

National Museum of Australia testimony

Collaboration with the British Museum

The National Museum of Australia and the British Museum have a long-standing international collaboration to:

- research the Australian Indigenous holdings of the British Museum
- reconnect this material with contemporary Indigenous communities
- display the results in Canberra and London
- enhance the nation's cultural life through public discussion about the complex issues that surround such collections.

In 2015, this rich international collaboration delivered two landmark exhibitions that drew Australian and British audiences into an engagement with the entangled Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories that lie behind this material. It has expanded public knowledge and appreciation of these objects and their associated histories.

Communities of origin in this country now enjoy an established dialogue with the British Museum and the National Museum of Australia in respect of the cultural material held in these collections. These relationships inform an evolving international debate about the roles and responsibilities of museums as cultural custodians of materials that originated from first peoples communities.

Prince's Charities Australia

In an extension of the work with the British Museum, the National Museums of Australia established a partnership with the Prince's Charities Australia for a scholarship program for Indigenous cultural workers, which includes skills and capacity building placements at the Museum and access to British institutions.

The partnership is providing development opportunities for six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural workers to engage in a transformative program in Canberra and London.

International Program

The Museum's International Program builds enduring collaborations with institutions through joint development of public events and exhibitions, and supports knowledge development, capacity-building and cultural understanding through skills exchange and expert advice. In 2015, the program played a key role in showcasing Australia to the world, integrating Australian stories and collections in a broader global context of story-telling and research about human history and experience. The major achievements of this program in 2015 were two landmark exhibitions – *Enduring*

civilisations at the British Museum, organised with the National Museum of Australia, and *Encounters: revealing stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander objects from the British Museum* at the National Museum in Canberra. Over 59,000 visitors saw *Enduring civilisations* at the British Museum, while over 70,000 have visited *Encounters* at the National Museum of Australia.

The Program builds long-lasting international partnerships between institutions, enhancing Australia's cultural diplomacy objectives through the following outcomes:

- agreements which develop professional expertise in museum practice across several disciplines, in curatorial, conservation, education and public programming, among others, through staff exchanges and training programs
- developing, touring and hosting object-rich exhibitions and two dimensional displays which communicate Australia's rich history and culture to international audiences
- fostering reciprocal programs that build knowledge between Australia and bilateral partners, and bring the best overseas collections to these shores for Australian audiences.

In support of its International Program, the Museum established agreements based on the same objectives of advancing cultural diplomacy between nations, including with:

- National Museum of Singapore
- National Museum of China
- British Museum
- Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery
- Museum D'Historie Naturelle Du Havre, France.

These agreements enable the Museum to co-curate and tour exhibitions, foster staff exchanges to build cross-country expertise and understanding, and undertake joint research and collection management projects. For example, in 2015, National Museum staff members were involved in professional exchanges in China, Singapore and Papua New Guinea, and staff from China and Singapore were hosted on exchange by the Museum.