



Institute Building, North Tce (corner Kintore Ave), Adelaide
PO Box 263, Rundle Mall SA 5000, Australia
Tel : + 61 (8) 8207 7287 Fax: + 61 (8) 8207 7207

info@collectionscouncil.com.au
www.collectionscouncil.com.au

**MEDIA RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, 22 SEPTEMBER 2009**

**COLLECTIONS COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA SEEKS
NEW BENCHMARKS FOR COLLECTIONS POLICY**

The Collections Council of Australia plans to develop and promote a new model for sustainable scientific and cultural collections in Australia.

The Council's Chair, Noel Turnbull, said today that such a model is an urgent national priority for nation-wide benchmarks, policy development and funding of the collections sector.

He said the Council plans to consult with the sector and look at a variety of international models which could be adapted to Australian needs.

"Many Australian collections are in a perilous state. The sector lacks integrated support outside capital cities; there is no over-arching framework to guide the creation and management of digital heritage collections; and there is inadequate resourcing to meet the needs of collections and their communities," he said.

"We aim to achieve better alignment with other major sectors and policy platforms so that Australia's collections in the arts, culture, environment, heritage, information and science fields are seen as active contributors to a national sustainable future.

"The model will provide a platform for future policy development by governments, a blueprint for planning, and new benchmarks for the sector. This will contribute to a host of areas including productivity and international competitiveness, education, research, innovation, economic development including cultural tourism, community connectedness, social inclusion and global recognition," Mr Turnbull said.

The 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 has circulated a position paper (see attached) on the proposed new model to Australia's collections sector which includes approximately 5,000 collecting organisations.

Media enquiries and comment, Collections Council of Australia:

Mr Noel Turnbull, Chair (03) 9646 4102

Ms Margaret Birtley, CEO 0418 814 957

Publicist:

MediaWise (John Myers) (03) 9818 6339

• 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.

A new Model for sustainable scientific and cultural collections in Australia

Version 1.0 (21 September 2009)

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,¹ the Collections Council of Australia,^{2,3} and successive *State of the Environment* reports⁴ 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.

• 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.

- 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*⁵.
- 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*⁶ 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.⁷

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*⁸ that addresses the significant needs of American collections, as identified via the 2005 *Heritage Health Index Report*.⁹

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,¹⁰ 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.

-
- ⁴ For State of the Environment reports from 1996, 2001 and 2006, see: <http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/> (viewed 16 September 2009).
- ⁵ See: <http://www.europeana.eu/portal> (viewed 16 September 2009).
- ⁶ 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.
- ⁷ See: <http://www.digitalnz.org> (viewed 16 September 2009).
- ⁸ See: <http://www.imls.gov/collections/> (viewed 16 September 2009).
- ⁹ See: <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/hhi/> (viewed 16 September 2009).
- ¹⁰ 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.
- ¹¹ 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).