

## **CONFIDENTIAL**

### **Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD)**

#### **'Brainstorm' Meeting with representatives of the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA)**

1 July 2009

Australian National Maritime Museum

#### ***Participants:***

Ms Margaret Anderson	Director, History Trust of SA (Chair, CAMD)
Ms Sally Bassar	First Assistant Secretary, Culture Division, DEWHA
Ms Kate Clark	Director, Historic Houses Trust of NSW
Dr Dawn Casey	Director, Powerhouse Museum
Mr Frank Howarth	Director, Australian Museum (CAMD Exec)
Mr Kim Allen	Asst Secretary, Collections Branch, Culture Division, DEWHA
Ms Mary-Louise Williams	Director, Australian National Maritime Museum (CAMD Exec)

#### ***In attendance***

Dr Meredith Foley	Executive Officer, CAMD
-------------------	-------------------------

#### **1. Welcome and CAMD Outline**

Mary-Louise Williams welcoming participants and explained that the meeting had grown from informal discussions held in Canberra 17 June.

#### **CAMD**

Margaret Anderson outlined the scope and activities of the Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD) which represented the 21 major national, state and regional museums in Australia (17) and New Zealand (4). While these museums hold a wide range of collections (including social history, natural history, Indigenous artefacts, industry and design collections and built heritage) and were supported by different funding bodies, they had collective interests in that they maintained large collections, staged exhibitions, ran education programs and fostered research.

Margaret noted that together these museums attracted over 12.5m visits through the door in 2007-08 and were an important site for education with over 1.4m students visiting through booked tours per annum. Museums are regularly acknowledged as one of the most popular and trusted sources of public knowledge on issues of national and global concern such as climate change, bio-diversity, biosecurity, Indigenous culture, national identity, nation building, social inclusion and social cohesion.

CAMD museums reach into most electorates as many members manage regional programs (eg in Queensland, NSW, WA, SA and Victoria). They also work closely and collaboratively with a wide range of Indigenous and multicultural communities and manage cultural restitution programs (including the repatriation of objects and cultural revitalization).

CAMD's museums hold over 50 million separate items in their collections which are dispersed across states and regions. This dispersion was formerly referred to as the distributed national collection but perhaps more appropriately should be thought of as a 'distributed national asset'. The collections represent the cultural and scientific memory of the nation and provide

an essential base for research. Due to the relatively recent establishment of national collections, the state based museums, continue to hold the larger collections. For example, over 90% of collections of Indigenous artefacts are held in state or territory museums.

Margaret explained that the collections provide the basis for research in the humanities and natural sciences. As most museums are within arts portfolios, they are required to seek funding for research projects and infrastructure development from science programs. Most recently, CAMD's natural science museums have been successful in gaining funding from NCRIS and the Super Science initiative for the online *Atlas of Living Australia* which allows access to all data on biodiversity held electronically.

The demand for online access to collections has increased greatly in recent years; in 2007-08 there were over 60 million visits to CAMD museum websites. Dawn Casey pointed out the popularity of the Powerhouse's photographic collections which have been made available via Flickr.

Frank Howarth noted that the web was catalysing a fundamental shift in the way museums interacted with their audience. The move was away from holding collections which the museums alone interpret to managing, using Web 2 tools, public debate about the objects held. Frank noted that there were several websites which have emerged from the ARC Linkage project 'Engaging with Social Media in Museums' and from museums themselves which cover the new social media and its implications for museums. With the roll out of the broadband network and the development of national curriculum content it was critical that Governments make use of museums to provide quality, Australian based information and stories from trusted, authoritative sources.

## **2. Museums Supporting Government Priorities**

CAMD members noted that museums were well poised to support Government initiatives and priorities and that the fit between museums and government policy was the closest it had been for a long time. Sally Baser agreed but pointed out that there was a greater need for museums to convince Government of these linkages. She encouraged CAMD to develop the stories which demonstrated museum relevance to current issues.

The following examples were discussed:

### **Social Cohesion and diaspora communities**

Frank Howarth described recent Australian Museum work with diaspora communities from the Pacific Islands. One recent museum activity involved islander students from Granville High School who visited and worked with the Pacific Islander sacred collections. A teacher from the school later wrote to the museum to emphasise how this type of activity provided greater social cohesion for the community.

Margaret Anderson noted that the Migration Museum in South Australia had regularly attracted a diverse audience and ran many programs designed to contribute to social inclusion. One recent program brought young mothers together from disadvantaged areas for tours and a discussion of racism which provoked some changes of opinion.

Meredith Foley noted that Museum Victoria had recently worked with the Fijian community to help develop a cultural exhibition for the Immigration Museum. Early work on this project revealed community divisions but in the successful aftermath of the project a member of the project described it as a form of 'community therapy' which had created greater understanding between different Fijian groups.

Dawn Casey commented that museums were still working to build this type of trust with Indigenous communities.

### **Enriching Formal Education**

Dawn Casey noted that museums were playing an important practical role in relation to education. Evidence has shown that lower numbers of students were engaging in maths and science and that few want to learn Australian history. Teachers are finding however that onsite visits to museums and the use of the tangible objects within them enhanced the learning process. Large corporations such as Alcatel and BHP have turned, in recent years, to the museum sector to produce programs to encourage students to become engaged in science.

As the broadband network is rolled out and the education revolution instituted, the Government will need more and more authoritative and engaging material for students. Meredith Foley noted that the recent pilot undertaken between The Le@rning Federation (TLF) and CAMD in providing online objects and programs for teachers and students was well received by teachers who commented on the need for this type of authoritative information and their preference for its provision by museums, which in many cases have their own education staff.

### **Protection of Heritage**

Dawn Casey described recent work with women from the Port Kembla Macedonian community who made and had kept heirloom woven aprons. The work was intricate and beautiful but had not been highly prized before. It was included as part of the exhibition during Sydney design week and, as a result, the loss of these collection pieces to overseas markets had been curtailed.

Frank Howarth noted that he had been a participant in the 2020 summit where museums were placed in the creativity strand of discussions. He suggested that the Government's view of creativity should extend well beyond the performing arts, visual art, writing and acting.

## **3. Models for Museum Integration**

Mary-Louise Williams suggested that the dominance of the performing and visual arts had been assisted by the development of the Australia Council which provided a model of what can be done with a body which supports and integrates the arts with Government. Its achievements over the past 30 years showed the possibilities for national collaboration and creative development through a well-resourced, independent body with peer-reviewed project funding. Margaret Anderson pointed out that the Collections Council of Australia was poorly funded and only partially met the concept for a Museums Commission mooted at the time the Australia Council was formed.

Another barrier for museums was the fact that most of the art museums were free while many of the museums were still required to charge for entry. Dawn Casey suggested that the lifting of fees would be an enormously positive gesture on the part of Government which could be done in participation with the states and open up the nation's collections to everyone.

Margaret Anderson pointed out that museums tend to straddle portfolios without belonging obviously to any particular policy area. The work undertaken by museums intersects with arts, design, education, heritage, science, research, innovation, community and tourism portfolios. Most recently the museums have worked closely with NCRIS, under the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) which has funded the *Atlas of Living Australia* and has encouraged, although not yet funded, infrastructure resources for the humanities.

Margaret emphasised that there was a lack of a national policy voice for museums outside the national collections; the federal government focussed on national museums but had not developed a national policy for museums. There was a clear need for museums to integrate further with Government policy. CAMD is keen to ensure that the contribution of museums is fully acknowledged within the national cultural policy. CAMD is aware that the Creative Advisory Group is currently providing input on this policy and raised museum involvement with the Minister. He indicated concern that this would lead to an overlarge committee but did invite CAMD to make input directly to him and the Department. Sally indicated that the development of this policy was currently underway so input should be provided as soon as possible.

Frank Howarth pointed out that CAMD's natural science museums have no national equivalent. The natural science wing of CAMD had recently resolved to form a virtual Natural Science Museums of Australia in order to provide a focus for national and international enquiries on biodiversity collections, science and research.

Sally Bassier suggested that there was a need for museums to build the case about what could be developed/leveraged with modest, further investment.

Dawn Casey suggested that the development of a National Indigenous Collection dispersed across Australia could be an important project.

Frank Howarth suggested that one area which museums would like to engage with DEWHA on was the development of legislation to prevent seizure of objects brought in from overseas for exhibition. He outlined recent discussions with Gerard Vaughan from the Council of Australasian Art Museum Directors (CAAMD). Kim Allen noted that there was protection in place to protect Indigenous material returning to Australia from being seized but that foreign objects may still be vulnerable. He noted that the UK legislation is immunity from seizure but not from suit. Frank agreed that there were a range of international models to choose from in this field. It was agreed that Frank and Kim would continue to liaise on this issue.

Kate Clark raised the issue of heritage issues and museums. It was noted that while moveable heritage sat under the Cultural Division of DEWHA, built heritage was in a separate Division. As a result, museums like the Historic Houses Trust were often forgotten in heritage discussions.

This was most obvious in the recent jobs funding for heritage where the HHT NSW found that it had few opportunities to apply.

### Alternative Models

The meeting discussed alternative options for museum integration with Government policy and federal level support and coordination:

- i) Change the **Australia Council** brief to cover cultural heritage? Frank Howarth noted that the Australia Council worked on three levels; it integrated art into national policy; it assisted in communication across domains and it had a downward role in relation to building skills etc amongst individual artists. Sally Basser noted however that museums were not within the remit of the Australia Council and they would have little to gain from being covered by this body.

CAMD members agreed that what they sought was a role for museums in national policy development plus a way to communicate and collaborate across the sector. Sally suggested that this might be achieved through a form of federated collections. The need for DEWHA to open up communications with other departments, for example, DIISR, was also discussed.

- ii) In searching for a form for Government communication with the museum sector, the **national heads of collecting institutions** (HOCI) meeting was discussed. Sally suggested that representatives of state/territory meetings could join this meeting when required or could send representatives expert in different areas such as design or innovation. The natural science museums could send a representative as they had no national equivalent.

In discussing this option CAMD members suggested that a widening of this body would detract from its valid and necessary focus which was the coordinated activity of federally funded national collecting institutions. It was also thought that this model would not adequately represent the federated collections and was unlikely to attract sector support.

- iii) A separate collections sector **roundtable** with representatives of peak organisations from the collection sector was discussed. It was suggested that such a body could meet twice a year to discuss the contribution of museums, galleries and archives to the implementation of Government policy. It could also consider commissioning projects across sectors. The Roundtable would not be about service delivery but could advocate for access to service funding. The roundtable could look at such things as populating the broadband; seeking support to unlock collections to researchers and the public; disaster management; national research initiatives.

It was envisaged that museums, art galleries and archives would be interested in such a collections roundtable. It was thought however that the libraries, with the exception of those with heritage collections, might be less interested as their growing emphasis was on supplying and maintaining information banks. Sally Basser suggested that the National Library would want to participate. Margaret Anderson volunteered to speak to the other domains and Museums Australia to gauge their level of interest. Mary-Louise suggested that a patron could be sought eg Therese Rein who has shown a great interest in cultural institutions.

Sally summarised the roundtable purpose as contributing to policy development and encouraging collaboration but not providing services. It would provide a national forum and consultative group for Government. It would foster communication and innovation, encourage skill sharing and help make connections across departmental boundaries. A chair could either be independent of the sector or voted for by the Roundtable. Frank argued that they should be independent in order to avoid the predominance of any one interest on the roundtable.

Membership suggestions included CAMD, CAAMD, Archives, the national Chair of Museums Australia, a representative from Indigenous Cultural Centres. It was considered that the National Trust or local historical groups with collections would generally already be linked in via Museums Australia or state based museum organisations such as Museums and Galleries NSW.

The Roundtable would not constitute a new peak body but would be a consultative group on behalf of collections.

In closing the meeting, Sally and Kim invited CAMD to provide further information to DEWHA regarding:

- Its view of a possible **Collections Sector Roundtable**;
- evidence concerning the assertion that the public saw museums as trusted, public authorities; and
- case stories demonstrating the strategic benefits of integrating museums further with Government policy

Sally and Kim were thanked for making the time to join CAMD for the discussion and they in turn thanked CAMD members for their input.

*[Sally and Kim were provided with a copy of the brief and attachments given to the Minister in June plus CAMD fact sheet].*