

WA Museum rejects Abbott's claims of lost items



Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village director Peter Abbott, far right, has drawn the ire of the Western Australian Museum for incorrect claims he made about lost items from its collection. Image: Warrnambool City Council.

EXCLUSIVE – Carol Altmann

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[/dropcap]he **Western Australian Museum** has strongly rejected a claim by Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village director **Peter Abbott** that it could not locate more than 6600 items in its collection.

[box][See our update to this story here](#): WA Museum chief says claim came from “confusion”.[/box]

Mr Abbott made the claim in a January 10 letter to the *Warrnambool Standard* in which he used the Western Australian example to defend the fact that Flagstaff Hill [cannot locate more than 130 items listed in its collection](#).

Mr Abbott wrote that museums around the world “go through

random collection reviews” that often reveal items “have been moved or misplaced”.

“As an example...Western Australian Maritime Museum in 2009 found over 6680 (items) unaccounted for,” he wrote.

The [Western Australian Museum](#) covers six sites, including the WA Maritime Museum. Its chief executive officer, **Alec Coles**, tonight described the claim as simply erroneous.

“The Western Australian Museum rejects any suggestion that (it) could not locate more than 6680 items in 2009 or at any other time,” he said.

“The number is almost half of the Maritime History Department’s total collection, so any claim that WAMM could not locate more than 6680 items is clearly erroneous.”



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[/dropcap]r Coles said the Maritime History Department had “occasionally found discrepancies involving three or four items as a result of loans or de-acquisitions, or lists not being updated, but these issues have always been resolved”.

He also rejected Mr Abbott’s assertion that credible museums undertake “random collection reviews”.

“The Western Australian Museum does not conduct random collection reviews,” Mr Coles said.

“As a State Government agency, the Western Australian Museum is required to conduct regular audits of its collection for government reporting and accounting purposes and these are required to be approved by the office of the Auditor-General.

“The most recent of these was conducted last year.”

When asked where Mr Abbott may have found the information to make such a claim, Mr Coles said that was for Mr Abbott to explain.

“A thorough check of the WA records and with senior staff can’t find any source of the information that might have given rise to the claim,” he said.

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[/dropcap]r Cole’s comments come on the back of confirmation that Flagstaff Hill is [under formal investigation by Heritage Victoria](#) over the missing items from its collection and damage to relics from the wreck of the *Loch Ard*.

As [recently reported in Bluestone Magazine](#), two of the 10 copper sheets from the *Loch Ard* (1878) that were loaned to Flagstaff Hill by the Federal Government have been cut.

The rejection of Mr Abbott’s claims also comes in light of [a separate scandal](#), in which Mr Abbott was named by the local newspaper as the author of a string of anonymous comments made to its online forums. He often used the forums to make personal attacks against Warrnambool City councillors **Cr Brian Kelson** and **Cr Peter Hulin**.

Cr Hulin will move a motion of no confidence against CEO **Bruce Anson** at the first council meeting of the year on Monday (Feb 2), citing his handling of Mr Abbott’s behaviour as an example of why the Local Government Minister should be asked to

intervene.

The same meeting will also discuss a proposed \$3 million upgrade to Flagstaff Hill, which has suffered from a steady downturn in visitors in recent years.

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