

16 December 2019

The Hon Paul Fletcher MP  
Minister for the Arts  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

## **National Museum of Australia – Statement of Intent for 2019-20**

Dear Minister

Thank you for your letter of 21 October 2019 outlining your expectations for the National Museum of Australia for 2019 – 20.

On behalf of the Museum's Council, I am pleased to respond to your Statement of Expectations with this Statement of Intent. The Council and the Museum's Executive greatly value and appreciate your continued support. The Government's funding commitment to the Museum will allow us to fulfil our mission and deliver important government priorities such as marking the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Captain Cook's voyage to Australia.

### **Our vision, mission and strategic commitments**

The National Museum of Australia is the key cultural institution that brings the long human history of our continent into productive engagement 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*:

Our **vision** is to be a trusted voice in the national conversation, and recognised as one of Australia's premier cultural destinations exploring Australia's past, illuminating the present and imagining the future.

Our **mission** is to bring the world's cultures to Australia and present Australia's history and culture to the world. In pursuit of this goal, the Museum has developed its ambitious Master Plan 2017–2030.

Our **strategic commitments** are to **invest, challenge, explore** and **connect** across all aspects of our business.

Our focus over the next four years will be on **five key streams** of endeavour: Collections for the 21st century; Program directions; Digital futures; Growing our business; and Brand recognition.

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 hopes to bring Australian stories to as many people as

possible, domestically and internationally. It focuses on identifying methods to ensure that we can continue to deliver our key functions successfully, including through public-private partnerships.

Our Corporate Plan for 2019 – 2020 describes 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. Both the Strategic Plan and Corporate Plan are in alignment with your expectations of the role and direction of the Museum.

### **Our activities in support of your Statement of Expectations**

The Museum's activities strongly support your goal to foster an authentic and vital Australian arts sector by growing the Indigenous art market, promoting Australian stories and identity and delivering arts funding that is sustainable and contestable. Our work with Indigenous artists has delivered real, tangible benefits to communities. This will be seen first-hand with the launch of the *Endeavour* exhibition in April 2020 and work commencing on the *Life in Australia* environmental history gallery. The Museum will procure works from Indigenous artists and filmmakers to feature in the exhibition and new gallery, allowing them to tell their stories in their own voices.

The Museum will undertake a range of activities in FY2019 – 20 in support of your Statement of Expectations:

- a. *Ensuring the Museum contributes to economic activity, particularly in regional centres, through touring and other outreach activity*
  - Over the next year the Museum will continue to tour exhibitions across the country. Our program includes the intergenerational appeal of *Happy Birthday Play School*, delivered in partnership with the ABC, to *Evolution: Torres Strait Masks* which will travel to venues across Western Australia, to the *Australia of the Year* annual exhibition and our new ground-breaking *A Portrait of Australia: Through the Lens of Australian Geographic* which is resonating strongly in regional and remote communities.
  - The Museum is a leader in providing development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practitioners and cultural work through its Encounters Fellowships and Cultural Connections Program, many of whom are located in regional and remote areas. The intention of both programs is to support, develop and strengthen cultural practitioners and their organisations and facilitate community-led projects and initiatives.
  
- b. *Providing leadership to the collections sector as an employer of choice*
  - The Museum continues to identify and build staff capabilities to maximise our ability to leverage existing talent and ensure ongoing expertise is sustained. This includes an emphasis on digital and leadership capabilities.
  - This financial year will see the implementation of new indigenous employment strategy and a 'Stretch' Reconciliation Action Plan. Together these seek to build cultural capacity and understanding, actively identifying opportunities to engage with communities and offer employment opportunities.
  - The Museum considers itself to be a leader in creating a flexible and healthy working environment, reducing stigma related to mental health, supporting staff

with mental health conditions and promoting the employment of people with disabilities.

- Participation in high calibre research projects (including several funded by the Australian Research Council) and staff exchanges and collaborations with national and international organisations such as Kings College and the Australia National University offer significant professional development opportunities for staff.

*c. Accepting opportunities to shape and promote Australian identity through the Museum's public-facing activities both nationally and internationally*

- Our plans for the future are to extend our reach across the nation and internationally. We will do this to a mix of touring exhibitions, public programs, speaking engagements and events.
- Internationally the Museum will conclude the tour of its *Old Masters: Australia's Great Bark Artists* exhibition across mainland China and Taipei. Over the past 18 months the exhibition has reached over ½ million visitors to the exhibition and over 7 million online.
- Over the course of the next few years the Museum's award winning *Songlines: Tracking the Sevens Sisters* exhibition will embark on a national and international tour, opening as the first temporary exhibition at the new Western Australian Museum at the end of 2020. This will be followed by an international tour commencing in Paris in 2021 with other likely showings in Canada, the United States, Germany, Finland, and the United Kingdom.
- The Museum has signed Memoranda of Understanding with key national and international museums including the National Museum of China, the British Museum, the National Museum of Singapore and state-based museums in Australia. The Director continues to support the sector as the Chair of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Australia and co-Chair of the Australia-Singapore Arts Group.
- The International Program will continue the successful partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade taking the Australian story abroad through a series of graphic panel displays via our diplomatic missions.

*d. Considering opportunities to create and meet demand for inbound tourism*

- The Museum has been an active promoter and advocate for greater collaboration between cultural agencies within the tourism sector.
- Currently the Museum is an active member of the Australian Tourism Export Council and Tourism Australia's Australian Tourism Exchange, which involves meeting with international and domestic buyers to add the Museum to tourism itineraries and activities. The Museum is also represented on the National Capital Attractions Association and attended the South East Asia Trade Mission in September 2019 (the latter hosted by Tourism Australia).
- The Museum has secured inclusion in the Tourism Australia Signature Series: Cultural Attractions of Australia, to be announced early in 2020, and which will

promote the Museum to broader western markets that have previously been difficult to reach. This complements the development of new internationally-focused tourism products at the Museum that are due for release in early 2020.

*e. Providing leadership in the delivery of collection management, arts education and public programs*

- The Museum is at the forefront of delivering high quality arts education through its Encounters Fellowships. During their fellowships, participants visited several cultural institutions in Canberra, the United Kingdom and France undertaking workshops with NMA staff and cultural sector specialists in areas such as collections management, conservation and research.
- The Museum has shown itself to be a leader in high quality and innovative public programming, with a focus on shared history and accessibility. This will be of particular importance coming into 2020. As always, the Museum will mark Australia Day with a Family Day on 26 January. Other related highlights include Indigenous themed workshops, led by contemporary Indigenous artists, to be held during NAIDOC Week. There is also a planned series of keynote speeches based on the Endeavour exhibition featuring contemporary indigenous and non-indigenous leaders current and emerging in their fields. These events will explore the things that bring us together and the commonality in our shared histories.
- The Defining Moments in Australian History program is the centrepiece of the National Museum's work, exploring the 'moments' in the country's history that helped define Australia as a nation and engaging all visitors on the significance of those moments. In a collaboration with ABC Radio National's Big Ideas program, the Museum runs a series of themed panel discussions which explore national culture and identity and position the institution at the forefront of debate about the issues that have shaped – and continue to shape – us as a nation.

*f. Continuing to explore opportunities to grow private sector support and increase own-source revenue*

- In the last four years the Museum's own-source revenue has doubled from approximately 10% to 20%. The Museum's Corporate Plan 2019-20 aims to further increase own source revenue by 5% on the five-year average.
- Commercial activities including the Museum Shop, catering, and ticketed exhibitions and public programs provide a strong basis for meeting this target, although that a decline in visitor numbers is expected in 2020 due to significant gallery development construction works. The Museum is working to address a potential drop revenue as a result of lower visitation during the gallery development period by increasing its revenue-raising activities in other areas.
- A program of development activities in recent months, including visits with individual donors by the Museum's Director and Council members in Adelaide and Sydney, has already led to financial support for Museum activities. The Museum will focus on seeking philanthropic support in other cities where local networks can be facilitated by Council members or Museum connections.
- The establishment of the Swayn Centre for Australian Design at the Museum, including the appointment of the Swayn Senior Fellow in Australian Design, has been made possible with philanthropic support from the Swayn Gallery and

demonstrates the Museum's ability to attract such support from donors with a range of interests.

- A primary focus in the coming year will be securing corporate assistance for projects such as international tours of *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters* and *Yiwarra Kuju* (Canning Stock Route); the incoming *Ancient Greeks* exhibition from the British Museum; and continuation of the Encounters Fellowships program.

Apart from delivering on the above priorities the Museum will continue its onboarding of cultural agencies to the Corporate and Cultural Shared Services Centre and undertake accessibility and safety works, having been allocated additional government funding for these measures as detailed in your Statement of Expectations.

I note your advice that the fiscal climate and the Government's commitment to maintaining budget surpluses over forward estimates means that requests for additional financial support in the long term may not be supported. The Museum is currently considering how best to direct its financial and staffing resources to meet its legislative obligations, within recurrent funding levels. As a result it may be that some of the activities the Museum's wishes to pursue – including those detailed in this Statement of Intent - will need to be held over to future years or until sufficient philanthropic or other support is received.

Despite this, the Museum will continue its work to improve our storage facilities and undertake asset renewal, both of which are fundamental to delivering on our legislative responsibilities to maintain the national historical collection. We will continue to work closely with you, the Department and portfolio agencies to achieve the expectations set out in your statement. As always we will keep you informed on 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 this week.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Jones', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Jones  
Chair of Council