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NATIONAL QUEER MUSEUM

A CONCEPT

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG

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1. Why do we need a National Queer Museum?

Such a museum would record a painful period in the history of Australia. It would capture that period before it is too late to record the nature of society that oppressed a significant minority of its people on grounds of personal features that they did not choose and could not change. In this respect, it bears some similarity to holocaust, immigration and other museums which do exist in Australia. So far, no museum has been created in the country to record, examine and analyse and remember the great wrongs of the homophobic oppression. In modern Australian history, those wrongs lasted from 1776 when the first British colonies were established on Australian soil. They lasted until 1997, at least, when the last jurisdiction in Australia (Tasmania) abolished the provisions in its criminal code that penalised and punished gay people for the acts natural to their sexual orientation and gender identity.

2. What is in the NQM?

The museum should include:

- * A large sound and film archive recording events in the history of LGBTIQ Australians'

- * Constantly running interviews with leading Australians from the community and from Allies who helped to promote the reform of the law and of social attitudes;
- * Interviews with non-LGBTIQ Australians should be included, including family members who indicate the pervasiveness and spread of the oppression;
- * Particular aspects of life in Australia that were oppressed should be recorded and historians should reflect on the record, which should be largely visual and include library material and service webinars and other events nationwide;
- * There should be materials relating to the triumph of reform and the existence of LGBTIQ visibility even before law reform;
- * The role of LGBTIQ Australians in all walks of life should be emphasised, including, but by no means limited to, the arts, music, literature, poetry, sport, politics, education and religion;
- * Some of the oppressors of LGBTIQ people should be recorded and memorialised. These should include at least:

3.

- The prison guards at Port Arthur (Tasmania and Norfolk Island);
- The resuscitated prison at Cooma NSW and the role of good people such as Honourable Reg Downing AC QC who complained about the “epidemic” of gay people;
- Notable citizens who were anti-gay should be remembered, including NSW Police Commissioner Colin Delaney (Australian Father of the Year) and South Australian Police Commissioner, Harold Salisbury, who was dismissed by Don Dunstan);

- * Australian political and social leaders in LGBTIQ law reform should be celebrated;
- * Likewise the marriage equality debate should be given great prominence and the role of friends and enemies of that reform should be reported and analysed with interviews with many of the participants;
- * Young people in schools, colleges and universities should be invited to express their feelings and speciality in the Australian nation;
- * LGBTIQ phenomena should be examined, debated and illustrated in the context of other major reforms in Australia including those affecting Indigenous First Nations People; women; Asian Australians during the White Australia Policy; disabled; convicted prisoners and refugee applicants detained, including in cases where protection was sought on the basis of SOGI.

4. Who is represented in the NQM?

The entire Australian community would be represented for it has from the start been the backdrop against which oppression occurred and had to be overcome.

Indigenous scholars should be invited to explain sexuality and Indigenous society.

Historians should be invited to explain the British hostility to sexual minorities, in Australia and throughout the British Empire. The encounter of sexual minorities and particular groups should be studied and illustrated:

- a) Irish, Scots, English and Welsh Australians;
- b) Islamic Australians;
- c) Asian gay and non-gay Australians and Asian attitudes;
- d) Particular employment groups should be identified and explained.

5. Why would people visit?

A growing cohort of tourists tend to visit Holocaust and immigration museums and are thirsting for museums that create and sustain serious reflection on the society.

Politicians and political scientists should be encouraged to visit to learn of the recent oppression.

Minorities in society should be encouraged to visit so as to learn the commonalities of oppression affecting gay and non-gay groups.

School children and university students would visit.

Workshops, conferences, auditoriums, university and public lectures should be conducted.

6. How would NQM pay for itself?

- i) It could be expected that government subventions would support in part the establishment of such a museum. The natural place for the

museum would be Sydney, NSW, given this is where the majority of the oppression took place and where reforms were triggered by the 1978 original public demonstration (Mardi Gras).

7.

ii) Gay philanthropists and supporters of good causes and minorities generally should be approached to provide resources;

8.

iii) Some Universities have special endowments and might be willing to be involved. Sydney University has the Norman Haire endowment and other endowments on LGBTIQ issues;

9.

iv) The NQM should also have an international perspective and should illustrate and analyse gay oppression around the world, including in the 11 countries where the death penalty still operates against LGBTIQ people.

10. If you walked into the NQM in 5 years what would it look like?

The best model I can think of is the Sydney Jewish Museum. This is a serious place, reflecting on an even greater oppression of a minority, namely the Jewish minority, specifically in Germany and Europe in the 1930s-40s.

The LGBTIQ oppression was more widespread and is continuing. But the entire story was not negative. There were happy aspects of LGBTIQ communities and international cooperation, certainly after developments in Berlin, Germany in the 1870s. The role of LGBTIQ personalities in literature, music, art, history, religion should be displayed. Large photographs and

screens with continuous interviews should be on display. The place should be welcoming and reflective. The ultimate journey through the museum should bring out a feeling of progress and challenge; heroism and response to suffering.

A major and distinctive section of the museum should deal with the HIV epidemic. The role of LGBTIQ people and their allies and supporters in that epidemic should be described and celebrated. Including the leading medical scientists and practitioners; politicians and community leaders:

- * Professor David Cooper AC;
- * Professor Ron Penney;
- * The Hon. Neal Blewett AC;
- * The Hon. Peter Baume AC.

A gallery and famous and infamous gay Australians should be established.

Particular gay Australians should be invited to contribute the cost of special rooms or “wings” of the museum which should then be named after them.

11. Other ideas?

No doubt other ideas would come from workshops and exchanges of viewpoints.

It is vital that ACON, the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation, the Kirby Institute, St Vincent’s Hospital, universities and community leaders, gay media, lawyers

and religious persons should be engaged. Primary obligation is to get interviews conducted before those who took part (especially after 1978) can be interviewed and their stories recorded in visual images and audio records before this selective memory is lost.

A dynamic and inspiring, energetic chief executive of NQM is needed and this should priority. There should also be strong cooperation with relevant institutions including:

- * National Archives of Australia;
- * National Library of Australia;
- * St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney;
- * ACON;
- * Bobby Goldsmith Foundation;
- * Sydney Jewish Museum;
- * Melbourne Pride Museum;
- * Melbourne Holocaust Museum.

A board of advisors should be established that includes notable and visible LGBTIQ Australians as well as allies and supporter/philanthropists.

Doubtless other ideas will spring forth in discussion and exchanges.

It is vital the project should have zest, energy but a serious cutting edge. It should pose the question: What are the oppressions that exist in Australia today that we meekly accept and even support, as Australians did with the crushing of the spirit of gay people prior to the 1970s.