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NMA Review Secretariat
DCITA, GPO 2154 Canberra

I write as someone who has visited the Museum several times in the past three years, but who is not privy to all its activities. I note the terms of the review.

The three basic themes of the Museum, deriving from its initiation, are Land, Nation and People, while the Act #5 stipulates a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia. I cannot find anywhere a precise statement of the "Government's vision" and I take it to be the Museum's functions as set out in the Act. The Museum's own Ethics Statement articulates a clear and appropriate vision.

Considering these objectives, I believe the Museum admirably fulfils its intended functions. Each of the three themes are clearly visible in the exhibits and there is a distinctive and interesting Aboriginal Gallery. In terms of the Act, the Museum exhibits written and material evidence about Australia's past, present and future. It does so in a manner which makes it clear that there may be more than one view of the past. Australia's history is not entirely sweetness and light. There are moments of darkness and aspects of greatness. While I find the Museum's overall exhibiting style sometimes a little confusing -- certainly non-traditional -- the approach of the exhibits is broad-ranging, informative, exciting and sometimes confronting. In any area I know something about, the Museum's exhibitions are unavoidably partial but do not present a distorted view of the past. I believe the Museum is fulfilling its role and function in these aspects.

Concerning future priorities, I suggest that the grand themes of Land, Nation and People should continue to be the Museum's guide. In regard to particular exhibits it might consider, if it does not already do so, designing these in consultation with one or two leading scholars in the field (e.g. World War 1, desert ecology). It might, in some cases, overtly present several interpretations of a particular event or theme, such as whether Australia is already overpopulated or needs more people. But mandating a 'balanced' view would lead readily to blandness and diminish understanding of the fact that there may be no agreed on viewpoint in many matters in our country.

A second priority in reaching for the Museum's aims should be support for adequate numbers of scientific and exhibition staff, appropriately qualified. If a vision is to be realised, then it must be appropriately funded.

Finally, although I regard the Museum building as of no great merit, its contents and displays are exciting and valuable. I can see no reason for a major change in the Museum's activities or priorities.

Yours sincerely



Peter White