circumstances, option a) is not to be considered.

#### 4.3.3 Proceeds from disposal

Any proceeds resulting from 4.3.2b or 4.3.2c should be used for the development of the National Historical Collection.

#### 4.3.4 Hazardous items

Disposal of hazardous objects or material must only be undertaken after liaison with relevant government departments and by certified suppliers.

## 5. Definition of terms

### Deaccessioning

The administrative decision to remove historical material from a museum collection and the processes involved in doing this.

### Disposal

The action taken to remove historical material from the Museum's ownership, control or possession once the material has been deaccessioned. This action may take the form of disposal by gift, sale, exchange or destruction.

### Historical material

Refers to any material (whether in written or any other form) relating to Australian history.

## 6. Definition of responsibilities

### Director

The Director is responsible for approving:

- NHC deaccessioning and disposal submissions to be taken to the Museum's Council; and
- the deaccessioning and disposal of historical material not in the NHC, up to the value of \$250,000.

### Assistant Director, Collections, Content and Exhibitions

The Assistant Director, Collections, Content and Exhibitions is responsible for:

- reviewing deaccessioning proposals for all historical material prior to submission to the Council or Director (whoever is the relevant decision-maker); and

- approving the deaccessioning and disposal of historical material not in the NHC, up to the value of \$100,000.

### **Council**

Council has the power to approve proposals for the deaccessioning and disposal of historical material up to a value of \$250,000. For non-NHC historical material, Council has delegated their powers to the Director and Assistant Director, Collections, Content and Exhibitions.

### **Minister**

The Minister approves proposals for the disposal of historical material valued at over \$250,000.

## **7. References**

RA Buck and JA Gilmore (eds), *The New Registration Methods*, American Association of Museums, Washington, 1998

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), 1975

*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*

*National Museum of Australia Act 1980 (Cth)*

*Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1986 (Cth)*

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation 1970, *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property 1970*

## **8. Implementation**

### **8.1 Coverage**

This policy covers the deaccessioning and disposal of historical material from the National Historical Collection (NHC) and other collections of the Museum.

### **8.2 Other related documents**

Collections development policy

Return of cultural objects policy

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human remains policy

### **8.3 Exclusions**

This policy does not cover the disposal of non-collection assets.

### **8.4 Superseded policies**

This policy supersedes:

<b>Former policy/ies title</b>	<b>Version number</b>	<b>Version date</b>	<b>Council approval date</b>
Policy and guidelines for the deaccessioning and disposal of objects	1.0	Dec 1987	Dec 1987
Deaccessioning and disposal policy	2.0	Dec 1996	Dec 1996
Deaccessioning and disposal policy	3.0	Nov 2002	Nov 2002
Deaccessioning and disposal policy	4.0	May 2006	May 2006

### **8.5 Monitoring**

The policy will be reviewed in January 2014.