

Permanent galleries exhibitions policy

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1. Title

Permanent galleries exhibitions 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 histories and cultures, Australia's history and society since European settlement in 1788 and the interaction of people with Australian environments.

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

3. Scope

3.1 Background

Since opening at Acton, a major focus of the Museum has been the management of the exhibitions in the permanent galleries and establishment of a temporary exhibition program at Acton.

3.2 Purpose

This policy establishes principles for the development of the Museum's permanent galleries exhibition program. It sets out an integrated approach to developing exhibitions for these galleries, focusing on the Museum's three core themes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories, Australian history and society since 1788 and People's interaction with the environment. The program is underpinned by rigorous scholarship and expertise, drawing on the Museum's own collections and loans from private and institutional holdings as required.

3.3 Rationale

The *National Museum of Australia Act 1980* states that the functions of the Museum include:

- to exhibit, or to make available for exhibition by others, historical material from the National Historical Collection or historical material that is otherwise in the possession of the Museum
- to exhibit material, whether in written form or in any other form, that relates to Australia's past, present and future
- from time to time as the occasion requires, to exhibit, by itself or in collaboration with others, in Australia or elsewhere, material, whether in written form or in any other form and whether relating to Australia or to a foreign country
- to conduct, arrange for or assist in research into matters pertaining to Australian history
- to disseminate information relating to Australian history and information relating to the Museum and its functions.

4. Permanent gallery exhibitions

Long-term exhibitions are developed and maintained in the permanent galleries at the Museum's Acton facility. These exhibitions are developed in-house and provide an overview of Australian history and experience related to the Museum's three core themes. Each exhibition integrates relevant objects, images, texts and audio-visual presentations to develop a rich and complex view of the nation's past. These exhibitions have an expected life of up to eight years.

Each permanent gallery exhibition should stand alone in its treatment of specific themes and ideas. At the same time, permanent gallery exhibitions should complement each other to provide a consistent and integrated experience for visitors.

The Museum periodically redevelops the exhibition content of entire permanent galleries to ensure they reflect contemporary scholarship and remain fresh, vibrant, interesting and relevant to visitors.

For conservation and/or interpretive reasons, the Museum may also make changes to an exhibition during the course of its life. These changes may introduce new objects and storylines into the permanent galleries, refreshing the themes and ideas that are represented.

5. Principles

In developing exhibitions for the permanent galleries, the Museum observes the following principles:

5.1 Exhibition content

As a set the permanent galleries exhibitions will form a coherent and complementary exploration of Australian history and historical experience developed around the Museum's the three major areas of thematic interest:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories
- People and the environment
- Australian history and society since 1788.

The Museum's senior curators will have intellectual carriage and responsibility for developing exhibitions relating to these areas.

All exhibition content will be sympathetic to the narratives of adjoining exhibitions.

5.2 Exhibitions and the National Historical Collection

Each exhibition will use relevant objects from the National Historical Collection. In this way, exhibitions will form a fundamental component of the Museum's strategy to provide community access to the National Historical Collection.

5.3 Role of scholarship

In developing exhibitions for the permanent galleries, exhibitions will incorporate the highest level of relevant scholarship and research. Curatorial research will drive exhibition content and associated collecting activities.

5.4 Exhibition standards and museum practice

The Museum will employ best practice in exhibition research and development. It also recognises its responsibility to document and reflect on exhibition-making, including contributing to relevant international debates and scholarship within the field of museology.

5.5 Engaging visitors and users

The Museum strives to develop and present exhibitions which are accessible and engaging. These exhibitions will enable visitors and users to reach their own understanding of Australian history and society. The Museum's interpretative strategies aim to inspire, to arouse and satisfy curiosity, to educate and to entertain visitors and users.

5.6 Multidisciplinary approach

Exhibitions are developed using a multidisciplinary approach incorporating curatorial, education, publishing and public programs perspectives. Exhibitions are developed with

regard to content, market and audience research. They are evaluated to enable a match between content and audience, through the identification of target audiences.

5.7 Funding

Exhibitions will be funded from annual appropriations and depreciation reserves according to current accounting principles.

5.8 Schedule

The Museum develops and maintains an eight-year forward schedule for the refreshment and renewal of the permanent gallery exhibitions.

6. Definition of terms

Audience

The people who make up the Museum's public including all consumers or users of its products such as visitors, researchers, volunteers, media, institutions, donors and sponsors. In the case of temporary and travelling exhibitions, this includes the people who are potential or actual visitors to the exhibitions.

Permanent gallery exhibition

An exhibition with an expected life of up to eight years that is located within a dedicated permanent gallery space.

Research

Research work undertaken on a systematic basis to increase knowledge, including knowledge of history, culture and society. The inquiry must be methodologically rigorous and the outcome subjected to appropriate peer review. Research has a value beyond its functional use to the Museum.

Scholarship

Scholarship is the critical mastery of an existing body of knowledge, its sources, nuances, and historical and intellectual context and its use to inform, educate and explain.

7. Definition of responsibilities

General Manager Audience and Programs

General Manager Collections and Content

General Manager Operations

The General Managers share responsibility for the implementation of this policy across the Museum.

8. References

Client Service Charter, National Museum of Australia, 2006

National Museum of Australia Act 1980

Report Against the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs Access and Equity Report, National Museum of Australia, 2006

Strategic Plan 2007-2010, National Museum of Australia, version 1.1, 2007

9. Implementation

This policy commences in July 2006.

9.1 Coverage

This policy applies to all permanent gallery exhibitions.

9.2 Other related policies

Audience development
Collections development
Communication
Interpretation
Outreach
Research and scholarship
Sponsorship and development
Temporary gallery exhibitions and travelling exhibitions

9.3 Exclusions

None

9.4 Monitoring

Implementation of this policy is monitored by the Museum's Executive Management team.
This policy will be reviewed in July 2009.