INQUIRY INTO FOLLOW UP OF AUDITOR-GENERAL'S PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORTS OCTOBER 2009 TO SEPTEMBER 2010

Organisation: Australian Museum

Name: Mr Frank Howarth

Position: Director

Telephone: 9320 6110

Date Received: 1/08/2011

Theme:

Summary

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
Mr Frank Howarth

Phone: (02) 9320 6110; Fax: (02) 9320 6074
Internet: frank.howarth@austmus.gov.au

1 August 2011

Mr Jonathan O'Dea MP
Legislative Assembly
Public Accounts Committee
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
Sydney   NSW   2000

Email: pac@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr O'Dea

I am writing to provide the information requested in your letter to me dated 6 July 2011 for a submission outlining the Australian Museum's response to the Auditor-General's *Report on Knowing the Collections*, tabled September 2010.

The attached table, using the template provided, outlines the actions taken over the last 12 months in response to the Auditor-General's recommendations.

The table shows that the Museum has completed all actions by their due dates and is on track to complete remaining actions in the timeframes specified. To this point we have undertaken most of this work by re-directing internal resources. We are taking every opportunity to seek funding to accelerate digitisation of our collections and are still waiting on the outcomes of several applications, including a major funding bid in collaboration with other Cultural Institutions through Communities NSW in late 2010.

In parallel, we have been participating in the Australian Government's development of a National Research Infrastructure strategy through the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. Our submissions and involvement in Expert Working Groups seems to have been successful in having digitized collections recognised as a critical national research infrastructure capability, but whether or not this will translate into funding is yet to be seen.

You also asked for feedback on the effectiveness of the audit process, including the benefit of the audit to the Museum. The Museum welcomed the Auditor-General's recommendations and, as you can see from this submission, we are making substantial progress in implementing them.
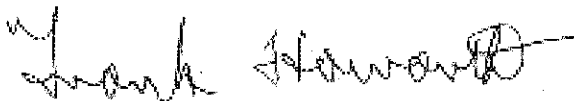
My only criticism of the process relates to the manner in which the findings of the audit were made public. The media statement issued by the Auditor-General's office at the time was sensationalist and negative to the point of substantially damaging the Museum's reputation. I received quite a few telephone calls and emails from concerned stakeholders in response to the media release. As a public institution relying heavily on our image of trust-worthiness and professionalism for support, the release resulted in us having to devote significant resources to counter and manage the negative press.

nature culture discover

.../2

   I ask that the Public Accounts Committee consider this aspect of the Auditor-General's office operations to help ensure that the resources of audited agencies can be devoted to dealing with the substance of the audit rather than the 'collateral damage'.

Yours sincerely

Frank Howarth
Director

PERFORMANCE AUDIT – *KNOWING THE COLLECTIONS*

IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

	RECOMMENDATION	ACCEPTED OR REJECTED	ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN	DUE DATE	STATUS (completed, on track, delayed) COMMENT	RESPONSIBILITY
1	The Australian Museum needs to grade or otherwise prioritise its collections in terms of their use and importance, in order to better protect the collections and improve use of resources. It needs to adopt criteria for this purpose by March 2011.	Accepted	a) Workshops will be held at the Australian Museum to develop criteria for prioritising natural science and cultural collections. Input will be sought from internal and external stakeholders.	March 2011	Completed Workshops were conducted in November 2010 to develop criteria for prioritisation of collections. A Canadian model was used as the basis for the prioritisation system adopted by the Australian Museum.	
			b) Criteria to be submitted to the Australian Museum Trust for endorsement	March 2011	Completed In December 2010 the Australian Museum Trust endorsed criteria for the prioritisation for the Natural Science and Cultural collections developed as outlined above.	
			c) Endorsed criteria to be used to determine priorities for collection digitisation.	March 2011	Completed The prioritisation system has been set up in the collections management database system.	
2	The Australian Museum needs to tighten inventory control by December 2011 to reflect differing levels of risk by: a) establishing an independent oversight and reporting role	Accepted in part	a) Changes will be made to the arrangements for quarterly inventories with staff from non-target collections selecting and participating in the inventory. Results of inventories will continue to be presented to the	December 2011	Completed In June 2011 the Australian Museum Trust endorsed a revised procedure for quarterly collection inventories based on criteria for risk and importance.	

				Australian Museum Trust.		
	b)	clearly defining and checking requirements of objects in each collection		b) The Australian Museum will revise the design of inventory checking of collections based on risk and the criteria developed in response to Recommendation 1.	December 2011	Completed In June 2011 the Australian Museum Trust endorsed a revised procedure for quarterly collection inventories based on criteria for risk and importance.	
	c)	setting specific standards for timeliness and cataloguing content		c) The Australian Museum has minimum requirements for the registration of objects and specimens. Many specimens, especially those collected incidentally (by-catch) will only have minimal details until they are subjected to detailed research. The timeframe for such research is unpredicatable because it depends largely on visiting research interests and success with grant applications. The criteria defined in response to Receommendation 1 will be used to prioritise digitisation of records should additional funding become available.	December 2011	On Track Collection prioritisation has been set up in the collection management database. Minimum requirements for registration of specimens and objects are being defined according to criteria for risk and importance.	
	d)	identifying the location of all objects within the collections, pinpointing high risk objects		d) All high risk objects will have their locations pinpointed.	December 2011	On Track High risk objects have been identified and location data is being entered to the collection database.	
	e)	evaluating ways of making inventory checking more efficient		e) Methods used by other museums to make inventory checking more efficient will be evaluated for application at the Australian Museum.	December 2011	On Track The Australian Museum is piloting a system developed at Museum Victoria for more efficient inventory checking of high risk specimens and objects. This system has been selected for trial as it is	

					compatible with the AM collection management database. Software has been purchased and the next phase of the pilot project will commence in August 2011.
	f) conducting a baseline inventory to serve as a basis for future inventory control		f) A comprehensive baseline inventory would not be an effective use of collection management resources. Quarterly inventories will be continued in conjunction with project-driven or loan-driven demands.		Not accepted, no action.
3	The Museum needs to develop by September 2011 a specific management policy and plans for retrospective documentation and digitisation including: a) its understanding of the backlogs it has b) its timescales for reducing the backlog c) levels of resources allocated to the task d) number of objects/records to be addressed e) the standard of documentation required f) progress reviews on a regular basis	Accepted	a) A detailed plan addressing the points contained in recommendations 3a) – 3e) will be developed b) Opportunities for allocation of appropriate internal resources to digitisation priorities will be explored. c) The Australian Museum will continue to apply for funding to progress digitisation of its collections. A joint	September 2011	On Track Priorities were identified in the Digital Asset Management proposal developed with Communities NSW in 2010. These are currently being reviewed. On Track Priority digitisation projects were funded in 2010-11 from internal resources. Budgets for 2011-12 are currently being discussed and it is hoped to fund some digitisation. On Track The result of the joint funding proposal which was developed with Communities

			funding proposal was developed with Communities NSW in 2010.		NSW is still not known. Funding has been received from the Commonwealth DSEWPC for digitisation of the ant collection.	
			d) Six monthly reviews of progress against the plan will be reported to the Australian Museum Trust.		On Track Reporting to the Australian Museum Trust will be a part of the plan which is being developed.	