

NEW ZEALAND MARINE SCIENCES SOCIETY

TE HUNGA MĀTAI MOANA O AOTEAROA



8 July 2013

Evan Williams
Chair of the Museum Board
Te Papa
55 Cable St. Te Aro
WELLINGTON 6014

Dear Evan,

Re: The future location of Te Papa Natural Environment Collections

The New Zealand Marine Sciences Society (NZMSS) is a professional society affiliated to the Royal Society of New Zealand with a membership of approximately 200 New Zealand's marine scientists. We are a non-profit organisation that provides access to, and within, the marine science community, and we identify emerging issues through annual conferences, annual reviews, a listserv and a website www.nzmss.org.nz.

Since the Campbell Live programme went to air in May 2013, a considerable amount of concern has been expressed among members of NZMSS about the news of changes at Te Papa. There has, however, been very little information forthcoming from Te Papa concerning the background and rationale for the proposed changes. We have seen the information on your website which states that Te Papa is being proactive in terms of its responsibility "to ensure that all risks to its collections are minimised and are examining long term storage solutions that take into account seismic and other natural risks as part of the development of a 10 year strategy". We are pleased to note that Te Papa is "not diminishing any of its collections and will ensure that they continue to remain fully accessible to researchers".

NZMSS applauds Te Papa in taking a pro-active approach to the nation's long-term Natural Environment collections; however, we consider that because they have been funded by the public to meet nationally identified needs, and they are critical science infrastructure, their fate deserves broader discussion. We are concerned that the risk to the collections and the impact of a move on their condition may in fact be greater than the seismic risk identified on the website and want to see evidence of the critical thinking that is contributing to Te Papa's analysis of different risk factors. We also want to understand how access to collections that are essential for research will in fact, be maintained.

As such, NZMSS would like to see greater public transparency about the decision-making process and how input from bodies such as NZMSS will be sought. Below are some questions that we would like answered, and in Appendix 1 we provide more detail on our concerns that we also wish to have addressed.

1. Is Te Papa planning to move the collections outside the lower North Island?
2. If so, when and where?
3. What criteria will be employed to evaluate options? Costs (short and long term), and accessibility?
4. What advice has the Museum sought/what consultation process is the Museum planning to undertake with affected parties?
5. Will there be an opportunity for submissions to be made and considered?
6. In the light of the current strictures on government spending where will the resources for moving collections come from?

We look forward to assisting Te Papa in its decision-making regarding these valuable public assets.

Yours in every good faith,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Livingston". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Livingston, President NZMSS

Mary.Livingston@mpi.govt.nz

CC Claudia Orange at Te Papa; Secretary NZMSS

Appendix 1: NZMSS specific comment

1. The marine collections at Te Papa (fish, marine invertebrates, seabirds, marine mammals, marine algae) are of great value both nationally and internationally. The Te Papa natural environment (NE) collections include ~~held~~ voucher material and type specimens which underpin a whole range of research projects. As the holders of national collections of a number of groups of organisms, the Te Papa collections are critical science infrastructure.
2. NZ public good science and research funds have supported the collection and curation of many of the specimens housed at Te Papa. As publicly funded assets it is vital that they remain accessible. The collections are not only Te Papa resources and assets, but they belong to the NZ public.
3. The natural environment collections underpin scholarly work conducted not only in Wellington but throughout the country and internationally. The lower North Island houses four very significant research institutions – Te Papa NE programmes, NIWA (the largest office of NZ's major national marine research agency), Victoria University of Wellington, and GNS. For some programmes within these institutions the Te Papa collections are absolutely critical to nationally prioritised research being conducted.
4. NE collections are repositories of vital reference specimens, enabling species to be studied and their distribution in space and time to be documented and analysed, as well as the development of hypotheses about species relationships. Within the past decade or so, there has been an increasing recognition of the value of collections in the analysis of biodiversity, with interest in their potential applications for example in conservation and ecology, inferring threats associated with anthropogenic change. Authors have described natural history collections as “sentinel observatories of life on Earth” and also “stewards of its future”.
5. The Te Papa collections provide critical reference and comparative material for the work of central government departments – Department of Conservation, Ministry for Primary Industries (with biosecurity, fisheries, and environmental roles) as well as providing reference material for regional government agencies (e.g. comparative material at Te Papa has been used to assist with identifying and tracking invasions of foreign species enabling advice to be supplied to Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Hawkes Bay and Wellington Regional councils).
6. A fundamental issue concerns the accessibility of the collections and particularly how a move of the collections will impact the science community in the lower North Island.
7. Moving many of the NE collections poses serious risks (arguably greater than the seismic risks) – with potential for their damage or destruction. This is particularly true for highly fragile collections such as parts of the invertebrate collection. Before being moved one has to consider whether the destination will provide more than the current location – and consider the very serious disruption packing, moving, unpacking will be to all the scientists and users of collections.
8. It is hard to understand any arguments that could be mounted to remove collections from Cable St - an earthquake proofed building – to any other kind of facility. The base-isolation and the climate control in collections in the main building have provided close to ideal conditions. As far as the building in Tory St, a great deal of money has already been spent on upgrading it and developing the collection areas. The fish area is regarded as the state of the art for this type internationally of natural history material. If this building is deemed unsuitable for some activities but safe for others, is it possible to exchange material between the base-isolated Cable St building and the Tory St building to lessen risk?
9. It would be very helpful to understand what is driving these proposed changes – and if the process is open to any inputs from organisations or people affected by the changes, if there is any process for people to make submissions once the plans become clearer.
10. It is critical that Te Papa fully understands the impacts of the changes on all the communities/users of the Te Papa collections and scholarship.

11. Given the current financial constraints faced by central government and the community at large is it appropriate use of public funds to be moving the collections rather than looking at iterative improvements to address the issues of risk to the collections?
12. Although Te Papa is primarily funded through the Ministry of Culture the science functions of the museum have been critical to NZ from the inception of the Colonial Museum in 1865. The National Science Challenges recently announced by Minister Joyce are attempting to get NZ institutions to operate cohesively and in the wider interests of NZ society. Te Papa needs to be cognizant of its position and role within the wider NZ science environment and the role it should be playing within the distributed network of NE collections.