



LAND · NATION · PEOPLE

PART ONE

Director's review of operations

THE YEAR UNDER REVIEW

In its second operational year, the National Museum of Australia has established itself as a popular learning and tourist destination for millions of people. This year is also the first in which the budget of the Museum was set by the Government to reflect the level of operations in our exhibitions and public programs; operations which began at that level from the first day the Museum opened in March 2001.

High visitor numbers and surveys revealing a high level of satisfaction with the Museum show that the National Museum is successfully addressing some of the challenges faced today around the world by other contemporary museums of social history. Our main challenge is to speak to the diversity of Museum visitors: young and old, well-educated and not, the hurried tourist and the devoted museum-goer. International experience shows that a social history museum, in particular, works best not by providing a single prescribed and orderly path through its galleries but rather by allowing visitors to find their own way through the Museum's rich mix of texts, objects and new media which together tell the Museum's stories.

The Museum brings these Australian stories together from a national perspective. By exploring our nation's social history, and revealing the stories of ordinary and extraordinary Australians, the Museum provides multiple voices, promotes exploration of knowledge and ideas, and provides a dynamic forum for discussion and reflection. By integrating its core themes of land, nation and people, the Museum is committed to sharing and communicating knowledge, engaging with its audiences and providing life-long learning experiences. Further, in fulfilling its national role, the Museum reaches beyond Canberra to disseminate knowledge about Australia's history and identities. This has been a high priority for the Museum this year, with its expanded number of collaborative research projects, publications, travelling exhibitions, public programs and the development of resources utilising the Museum's information and communication technologies.

The Museum has in these ways delivered on the Government's vision for the Museum, a vision consistent with the Pigott Report of 1975, a vision reiterated at the foundation of the Museum in 1980 and again in the words of Prime Minister John Howard when he opened the building in 2001. Broadly speaking, that vision was for a Museum which would attract a wide audience, be contemporary and attractive, develop and care for significant collections and play an important role in the lifelong learning of Australians.

The specific functions as defined in the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980* and forming the Government's intentions for the Museum when it approved funding for the construction of the new building on Acton Peninsula, can be summarised as follows:

- stewardship of the National Historical Collection
- innovation, especially in the use of new media technologies both in exhibitions and in reaching audiences beyond Canberra



George Serras

■ Director of the National Museum of Australia, Dawn Casey

- active exhibition and public programs which interpret the key themes of Australian society and reflect on and celebrate our journey as a nation
- research facilities and collections to be accessible to researchers, students and communities
- commercial and marketing activities in support of the Museum's functions.

The annual report outlines how well the Museum has performed against this vision.

REVIEW AND EVALUATION

This year has seen the Museum subjected to a significant level of external review.

- The Commonwealth Government's 'Review of Cultural Agencies — Encouraging Best Practice' examined cultural agencies in the Communications, Information Technology and the Arts portfolio in order to identify opportunities for strengthening networks and partnerships between the agencies in relation to both operational and cultural activities. The review recommended a range of collaborative strategies relating to collection storage, digitisation, conservation and procurement.
- The Council commissioned a 'Review of Exhibitions and Public Programs' in the Museum. The Museum provided a significant amount of information in briefings and documentation to the review panel as well as providing a submission to it directly addressing its terms of reference. The review panel will provide its report early in 2003–2004.
- Internal evaluations were conducted of lighting, acoustics, wayfinding and competitive tendering and contracting. Improvements in lighting have already been introduced and changes in acoustics, wayfinding and contract management will be implemented in 2003–2004.

These build on other major reviews conducted since the Museum's opening: a strategic review of the Museum's information and communication technologies capabilities, and a major funding review.

EXHIBITIONS

Public satisfaction with the Museum's exhibitions and programs is extraordinarily high with ratings of satisfaction consistently over 90 per cent. These formal evaluations are drawn from independent exit surveys with 12,000 visitors in the first two years and anecdotal evidence and informal feedback further supports them. The number of visitors to Museum exhibitions, programs and events this year reached 825,049. The figure is less than that for 2001–2002 as a result of a general downturn in tourism owing to the Canberra bushfires and world events.

The Museum has successfully entered into a number of significant collaborations. Museum curators, researchers and other staff join with academic and other national and international experts to review the latest research and scholarship, to agree on themes for exhibitions and the messages to be communicated to visitors, and to prepare programs to support them. Extensive audience testing is then done to ensure that these messages can be appropriately conveyed to visitors.

The Museum does not attempt a single continuous narrative of a single Australian history, but concentrates on themes and engaging the visitor with questions and issues, so its exhibitions can evolve and encompass less prominent subjects over time. This year saw the first major changeover of content in most of the five permanent exhibitions, the largest being the replacement in May 2003 of half the stories in the popular Eternity gallery. Visitors can now see 25 new stories of Australian achievements, in sport, science, the military and many other historic and contemporary walks of life. They also continue to join the thousands who record their own stories in the *Your story* section.

The temporary exhibition schedule continues to explore important subjects. *To Mars and Beyond*, which closed in October before travelling to the Melbourne Museum, introduced visitors to Australia's significant role in space exploration. This year *Rare Trades*, which celebrates the art of 24 Australian skilled craftspeople and manual workers, was the first temporary exhibition solely developed within the Museum since the opening. Underlining the Museum's national role, *Rare Trades* opened first at Scienceworks in Melbourne, where it drew more than 60,000 visitors before opening at the Museum in June. *Stories from Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* was shown at the Guangzhou Museum of Art, China.

Development is on schedule to open *Outlawed! Discover the Stories Behind the World's Rebels, Revolutionaries and Bushrangers* in November 2003, exploring the mythmaking of the world's outlaws from England's Robin Hood to Australia's Ned Kelly. Other Museum exhibitions to travel across Australia during the year were: *Cartoons 2002: Life, Love and Politics*, and *I am Woman Hear Me Draw: Cartoons from the Pen of Judy Horacek*.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

The concept of lifelong learning underpins the Museum's formal education and informal learning programs. Lectures, forums, seminars, conferences, workshops and presentations are used to share the Museum's research and scholarship with the community, to enhance exhibitions, particularly temporary exhibitions, and to provide alternative or more detailed information about subjects covered in exhibitions. The program also provides information about events, people, issues and topics that lack of space or objects prevent from being covered in exhibition galleries.

Families and especially children are a key audience for the Museum. There are dedicated spaces for children and young people, text specifically written for children and a series of supporting programs. These programs aim to encourage self-directed exploration of the Museum and provide opportunities for children to interact with exhibition content, visiting personalities, writers, storytellers and performers. This year the Museum, for the first time, took storytelling outside of Canberra to Dubbo, New South Wales.

Other family programs included theatre performances which had strong appeal to children and young people, *Our Place*, which is designed to provide educational outcomes by encouraging children to explore four cubbies, and *Kspace*, an interactive activity which asks visitors to imagine what Australian cities will look like in the future.

Teenagers and young adults are not considered a natural demographic group attracted to museums, and the Museum has made particular efforts to capture the attention of this group. Programs for young people this year included Sky Lounge, a Friday evening multimedia festival under the stars for teenagers and young adults, school holiday workshops, a national competition to create a concept for the youth section of the Museum's website, and the 'online muster' which involved youth groups from all states and territories, especially those living in remote and outback communities.

The Museum is also a forum for presentations and debate on topical issues which during 2002–2003 included forums on the ACT bushfires and national drought, and lectures on desert environments, archaeology, cultural heritage (including forums on the recovery and restoration of cultural property in Iraq) and a range of topics related to exhibition themes.

The Museum's subject matter, unusual architecture and development history continue to make it interesting to many special interest groups. During the year, I accepted a number of requests to speak at conferences and forums on a wide range of subjects. These extended awareness of the Museum and its role into a number of different public arenas. Further details of these presentations are in Appendix 7.

SCHOOLS PROGRAMS

Our school activities, which this year attracted more than 80,000 students, had an approval rating in the top quintile. A new schools database will become available in 2003–2004 which will enable the Museum to monitor and report on schools programs more effectively.

Schools will only participate in programs which relate to school curriculums. While there is no common nationwide curriculum, the Museum's school programs have been designed to be relevant to a broad range of school curriculums including Studies of Society and Environment, History, English, Media Studies and Science. The Museum relates its programs in these areas primarily to the state programs of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

To assist in linking the Museum's schools activities to curriculums and to help teachers to understand the curriculum relevance of the Museum's educational offerings, particular attention has been paid to the professional development of classroom teachers. This year



■ Storyteller June Barker from Lightning Ridge entertains children in the Museum's boab tree

more than 1000 teachers attended workshops and 36 trainee teachers took part in the pre-service history fellowship program that the Museum conducts jointly with the Australian War Memorial and the National Capital Education Tourism Project.

New programs for junior primary school students were introduced during the year and the Museum plans to develop new programs for senior secondary students in 2003–2004.

School audiences outside Canberra are important to the Museum. The Talkback Classroom project continued successfully in 2002–2003. Over 1000 students participated and selected students were given the opportunity to interview nine prominent politicians or opinion makers in a forum broadcast on ABC's *Fly TV* and on ABC Radio. One of these, an interview with the Prime Minister, included student panellists from the USA and was conducted in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution.

Our Voices, comprising 21 books, three teacher's resource books, three poster packs and a CD-ROM, reflecting the Museum's main themes of land, nation and people, was published during the year for primary schools. *Australian History Mysteries*, a video, print and web publication, was published for a secondary school audience. Both received widespread praise from educators. *Our Voices* was judged best book for primary schools in the *Australian's* Excellence in Educational Publishing Awards for 2003.

ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND COLLABORATIONS

The Museum is committed to a program of research and scholarship, with a strong emphasis on collaboration. Research is directed towards specific outcomes: exhibitions, publications or conservation of collections.



Dragi Markovic

■ *23° Degrees South, the largest conference ever held in Australia on desert archaeology, brought together delegates from 16 countries*

A significant example of this occurred during the year when the Museum hosted and jointly sponsored an international scientific conference, 23° South: Archaeology and Environmental History of the Southern Deserts, attended by 90 delegates from 16 countries. In addition to receiving significant praise for the Museum from international scholars, a direct result is the establishment of a network of support for the development of a forthcoming exhibition with the same theme.

The Museum is a partner in six Australian Research Council Linkage Grant projects and a participant in a range of other collaborative research projects, including projects funded by the Commonwealth Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. It has significant scholarly collaborations with the Australian National University and with other universities and cultural institutions.

Museum staff continue to make important contributions to their specific fields of professional expertise by publishing and presenting a wide range of professional research papers at seminars and forums. Details of these are in Appendix 10.

NATIONAL HISTORICAL COLLECTION

A new Collections Development Policy and Framework were approved by Council during the year. These are consistent with Ministerial guidelines and outline the priority collection areas for the Museum. Guidelines in the Collections Development Policy cover collecting practices and ethics, the structure and use of the National Historical Collection and other Museum collections and identify criteria for the acceptance of items for the collection. The policy also indicates the Museum's approach to custody and ownership of material. The Collections Development Framework supports the policy by defining eight collection domains, linking those domains to the Museum's three themes and identifying priority collecting areas for the next five-year period.

Development of the collection during the year saw the acquisition of an Australian tinker's wagon, Saibai Island dance costumes, Sydney Olympic memorabilia and an early 20th-century ballot box, among other items. The tinker's wagon is now the centrepiece of the *Rare Trades* exhibition and indicative of the close connection between collection development and the exhibition program.

Attention was given to collection control. The number of items accessioned, recorded and documented was significantly higher than during the previous year. Requests for public access to the collections also increased substantially this year.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The Museum's financial statements have again received an unqualified report by the Auditor-General. The Statement of Financial Performance reports an operating surplus of \$32.173 million for the year ended 30 June 2003 (2001–2002: \$25.592 million). This is an extremely pleasing result as the Museum has now moved from last year's underlying

operating deficit of \$3.721 million (when Capital Use Charge funding is excluded), to an underlying operating surplus of \$3.940 million in the current year.

Contributing to the surplus has been a substantial increase in non-government revenues, rising from \$3.205 million to \$4.516 million in 2002–2003 (an increase of 41 per cent). This is a strong result given the ongoing decline in international travel brought about by security concerns and the continuing world economic downturn. The improvements in commercial operations have seen the retail operation move from a disappointing loss in the prior year to a surplus situation this year, complemented by a substantial rise in sponsorship and donations. The Museum also continues to seek alternative commercial opportunities for providing additional revenue sources including consultancy-based activities, partnerships and joint venture arrangements for exhibition development, and revised retail delivery arrangements, including e-commerce development.

COMMERCIAL PERFORMANCE

The Museum's commercial activities, including the Museum Shop, food outlets and catering and function facilities, are an essential part of its role. They not only produce revenue for the Museum but are also intended to enhance the experience of a visit to the Museum, play a part in its broad educational role and supply visitors with a memento of their experience.

An expert review of the Museum Shop was undertaken during the year following last year's commercial returns. A number of structural and merchandising changes flowing from the review have been implemented and have resulted in a substantial increase in net retail revenues and in the Shop meeting its financial targets.

In conjunction with the Hyatt catering team, use of the Museum's facilities for venue hire has again proved to be a highly successful area of commercial operation.

Sponsor and donor contributions are an essential element in meeting the Museum's core objectives relating to exhibitions, education, access and collection development. The sponsorship and development unit continued to seek support philanthropically as well as from sponsorship and business partnerships. An endowment program was established in 2002 as the philanthropic vehicle for the Museum with the goal of achieving a capital base of \$60 million over 20 to 25 years. Programs aimed at increasing the level of knowledge of the Museum with corporate leaders, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne, as well as Canberra, have been established as a fundamental step in developing long-term support for the Museum.

OPERATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

The Museum is addressing problems of lighting, wayfinding and acoustics in the galleries by commissioning consultants to investigate and recommend improvements to the existing situations.

A new workplace agreement was approved by the staff and implemented during the year. The agreement sets out terms and conditions of employment for the Museum. It supports

a working environment that enhances the productive capacities of employees in a vibrant, equitable and productive workplace and assists employees to balance their work and personal lives while delivering quality programs and services to the public. These programs and services will, as a minimum, meet the standards agreed in relation to the funding decisions reflected in the 2002–2003 Budget outcome. Seventy-seven per cent of eligible staff voted on the Museum’s new workplace agreement with 96.6 per cent approving of the agreement, showing their overwhelming support for it.

FUTURE OUTLOOK — THE YEARS AHEAD

The Museum’s first three years have been devoted to the development and delivery of exhibitions, visitor services and programs to audiences both at Acton and beyond Canberra. It has demonstrated a fresh innovative approach to its programs and exhibitions. In order to continue to address this question and to maintain its strong performance into the future there are six areas which need to be addressed:

Recognition and consolidation of existing strengths — In the pre and post-opening periods the Museum has developed a range of strengths which have been recognised nationally and internationally. These are a strong audience focus, use of external expertise, project management skills, community consultation, contemporary relevance, educational and general public programming and its professionally trained hosting staff. Building on these strengths is an important aim for the Museum’s future.

Development of a new five-year strategic plan — The Museum has prepared a preliminary strategic plan for the period up to 2007 which it is reviewing in light of experience gained in the Museum’s new operational context, further consultations with internal and external stakeholders, and the outcomes of the Review of Exhibitions and Public Programs.

Development of the National Historical Collection — The new collection development framework identifies the collecting domains around which the Museum’s collections will be focused for the next five years. It provides a definition of each collecting domain as well as identifying collecting areas, which will balance both long-term collecting interests with targeted collecting projects and acquisitions for specific exhibitions and other public programs. However, implementation of this new framework cannot be effected unless the Museum can draw on funds set aside for acquisitions. Without this it will have no alternative than to continue acquiring objects on a small scale or to transfer resources from other Museum projects to fund acquisitions.

Enhancement of the research program — In 2002, the Council approved a new research policy. The Museum is currently engaging in a number of research activities which underpin and support the national role of the Museum, are relevant to the Museum’s three core themes, are relevant to the Museum’s collections, exhibitions, and other public programs, provide opportunities for external funding through grants, and provide opportunities for using the outcomes for promoting the Museum. It is important that the Museum now develops a range of strategies designed to implement these key objectives.

Enhancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) — The Museum's ICT infrastructure positions the Museum as a leader among Australian cultural institutions in the use of ICT. The Museum must capitalise on its assets to become a world leader among museums in the innovative use of ICT by providing electronic outreach to off-site audiences, developing key areas of technological expertise, and building an organisational culture that is informed and enabled by best practice in ICT.

Gallery extension — The Museum has achieved an impressive record in attracting visitors, including school students, to its Acton facility. However, only 4304 square metres is available for permanent exhibition space with another 1000 square metres available for temporary exhibitions. This space is modest in comparison with other major museums and has meant that some significant subject matter and events are not covered in the exhibitions. The most appropriate means of ensuring that these events and issues are reflected in exhibitions of the same design, quality and integrity as the existing exhibitions, is to construct additional exhibition galleries. As well as expanding exhibition spaces, an extension should also enable increased facilities for school students, performances, conferences and associated visitor services.

A TEAM EFFORT

I wish to acknowledge the support for the Museum by the Minister for the Arts and Sport, Senator the Hon. Rod Kemp and the work of the Chairman of Council, the Hon. Tony Staley and of other Council members. In particular I would like to thank the Deputy Chairman, Mr Marc Besen, whose role in relation to sponsorship is critically important, and Mr John Thame, Chairman of the Audit and Finance Committee.

The Museum is lucky to have an active and involved group of over 5000 Friends who support it and act as its publicists and advocates. Over half of these live outside the Canberra region.

Finally, thanks must go to all those who work at the Museum as staff, volunteers or contractors. The Museum's achievements are a credit to their professionalism, skills, knowledge, creativity and effort. They have once again delivered the highest quality of service to our customers and have demonstrated their commitment to making the Museum an ever improving place.

I value immensely their continued support and friendship.



Dawn Casey

Director

31 July 2003