



Museums Australia is the national association for museums and galleries in Australia.
ICOM-Australia (National Committee of the International Council of Museums, Paris) is a key partner.

Review of the Collections Australia Network (CAN): Museums Australia submission (April 2009)

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Introduction

A. Museums Australia's engagement with the CAN Review

Museums Australia (MA) welcomes the *Review of the effectiveness of CAN* (the Review) and appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the review process.

This Review directly intersects with central issues in Museums Australia's organisational vision and guiding objectives:

for natural and cultural heritage to be valued, sustained and communicated as it represents the shared histories, heritage and identities of all Australians.

Museums Australia is the national organisation for the museums sector. Members encompass individuals (including volunteers), national and state institutions, as well as local and community-run museums across remote, rural and regional Australia.

(See **Attachment 1** for an overview of Museums Australia's dispersed national footprint.)

The international (International Council of Museums/**ICOM**) definition of *museums* includes galleries, historic sites, keeping places, botanic gardens and zoos – that is, public sector institutions, large and small, dedicated to the conservation, collecting and interpretation of cultural heritage in its broadest aspects.

The museums sector includes places and their collections, and encompasses the conservation, continuation and communication of Australia's historic, natural and Indigenous heritage: both tangible and intangible.

While Museums Australia recognises that the current structure of CAN includes the so-called four collecting domains – museums, galleries, libraries, archives – MA is making this submission **on behalf of the museums sector**, which (by internationally accepted distinctions, as noted above) includes **galleries**, but not **libraries** or **archives**.

The focus of this submission is therefore on the **vantage-point of the museums sector**, rather than on the larger conglomerate of collection 'domains' currently serviced by CAN. However some comparative remarks about some critical differences between the four collections sector domains are made within the body of this submission (in **Parts One** and **Two**). Such discussion does not seek to override any advocacy of other domains' interests (which the nationally representative associations for Australian libraries (Australian Library and Information Association/**ALIA**) and archives (Australian Society of Archivists/**ASA**) are themselves best fitted to present). The Collections Council of Australia/ **CCA** will meanwhile have further arguments to make, according to its mission to represent common interests across all four domains.

MA's comments in respect of '**domain differences**' arise through its deep connection to the **museums and galleries** domains, and merely seek to draw some distinctions about the critically different ways in which the four domains are constituted and operate.

B. Key issues framing MA's response to the CAN Review

The CAN Review broadly asks respondents to consider questions concerning three key issues (summarised from the ToR and the questions outlined to guide submissions):

- The current efficiency and effectiveness of CAN
- The importance of online developments for the museums sector
- Suggested changes to CAN structure, programs and funding arrangements to provide improved services and support to the museums sector in the ever-expanding digital environment

MA's submission addresses these three questions, but within the broader conceptual and governance framework within which cultural activities are created, nurtured, conserved and renewed.

MA believes that in order to harvest best value through this Review, attention needs to be given to the **context** within which cultural agencies and institutions (including CAN) are constituted and within which they operate.

This requires consideration of both:

- The overarching **conceptual framework** within which culture arises, is communicated and embraced by society, and then conserved and historically contextualised – in turn stimulating and encouraging further creativity.
(MA models this generic process in a diagram, *The Integrated Cycle of Environment, Culture and Heritage* – provided as **Attachment 2** in the Appendix)
- The **broader legislative, governance and policy context** within which the CAN facility currently operates.

Museums Australia believes these considerations are pivotal to achieving nationally effective solutions to any of the inefficiencies currently constraining the effectiveness of CAN operations.

The main body of this submission (after this **Introduction**) is structured in three parts:

Part One: Current Policy and Program Context of the CAN Review

Part Two: The Distinctiveness of the Museums Sector

Part Three: Responses to Can Review Questions

C. Summary of Museums Australia's Submission

MA strongly supports the concept of a 'CAN:' as both a public search portal and a vital networking hub for professional interchange of specialised, high-quality cultural information. MA also pays tribute to the dedicated work by successive CAN staff over recent years to shape and improve the operational effectiveness of CAN.

However MA argues in this submission that CAN, as currently constituted, has suffered from its attempt to fulfil a diverse and daunting brief with very limited resources. This has made it virtually impossible for CAN itself to maintain a dynamic evolution in step with the evolving technological and visual design interface of the encompassing Web-shaped environment in which cultural information is networked and interchanged.

Meanwhile CAN has been dedicated to providing two essential services – public access and professional support – without there being an adequate recognition that these are interconnected but **different functions**, shaped towards **different outcomes** from the point of view of **critical users** (the general public on the one hand, and professionally shaped networks of expertise and specialised resources on the other).

Without these two functions being adequately differentiated and resourced, CAN has inevitably been placed in a position where it must fall between stools. It inevitably falls short in its potential service to the museums sector (the **museums and galleries** collecting *domains*) while also being unable to add real value to the other two 'collections sector' domains it encompasses – the domains of **libraries** and **archives**.

Furthermore MA argues that while CAN does represent a positive government response to the **increasing convergence of cultural information available digitally**, CAN's structural design and operations across the four 'collecting domains' **mask some fundamental divergences** between these same domains.

This is because CAN, as presently configured, cannot take full account of the profound differences between the distinct and differently specialised collecting institutions currently grouped together as though they formed **one cohesive 'collections sector'**.

The broad spectrum of what has been condensed as 'the collections sector' is in fact distinguished as much by differences in institutional types, basic intent and core functions as it is linked through the common feature of holding collections.

Such under-recognised and often important differences affecting the brief, structural design and operational disposition of the institutions resourcing CAN as a facility have regrettably constrained its effectiveness as both a **public information portal** and a **professional support hub** from the vantage-point of the museums sector.

Furthermore these conditions, MA argues, inevitably continue to **disadvantage the museums sector** (notably the great number of smaller, community-based and regionally dispersed museums that make up the museums sector) – with its distinct set of characteristics, needs and interests unable to be accommodated in present CAN arrangements.

D. MA Recommendations concerning CAN

Museums Australia has outlined a number of considerations and measures for improvement throughout this submission. Some of these touch upon governmental provisions and the broader cultural context within which **CAN**'s operations are situated. MA recognises the latter are outside the ToR of the CAN Review, and therefore we have not included them as CAN Review recommendations specifically. However MA strongly believes their consideration is important to achieving the best outcomes from the CAN Review itself.

Concerning CAN specifically, MA's Recommendations are follows:

Recommendation 1

That **CAN** (or an evolved-**CAN** facility) is vitally important for the museums sector: encompassing the two collection-related domains of **museums** and **galleries** – that is, half of the four distinct domains constituting the Australian 'collections sector', as defined and encompassed by the remit of the Collections Council of Australia.

Recommendation 2

That **CAN** be recognised as constituted around two distinct and different functions (operational trajectories that have web-architectural implications):

- (i) **public PORTALS provision**
conveying networked information digitally from many distinct collecting institutions towards a seamless interface of Internet-based public search and access
- (ii) **professional HUBS provision**
supporting **professional developmental and networking activities** across and between the specialised and diverse institutions that make up the collections sector itself.

Recommendation 3

That the **CAN** Review should note, and if possible consider, potential connections, overlap or even duplication between **CAN**'s brief and functions and the functions of other government-supported facilities such as the DEWHA-resourced **Culture Portal** – even though the Culture Portal has not been specifically mentioned in the **CAN Review ToR**.

Recommendation 4

That a suitably knowledgeable and representative **Reference Group** be constituted for the future development and improvement of **CAN** (or an evolved-**CAN** facility), and that this Reference Group should incorporate specific expertise from **the four domains** constituting the **collections sector** – recognising **the fundamental differences of intent** across and between the domains that make up the collections sector in Australia (as referred to in some detail in **Parts One** and **Two** of this Submission).

Recommendation 5

That the future development and improvement of **CAN** (or an evolved-**CAN** facility) should signpost – and take broad account of – the broader environment of governmental provisions, programs and policies in play (including the various Ministerial Councils and related bodies) that significantly shape policy, activities and resources across the cultural heritage sector at a national level.

Recommendation 6

Recognising the Commonwealth government's broad (whole-of-government) commitment to

- **social equity** (for Australia's regional and dispersed communities),
- an **education revolution** (investing in enriched learning futures for all young Australians), and
- '**Closing the Gap**' affirmative action (in respect of Indigenous communities' access to mainstream social and economic opportunity),

there should be greater coordination and resource support at Ministerial Councils and other S/T government levels to increase digital access – **for all Australians' to Australia's cultural heritage** – across the broad community footprint of the nation.

This is now of crucial importance given the 7 April 2009 announcement of the government's commitment to the provision of **fast broadband connection across the nation**.

Notes to this final Recommendation

- 6.1 To be effective, such coordination and support would need to take better account of the **disabling capacity-gaps** that exist presently at regional and community-museum levels of **the collections sector** nationally. (See esp. 3.1.1)
- 6.2 The conditions of cataloguing and access that affect **volunteer-run regional** and rurally based **historical and museum-related collections** form a direct comparison with the **professional training-levels** and required skills development that **guide delivery by Australian libraries and archives** at such local levels. (See esp. 3.1.1)
- 6.3 Effective recognition of differences in capacity-levels would seek to remediate some of the **long-standing differences that have constrained the museums sector** and its ability to support local communities. (See esp. 2.3, 2.4, & 3.2)
- 6.4 However remediation of the neglected conditions of many **community-based collections** – improved training, cataloguing, conservation and access of communities' cultural memory, stories and heritage through documenting and accessing the stories that surround local history and heritage – is well recognised as **providing a direct stimulus in the enhancement of local pride, identity, social amenity and socio-economic opportunity across the dispersed communities of Australia**. (See esp. 3.2)

Part One: Current Policy and Program Context of the CAN Review

Australian government policy objectives are not referenced in the CAN Review ToR.

However the CAN Review, like the many other reviews currently in progress, is being conducted within **a changing government policy environment**. Understanding of this dynamic governmental context is crucial to achieving a good outcome from the CAN Review itself.

Therefore MA suggests that it is appropriate to consider the following two Australian government policy objectives (quoted in the Jan.2009 *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Review Discussion Paper*):

- **Australian government policy objective 1:**
to protect and conserve Australia's most significant movable cultural heritage and to promote Australian arts and culture;
- **Australian government policy objectives 2:**
to work in partnership with the states and territories within an effective federal arrangement.

From MA's vantage-point, the timeliness and potential outcomes of the CAN Review have a three-fold importance:

- (i) in the Review's potential to improve the effectiveness of the current operations of CAN, and to provide better support and services: both to the museums/collections sector and to the general public simultaneously;
- (ii) in the possible improvements (from a broader, longer-term policy perspective) that Review recommendations could trigger concerning Commonwealth approaches to supporting and servicing the professional needs of the museums sector – enabling the sector in turn to be able better to meet the needs and interests of the broader information-seeking public;
- (iii) in the Review's potential to open out an analysis of ways in which this particular Commonwealth program (CAN) relates to and could significantly improve wider measures for the identification, conservation and protection of Australia's cultural heritage, from a whole-of-government perspective.

An attached diagram provides a simple modelling of the **cyclic processes of cultural production**.

(See **Attachment 2** – diagram of the ***Integrated Cycle of Environment, Culture and Heritage*** - an MA modelling of cultural process.)

This MA diagram is not meant to be either artful or abstract. Rather, it simply seeks to illustrate that **all parts** of the '**cycle of cultural production**' are **active at all times**, and **in all human societies**. Moreover, that this **is a cycle** – not a series of discrete or separate activities.

The MA diagram (which is integrative) seeks to show that **all** aspects of the **broader legislative, governance and policy context** supporting cultural heritage generally may be situated somewhere within this interconnected and continuously operational cycle. Finally, in an ideal world, there would be **alignment in governmental arrangements** that would **best stimulate and maximise the spontaneous energies of all communities in the creation and care of their culture and heritage.**

1.1 Summary outline of cultural administration at the national level

Having stressed the timeliness and larger potential of the CAN Review, it is important to note again that it is being conducted within a **fluid and changing environment of wider policy and program initiatives** currently in process or under review by the Commonwealth.

This fluid policy environment is shaping and affecting the resourcing and capacities of collecting institutions generally. However, it impacts adversely on the museums sector in a number of specific ways, as outlined below.

Regrettably, there is **no national policy framework** for the protection, conservation and communication of Australia's cultural heritage. This is despite, or perhaps because of, Australia's increasingly integrated **federal** system of government.

1.1.1 Australia's federal system and its impact on cultural policy

Australia's federated government structure is a complex and evolving system of governance arrangements covering all aspects of governmental responsibilities.

The Australian constitution is a relatively fixed instrument (able to be amended only by referendum) imposing limitations on the power of the national government in certain areas, and bestowing responsibilities for other aligned areas across the set of S/T and local government jurisdictions.

Responsibility for culture, heritage, the arts, the environment – and especially for museums and 'collections' – **is embedded awkwardly within this jurisdictional maze.**

However since the formal establishment of the **Council for Australian Governments** (COAG) in 1995, an increasing number of inter-governmental Councils has been established (now some 50 in number) – each supported by constituted bodies of officials drawn from the respective governments (including in some cases, New Zealand).

The key **COAG Councils** responsible for 'cultural heritage' are the **Cultural Ministers Council** (CMC), and the **Environment Protection and Heritage Council** (EPHC).

1.1.2 Responsibilities of Commonwealth Minister

The current federal minister responsible for the museums sector, and indeed for the collections sector, The Hon. Peter Garrett, has the broadest and most inclusive set of 'cultural' responsibilities of any minister for the past several decades. The scope of the minister's responsibilities are in fact strikingly convergent, since he is Minister for the Arts, Heritage and the Environment.

A sketch-outline of these Commonwealth responsibilities includes:

Arts –

- the national museum, gallery, library and archival institutions
- the Australia Council and its associated support and resourcing programs for the literary, performing and visual arts (including programs supportive of community and regional arts development, of touring exhibition development and associated government indemnity provision, and the performing and visual arts academies)
- *Visions of Australia* – Commonwealth grant program for touring exhibitions
- *Playing Australia* – Commonwealth grant program for touring performing arts
- numerous programs supportive of Indigenous arts
- Regional performing and touring arts programs, including Regional Arts
- a range of digital access measures, including the Culture Portal
- *Protection of Moveable Culture Heritage Act (PMCH Act) 1986*
- *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*

Heritage –

- the National and Commonwealth Heritage System, protecting places with Indigenous, historic and/or natural values and associated collections (including Australian places inscribed on the World Heritage List) through the *Environment, Protection Bio-Diversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC)*, with the Australian Heritage Council providing advice to the Minister regarding the assessment of heritage values.

Environment –

- protection and conservation of the natural environment (*EPBC Act, 1999*)
- the generously funded *Caring for Country* and numerous other community-focussed conservation programs
- the Commonwealth Grants to Volunteer Environment and Heritage Organisations (GVEHO) – a funding program primarily directed at environmental organisations, but with some funding also allocated to heritage organisations (the quantum is unclear).

It should be noted that although the Minister’s portfolio includes numerous community-focused training and support programs for the arts and the environment, there are **none specifically directed at community care for heritage places**; and **no program**, except the very small Community Heritage Grant Program, is **aimed at capacitating the community museums sector** – meanwhile this program is itself under review.

1.1.3 Ministerial Councils

Cultural Ministers Council (CMC) initiatives and programs include:

- Collections Council of Australia (CCA)
- CAN
- The Culture Statistics Working Group (in partnership with the Australian Bureau of Statistics)
- Several educational initiatives including:
 - Support for the Learning Federation to develop sets of ‘learning objects’ (digital storytelling) for Australian schools
 - Two national educational statements – *Education for a Sustainable Environment* (which failed to mention ‘heritage’), and the *Education and the Arts Statement* – both of these issued with the Ministerial Council for Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA)
- Commitment to the development of a *National Disability and the Arts Strategy*.

Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC) initiatives and programs include:

- (regrettably) no community heritage programs: there are now few (if any) S/T ministers with 'heritage' in their ministerial title, since the allocation of portfolios now favours 'sustainability' and the environment – although **heritage remains a legislative responsibility in each jurisdiction.**

1.1.4 Heritage legislation and consequences for management of collections

A consequence of progressive changes to heritage legislation is that while there is increasing protection provided for **collections associated with heritage places** across all jurisdictions (including the Commonwealth), there does not yet appear to be a commitment to developing appropriate **national frameworks** for the **assessment of significance or conservation and protection** of these 'protected' collections.

As noted above (under 1.1), there is no national policy encompassing 'culture' or 'cultural heritage', 'heritage' or even national 'arts' and 'creativity' to provide a cohesive framing of governmental policy and program development for the benefit of all Australians.

Instead, a series of disparately located institutions and arrangements has developed over many years, covering the performing and visual arts (the **Australia Council**), the collecting domains (**CCA**), the national heritage system (the **Australian Heritage Council**) and so on.

The present Commonwealth Minister, having been given responsibility for an integrated environmental portfolio, has recently disbanded the sole integrating advisory forum, the **National Cultural Heritage Forum (NCHF)** – inherited from his predecessors – and has constituted a set of new, separate, **advisory groups** to supplement his formal **legislative advisory Councils**. These include the following:

- Creative Australia Advisory Group
- Heritage Working Group
- Tourism Task Force

In other words, at the very moment when the new Minister had the opportunity to integrate all aspects of his newly integrated portfolio responsibilities into an inclusive national policy framework, the Commonwealth seems to have chosen to move in the opposite direction. As a consequence, administrative arrangements now regrettably appear to detach **collections from place**, and separate 'heritage' from the 'environment' – both administratively and functionally.

How this situation impacts adversely on the museums sector may be highlighted by the fact that many **community museums** are located in **heritage buildings**. Meanwhile many of their **collections** inform significantly about **place**; and equally, the **heritage value** of many **places** is **integral to the significance of associated collections**.

1.1.5 Need for integration of environment and cultural policy

The separation and fragmentation of governmental arrangements described above particularly thwarts the **fundamentally integrated view of the environment, people and culture among Indigenous Australian communities**.

Furthermore the situation sadly constrains or contradicts significant legislative and other environmental programs that are more 'holistic' in their concepts and structure. The situation awkwardly runs counter to underpinning concepts in the national environmental legislation (the **EPBC Act**, of 1999), which protects **places** of natural, historic and Indigenous values and **their associated collections**.

In MA's view, the tensions arising through such counter-crossing legislative frameworks produce outcomes that are harmful to the best interests and capacities of Australian communities in achieving recognition, pride and appropriate measures of care for culture and heritage nationally (in which communities themselves have a vital role to play).

If communities were better-encouraged to care for their own cultural heritage 'upstream' of conservation measures that governments might put in place proactively, there would be considerable savings in resource-allocation 'downstream', in the remedial measures that might need to be supplied from the public purse at a later date.

Meanwhile the **relationship of digitised protection of collections** and public access through networked facilities – such as CAN – directly to the important **social-equity issues of community pride and participation in Australia's heritage nationally** are addressed clearly in various parts of this submission – see especially (2.3), (2.4), and (3.2).)

Australia's world-leading practices are under-recognised and under-utilised

The long-standing fragmentary situation legislatively affecting care and management of Australia's heritage, sketched above, sadly undermines the genuinely progressive and benchmarking achievements (by world standards) that have underpinned many of Australia's framing principles for cultural and environmental protection and care, as evolved through the cumulative work of many governmental and NGO bodies in recent decades.

Australia led the world in its approach to the conservation and protection of the environment from the mid-1970s onwards. The establishment of the **Register of the National Estate (RNE)**, compiled between 1976 and 2003 by the Australian Heritage Commission, was ground-breaking in its comprehensive scope and inclusive approach to identifying heritage places. It encompassed places from **all three aspects of the environment (natural, historic and Indigenous)**, and appraised places at **all levels of heritage values**.

Australia furthered this understanding of the 'holistic' nature of the environment and heritage through its successful attainment of the **World Heritage Listing** of places such as **Kakadu** and **Uluru** (for their cultural as well as natural values), and continues this approach with the inclusion of **cultural heritage** as a **key indicator** in the national **State of the Environment Reports**.

Finally this rich, comprehensive approach to consideration of heritage values – further championed by the Commonwealth in the development of the **National Heritage System** over many years – is integral to the inclusive definition of heritage proclaimed in

the **EPBC Act** itself.

In view of such progressive achievements by many actors and agencies on behalf of Australia's **heritage protection over many years in framing principles**, it is regrettable that these principles do not appear to have successfully shaped the **administration of cultural heritage in practice**.

This situation bears some reflection when appraising the effectiveness of CAN operations – since some general difficulties of governmental fragmentation described above have also contoured CAN's establishment, brief, resourcing and operations.

1.1.6 Ministerial portfolio initiatives and reviews

There are two further ways of demonstrating the complex policy and program strands directly affecting cultural heritage nationwide. These are outlined below, not only as illustration of their inherent complexity but also because they are indicative of the dense, rich fabric of information, advice, support and professional information exchange currently required by all institutions and organisations operating within the cultural sphere.

In view of the above considerations, MA would argue that a re-constituted CAN should be an information hub providing co-ordinated advice about all such related government activity (this would include some rationalisation regarding the Culture Portal). Information and advice to be provided should include the following:

The Minister's portfolio initiatives and reviews (in addition to the present CAN Review):

- Review of the *Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Protection Act*
- Two reviews of the operation of the *EPBC Act*:
 - Independent Review (chaired by Dr Allan Hawke) of the *EPBC Act*, and
 - Review by the Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts into the operation of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

Each review is focused primarily on the efficiency and effectiveness of the *Act* in protecting the 'environment' (the definition of which includes **places** holding national and/or Commonwealth Indigenous, natural and historic heritage values, since such places are protected under the *Act*, **including associated collection material**);

- Forthcoming review of the *Historic Shipwrecks Act*
- The Collections Council of Australia's current revision and republication of *Significance: A Guide to Assessing the Cultural Heritage of Objects and Collections* (2001), commissioned by the Cultural Ministers Council (CMC)
- Development by CMC of the *National Arts and Disability Strategy* (supporting the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and affirming the Australian government's commitment to social inclusion) – together with proposals to amend the Building Code of Australia to ensure all public buildings are rendered fully accessible;
- Preparation of the framework for the *2011 State of the Environment Report* (including the establishment of the approach to reporting on cultural heritage)
- Consideration of the Creativity Stream recommendations from the *Australia 2020 Summit*

1.1.7 International Conventions shaping Australia's cultural provision

Australia is a signatory to – or is considering becoming a signatory to – many international treaties and conventions that impact on and influence our approach to cultural administration and regulation.

These include:

- *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (support recently announced)
- *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (Australia is a state party signatory)
- Commitment to ratification of *UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*
- *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Australia in the process of ratification)
- The *UNIDROIT Convention on the Return of Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects* (ratification under consideration).

The museums sector is active (and in many cases is a leading player nationally and internationally) in the development of policies and programs fulfilling the obligations imposed by these international conventions.

Organisations such as the Australian Committee of the International Council of Museums (**ICOM Australia**), and the Australian branch of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (**Australia ICOMOS**), have provided leadership and supported government initiatives (often without government support for their own organisations or operations) over many decades.

This is most evident when considering the profound influence of such internationally recognised instruments as the **Burra Charter** (Australia ICOMOS) and the internationally esteemed Australian approach to such sensitive issues as **repatriation of Indigenous human remains** (under the Commonwealth's **RICP Program**), and the **protection and return of stolen or illicitly traded cultural material** (ICOM Australia and MA have been working jointly on these issues since the early 1990s).

(See **Attachment 6 – MA Recommendations concerning the need for Indigenous protocols**)

1.1.8 General legislative and program reviews impacting on the cultural sector include:

- Recently commenced Productivity Commission Inquiry into the *Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector*, seeking to establish better ways to determine the contribution of the sector (quantitatively and qualitatively) and to streamline regulatory measures impeding the efficiency of the NFP sector
- Ongoing *Review of Australia's Future Tax System*
- Education
 - Development of the National Curriculum, and associated consultative reviews of its guiding framework, subject-specific curricula and suggested pedagogy. The museums sector is committed to supporting the developing national curriculum.

(See **Attachment 3 – Declaration of the Value of Museums to Education**)

- CMC funding of the Learning Federation for the development of 'learning objects'
- Review of the collection of 'cultural' statistics by the ABS
- Innovation, Research and the Broadband review and development
 - Cutler Review of Innovation and the anticipated White Paper response
 - NCRIS – possibility of extending funding to the humanities sector for digitisation of collections to assist research
 - Planned National Broadband Network (fibre to the premises or 'FTTP' construction initiative announced by Commonwealth government, 7 April 2009)

The above sketch of the present cultural landscape nationally is provided to illustrate the complex arrangements, players and forces currently affecting cultural heritage (including the 'collections sector' itself).

It also suggests the great array of information, activities and advice that need to be drawn together and made available in a more effectively reconstructed and integrated CAN facility: to strengthen the professional functioning and expertise that directly contribute to and enrich the public value of the cultural sector as a whole.

A further illustration of the complex landscape currently (which the museums sector is addressing proactively) is provided by a glance at the six themes of the *Museums Australia 'Futures Forum'* work – the collaborative review conducted by MA across the museums sector in 2008, yielding recommendations brought together in a sectoral Framework Report (currently being concluded).

(See Attachment 4 – MA 'Future Forum' Themes (2008))

Part Two: The Distinctiveness of the Museums Sector

2.1 The international context of defining the 'museums sector' – some comparative notes

As noted in the **Introduction** to this submission, the internationally accepted definition of 'museums' includes 'galleries' (understood as 'art museums') but does not include **libraries** or **archives**.

The internationally recognised body representing **museums** at a global level is the **International Council of Museums ICOM** (an NGO formed in 1946, headquartered in Paris, within the UNESCO complex). ICOM is the representative body for the great range of institutions that are referenced in ICOM's definition of 'museum' (which includes zoos, aquaria, herbaria, art museums and a diverse array of museum-like institutions – some of which do not collect).

ICOM recognises the international body for **libraries (International Federation of Library Associations) IFLA** and **archives (International Council of Archives) ICA** as fully independent partner professional bodies – with partner status and invited representation at the annual large gathering of some 100+ ICOM Committee Chairs in Paris annually (usually for a week in June).

These bodies confer formally and regularly, for matters of common work and overlapping interest. However they have independent organisations, hold independent conferences and meetings that are organised around different issues, as pertain to the character of these separate bodies and the different kinds of professional training and operational issues each encompasses.

In Australia, by contrast, the **two domains** encompassed by ‘**museums**’ internationally (represented by **ICOM**), and the separate domain of **libraries** (represented by **IFLA**) and of **archives** (represented by **ICA**), have been merged into the single four-domain entity encompassed by the **Collections Council of Australia (CCA)**.

There is an awkward mis-match between the ways Australia has organised representation of these very different collecting entities at a national level and the way they are organised and recognised internationally.

There is no wish or intention in this submission to make comment on these arrangements in a political sense – other than to observe that the Collections Council of Australia has itself been given **very minimal resources** to achieve the representivity and scope of action that the (**three**) comparable representative bodies achieve internationally across the four domains the CCA has been constituted to represent.

The other summary point worth stressing, as explained above, is that this mis-alignment between international arrangements for representative bodies across these domains world-wide, and the arrangements in place inside Australia, presents some problems for all parts of the four collecting domains.

2.2 The different character of museums from libraries and archives (while they share some common concerns)

As indicated earlier in the submission, although there are some similarities between museums (including galleries), archives and libraries as **collecting institutions**, there are **profound differences across and between these different types of collecting domains**.

Museums and galleries are in some vitally significant respects quite different from libraries and archives – and these differences cannot be elided, without cost to their varying developmental needs and potential to provide distinctive resources and value to many communities (including specialist and scholarly communities) as well as to a broad public.

Museums and galleries are constituted (and their training and care of the collections owned or circulated) is organised around the following distinctive activities:

- **active interpretation of collections by staff** and public displays of ‘kinds of knowledge’ in action;
- displays of collections and heritage materials owned are usually intricately **protected** from any public handling (**uniqueness** of collection items and **non-public-handling** are invariably organising concepts systemically);
- in museums/galleries since the 1970s, there has been a dramatically increased emphasis on **changing displays** (and a **sharp rise in travelling exhibitions**); libraries and archives have entered these fields more recently, and exhibitions in those institutions would still be regarded as ancillary to their main purposes;
- museums and galleries welcome a huge proportion of **ambulatory public visitors daily** (including tourists) who walk about (and converse) throughout the whole of the public areas, and experience with their eyes and minds what are presented as **pre-formed experiences** (displays/presentations) for their enjoyment and learning (including increasingly interactive support materials in recent years);
- successful outreach programs, managed by education and Public Programs staff, seek to make contact with the education sector in advance of school group visits to museums, based on an engaged relationship to school curricula;
- the **cataloguing systems encompassed by the museums sector are extremely diverse**, according to the great range of collection typologies and primary purposes of different museums; ranging from art galleries to scientific and natural history collections, these cataloguing systems cover object collections of great diversity; they are quite different from the cataloguing technologies utilised for **book and print-based or documentary collections** in museums (which are more like handled those in used in libraries and archives);
- there is meanwhile an increasingly recognised need and co-operative effort to find ways of interconnecting many different types of material for public access (especially **integrated digital public access**); such commonalities in no way elide fundamental differences of cataloguing and IT-based systems used.

In contrast to museums and galleries, libraries and archives generally organise, catalogue and access their collections primarily as **sources of user-directed information**, provided for a **seated, often screen-reading public**.

Libraries and archives are generally constituted to be **repositories of information** and providers of **access** and **support** advice about the material they hold. Museums and galleries, however, collect in order to **research, prepare** and directly **present** **institutionally generated interpretations (exhibitions/displays)** of the **value and meaning of objects** held within their collections.

While our major, capital city libraries hold unique historical resources (rare books and pictorial collections which they care for in specific ways), and increasingly mount **exhibitions** and displays **drawing upon the training and technologies of the museums sector**, a great proportion of smaller, regionally dispersed school and local government libraries hold **disposable/renewable collections** – often with an **estimated life of no more than 5 to 10 years**. This would be an unthinkable proposition for museums, galleries – or indeed archives.

Similarly, while archives collect and hold unique manuscripts and other material, they do so primarily for research purposes. (There are exceptions, of course, since there are many different institutional models and variants in play. For example, the **National Film and Sound Archives** (Canberra) is an institution that is **museum-like** in many of its operations, to the degree that it has special primary objects (e.g. films/ videotapes/ vinyl recordings/ audiotapes) to care for that depend on related technologies and other objects for access of their holdings.)

Broadly speaking, it is fair to say that there are **critically important differences in fundamental intent and orientation** among our varying **collecting institutions**. These differences are further ramified by the divergent approaches taken to managing different types of collections within institutional cultures. Moreover, such differences flow throughout all aspects of how staff, training and resources are disposed, organised and developed incrementally within these different institutions typologically, as well as in their institutional lives and strategic development.

2.3 Important differences in training levels of staff across the four 'collections sector' domains

Not only are museum and gallery collections held for generally different purposes from those of libraries and archives, but there are **critically divergent conditions of training-levels and employment across the different domains**. Collections in the different institutions are managed and resourced in a variety of ways that also have starkly discrepant implications in terms of **social equity** and **access to heritage at local and regional levels** for communities.

These discrepancies are **not** part of segregated institutional values (**all** share a common dedication to public service). Rather, they are an aspect of sectoral specialisation.

2.3.1 Differences in levels of professionalised cataloguing and public access of collections

Libraries and archives (but not historical societies) are, in general, **completely professionalised**. All libraries, from the smallest local library to the largest national institution are administered (certainly at the level of cataloguing) by **professionally qualified cataloguing staff**. Library holdings are managed (that is, accessed to and retrieved from their reading public and borrowers) by **professionally qualified librarians**. Volunteers in libraries, when present, are still managed by professionally trained staff.

By contrast, the **majority of community museums** across Australia **are volunteer-managed**, and often operate **without direct guidance or support of trained staff**.

Museums have long failed to receive comparable **funding or support to that provided by local government to local libraries**, which are considered to be essential providers of local and community reference and information services.

Many historical collections in community museums have long been identified as needing professional training to advance cataloguing knowledge and documentation skills of those collections (documenting the ‘stories’ and knowledge associated with objects, without which it is impossible to know or ‘assess’ the significance of what is held locally).

In many cases there has been no change over decades to the most vulnerable of such local historical collections. Those in dispersed rural and regional communities often do not yet have even a **basic inventory of holdings** – which is the first control measure in protection against theft and loss. Unscrupulous collectors or dealers can ‘prey’ upon such undocumented collections and cherry-pick specific items of value – and indeed, professional colleagues are aware of this having occurred in regional situations.

Sadly, the main change affecting long-neglected collections is that the crucial primary-source authorities (senior citizens and elders) whose oral knowledge is imperative to document and record these collections – to help ensure informed access to their descendant and future communities – are slowly ‘dying out’.

When local stories (even oral histories) are not captured to document and help interpret collections, a multiple wastage and irreparable loss of knowledge occurs. For with the loss of primary sources and voices to make local collections meaningful, there is a **demise of the social memory** that is vitally activated around **objects** of the past that were **once central in people’s ways of living** in Australia.

In terms of the disturbing erosion of social memory that is vital to illuminate our community-based collections, the challenge for the museums sector is intensified by the fact that there is, as yet, **not even a complete national list of all these local museums**, let alone detailed information about their **collections**, in contrast to the generally detailed inventories of libraries and their holdings across Australia.

2.4 Museums and digitisation capacity

Outside of our leading institutions (our fine state and national galleries and museums), the greater number of smaller museums in Australia lags far behind other collection domains (libraries and archives) in dealing with a networked world. Not only are the majority of community and local museums not confident with digital technology, many are still not even connected to the Internet.

This distinction is further exacerbated by the fact that the museums sector has not benefited from **capacity-building and support programs** comparable to those **provided by the Australia Council to the visual and performing arts sectors over the past three decades**.

A desired **Museums Commission** for Australia – which had been a significant government advisory body in the UK and was a central recommendation of the **Pigott Report** of 1975 – was never implemented. Thus Australia continued to lack a governmentally supported, coordinated level of support for museums nationally – as had long existed in Britain **prior to** the UK’s own condensation of domains into the **MLA** (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council /MLA) in recent years.

Consequently, Australia's modelling of the Collections Council of Australia (CCA) directly upon the MLA prototype in the UK, represented a modelling of **presumed commonality** across very different, long-standing and retarding **discrepancies of difference** between (broadly) **museums** and **libraries/archives** provision in Australia, and discrepancies between Australian and UK conditions of earlier investment by government.

The **CCA** meanwhile, although **reporting to and advising the Cultural Ministers Council** for developmental needs and performance across four crucial domains of our cultural and heritage provision nationally, **was not created with resources remotely comparable to those of the Australia Council** (with its traditionally seven distinct artform 'boards' – each with their own chairs and dedicated staff, who are also directly present (chairs & directors) on the overarching Australia Council (as the governing 'Council' appointed by the federal Minister).

Accordingly the CCA was created as a very modest creature in comparison with governmental provision long afforded to **arts development** in Australia. The CCA's lack of internal support structures – for example, professionally distinct domain bodies (boards or committees representing and advising directly on needs of the separate and highly professionalised **four domains**) – has contoured a very challenging and constrained situation for the CCA's operations. This has inhibited the CCA's capacity to provide broadly grounded and deeply sourced advice **drawn directly from the four domains** it represents across Australia.

The long-standing and retarding problem of scant attention applied to **digital technology in the community museums sector** across Australia can be heightened clearly by browsing a recently published developmental tool of great value: the **National Standards for Museums** (available on CAN).

It is evident in reading this excellent new tool for analysis and strategic development of community collections how complex, detailed, and ultimately specialised are the skills required to develop and manage all the functions of a 'museum' of even modest size.

Meanwhile, within the multiple skills-sets and capabilities to be acquired, **collection management** is but one component of the whole menu of tasks, and **digitisation and access of collections digitally** is an even smaller segment of that menu.

Regrettably there is, as yet, **no single document for the museums sector** comparable to the excellent and comprehensive **Re-Imagining Library Services, Strategic Plan for the National and State Libraries**, completed in 2008. Neither is there, at present, ready capacity in the museums sector as a whole to create such a cohesive commitment to digital action, because of the disparities outlined above.

(See www.nla.gov.au/pub/gateways/issues/96/story06.html).

Some special resources would have to be allocated for a comparable museums sector document to be achieved.

For the many reasons identified above, Museums Australia argues that the museums sector, relative to the other collecting 'domains', has **very specific needs and interests**.

Moreover, these needs are **not being adequately addressed** nor are they able to be well-met by CAN as it is currently constituted.

It would be unfair to highlight such conditions simply as a critique of CAN itself, for the disabilities identified are historical and preceded CAN's establishment.

Nevertheless, while such deep discrepancies in fundamental collections inventory and professionalised operations and **capacity** for access exist, any national effort of **digital hubbing and access** of knowledge across the four collecting domains is fundamentally hampered, until questions of greater parity of capacity and access can be addressed.

Part Three: Responses to Can Review Questions

3.1 The current efficiency and effectiveness of CAN

3.1.1 MA's approach to the assessment of CAN

MA considers that in any assessment of CAN – whether sketching its future development or scoping appropriate resourcing – it is important to recognise a 'Janus-faced' character of CAN's functioning.

The twinned functions can be characterised as follows:

- **information portal** activities, conveying information/resources **outward**, towards **public use** (especially Internet-based use) and
- **professional hub activities**, drilling **inward**, to capture and communicate **domain expertise and advice**.

Understanding this duality of functions is crucial to grasping how CAN (at all times) is functioning differently for differentiated users and towards diverse outcome objectives. Perception of these different 'flows' and 'functions' is necessary before assessing where any particular comment may be 'coming from' or 'pointing towards' in this Review process.

Throughout this submission MA has sketched reasons why CAN, as currently constituted to uptake from and interconnect **four very different domains of the collections sector**, is unable realistically to meet the needs of the museums sector (the domains of *museums* and *galleries*). It thereby is also constrained in its ability to add value in its networking of the other two domains (*libraries* and *archives*).

Many constraints already discussed in this submission can now be particularised a little further:

- **Divergent sectoral interface with CAN:** Since the particular institutional cultures, facilities, expertise, training and modes of core operations are often fundamentally different **across the four collecting domains**, this means that each is constituted to interact **differently** and **separately** in its relationships **towards a centralised CAN**.
- **By-passing of CAN:** The best-resourced, typically capital-city institutions **within** any of these four domains (for example, the National Library of Australia,

Museum Victoria, the Powerhouse Museum, the Australian War Memorial and others) are already successfully **internet-present and web-capable** in providing access to their own resources and collections to a broad public. The reality is that while some of these major institutions provide a specific portal on the CAN site itself, they are also individually **reaching the public interface of networked web-search directly** – and that their direct public interface bypasses the CAN facility.

- **Sectoral domains not interconnecting effectively through CAN:** Another way of highlighting this point is to state that **the domain HUBS** are not working effectively through the CAN facility, and value-enriched digitised information is passing directly from single institutional sources to more **effectively linked public PORTALS** for public access and use.
- **Capacity-gaps within sectoral domains precluding common access:** From the opposite end of the **spectrum of institutional capacity**, there remain numerous poorly resourced institutions, especially those within the greater spread of the **regionally dispersed museums domain** (small, **community-based collections** distributed across Australia, and often purely **volunteer-run**) that are **not even successfully reaching CAN** itself – much less reaching a wider public level of access **through and beyond CAN**. This is a very different problem (in comparison with well-resourced institutions) for government to address at a social equity level in terms of **accessing Australian culture to all Australians:**
 - Many of the numerous small, dispersed collections are often not e-capable, and are failing to reach or link into any professional network of supportive expertise to enrich their own knowledge, resources and capabilities. They are thereby fundamentally constrained (by **e-capable ‘lock-out’**) in their own possibility of gaining access to digitally delivered resources.
 - Concerning their **collection objects**, this means that remote and regionally dispersed collections do not have the base-level capacity to harvest vital information that could provide them with vital knowledge or comparative data-sets to assess the value of what they hold.
 - This is an acute form of **cultural loss** in terms of understanding and **sharing Australia’s cultural heritage** among communities locally as well as nationally.

The confusingly divergent state of actual need and condition of collections within the two-domain **museums sector** (masked by the **deceptive parity of the collections sector construct**) has thereby seriously limited the management provisions and the possible effectiveness of CAN.

MA therefore recommends that CAN be re-considered and re-constructed to improve service on **both sides of the culture sector’s requirements**. These are highlighted here as:

- the **public need for integrated access** to Australia’s cultural institutions and organisations and their associated collections (**access to Australia’s heritage and stories**), and

- the **cultural institutions’ own professional needs** for peer support and information-sharing networks that **enhance their capabilities** – and ultimately their increased **service capacities and public value**.

Again, MA advances an argument throughout this submission that any proposed restructuring of CAN should be considered within the broad framework of the cultural sector’s current and future needs, and within the perspective of the Commonwealth’s responsibilities towards the museums sector nationwide.

3.1.2 How well does CAN serve museums sector needs?

The most useful and important aspect of CAN is that its very existence speaks to the recognition by government of vital needs in relation to digital access of and to the nation’s culture, history and heritage.

However as suggested throughout this submission, these needs are complex, and the configuration and resourcing of CAN has been inadequate to enable it to meet the rapidly changing conditions of the ICT and digital environment.

This acknowledgement needs to be further qualified in two ways:

- The relationship between the **DEWHA-funded Culture Portal** and the **CMC-funded CAN** is neither articulated in objectives nor rationalised in terms of resources for each.
- Furthermore there does not appear to be any synergy yet encouraged between the two services (some of which directly intersect or overlap in terms of public search-access networks via the Internet). Indeed it is striking and perplexing that the purposes and functions of the **Culture Portal** are not referenced in the ToR of the current **CAN Review**.

These issues of unclear allocation of government provision, and partial duplication in brief/function of two related facilities, are further compounded by **the technical disparity but potential overlap between the two sites** – both resourced by government, but with CAN much less technically sophisticated and powerful than the Culture Portal in its search and information management capacity.

While DEWHA’s Culture Portal connects sites, and does this well with a powerful and adaptable search engine, the CAN site providing access to detailed information **within** a huge **range of resource-rich institutions** has far less capacity to search or network that information reflexively at **meta-search levels**.

Indeed, as already mentioned, many of the most prominent museums and galleries in capital cities have much greater capacity to access the richness of their collections **direct to the public**, altogether **by-passing CAN** (and even DEWHA).

This is not the fault of CAN service innately, but a consequence of its lack of capacity or adequate resourcing relative to the **highest performing individual institutions** that it seeks to connect. Meanwhile, in contrast, **the smallest institutions may not yet be even e-connected** or have attained any networked provision of digital access to collections – either their own collections or collections residing in other institutions. Nevertheless they need such access in order to enrich data and understanding about their own inventory and holdings, before any wider, network-enriched access of their collection resources could be possible.

3.2 The Importance of online developments for the museums sector

Without question, online developments are of profound importance to the museums sector. In a mere two decades the Internet has transformed communications globally, and in doing so has transformed all aspects of our contemporary world. It has reshaped museums and the public expectations surrounding them in ways that continue to evolve and extend our concepts and boundaries daily.

Nevertheless, as this submission has sought to detail, there is a huge disparity within the institutions that make up the museums sector – based on location, resources, capabilities and capacity. This critically constrains the ability of smaller museums, galleries and historical collections to meet constantly escalating changes and opportunities that confront cultural institutions daily in an Internet-shaped environment.

While several major Australian museums are world leaders in digitisation and use of social media tools to communicate with visitors and reach new audiences, their tiny far-flung compatriots may not even be ‘hooked up’ or present in the on-line world.

Consequently, while we recognise the value of the myriad governmental reviews and initiatives to enhance community capacity and access Australia’s heritage digitally, an acute concern to Museums Australia is to highlight and redress the huge disparity and disabling capacity-gaps that exist throughout the museums sector itself.

These gaps critically constrain present facilities and resources at local levels, inhibiting many communities’ ability in the following important ways

- sharing and making known *their own stories*
- gaining access to the resources that convey *national stories*
- enabling people to feel connected to and part of *a two-way national story-telling process* that promotes social bonds and pride in Australia’s heritage and achievements as a nation.

MA would argue that a tipping point has now been reached concerning digital services provision, and that while the **museums sector** remains the least well-developed in this regard (compared with the other half of the collections sector’s domains), there is a strong argument for **policy, programs and resources** to be directed towards **bringing the whole museums sector more equitably into the digital world.**

This is of critical importance given the government’s own commitment to the provision of a **national broadband network.**

In such circumstances a CAN of some kind is a crucially needed part of the public infrastructural support for Australia’s ‘Remote and Regional’ museums sector (encompassing by far the largest **number** and **distribution** of institutions nationally). Moreover it needs to be attuned to achieving a better interconnection and synchronisation with developments occurring through the continually enhancing digital capacities and access provisions of the larger institutions. This means that ‘**access**’ itself has to be more effectively provisioned and facilitated **as a two-way process.**

3.2.1 Importance of the Assessment of ‘Significance’

There is one aspect of collections management that is critically dependent upon access to appropriate **data-sets**, and this is the **assessment of ‘significance’**.

Significance assessment is a crucial part of any process of interpreting, managing and caring for collections. It is also a crucial methodology in the assessment of any object’s **national, state or local significance** – and to policy setting about any resources appropriate to collections care and protection nationally.

Assessment of significance relies on **access to other related material for comparative purposes**. Digitisation increasingly and inexorably impacts upon this process – either advancing or retarding it.

(See **Attachment 5: Analysis of Issues Associated with the Assessment of Significance**)

3.3 Suggested changes to CAN structure and resourcing

(to provide improved services and support to the museums/collection sectors in an expanding digital environment)

From the museums sector’s perspective, CAN’s objectives, as outlined on the CAN site, seem admirable. However, as discussed in various parts of this submission, it is MA’s view that CAN has neither been appropriately constituted nor adequately resourced to enable it to meet these admirable and important objectives.

CAN is dedicated to providing high standard online access to Australian collecting institutions (and collections), our activities being guided by the following objectives:

- *Extending the scope of regional collections online and providing support for professional development and collection management including digitisation;*
- *Supporting workers in the collections sector, especially in the regions to improve networking and communications, help place collections online with the correct documentation and provide access to agreed training and standards;*
- *Enabling comprehensive quality content; and*
- *Extending partnerships with the education and tourism sectors and the general public.*

Besides providing access to nationwide information on Australia’s cultural heritage, members of the public can also access an individual institution’s own CAN website to explore its specific content, including:

- *collection descriptions and objects*
- *exhibitions and general events*
- *news*
- *useful tools, links, resources for people working in the sector*

The disparities in systems and institutional intent across the four collecting domains – as highlighted in this submission – cause inevitable tensions right across the collections sector when commonalities are sought (notably for networked digital access of collections nationally). These inevitable tensions, which precede CAN’s establishment,

have in some respects exacerbated the difficulties faced by CAN itself in supporting and providing service equally to the four domains. Meanwhile, there can even be an argument made for increasing the number of recognised collection ‘domains’ – to include, for example, **Indigenous collections** and **place-based collections**.

With regard to Indigenous collections, it is notable that the Culture Portal has attended specifically to this area. It has created a very interesting provision of a new meta-level of increased search capacity for public access to knowledge about Indigenous holdings across diverse institutions (which can greatly assist Indigenous people themselves in knowing where material from particular culture areas and communities has been dispersed across different kinds of collections over a long period since colonisation).

This new facility links Indigenous holdings in collections digitally in a sifted and ‘enriched’, more useful way than is normally the case for networked collection holdings at a basic catalogue- or inventory-level of digitised record.

This example again points to the need to consider the Culture Portal’s capacities and brief in relation to the current review of CAN, though this has not been included in the ToR for the CAN Review itself.

CAN has been required to serve all four collecting domains ‘equally’, because of the important **convergence** that exists digitally at the global public interface of user search and access. However this undoubted imperative has been given primacy and obscured the equally important **divergence** factors that also exist across these same domains, which configure their daily operations diversely at an organisation-specific level.

Recognition of such divergent factors is necessary to any consideration of a networked facility’s capacity to harvest information at value-enriched, institution-specific nodal relay-points within the total facility’s on-line output.

Analysis of different sectoral dynamics, equally important to CAN’s effective functioning, has caused MA to characterise CAN’s structural design as encompassing a JANUS-headed model of information flows, with two ‘faces’ oriented in opposite directions:

- one oriented ‘internally’, supporting and interconnecting the professional and specialised needs and interests of each domain;
- one oriented ‘externally’ towards the needs and interests of the searching public.

These two different peripheries – **the global public interface**, and **the focussed professional interface** – are of equal importance. Meanwhile the two distinct flow-streams, orbitally connecting both interfaces, need recognition in accomplishing any ideals of **federated search** across collection-specific institutions, in order to yield **integrated access** for a searching public.

3.3.1 MA’s modelling of CAN: as PUBLIC PORTAL & PROFESSIONAL HUB

MA’s metaphor of a Janus-faced communications design, facilitating digitised information relay in two different directions simultaneously, is used simply as a means of

clarifying the two separate but complementary aspects of a properly functioning digital delivery platform (such as CAN).

Such a facility needs to achieve seamless interconnection of the **public information portal** and **professional hub** functions, while recognising that these are oriented towards different peripheries of use.

The following diagram summarises MA's modelling of CAN:

(A) a search portal facility

- oriented towards an 'eastern' horizon of PUBLIC INTERFACE and PUBLIC UPTAKE
- **convergence** of resources is an organising dynamic across this horizon of users
- **'federated search' & 'integrated access'** are shaping values

(B) a networking hub for professional interchange

- oriented towards a 'western horizon' encompassing expert institutions presently constituted as the COLLECTIONS SECTOR and harnessing SPECIALISED FACILITIES AND RESOURCES
- **divergence/particularisation** is an organising dynamic across this horizon of users
- **'differentiated resource' & 'granular connection to expertise'** are shaping values

In conclusion

MA recommends that CAN be reconsidered and reorganised to improve service to both sides of the culture sector's requirements:

- the **public need for integrated public access** to Australia's cultural institutions and organisations and their associated collections (**access to Australia's heritage and stories**), through a re-configured portal, and
- the **cultural institutions' professional need** for peer support and information-sharing networks that enhance their capabilities – and ultimately their increased **service capacities and public value, through a re-configured hub.**

MA believes that all parties and players would be better served if the current CAN Review could enable more particular consideration to be given to the needs and interests of the diverse professional constituencies on which it draws, in the process of appraising how CAN might be better resourced and capacitated to render improved public service.

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APPENDIX

Six 'Attachments' referred to are linked below

Attachment 1



Museums Australia is the national association for museums and galleries in Australia.
ICOM-Australia (the National Committee of the International Council of Museums, Paris) is a key partner.

Profile of Museums Australia

(formed 1994, combining various museum organisations, the oldest dating back to the 1930s)

Museums Australia (museums + galleries) encompasses a diverse range of museums, galleries, historic sites, heritage centres, botanic and zoological gardens, research centres, Indigenous Cultural Centres, and Keeping Places across Australia; it includes some other cultural heritage organisations.

MA is a service and professional development organisation. It seeks to provide professional stimulus and value for the whole museums sector nationally (and especially regionally)

- MA produces **programs and services nationally**, not confined to MA members alone;
- MA works with a range of **“third sector” partners in the non-profit area of cultural heritage** provision – e.g. Federation of Australian Historical Societies, ICOMOS, ACNT.
- MA is not a union or lobbyist organisation – remuneration and employment conditions are matters for relevant employing authorities at all levels of government or other bodies;
- as a service organisation, MA is focused as much on museums’ **service to Australian communities** as on the **capacities of museums** themselves to increase resources and skills, and render such service;
- MA also **acts internationally** as a museums organisation (and especially – in partnership with ICOM-Australia – with proactive attention to the Asia-Pacific region).

MA membership

Currently membership (Oct. 2008): **1673 members**

- **923 individual members** = 55.47%
- **745 institutional members** = 44.53% (reaching many more individuals through the large institutions than can ever be calculated precisely)

A current national snapshot of MA institutional members

(This snapshot captures the variety of institutions, from tiny, regional and remote, to large/capital city institutions; from parks and zoos to galleries)

QLD

- Calliope River Historical Village (Gladstone)
- Yugambeh Museum, Language and Heritage Resource Centre (Indigenous museum project – Yugambeh is south of Brisbane area); (*MA and ABC Radio National “Marvellous Regional Museums”- Indigenous Cultural Centre/ Keeping Place category winner 2008)
- North Burnett Regional Council (incl. Mundubbera Art Gallery (Gayndah), an Indigenous cultural centre and gallery (Gayndah)
- Cairns Regional Gallery (Cairns)
- Tableland Regional Gallery (Atherton)
- Brisbane Botanic Gardens (Mt Coot-Tha)

- University of Queensland Art Museum (UQ)
- University of Technology Art Museum (QUT)
- University of Queensland Anthropology Museum (School of Social Sciences, UQ)

NT

- Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (Darwin)
- Northern Territory Police Museum, Winnelli (Darwin)
- Catherine Outback Heritage Museum (Catherine)
- Chung Wah Society Inc. (Darwin) (for Chinese heritage; volunteer-run)
- Northern Territory Police Museum (Darwin)
- Strehlow Research Centre (Alice Springs)
- National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame (Alice Springs)

TAS

- Levensdale and Woodsdale History Room (Orford)
- Devonport Regional Gallery (Devonport)
- Beaconsfield Mine and Heritage Centre (Beaconsfield)

VIC

- Zoos Victoria (Melbourne)
- Museum Victoria (Melbourne)
- Latrobe Regional Gallery (Morwell)
- Sovereign Hill (Ballarat)
- Insectarium of Victoria (Mt Macedon)
- Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery (Swan Hill)
- Golden Dragon Museum (Bendigo)
- Bendigo Art Gallery (Bendigo)
- Ararat Regional Gallery (Ararat)
- Parks Victoria
- Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne Library (MA has some library members – eg. of schools, caring for archives and collections of a school)
- Monash University Museum of Art (Clayton)
- La Trobe University Art Museum (Bundoora)

NSW

- Lake Macquarie Regional Gallery (Lake Macquarie)
- Zoology Museum, University of New England (Armidale)
- Goulburn Regional Art Gallery (Goulburn)
- Goulburn Mulwaree Parks and Recreation Services

SA

- Architecture Museum, University of South Australia
- Art Gallery of South Australia
- Army Museum of South Australia (Keswick)
- Flinders University Art Museum
- Mary McKillop Penola Centre (Penola)
- Olive Wood, Renmark

WA

- Broome Historical Society (Broome) (Volunteer-run)
- Museum of Natural History (Guildford, WA)
- Geraldton Art Gallery (Geraldton)

- Ongerup and Needilup District Museum, Ongerup (north of Albany)
- Carnamah Historical Society (300 km north of Perth)
- Kodja Place and Visitors Centre, Kojanup, south of Perth (* winner of MA and ABC Radio National “Marvellous Regional Museums” National Winner (all categories), 2008); ABC Radio National Life Matters program travelled Sydney-WA and produced a 1-hour from Kodja Place in August, to mark their winning of the national award.

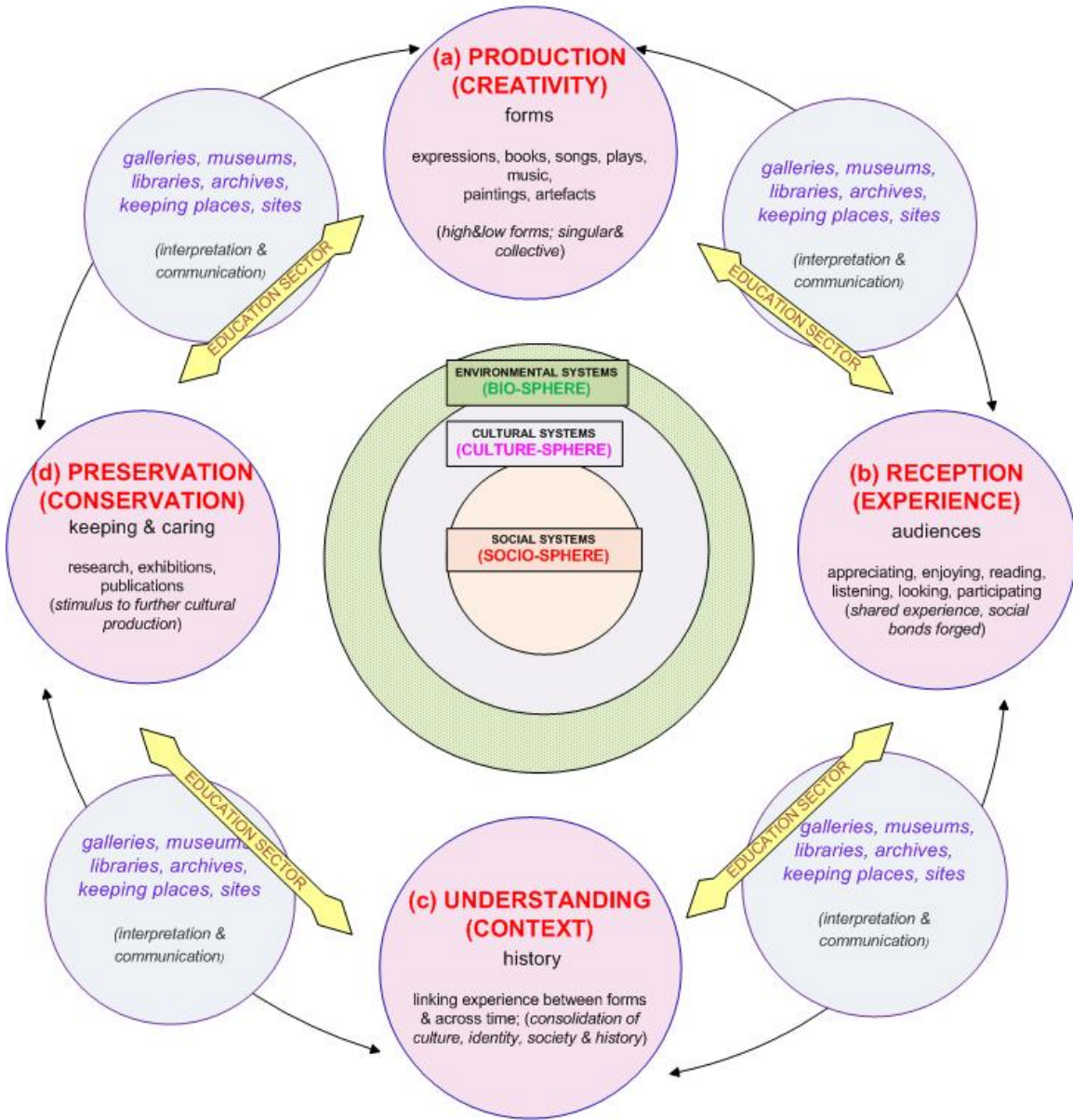
ACT

In addition to the major institutional members of MA in Canberra (**National Gallery of Australia, Australian War Memorial, National Museum of Australia, Old Parliament House**) MA includes the following institutional members:

- Australian Customs Service
- ACT Historic Places (incl. Lanyon Art Gallery; Blundells Cottage)
- Canberra Museum and Art Gallery (Canberra Civic)
- Australian Natural Wildlife Collection (CSIRO)
- Australian Council of National Trusts (ACNT)

Attachment 2

THE INTEGRATED CYCLE OF ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE & HERITAGE
A working model (Bernice Murphy)



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Old Parliament House, Canberra, ACT; Tel: 02 6273 2437 <ma@museumsaustralia.org.au>

Education National Network

Declaration of the Value of Museums to Education

Museums... are universal educational institutions of immense expressive power and authority. They hold their resources in trust for all people.

They communicate with us across boundaries of language, culture and time, and suggest comparisons which illuminate our experience of the present...

Through museums, we have direct contact with peoples of all ages and cultures, experience the unimaginable variety of the natural world and expand our understanding of what it means to be human.¹

Museums are essential places of learning. They enable and support young Australians to become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners and active and informed citizens through unique and authentic learning experiences.

Museums are critical partners with government, schools and communities in the promotion of equity and excellence in education through access to sites, collections, exhibitions, professional staff, programs and resources.

Engagement with, and enjoyment of, Australia's wealth of natural and cultural heritage should be:

- Integral to the learning outcomes proposed in all areas of the National Curriculum, and
- Embedded in the teaching and learning strategies of the National Curriculum.

Museums and National Curriculum learning outcomes

Museums are integral to the learning outcomes proposed in the National Curriculum by:

- (a) Deepening and broadening the learning experience of all Australian students and teachers, by exposing them to the diversity, singularity and complexity of Australia's natural and cultural heritage, and to the ways in which this has been, and continues to be, expressed;
- (b) Educating students about the place of humanity in the environment, the nature of the physical universe, and the impacts of global development and change;
- (c) Strengthening awareness of the value of diversity and sustainability;
- (d) Contributing to students' understanding of Australian national identities; and
- (e) Developing student understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens through providing local, regional, national and global perspectives.

¹ *A Common Wealth* – Museums in the Learning Age, Report by David Anderson, revised 1999

Museums and teaching and learning strategies

Museums enrich teaching and learning by:

- (a) Providing teachers and students with opportunities for direct and virtual access to material culture (primary sources, including sites);
- (b) Supporting access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture;
- (c) Fostering the development of student self-esteem through active student-centred learning;
- (d) Responding to individual abilities and learning preferences;
- (e) Encouraging skills development, collaboration, problem solving and dialogue in safe, stimulating environments; and
- (f) Offering students hands-on, experiential and visual learning outside the classroom.

What is a museum?

A museum helps people understand the world by using objects and ideas to understand and interpret the past and present and explore the future. A museum preserves and researches collections, and makes objects and information accessible in actual and virtual environments. Museums are established in the public interest as permanent, not-for-profit organisations that contribute long-term value to communities.

The use of the word “museum” in this document is broadly inclusive of galleries, science and natural history centres, historic sites and heritage places, monuments, keeping places and cultural centres, zoos and herbaria, libraries and archives and includes collections, resources, programs and exhibitions.

What is the Museums Australia Education National Network?

Museums Australia (MA) is the national organisation for the museums sector, committed to the conservation, continuation and communication of Australia’s heritage. MA encompasses places and their collections, and covers the conservation, continuation and communication of Australia’s historic, natural and Indigenous heritage: tangible and intangible.

The Education National Network is a professional body of educators in museums across Australia founded in 1975. It came under the auspices of MA in 1993.

Working with the National Curriculum Board

We are committed to working with the National Curriculum Board and its processes to ensure that the museums sector can play its part in helping to deliver a world class curriculum for Australian schools.

We would welcome any further opportunities to discuss our feedback and recommendations.

Attachment 4

Museums Australia

MA Futures Forum Themes (2008)

Following the election of the Rudd Government in November 2007, and a new policy-setting environment nationally, Museums Australia identified productive alignments between the Australian government's priorities for national policy development (the ten selected themes of the *Australia 2020 Summit*) and the principles and approaches embraced by Museums Australia that speak actively to these priorities – on behalf of museums and galleries and their many communities of professional activity and public service across the country.

This led to MA's establishing the following six-theme framework:

Six themes for Museums Australia's *Futures Forum* work in 2008

1. ***'Equity and Amenity': cultural facilities supporting the social and economic well-being of Australian communities.***
2. ***'Learning for Life': Australia's museums and galleries as sites of encounter and challenge, of learning and leisure.***
3. ***'Closing The Gap': remaking opportunities for Indigenous cultural development & reshaping Indigenous Australians' stake in the mainstream***
4. ***'Museums in a Changing Climate': the environment, science and Australia's evolving natural heritage***
5. ***'Charting Digital Futures': accessing and preserving Australia's cultural heritage in the evolving digital interface***
6. ***'Boosting Creativity': promoting innovation, collections, interpretation and research through Australia's museums and galleries***

Attachment 5

MA analysis of issues concerning assessment of collections' 'significance'

The assessment of significance is crucial to the management of collections, particularly in the museums sector.

However achievement of rigorous and authoritative assessment of significance is complex and is dependent on a number of factors.

The following factors are discussed in detail below:

- 1.1 Assessment of Significance Methodology
- 1.2 National Data Sets: development of and access to appropriate data sets to support the assessment of significance
- 1.3 Establishment of a National Significance Threshold
- 1.4 Establishment of a National Register (of movable cultural heritage)

1.1 'Assessment of Significance' methodology

The assessment of any object's national (state or local) significance is fundamentally a *comparative process*.

It therefore requires implementation of a methodology that is dependent upon the following conditions:

- quality research conducted into the background history (provenance) of objects and their relationship(actual or potential) to a variety of collections;
- understanding and availability of requisite data sets on which any significance assessment process would depend for integrity of outcomes, as well as any further judgments or recommended actions (including conservation, resource allocation or program development) based on such outcomes.

There have been many positive developments in the museums (and collections) sectors regarding the assessment of significance methodology over the past decade, so that it is now a recognised and valued part of collection management.

However significance assessment is often not applied with sufficient rigour or understanding of its intellectual basis. Consequently the assessments made are often poorly judged, and inadequately informed.

This is a compounding problem, as these poorly informed judgements at an initial stage have negative downstream consequences in further relay of such judgements. The comparative data available – not always reliable at the start – gradually gains 'authority' through its circulation, progressively distorting further judgments, resulting in ill-informed assessments.

This problem – of proliferating effects of poorly based primary judgments – causes major difficulties for the PMCH system. The source of this problem is twofold:

- one is the lack of a national system for ensuring that collection-related data has integrity
- second, is the lack of agreed thresholds for levels of significance (at local, S/T, national and international levels).

1.2 National data sets: development of and access to appropriate data sets to support assessment of significance

As described above (2.1) the assessment of any object's national (state or local) significance is fundamentally **a comparative process**.

It is dependent upon

- quality research, and
- understanding and availability of requisite data sets.

Therefore improving the quality and availability of the data sets – at all levels of significance, and across all kinds of objects and collections – is crucial to achieving authoritative assessments.

MA affirms two positive aspects of progress on significance assessment of heritage items in recent years, namely that

- the use of the assessment of significance methodology is widespread, and
- such use is being actively encouraged (for example, through the Cultural Ministers' Council's commissioning of the Collections Council's revision and national distribution of the publication, **Significance**).

However a nation-wide problem exists, that can only be addressed by concerted action at a national level. This is that very little attention is being directed to the crucially connected issues of the **development and accessibility of appropriate data sets**.

While there are numerous ways in which communities and institutions are encouraged and supported to document and care for their collections – including assessment of significance of individual objects and collections – there is a lack of national coordination to provide cohesion across these programs.

There is currently no Commonwealth policy or program commitment directed towards achieving these important national objectives.

As a consequence the data sets available for comparative assessment are generally grossly incomplete and inadequate, and the assessments therefore lack authority.

This problem cascades through the levels of significance across an increasingly complex set of differing kinds of objects, and is of course at its most pressing where assessment of national significance is required.

This is the issue that most plagues the PMCH system. It can be encompassed in the following question:

How can it be determined a particular object is of national significance?

1.3 Establishment of a *National Significance Threshold*

There are currently many different sets of objects and collections nominated and/or assessed as being of national significance. These include those objects on the Control List – with no definitive criteria or agreed threshold for determining their level of significance.

The sets/lists currently include:

- Movable heritage associated with places of National and Commonwealth Heritage significance (under the *EPBC Act*)
- Movable heritage inscribed on the *Memory of the World Register*
- Collections assessed as of National Significance under the *Community Heritage Grants Program*
- Objects selected as ‘National Treasures’ by Australian libraries (and particularly the National Library of Australia for its proposed National Treasures Gallery)
- Lists of ‘national’ objects developed by institutions, including:
 - The Migrant Heritage Centre (NSW)
 - Powerhouse Register of National Australian Dress

Establishing thresholds is a complex and highly skilled process. It needs to be understood that **place-based assessment of significance** has been developed through decades of work determining thresholds of value. Such place-based assessment, based on the methodology of the Burra Charter and its associated Guidelines, now provides the intellectual foundations of the assessment of significance methodology as applied to **objects**.

However, while place-based assessment has successfully evolved a hierarchy of levels of significance through decades of collaborative endeavour between governments (at local, S/T, national and world levels), no such federal commitment towards the development of a hierarchy of object-based significance levels has yet been achieved.

The EPBC Act protects **objects** associated with **places** of ‘national’ and ‘Commonwealth’ significance. It should be noted that several state/territory jurisdictions now **protect objects** associated with **places** of S/T significance. Australia is now a signatory party to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. Thereby Australia is *ipso facto* developing a set of thresholds at different levels of significance for **objects** – but without the cohesive federal framework necessary to the establishment of an agreed hierarchy of thresholds of significance.

Unless and until the Commonwealth exercises national leadership, and commits to working collaboratively (through the COAG process) with S/T governments to achieve an **agreed set of thresholds** for the assessment of local, S/T, national and international significance of **objects**, the PMCH system will continue to struggle to make the determinations of national significance that are integral to its responsibilities.

It should be noted in the contexts of issues described here that it has taken the Australian Heritage Council no less than five years to achieve an agreed Table of Values for assessment of places of national heritage value.

1.4 Establishment of a National Register (of movable cultural heritage)

MA recommends that a National Register should be established.

Such a Register would need to be established as a federal register.

However, as discussed in 2.3 above, the development of a comprehensive national assessment system, including the establishment of an agreed set of local, /S/T, National and World (*Memory of the World*) thresholds, would require collaboration with S/T and local government authorities.

There are substantial issues that would need to be addressed to achieve such improvements. Issues include the following:

- The Commonwealth has no constitutional power to compel private owners to bring their objects into the public domain.
- Significance-related **data sets** are necessarily provisional, evolving, and always incomplete (in some areas more than others).
- There is a lack of an agreed standardised **national significance threshold** to guide significance assessment.
- There is a lack of an established single COAG forum responsible for collections – at present, several ministerial councils share responsibilities for collections, including
 - the Cultural Ministers' Council (CMC), focussed primarily on national collecting institutions and arts responsibilities including the Australia Council – but not directly covering the museums sector (the Collections Council of Australia is not a grant giving body like the Australia Council);
 - the Environment, Protection & Heritage Council (EPHC), is now largely composed of S/T environment ministers (not necessarily responsible for heritage), unlike the Commonwealth Minister, whose responsibilities cover collections as well as environment and heritage.

MA PMCH Recommendation

That the Commonwealth bring together the many different lists and sets of objects of 'national' significance, to analyse the various assessment thresholds currently in use and develop a standardised set of assessment thresholds (local, S/T, national and world significance) – as has been achieved by the Australian Heritage Council for place-based heritage.

MA PMCH Recommendation

That the Commonwealth establish two bodies responsible for collections at a national level:

- (A) *a 'COAG Collections Forum' (or similar) – comparable to the Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and NZ, or the Cultural Ministers Council Standing Committee.*
- (B) *an 'Australian Collections Council' (or similar) developed through expansion of the responsibilities of the present Expert Committee advising the PMCH system, to take on similar responsibilities to the Australian Heritage Council in terms of establishing national significance thresholds, and advising on the identification, protection and conservation of Australia's collections.*

Attachment 6

Museums Australia: Recommendations Concerning Indigenous Heritage Protocols

[Extract from Museums Australia's PMCH Act (Review) submission, March 2009 - below]

Review of *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*: Museums Australia submission (March 2009) (22.pp.)

MA strongly supports the right of Indigenous people to identify and conserve their own heritage as set out in our national policy: *Continuing Cultures On-Going Responsibilities* - see www.museumsaustralia.org.au

However MA is concerned by two broad issues touching upon the Commonwealth's role in relation to Indigenous heritage:

- (i) There is a regrettable lack of a set of Commonwealth protocols governing relations with Indigenous people in the care and protection of their heritage.
- (ii) There currently exists a multiplicity of Commonwealth programs and provisions that impinge directly upon the protection and care of Indigenous heritage, but very little regular connection or means of rationalising how these many diverse provisions impact upon the protection and affirmative management of Indigenous cultural heritage from the point of view of Indigenous communities.

For example, in addition to provisions under the PMCH Act, other legislative programs include:

- The *EPBC Act*, that protects identified places and associated collections assessed as having national Indigenous values .
- The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Act 1984*, currently under review, in consideration of the Report written a decade ago by Justice Elizabeth Evatt: *Review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*.

The Commonwealth also supports Aboriginal and Torres Trait Islander culture and heritage through a multitude of programs. Key amongst these are:

- *Caring for Country*
- The many different programs supporting Indigenous artists and art centres and jointly supported by the DEWHA and FACSIA portfolios
- The Return of Indigenous Cultural Property Program
- The Indigenous Cultural Portal under development by DEWHA

MA PMCH Recommendation 2 (concerning Indigenous heritage)

2.1 That a clear set of protocols be developed in consultation with Indigenous representatives to ensure that appropriate Indigenous expertise and representatives are enabled to have direct cultural input and influence to secure adequate national measures for the protection of Indigenous heritage.

- We note the set of principles published in *Ask First*, by the former Australian Heritage Commission, but it is not clear if these principles are accepted as standards governing Commonwealth practice)

2.2 That steps be taken to ensure that the wider public is well informed about the value and sensitivity of Indigenous material culture and the need for appropriate consultation with Indigenous people, especially with regard to its high-order intangible heritage values.

2.3 That an explanatory pamphlet concerning Indigenous artworks and cultural objects – a ‘plain English guide’ to the management of Indigenous heritage (and ethical policies thereto) – be developed and made widely available for general public awareness and use.

2.4 That the Commonwealth work speedily towards determining when and if separate legislation will be drafted to provide specifically for the roles and responsibilities of Indigenous people in the identification and conservation of their cultural heritage nationwide.

2.5 That consideration be directed to other Commonwealth programs and legislation concerned with the identification and protection of Indigenous cultural heritage, to achieve more integrated outcomes for communities.

Such consideration should include:

- o recommendations in the Evatt Report
- o proposed revision of the Commonwealth *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act*
- o connection of these instruments with the EPBC Review and management of the National Heritage System (remembering that the EPBC legislation protects movable **heritage** associated with the Indigenous places on the NHL and CHL lists)