



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Sydney University Museums

COLLECTIONS GUIDELINES

SECTION 3: DEACCESSION

Macleay Museum
Nicholson Museum
University Art Gallery

SECTION 3: DEACCESSION

3.1 Overview

3.1.1. Definition

Deaccessioning is the process of de-registering an accessioned object or specimen from the Sydney University Museums (SUM) permanent collection and amending the documentation relating to that object or specimen. An object or specimen that is deaccessioned is then disposed of in accordance with approved guidelines.

3.1.2. Purpose

Sydney University Museums recognise that the ability to deaccession and dispose of material from the permanent collection is an integral component of an effective collection management program that allows for the proper care and use of the collection. Deaccessioning activity is conducted in a reasoned, documented, professional manner with the intent of improving the quality and relevance of museum collections, and acting within international ethical policies.

3.1.3. Objectives

The objectives of these guidelines are to enable Sydney University Museums to:

- Transfer objects or specimens, which by virtue of their subject focus or quality, may be better placed in another part of the University, museum or similar public collecting institution.
- Dispose of material that is not required as part of the collection, in accordance with the guidelines set out under section 3.4 below.
- Repatriate ancestral remains or objects of cultural significance to appropriate communities of origin.
- Align its collection documentation with its actual collection holdings.

3.1.4. Scope

These guidelines cover the deaccessioning of objects and specimens from the Sydney University Museums' permanent collection and custody collection, as defined in section 1.4.4.

3.2 Standards

3.2.1. Sydney University Museums holds its collections in the public trust, which obligates acting in accordance with the highest legal and ethical standards in accordance with the University of Sydney's Code of Conduct, Museums Australia Code of Ethics, and ICOM Code of Ethics.

3.2.2. Caution and transparency are essential in the deaccessioning process. The same careful assessment must be applied to objects or specimens recommended for deaccessioning as for those proposed for accessioning.

3.2.3. Deaccessioned material will be documented fully, clearly justified, disposed of appropriately, and be free from problems of ownership, conflict of interest, and ethical and legal issues.

- 3.2.4. Sydney University Museums can only dispose of property to which it has clear and unrestricted title. That is, property given, donated, bequeathed or otherwise demised to the University of Sydney through its component museums in accordance with the University's Finance and Accounting Delegations policy.
- 3.2.5. Objects or specimens suggested for deaccessioning will be carefully assessed on the basis of established criteria outlined in section 3.3 below.
- 3.2.6. Repatriation of Indigenous Australian ancestral remains and objects of cultural significance will comply with the provisions of the University's repatriation policy, *Policy and Procedures Concerning the Management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains and Culturally Significant Items* (1996).
- 3.2.7. Requests for repatriation to non-Australian source communities will be considered on a case-by-case basis, acting within international agreements and protocols.
- 3.2.8. Type materials and comparable objects are eligible for deaccessioning on through provisions outlined in sections 3.3.6 and 3.3.7.
- 3.2.9. Raising funds for SUM or the University through the sale of deaccessioned items is not a valid reason for deaccessioning. Such activity undermines the concepts of fiduciary responsibility and public trust.
- 3.2.10. Any proceeds from the disposal of a collection object or specimen must benefit the care and development of the SUM collections.
- 3.2.11. SUM or University employees or anyone whose association with these bodies might give them an advantage in acquiring a deaccessioned object or specimen, may not acquire deaccessioned material by private sale or exchange. Additionally, these parties may neither act as private agents concerning the sale or disposal of collection material nor otherwise benefit from its sale or disposal.
- 3.2.12. If reservations or disagreement exist about the significance and relevance of items proposed for deaccession, SUM will retain items for a six-month period before disposal. During this period, items proposed for deaccession will be available for inspection, together with a statement detailing the reasons for deaccession.

3.3 Criteria for Deaccession

Objects or specimens considered for deaccessioning will be assessed against the following criteria:

3.3.1. Significance to Collection

The object or specimen does not conform to current SUM acquisition guidelines and would more appropriately belong to and is accepted by another public institution with a mandate to collect and preserve such material.

3.3.2. Significance of Object or Specimen

The object or specimen lacks associated information to enable its proper identification or to establish its relevance to the collection. Or the material lacks historical significance or aesthetic qualities, making its contribution to the collection minimal.

3.3.3. Redundancy

The object or specimen is over-represented in the collection, and the multiples are not required for comparative research, exhibition changeover, education or other SUM purpose.

3.3.4. Sensitive Materials

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains and secret/sacred material appropriate for repatriation under University policy. Or similar international material requested for return to the country of origin under the ethical principles advocated in the ICOM Code of Ethics.

3.3.5. Illegitimate Possession

SUM has reason to suspect that the object or specimen was stolen, illegally exported from a foreign country, or imported into Australia in violation of applicable laws and international agreements. Or the ownership is the subject of a substantiated request for return by the owner, the legality of which is recognised by the University.

3.3.6. Condition

The object or specimen is so degraded or irreparably damaged that it is no longer recognisable or restorable. Or the material is so degraded that the cost of restoration is disproportionate to its financial value or significance.

3.3.7. Hazard

The object or specimen is of a hazardous nature that may pose a serious occupational health and safety risks to staff and visitors, which cannot be dealt with through storage methods.

3.3.8. Administrative

The object or specimen is presumed to no longer be in the SUM collections due to theft, or presumed to be permanently missing. Or the material was accessioned in error.

3.4 Disposal

3.4.1. Interest of Donors and Artists

For material donated without restriction, the donor retains no legal rights.

Where required by prior agreement, the donor of deaccessioned material will be consulted on its disposal.

In other instances when feasible, SUM may notify donors or their heirs, and living artists, prior to the disposal of deaccessioned material.

3.4.2. Disposal Options

Depending on the nature of the deaccessioned object or specimen and the rationale for removing it from the collections, the following options may be considered for its disposal:

- Repatriation in accordance with the University repatriation policy.

- Objects or specimens that have a significant cultural or scientific value, but which do not conform to the collections guidelines, should wherever possible be placed with the most appropriate public institution, by means of transfer, gift or sale.
- Objects or specimens accessioned from a faculty within the University may be returned to that faculty for unencumbered use by the faculty.
- Objects or specimens that do not have a significant cultural or scientific value but do have a market value may be disposed of by public auction or tender.
- Addition to education collection where the object or specimen meets the Collection Priorities
- Objects or specimens normally are not returned to the donor or heirs. In such cases where the return is deemed appropriate, a report of that action is sent to the Australian Tax Office if necessary.
- Objects or specimens that are degraded to the point where they are no longer recognisable or restorable may be destroyed or recycled for materials or components where appropriate.
- Objects or specimens that cannot be disposed of in any other way may be destroyed.

3.4.3. Hazardous Items

Disposal of hazardous objects or material must only be undertaken after liaison with the University of Sydney's Audit and Risk Management Office.

3.4.4. Proceeds from Disposal

All proceeds resulting from the sale of deaccessioned material will be committed to the care and development of the Sydney University Museum collections.

3.5 Implementation

3.5.1. Responsibilities

No material will be deaccessioned, disposed of, or in any way removed from the Museum records without careful review, documentation of clear title, and staff evaluation.

Material proposed for deaccession will be assessed by the relevant Senior Curator in consultation with the Collections Manager, and submitted to the SUM Director for formal approval. The SUM Director must give written approval for every deaccession and the method of disposal. In accordance with the University's Finance and Accounting Delegations policy, the SUM Director may refer specific cases for final approval to the Vice Chancellor or University Senate.

3.5.2. Retention Period

If the deaccession proposal is approved, the object will be retained by SUM for a period of not less than six months. After that period, disposal arrangements may be implemented. The retention period does not apply to cases of repatriation.

3.5.3. Documentation

Complete records must be kept of all deaccessioning decisions, the object or specimen involved, and the disposal of the material. The relevant records will be amended in the collections documentation system, with the registration number retired, not deleted. Documentation of deaccession activity will proceed in accordance with the University's Recordkeeping Policy and the SPECTRUM Documentation Standard.

3.5.4. Reporting

In accordance with University formal reporting requirements, SUM reports to:

- Internal Audit Office on an annual basis with a "Certificate of Verification of Heritage Assets" for all collections within its care, including the listing of all deaccessioned material.

3.5.5. Review

The SUM Collections Deaccession guidelines will be reviewed every five years.

3.6 Related Documentation

3.6.1. University References

Archives and Record Management Services. (2000). *University Recordkeeping Policy*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Finance and Accounting Department. (2007). *Finance and Accounting Manual Delegations for Specific Activities and Financial Delegations*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Human Resources Department. (2008). *Code of Conduct*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Macleay Museum. (1996). *Policy and Procedures Concerning the Management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains and Culturally Significant Items*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

3.6.2. External References

International Council of Museums. (2006). *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*. Paris: ICOM.

McKenna, Gordon and Patsatzi, Efthymia, eds. (2009). *SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard (version 3.2)*. Cambridge, UK: Collections Trust.

Museums Australia. (1999). *Code of Ethics*. Canberra: Museums Australia (national office).