

House of Representatives – Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment
and the Arts
Transcript of public hearing Perth 7th November 2011-11-21
Western Australian Museum

Question on notice:

p.27: "CHAIR: So what do we need to do to get a coordinated research project underway? What are the barriers? What is the problem? Let's put funding to one side for a moment. I assume there are also processes that are causing the problem. Think about that and, if you want to, write back to the committee."

Response:

We suggest there are two major opportunities to address the issue of research barriers for collections and research facilities throughout Australia.

Recommendation 1. Federal Government funding distribution methods. We would recommend an independent committee be established that would address the essential research priorities and allocation of funding across both the marine and terrestrial environments throughout the States of Australia. Collections and research facilities in Museums, whose mandate is to document biodiversity, do not have equal footing with research in regulatory agencies. An independent committee would assess the research needs and outcomes regardless of the institutions strategic brief and could provide long-term oversight of the national research effort. The independent committee should also provide more careful targeting of the national research effort by drawing and building on ongoing and previously conducted programs. This would maximize financial efficiency by enabling integration and utilization of current knowledge (held by many different agencies) to inform decisions, while facilitating the gathering of new essential knowledge.

Recommendation 2. Collections as infrastructure. We would recommend that collections be regarded as essential and valuable components of the nation's research infrastructure. Scientific collections are the bank of knowledge of the biodiversity of Australia (see p. 23 of this transcript). Regarding biological collections as infrastructure allows for clear national goals for science investments and appropriate management strategies to be provided for nationwide coordinated research initiatives. This would benefit the national and global scientific enterprise. It would address current problems of maintenance, under-resourced curation and lack of sufficient funds for new and replacement staff and buildings and ensure that digitization, state-of-the-art informatics and internet-based taxonomy significantly improve the information base available for ecosystem assessment and management