

30 January 2012

Senator the Honorable Chris Evans
Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

We have noted recent changes to the 2013 funding rules for Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Projects and ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Awards (DECRAAs), whereby "Museums and herbaria which are Australian publicly funded organisations not directly funded to carry out research, but with research-related purposes and objectives" have been removed from the list of "Eligible Organisations" (Appendix A).

A major consequence of this change is that our museum researchers, many of whom are internationally-recognised experts, will no longer be able to apply as Chief Investigators for funding under these granting schemes, and no longer able to lead ARC research projects. We will be forced to apply as partner investigators, under the direction of university-based academics. In addition, museum-based early-career researchers will be prevented from continuing their research in museums through restrictions in the DECRA scheme. The impacts of these changes to ARC eligibility rules are profoundly detrimental.

These changes appear to have been made arbitrarily, and were certainly made without any consultation with museums and herbaria. The rationale for this change that we were given by the ARC Office in Canberra was "to encourage Universities and other organisations such as Museums and Herbaria to build stronger research collaborations by submitting applications in partnerships with Eligible Organisations and fostering a supportive and high quality research environment for research and research training purpose". We do not agree that the removal of museums and herbaria from the list of eligible organisations will achieve this desired outcome.

All Australian museums and herbaria already undertake research in collaboration with Australian and overseas universities; apply for joint funding for collaborative projects through a variety of competitive grant schemes; many of our research staff hold adjunct appointments at universities; teach and co-supervise tertiary students.

We are highly sought after as partners in research projects, and our collections and associated expertise are regarded as vital resources for research in many different areas.

Australian museums and herbaria make significant and unique contributions to several of the Government's four National Research Priorities (NRPs) and their associated Priority Goals. Our science researchers directly contribute to national priority areas such as:

- An Environmentally Sustainable Australia: *Sustainable use of Australia's biodiversity and Responding to climate change and variability*; and,
- Safeguarding Australia: *Understanding our region and the world and Protecting Australia from invasive diseases and pests*.

Our researchers in cultural, Indigenous and contemporary museums studies undertake work that contributes to other national priority areas, in particular:

- Safeguarding Australia: *Understanding our region and the world*; and,
- Frontier Technologies for Building and Transforming Australian Industries: *Smart information use*.

Australian museums and herbaria undertake cutting-edge, internationally competitive independent research across a broad range of areas in the sciences and the humanities. Much of this research is based on our unique collection assets, and is significantly different from university-based research (such as our pre-eminent role in the collaborative research with Indigenous people in Australia), or covers research topics that are insufficiently represented at Australia's other research institutions (such as systematics, taxonomy, phylogenetics and biogeography).

The negative impact of these new changes to the ARC funding rules is profound for Australia's museum and universities. The changes will undermine our strategic research goals and redefine our research roles. They will diminish the national recognition of Australian museums as essential scientific research institutions, and diminish the overall capacity of research in Australia.

The changes will also significantly reduce the capacity of Australian museums to recruit new, high-potential scientists, especially early career and international researchers. Researchers may now be reluctant to accept positions at Australian museums. The changes will diminish the research competitiveness of Australian museums and the Australian research community.

We are seeking to redress these new changes to the ARC eligibility rules, and have museums and herbaria restored to the list of 'Eligible Organisations', which will allow us to continue to apply for ARC Discovery or DECRA grants as Chief Investigators. As Australian museums and herbaria, we wish to continue to play a key role in initiating and collaborating on research projects, and conducting independent cutting-edge research across a wide range of disciplines.

As Chair of the Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD), I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this matter further with you as soon as convenient.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely



Dr J Patrick Greene
Chair, Council of Australasian Museum Directors
Chief Executive Officer, Museum Victoria