



Te Papa Natural History – Collections Review Panel (CRP)

Recommendations 30 October 2018

Summary

The international panel have **conducted: a review of Te Papa’s** strategic and collection management documentation and practices; and **interviews with Te Papa’s senior management** related to Natural History collections and research. The panel endorses **Te Papa’s** strategic direction as outlined in the Strategic Narrative. The panel acknowledges that Te Papa is a leader of indigenous practice inclusion within the museum sector and urges Te Papa to continue this important work. The panel is confident that Te Papa is documenting and managing its collections well. The panel fully endorses the Collections Standards document recently created by Te Papa as an excellent description of the way collections should be taken care of. The panel also endorses Te Papa’s **plans to** join the Natural History portion of the Collections Services team with the Curatorial team making a single team devoted to Natural History with multiple elements for career progression. **The panel have made numerous suggestions to improve Te Papa’s collection access** to the wider research community.

Introduction

An international group of experts in Natural History museum collection management, curation and conservation was commissioned by the Te Papa Board to function as a panel advising the Executive Leadership Team and the Board on international best practice of collection management for Natural History collections. **The Collections Review Panel’s (CRP’s) purpose is to:**

- Review the suitability of our current collection policy, collection strategy for Natural History and collection standards.
- Identify any gaps in our processes and possible new practises which should be incorporated into our collection management system.
- Provide advice on collection management and access to collections as they relate to our strategic direction.
- Provide advice on the emphasis of roles in the areas of research, exhibition development, collection management, collection documentation and object conservation.
- Provide information on current trends in collections care and ethics that would help Te Papa better meet its objectives.

The objectives of the CRP are to:

- Establish a benchmark for collection management that maximises collection care and minimises risk to our collections.
- Review and approve our collection policy, collection strategy and collection standards.
- Ensure that Te Papa is following modern practices of collection management and access.
- Ensure that Te Papa meets its commitments to the ICOM code of ethics for Museums 2006.



Membership

The international panel consists of experts on the management and access of Natural History collections. Each member brings with them a set of knowledge related to their areas of **expertise and their institution's** system of collection management.

The members are:

- Carol Butler, Assistant Director for Collections, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History
- Catharine Hawks, Conservation Specialist, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History
- Dr Elizabeth Hide, formerly Cambridge Museums Consortium
- Dr Henry McGhie, Head of Collections and Curator of Zoology, Manchester Museum
- Tim White, Director Collections & Research, Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University

Procedure and Recommendations

The CRP received documentation from Te Papa regarding strategic direction and the management and access of Natural History collections. Along with the documentation there were two video conferences held to: discuss the documents; interview the Director of Collections, Research and Learning and the Director of Strategy and Performance; and agree on collective recommendations. The following comments and recommendations have been agreed to by the CRP.

Review of **Te Papa's** current collection policy, collection strategy for Natural History and collection standards.

The panel endorses Te Papa's Collection Policy 2018-2019 document. This document sets out the policy for collecting and deaccessioning objects at Te Papa for all items including the Natural History area.

The panel endorses Te Papa's Collection Strategy 2018-2023 document. This document is consistent with the direction presented in the Strategic Narrative and details plans for each area of collections within Te Papa.

The panel endorses Te Papa's Ngā Tikanga Whakahaere Kohinga Taonga a Te Papa | Collection Care and Practice Framework document. This document bridges the gap between strategy and procedures. The panel applauds the practical way this document outlines the practice used, unacceptable practise, extension of the current practice and who is accountable.

The panel recommends that all documentation points back to the Strategic Narrative and that a common nomenclature is used throughout all documentation (ie., science, Natural History, Natural Environment...)



Identification of gaps in Te Papa's processes and possible new practises which should be incorporated into our collection management system.

The panel agreed with current Te Papa practise, which uses the Collection Review Committee (CRC) to manage the collection process. The CRC collectively makes decisions on what should be collected and deaccessioned. This shared ownership and understanding creates extra interdisciplinary opportunities, which would be lost without this forum.

The panel endorses the collection procedure documentation presented to the panel. This documentation is well thought-out and presented as a flow diagram.

The panel found no gaps in Te Papa's processes for the care of Natural History collections.

The panel recommends that backlog of entering data into databases should be tackled as a strategic objective. Backlog of cataloguing data can come from two areas, often it is from historical collections, but it can also come from large field collection activities. It may sometimes be best to **stop collecting to allow a backlog to be reduced. The panel stated, 'Collections are not useful if they are not in the database.'** The three collection areas which need attention are: botany, insects and invertebrates (excluding insects).

The panel recommends that Te Papa look at different ways and reasons for collecting specimens. **Don't limit your museum to** only taxonomic categories. Think about entire ecosystem descriptions, regional focus or societal issues, as reasons for collection. The collection needs to represent New Zealand's natural history as a whole.

Advise on collection management and access to collections as they relate to **Te Papa's** strategic direction.

The panel endorsed and applauded Te Papa's Bi-cultural philosophy. In particular, the description of Mana Taonga and how it is at the heart of collection item care and access. Te Papa is a leader of indigenous practise inclusion within the museum sector. It is important that Te Papa continues to share this way of working with other museums around the world.

The panel recommends that Te Papa focus on access to its Natural History collections. This can be done through introducing researchers to the specimens through digital images, databases of genetic materials, and details of expertise and facilities available at Te Papa. The more details available for the external community, the more likely there will be new partnerships and research opportunities.

The panel endorsed Te Papa's **emphasis on learning and recommends that access to collections** also focuses on the New Zealand public for learning opportunities.

The panel recommends that Te Papa actively pursues external researcher expertise to work in taxonomic areas not covered by staffing. There are too many different types of collections within Te Papa to expect internal staffing to be able to cover all areas. Collections that are not used, can often become neglected. **External researchers should be encouraged to work with Te Papa's** collections. This could be supported with special funding through endowments or through student grants.



Advise on the emphasis of roles in the areas of research, exhibition development, collection management, collection documentation and object conservation.

The panel believes that the marine vertebrate collection is an important, world class, Southern Hemisphere fish collection. The extent of fish species covered is very impressive. **Te Papa's large fish collection is one of the largest in the world.**

The panel acknowledges that the research by the botany team at Te Papa is well recognised internationally.

The panel recommends that the National Systematics and Taxonomic Collections Working Group continue its collaborative work. New Zealand has an ability as a nation to ALL work together. This working group gives New Zealand the ability to look collectively at gaps and opportunities.

Provide information on current trends in collections care and ethics that would help Te Papa better meet its objectives.

The panel recommends that all Te Papa employees are made responsible for the care and maintenance of the collections. This **'Share the Care' way of thinking will increase everyone's** understanding of the management of the collections and create a more open reporting culture for the betterment of the collections.

The panel recommends that Te Papa's Natural History strategy include priorities for the digitisation of the collections. This should be based on creating more access of important collections to both the research community and the public.

The panel agrees with the vision of 'Important Conversations' and fully endorses this as a great output for a relevant museum. An important role of any museum is creating an environment for learning. Debate and relevance are two excellent ways to begin these important processes. Te Papa should use its public profile to increase understanding and activities that relate to issues facing New Zealanders today.