

Submission to Review Panel for National Museum of Australia

Lance Chapman's Four Perspectives

1 *An Educator*

I spent forty-six and a half years as a teacher and principal in NSW and ACT government high schools and secondary colleges. In 2001, I conducted an Australian History excursion to the NMA for Year 10 students whom I was teaching. Throughout 2002, a colleague and I took Year 9 students to most sessions of Triple J Talk-Back Classroom in the Studio.

2 *A Student of History, especially Australian History*

My first degree, completed as mature age student thirty-three years ago was History Honours. In fourth year of that degree study, I was fortunate enough to be taught by Russel Ward, UNE, and Manning Clark, ANU. I have had a keen interest in history ever since.

3 *A Grandparent*

I have two pairs of grandchildren under ten years of age, both currently living in England. When they visit Australia, I use the NMA as a key tool to keep them in touch with their Australian heritage and identity.

4 *A Friend of the NMA*

I have a deep love of the NMA and count myself fortunate that it was finally opened during my lifetime. Therefore, I have joined the Friends' organization. I believe that it is the role of any friend to help their friend to become the best that they can be. This may involve, at times, kindly, constructive suggestions for change and that is what I am doing in the SWOT analysis which follows.

The SWOT Analysis

Due to time constraints, I have presented my thoughts in SWOT form rather than writing directly to your terms of reference, but they are certainly relevant to them.

I believe a strategic plan for the NMA should:-

- preserve, extend & publicize the strengths
- address the weaknesses,
- seize the opportunities, and
- neutralize the threats.

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STRENGTHS

1. The stunning location on Acton Peninsula.
2. The First Australian Gallery is the jewel in the crown of the NMA, Keith Windshuttle notwithstanding! I suspect it is world class.
3. Tangled Destinies Gallery
eg illuminated map of Australia showing the inexorable spread of introduced pests has great impact, as have the platypus skins made into a rug.
4. Australian Voices (& associated publishing program *Aussie English for Beginners 1 & 2*) & Vocabulary of the Land.
5. Blockbusters past & planned. (See also Opportunities)
6. Exceptionally well chosen book titles on sale in Museum shop.
7. Use of Studio for JJJ Talkback Classroom is a great initiative, well supported by local schools and colleges.
8. Discussion of Australian identity, nationhood & heroes in Circa is good, though not brilliant.
9. Willingness to use oral testimony to illuminate the past. Just as valid as the written documents and the only way some groups can be heard. Both need to be treated with critical care. }
10. Some outstanding hosts, and overall they are very knowledgeable & helpful. (See also Opportunities)
11. Use of IT eg Website & kspace

WEAKNESSES

1. Grossly inadequate exhibition space of 5,500 square metres.
The War Memorial has 20,000 square metres.
2. The pernicious influence of post-modernist “structures of power” ideology or is it just the plain old Australian “cutting down the tall poppies” syndrome?
eg in Eternity, few people are featured who really made a difference in the big picture of Australian development (Some others were involved in events of national significance or are representative of important groups or organizations).
3. Mining section far too small & incomplete
cf Blainey, *The Rush that Never Ended*.
4. Exhibit changeover a little slow
eg Eternity only 12/50 individuals have been replaced in nearly two years.
5. Students visiting NMA without a preexisting “cognitive map” of the chronology of Australian history would struggle at the NMA
eg in the SAS Visions Theatre, where the film jumps around between 1930 and 2000.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Use available space on the Acton Peninsula and build another major gallery to do justice to the history of non-Aboriginal people in Australia esp economic history.

If this is too expensive, a ‘budget’ annex at Yarramundi Reach!

2. Possible future Blockbusters
eg Irish in Australia } Would attract strong grassroots support and loans of
Italians in Australia } material from these communities
Greeks in Australia }
Chinese in Australia }

Mining in Australia } Should attract commercial sponsorship
Computer industry in Australia }

Blockbusters could turn over a little more quickly, if developmental funding allowed it.

3. High profile networking with and supporting regional and even some capital city museums. Mutual promotion, two way loans, technical assistance from NMA.

Antarctica Museum	Hobart, Tasmania
Wadlata Outback Museum	Port Augusta, SA
Local History Folk Museum	Armidale, NSW
Golden Dragon Chinese Museum	Bendigo, VIC
Convict Museum	Port Arthur, Tasmania

Emphasise that this is in no way infringing their autonomy, and face the fact that some large and well established ones may not want any association with NMA

This networking could give the NMA more political clout with Ms HR Australia wide.

4. Expand Circa by two minutes on each sector and add more substantial content.
In The Nation, more of the great defining events (besides Gallipoli)
In The Land, some of the recognizable landmarks
In The People, some of our living “national treasures”
5. Structured and planned professional development of hosts, to make a good team even better.
6. Develop two more films to supplement the present one in the SAS Visions Theatre, which mainly covers 1930 to the early 1970s.
 - a) Plenty of material would be available for 1970s-2003.
 - b) For the period before 1930, archival material is available, though less plentiful. It could be supplemented with excerpts from feature films eg Picnic at Hanging Rock and The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith for the turn of the century period.

THREATS

1. Some people who may attack the NMA destructively, because of their own ideological axe to grind, ego or sheer cantankerousness.
2. Some people whose long association with and deep love of the NMA may make them defensive about this review and/or may blind them to the need for ongoing development and evolution.