



Sydney Maritime Museum Ltd  
home of **Sydney Heritage Fleet**

# Collection Policy

*To explore maritime heritage, particularly as it relates to Sydney  
and Australian waters, in ways that enlighten and inspire*

Adopted by:  
SHF Collection Custodian Trustees & SHF Board  
September 2014 v2.2

## Introduction

The museum was founded in 1965 with very broadly stated objectives but which centred around the aim “to restore, maintain, exhibit, display and operate for the benefit of the public vessels and artefacts held by the Museum”.

Overarching that was the object “to contribute to the preservation of the Maritime Heritage of the Commonwealth of Australia”.

There was no specific collecting policy put in place in 1965. However the museum has acquired vessels, small marine engines, navigational instruments, books (historical and marine engineering), maritime publications, nautical charts, art work, ship models, extensive photographic collections, mariners’ documents and diaries and other maritime paraphernalia and ephemera, most of which came as unsolicited donations rather than being systematically sourced for the museum’s collection.

As a result, some fifty years on, the museum has an eclectic range of objects in its collection.

A new museum site is to become available with enhanced exhibition facilities and this has prompted a re-evaluation of the museum’s Collection and the opportunity to set down a clear collecting policy for the years to come.

## SECTION 1

### Sydney Heritage Fleet collecting themes

(1) The museum’s existing Collection suggests many themes, among them:

Fleet vessels:

- Trade in the latter days of sail; *James Craig*
- The legacy of Naval Architect Walter Reekes; *Lady Hopetoun & Boomerang*
- Keeping the NSW coastal waterways open. Dredging tug *Waratah*
- The workboats of Sydney Harbour; *Harman, Berrima & Protex*
- Recreation on the waters of Sydney Harbour: *Kookaburra II* and the small craft collection representing recreational sailing and boating in a variety of craft
- The coastal steamers, typified by steamship *John Oxley*
- Ferries of Sydney Harbour; example, ferry *Kanangra*

Maritime Records & Research Centre:

- Immigration to NSW (and Australia)
- NSW (and Australian) Coastal Shipping and Shipping Companies
- Shipbuilding around Sydney Harbour
- Shipwrecks along the NSW (and Australian) coast

- Sydney Harbour as a working harbour
- Sydney ferries
- Sydney Harbour and the NSW coast during WW1 and WW2
- Ship restoration; plans, specifications & techniques from the Fleet's restoration projects
- Ship modelling
- Maritime research material
- Maritime photography
- Oral history

(2) From this diverse list the following collection focus areas develop:

- a. The SHF vessel fleet
  - description, history, technology, social context
- b. Sydney Harbour
  - description, history, shipping, trade, recreation and recreational small craft, social context, future
- c. Shipping & Trade, particularly on the Australian east coast, and with particular reference to NSW
  - coastal trade, significance of sea transport, immigration, diverse waterways (bar crossings, coastal vessel designs), impact of WW1 and WW2, shipping and shipping companies
- d. Shipbuilding
  - Sydney Harbour and NSW coast, coastal trade and recreational vessels, the shipbuilding yards, social context
- e. Colonial exploration and settlement

## **SECTION 2**

### **Collection Aims**

To comply with its objects to make available its Collection to the public of Australia, the Fleet aims to:

- (1) exhibit vessels and artefacts in its Collection and make available to the public, as far as is possible, other items in the Collection
- (2) develop, preserve and maintain the Collection
- (3) disseminate information relating to the Collection

- (4) conduct and assist research, including responding to public enquiries, into matters relating to the Collection and NSW (and Australian) maritime history

## **SECTION 3**

### **Means of Acquisition**

Historically, the museum has acquired objects predominantly by gift, bequest or purchase but from the date of this policy:

- (1) The museum will not accept conditional gifts and does not recognise the term “permanent loan” unless authorised by the Custodian Trustees
- (2) The museum requires clear legal title to its Collection. Title to material donated to the museum is given through the donor signing the museum’s official Deed of Gift
- (3) Unless specifically agreed by the Custodian Trustees and the Board of the museum, no major object such as a vessel will be accepted for the Collection without an accompanying dowry to defray preservation and maintenance costs.

## **SECTION 4**

### **Collecting Principles**

The museum will collect material consistent with its five Collection Focus Areas outlined in Section 1(2)

- (1) Acquisition of further historic craft will be informed by rigorous research and resource assessment and conducted in consultation with information supplied by the Australian Register of Historic Vessels (ARHV). The need for an accompanying dowry as set out in Section 3(3) is a requirement unless specifically waived.
- (2) The museum will only rarely consider the acquisition of historic craft due to the considerable resources required to manage, restore, maintain and interpret them. This is particularly true of floating vessels.
- (3) All prospective acquisitions will be assessed according to the following assessment principles:
  - a. Consistency with the museum’s Constitutional Objects, Mission Statement and Collection Focus Areas

- b. Historic, aesthetic, technical, scientific or social significance
- c. Objects should be in reasonable condition given age and material
- d. Each object must have clear evidence of ownership and legal title
- e. Rarity and representativeness
- f. Objects must have clear and detailed histories with demonstrated provenance
- g. In the case of major objects such as a vessel the availability of an accompanying dowry to ensure preservation and ongoing maintenance

## SECTION 5

### Process of Acquisition

- (1) **Proposal:** All objects (with the exception of those described at 1d below) proposed for inclusion in the Collection will be detailed in a written report by the MRRC.
  - a. This report will refer to the collecting and assessment principles outlined in Section 4. Based on these principles the MRRC Curator and/or a qualified Assessor consulted for the purpose will make recommendations to the museum Board.
  - b. If the museum Board supports acquisition the written report and notice of Board support will be forwarded to the Custodian Trustees for consideration.
  - c. As owners of the collection the Custodian Trustees have final say in the acquisition of any object but will take note of the MRRC Curator and museum Board's recommendations.
  - d. Objects such as individual books, images and documents proposed for inclusion in the Collection which, in the opinion of the MRRC Curator and/or a qualified Assessor consulted for the purpose, are of minor significance but of sufficient merit to warrant inclusion, may be added to the Collection directly by the MRRC provided that the Custodian Trustees are notified at their next meeting.

- (2) **Documentation:** All information and data available on proposed acquisitions will be recorded by the MRRC which will compile a report on the object including a statement of significance and collection relevance. This will form the basis for the ongoing management of the object within the Collection.
- (3) If the proposal to acquire an object is accepted, the MRRC will accession the object. The MRRC will register the object, allocate it a unique identification number, describe and photograph the object and electronically record the information for later retrieval.
- (4) **Condition Assessment:** The MRRC will arrange for a conservation report to be prepared for each object to assess its condition and the likely costs of restoration and preservation. In the case of a vessel this can be no more than an estimate but a condition assessment will help guide workshop planning and priorities.

## SECTION 6

### Deaccessioning

Reviews of the Collection should be undertaken periodically to assess relevance of objects and material to the museum's policies as guided by its Strategic Plan. This will enable the museum to evaluate objects and material no longer considered appropriate to the Collection for various reasons including:

- (1) Change in condition (damage)
- (2) Questionable legal title
- (3) Information that leads to a reappraisal of the significance of an object
- (4) Duplicate

Wherever possible objects to be deaccessioned should be offered to members of the museum or others first before destruction or waste disposal is considered.

## SECTION 7

### Loans from the Collection

Items from the Collection may be lent to other institutions or organisations, but not to individuals without the express permission of the Custodian Trustees:

- (1) On receipt of a loan request the MRRC will prepare a loan request report which will set out the proposed terms of the loan and an assessment of the conditions under which the object will be kept whilst on loan.
- (2) If the MRRC recommends that, with or without the services of a qualified Assessor consulted for the purpose, the loan be approved the loan request report will be forwarded to the Custodian Trustees for approval. If approved by the Custodian Trustees, the loan request then passes to the museum Board for its approval. To expedite the process, the loan request may be dealt with electronically between the parties.
- (3) If the loan request is for use of an object such as a vessel the loan request must state the nature of the use, a risk assessment of that use, details of any personnel involved and Work Health and Safety provisions for their wellbeing, insurance cover, transport arrangements and security of the object while out of the museum's control.
- (4) The MRRC will prepare all necessary paperwork in connection with the loan of an object from the Collection. No object may leave the control of the museum until the loan agreement has been signed by both the MRRC on behalf of the museum and the institution or other organisation borrowing the object.
- (5) No loan may be open-ended, but should be for a short timeframe (eg. twelve months), but with the option for renewal for a further period.
- (6) The museum reserves the right to recall an object on loan at any time at its discretion. Wherever possible, reasonable notice of recall will be given.
- (7) Payment for loan of an object from the Collection whether by way of a loan fee or donation does not in any way reduce the rights of the museum over that object or the museum's right to recall the object at its discretion. If a fee has been paid and an object is recalled within the period covered by the fee the museum will refund the unexpired portion of the fee.

## **SECTION 8**

### **Ethics**

Objects will not be acquired which have been stolen, illegally imported, or illegally salvaged or removed from archaeological sites.

In its collecting activities the museum will have regard to Commonwealth and State laws and international conventions. These will include:

- a. Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act, 1986 (Commonwealth)
- b. Historic Shipwrecks Act, 1976 and 1984 amendments (Commonwealth)
- c. Protection of the Sea (Civil Liability) Act, 1981 (Commonwealth)
- d. Commonwealth Customs Act, 1901 (Commonwealth)
- e. UNESCO International Convention of the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, 2001
- f. United National Convention on the Law of the Sea, (UNCLOS), 1982
- g. UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972
- h. Archives Act, 1983 (Commonwealth)
- i. Freedom of Information Act, 1982 (Commonwealth)
- j. The Heritage Amendment Act, 2009 (NSW)
- k. Environment Planning and Assessment Act, 1979 (NSW)
- l. Copyright Act 1968 (Commonwealth)
- m. Museums Australia Code of Ethics

### **FORMS USED IN ADMINISTERING THE POLICY**

Forms used in connection with the Collection Policy (such as those required for the accessioning or loan of an object from the Collection) are administered by the SHF Maritime Records & Research Centre (MRRC)



## INTERPRETING THE SYDNEY MARITIME MUSEUM COLLECTION

### A PROTOCOL

The Terms of Reference for the Interpretation Committee explain its primary role and duties:

1. To advise the Board on historic, public, exhibition and literature interpretation of the Sydney Maritime Museum Collection as defined by the Sydney Maritime Museum Collection Policy
2. To advise on, assist in developing, and approve, all exhibitions, displays, interpretation signage, labels and literature in connection with the Sydney Maritime Museum Collection

This protocol sets out how the Committee's role and duties are implemented.

### SOME BASICS

**The Collection:** The Sydney Maritime Museum Collection is made up of museum 'objects', a word which covers our vessels, artefacts large and small, and the books, charts, documents, images and all accessioned objects recorded by the Maritime Records and Research Centre.

**Interpretation:** A broad term which relates to how an object is presented, described, exhibited, or written about. It also relates to how a part of an object is interpreted, for example, a vessel's engine, or wheelhouse, or other part of the vessel which may benefit from being separately interpreted from the whole because it has its own story to tell.

Interpretation is all about telling stories; not just what an object is and its basic description; but why it is significant, what it has done, who has been connected with it and so on.

Interpretation is all about engaging with the widest possible audience, not just the enthusiast.

**Presenting the Collection:** The Collection Policy sets out the themes the SHF has selected as being relevant to its Collection. Not surprisingly, they focus on Sydney Harbour. That will be the basis for assessing all proposed interpretation of the Collection.

An essential element of presentation is style. That means adopting the current guidelines for presentation which will include the look, the terminology, and the way in which the presentation fits the style adopted for a particular collecting theme and so on.

### THE INTERPRETATION PROCESS

Any member of the SHF may propose an interpretation project for a vessel or artefact in the Collection. For consistency in the interpretation of the Collection, the proposal must follow the following steps:

STEP 1: What is the interpretation project?

- Write a brief overview description of the project which should:
  - explain WHY it is considered necessary. What is its significance in connection with the object? What will it add to the visitor experience?
  - describe the proposed method of interpretation. Signage, literature etc. How would you propose to present that, and where?

STEP 2: Meet with the Interpretation Committee to discuss your proposal

- Your written description will be reviewed against the Collection Policy themes to be sure there is a match
- The Committee will discuss with you how your proposed project might fit within the Fleet's overall 'Museum of Sydney Harbour' interpretation guidelines
- Remembering that all our vessels and artefacts are accessioned museum objects, plans for signage or anything proposed for attachment to a vessel or artefact need to be considered in light of its impact on the overall presentation of the object
- With a match to themes and guidelines, and an understanding of presentation limitations, you will be asked to develop the project into a detailed written brief. This should include a best estimate of costs involved in the project
- If signage is to be attached to an object, its specific location must be detailed, along with a clear specification of the type and appearance of fixing proposed

STEP 3: The detailed brief should be submitted to the Interpretation Committee which will usually invite the proponents for a discussion to review the detail of the proposal.

- Once agreement has been reached on the proposal, the Interpretation Committee in consultation with management will determine if funds are available to progress the project, or agree for the project to be budgeted for in a coming period.

STEP 4: Once funding is available, the detailed brief agreed with the Interpretation Committee will be used by the Committee to brief a designer and/or writer and whatever production facilities are required.

STEP 5: The design draft will be shared by the Committee with the project proponent for comment and any suggested amendments agreed with the Interpretation Committee.

STEP 6: The project will proceed to completion.

- Mounting of any signage will be to the agreed specification and positioning and carried out in consultation with the Interpretation Committee.

Interpretation Committee

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