

Subject: review of exhibitions and public programs

dear panel ,

this is not an extensive review or detailed examination of the nma's exhibitions and programs . it is nonetheless a critical response to both some key areas of its policy as well as its current implementation .

i shall begin with the strategic plan 2000-2003 (draft3 nov 2000) . this i found to be user friendly and showed how the plan was evolving .

although the 7 strategic priorities may fit in with administrative nodes, i feel that there are too many to provide the hi-definition foci that a successful strategy requires .

for instance, 6 ."to develop a culture where customer satisfaction is the single most important criterion for success" is self-defeating .

whilst the intention is admirable, the choice of words is unfortunate and gives the impression that success equates only with satisfaction .

on the other hand, 7 ."to invest in the museum's people:" hits the nail right on the head . and if you believe as i do, that customer satisfaction will more readily be achieved, when the staff are valued, why not telescope the two .

this would be the 'people' focus . for it seems apparent from the document, that people who feel 'invested in', will be readily satisfied without feeling it's a 'hard-sell' .

the other foci : 'profit' and 'product' would cover 1-3 and 4-5 respectively . then could it be said that the nma provided its people(both staff and visitors) with products that profited its people .

perhaps there is too much of the 'qed' in this view, but it seems clear mathematically, that the current 7 priorities will require more energy to achieve people satisfaction .

it is interesting to note that this document's, section 1. purpose, states "to be finalised". in many organizations this is defined at the commencement and often proves an unnecessary constraint on evolution .

i will now turn to the vision and mission paper(draft version1 - feb 2002) . this paper is also user friendly and clearly sets out the evolution from pre-1993 , to 1996-present . it forms part of the strategic plan 2002-2007 .

it concludes by stating that further drafts will come, "after envisaging the long term future". this approach is potentially limiting in scope and weakening in achievement . it is however a currently accepted practice .

however, this submission is aimed at highlighting areas where current policy or practice will not readily achieve its potential, as well as reporting on best practice achievements .

the current vision envisages : "exploring the past, illuminating the present, imagining the future" . this is an ideal point for the nma to be at in its evolution, as it is a unique in australia and possibly the world .

the nma is not a classical museum . it is like an art gallery that presents works of art to involve the heart and mind of the viewer . it is like a library that presents text and image to inform the heart and mind of the reader .

it is moreover a living archive where time and space are juxtaposed in the individual and group memory . and as such it reaches into the future . as by imagining the past, the present is illuminated, so that the future might be explored without imaginary fears (they have been

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'conquered' in the past) .

by using the wisdom which illuminates, to light the way forward, the future no longer needs to be imagined, but can be creatively explored . this requires the nma do an antipodean swap of past and future functions .

this is to be expected of our place in the discovery of the world . we are sure to run out of space to explore if we look only at our national past . however imagining provides more fertile ground as it is not constrained in time and space .

likewise the future, so exploration is potentially unlimited .but without knowing whether "the government's vision in approving funding", accords with the nma's, i can only claim that it should .

in this regard, i must restate what must also be obvious . namely that the nma does not become a politically correct arm of the legislature . but is given at least, if not more, freedom and protection as the executive and judiciary .

it also should be free from the destructiveness of the dogmatic or the obscurity of the enigmatic . and provide a sanctuary for the light of the eternal flame of our national remembrance .

this link with the national war memorial is a natural outcome of their joint task in passing on the nation's spiritual baton . one keeps the flame of sacrifice ; the other lets its light shine on the present .

in my view the nma represents a "cathedral of the nation's spirit" . a place filled with national light and the natural sounds of the land and of the people . and not just through a glass darkly or with muffled hooves .

it is the place where the celebration of our nation goes on, in truth and beauty, into its destined future . and it is vital to agree, or at least try to understand, that without the nma this land and people will never become a nation.

i am peripherally aware that the director has received some negative comment . this is to be expected and must not be allowed to compromise the reputation for independence and integrity, which the nma must not only exhibit, but achieve .

i will conclude this comment on policy with a suggestion . i believe the time has come to recognize that just as wisdom is not knowledge, the seat of wisdom should be allowed to move freely from the green groves of academia, to the red or black soil plains of the outback .

in keeping with the tradition of the cathedral as the 'keeping place' of the bishop's chair, i wish the nma consider adopting as a sign of its commitment to indigenous white (as well as black) wisdom, the creation of a chair of national history .

this would not detract from established academia any more than the nma does to established museums . there would also be no need for any buildings to be built or campuses established .

the occupier of the chair would be peripatetic and the students linked by internet and local seminars . the scope and evaluation of the courses would evolve as the concept is developed and worked out .

it would perhaps channel the wisdom of the family, the local, the regional history, into a natural national course which would visibly contribute to a global , yet extra-terrestrial and still in its depths uncharted, world ocean . a national contribution to the global story which would celebrate life and its renewal .

i believe a prototype could be established linking the nma with the first 'cathedral' chair at deniliquin . there is sound foundation for such an initiative . it seems only such an initiative can overcome, a not so much today evident, tyranny of distance; but the inertial ignorance of a democracy, which tries to function inorganically .

i will now address the implementation of these policies . i have been in contact with the museum since its inception, both professionally and as a visitor . it has clearly exhibited standards of excellence which reflect the achievement of its aims .

as regards the acquisition of the hanlon copy of the jerilderie document, the nma showed initiative and flexibility in making certain, without political intervention, that it stayed in

australia . ned's scrap metal was however at a premium and cost the tax payer a premium price . its curation and access have been exemplary .

i was also pleased to discover, only on my last visit, that the reversal of the earth's polarity was not 180 degrees . and that my experience again, of the rotating land-nation-people, was a refreshing initiation into the spirit of the 'keeping place' .

and when i see the standard of presentation, flexibility of interpretation and glitch-free internet accessibility for the australian history mysteries, i can see this is the way to go . it is as exciting as the concepts on which video games or pulp fiction are based . but with organic truth .

history can now, like medieval mystery(miracle) plays, give our nation (and indeed others) the moral fibre and spiritual backbone to finally, in the words of manning clark : "understand who we australians are and what we might become" .

manning clark initially failed to see that a 'civilization' existed in australia before 1788 . and yet in terms of what civilization is meant to represent it is questionable if this was so much a failure as a difference in perspective which this museum successfully depicts .

i've always been more impressed with his claim that : "everything a historian writes should be a celebration of life". and for the nma this is confirmed by observing how mothers, sometimes singly, often in groups, pushing babies in prams or balancing the disparate demands of mobile offspring, come to the nma.

and these are only the tip of the iceberg . if the nma can provide a viable and valued sanctuary for the hearts and minds of its people, then manning clark as a historian and the government of this nation as the initiator, can rest in peace .

i trust these comments assist you in your task and i look forward to seeing the nma continue to evolve organically .

yours respectfully ,
dctr. maikel annaley .

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