



AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

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1. TITLE

Complaints Handling Procedure

2. PURPOSE

To outline procedures for handling complaints received by the Australian National Maritime Museum (the Museum). These procedures apply to all areas of the Museum.

3. BACKGROUND

The Museum recognises the value of feedback, including enquiries, suggestions and complaints, in improving its programs and services. The Museum's Client Service Charter provides general information about how the Museum will deal with feedback, including complaints, received from Museum visitors and clients. This Complaints Handling Procedure outlines the Museum's general process for receiving, managing and responding to complaints, including where these relate to the Museum's commitments under the Client Service Charter or other Museum policies and procedures.

4. RECEIVING FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

Feedback is a compliment, criticism, comment or suggestion where a response is not sought, or reasonable to expect. Feedback can be positive, negative or neutral. Feedback does not require a formal response; however, a response may be requested. The Museum aims to acknowledge all feedback received where a response is requested.

A complaint is an implied or expressed statement of dissatisfaction where a response is sought, reasonable to expect or legally required.

Most complaints are received as part of feedback provided to the Museum. Feedback can be provided in multiple ways including:

- Speak to a staff member in person
- Email to info@sea.museum or via one of the email addresses listed in the Museum's website at <https://www.sea.museum/About/Contact-us>
- Write to 2 Murray Street, Sydney, NSW 2000.

Feedback and complaints may be made anonymously. However, this may mean it could be difficult to properly investigate a complaint. In such cases, and where possible, the anonymous complainant will be asked how they wish to proceed.

5. HOW A COMPLAINT WILL BE HANDLED

In the first instance, the Museum staff member who receives the feedback will assess whether it should be handled as a complaint, with advice from their supervisor if required.

The Museum aims to resolve complaints on the spot. If, due to the nature of the complaint, this is not possible, we will aim to have the complaint resolved within 10 working days or advise the reason for any delay. Early resolution of complaints provides a better experience for complainants and is more effective.

The Museum's complaints handling process will generally comprise these steps:

1. acknowledge all complaints quickly, within 10 working days of receiving the complaint
2. assess the complaint, including its priority
3. resolve early or investigate the complaint
4. communicate the outcome
5. finalise or escalate, within 10 working days of receiving the complaint
6. feedback any systemic issues to be addressed by the Museum.

5.1. Acknowledge

The complainant should be provided with an acknowledgement of the complaint containing the following information (if known):

- name and contact details of the person who will be dealing with the complaint
- if appropriate, an outline of the complaints handling process
- an estimated time frame for when the complainant can expect to be contacted next.

This initial acknowledgement should be provided as soon as possible after the complaint is received, and within 10 working days at the latest. The acknowledgement may be written or oral, depending on the circumstances.

For complaints that are straightforward and can be resolved quickly, the acknowledgement, assessment and response phases may all take place 'on the spot' for direct resolution of the complaint, or be included in a written response to a straightforward complaint received via email or by post. This approach is reflected in the Museum's Client Service Charter.

If a complaint cannot be resolved directly, the complainant is to be advised of the Museum's complaints handling process, including the likely time frame for the Museum to provide a further response to their complaint. If the complaint has been made in person by a Museum visitor, the visitor should be referred to the Client Service Charter and feedback methods available.

5.2 Assess the Complaint

The Museum will assess the nature of the complaint and decide whether:

- any further information is required from the complainant at this stage.
- the complaint should be prioritised or is urgent.
- The complaint is simple to resolve or is complex and sensitive, and requires deeper investigation involving other areas of the Museum, or escalation.

Some complaints may have specific legislative procedures and may be dealt with more appropriately under other Museum policies, such as Public Interest Disclosures or Code of Conduct breaches. The Head of Governance, Policy and Reporting will advise the appropriate mechanism for handling these complaints.

The complaint will be allocated to a person who is impartial and has the suitable skills to consider the complaint on its merits. For example, a complaint about a privacy breach will be allocated to the Privacy Officer.

The person to whom the complaint is allocated will be required to treat the complainant fairly,

and to demonstrate impartiality, confidentiality and transparency in their investigation. If appropriate, the complainant should be asked how they would like to see the complaint resolved and/or what outcomes they are seeking. At this point the complainant may also need to be advised about what outcomes are feasible and why. The complainant should also be informed of the process that will be adopted for investigating the complaint and applicable time frames.

The Museum may decline to investigate a complaint if it is assessed to be unreasonable or groundless.

5.3 Resolve early or investigate

Most complaints can be resolved on first contact, or with minimal further assessment or enquiries being made. If a complaint cannot be resolved early and quickly, an investigation may be required to resolve. A plan may need to be prepared, outlining what is to be investigated, the relevant steps, and the estimated time needed to undertake each step to resolve the complaint. Plans can be as simple as a few dot points to outline proposed actions.

Any investigation should take into account any relevant Museum policies and procedures. Where possible, the investigator should also take account of the outcome the complainant is seeking, and note any special considerations that apply, such as keeping the identity of the complainant private, or safeguarding sensitive or confidential information. For complex or lengthy investigations, the plan may need to be reviewed and adjusted as the matter progresses.

If a complaint requires investigation, the investigator should seek advice from the Museum's Head of Communications and/or Head of Governance, Policy and Reporting who will review the plan and support the resolution of the complaint as quickly as possible. In some cases it may be desirable to appoint an independent investigator to investigate the complaint.

5.4 Communicate the outcome

When an investigation is complete and a complaint resolved, the outcome and reasons for any decisions should be communicated to the complainant. Communication can be either in writing or verbal. It is important to ensure the outcome is communicated in a language and form that the complainant will be able to easily access and understand, making sure the circumstances of the complainant and any special needs or preferences are considered.

When communicating outcomes, the responder should include:

- a short summary of what the complaint was about
- what actions were taken to assess and/or investigate each element of the complaint
- what information and evidence was considered
- reasons for any decisions, findings or conclusions
- any remedial action.

Outcomes advised in writing should:

- invite the person to make contact if they want to discuss the decision
- provide a contact name and contact details for the decision-maker
- include advice on internal and external review options.

Outcome decisions should be communicated to the complainant as soon as practical after the decision is made, and within stated timeframes.

5.5 Finalise or escalate

A complaint is finalised when the complainant is provided with a decision and outcome. A complainant does not need to be satisfied for a complaint to be closed. If the complainant is confused, dissatisfied and has further questions the complaint may need to be escalated.

First points for escalation will be the Museum's Head of Communications and/or Head of Governance, Policy and Reporting. If a complaint is unable to be resolved, the Executive Team and the Director will review the investigation and all communication to date to determine next steps to finalise the complaint.

5.6 Feedback systemic issues

Complaints are a source of information that provide an opportunity for the Museum to improve programs and services, as well as providing valuable insights on visitor behaviour, needs and preferences.

6. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The Museum will treat all complaints confidentially and take steps not to disclose details of a complaint, other than is reasonably necessary for the purpose of investigating the complaint. Complaints involving personal information will be dealt with in accordance with the requirements of the *Privacy Act 1988* (Commonwealth). A complainant's identity or personal details will only be made available to Museum staff involved in dealing with the particular complaint or who are responsible for handling Museum complaints. Personal information about a complainant will not be disclosed to people outside the Museum unless the complainant has given their consent, or they would reasonably expect for their information to be disclosed, for example, where their complaint involves another organisation, such as a Museum supplier or contractor.

7. REFERENCES

Commonwealth legislation and guidelines

Australian Public Service Values, Employment Principles and Code of Conduct, 2022

Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling, Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2023

Freedom of Information Act 1982

Privacy Act 1988

Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013

Public Service Act 1999

Australian National Maritime Museum policies and plans

Child wellbeing and Safety Policy

Client Service Charter

Data Breach Response Plan

Fraud Control Plan

Information Management Policy

Privacy Policy

Public Interest Disclosure Policy

Social Media Policy

Work health and Safety Policy

8. APPROVAL AND REVIEW

9. VERSION HISTORY