

National Committee for Ecology, Evolution and Conservation

A committee of the Australian Academy of Science

Friday, 23 July 2021

Secretariat

Public Works Committee

Re: National Research Collections Building, Black Mountain CSIRO

I write on behalf of the AAS in support of the proposal to build a new facility to house, maintain, and conduct research on the National Research Collections Australia (NRCA).

The NRCA represent irreplaceable infrastructure for documentation and understanding of Australia's unique biodiversity, with applications across research and innovation in agriculture, public health, biomedicine and for managing our biodiversity. The value of our national collections, and research done on them is well documented in the 2019 [AAS Decadal Plan for Taxonomy and Biosystematics](#) and an analysis from [Deloitte Access Economics](#) found a return on investment ratio of between 4.5x and 35x.

The NRCA specifically holds 13 million specimens, representing 240 years of collection and analysis and ~20% of all biological collections. These collections are increasingly digitised, so so available to all, but it remains crucial to protect the specimens themselves as the physical record and for future study. Both here and internationally, there are many examples of using such collections to answer unanticipated questions with unanticipated methods as the science and needs change over time. The embedding of NCRA within CSIRO is ideal for developing and applying such new methods (eg in genomics, image analysis and AI) to maximise the value of the collections for addressing important problems.

The proposed investment in this new facility will colocate all CSIRO-managed, Canberra-based collections into a new start-of-the-art facility, ensuring the long-term protection and availability of this resource. In parallel, it will deliver the next generation of research facilities and infrastructure to support fundamental and applied biodiversity discovery, documentation and diagnostics.

For the above reasons, the Academy, through the NCEEC, supports strongly this investment.

Yours truly

