



Australian Institute of Architects

6 July 2017

Hon Michael Gunner MLA
Chief Minister
Parliament House, Darwin NT 0800
GPO Box 3146
DARWIN NT 0801
By email: chief.minister@nt.gov.au

Dear Chief Minister Gunner,

**Re: RFT T17-1687 New Museum of the Northern Territory – Planning and Initial Design Consultancy,
Best Practice Procurement**

The Institute applauds the Northern Territory Government's (NTG) commitment of \$50m towards this once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a major facility celebrating the Northern Territory's rich culture and history. The proposal is worthy of national and international acclaim, and complements the recently signed City Deal Memorandum of Understanding between the NTG and the Commonwealth.

In the context of such an important project, we cannot overemphasise the importance of the initial procurement phase as a determining factor in shaping the final outcome. In this case the potential for the *Museum of the Northern Territory* to be a sought-after destination on Australia's diverse map of cultural institutions draws attention to the importance of careful and considered procurement processes for both the design of the Museum as well as its construction.

The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) strongly believes that the current tender process for the design of the *Museum of the Northern Territory* is inappropriate for a project of such public significance. The limited information contained in the Request for Tender and the use of a simple tender Response Schedule may be appropriate for smaller scale, low-profile projects. However, such a simplified approach for a project of this scale and national importance lacks the rigour that is required to ensure that the highest calibre design team will be selected to deliver this significant cultural project.

While we understand the NTG's imperative to deliver on its promises to Territorians in a timely manner, a fast tracked process will merely deliver a building. A more carefully considered approach, on the other hand, will be rewarded with community commitment to quality architecture, a better public realm, and

a major contribution to the cultural fabric of Australia. These are the qualities for which good governments are remembered.

The Institute therefore urges the NTG to reconsider its procurement approach to the design of the *Museum of the Northern Territory*, and as a matter of priority to postpone the current tender process until a more appropriate one is in place. We believe that there are better and well-established models for procuring design excellence, not least the model of design competitions. We refer you to the recent examples of the Sydney Modern in New South Wales, Shepparton Art Museum in Victoria, and the Gallery of Modern Art in Queensland – processes in which a diversity of creative thinking was applied to a considered brief; where there was broad community interest and commitment to the project; in which the necessary time was afforded for consensus on design, and in which an assessment panel of suitably qualified experts was convened.

If a postponement of the current tender is not possible, then at the very least we urge that the NTG issue a tender addendum which addresses the following:

1. Project Phase 3 includes as a deliverable a Reverse Brief, when the proposed project phases 1 and 2 provide the loosest of frameworks for establishing, within a compressed timeframe, the parameters of a functional brief. The provision of a detailed functional Brief to the tenderers, outlining the essential spatial and technical requirements, the nature and extent of the collection, the narrative vision and a clear understanding of the museum's curatorial approach, is essential at this early stage. This will then inform the development, by the design consultancy, of the required technical Return Brief. It is very difficult to evaluate a brief for a building if it is not clear what it is supposed to contain.
2. Ensure that tenderers are issued background documents recently developed by the Government Architect around the City Deal proposal for Darwin. The Museum must be considered within this context so that the City Deal momentum is not lost to ad hoc development.
3. Request from tenderers a detailed methodological statement outlining how the proponent will approach the development of the Return Brief and the project narrative (see 1. above); how the design team will shape community consultation; how cultural and social inclusiveness will be considered in the design; and how sustainability objectives will be addressed.
4. Extend the design consultancy timeline beyond the January deadline. The summer months are traditionally a time when most people are on holiday. The project will be better served by fully attentive involvement by all stakeholders throughout the design period.
5. Provision of an indication of approximate costs, in order to limit the risk of tenderers submitting unsustainable fees that might jeopardise the project.

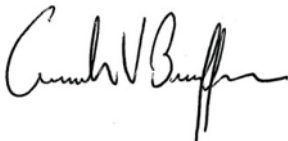
In addition to the above, we strongly recommend the following:

- a) Appointment of a respected and credentialed museum expert, with experience in the procurement of museum infrastructure, to drive the project from selection of the design team through to construction completion. Such an expert will help to complement the skills of the DIPL project managers and ensure a successful outcome.

- b) Ensuring that the tender selection panel includes a suitably qualified and independent architect (perhaps from outside of the Northern Territory) who can advise the selection panel in their deliberations. This will help to foster objectivity, wisdom and confidence in the selection process.
- c) Taking advantage of the expertise of the Northern Territory Government Architect and the Expert Design Panel in the procurement process. Large, high profile projects require this level of scrutiny.
- d) Refuting in the strongest possible terms any suggestions to pursue a Design and Construct construction methodology following the design phase. Design decisions during the construction of a major cultural institution such as the *Museum of the Northern Territory* must reside with the Northern Territory Government, as Principal, through its design team. Important decisions regarding a building of this significance should not be entrusted solely to the commercial interests of its building contractors. This should be a public building for the next hundred years, not one that rests on the profit margin of a private entity.

The Museum of the Northern Territory has the potential to be a significant contribution to the built environment, one that honours the NTG's investment and provides a lasting cultural legacy for Territorians and Australians alike. We urge the Government to commit to a process that appropriately pursues the highest of aspirations. This is surely the only way to honour the legacy of this important site.

Yours Sincerely,



Andrew Broffman RAIA

NT Chapter President, Australian Institute of Architects

cc. Hon Nicole Manison MLA: minister.manison@nt.gov.au

Hon Lauren Moss MLA: minister.moss@nt.gov.au