

# **Collection deaccessioning and disposal policy**

POL-C-035

Version 7.0      30 May 2024

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<b>ID</b>	POL-C-035
<b>Version</b>	7.0
<b>Version date</b>	April 2024
<b>Type</b>	Council approved
<b>Council approval date</b>	30 May 2024
<b>File</b>	09/462
<b>Availability</b>	Public & all staff
<b>Keywords</b>	Assets, deaccessioning, disposal, National Historical Collection, objects
<b>Responsible officer</b>	Head Collection Care and Management
<b>History</b>	<p>Policy and Guidelines for the Deaccessioning and Disposal of Objects, version 1.0 approved by Council, Dec 1987</p> <p>Deaccessioning forms and procedures approved by Council, May 1988</p> <p>Deaccessioning and disposal policy version 2.0 approved by Council, Dec 1996</p> <p>Deaccessioning and disposal policy version 3.0 approved by Council, Nov 2002</p> <p>Deaccessioning and disposal policy version 4.0 approved by Council, May 2006</p>
<b>Review date</b>	June 2026
<b>Related documents</b>	<p>Collections development policy (POL-C-005)</p> <p>Collections - return of cultural objects policy (POL-037)</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral human remains and returns policy (POL-C-011)</p> <p>Indigenous cultural rights and engagement policy (POL-C-054)</p> <p>Collection care and preservation policy (POL-C-042)</p>
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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 historical material is an essential part of an effective collection management program. This policy covers the deaccessioning and disposal of historical material from the National Historical Collection (NHC) and other collections of the Museum.

### 3.1 Purpose

The objectives of this policy are to enable the Museum to:

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

### 3.2 Rationale

Under section 9 of the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980*, Council is empowered to dispose of historical material forming part of the NHC. Similar powers are conferred on Council in relation to historical material which is not in the NHC. Council has delegated its powers to dispose of historical material not in the NHC to the Director, Deputy Director and Assistant Director, Discovery and Collections.

To effect disposal of historical material, the Museum requires a policy to ensure that such disposal is neither unwarranted nor haphazard. The guidelines in this paper provide the basis upon which responsible deaccessioning and disposal of objects may be undertaken.

## 4. Principles or guidelines

### 4.1 Categories for deaccessioning historical material

The following classes of objects may be considered for deaccessioning from the Museum's collections:

- a) objects that do not fall within the Collections development policy of the National Museum of Australia
- b) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 or maintenance is disproportionate to the significance of the object
- g) objects in the possession of the Museum about which no documentation of their acquisition or provenance is available
- h) objects that have been incorrectly identified or attributed, or are forgeries
- i) duplicates of objects in the collection
- j) objects of a hazardous nature which may pose a serious occupational health and safety risk to staff and visitors.

## **4.2 Assessment of historical material for deaccessioning and disposal**

### **4.2.1 Curatorial assessment**

Historical material proposed for deaccessioning and disposal will be assessed by the Curatorial team. The assessment will be conducted with reference to the Collections development policy and the Collection Significance Interrogation Framework. It should include the current market value and the proposed method of disposal. In some cases, material recommended for deaccession from the NHC may be retained for another collection of the Museum.

### **4.2.2 Procedures for deaccessioning and disposal of NHC historical material**

Proposals for deaccessioning and disposal of historical material from the NHC should be submitted to the Assistant Director, Discovery and Collections (subject to deaccessioning value, see below). If accepted, such proposals will then require Director or Deputy Director endorsement before being referred to Council for decision.

If the proposal is approved by Council, Council may choose to impose a retention ('cooling off') period on either the deaccessioning and/or disposal of the material. After the retention period has lapsed, the approved documentation will be returned to Council for final endorsement. Upon final endorsement by the Council, the historical material may be disposed of in accordance with the provisions of 4.3 below.

Where the NHC material exceeds \$2 million in value, permission for deaccessioning and disposal must be sought from both Council and the Minister. In such cases, disposal arrangements in accordance with the provisions of 4.3 below may be implemented after ministerial approval has been received.

### **4.2.3 Procedures for deaccessioning and disposal of non-NHC historical material**

Proposals for deaccessioning and disposal of historical material not held in the NHC should be submitted to the Assistant Director, Discovery and Collections, with the relevant decision-makers being as follows:

- historical material with a value of \$100,000 or less may be disposed of with the approval of the Assistant Director (or, if the Assistant Director considers it appropriate, the Director or Deputy Director)
- disposal of historical material with a value exceeding \$100,000 but less than or equal to \$250,000 will require the approval of the Director or Deputy Director
- disposal of historical material with a value exceeding \$250,000 will require the approval of the Council
- disposal of historical material with a value exceeding \$2 million will require the approval of the Minister.

Particulars of any decision to deaccession and/or dispose of non-NHC historical material made by the Museum Director or staff members under Council's delegation instrument will be reported to Council at its next meeting.

Disposal in all such cases should be implemented in accordance with the provisions of section 4.3 below.

### 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 collection the following provisions for disposal of material should be followed.

- a) Where objects have been donated, all reasonable efforts will be made to return the objects to the donors or other such person(s) who the donors have advised may receive the objects. If the Museum has made all reasonable efforts to return the objects but is unable to do so within a period of six months following its proposal to dispose of them, the Museum may proceed to dispose of the object in accordance with the requirements of the *National Museum of Australia Act* and this policy.
- b) Objects that have a significant cultural value, but which do not conform to the Collections development policy should, wherever possible, be placed with the most appropriate public institution, by means of gift, sale or exchange.
- c) Objects that do not have a significant cultural value but do have a market value may be disposed of by public auction or tender, once de-identification of their status as a former collection of the National Museum of Australia has taken place.
- d) Objects whose trade and movement are governed by any applicable laws or agreements, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), or the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth), should only be disposed of in accordance with such laws or agreements.
- e) Objects that are degraded to the point where they are no longer recognisable or restorable, and which do not have any saleable value, may be destroyed or recycled for materials or components if all other avenues for disposal have been exhausted.
- f) Objects that cannot be disposed of in any other way, and which do not have any saleable value, may be destroyed.
- g) Where the object was gifted under the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, formerly the Tax Incentives for the Arts Scheme, it cannot be returned to the donor as the donor has received the benefit of a tax deduction for the gift. Therefore, under these circumstances, option a) is not to be considered.

#### 4.3.3 Proceeds from disposal

Any proceeds resulting from 4.3.2b or 4.3.2c 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 administrative decision to remove historical material from a museum collection and the processes involved in doing this.

### Disposal

The action taken to remove historical material from the Museum's ownership, control or possession once the material has been deaccessioned. This action may take the form of disposal by gift, sale, exchange or destruction.

### Historical material

Refers to any material (whether in written or any other form) relating to Australian history.

## 6. Definition of responsibilities

### Director or Deputy Director

The Director and Deputy Director are responsible for approving:

- NHC deaccessioning and disposal submissions to be taken to the Museum's Council
- the deaccessioning and disposal of historical material not in the NHC, up to the value of \$250,000.

### Assistant Director, Discovery and Collections

The Assistant Director, Collections and Discovery is responsible for:

- reviewing deaccessioning proposals for all historical material prior to submission to the Council or Director/Deputy Director (whoever is the relevant decision-maker)
- approving the deaccessioning and disposal of historical material not in the NHC, up to the value of \$100,000.

### Council

Council has the power to approve proposals for the deaccessioning and disposal of historical material. For non-NHC historical material, Council has delegated their powers to the Director, Deputy Director and Assistant Director, Discovery and Collections.

### Minister

The Minister approves proposals for the disposal of historical material valued at over \$2 million.

## 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

*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*

*National Museum of Australia Act 1980 (Cth)*

*Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1986 (Cth)*

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation 1970, *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property 1970*

## 8. Implementation

### 8.1 Coverage

This policy covers the deaccessioning and disposal of historical material from the National Historical Collection (NHC) and other collections of the Museum.

### 8.2 Other related documents

Collections development policy

Return of cultural objects policy

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human remains policy

### 8.3 Exclusions

This policy does not cover the disposal of non-collection assets.

### 8.4 Superseded policies

This policy supersedes:

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Former policy/ies title	Version number	Version date	Council approval date
Policy and guidelines for the deaccessioning and disposal of objects	1.0	Dec 1987	Dec 1987
Deaccessioning and disposal policy	2.0	Dec 1996	Dec 1996
Deaccessioning and disposal policy	3.0	Nov 2002	Nov 2002
Deaccessioning and disposal policy	4.0	May 2006	May 2006
Deaccessioning and disposal policy	5.0	June 2018	
Deaccessioning and disposal policy	6.0	June 2020	

### 8.5 Monitoring

The policy will be reviewed by June 2026.