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The National Museum of Australia is pleased to make this submission to the Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy. The Museum has a considered view that the life and health of a democratic national community is vivified and sustained by strong national institutions that affirm the value of the nation and its peoples.

Moreover the high public trust in institutions such as museums is evidence of the wider community's desire for places upon which they can rely for impartial and considered information. In particular, the National Museum believes that it has a responsibility to serve the national community by encouraging and stimulating learning and discussion about Australian life and experience. The discharge of this responsibility in ways that are embracing and engaged with our publics is crucial in building an engaged civil society that will underpin the future of our democracy. It is vitally important that people are supported in reflecting upon and thinking about what it means to live in this country, what their responsibilities are to the wider community, and how they can constructively engage with debates about our future.

Fundamentally, the Museum has a view that its role is to *support* public discussion and debate about our past, present and future by canvassing a breadth of ideas and interests in its work, and not in taking sides or settling arguments that might exist between partisan interests. The Museum is committed to representing the long human history of the continent through the history and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in all their diversity, and joining this to the remarkable story of the making of modern Australian in the past two centuries or so. This story, unique in terms of the global storytelling of human experience, is composed of three important, inherent strengths, as identified by Noel Pearson and others:

- The lives and cultures of the First Peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- The foundation of Australian democracy upon British forms and institutions; and
- The successful integration of people of varied faiths, cultures and ethnic backgrounds in a diverse, multicultural Australian people.

The National Museum believes that a knowledge and understanding of these three pillars of Australian life is crucial to developing a clear sense of our national meaning and identity, and therefore in productively engaging people in the core ideas of nation. Without a clear sense of the human history of this land it is difficult to imagine how the Australian people can join together to confront the challenges of this Fourth Industrial Age. It is axiomatic, in the Museum's view, that our understanding of the past is the foundation upon which we come to know the present, and by extension can then frame and deal with the future. This is true for the nation, as much as it is true for the individual.

- a. the changing notions of nationhood, citizenship and modern notions of the nation state in the twenty first century; and g. comparison between Australian public debate and policy and international trends;

There is now widespread public debate about the character of nations and nation states in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which focuses on the inherent limitations of the democracies and their tendency to populism. Much of this is attributed to the rise of new technologies and media, which have tended to polarise publics and produced fragmented national communities without any clear, shared conception of their shared interests and values.

While these forces are no doubt real and present, the practice of politics in our civil society has always included a popular element within political movements and advocacy. An examination of Australia's own experience in the nineteenth century shows that there were populist forces in play, particularly with respect to such events in our political life such as the development of representative democracies, the rise of labour politics and emergence of federal ideals which resulted in Federation of the Australian colonies. Later, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the movements for civil and land rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were ultimately joined by broadly-based political engagement from across a wide cross-section of Australian society.

The National Museum's *Defining Moments in Australian History* project, which encourages public discussion and debate about key events and moments in our past, is a case in point. Through the use of online communications technologies, social media and public discussions and debates (many of which are later broadcast in partnership with ABC Radio National), the Museum has asked Australians to reflect upon the nature of Australian experience and how this has contributed to our present conditions and circumstances. This program has led to a steady growth in the public's contribution to our understanding of the past, through the events or experiences that they have advanced as being nationally important and significant.

Hence, the National Museum believes that there is a practical utility, as well as intrinsic value, in Australians learning about their own political and democratic history as they seek to make sense of their present circumstances and the fate of the nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Museums have the capacity to raise public awareness of the value of cultural and natural heritage in ways that encourage people to recognise their responsibilities to their fellow citizens, and the shared experiences of all elements of the national community. They are places that can affirm our citizenship and the practice of civics.

It is also the case that museums such as the National Museum help make otherwise abstract ideas of national meaning more material and physical, through exhibitions and other programs that feature collections of history and heritage. Such programs make the past manifest and real. In other words, museums committed to the national story can render ideas of nation more accessible and meaningful, by employing communication methods that are felt and visceral, as well as stimulating their mental and cognitive reflection upon national identity, national community and the practice of citizenship.

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This is especially important for school children, who are looking for ways to make sense of the world in which they live. It is why the National Museum has a strong view that all school visitors to Canberra, and indeed all students across the nation, should be able to learn more about the breadth of Australia's past, by engaging with programs like *Defining Moments in Australian History*. With the assistance of philanthropists John and Pauline Gandel, the Museum is now preparing online resources for all schools under an extension of this program, known as *The Defining Moments Digital Classroom*.

b. rights and obligations of citizenship, including naturalisation and revocation, and the responsibility of the state to its citizens in both national and international law;

A resilient and strong society requires cultural prosperity. People need to feel a sense of belonging, value and agency. This sense of belonging to the national community is the bedrock of understanding both one's rights and also one's responsibilities to fellow citizens and the nation. We should all learn about the history of our country, in all its diversity, in order to fully understand our culture and embrace the shared aspects of our identity as Australians.

Education is a primary function of the National Museum of Australia. Museums engage in formal and non-formal education and lifelong learning, through the development and transmission of knowledge, educational and pedagogical programmes, in partnership with other educational institutions, notably schools. They educate various audiences about the subject matters of their collections and about civic life, as well as helping to raise greater awareness of the importance of preserving heritage, and fostering creativity.

The Parliamentary and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) scheme, administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education, funds students by kilometre travelled to undertake a civics and citizenship excursion to Canberra. School groups must participate in programs at the Australian War Memorial, the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, and the Australian Electoral Commission to qualify for the rebate.

The Museum offers a highly regarded and nationally recognised education program, and is included in major education itineraries for Canberra excursions, welcoming ca.90,000 students to its Acton site each year. However, the Museum is not currently a mandatory PACER recognised organisation, despite the fact that there is a clear sense in which the history of the nation is essential to understanding one's place in our civil society and the responsibilities such membership of the national community confers.

While it remains an optional destination for school visits under the PACER program, the Museum offers two programs that specifically focus upon civics and civics education, alongside its many other education programs: the 1-hour *Meet the People* program; and the 2-hour *Making a Nation* program. The Museum's current education programs are all aligned

to the Australian Curriculum (including methodological/inquiry skills in civics and citizenship and history, as well as specific topics).

- c. social cohesion and cultural identity in the nation state; and e. contemporary notions of cultural identity, multiculturalism and regionalism;

The plural reality of the contemporary Australian community is one of its great strengths, but one which cannot be taken for granted. The nation has flourished as a result of its diverse national community and it has an enviable record of dealing with waves of migration to its shores in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pragmatically and peaceably. Moreover, the nation has successfully incorporated migrant communities in the life of the nation over the course of the past century, a fact which is recognised by other nations in our region.

With collections directly referencing and representing the diversity of the national community, the National Museum is well placed to present multiple viewpoints on important issues, talk about complex ideas and events as well as promote a public conversation that can bring people together in meaningful dialogue. The challenge for the National Museum is to maximise the use of its collections and the stories that surround them, to use objects and personal experiences to encourage discussion and debate and to help people re-shape or re-imagine their lives in an ever-changing world.

Domestically, it is clear that Australians greatly value their major national institutions and regard them as places that connect them to the nation. The most recent National Cultural Institutions Impact Report prepared by the Department of Communications and the Arts, for financial year 2016-17, showed how important these institutions are to Australia's cultural landscape. Some key findings for that year include:

- Visits to the National Collecting Institutions reached 10.7 million;
- 416,000 students visited the National Collecting Institutions; and
- 40.5 million website visits were made to their online sites.

The NMA's contribution to this success for 2016-17 was profound, with

- More than 1.8 million visits to the NMA and its programs;
- 90,000 students participating in education and teacher-guided programs at the NMA; and
- 2.1 million visits to the NMA's website.

The NMA faces a series of challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as the broader community experiences seismic shifts in social, political and cultural norms and expectations. These societal changes are transforming public discourse and engagement, and demand that institutions respond in ways that enable audiences to be participants in, not simply consumers of, what the institutions can offer. Rather than focused on their internal operations, all institutions need to be intensely focused on their publics – on their visitors and audiences. The National Museum is committed to building its relationship with the Australian people in ways that encourage them to reflect upon the common points in their experiences, as much as their differences. Through this, it believes that people can be proud of their specific

cultural, religious and other distinctions, but understand the shared character of their membership of the national community.

- d. the role that globalisation and economic interdependence and economic development plays in forming or disrupting traditional notions of national identity;  
and f. the extent to which nation states balance domestic imperatives and sovereignty and international obligations;

The global flows of information, capital and people are redescribing the way we have come to understand the nation state in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In particular, people now have almost instant access to global forms and ideas that transcend national boundaries. Some of these narratives may in fact contest the interests of one's own nation, and may be seen as posing significant risks or security concerns for Australians and their society.

The National Museum has an important role in cultural diplomacy and economic development, in leading the nation's creative enterprise within the emerging knowledge economy. Australia's place in the Asia Pacific is a great opportunity for the nation – an EY study<sup>1</sup> found the value of creative industries in the Asia Pacific outstripped comparative figures for all other regions (creative industries were valued at 743 billion US dollars in the Asia Pacific out of a global total of 2.25 trillion US dollars). Australia's national institutions are key players in helping unlock that economic opportunity and value.

As the NMA has previously argued, its mandate to develop, conserve, research and exhibit a National Historical Collection has both intrinsic and instrumental value that enhances Australia's national standing, and which affirms the strength of our society and its values to our own people. The Museum's National Historical Collection, and indeed all national collections, are fundamental to our self-understanding as a people and a society. In a world where global forces are increasingly experienced and felt at a local level, it is a matter of national interest to provide clear and accessible opportunities for all people in this country to develop a mature sense of what it means to be Australian.

The presentation of a coherent narrative of nation is therefore critical to dealing with the risk posed by the flows of information and ideas that contest values that are broadly understood to underpin our society. Young and old alike need to have access to clear and sensible information that reflects our capacity as a nation to endure and make sense of conflict and contest in ways that are consistent with our aspirations as a society. The National Museum, and indeed all cultural institutions, offer this capacity to involve people directly in reflecting upon what matters in our society and the opportunities that it presents. The National Museum believes that it is important to ensure that our own distinctive and unique characteristics as a nation flow from our history and experience. The accretion of layers of meaning in our public life altogether help to establish the record of our nation, in ways that allow people to feel themselves to be a part of that story, and with a life purpose that is consistent with our traditions as one of the world's oldest democratic nations.

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<sup>1</sup> EY - *Cultural times The first global map of cultural and creative industries*, December 2015  
[http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-cultural-times-2015/\\$FILE/ey-cultural-times-2015.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-cultural-times-2015/$FILE/ey-cultural-times-2015.pdf)