

A statewide community-based lending service

Queensland Museum Loans, <http://www.qmuseum.qld.gov.au/education/loans/>

It has been called a museum supermarket, the library where even the *live* Blue Tongues have barcodes, the greatest loan-a-thon on earth and the place where you can rent a roo! But, no matter what the tag, the business of this service is lending and the status of the service is constantly bullish. So much so that in 2001 the service won the Queensland Premier's award for excellence in Public Sector management for Services to Rural and Regional Queensland.

Access

Queensland Museum Loans (QMLoans) operates from headquarters at Queensland Museum, South Bank Campus, Brisbane and through thirty-one rural and regional distribution centres.

It extends the museum experience to anyone or any group, especially to those who, through isolation, incapacity, age, race or cost, are unable to visit the Queensland Museum's six campuses. Last year 980 educational institutions (covering the spectrum from early childhood centres to universities) and 208 community groups borrowed on a regular, often fortnightly, basis. Borrowers ranged from three to ninety-three year olds and include home educators in out-back Queensland, Clownfish Club members on Hamilton Island and students from Yam Island, Torres Strait.

The loans library of Realia

Borrowers are interested in learning about the changing story of Queensland through acquisitions from our ancestors, our land and our seas; yesterday, yesteryear and yestera. Our culturally and biologically diverse collection has grown ten-fold in a decade to 5000 kits containing more than 30 000 artefacts, supported by 10 000 books, posters and audiovisual resources. Lent items encompass an enormous breadth. Educators may select from the catalogue

and request a 'hands on' loan of fossils and dinosaur bones for a preschool, or an animal classification set for year 11 Biology, a Multicultural Hats collection and a Buddhist kit to celebrate religious festivals, a sulky wheel to teach 'Pi squared', or a PNG drum and an Indonesian Anklung to introduce musical instruments. You may borrow a koala, a kookaburra, a crocodile, a didgeridoo, a d'oley, a dingo trap, a Dragons and Diprotodon kit, a Weeds kit, a Muttaborasaurus jigsaw and activity kits — for example, Museum in a Box, Sea Surprises, Bush treasures, Museum Mysteries. All loans are personally tailored to the each client's requirements thus ensuring optimal coverage of the requested topics.

The collection includes all nature of animals, some of which are alive, geological specimens, cultural objects, indigenous artwork, through to comprehensive theme-based kits titled 'Aboriginal Australia', 'Torres Strait Islanders', 'Is-lan Kastom — Recognising Australian South Sea Islanders'; 'Endangered species' and 'Australian inventions'. New kits are developed in response to client evaluations and requests, to Museum strategic priorities and to changes in the school curriculum. To meet the growing demands for its services volunteers provide time and expertise, and funding is secure through partnerships, sponsors, grants and awards.

In-house resource production

To more effectively extend the museum experience, QM-Loans has become a production unit as well as a library. In liaison with curators, loans staff design museum loan materials and are involved in producing kits, preparing artefacts, displaying specimens and collating collections. Central to each loan resource is the powerful and exciting museum ingredient — a reconstructed model, an excellent cast or most commonly the original object. As Marc Pachter the acting director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History recently remarked 'as surrogates of artefacts become all the more easy to reproduce, the need and desire for the authentic artefact — the "object as witness" — will become even stronger.'

The loans library has become a loans 'museum' with a display construction workshop, desktop publishing facilities, backup collection of donated cultural and biological objects. This in-house production capability and the statewide distribution network has attracted partnerships and collaborations with outside organisations resulting in sponsored kit development.

Staff

From a one-person operation servicing a limited area QMLoans now employs three paid staff and a network of seventy volunteers. Known as the 'priceless workforce' the 590 loan transactions they made in 1987 has grown to 6800 in 2001.

Service delivery — managing the tyranny of distance

QMLoans has adopted innovative approaches that have led to high levels of service provision and management. Four distinct services maximise access and facilitate convenience.

The *Metropolitan service* annually makes 500 000 kit contacts with students in South East Queensland.

The voluntarily staffed *Country Touring Service* operates out of twenty-eight (formerly twelve) libraries, museums, education centres and schools from Thursday Island to Thar-



Rae Sheridan and frozen elephant seals from Maquarie Island

gominda. An extensive rail, ship and courier linked network circulates 238 kits through the centres from where they are locally distributed to schools and local groups such as the Country Women's Association.

In response to demand the *Country Satellite Service* evolved. Collections of 'hands on' kits are placed under the *permanent* management of country centres for local distribution.

The *Specialist Service* reaches seniors with the 'Living Treasures' collections; those studying war through distributing The War Memorial's kits; the public by lending large-scale valuable collections, for example Antarctica memorabilia and the lucky by lending collaboratively developed heritage award winners such as the Urban Forest Kit.

Increased visitation

Research demonstrates that those who use QMLoans visit Queensland Museum, South Bank more than those who do not use the outreach service. Specifically, statistics reveal that schools that borrow make more school excursions to the museum. Further evidence shows that the families of students, whose teachers borrow, pay more visits than those fami-

lies whose children do not have regular access to museum loans in the classroom.

As well as winning hearts and kindling the love of learning, our 'Cinderella' service has won grants, awards, donations, sponsorship, praise and partnerships and now raises revenue to subsidise its remote outreach. Over the last fourteen years QMLoans has become the world's largest museum loans service in terms of collection size, transaction and audience numbers, and geographic reach. ■



Bedourie State School in Central West Queensland with materials borrowed from QMLoans

How will you shape the future?

Age 6: She'll make autumn leaf collages in the children's room of her local library.

Age 15: She'll write a report on herbal remedies based on interviews with Native American healers collected by the Smithsonian Institution.

Age 26: She'll study 3-D models of the molecular structure of rare plant species, using her medical school's database resources.

Age 32: Her daughter will make autumn leaf collages in the children's room of her local library.

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