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20 February 2003

The Secretary
NMA Review Secretariat
NMA Review
Department of Communications, Information Technology and Arts
GPO Box 2154
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam,

I tender this submission to the National Museum of Australia Review Committee. Although now retired from university employment I spent thirty years of my professional academic career in the training of history teachers for secondary schools. During my career I have been a lecturer in Australian history and teacher education at Colleges and Universities. I am the author or co-author of ten books, including secondary school text books, teacher education texts, local histories and school histories. It is with this background and experience as an educator and historian that I submit the following comments addressing the terms of reference of the National Museum Review of the NMA's exhibitions and public programmes.

The aims and content of the Museum's exhibitions:

The aims of the Museum in basing its exhibits and programmes around the three themes of the Australian environment, Aboriginal history and culture and the history of Europeans in Australia are highly commendable and from the viewpoint of an educator, a necessary and worthy set of purposes. The very professional organization and high quality display of items selected and exhibited, in my professional opinion, makes a major contribution to the successful achievement of the Museum's stated aims and purposes.

Educational Appropriateness of Exhibits:

All of the exhibits in each of the three categories of display have a great appeal and engender great interest amongst school students. School students today are, in the main, discriminating, thoughtful and quite appreciative of alternative viewpoints that may surround various exhibits. Indeed, it is an important aim of modern educators to challenge students to consider and appraise alternative viewpoints, theories and arguments surrounding historical topics. While it is necessary that a museum provides adequate information surrounding its exhibits, this needs to be achieved in a motivating and relevant fashion. I believe that the National Museum's exhibits, their content and manner of display achieve these

educational aims and purposes most effectively. The Museum's curators have done a highly commendable job in presenting to the public an overview of almost all of the major periods of Australian social history, from Australian Pre-history, through the decades and challenges of European discovery, settlement and development, including a fair and balanced representation of the periods of conflict, technical and social change in Australia. I also thoroughly approve of the emphasis the exhibits give to National, regional, social and scientific achievements of Australians over two centuries.

Collection Development:

During the last dozen years or so of item acquisition and collection development, there is evidence, through its reports and new exhibits that the Museum is acting wisely, seeking out and acquiring items which effectively illustrate the changing social context of Australia's modern history. Critics of the Museum should appreciate that the institution is essentially a *social history* museum, and, I believe, a *popular history* museum, as opposed to a purely "academic" institution. However this does not mean that the NMA should neglect the "research" aspect of modern social history museums. Its role in the promulgation of Australian social history in a "popular" style comprehensible to average Australians and foreign visitors need not in any way conflict with or detract from the important research role which museums and their research staff should play in extending the frontiers of historical research. This implies that the NMA needs to be adequately funded to fulfill a research role concurrently with its other aims.

Relationships with Other Institutions and Individuals in the Community

During the comparatively limited time since opening, the Museum has engaged in Community activities and offered great co-operation to National and local institutions. May I cite two examples. Recently as part of my research in the writing of a history of one of Canberra's oldest government schools, I discovered that the Museum held documents and items, including the original Visitors' Book of Ainslie School, used at the official opening of the school by Prime Minister Stanley Bruce in 1927. The staff of the Museum was only too happy to make this item available to me for research purposes at its repository in Mitchell. As a private researcher I was greatly appreciative of this co-operation. Further still, upon a request from the school, the Museum agreed to make available to the school the Visitors' Book, which the Museum delivered to the school in a secure display case as part of the school's display of memorabilia on the occasion of its Anniversary Day.

The Museum's Research Library

For the sake of efficiency and convenience for curators and research staff the Museum's Research Library should be located on the site of the Museum as a matter of urgency. Furthermore, if the research role of the Museum is to be enhanced, and I believe it should, then its library needs to be more adequately funded both for additional staffing and for

expanded acquisition of technical references and periodicals. I hope the Museum will continue with its policy of providing access to its research Library for bona fide researchers and private scholars. Also it is important that the Museum continues to offer similar Library access to members of the Friends of the Museum.

Concluding Remarks:

I believe that the Director and staff of the Museum have done a superlative job in successfully achieving the aims and functions of the Museum as defined in the Act. The evidence is in the record crowds of visitors to the Museum since it opened and the large number of school groups from around the nation scheduling regular excursions to the Museum. I see no reason for any change in the aims and functions of the Museum and I suggest that the Director and staff be unconstrained in continuing with their current programmes and principles underpinning the Museum's exhibitions and acquisitions policies.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Geoffrey Burkhardt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "G".

Geoffrey Burkhardt
BA, Dip. Ed, Litt. B, MA, PhD., FACEA, FHGSC.