

## **Submission to the Review of National Museum of Australia**

History, being a narrative of past events contains a significant subjective element – there is considerable room for interpretation of the historical “facts”. The interpretation needs to be viewed not only in the societal and cultural context of the time but from the view points of the various actors/groups involved in the events. It is not so much a matter of correct or incorrect interpretation but a range of interpretations that take into account those view points.

There has been a need for a national centre that looks at, displays, researches and interprets the history of Australia, “the Land, Nation and People”. It is appropriate that such a centre, the National Museum of Australia, be in the Nation's capital city - Canberra.

A review so early in an institution's life suggests some degree of concern or unhappiness with the operations of the institution. It is unreasonable, however, to expect that such a young institution operating in such a complex and political environment should have realised “the Government's vision” in the short time it has been open. While there may have been some teething problems our overwhelming impression has been of an effective and innovative institution that deserves continued recognition and strong support.

The NMA has clearly being undertaking the functions of the National Museum of Australia Act, the question is more how effectively. Our impression is that the NMA hit the ground running and has kept up that momentum with an array of innovative exhibits. The Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, which has a strong accent on the Canadian First Peoples, including a striking First Peoples Hall, provides a useful international benchmark and one against which we consider the NMA measures well.

We see a major strength of the NMA's public exhibits has been presenting interpretations of a range of events from the view point of groups involved in the events as well as establishing the societal and cultural context. This range of interpretation has provided information that improves our understanding of our existing society.

A national perspective is also important aspect, as it will reflect the considerable variation in State/Colony policies, actions and attitudes. An aspect of Australian society that continues to some degree!

We believe it important that Australians continue to develop a tolerant and understanding attitude and acceptance of a diversity of views. Members of our society must appreciate the different impact of events on different groups and to understand the width of views and interpretations that can be placed on those events. We consider the NMA is and should continue as an important contributor to that process.