

5 November 2020

The Hon Paul Fletcher MP
Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

National Museum of Australia – Statement of Intent for 2020-21

Dear Minister

Thank you for your letter of 31 August 2020 outlining your expectations for the National Museum of Australia for 2020-21. On behalf of the Museum's Council, I am pleased to respond to your Statement of Expectations with this Statement of Intent.

Our vision, mission and strategic commitments

The National Museum of Australia is the key cultural institution that connects the long human history of our continent with the remarkable story of the making of modern Australia. We are committed to bringing this distinctive and important story of our nation alive. The Museum's vision, mission and strategic commitments are described in its *Strategic Plan 2018–2022*.

The Strategic Plan confirms our role as a key national cultural institution and envisages a museum for the future. By adopting new technologies and innovative methods, and making our audience central to everything we do, the Museum aims to bring Australian stories to as many people as possible, domestically and internationally. The importance of this mission has been brought into focus by COVID-19 which has seen Australians connecting with each other - and with trusted institutions such as the Museum - in a myriad of new and different ways.

Our Corporate Plan 2020-21, due to be published in December 2020, will describe the key strategies and activities to deliver on our Strategic Plan and our vision of what success will look like over the reporting period and into the future.

COVID-19 impact

As noted in your letter, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the museum sector and arts community. Like other National Collecting Institutions, we have seen a downturn in local, interstate and international visitation to the Museum, school and tour bookings, corporate functions and events as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions on travel and the holding of large gatherings.

Strong onsite visitation is a key component in our ability to generate revenue through commercial activities including paid public programs and tours, entry to special exhibitions, and through purchases from the Café and Shop. The overall effect has been a substantial reduction of 50% in the forecasted revenue that the Museum would normally receive from these activities in 2020-21.

The Museum is very grateful to you and the Government for the additional funding of \$3.86m this financial year provided in response to the reduction in revenue due to COVID-19. This additional funding will allow us to continue to deliver our services and activities in 2020-21, including our

pivot to digital platforms and programming, enabling us to expand our reach to national and international audiences.

However, COVID-19 will continue to pose financial challenges for the Museum this year and into the future. It is the case therefore that going forward, the impact of COVID-19 and structural funding issues will remain a significant challenge for the Museum. The Council and the Museum's Executive welcome the opportunity to engage with you and our portfolio agency in the coming months to progress these matters.

Our activities in support of your Statement of Expectations

The Museum will undertake a range of activities in 2020-21 in support of your Statement of Expectations:

- a. *Providing national leadership and fostering collegiality within the museum sector to assist with its recovery from COVID-19*
 - The Director takes a strong leadership role in the sector, currently serving as Chair of the International Council of Museums Australia and co-Chair of the Australia-Singapore Arts Group. He has also been appointed as Chair of the Government's Holden Collection Advisory Committee.
 - The Museum's focus on collaboration within the cultural sector over the years has resulted in long-term MOUs with State-based museums and galleries, such as the Western Australian Museum and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, as well as international museums in the UK, Italy and China. These arrangements provide the foundations for a number of potential future projects that will stimulate activity in the sector and allow organisations to share their expertise, knowledge and collections.
 - The Cultural and Corporate Shared Services Centre (CCSSC) continues to provide corporate services to a number of partner agencies, many of whom are other Commonwealth cultural institutions. The partnership model utilised by the CCSSC has shown itself to be a successful basis for collaborations of this nature.
- b. *Contributing to economic activity and recovery as social restrictions ease, particularly in regional centres, through touring and other outreach activities*
 - The Museum will continue its active touring exhibition program in 2020-21 with seven exhibitions touring to Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. The program builds on the popular exhibitions that commenced touring last year with the important additions of *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters*, the first temporary exhibition to be displayed at the redeveloped Western Australian Museum, and *A Portrait of Australia: Through the Lens of Australian Geographic*, which is resonating strongly in regional and remote communities.
 - There are also two new touring products currently in development that are specifically designed for regional and remote Australia. These are the *Walking Through a Songline* digital immersive experience and the *Defining the Symbols of Australia* graphic panel exhibition. The Museum acknowledges the importance of funding from the Office for the Arts, through its Visions of Australia and National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach Program, in developing those exhibitions.
 - The Museum is delivering several new educational outreach activities as a result of COVID-19. The *Museum to You* kit, hired by schools for a fortnight at a time,

includes a selection of education handling objects and accompanying classroom activities. *Museum in the Classroom* offered ACT schools an in-school experience with Museum education staff visiting schools with a variety of objects to run curriculum-aligned inquiry learning programs. For regional and remote schools, the *Warakurna* video book resource, comprising a book with artwork, two videos and related classroom activities, is being sent to schools around Australia.

- The Museum is collaborating with the Bendigo Art Gallery (BAG) on their new exhibition *Piinpi: Contemporary Indigenous Fashion*. The exhibition, due to open in Bendigo when the lifting of restrictions in regional Victoria allow and then for display at the Museum, may also tour internationally as a joint project between the Museum and BAG. A second collaborative project involving the cultural sector in Victoria is a proposed digital project with Arts Centre Melbourne for onsite screening at the Museum and online.

c. *Focussing on how the Museum's activities can further encourage social cohesion and foster diversity and inclusion*

- Following closure of its doors to the public in March, the Museum launched new Digital Outreach initiatives designed to take its collections and programs to people online. One of the most popular was a new Facebook group, *Bridging the Distance – Sharing our COVID-19 Pandemic Experiences*, which gave Australians an opportunity to connect with others during a time of heightened anxiety and uncertainty.
- The Museum is looking to build on the success of the *Bridging the Distance* concept by launching a new website that will seek to collect stories from Australians, documenting their experiences of recent bushfires and the pandemic. The purpose of the website is to create and connect the Australian community, serve as a digital collection program and celebrate the resilience of Australian communities in the face of serious threats and disruption to their lives.
- The Digital Outreach program also involved live-streaming of children's and adult programs such as a tour of the Torres Strait Islander gallery and the history of the iconic 140 year old Paddle Steamer *Enterprise*, incorporating live Q&A sessions with curators. Modifying these programs to allow people to connect with our staff and access our collections online has given the Museum a much broader geographical reach at a time when people have been keen for new digital content and educational activities. We intend to continue these programs to better engage with all Australians, particularly those in regional and remote areas.
- The Museum is aiming to have its 'Stretch' Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) endorsed by Reconciliation Australia this financial year. The 'Stretch' RAP will include commitments to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes; strengthening staff cultural competency; improving visitor engagement and understanding with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content by presenting collections and stories from a perspective of shared histories; and maintaining and expanding our relationships with Indigenous partners.
- The Museum is providing development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practitioners and cultural workers, many of whom are located in regional and remote areas, through its Cultural Connections Program. The program has seen the funding of ten agreements with First Peoples' communities on the east coast to create cultural worker jobs and capabilities, enabling them to respond to the anniversary of the *Endeavour* voyage in their own words and actions.

- Australia's Defining Moments Digital Classroom website, which was launched in October, is a major online education platform aligned to the national curriculum for primary and secondary students. It provides digital teaching and learning resources, games and interactives, competitions and teacher professional development. The website helps students better understand Australian history by making links to key 'defining moments' within their own family history and that of their local area, fostering a strong sense of community, personal identity and social inclusion.

d. *Continuing to champion and showcase our Indigenous cultures for the education, enrichment and benefit of all Australians.*

- The *Life in Australia* and Discovery Centre permanent gallery developments, both due to open in mid-2021, contain substantial Indigenous content and themes. *Life in Australia* weaves Indigenous knowledges, narratives and cultural meaning into an explanation of Australia's environmental history. Indigenous authors and art centres worked closely with the Museum in designing the Discovery Centre to feature Indigenous-themed stories for a child-friendly audience.
- The *Endeavour Voyage: The Untold Stories of Cook and the First Australians* exhibition has been extended onsite until April 2021. During the closure period the Museum developed and made available extensive web and social media content to allow people to access the exhibition remotely. The content has been highly popular with online visitors at a time when travel to Canberra was difficult for many.
- The new *Talking Blak to History* permanent installation at Acton displays more of the Museum's diverse Indigenous collections. In showcasing carefully chosen objects and rarely seen works from the Museum's holdings, it presents an Indigenous counterpoint to Australian history on themes such as land rights and deaths in custody.
- The new Forecourt Garden, developed with the input of local host nations, is now the centre of a daily Acknowledgement of Country that properly welcomes visitors to the Museum's Acton site. The new garden and acknowledgement overtly places First Australians at the front and centre of the Museum's work and signals to visitors that the story of our Indigenous people will be integral to their Museum experience.

Apart from delivering on the above priorities the Museum will continue planning to undertake storage remediation works in anticipation of additional government funding for these measures in subsequent financial years, as detailed in your Statement of Expectations. The Museum will also continue to work with our NCI colleagues and the Office for the Arts to progress a shared storage facility. Apart from addressing the issues faced by the Museum with our current leased premises, a new facility may also provide the opportunity to increase public access to the nation's rich historical collections. We look forward to working closely with the Office for the Arts on the scoping study for shared storage facilities, with the quality of Museum storage being fundamental to delivering on our mandate to properly maintain the national historical collection.

The Museum's 20th birthday in March 2021 will be a time to reflect on our many achievements since opening. We are working on a small program of activities that will allow Australians from around the country to celebrate with us and to acknowledge the importance of the public in all the work we do.

This financial year will also see the Trevor Kennedy collection being receipted and accessioned into the National Historical Collection, with the collection having been delivered to the Museum's premises in August. The Museum is keen to see the collection made available, either online or in person, as soon as possible and is exploring how best to achieve this within existing resources.

This Statement of Intent and our Corporate Plan for 2020-21 contains only those measures which the Museum considers it can deliver within our available budget. We will continue to work with you, the Department, cultural institutions across the sector and other Australian Government agencies to achieve the expectations set out in your statement. As always we will keep you informed about significant issues relating to our activities. I look forward to discussing the Museum's performance further with you at our next meeting.

Your Statement of Expectations and this Statement of Intent will be published on the Museum's website shortly.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

David Jones
Chair of Council