

Australian National Maritime Museum

Submission National Cultural Policy

22 May 2026

The Australian National Maritime Museum (ANMM) is pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the public consultation process for a new National Cultural Policy.

The Australian National Maritime Museum informs, challenges and nurtures conversations about this nation shaped by sea. We share the rich and compelling narratives of our island nation, adding knowledge, building cohesion and promoting hope by connecting Australians, and all visitors, with the unique role our waterways and oceans play, in shaping our past, present and future.

Since the launch of the National Cultural Policy in January 2023, the ANMM has been guided by its pillars and principles in all our activities. We support the vision and objectives of a National Cultural Policy, recognising its social, cultural and economic impact at a time of geopolitical and climate uncertainty. We are uniquely placed to provide insight for the development of the next policy and share opportunities for the potential future of our cultural framework.

The current global outlook is defined by uncertainty, and social cohesion is being challenged around the world. National and global events continue to place pressure on Australian society, testing the resilience of its social fabric and cohesion.

Museums are trusted, accessible and inclusive cultural spaces, and can play a pivotal role in strengthening social cohesion by fostering community engagement, promoting cultural understanding, and providing educational opportunities. Museums are key actors in building a sense of belonging and promoting social inclusion and resilience.

Museums play a leadership role in connecting and enriching all Australians. ANMM recommends that the revised policy fully reflects the impact and influence of the museum sector in our cultural landscape.

The role of the ANMM in building trust and belonging

As a national museum, ANMM is responding to the challenges of our times with exhibitions and programs that celebrate our diverse and inclusive national identity. We also aim to support those impacted by rising cost of living pressures in a variety of ways such as our targeted free entry days.

We are advancing a trusted relationship with our audiences and stakeholders, ensuring that everything we do is based on sound evidence, research, and our enduring commitment to truth-telling. The Museum's exhibitions, programs and educational activities are dedicated to telling the stories that explore who we are as a nation and culture shaped by the seas. We are a safe place to understand what social cohesion means and to answer: Who are we? Why are we? Where are we going? Our exhibitions and programming are designed so visitors leave hopeful and empowered.

Migration, and its ongoing role in our multicultural nation, is one of the key pillars of the Museum's activity. Central to this is our National Monument to Migration, which recognises the enduring contribution of migrants to Australia's national identity and provides a focal point for reflection, commemoration and community connection.

We are creating a place where every visitor feels empowered to share their story and be part of Australia's future. We are increasing our commitment to 'owning the migration narrative' by developing people-focused exhibitions around belonging, migration and social resilience, which will encourage visitors to first see themselves and their experiences in the ongoing story of our nation.

National leadership

The National Cultural Institutions such as ANMM, are foundational cultural infrastructure delivering across all pillars of the National Cultural Policy. These national institutions support the entire national cultural ecosystem. ANMM expands national impact through extensive outreach, such as our touring exhibitions, education programs, digital access initiatives and community partnerships, ensuring that cultural participation is not confined to just our site but reaches regional and remote communities across the nation.

As the National Maritime Museum, we occupy a unique place – providing leadership and support to regional and volunteer museums and organisations across Australia. With our networks well established, ANMM is strongly positioned to help further build strong cultural infrastructure and provide more support to institutions and communities, sustaining our arts, culture and heritage communities.

Maritime Museums Australia Project Support Scheme (MMA PSS).

The Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme (MMA PSS) is part of the Distributed National Collections (DNC) program. It is a national outreach initiative that helps Australian maritime heritage organisations preserve and display objects of significance to our shared maritime history. It is administered by ANMM and funded jointly by the Museum and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts. Support leads to quality, tangible results for regional and remote partners that reflect the diversity of maritime heritage stories across the nation.

MMAPSS is a proven method of empowering regional organisations to tell stories that matter to their community, in a local context. MMAPSS helps create an enhanced sense of belonging by championing locally significant narratives that tell a national story.

Since it commenced in 1995, the MMAPSS program has provided more than \$2.7 million to over 400 maritime heritage organisations across Australia, supporting more than 580 projects and 190 individual training opportunities. Government funding for the project has remained at \$105,000 since 2015. Demand for grant funds or training opportunities exceeds our funding ability. In 2026, 41 grant funding submissions were received, with only 27 awarded due to the level of funding available. ANMM also provides considerable in-kind support to regional organisations through its training courses and specific staff assistance and expertise.

The scheme has a track record of supporting institutions to tell previously untold aspects of regional Australian history, including First Nations stories. For example, in 2025 the Portland Maritime Museum in Victoria was awarded funding to redesign its First Nations displays and opened the new Nyamat Miring gallery, and the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council (NSW) were funded to film and document the construction of a Guridja (traditional bark canoe) by a senior Thaua Elder, to be installed in a refurbished Keeping Place at Jigamy.

Travelling exhibitions and national collection lending

Sustained and expanded support for touring exhibitions and collection sharing will enable national institutions like ANMM to bring more of our nation's stories to regional and remote communities, deepening cultural participation across Australia.

ANMM has a strong touring exhibition program. Over 1.4 million people visited our travelling exhibitions and programs in 2024/25, nationally and internationally. With the support of government funding through the National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach Program, we have had the ability to tour exhibitions such as *Mariw Mineral: Spirit Patterns*.

We have also recently received funding from the Office of Social Cohesion to develop and travel *Sea Country to Safe Harbour*. This will be a co-designed, modular exhibition and program of community activations that strengthens social cohesion and democratic resilience around the nation. It aims to create structured, empathetic and respectful engagement between First Nations communities and migrant communities through a single theme: a shared human experience of water. The project integrates fresh water & saltwater kinship systems in First Nations Australia and connects this to the journeys of others as a pathway of arrival, survival and storytelling for people from across the oceans who make Australia their home.

Over 75% of the National Maritime Collection is accessible to the public through our online catalogue. The Museum also lends objects from the National Maritime Collection to other institutions. Building our capacity to share the national collection would strengthen regional cultural infrastructure and audiences, supporting the policy pillar of "A Place for Every Story" by distributing cultural participation nationally.

Recommendation

The Australian National Maritime Museum recommends the next National Cultural Policy fully recognises the vital role museums play in strengthening social cohesion, expanding cultural participation and preserving the stories that shape our national identity. As a trusted national institution with deep community reach, ANMM contributes leadership, expertise and partnership across the cultural sector. A renewed policy that invests in national museums as essential cultural infrastructure will help build a more connected, inclusive and resilient Australia, where every story has a place and every community can see itself reflected in the nation's cultural life.