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In June 2001, I convened the National Seminar on Teaching Australian History in Schools – an initiative funded by the then federal Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs as a component of the National History project. The invitation-only seminar brought together fifty leading Australian historians, teacher educators, education jurisdiction officers and practising school teachers.

The seminar was held at the National Museum of Australia. As part of the proceedings, participants toured the exhibitions and were addressed by NMA Education staff. In both the seminar discussions and in the evaluation reports, there was frequent and enthusiastic reference to the Museum.

Most importantly, this gathering of experts in Australian History and its teaching applauded the ways in which Australian History is represented in the Museum. Delegates commended the ways in which an appropriate and valuable balance had been achieved – between celebratory and critical traditions of telling the stories of our nation; between the public and the private dimensions of human experience; between the lofty, famous elements and the mundane, everyday elements; among the social, political, economic and environmental dimensions of Australia's past. Further, the delegates appreciated the thoughtful way in which items were chosen for display, and the imaginative and appealing ways in which the displays were designed. There was particular comment on the interactivity encouraged, in contrast with the passivity often associated with conventional museum visits. Overall, the seminar participants seemed convinced that the NMA exhibitions provided an historically sound and engaging basis for students' explorations of Australia's history.

In my continuing contacts with the NMA since 2001, I have become familiar with elements of the Schools Program. As a tertiary educator, I appreciate the pedagogical value of the NMA's innovative approaches to students who visit the museum. The face-to-face programs are engaging, and promote valuable learning. The curriculum materials available in print form are high quality.

I hope that the current review will affirm the very valuable contribution that the NMA Schools Program is making to the historical education of young Australians, and will recommend that the NMA be encouraged and funded to extend that contribution.

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