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ANMuseum 1

12.1.03

Mt Tony Staley,
Chairman
Australian National Museum
Canberra
ACT.2600

Dear Mr Staley,

This letter is prompted by Richard Yallop's contribution to the Weekend Australian January 4-5. It is understood that a review panel has been appointed to consider new guidelines for exhibits at the museum. The panel is to seek submissions from the public. To avoid loss of direction when the newspaper is destroyed, this is an early submission and I ask that it be passed on to the panel at the appropriate time.

SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM FOUR MEMBER REVIEW BOARD.

Background.

I am an Engineer, a Fellow of the Institution of Engineers Australia. My work involves innovation and intellectual property and the investigation of industrial incidents and accidents. Mostly it is engineering design. My interest in the museum is that of a potential lay visitor with a preference for science and marine exhibits.

I have never been to the National Museum.

SUBMISSION

General.

Two separate views are expressed. They are not mutually exclusive.

Why have a museum?

- ◆ To preserve the past for the benefit of future generations. (The interest element)
- ◆ To recognise and honour distinguished people.
- ◆ To provide a history that records and explains the past and guides the future. (The useful element)

Who will benefit?

- ◆ The public, the mums and dads and children. The students. They will visit because of their own interest and of their own volition.
- ◆ The historians as a guide to their future work.
- ◆ The investigative media.

View 1

- ◆ The museum is funded by Australian taxpayers. It is fraudulent misuse of public funds if the museum is used to display falsified history and partisan views.

- ◆ It is equally unthinkable for the exhibits to promote the interests of benefactors or corporations
- ◆ To preserve the past, to honour distinguished people and to provide a useful history, the exhibits must be authentic, accurate and balanced.

View 2

- ◆ A publicly funded museum must be seen to be relevant to the public. People must go of their own volition because of their own interest.
- ◆ Often the facts of the past are difficult to establish. This author knows only too well that even recent facts become clouded by indifferent recall and personal choice. Perceived present or future benefit can influence reporting of the past. Often a reporter's (historian's) interpretation must be added to complete a picture. Judgement, experience, integrity and scholarship are needed.
- ◆ Provided exhibits and the interpretation given to them, are supported by available records and there is a genuine interest in them, they should be considered.

Compatibility.

Are the two views compatible? Yes.

The explanatory plaque can and must be supported by a reference list. The list does not need to be on display so long as it is available on the spot for examination by every visitor who wishes to do so. The explanatory plaque can and should provide valid opposing interpretations.

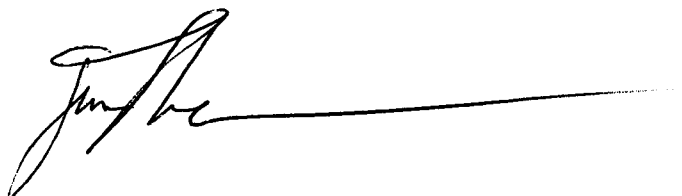
The following example is taken from the Weekend Australian article. This author does not know any of the facts or the people involved. It is assumed that the subject was given peer review, graded and deemed to be appropriate for display.

It appears that museum staff arranged a display to illustrate a massacre of aborigines at Bells Falls. A Mr Windschuttle believes that the massacre did not occur. Assuming both museum staff and Mr Windschuttle are of good reputation, provide the explanatory plaque with two sides. One to mirror museum staff views and one to show those of Mr Windschuttle. Always include the names of the historians who provided the opposing views.

A postscript

Errors and any lack of clarity in this submission are the responsibility of the author alone. Three referees were kind enough to read a draft and the submission is the better for this. One of them has been to the museum and she said that certain displays, at that time, were seriously biased and useless as history.

Sincerely,



Jim Shannon