Deaccessioning 201: reaching the ‘Past their Use By Dates’ – an Australian example

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WHAT
WHY
HOW
Sekar Aman was purchased in 1987 as a representative example of Indonesian lete-lete perahus which have a centuries-long association with the north and north-western Australian coast, making annual voyages to collect trepang, clam meat and trochus shell.
Acquired in 1987 in a “new” condition of less than two years old; however it had been substantially built from timbers of an older perahu of about 20 years old. This compounded the problems we experienced.

Length: 15 m
Breadth: 5.5 m
Draught: 0.75 m

Teak timbers
Traditionally it would have been completely out of the water at low tide thereby allowing for daily inspections, repairs and maintenance as required. Something we couldn’t hope to replicate.

Removing any one plank was almost impossible without dismantling all the timbers above it.
Other issues:
- traditional caulking was of dempul – a mixture of hydrated lime, boiled vegetable oil and fibres of hessian sacking
- The original paint system promoted a build-up of moisture leading to an almost permanent pool of seepage
- A weakened fore deck resulted in failure of deck timbers
- Replacement of timbers would mean the use of rainforest timbers which had to be sourced from an ethical and sustainable source
- The original builder took shortcuts and used lesser timbers in some places
Sekar Aman survived well beyond the expected 20-25 year life of a traditionally-built Indonesian lete-lete but despite the museum’s best stewardship, the vessel reached a point where it was impossible to halt deterioration. Ingress of salt water and termite attack meant that extensive time, labour, materials and funding was required to remedy the structural and watertight problems associated with the hull structure.
An assessment was made as to its viability and the following options offered:

1. Repair and maintain in water
2. Repair and maintain on land
3. Deaccession
4. Deaccession and replace

Option 3 was recommended due to the condition of the vessel, the costs involved in option 1, 2 & 4; the skills and site requirements for options 1 & 2; and the impact options 1, 2 & 4 would have on the rest of the fleet
The process:
Guided by ANMM’s Deaccessioning and Disposal Policy we
• confirmed the museum’s ownership and legal issues
• Estimated costs involved
• Completed a full documentation of the vessel including history pre-museum and all maintenance undertaken to date
The evaluation period we are allowed is of not less than six months; it took one year.

Two independent experts and two independent valuers were engaged.

The value was more than $20,000 which meant we had to go to our Federal Minister for his approval.
How do we dispose?

- Destruction
- Exchange
- Gift – back to the original donor or to another institution
- Sale by public tender or auction – but not to staff, Council or their family

We approached five institutions – all declined our offer
The decision was made to destroy it.

A number of timbers (in good condition) were retained and a solid model of this lete-lete will be made in the future.