



ARCS CONFERENCE 2025

OVERVIEW

- **Collection storage at the NMA**
- **Rationalizing part of the collection and why**
- **Process**
- **Learnings**
- **Next steps**



Image courtesy of the National Museum of Australia



Image courtesy: <http://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/images/map-australia-showing-states-and-territories>

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA (NMA)



- Established in 1980 by the Australian Government under the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980*
- Museum building opened in Part II—The National Museum of Australia

4 Establishment of Museum

- (1) There is established by this Act a National Museum of Australia.
- (2) The Museum:
 - (a) is a body corporate, with perpetual succession;
 - (b) shall have a common seal;
 - (c) may acquire, hold and dispose of real and personal property; and
 - (d) may sue and be sued in its corporate name.

Note: The *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* applies to the Museum. That Act deals with matters relating to corporate Commonwealth entities, including reporting and the use and management of public resources.

Image: [National Museum of Australia Act 1980 - Federal Register of Legislation](#)

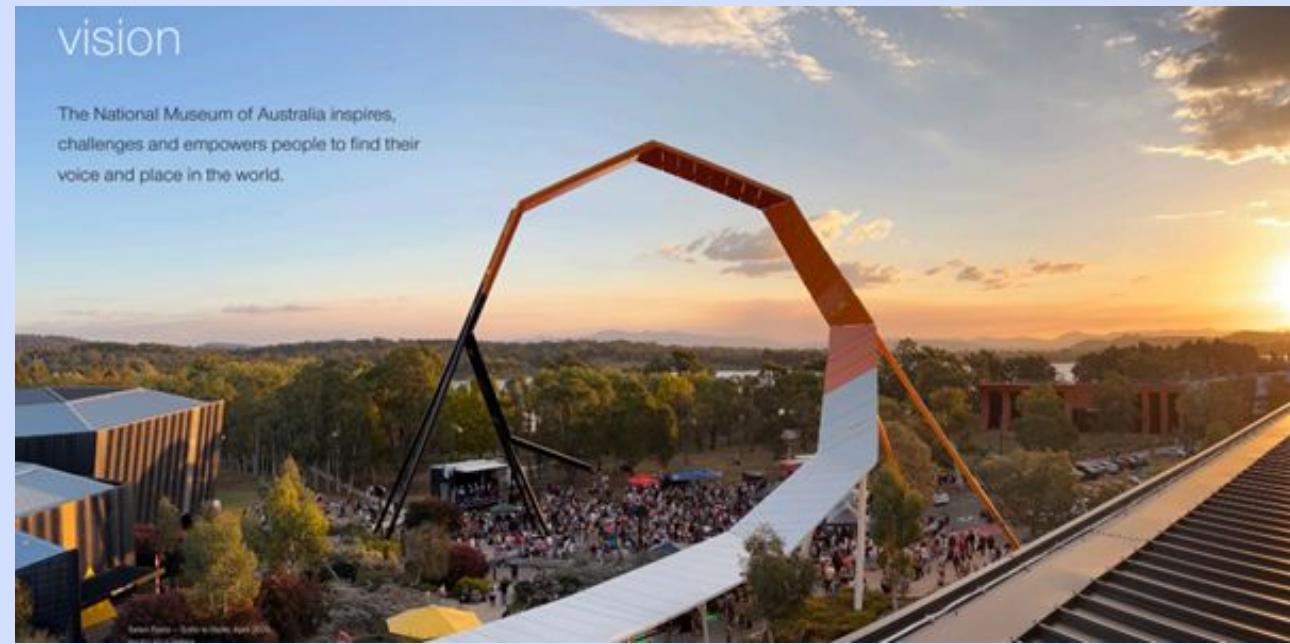


Image: www.nma.gov.au/about/corporate/plans/strategic-plan

COLLECTION STORAGE IS SEXY

- Addressing significant storage issues
- Unmanaged environmental conditions
- Lack of \$\$\$\$\$\$
- Becoming a priority!



NMA Storage Facility, 8 McEacharn Place, Mitchell ACT AUSTRALIA, Image: Pippa Thorogood McLennan, 13 February 2025



NMA storage facility, 90 Vicars Street, Mitchell ACT, AUSTRALIA, Image: Pippa Thorogood McLennan, 30 October 2025

COLLECTION STORAGE CONTINUES TO BE SEXY

- In 2023:
 - Commitment from Government with \$\$\$\$
 - *Revive: Australia's Cultural Policy* launches



NMA Storage Facility, 8 McEacharn Place, Mitchell ACT AUSTRALIA, Image: Pippa Thorogood McLennan, 18 October 2025



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
Office for the Arts

WHERE TO START?

- **Criteria:**
 - **Most at risk collection in least appropriate storage facility**
 - **Rationalize collection in one storage facility, start small!?**



NMA Storage Facilities, Mitchell ACT AUSTRALIA, Image courtesy Ray White Commercial, 2025

HOW TO MAKE IT WORK

- Create dedicated and diversely skilled team
- Introduce and implement new documentation processes to streamline cataloguing
- Get buy in from organization to support all rationalization

Minimum Dataset for Non-Accessioned Collection Record

FOR MCEACHARN PURPOSES ONLY

Must be Completed	
Not Essential but Useful	
Field	Data Entry Notes
TITLE	
Record Category	Collection Record
Category Type	NMA
Hierarchy Type	Object OR Parent
Primary Object Type	What is it? Search key words to find the relevant type.
Title/Name	What is it called?
Title Type	Is always set to <i>Descriptive Title</i> and doesn't need changing
Collection Type	NHC most of the time, OR Archive, Museum, To Be Determined
Collection Name	Search from look up list
Accession Lot	Either found from previous records, or from CM10 file
File Number	File Number found on CM10 (can copy and paste)



NMA Storage Facility, 8 McEacharn Place, Mitchell ACT AUSTRALIA, Image: Jen Rodriguez NMA, 2022

PREPARATION

- Desktop assessment
- Decontamination of the site
- Install infrastructure for staff to work on-site: office, toilet!



NMA Storage Facility, 8 McEacharn Place, Mitchell ACT AUSTRALIA, Image: Jen Rodriguez NMA, 2022



RATIONALIZING!



Objects from L-R: Thomas Dalton Collection and Jack Liddle Collection, NMA Storage Facility, 8 McEacharn Place, Mitchell ACT AUSTRALIA, Image: Pippa Thorogood McLennan NMA, 2024

Conservator Dr. Cancy Chu cleaning collection of lead dust from posters, NMA Storage Facility, 8 McEacharn Place, Mitchell ACT AUSTRALIA, Image: Pippa Thorogood McLennan NMA, 2024



RATIONALIZING!



Curator, Di Rutherford, inspecting type from the Thomas Dalton printery collection NMA Storage Facility, 8 McEacharn Place, Mitchell ACT AUSTRALIA, Image: Pippa Thorogood McLennan NMA, 2024

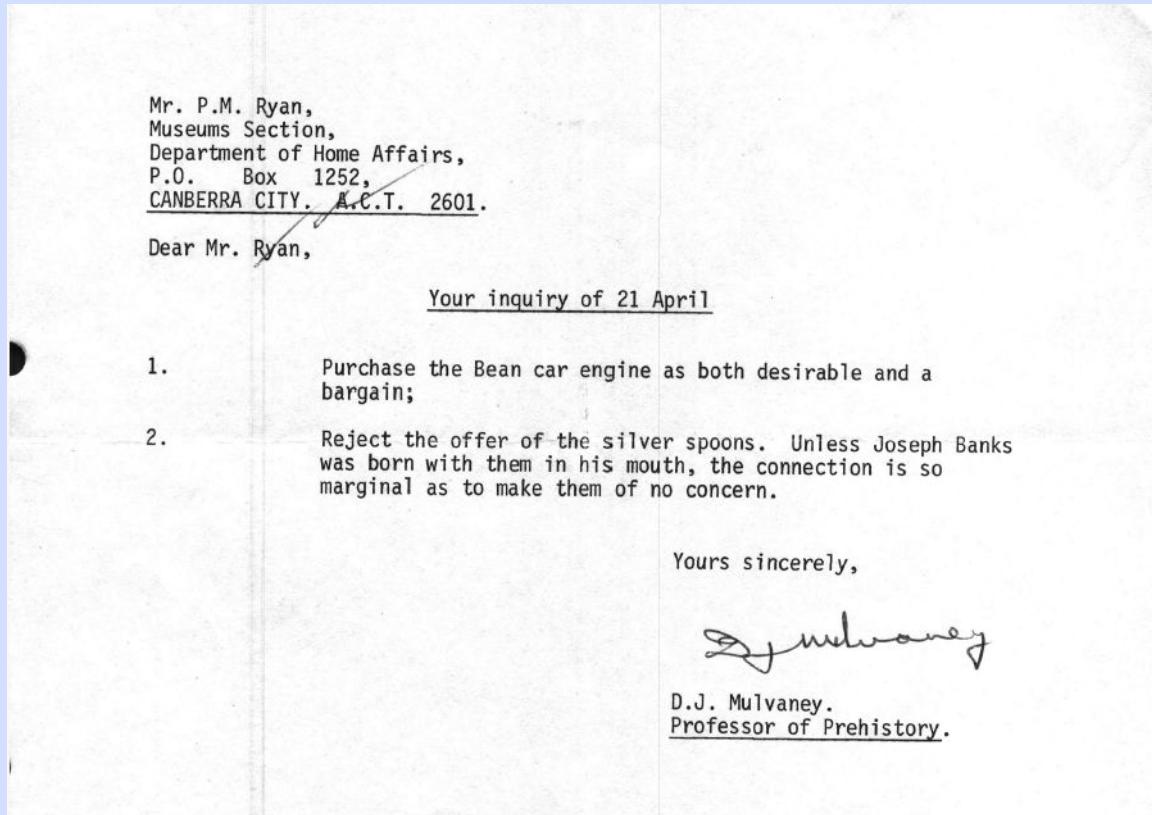
Registration Officer, Jas Sydenham cataloguing objects from the Locker Collection, NMA Storage Facility, 8 McEacharn Place, Mitchell ACT AUSTRALIA, Image: Pippa Thorogood McLennan NMA, 2024

FROM THEN, TO NOW

- **As of 30 June 2025:**
 - **Number of object records rose to 5,085, from 930 in 2022 (desktop assessment)**
 - **All objects have been viewed, assessed and documented.**
 - **29% of the collection has been recommended for disposal, releasing 500 sq/m or 5,400 sq/f of space**
 - **Area is decontaminated and hazards are known and/or progressing to hazard mitigation**



Twin cylinder Willans & Robinson vertical engine L-R before and after asbestos removal and encapsulation work, NMA Storage Facility, 8 McEacharn Place, Mitchell ACT AUSTRALIA, Image: Pippa Thorogood McLennan, 2025



File note – Bean car engine purchase, Image courtesy National Museum of Australia

LEARNINGS

- **What worked, what didn't?**
- **Museum Council – are more informed and confident to advise on disposals.**
- **Having organizational buy in from across teams, including Executive led to the success of the project**
- **Took longer than anticipated!**
- **Always look at past projects to guide current and future projects, whether they worked or not**
- **The project led to review of procedures for acquisition, deaccession and disposal to guide current practices**



QUEENSLAND MUSEUM

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Reviewing the Collection

Museum collections are at the heart of preserving our shared history, culture, and knowledge. Queensland Museum has been collecting objects and specimens that tell the story of Queensland since 1862, but over time, even the most carefully curated collections can require change. Items once thought essential to a museum's mission can, as time passes, no longer align with its purpose or public needs.

MUSEUMS VICTORIA

ABOUT US [COLLECTIONS & RESEARCH](#) EDUCATION [DISCOVER](#)

◀ HISTORY

Deaccessioning: Why do museums remove objects from collections?

The public collections found in museums across the world are a historic record. But that does not mean everything can stay there forever.

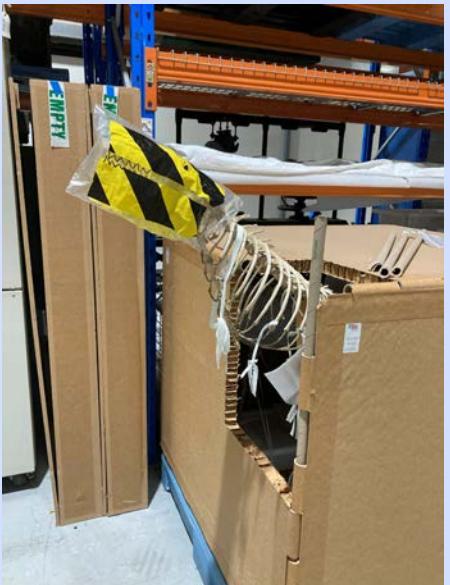
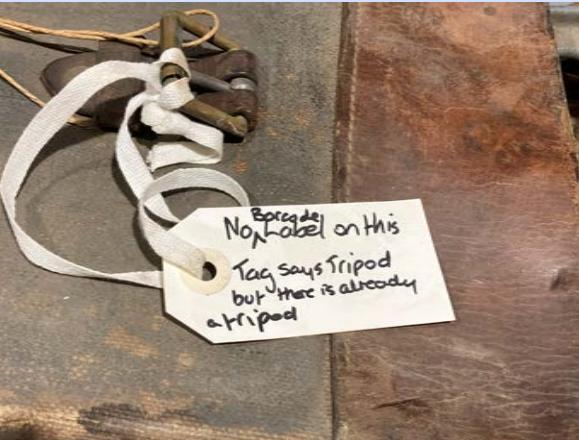
Museums like ours, and the people who work here, love to collect things.

WE ARE NOT ALONE

- **Queensland Museum** [Reviewing the Collection - Queensland Museum Collection | Queensland Museum](#)
- **Te Papa**
https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/assets/76067/1687925517-collection_rationalisation_v6_31may.pdf
- **Museums Victoria**
<https://museumsvictoria.com.au/article/deaccessioning/>



Collection staff undertaking an audit at 90 Vicars storage facility. Images: Pippa Thorogood McLennan 2025



WHAT'S NEXT?

- **To progress disposal of collection material**
- **Endorsement by the Museum of a Collection Storage Programme including:**
 - **Rehousing First Nations material**
 - **Rationalizing of collection in other storage areas (!!)**
 - **Improving other storage areas**
- **Strengthened and creating new procedures to manage collections and dispose of material (collection and non-collection)**



Thank you to the ARCS board and organising committee for inviting me to speak at this year's conference.

Thank you to my colleagues and managers at the National Museum to support my travel and presentation at this conference, especially my team to allow me to take many photos of them when working.

● Pippa Thorogood McLennan

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