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Submission from the Council of Australasian Museum Directors for *National Cultural Policy consultation 2026.*

COUNCIL OF AUSTRALASIAN MUSEUM DIRECTORS (CAMD)

The Council of Australasian Museums (CAMD) comprises of the leaders of the 24 major museums in Australia and New Zealand and welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation 2026.

CAMD is dedicated to fostering collaboration and excellence within the museum sector of Australia and New Zealand. CAMD brings together museum directors, professionals, and institutions to support the preservation stewardship and public promotion of cultural and natural heritage.

Through initiatives, knowledge sharing, and advocacy, we enhance visitor experience, promote social cohesion, encourage innovation, and contribute to the growth and relevance of museums in our region. Together, we create a vibrant community that promotes best practices, professional development, and impactful dialogue.

Museums are richly diverse and complex institutions encompassing artists and creatives, historians, academics, scientific researchers, archivists, administrators and First Nations and Pacific islander cultural leaders and play an important role in international relations and soft diplomacy in our region and beyond. As trusted public institutions with broad community reach, museums do not simply preserve the past; they are active participants in shaping a shared national future.

Critically, museums are able to demonstrate impact through evidence built over centuries. Longitudinal collections, research partnerships, and decades of public engagement data place museums in a strong position to show, not just assert their value to education, science, community wellbeing, and the national economy.

Museums are among Australia's most visited and valued cultural institutions**. Together, CAMD's Australian member institutions in 2025 welcomed more than 14m+ visitors annually, employed over 4000 staff, with a total audience engagement of over 89m+ and contributed immeasurably to the impact on community engagement, tourism, education, science research and social unity across Australia*. We are the custodians of multi-billion-dollar collections, assets held in trust for all Australians across history, science and culture.

CAMD museums hold over 75 million collection items*, the majority relating to natural sciences such as geology and biology. These collections are vital for research and play an increasingly important role in addressing global challenges including climate change, food security, emerging diseases and biodiversity conservation. Around 80% of the biological collections are unique to Australia, making them globally significant resources.

Beyond natural sciences, CAMD collections support research across the sciences and humanities, strengthened by technologies such as gene sequencing and artificial intelligence. The collections are highly diverse, encompassing First Nations and Pacific Islander culture and history, social history, science and technology, dinosaurs, minerals, meteorites, and iconic extinct specimens including the thylacine and modern-day icons like Phar Lap.

Museums have active involvement across every pillar the National Cultural Policy seeks to advance and CAMD requests a greater focus on museums in this updated policy. CAMD urges the importance of ensuring the sector is fully understood and appropriately reflected against its scale and impact.

Museums are not peripheral to Australia's cultural life; indeed, as the original cultural hubs in Australia's newly founded cities, museums are central to it and have been since the modern cultural sector was established.

EXCUTIVE SUMMARY

Museums are not peripheral to Australia's cultural life, they are central to it. As the original cultural hubs in Australia's cities, museums have shaped public life since the modern cultural sector was established. Yet the National Cultural Policy consultation paper is noticeably weighted toward the creative industries, performing arts and screen sectors. Museums and collecting institutions do not feature prominently. CAMD urges that the updated policy fully reflect the scale, diversity and impact of the museum sector.

This submission addresses five priorities:

First Nations First. Repatriation must be treated as core national cultural work with dedicated, sustained funding, not project grants. CAMD calls for a whole of government repatriation working group, standalone ICIP legislation with a GLAM implementation framework, and a genuine shift from advisory-only models to First Nations co-governance over cultural heritage decisions.

Strengthening Philanthropic Investment. Museums require increased tax incentives for philanthropic giving, simplified administrative processes for donors, and a shift from short-term project funding to sustained systemic investment. Museums must be repositioned as essential public infrastructure, not solely as cultural venues.

Investing in Australia's Cultural and STEM Workforce. Museums sustain a broad ecosystem of creative, scientific and technical practitioners. The new policy must enable museums to access Australian Research Council funding directly, formally recognise the sector as critical national research infrastructure and extend STEM and cultural education investment across the full learning spectrum.

Recognising Scientific Culture. Scientific collections, natural science research and STEM engagement are integral to Australia's cultural identity. The policy should explicitly recognise science as a foundational cultural pillar and consider science as a potential sixth pillar, while funding science centres and major natural history museums as critical cultural infrastructure as happens in other countries

Museums' Economic, Educational and Social Value. Museums are significant economic contributors, core educational institutions and essential anchors of social cohesion. The policy should formally recognise this, invest in the care and accessibility of longitudinal scientific collections and reflect museums' unique role in building connection, understanding and national identity across all communities.

CAMD is ready to work with government to ensure museums are fully understood, appropriately resourced and centrally positioned in Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

FIRST NATIONS FIRST

Museums are places of truth-telling. They hold a unique responsibility to First Nations communities, not only as custodians of cultural heritage, but as institutions that must support living, dynamic, thriving cultures and the realisation of First Nations ancestral futures. This is not historical work. It is present and ongoing.

Increased investment in First Nations and Pacific Islander repatriation is the most urgent priority. CAMD calls for repatriation (both of Ancestral remains and cultural material (Restricted Collections) to be treated as core national cultural work with dedicated, ongoing funding (a whole of government repatriation working group, standalone ICIP legislation with a clear GLAM implementation framework, and a shift from advisory only models to genuine First Nations co-governance and decision-making authority).

The importance of returning Restricted Collections back to Country, to their rightful place, is reflected in the below quote:

> *"For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the return of ancestral remains back 'to country' is the first step towards recognising their dignity. It restores their rightful place as Elders, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters. It acknowledges the wrong done to them and allows the ancestors to finally rest in peace in their homelands. It recognises the unbreakable bond, customary obligations and traditional practices between the living, the land and the dead."*[1]

As a result of past collecting practices, museums hold a significant number of Restricted Collections in their collections. The sector agrees that museums should not retain Restricted Collections and is committed to supporting their respectful return to Country and community. This work requires continued prioritisation and investment to strengthen the capacity, partnerships and processes needed to enable repatriation. There is a clear imperative to strengthen investment, collaboration, and institutional focus in this area to ensure ancestral remains and cultural material can be returned to Country and community in a respectful, timely and culturally informed way. CAMD notes that some museums have been assigned a custodial responsibility for Secret/Sacred Objects or Ancestral Remains by State or Federal legislation and deal with such material in accordance with the applicable legislative requirements.

The scale and complexity of this work requires increased and sustained government investment to ensure it can continue effectively and equitably across the sector. Increased funding is needed to support research, community consultation, staffing, travel, care and return processes and long-term partnerships with First Nations and Pacific Islander communities. Without coordinated and ongoing government support, the sector's capacity to deliver timely, respectful, and culturally informed repatriation outcomes will remain constrained. We request adequate funding for First Nations initiatives both current and future. This is central to a 'First Nations First' statement and to reconciliation in Australia.

Repatriation requires a genuinely collaborative approach, with museums working in partnership with First Nations and Pacific Islander communities, governments and cultural organisations to support respectful and culturally informed outcomes. As custodians of collections and key participants in this work, the museum sector must be actively represented at the table in policy development, decision making, and implementation discussions to ensure processes are effective, accountable, and grounded in shared responsibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Treat repatriation as core national cultural work** with dedicated, ongoing funding that reflects its scale, complexity and urgency, not project-based or time-limited grants.
- **Establish a whole-of-government repatriation working group** to coordinate policy, funding and implementation across agencies.
- **Introduce standalone ICIP legislation** with a clear implementation framework for the GLAM sector.

[1] Commonwealth Government Department of Communications and the Arts, Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation, 2016, p.4.

- **Recognise museum's role in First Nations First policy development** and the contribution that can be made to reconciliation.
- **Shift from advisory-only models to genuine First Nations co-governance and decision-making authority** over repatriation processes and cultural heritage policy.
- **Increase and sustain government investment in repatriation** specifically to support research, community consultation, staffing, travel, care and return processes and long-term partnerships with First Nations and Pasifika communities.
- **Recognise museums in Australia hold thousands of First Nations and Pacific Islander Ancestral remains** and these must be repatriated where possible to Country and communities
- **Adequately fund First Nations cultural initiatives** both current and future, ensuring equitable capacity across institutions of all sizes.
- **Ensure the museum sector is actively represented** in policy development, decision-making and implementation discussions, as custodians of collections and essential participants in repatriation, not just implementers of policy decisions made elsewhere.
- **Establish sustained pathways for First Nations and Pacific cultural leadership**: The next Policy should fund structured First Nations cultural leadership pipelines from early career through to executive levels. The shortage of First Nations leaders in senior cultural sector roles is a structural problem requiring structural investment: targeted recruitment, paid internships and cadetships, secondments between institutions, mentoring, and long-term placements.

CASE STUDY ONE: Museum and Art Gallery Northen Territory (MAGNT)

Museum and Art Gallery Northen Territory (MAGNT) proudly supported Larrakia Development Corporation and Larrakia people in hosting a smoking ceremony for returned material from the South Australian Museum (SAM) and the Fowler Museum at UCLA. Staff provided a private, respectful event with support and safe passage through the museum corridors, gardens and store areas. "Hold – in – trust" Agreements replace previous 'Loan Agreements' for repatriated material to reflect the new owners, and best practice repatriation. MAGNT is committed to caring for the repatriated material for Larrakia, who expect to see more of their cultural treasures returned in the coming years.

Source: 24/25 MAGNT Annual Report

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First Nations First
A Place for Every Story
The Centrality of the Artist
Strong Cultural Infrastructure

STRENGTHENING PHILANTHROPIC INVESTMENT

There is increased emphasis across the States and Federally on museums needing to raise philanthropic funding. Existing government policies and programs have played an important role in encouraging and in many cases directing seeking philanthropic support, but these need to be strengthened adding greater incentives for giving.

Given the challenges in the financial environment, CAMD supports several recommendations. In particular, the CAMD endorses recommendations directed at lowering barriers to entry for donors, improving the accessibility of charitable information, and simplifying administrative processes.

It is essential that greater tax incentives be provided for donations (both cash and cultural heritage/objects) to museums, galleries and the broader arts and cultural sector. An increase in the percentage of deduction to the cultural sector is urgent and essential.

Museums should be repositioned as essential public infrastructure, not just cultural venues and that funding models need to shift from short-term project grants to sustained, systemic investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Lower barriers to entry for donors:** simplify the administrative processes associated with philanthropic giving to cultural institutions, both cash contributions cultural gift tax deductions.
- **Improve the accessibility of charitable information:** make it easier for donors to understand how and where to direct support.
- **Provide greater tax incentives** for donations to museums, galleries, and the broader arts and cultural sector. ie. higher deductions
- **Reposition museums as essential public infrastructure** not just cultural venues; reflecting their role in education, science, community wellbeing, and national identity.
- **Shift funding models** from short-term project grants to sustained, systemic investment.

CASE STUDY TWO: Lang Walker Family Academy: Powerhouse Parramatta

The Walker Family Foundation's investment in the Lang Walker Family Academy is a landmark example of philanthropic capital driving long-term cultural and educational impact supporting 10,000 students across NSW annually in accessing immersive STEM experiences unavailable in school environments.

Active since 2022, the program connects students across Western Sydney and regional NSW with industry leaders, knowledge institutions, researchers and programs across the applied arts and sciences. In 2023, students developed NASA-inspired experiments through *Powerhouse: Future Space*, with the winning experiment sent to the International Space Station. When Powerhouse Parramatta opens in 2026, the Academy will add residential STEM camps and a digital platform giving alumni ongoing access to the world's leading practitioners demonstrating how targeted philanthropy can extend a museum's reach into communities that need it most.
Source: https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/lang-walker-family-academy

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Strong Cultural Infrastructure
Engaging the Audience
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INVESTING IN AUSTRALIA'S CULTURAL AND STEM WORKFORCE

Beyond bricks and mortar, the museums sector infrastructure brings together built environments, collections and knowledge systems that enable a diverse network of natural science and biodiversity work.

Investment is needed across the talent and research pipeline, including renewed support for the Humanities at the university level and stronger recognition of the research contribution of the GLAM sector.

The updated policy should enable greater engagement with Australian Research Council (ARC) funding (currently administered by the Federal Department of Education) and create clearer pathways for the economic, cultural and knowledge benefits of publicly funded research to flow through to galleries, libraries, archives, and museums. This should be accompanied by formal recognition of the sector's role as critical national research infrastructure and the academic rigour and science and cultural research undertaken in museums. Currently only universities can apply for ARC grants (this process was changed 15 years ago removing natural history museums from applying for grants and only allowing universities to apply for funding). Ironically, it now costs museums to participate in these grants when invited by universities to participate in 'collaborative' research accessing museum collections and knowledge infrastructure.

Museums are often the lead researcher in these grants but are not recognised as such Museums supervise the students but do not share in the funding allocated to the Universities for this work. The current ARC grant program contains a significant structural inequity for museums. CAMD urges a review of these eligibility settings to better reflect the genuine research contributions of museums.

Revive (2023) established Commonwealth funding for specialist in-school arts education, and the next Policy should extend this commitment across the full breadth of cultural and STEM learning that museums produce the next generation of curators, conservators, scientists, educators and creative practitioners. This support should span the full education continuum, strengthening partnerships with schools, TAFEs and universities that prepare the next generation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Renewed support for the Humanities at University level – remove the discriminatory practice of recently introduced higher fees for Arts degrees.
- Enable greater engagement with Australian Research Council (ARC) funding and allowing museums to apply for ARC grants as before and remove the 'penalty' Museums pay to participate in ARC Research Grants.
- Formal recognition of the sector's role as critical national research infrastructure. The billions of dollars invested in buildings and collections across Australia demand this.
- Create clearer pathways for the economic, cultural and knowledge benefits of publicly funded research.

CASE STUDY THREE: **First Nations Undergraduate Student Research Program**

Queensland Museum hosted the second First Nations Undergraduate Student Summer Research Program from 12 December 2025 – 20 February 2026. Five students participated in an eight-week placement designed to build research skills, provide hands-on experience, and explore career pathways in cultural heritage and museums.

Participants completed independent research projects and engaged in weekly research and cultural workshops, supported by Queensland Museum's First Nations team and project supervisors. The program culminated in a public symposium, where students presented their work on topics including provenance, interpretation, policy, social impact, and repatriation.

Generously supported by the Maria Vasas Foundation, the First Nations Undergraduate Student Research Program will be offered a third time in 2027.

Source: https://www.museum.qld.gov.au/about/first-nations-initiatives-and-programs/first-nations-research-program/

CASE STUDY FOUR: Marine Biodiversity Research - Western Australian Museum

A long-standing collaboration led by the Western Australian Museum has delivered one of Australia's most significant long-term biodiversity research programs. Over 28 years, the program has surveyed more than 575,000 km² across 315 sites along Western Australia's north-west coastline, contributing over 55,000 specimens representing over 8,500 species to the Museum's collections.

This work has directly supported workforce development, engaging 147 researchers, seven PhD students and 29 trainees, and producing more than 160 peer-reviewed publications and over 700 species new to science. The research has also led to the Kimberley coast being recognised as a nationally significant coral biodiversity hotspot.

Importantly, this example highlights the need for policy settings that recognise museums as core components of Australia's research infrastructure and enable more direct access to competitive research funding, including Australian Research Council (ARC) programs.

Now extended for a further five years to focus on the Gascoyne coastline, the program continues to demonstrate the unique role museums play in building Australia's long-term research workforce.

Source: https://visit.museum.wa.gov.au/learn/news-stories/wa-museum-extends-marine-research-collaboration-woodside-energy

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RECOGNISING SCIENTIFIC CULTURE

Scientific, biodiversity and environmental knowledge and technological innovation have long shaped Australian identity, and museums are uniquely positioned to communicate these intersections to the public in meaningful and accessible ways. Policy refinements should explicitly recognise scientific collections, natural science research, and STEM engagement as integral components of Australia's cultural life.

Science should be understood as a foundational cultural pillar for any thriving country, state, or city. Science literacy is a precondition for the civic participation and the cultural resilience this policy seeks to foster, enabling communities to reason with evidence, evaluate risk, and meaningfully engage with the natural world. While science may ideally be recognised as a standalone "sixth pillar," it is more immediately and pragmatically embedded across the existing framework, particularly within Pillar 2, where science can be understood as story, human inquiry, and a distinctly Australian contribution to global knowledge both through Western science and first Nations science; Pillar 4, through science centres as critical cultural infrastructure; and Pillar 5, where public engagement with science is itself a form of active audience participation.

Culture is not static or purely historic. Scientific inquiry, biodiversity and environmental knowledge and technological innovation have always shaped Australian identity and museums are the institutions best placed to communicate these issues to the public. The next policy should explicitly acknowledge the role of scientific collections, natural-science research and STEM engagement as part of Australia's cultural life acknowledging the intersection of science and culture which reflects the work of major Australian museums.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Explicitly recognise scientific collections, natural science research, and STEM engagement** as integral components of Australia's cultural life within the next National Cultural Policy.
- **Recognise science as a foundational cultural pillar** and while pragmatically embedded across existing pillars now, give consideration to science as a **standalone sixth pillar** in the policy framework.
- **Recognise science literacy as a precondition** for civic participation and cultural resilience, and reflect this in how the policy frames audience engagement and community outcomes.
- **Recognise natural history and science centres as critical cultural infrastructure** (alongside galleries, libraries, archives and museums) and fund them accordingly under Pillar 4.

CASE STUDY FIVE: The Collective Research Impact of Australia's Major Collecting Institutions

Australia's major collecting institutions are world-class research organisations generating knowledge that spans biodiversity, conservation, climate science, cultural heritage and history. Taken together, their annual research output demonstrates an extraordinary depth of scientific and cultural contribution that is rarely visible in public policy.

South Australian Museum researchers described more than 100 new species and four new minerals; and West Australian Museum biologists identified previously unrecorded species at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands, including a marine snail never recorded south of Singapore. Museums Victoria used AI technology, developed with QUT, to rediscover an endangered Plains-wanderer in Melbourne's west after more than 30 years, and identified a new Victorian mineral on meteorites from Cranbourne, only the third known occurrence in the world.

This scientific work is deeply collaborative. Queensland Museum secured ARC-linked research grants, partnering with universities across Australia and internationally to investigate marine species resilience, First Nations repatriation and Pacific colonial history. The Australian National Maritime Museum confirmed the identity of HM Bark Endeavour's shipwreck after 25 years of research, a landmark in global maritime heritage, while supporting three active ARC projects spanning underwater virtual heritage, Dutch East India Company collections and First Nations floodplain management.

In 2024/25 the Australian Museum held 11 active ARC grants covering a wide range of research priorities,

from biodiversity, palaeontology and conservation to Indigenous histories, wildlife crime and threatened species. Administered through partner universities across Australia, these grants reflect the Museum's significant and ongoing contribution to nationally important research. In addition, in 2024/25, Australian Museum scientists discovered and named 292 new species and maintains this high level of science output year on year.

Critically, this research serves the public. West Australian Museum's Kimberley marine research produced a major public exhibition. Museums Victoria's wildlife biobank is actively safeguarding genetic diversity against extinction. South Australian Museum added 5,759 new collection items and recorded more than 41,000 digital downloads via the Atlas of Living Australia.

Collectively, these institutions sustain hundreds of researchers, PhD students and early-career scientists, produce peer-reviewed publications at scale, and hold longitudinal collections that underpin evidence-based responses to climate change, biodiversity loss and cultural heritage. This is not ancillary activity, it is nationally significant research infrastructure core to museums and it must be recognised and funded as such.
Sources below.

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MUSEUM'S IMPACT: ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, SOCIAL COHESION

Museums are among Australia's most visited and trusted cultural institutions**, yet the consultation paper's framing is noticeably weighted toward the creative industries, performing arts, and screen sectors. Museums, galleries, and collecting institutions do not feature prominently – indeed hardly at all (CAMD made these two points in correspondence to the Minister for the Arts in April 2026 – see appendix one).

Museums are significant economic contributors that generate visitor expenditure, supporting tourism, creating employment, and anchoring cultural infrastructure in communities across the country. This contribution is broad-based, spanning metropolitan flagships and regional institutions, and extends well beyond the cultural sector into education, science, and the visitor economy.

Museums support learning at scale through general public visitation and formal student programs delivered both at the institutions and in the communities served by CAMD. Over 14 million people visit major museums annually in Australia. Museums are a core part of Australia's educational landscape*. This aligns directly with Pillar 2 (A Place for Every Story), which recognises all Australians as creators of culture and the importance of place-based practice, and with Pillar 5 (Engaging the Audience), which seeks to strengthen participation and discovery.

Museums hold irreplaceable scientific collections that underpin research, evidence-based policy, and collective understanding of environmental change over time. Longitudinal collections, built over decades and centuries provide the baseline data needed to track change, measure the impact of climate change, and inform the decisions that society depends on. This pipeline of evidence is not replicable: once lost, these records cannot be reconstructed.

As climate change accelerates, the scientific value of museum collections will only grow. Investment in their care, accessibility, and continued development is an investment in Australia's long-term research capacity and environmental resilience.

Museums also play a vital role in underpinning social cohesion. They are among the most visited and trusted cultural institutions in the country, welcoming people across age, cultural heritage background, and geography. Through their collections, programs, and community partnerships, museums build connection, foster understanding, and reflect the diversity of Australian life. Museums also focus on accessibility ensuring they are welcoming, friendly family places, accessible to all sectors of the diverse Australian community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Clearly frame and acknowledge museums, galleries and collecting institutions** in the National Cultural Policy as central to the nations infrastructure.
- **Recognise museums as significant economic contributors:** visitor expenditure, tourism, employment and regional cultural infrastructure should be reflected in how the policy measures and values cultural impact.
- **Recognise museums as core educational infrastructure:** formal student programs and community learning delivered by museums should be acknowledged and supported within the policy framework.
- **Invest in the care, accessibility and continued development of scientific collections:** longitudinal collections underpin climate change research and evidence-based policy, and their loss is irreversible.
- **Recognise museum collections as critical environmental and research infrastructure:** as climate change accelerates, the scientific value of these collections will only grow and investment should reflect this value to the nation.
- **Recognise museums as essential institutions for social cohesion** and reflect this in the policy framework. Their reach across age, and geography, and their role in building connection, fostering understanding and reflecting Australia's diversity, should be named as a distinct cultural and social outcome that justifies sustained public investment.

CASE STUDY SIX: ECONOMIC: Exhibition - Australian Museum's *Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs*

The Australian Museum's *Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs* exhibition held in Sydney (November 18, 2023, to May 19, 2024) demonstrates the significant economic and cultural impact museums are able to generate. The exhibition was the most successful in the Museum's history, attracting more than 510,000 visitors and contributing directly over $57 million to the NSW economy. Visitor spending, tourism, hospitality and related business activity generated substantial economic benefits, with every $1 invested in the exhibition returning more than $11 in value to the community. Interstate and international visitors also increased hotel stays, restaurant spending and broader tourism activity in the City of Sydney.
Beyond its economic contribution, the exhibition demonstrated the power of museums to deliver major cultural experiences, support education and strengthen international cultural engagement. The exhibition drew record audiences through immersive storytelling, rare artefacts and educational programming, reinforcing the role museums play in cultural participation and community connection.
Economic Impact Report:
Source: https://australian.museum/about/organisation/media-centre/ramses-economic-impact/

CASE STUDY SEVEN: SOCIAL COHESION: Australian National Maritime Museum *National Monument to Migration*

The Australian National Maritime Museum *National Monument to Migration* is an example of how museums can strengthen social cohesion by recognising and celebrating Australia's multicultural identity. The monument honours migrants from more than 140 countries and shares personal migration stories that reflect the diversity of modern Australia. By creating a public space where families and communities can commemorate their journeys and cultural heritage, the museum fosters inclusion, understanding and a shared sense of belonging. The project also encourages intergenerational and intercultural connection through ceremonies, storytelling and digital archives that preserve migrant experiences for future generations. The museum describes these stories as helping to build "a more inclusive, respectful, harmonious and stronger Australia", demonstrating the important role museums play in promoting dialogue, empathy and national unity. The National Monument to Migration now has over 36,000 migrant names from 117 countries on 102 bronze panels.
Source: https://www.sea.museum/en/support/national-monument

CASE STUDY EIGHT: EDUCATION: Scitech Science and Technology Centre

Scitech, Western Australia's science and technology centre, demonstrates how science institutions can function as cultural infrastructure while fostering public participation and social engagement.

Scitech presents science not simply as technical knowledge, but as human endeavour connected to everyday life, innovation and Australia's contribution to global research. Its exhibitions and programs highlight distinctly Australian scientific achievements and local knowledge, including Western Australian radio astronomy, marine science, environmental sustainability and Noongar seasonal knowledge. The *Here, There and Everywhere* exhibition, for example, connects STEM to real-world issues and showcases Australian research and technologies through interactive storytelling.

Scitech engages 450,000 people annually through its Discovery Centre and regional programs. Scitech creates public spaces where communities gather to learn, discuss and engage with contemporary scientific issues such as climate change and sustainability. Source: https://www.scitech.org.au/

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MUSEUMS AS EMPLOYERS, COMMISSIONERS AND CREATIVE PRODUCERS

Museums are among Australia's most visited and valued cultural institutions. Together, CAMD's Australian member institutions in 2025* welcomed more than 14m+ visitors annually, employed 4000 staff, with a total audience engagement of over 89m+ and contributed immeasurably to the impact on community engagement, tourism, education, science research and social unity across Australia. We are the custodians of multi-billion-dollar collections, assets held in trust for all Australians across history, science and culture.

Museums are significant employers and commissioners of artists, designers, writers, performers, scientists, technologists, and other creative practitioners. Across exhibitions, publications, digital initiatives, research, and public programs, the sector supports a broad ecosystem of cultural and creative work each year. As interdisciplinary practice becomes increasingly common, with growing overlap between artistic, scientific, research, and communication roles, policies must recognise and respond to the evolving nature of cultural and creative labour expertise across the museum sector.

Exhibition development, digital experiences, immersive theatre, interactive design, publication, and product development are all creative industries activity that museums use every day to engage our audiences. This is directly relevant to Pillar 3. Designers, producers, educators, and public communicators working in museums are creative workers who currently fall outside the policy's scope.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Update policy definitions of cultural and creative labour** to reflect the reality of interdisciplinary practice, the growing overlap between artistic, scientific, research and communication roles – the current definitions are leaving a significant part of the cultural workforce outside the policy's scope.
- **Expand the policy's definition of creative industries activity** to include exhibition development, digital experiences, immersive theatre, interactive design, publication and product development, all of which museums deliver at scale every day.

CASE STUDY NINE: *Our Wondrous Planet*, Melbourne Museum

Opened in September 2025, *Our Wondrous Planet* is Museums Victoria's largest science and biodiversity gallery with 1,800 square metres of permanent, immersive exhibition space at Melbourne Museum. Delivering *Our Wondrous Planet* required more than two years of integrated work spanning conservation science, biodiversity research, First Peoples knowledge systems, multimedia production, interactive design, sensory environment design, and science communication. None of these contributions sit neatly within existing definitions of "cultural" or "creative" labour, yet together they have produced one of the most significant cultural experiences in Victoria's recent history.

The gallery delivers across multiple dimensions: immersive environmental design that recreates four global biomes through light, sound and form; interactive digital experiences enabling visitors to traverse atmospheric currents and connect to underground root networks; story-led multimedia drawing on rare State Collection objects; and a dedicated collaborative space, Our Moment, which is designed to drive collective civic engagement with ecological challenges.

Our Wondrous Planet has been consistently rated as a visitor favourite since opening and extends beyond the gallery walls, connecting audiences to the Museums Victoria Research Institute's active biodiversity and conservation programs, and providing pathways for citizen science participation. The project demonstrates that museums are not merely custodians of collections but producers of complex, high-impact creative and cultural experiences that serve broad public, scientific and civic purposes.

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SOURCES

* 24/25 CAMD Member Survey
** Museums among Australia's most trusted organisations
https://camd.org.au/museums-among-auss-most-trusted-instns/
Case Study 1: MAGNT 24/25 Annual Report
Case Study 2: PH Lang Walker Family Academy: https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/lang-walker-family-academy
Case Study 3: QM First Nations Undergraduate Student Research Program
https://www.museum.qld.gov.au/about/first-nations-initiatives-and-programs/first-nations-research-program/
Case Study 4: WAM Marine Biology research https://visit.museum.wa.gov.au/learn/news-stories/wa-museum-extends-marine-research-collaboration-woodside-energy
Case Study 5: Collective Impact AM, WAM, ANMM, SAM, MV 24/25 Annual reports
Case Study 6: AM *Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs* Economic Impact:
https://australian.museum/about/organisation/media-centre/ramses-economic-impact/
Case Study 7: ANMM *National Monument to Migration* https://www.sea.museum/en/support/national-monument
Case Study 8: Scitech https://www.scitech.org.au/
Case Study 9: MV Our Wondrous Planet https://museumsvictoria.com.au/melbournemuseum/whats-on/our-wondrous-planet/

Yours sincerely,

Ms Kim McKay AO
Chair, Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD)
Director and CEO, Australian Museum

22 May 2026

Submissions disclaimer
This submission has been prepared with the assistance of CAMD members and while CAMD endeavours to speak with a unified voice, this does not negate individual policy positions which may be made by CAMD members.

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Council of Australasian Museum Directors

Australian Members

ACMI
Australian Museum
Australian National Maritime Museum
Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney
History Trust of South Australia
Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House
Museums of History New South Wales
Museums Victoria incl. Melbourne Museum, Immigration Museum and Science Museum
National Museum of Australia
Powerhouse Museum
Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery
Queensland Museum
Questacon
Scitech
South Australian Museum
Sovereign Hill
Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery
Western Australian Museum

New Zealand Members

Auckland War Memorial Museum
Canterbury Museum
Museum of Transport & Technology
Te Papa
Tūhura | Otago Museum

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COUNCIL OF AUSTRALASIAN MUSEUM DIRECTORS

15 April 2026

The Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for the Arts
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Re: Review - National Cultural Policy

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD), representing 24 major Museums across Australia (19) and New Zealand (5). I am also the Director & CEO of the Australian Museum in Sydney, the nation's first museum, custodian of the largest museum collection in the southern hemisphere.

The Council has asked me to raise a matter of concern regarding the appointment of the review panels established to provide feedback on the 2026 National Cultural Policy submissions. Specifically, we note that the Museum sector has not been represented on these panels.

Museums are among Australia's most visited and valued cultural institutions. Together, our member institutions in 2025* welcomed more than 17.8m visitors annually, employed 5745 staff, with a total audience engagement of over 100m+ and contributed immeasurably to the impact on tourism, education, science research and social unity across Australia. We are the custodians of multi-billion dollar collections, assets held in trust for all Australians across history, science and culture.

Museums are richly diverse and complex institutions encompassing artists and creatives, historians, academics, scientific researchers, archivists, administrators and First Nations and Pacifica cultural leaders and play an important role in international relations and soft diplomacy in our region and beyond. We have active involvement across every pillar the National Cultural Policy seeks to advance.

It would be a missed opportunity and a significant gap for an Arts policy of this importance to be further developed without the direct input of the Museum sector (we noted with concern that museums were not included in the original policy). We are not peripheral to Australia's cultural life; we are central to it and have been since the modern cultural sector was established.

We respectfully request the appointment of a museum representative to the review panels for the revised National Cultural Policy. I would be pleased to meet with you and brief you on the scope and the increasingly important role museums play in social unity within Australia.

Thank you for your consideration of our request and the CAMD will also be making a formal submission to the Revive Policy review. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Kim McKay AO

Chair, Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD)

Director and CEO, Australian Museum

*based on 2024-2025 survey results (AUS and NZ)

Members list attached

Council of Australasian Museum Directors

Australian Members

ACMI
Australian Museum
Australian National Maritime Museum
Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney
History Trust of South Australia
Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House
Museums of History New South Wales
Museums Victoria incl. Melbourne Museum, Immigration Museum and Science Museum
National Museum of Australia
Powerhouse Museum
Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery
Queensland Museum
Questacon
Scitech
South Australian Museum
Sovereign Hill
Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery
Western Australian Museum

New Zealand Members

Auckland War Memorial Museum
Canterbury Museum
Museum of Transport & Technology
Te Papa
Tūhura | Otago Museum