

Mr Alec Coles  
Delivered by email  
3 June 2016

Dear Alec,

### **Cultures and Communities Capability – NCRIS**

Thank you for providing the opportunity for the [Council of Australasian Museum Directors \(CAMD\)](http://www.camd.org.au) to provide initial comment on research infrastructure needs in relation to the development of a 'Cultures and Communities' capability as part of the NCRIS Roadmap process.

#### **2011-12 Roadmap process**

As you will be aware, CAMD was strongly supportive of the similar community and cultures capability advanced during the 2011-12 roadmap process and the concomitant recognition of cultural collections in Australia as a highly significant form of research infrastructure in their own right. CAMD also agreed with the designation of online discoverability of these collections as a key action associated with the community and cultures capability.

At the time CAMD emphasised the following:

- the importance of utilising the vast research resource available in Australian public collections in which the Government, at both Federal and State levels, has made significant, long-term investment;
- the importance of museum collections as significant research infrastructure which in turn provides the basis for ongoing, unique research by museum research staff and other academic researchers;
- that the history, heritage, cultural and humanities collections held in museums and other collections hold information which informs and fosters research in the humanities, arts and social sciences;
- the collections are particularly vital in relation to Indigenous cultural studies and for historical and social science studies which focus on national identity, adaptability and change;
- the humanities, arts and social sciences can provide critical input not only to immediately recognisable social and cultural issues but across the sciences to encourage new thinking about the conceptualisation of problems and the implementation of workable solutions. They also contribute to the development of solutions for contemporary challenges in areas such health, education, sustainability and tolerance;

- the analysis of material culture/moveable objects can reveal much additional context about history and diverse cultural groups that may otherwise not be detected through the more traditional approaches to inquiry (eg in history correspondence, oral histories and archives). Museums have a lead role to play here and have the capacity to generate novel research solutions to gaps in our knowledge base eg the [Indigenous hair sample collection in the South Australian Museum](#) which was collected in the 1930s and 1950s and which it is hoped will, with the consent of Indigenous family members, help map Australia's ancient genetic history;
- that the lack of consistent cultural mapping for Indigenous Australia, including both urban and rural areas, means that the remains of the oldest continuous culture in the world are at risk, as is our potential to learn from 30,000 years of land management and climate change.

### Recent developments

Since the last road map process, a number of events and initiatives have served to further highlight the need for research infrastructure which would enhance the online access and discoverability of Australia's history, humanities and arts collections:

- enhancing online access to natural science collections through the **Atlas of Living Australia (ALA)** (which grew out of work undertaken initially by CAMD members with the Australian Museum) has demonstrated its full worth having passed the billionth download mark. It should be noted that the success of the Atlas has been grounded in its access to secure national funding;
- The potential for this type of investment in humanities research infrastructure was seen in the pilot [Museum Metadata Exchange](#) (MME) which was initiated by CAMD member museums in association with [Museums Australia](#) (MA). The MME, which was funded by the Australian National Data Service (ANDS), involved a partnership between 15 major collecting institutions and four universities and has made data on close to 1,000 collections accessible to research academics through [Research Data Australia](#). Its inception also contributed to a shift in culture in the way museums conceptualise their collections. The positive response of research academics from a variety of disciplines to the MME pilot projects attests to the potential for digitisation projects which unleash the knowledge held in Australia's collections.
- **TROVE**, which provides a single access point for over 471 million online resources from libraries, museums, galleries and archives across Australia, has been [hailed by humanities researchers](#) for its nation-building contribution to research infrastructure development. The fact that it now has more than 20m unique users each year demonstrates the enormous appetite for cultural content. Its development has been funded to date by the National Library of Australia. Recent cuts to the NLA budget has led the library to seek to charge small to medium organisations (which can least afford it) to upload their collections to TROVE;

- Australia's national and state/territory museums have greatly advanced access to sections of their collections utilising digital innovations, different portals and in partnership with bodies like [the Google Cultural Institute](#);
- in 2015 the *National Arts and Culture Accord: Digital Technology survey*, which was commissioned by the [Meeting of Cultural Ministers](#), reported on the need for national, cross-domain collaboration in the collection sector in order to implement national digital strategies and standardise technical and skills areas in relation to online access;
- in 2016, peak organisations from the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (**GLAM peak**), including CAMD, have been successful in gaining Catalyst funding for the first year of a three year project to assist with enhancing digital access to collections. The GLAM digitisation project, which includes a representative from the Academy of Humanities, will:
  - prepare a draft national framework for digital access to collections;
  - endorse principles and common standards to assist small to medium institutions to prioritise digitisation and adopt best practice approaches to digital access; and
  - produce an accompanying case study-based prototype toolkit to support capacity building in the collecting sector.

The GLAMpeak digital access project has seen an unparalleled level of collaboration across the collections sector. It will bring coherence to collaborations in this area, streamline further partnerships with other sectors and also build capacity amongst a range of small to medium collections across Australia.

### **Infrastructure Needs**

CAMD would support, as it did in 2011-12, the development of a collaborative platform which would parallel the ALA and, which would serve the purpose of an **Atlas of Cultural Australia**. The platform might build on existing models, such as TROVE, or utilise a new model. The second part of the GLAMpeak project, which is yet to be awarded funding, is to explore the models available and make recommendations to the sector and users.

Regardless of this process, CAMD believes that the platform needs to be:

- free to users, as is the case with the ALA;
- be linked to the ALA;
- providing seamless online access;
- able to refine results with filters such as date, theme, collection and location;
- accessible for the development of different apps utilising data and metadata;
- able to provide spaces for collaboration, resources and tools;
- be accessible from researchers' desktops and able to link individuals and groups of researchers with virtual research communities nationally and internationally; and

- able to deal with born-digital material.

CAMD also believes that funding for research infrastructure of this type should cover all aspects of research including capital costs, skilled technical support staff, operations, maintenance, training and skills development and effective governance of facilities.

The project would be further enhanced by consideration of capital input to purchase large scale equipment for high volume digitisation and for 3d imaging which can be accessed by a range of collections large and small.

Humanities research is informed by the significant and disparate collections currently held within museums and other cultural collections in Australia. This proposal will enable more effective access to and use of Australia's distributed national collection and allow it to be researched as one entity; an opportunity which may well produce valuable research outcomes not yet even envisaged.

Regards



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