



# National Coin Collection Preservation Policy

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## 1 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this document is to present high level policy statements for the Royal Australian Mint (Mint) regarding the preservation of the National Coin Collection (NCC).

The policy is intended to define the Mint's preservation responsibilities, and to provide guidance to Mint staff engaged in making decisions and undertaking other activities that may have an impact on the NCC. It is also a fundamental accountability document concerning one of the Mint's business functions, and is intended to serve as the basis for communication with a range of external stakeholders.

## 2 Mint's preservation mandate and responsibilities

The Mint's preservation mandate and responsibilities form part of the Mint's objectives. These include:

- promoting public understanding of the cultural and heritage significance of coins; and
- maintaining Australia's National Coin Collection.

Included in the Mint's authority of providing coins to the Australian Public, the Mint ensures that Australian coinage is collected and safeguarded. To achieve this, the Mint protects and maintains its collections to ensure their longevity, and implement relevant preservation strategies for priority areas of the collection. The Mint also maintains a significant collection of non-Australian coins to ensure they are available for current and future use for as long as they are needed.

With regard to its own collections, the Mint's preservation responsibilities are to ensure that a representative record of Australian coinage is collected and preserved for the future.

## 3 Preservation of the Mint's collection

The items that make up the Mint's collection are composed primarily of coinage materials which are subject to natural deterioration even in storage.

### 3.1 Principles for preserving the Mint's collection

Preservation of the NCC is a business function for the Mint. Mint staff are responsible for taking account of potential impacts on preservation of the collection in their work and their decisions.

The main aim of the Mint's preservation program is to preserve collection items and to maintain access to them, consistent with their significance to the collection, usage requirements and current condition. This may require maintenance of the physical format of the items or maintenance of access to their information content.

In addressing its preservation commitments, the Mint recognises that different items may need different levels and types of care, security and intervention. This may involve differences in how long materials will be maintained, and how far the Mint will go in seeking to avoid or overcome either damage or loss. Most materials in the Mint's collection will be maintained in their original format.

In supporting accessibility, the Mint seeks a suitable balance between the needs and rights of current users and the access expectations of future users.

In managing its preservation commitments, the Mint takes account of a number of factors, including:

- the nature and purpose of the collection;
- the nature of the risks to their ongoing value and usefulness; and
- the business context in which it operates, including the resources that have been made available for allocation to preservation; the availability of specialist expertise and facilities; and opportunities for addressing preservation needs along with other business requirements.

To adequately account for these factors, the Mint must maintain adequate knowledge of its collection in order to make informed planning decisions, and to report on the Mint's performance in caring for this highly valued publicly-owned asset.

The Mint attempts to retain and preserve at least two copies of all Australian coins manufactured in accordance with its collection development policy. Items will be maintained in their original format for as long as practicable, although access may be provided to the original format or to a surrogate copy as appropriate to support user's needs and cost-effective preservation.

In all of its preservation approaches, the Mint applies high standards of professional care and appropriate methods to maintain the significant characteristics for which the material receiving attention is valued. The Mint also recognises the need for adequate documentation that will support effective planning, informed decision making, appropriate future action, and accountability.

## 4 Means used by the Mint to achieve its preservation objectives

To achieve its preservation objectives, the Mint uses a range of means including:

- planning and policy making;
- development and use of procedures across the Mint to prolong the useful life of collections; and
- specialised conservation treatment

These measures are aimed at:

- recognising potential threats and preventing or minimising their impacts;
- stabilising damage that may have occurred and preventing further loss;
- repairing damage or loss that significantly interferes with use or detracts from the usability and values that give the collection material significance; and
- providing suitable replacement copies if necessary and available.

Because conservation repair treatments and data recovery are relatively expensive and not always successful, the Mint aims to prevent or pre-empt damage or loss where it is practical to do so.

## 5 Notes on specific activities

### 5.1 Acquisition of NCC collection items

The Mint acquires collection items either from external sources (by purchase, loan or donation) or through its own coin manufacture (transfer). The Mint has been issued with a Records Authority<sup>1</sup> by the National Archives of Australia in relation to actions which the Mint can undertake as part of their management of the NCC.

The Records Authority specifies the components to be incorporated into the NCC. These include as a minimum:

- 2 examples of standard Australian circulating coins caused by the Treasurer to be made and issued since 1910;
- records documenting artists' plasters and master tooling (reduction punches & master dies) produced for legal tender coins; and
- machinery and tooling pertaining to circulating and numismatic coin operations.

An acquisition policy depends on informed curatorial judgement. In assessing proposed acquisitions the curator will rely on an agreed set of criteria to determine what items should be added to the national collection. The criteria for evaluation entails the assessment of:

- significance;
- authenticity;
- need;

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<sup>1</sup> Records authority issued 2 September 2010, <http://www.naa.gov.au/naaresources/ra/2010-00255154.pdf>

- completeness;
- current and future usefulness;
- resource issues; and
- ownership and access.

In acquiring material for the NCC, the Mint will abide by the following general principles:

- the Mint does not commit itself to display any item which has been accepted;
- material is sought in the condition and format(s) which best meet agreed acquisition criteria;
- items collected should, wherever possible, be free of any legal, moral or financial impediment;
- subject to copyright constraints, the NCC reserves the right to make, at any time, such copies of acquisitions as it considers necessary for preservation and access;
- the NCC will honour the entitlements of copyright owners and donors in its subsequent dealings with collection items; and
- the NCC will honour obligations in relation to the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*, and the *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*

## 5.2 Disposal of NCC collection

The Mint's responsibility is to develop and maintain the NCC. Disposal will be undertaken only after careful consideration and in accord with the following criteria. An item being considered for disposal need not meet all of these criteria, but it is expected that it would meet one or more. The criteria for disposal are:

- duplicates;
- significance;
- inferior items;
- lack of documentation or provenance;
- deterioration;
- assets management;
- legal and moral obligations/impediments;
- ethical considerations; and
- copies and fakes.

The means by which the disposal of an item will be conducted is an important consideration which may affect the action. Decisions will need to be made about sale, exchange, destruction or donation. Recommendations and disposal procedures to be followed will depend on the type of item, its value and historical significance, as well as size and general level of ongoing conservation and maintenance required.

Every opportunity should be taken to ensure that the disposal of items will benefit the national collection. As has been stated, it is not unreasonable for a surplus item to be sold or traded and the proceeds used to offset the acquisition of other significant collection items. This may involve the disposal of a collection item of a lower order of significance if there is an opportunity to replace that item with one that is more significant. Destruction of an item

should be considered as a last course of action and every reasonable effort should be taken to avoid this option.

### **5.3 Collection processing and maintenance**

The Mint believes that appropriate collection processing, housing, and ongoing collection maintenance will reduce the likelihood of serious damage to its collection. These measures include:

- timely processing of newly acquired materials to a use-ready state;
- using appropriate means of identifying items to ensure ongoing retrieval and security while minimising the risk of causing long-term damage;
- using suitable containers such as cabinets and packaging materials where required to protect collection items;
- regularly maintaining storage areas, equipment and collections in a clean condition using suitable low risk methods.

### **5.4 Safe storage**

The Mint provides appropriate accommodation to support preservation of the NCC collection, and suitable secure systems and storage for the collection. This is achieved by:

- ensuring engineering and building specifications for new buildings and for upgrades or renovations to existing buildings address preservation needs of collections to be stored in them;
- ensuring that all Mint buildings are maintained to continue to meet those specifications;
- providing appropriate environmental conditions for collection storage with acceptable levels of temperature, relative humidity, light exposure, air quality, space, compression and other parameters that may be specified from time to time;
- providing security measures that ensure collection materials are protected from theft, vandalism, and accidental damage or loss during use or in storage;
- using appropriate shelving and retrieval equipment;
- using best practice systems and regimes for long term data management, including secure backup and disaster recovery arrangements; and
- maintaining best practice disaster plans and procedures to prevent, minimise, react to and recover from emergency situations that may damage the physical collections.

### **5.5 Protective use, display and handling**

The Mint recognises that use of its collections is a prime purpose of its existence. However, the nature of the collections, their national significance, what is required to support user access needs, and the access rights of future users are taken into account in determining what kinds of use will be allowed.

The Mint takes serious account of preservation considerations in determining the selection of items and the frequency and duration of their use for exhibition purposes, or for loan for exhibition to other institutions. All items proposed for exhibition or loan are assessed for their

current condition and vulnerability, and all items approved for exhibition or loan are appropriately prepared to minimise the risk of damage and to maximise the effectiveness of their display. Display and loan conditions with regard to security, light and UV exposure, temperature, relative humidity and air quality are specified in exhibition and loan agreements, and are intended to comply with current international standards or with special Mint specifications for particular materials.

The Mint requires staff and users to handle collection materials in ways that minimise the risk of damage. To address this need, training and advice on safe handling and transportation of collection materials are provided.

## **6 Cooperation**

The Mint recognises the need to work with other Mints, numismatic experts, dealers and information sectors to address common challenges while minimising unnecessary duplication of effort and facilities.

As the national mint, the Mint has a key role to play in fostering the preservation of Australia's coining heritage beyond its own collections.

In its fostering and facilitating role, the Mint gives priority to supporting and initiating programs and activities that enable others to identify and meet their objectives and responsibilities in preserving coining heritage.

## **7 Responsibility for Preservation Policy**

This policy is monitored and reviewed by the Mint's Museum Committee on a regular basis.