

Australian Museum

Highlights & snapshots 2009–2010



nature culture **discover**



President's report

Thriving in partnership



In looking back on the previous year, it is pleasing to see how well the Museum has performed in its ability to collaborate, not only with other cultural and scientific institutions, but with the education sector, private enterprise, other parts of government and the wider community.

These partnerships are vital to the future of the Museum. Firstly though, I want to acknowledge the enormous contributions of Brian Sherman, who retired in December after nine years as President of the Australian Museum Trust. For me it has been both a pleasure and a privilege to serve on the Trust over the last seven years, and I am thrilled to take up his legacy. I am also pleased to acknowledge the contributions of retiring Trustees Julie Walton and Cate Blanchett, and to welcome our new Trustees Paul Connor and Professor Amanda Lawson.

SYDNEY AND BEYOND

Highlights of the Museum's touring exhibition program this year include *Art of the Pharaohs*, a collaborative effort with national museums of Singapore and Korea, and the *Menagerie* exhibition with Sydney's Object Gallery. Another great example, and an indication of the Museum's interest in future partnerships in western Sydney, is *Body Pacifica* at the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre. This celebration of Pacific material culture and art is a partnership between the Casula Powerhouse, the Museum and the National Rugby League. New initiatives for 2010 in our Science Communication program include partnerships with the Ultimo Science Festival and Science EXPOsed, while the Museum was delighted to welcome 3M as a new corporate supporter of Science in the City, Suburbs and Bush.

RECOGNITION

In a year when many scientists have been under attack in the debates about climate change, the many partnerships involved in the Eureka Prizes are more valuable than ever. The Eureka Prizes represent one of the few opportunities this country has to recognise the 'unsung heroes' of science who play such a vital role in documenting our relationship with the natural world and the perils that it faces.

Australian Museum scientists and researchers have been active participants in partnerships with Bush Blitz biodiversity surveys, the Atlas of Living Australia, and the Virtual Museum of the Pacific with the University of Wollongong. All of these projects make the Museum's research and collections information more widely available to the public, and along with the Eureka Prizes help us understand what it is we need to protect and what we stand to lose from the natural and cultural world.

INTERACTION

In 2010 we enjoyed the first full year of operation of our new website and its capacity to create a two-way communication between the Museum and our online public. This website is hosting online conversations on topics as diverse as cassowaries, climate change and 'Mr Blobby' (a specimen of fish which has achieved great notoriety). The Museum has been a leading participant in the debate about the future shape of museums, and is actively exploring how new technologies can help create partnerships with the communities we serve.

A WIDENING GAP

The Australian Museum has achieved these successes despite the decline, in real terms, of NSW Government funding over the last five years. In an environment of constant budget constraints and efficiency challenges, staff have worked hard to control costs and develop new revenue raising opportunities such as behind-the-scenes tours. While the Museum is fortunate to have the opportunity to attract funds through its commercial activities, Foundations, supporters and partners, the widening gap between State Government funding and the Museum's costs of operation will be perhaps the most significant challenge faced by the institution in the years ahead.

THANK YOU

Finally, I would like to thank the wonderful and hard-working team at the Australian Museum in all their various roles across the many parts of the organisation. They continue to bring their passion, enthusiasm and ideas to this important institution, and ensure that the Museum remains relevant and engaged in the exploration of science, nature and culture. On behalf of the Trust I would also like to extend special thanks to Assistant Director Janet Carding for the outstanding leadership she has provided since joining the Museum in 2004. We wish her all the best in her exciting new role as Director of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. I also extend my thanks to my fellow Trustees, who continue to make significant contributions to secure the long-term future and success of the Australian Museum.

Sam Mostyn

President

Australian Museum Trust



New technologies
can help create real
partnerships with
the communities
we serve



Partnerships are
vital to the future
of the Museum



The Australian
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of government funding

Highlights 2009–2010

Accessing the Museum

ACCESS FOR LEARNING

▼ Video conferences provide schools with access to Museum collections and educators through themed, interactive classroom sessions.



◀ Science in the City, Suburbs and Bush delivered science literacy activities to more than 10,000 students and their teachers across NSW.



▼ More than 63,000 preschool, primary and secondary school students across Sydney and regional New South Wales accessed Museum in a Box.



▲ Premium behind-the-scenes tours provide visitors with a unique experience of the collections and raise revenue for the Museum.

▼ Bugwise for Schools is a free online learning program to help schoolchildren investigate their local environment.



▲ *Body Pacifica* featured rare objects from the Pacific collection, new artworks and community activities, in partnership with the Casula Powerhouse.



► Groups of 'at risk' youth from Pacific communities are finding a new sense of pride and dignity by visiting the collection and connecting with cultural artefacts during a partnership program with the NSW Dept of Juvenile Justice.



▲ *Menagerie*, one of this year's temporary exhibitions, was developed in partnership with Object Gallery. It showcased contemporary Indigenous sculpture and contributed to record 16% growth in visitor numbers.

ACCESS FOR COLLECTIONS

▼ The Virtual Museum of the Pacific showcases 400 artefacts from the Museum's vast Pacific Collection online.



◀ The Museum's 16 million specimens are used to help us understand biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural diversity.



▼ Visiting scientists spent more than 1900 days working in the natural science collections. Staff sent 425 loans comprising 28,665 specimens around the world for other researchers.



▲ The Museum continues to build strategic alliances, with 21 sponsors supporting the Eureka Prizes for outstanding Australian science in 2009.

▼ Objects require conservation work to stabilise their condition before they can be loaned or displayed, such as these rare artefacts from the Captain Cook collection on loan to museums in Bonn and Venice.



▲ All scientific articles published in the *Records of the Australian Museum* and associated journals since 1851 are now available free of charge on the Museum's website.



► Additional accommodation capacity at Lizard Island Research Station is allowing greater access for scientists to research the effects of climate change on coral reefs.



▲ 'Bush Blitz' surveys bring together scientists and volunteers to fill knowledge gaps about plants and animals and provide a baseline for monitoring future changes.

Shaping the future



Trust President Sam Mostyn has reflected on our achievements over the past year. Here, I look ahead at the factors that will influence us in the next few years.

For many museums, the driving forces of the second decade of the millennium will be about three interconnected issues: first, the need for us to demonstrate that our collections are incredibly useful, that they can make the world a better place; second, the impact of the internet, and more specifically of social media; and third, that we are living in a climate of increasing restraint in public sector spending, which means less government funding for museums.

COLLECTIONS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Collections are held to be the lifeblood, indeed the reason for existence, of museums. For many years of the twentieth century they were an end in themselves: the bigger and more comprehensive, the better. But a range of factors is causing us to increasingly ask how we can better use the collections we have. In the biological sphere we at the Australian Museum have been at the forefront of the argument to prove that good access to biological collections can help us address questions of biosecurity and environmental management, as well as better addressing fundamental questions about species diversity and genetic diversity. For example, over the last year we have been heavily engaged with a national project, the Atlas of Living Australia, which promises to 'unlock' the biological collections of museums, herbaria and universities.

Cultural collections pose more complex and fundamental questions for museums. The Museum's collections represent the material culture of real communities of

indigenous people in Australia and the Pacific. Do we 'own' those collections, or are we holding them as custodians, in trust, for those creator communities and their descendants? Are the collections primarily a record for anthropological research, to help us better understand the history of those communities, or are they a resource for the communities themselves? The answers to those questions are not simple, and they will preoccupy us for many years. We need to engage more with these creator communities in order to answer them, and this engagement will be a continuing key focus for us for the next few years.

MEETING THE SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

Interestingly, the second of our major challenges, the web and social media, is already heavily influencing discussions about collections and how they can be used. The boom in social media is changing the very nature of the visitor relationship with museums. Previously, we had a one-way communication in which we, the Museum, told you, the public, the 'facts'; now we are managers of a multiparty 'conversation' about the Museum, its collections and its stories. Such change is enabling us to better communicate with creator and diaspora communities, and to explore how they would like to engage with the collections we hold.

The boom in virtual access to our collections seems to be driving a parallel demand to see the 'real thing' too, which raises the question of how we can provide access to our collections when so few of them are on public exhibition. I'm sure that finding ways to improve the community's access to our collections will continue to challenge us.

DOING MORE WITH LESS

The third challenge will cause us to rethink both what we do and how we do it. Demands for government funds from areas such as health, education and transport will continue to put pressure on the resources available for arts, culture and science. This change is driving two things. First, we need to continually review our priorities for the funds we have while looking to more innovative internal arrangements to make those funds go further. Second, we need to keep exploring ways of increasing the funds we earn ourselves. Our direct commercial returns through retailing and venue hire are good and getting better, but our biggest income generator, after NSW Government funding, is admission ticket sales. We need to be more innovative in our programming to most effectively combine content which is both popular and timely to continue to attract visitors through the door.

Fortunately, we have a creative, hardworking team at the Museum and we are well placed to engage with these issues. The capacity to address significant issues is reflected, for example, in the great improvement in workplace safety we have achieved over the past year, for which I congratulate the team. Their many other achievements across the fields of research, public programs and collection management are documented in this year's full annual report.

The combined impact of these challenges will make the next few years at the Australian Museum both interesting and difficult. Tenacity, determination and flexibility will all be important, but so will a sense of pride, optimism and excitement. My thanks go to all the Museum's staff, Trustees, sponsors, Members, volunteers and visitors. I look forward to continuing the journey with you.

Frank Howarth
Director
Australian Museum

Increasing our knowledge

Throughout 2009–10 the Museum continued to perform its core functions: to increase knowledge of the natural and cultural world and to propagate that knowledge.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

Museum scientists are actively addressing the many gaps in our knowledge of Australasian marine, terrestrial and freshwater environments, for example, through taxonomic research and the description of new species (115 in 2009–10, including snails, crustaceans, frogs, insects and birds). Research and Collections staff maintained a strong publication record (136 scientific publications in 2009–10), leading and participating in many research projects of national and international significance.

Essential to this research effort is the work of maintaining the Museum's natural and scientific collections. A core objective for the Museum is to compile a comprehensive electronic database; in 2009–10, the number of electronic collection records rose to over 1.6 million (see Figure 1). Even so, there is much to be done in transferring old records to the new system to ensure that the entire collection is accessible through this database.

ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES

Drawn by an exciting combination of permanent and temporary exhibitions, and visitor programs such as tours, workshops and school holiday events, the Museum recorded a 16% jump in visitation to its College Street site (see Figure 2). This increase was due in part to the number of primary and secondary school students participating in onsite, educator-led learning experiences (see Figure 3).

The Museum also provided a range of opportunities for people across Sydney, regional New South Wales, nationally and internationally to engage with the Museum. Pathways included the website (visited by nearly 10 million users during the year), science communication programs (Science in the City, Suburbs and Bush), and education programs (Connected Classrooms and Museum in a Box®).

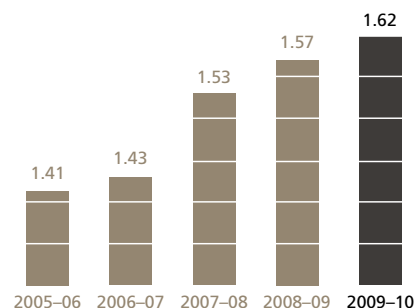


Figure 1 Number of collection records in the Museum's electronic database, 2005–06 to 2009–10 (millions)

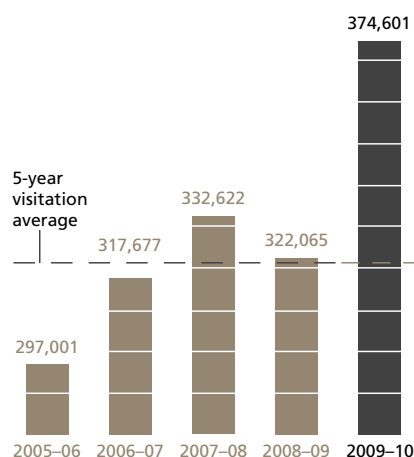


Figure 2 Onsite visitation to the Museum, 2005–06 to 2009–10

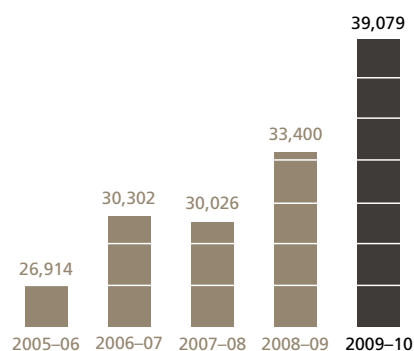


Figure 3 Growth in onsite school program numbers, 2005–06 to 2009–10

self-generated revenue rose by 18% in 2009–10

the Museum recorded a 16% jump in visitation

Engage with us

INCOME GENERATION

The Museum is working hard to increase self-generated income to sustain its activities. The Museum earns approximately one-third of its revenue from sources other than the NSW Government (see Figure 4), principally from admissions (\$3.3 million), the sale of services such as consulting and venue hire (\$3.3 million) and shop sales (\$1.3 million).

Excluding the impact of a 'one-off' insurance recovery of \$2.8 million in 2008–09, self-generated revenue rose by 18% to \$11.9 million in 2009–10 (see Figure 5).

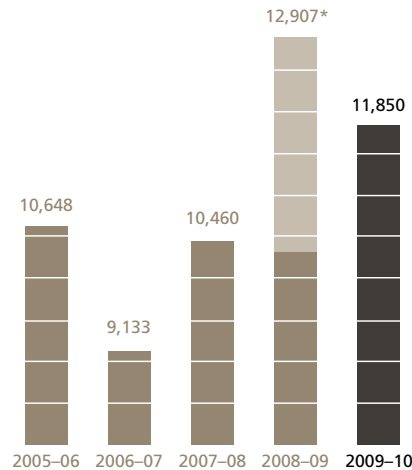


Figure 5 Revenue earned by the Museum, 2005–06 to 2009–10

Revenue earned excludes NSW Government recurrent and capital funding.

*includes an insurance recovery of \$2.8 million, with other revenue of \$10.1 million.

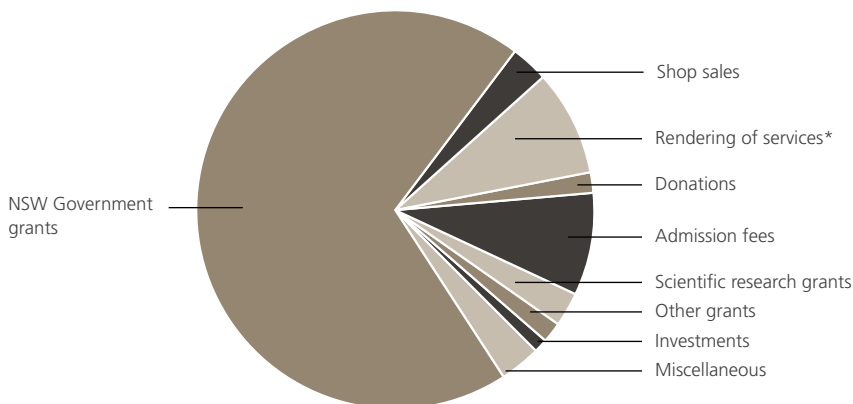


Figure 4 Australian Museum revenues, 2009–10

* Includes venue hire and consulting revenue

VISIT

6 College Street Sydney NSW 2010
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