

Collections — deaccessioning and disposal policy

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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 objects from the collection is an essential part of an effective collection management program. This policy covers the deaccessioning of objects from the National Historical Collection (NHC).

3.1 Purpose

The objectives of the Deaccessioning and Disposal Policy are to enable the Museum to:

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

3.2 Rationale

Subject to section 9 of the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980*, Council is empowered to dispose of historical material from the collection. To effect disposal of such material the Museum requires a policy, to enable disposal to take place while ensuring that it is neither unwarranted nor haphazard. The guidelines in this paper provide the basis on which responsible deaccessioning and disposal of objects may be effected.

4. Principles or guidelines

4.1 Categories of objects for deaccessioning

The following classes of objects in the NHC may be considered for deaccessioning:

- a) objects that do not fall within the collection policy of the National Museum of Australia
- b) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders 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 is available as regards their acquisition or provenance

- h) duplicates of objects in the collection that are not required for exhibition changeover, education collection or other Museum purpose
- i) objects of a hazardous nature which may pose a serious occupational health and safety risk to staff and visitors.

4.2 Assessment of objects for deaccessioning

4.2.1 Curatorial assessment

Objects proposed for deaccessioning will be assessed by the relevant curator. The assessment will be conducted with reference to the collections policy and the condition of objects. It should include the market value and the proposed method of disposal.

4.2.2 General Manager and Director endorsement

Proposals for deaccessioning should be submitted to the General Manager, Collections and Content. If accepted, it will then require the Director's endorsement before being referred to Council for decision.

4.2.3 Retention period and final endorsement

If the deaccessioning proposal is approved by Council, and the value of the object is less than \$100,000, it will then 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.

Where the object exceeds \$100,000 in value, permission for deaccessioning and disposal must also be sought from the Minister. In such cases disposal arrangements may be implemented after ministerial approval has been received.

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 collections, four options may be considered for its disposal:

- a) Objects that have a significant cultural value, but which do not conform to the collections policy, should wherever possible be placed with the most appropriate public institution, by means of gift, sale or exchange.
- b) Objects that do not have a significant cultural value but do have a market value may be disposed of by public auction or tender.
- c) Objects that are degraded to the point where they are no longer recognisable or restorable may be destroyed or recycled for materials or components where appropriate.
- d) Objects that cannot be disposed of in any other way may be destroyed.

4.3.3 Proceeds from disposal

Any proceeds resulting from 4.3.2a or 4.3.2b 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 permanent removal of an object from a museum collection and the processes involved in doing this.

Disposal

The action taken in relation to an object once it has been permanently removed from a collection. This action may take the form of disposal by gift, sale, exchange or destruction.

6. Definition of responsibilities

Director

The Director is responsible for approving deaccessioning submissions to be taken to the Museum's Council.

General Manager, Collections and Content

General Manager, Collections and Content is responsible for reviewing deaccessioning proposals from staff and taking these forward via the Director for Council discussion and endorsement.

Council

Council approves initial deaccessioning proposals and the subsequent final proposals after the one-year pending approval period.

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

Dangerous Goods Act 1975

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1986

8. Implementation

8.1 **Other related policies**

Collections Development Policy
Return of Cultural Objects Policy

8.2 **Exclusions**

Disposal of material from the Education Collection and prop material is excluded from this policy.

8.3 **Monitoring**

The policy will be reviewed in April 2009.