

APPENDIX III – REVIEW OF THE DISCOVERY CENTRE

This review has found that the Discovery Centre is not reflective of the quality and standing of CSIRO as a national research organisation carrying out cutting edge research.

There are a range of issues affecting:

1. Poor design

When reviewed in the context of best practice contemporary exhibition design, it appears that the CSIRO Discovery Centre is of poor quality with several critical issues as outlined below:

- » The lighting is poor with reflections cast on display cases and media screens and shadows on text panels; a barrier to comfortable viewing.
- » The placement of products available for purchase within the displays visually detracts from the exhibition content and appears as an afterthought in a desperate attempt to boost sales.
- » Some text panels are displayed in very inaccessible locations – for instance, on a 45 degree angle above the turtle tank.
- » Many of the audio and video presentations go well beyond the length of what would be expected to be tolerated by the average visitor who is being asked to simply sit and listen, with many individual clips up to five minutes in length and some up to ten.
- » Audio is difficult to hear when school groups are present.
- » Several multimedia displays were either not functioning, or functioning only in part, resulting in the feeling of missing content.
- » Some electronic touch screen displays were clunky, difficult to use and required significant investment from the visitor for little reward.
- » Bleeding of sound between areas can be intrusive, for instance the climate soundscape is incongruent with the content in the area focusing on renewable energy but is highly audible from there.

2. Heavy Reliance on text

The Discovery Centre displays have a particularly heavy reliance on text, with a large amount of text on each panel, and often many panels in the same area. The text panels often don't have a leading caption so visitors have to read half the panel before they can understand what they are reading about and to choose whether or not they are interested.

3. Poor Introduction and flow between spaces

Several of the themed areas don't have a clear introduction, this was particularly noticeable in the area focused on renewable energy, in which there is no flow from the previous section on climate, and the huge amounts of text panels surrounding the visitor make it difficult to know where to look.

4. Didactic, uni-directional and non-interactive displays

The name Discovery Centre lends itself to a notion of being able to uncover something through some kind of active participation, to be a discoverer. However, the displays in the Centre are largely uni-directional, didactic and non-participatory. The Centre should certainly be authoritative, but deeper engagement needs should be enabled through a wider variety of modes of engagement, allowing active participation going well beyond the interactivity of merely being able to choose which video to watch on a touch screen.

Even in a new display on climate, the visitor is invited to "ask questions about climate change and to take the opportunity to better understand its impact on all areas of our lives." However, the large "interactive" touch

screen consists only of a large number of pre-recorded videos which visitors can choose to watch. Other displays such as the global food security display uses buttons as a visual attractor (hinting at interactivity) to what is essentially only a display of text with complementary images.

It must be noted that school groups taking part in programs at the Discovery Centre are indeed treated to a participatory experience with the "DiscoverLab", but this intriguing area is not available for broader public interaction.

The lack of interactivity at the Centre is further compounded by the lack of presentation of avenues for further participation and engagement in the research and public debate and dialogue of the CSIRO.

Having the scientific labs visible from the foyer of the Discovery Centre provides the illusion of bringing the back of house to front of house; a trend that is taking off in science museums internationally. In the case of the Discovery Centre, it seems as if this is meant to provide the sense that the scientists and the research that is being undertaken are close and therefore accessible. However, there is no further interpretation or engagement with what actually occurs in those labs: the work of the scientists remains a mystery.