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SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA'S EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

1. Aims and content of the Museum's exhibitions, both permanent and temporary, and schools and public programs.

i. complied with its role and functions as set out in the Act, Charter and other relevant documents

The functions of the National Museum of Australia (NMA) are set out in the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980* and I believe it has fulfilled these functions to the best of its ability within the available resources. The numbers below refer to functions as described in the Act.

- (a) The collection is always developing and being maintained. New objects are added that enhance existing items, help to give a richer picture of a story or item that is already held, or that refocus our view.
- (b) Objects from the collection are exhibited at the Acton site. The Museum arranges travelling exhibitions of its collection and also makes many loans to other institutions.
- (baa) The exhibitions reflect Australia's past, present and future. A variety of material is displayed to give a rich picture of a particular event that occurred. Different forms of exhibition material is gathered and displayed to make up the picture. The Mars exhibition showed a diverse range of material to explain space travel to the audience, as showing how technology developed for space travel has been incorporated into our daily lives.
- (ba) The Museum takes many opportunities to showcase objects from the collection both in Australia and overseas. The exhibition of Aboriginal art that was exhibited in China in late 2002 is an example.
- (c) The Museum has played a lead role in organising symposiums, seminars and conferences pertaining to Australian history. Long before it was opened, the Museum hosted conferences and established a role in leading scholarship, generation of good discussion and enhanced professionalism of the industry. Publication of conference proceedings, for example *Negotiating Histories* held in July 1999 is one example. *Storykeeping*, published in collaboration with the National Word Festival

- and funded through a Federation grant, is another example of involving research into Australian history.
- (d) The museum uses a variety of ways to disseminate information relating to Australian history and information about the Museum. This is done through publications, the web site, public programs, touring exhibitions, loaning items from the collection, working with the Friends of the National Museum of Australia, staff working with other institutions, staff giving talks and through an extensive schools program.
 - (e) The Museum has achieved an admirable level of sponsorship and has embraced a vigorous marketing regime. The Museum Shop is the best shop associated with an institution of its kind in Canberra. Items and objects for sale reflect the collection and the role of the Museum.
2. I strongly believe the Museum has used every endeavour to make the most advantageous use of the national collection in the national interest. As noted by the Hon Tony Staley, Chairman of the Council in his letter transmitting the *National Museum of Australia Annual Report 2001-2002* to the Minister, the museum demonstrated a number of strengths in its first year.

ii. realised the Government's vision in approving funding for the development of the Museum

The Government's vision was the establishment of the Museum. If the vision is conveyed through legislative documents such as the Act and its Charter, it is being, and will continue to be achieved by the Museum, within budgetary limitations. I quote Hon Staley's comments in the letter referred to above:

[the Government's] expectation was that the Museum would break new ground by combining the best contemporary exhibition techniques with new media technologies. The Museum has achieved this handsomely.

The Museum has an energetic, vibrant public program that responds to issues that affect us all. The symposiums held in January last year and this year about bushfires are an example of the Museum raising important issues, allowing people to discuss them in a different context, with a panel of experts.

Now that it is operating, the Museum is a national institution, not a government institution. It is guided by a board and is subject to its own Act and two other Acts that guide its corporate governance and staffing policies.

As a Statutory Authority, the Museum is independent of the executive arm of Government and it must remain this way.

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