



Submission to the Review of the National Museum of Australia's Exhibitions and Public Programs

This submission is made by the Australian Federation of Friends of Museums, a national body which represents one hundred museum support groups in all states. The combined membership of Federation members is over 198,000 people.

The Federation supported the establishment of a National Museum of Australia from the time a Friends group was originally formed to promote the idea of creating this important national institution. The Federation applauded the Federal Government's decision to commit funds to its construction, seeing this as an important step to aid the understanding of our national identity and to provide a place to reflect on the make up of our society and the achievements of its people.

We believe the Museum, through its displays and public programs, has complied with its role and functions as set out in its governing Act and Charter. It has set out to interpret this country's social history in ways that provide visitors with the means to understand the origins and development of our contemporary society. The success of the museum's displays is confirmed by the large number of visitors it has attracted and the high level of satisfaction expressed by the vast majority of visitors in surveys of attitudes.

Contemporary museums often challenge the visitor to reassess their understanding by presenting, sometimes controversial exhibits, along with more traditional displays. Museums too, have developed their role as places of discussion where current issues and the past can be examined rather than simply being venues for exhibitions. The Australian National Museum has taken its place alongside major international museums in assuming this role, one that is appreciated by visitors, not least those from other countries.

The Museum has been recognised for its interpretation of Australia's social history in international forums and in its work to reach out to all sections of the community. At the recent World Federation of Friends of Museums Congress in Argentina and at the previous Congress in Sydney, the Australian National Museum was cited as a model for its work in interpreting our social history and in engaging the community.

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We believe that through its permanent displays, *Tangled Destinies, Eternity, Nation, Horizons, and First Australians*, the Museum has met the recommendations of the 1975 Pigott Report which called for the themes of Land Nation and People to be articulated. It should be recognised that in articulating broad themes, Museums may find some individuals hold views or reach judgments that are contrary to those of the majority of visitors.

However, through its public programs and the efforts of its Friends organisation, valuable links have been made with the community and these will strengthen even further over time.

In examining the future, we would encourage the committee to appreciate the work done by the Museum, the achievements made to date and the valuable role it plays in interpreting Australian society.

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