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**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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**CULTURAL MINISTERS COUNCIL TO CEASE FUNDING OF PEAK BODY IN  
COLLECTIONS SECTOR**

The Cultural Ministers Council has stopped funding the Collections Council of Australia.

Established by the Cultural Ministers Council in 2004, the Collections Council has worked to bring the collections sector - archives, galleries, libraries and museums - together. Last month it released plans to develop and promote a new model for sustainable scientific and cultural collections in Australia.

The Collections Council's Chair, Noel Turnbull, said that abolishing the CCA would not help solve significant fundamental problems facing the collections sector.

"Collections will continue to be under-utilised at a cost to productivity, innovation and a sense of national identity. The care of Australia's distributed national collection is divided between large well-funded national and state institutions, and smaller organisations that depend on the work of committed volunteers. Coordinated strategic planning, as advocated by the Collections Council, could have added value to governments' investment in larger institutions, while providing a much-needed hand to the thousands of local and regional collections which need more support," Mr Turnbull said.

"The Collections Council, which has achieved much with very limited resources, had immense difficulty overcoming this divide. The failure of some large institutions to understand the value of a strategic peak body has probably provided a justification for ending the Collections Council's funding. Our proposed new model for the sector, which we will now be unable to develop, was expressly designed to overcome this divide," he said.

The Collections Council's operations over four and half years with its four person staff have been supported by the Cultural Ministers Council and the Australian Government with grants totalling \$2.1 million.

Mr Turnbull said: "Australia's Arts Ministers say they won't spend \$500,000 on keeping the Collections Council going, yet our equivalent organisation in Norway, a country smaller in area and population than Australia, has 70 employees and an annual budget of 23.5 million Euros."

**MF**

**• LINKING THE NATION'S MEMORY**

The Collections Council of Australia Ltd is supported by the Cultural Ministers Council.

The office is hosted by the Libraries Board of South Australia.

“In Australia the sad reality is that if you are part of the car, defence or financial industries you will get rewarded with billions of dollars for failure. In the arts your funding is more likely to be at a level which stifles success or causes failure,” Mr Turnbull said.

The Collections Council has been invited to participate in discussions with Cultural Ministers Council regarding the decision.

The Collections Council’s vision is for all Australians and their governments to be committed to policies and practices that ensure Australia’s collections will always inspire, amaze, inform and delight Australians and the world.

**PLEASE FIND FOLLOWING:**

- Cultural Ministers Council’s terms of reference for the Collections Council
- The Collections Council’s proposed Model plan for sustainable collections.

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES AND COMMENT:**

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## **TERMS OF REFERENCE FROM THE CULTURAL MINISTERS COUNCIL**

The Cultural Ministers Council terms of reference (2004-2009) for the Collections Council of Australia were to:

- Advance the stability and sustainability of the collections sector, through communication, consultation and resolution of common issues
- Promote understanding among the community, government, other funding bodies, and the media, of the nature of the sector and the issues it faces, as well as the contribution made by the sector to the areas of economic and social development
- Sponsor such programs deemed necessary and desirable to further industry development
- Promote high standards of performance and efficiency throughout the sector, through education, training and development
- Promote benchmarks and standards for the care and management of collections
- Promote access to and participation in Australian cultural heritage collections
- Act as a source of consolidated advice for governments on issues facing the collections sector
- Investigate sources of independent funding for the sector, and encourage private-sector support.

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## A new Model for sustainable scientific and cultural collections in Australia

### Introduction

The Collections Council's vision is for all Australians and their governments to be committed to policies and practices that ensure Australia's collections will always inspire, amaze, inform and delight Australians and the world.

The Council's strategic plan for 2009-2011 has identified as a priority the development and promotion of a *Sustainable Collections Sector Model* as the accepted benchmark for nationwide policy development and sector funding as a means of making this vision a reality.

### Why is a new Model required?

Research commissioned by Cultural Ministers Council,<sup>1</sup> the Collections Council of Australia,<sup>2,3</sup> and successive *State of the Environment* reports<sup>4</sup> has highlighted the perilous state of many Australian collections. The issues faced by the collections sector are real, substantial and urgent.

Under the *status quo*, the sector lacks:

- integrated systems of support for collections outside the central zones of the capital cities
- a framework to guide the creation and management of digital heritage collections
- linkage of digital and physical collections
- appropriate resourcing (i.e. funding, people and infrastructure) to meet the needs of the users of collections, and their communities

The challenges are:

- Most funding programs are over-subscribed, and their provision falls far short of actual needs.
- The income streams for collecting organisations are project-oriented, *ad hoc* and sporadic.
- Funding for capital projects often fails to recognise the need for ongoing and long-term operational support.

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- Involving more than 50,000 workers and over \$2 billion of government investment, the sector is larger than many decision-makers imagine, and the lack of coordinated information about the sector's operations obscures its scale and contribution.
- Australia's global identity is compromised by the lack of quality online resources such as the European Commission's *Europeana*<sup>5</sup>.
- Most people assume that all 'real' collections are also available in digital formats online, but in fact only a very small proportion of Australia's physical collections is available in digital format.
- Even higher expectations for accessible digital content will be created by the Australian Government's National Broadband Network initiative.
- The potential of the sector – for both scientific and cultural collections – is yet to be realised for all Australians.

## What will a new Model achieve?

The *Sustainable Collections Sector Model* aims to strengthen the collections sector's contributions to Australia's productivity and distinctive identity.

The Model will build on existing strengths of the sector; the activities and achievements of the Collections Council (particularly with respect to its encouragement of collaboration, and its development of standards, guidelines and resources); and world's best practice.

Implementation of the Model would:

- Facilitate better alignment between arts, heritage, environment, science, tourism, education and innovation policies so that Australia's collections are seen as active contributors to Australia's sustainable future.
- Identify new ways of recognising and sustaining Australia's Distributed National Collection.
- Re-frame the structural and financial systems that support the collections sector.

## Who will benefit from implementation of the new Model?

The new Model will provide:

- a platform for future policy development by governments
- a blueprint for planning by governments
- new benchmarks for the collections sector

A stronger collections sector will contribute to Australia's agendas for:

- productivity and international competitiveness
- education
- research
- innovation

- economic development (including cultural tourism)
- community connectedness and social inclusion
- global recognition

All Australians and their governments will, therefore, benefit from a more sustainable collections sector.

Has re-modelling been tried before in the collections sector?

In Australia, the 1996 *Cinderella Collections*<sup>6</sup> study of university museums and collections stimulated organisational change in several of Australia's universities and transformed their management and resourcing of collections.

In New Zealand, a holistic strategy – *Digital New Zealand* – aims to make New Zealand content easy to find, share and use. This includes content from government departments, publicly funded organisations, the private sector, and community groups.<sup>7</sup>

In Canada, Chile, England, Wales and the USA, various models exist but, importantly, each of those national governments sponsors a single peak agency that provides strategic leadership and a range of significant programs for their scientific and cultural collecting organisations. One example of an outstanding program is *Connecting to Collections: A Call to Action*<sup>8</sup> that addresses the significant needs of American collections, as identified via the 2005 *Heritage Health Index Report*.<sup>9</sup>

How will the Collections Council develop the Model?

The Council has already prepared a draft implementation plan which will build on its existing activities and extensive data base. In developing the Model, the Council will analyse the problems, consult broadly and carefully with the sector and other interested parties, and encourage a collaborative approach including whole-of-government and cross-portfolio approaches.

When will the Model be developed?

Subject to funding, the Council aims to finalise the Model by the end of 2011.

About the collections sector

According to *published* sources,<sup>10</sup> there are at least 2,359 collecting organisations in Australia. As yet *unpublished*, the Council's Australian Collecting Organisations Register includes approximately 5,000 collecting organisations.

The people in the sector include at least 30,401 volunteers and 22,030 employees working in collecting organisations, as well as the donors and subscribers (members and friends) who support individual collecting organisations, and the staff of service providers and government departments.

Australia's three levels of governments (Federal; State & Territory; Local) contributed \$2.108 billion to the collections sector in 2007-2008.<sup>11</sup>

Whether they are discovered in archives, galleries, libraries, museums, historical societies, keeping places, botanical or zoological gardens – or online – collections are central to Australia's identity and productivity.

Historical, cultural, scientific and digital collections hold the evidence and information that helps people solve problems in a changing world. Australia's collections extend awareness of self and place for individuals and groups. Collections can bridge gaps between generations and connect communities – past, present and future.

The collections sector includes a wide diversity of collecting organisations, from the large nationals to the small and specialist. Each of the four major domains (archives, galleries, libraries, and museums) in the collections sector is diverse in nature, different in structure and at a different stage of development. Each has unique issues but there are also commonalities of purpose and need associated with the collection, preservation, study and presentation of the nation's heritage.

## About the Collections Council of Australia

The Collections Council is Australia's national peak body representing the shared interests of archives, galleries, libraries and museums. The organisation was initiated by the Cultural Ministers Council and is supported by the Australian Government through the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

## Further information

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Ms Margaret Birtley, CEO                      0418 814 957

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Deakin University, Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific. *A study into the key needs of collecting institutions in the heritage sector – final report*. Canberra: Cultural Ministers Council, 2002. Viewed 16 September 2009 at: [http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector\\_info\\_item/4](http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/4)

<sup>2</sup> Dunn, A, *The Dunn Report*, Collections Council of Australia, Adelaide, 2007. Viewed 16 September 2009 at: <http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/Portals/0/The%20Dunn%20Report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Collections Council of Australia, *Digital Collections Summit 2006: Final Report*, Collections Council of Australia, Adelaide, 2008. Viewed 16 September 2009 at: [http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/Portals/0/Digital\\_Collections\\_Summit\\_FinalReport\\_v1.0x.pdf](http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/Portals/0/Digital_Collections_Summit_FinalReport_v1.0x.pdf)

- <sup>4</sup> For State of the Environment reports from 1996, 2001 and 2006, see: <http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/> (viewed 16 September 2009).
- <sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.europeana.eu/portal> (viewed 16 September 2009).
- <sup>6</sup> Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee: University Museums Review Committee, *Cinderella collections: University museums & collections in Australia: The report of the University Museums Review Committee*. Canberra, Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee, 1996.
- <sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.digitalnz.org> (viewed 16 September 2009).
- <sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.imls.gov/collections/> (viewed 16 September 2009).
- <sup>9</sup> See: <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/hhi/> (viewed 16 September 2009).
- <sup>10</sup> The Collections Council's primary source for quantitative data about the collections sector is the Australian Bureau of Statistics 'service industry' data collected in 2004 (*Public Libraries - Australia 2003-2004* - ABS Cat. No. 8561.0), and 2008 (*Museums - Australia 2007-2008* - ABS Cat. No. 8560), supplemented by information available from the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities and the Australian Society of Archivists.
- <sup>11</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Cultural Funding by Government, Australia, 2007-08*, released 28 August 2009. Reference: 4183.0, via <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/4183.0> (viewed 16 September 2009).