

The National Museum
Of Australia,
Review Secretariat

Jack Thompson A.M.,
P.O. Box 630,
Woolgoolga,
N.S.W., 2456

4th March 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

I have been associated with the National Museum of Australia (N.M.A.) for many years, serving as a member of Council, and then as the President and currently Patron of the Friends of the N.M.A.

During this time I have been privy to and often part of discussion and debate concerning the role and vision of this important institution. The current nature and role of the museum has been derived from these many years of dialogue and exchange with museologists, historians, artists, educators, anthropologists, archaeologists, sociologists, architects and many other pertinent disciplines. This expertise has been sought from both within Australia and from other parts of the world, where the creation of similar institutions has provided appropriate experience or example.

The Gallery of First Australians has been a central element in this expression of the vision of a National Museum from its inception. It has been extremely important for us to establish in Australia, together with our presentation of European Settlement, a museum in which the past and present of the First Australians is presented by the people themselves; as is the current practise in museums in Canada with their First Nations and in the United States of America with their Native Americans.

The decision to give prominence to the Gallery of First Australians was made after considerable deliberation. It was recognised by Council that due to lack of adequate funding it would be impossible to present each of the major themes of the museum with the depth and wealth of detail available in the museum's repository. However, since the Gallery of First Australians is the only one of its kind in Australia and the only one of the museum's themes not dealt with in this way by any other museum; it was seen as only fitting that this unique exhibition should take pride of place in our National Museum.

As the N.M.A. stands, it is a monument both to the vision of those who perceived the need for such a national institution, and the tenacity and persistence of those who pursued that vision in spite of a paucity of funding and it would seem, political will.

The National Museum of Australia, on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, stands at long last as a bright beginning. The museum's Director, Ms. Dawn Casey and her able staff have certainly done their part in presenting dynamic, contemporary and pertinent exhibitions; that have ensured the approbation both public and academic worthy of this important institution. I trust that this current Review will not fail to recognise this and will recommend further increased funding that will allow this vision to flourish, so that this institution might become an organization on the scale of the Smithsonian Institute in the U.S.A.; capable of overseeing the preservation, exhibition and recognition of our vast and complex National Heritage.

I am sure that although your Panel of Review does not appear to include an historian, a representative of the First Australians or a number of other areas of relevant expertise; you will consult such people for the advice and guidance that will bring to your ultimate deliberations and recommendations the balance and authority they deserve, if they are to have the credibility necessary for their implementation and the future growth of this great Australian institution. It has been my privilege to be involved with the creation of the National Museum of Australia and I look forward to your recommendations enhancing, expanding and furthering the vision of the museum's contribution to Australian public life.

If we can not secure increased funding for the museum, in these troubled times, let us at least be assured that we can continue to support our National Museum and the role and vision that are currently expressed in its vital exhibitions and public program activities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jack Thompson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jack Thompson A.M.