

Submission to help guide the development of a new National Cultural Policy

Who we are

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) is the largest global network of museum and heritage professionals, with more than 60,000 members around the world. ICOM Australia is the national committee representing our nation's museums and galleries in this forum, providing the international voice of Australian museum and gallery professionals, and upholding international standards, benchmarks and ethics.

45 major institutions and more than 700 individual arts and museum workers are members of ICOM Australia, using ICOM's code of ethics and established standards of practice to participate in global museum practice and international exhibition exchange. Many members also participate at the highest professional levels on international committees of policy and practice, and we actively engage with the sector in Asia and the Pacific as well as participating in global fora.

ICOM Australia, with its international focus and professional membership body, sits alongside and complements AMaGA, as the nationally focused museums and galleries association representing volunteers as well as professionals and working at national, state and local levels. As such, we strongly support their submission to this consultation, along with that from GLAM Peak.

Revive – Australia's current national cultural policy

ICOM Australia warmly welcomed the first national cultural policy for a decade, *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*. We believe that it was the first crucial step for the museum and gallery sector to enable the development of a comprehensive policy and strategic framework for sustained investment in our nation's arts and cultural sector.

We appreciate that much work has been done in the last three years to implement many critical new initiatives under the 5 Pillars, and strongly support in particular the commitments to First Nations artists and culture as outlined in Pillar 1.

Gaps and priorities that must be addressed

However, the policy framework itself had some troubling gaps, such as overlooking the issues of climate change and sustainability, minimising the roles of heritage and the humanities and the collecting sector, and understating Australia's international cultural responsibilities and potential impacts. The interpretation of these 5 Pillars needs to be expanded significantly.

The current policy reads more as an arts policy rather than a cultural policy. The critical gap is the absence of a framework or acknowledgement - with associated policies, programs, partnerships and funding streams - for cultural heritage, history and the humanities.

The recent appointment of boards of specialist advisors for each pillar of the policy was yet another blow for the GLAM sector, as there were no appointees who can provide representation and advocacy for Australia's cultural heritage sector and collecting institutions. The lack of representation from our sector and from regional and remote areas together with an inherent east coast centric bias, will not provide a balanced view of the issues facing all Australian arts and cultural organisations.

This must be redressed particularly in relation to *Pillar 3 - A strong cultural infrastructure*. It can reasonably be argued that our sector comprises the majority of built and moveable cultural heritage infrastructure in Australia, which makes the omission of an appropriate professional to represent Australia's cultural institutions and distributed national collections both unfair and a missed opportunity.

Stories are the life blood of museums. Yet Pillar 2 – *A Place for Every Story* - is on shaky ground. ICOM Australia continues to identify the lack of a national body to deal with the needs of Australia's collecting institutions that preserve, present and promote creativity and knowledge of our history, heritage, environment and society. Such a body would address a significant gap and bring Australia into line with other comparative countries. One example is the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, which covers heritage policy, national monuments, landscape and environment, archaeology, museum collections and movable heritage.

Recommendations

ICOM supports the development of a new National Cultural Policy to address gaps and respond to emerging priorities, and makes the following recommendations.

1. Implement a national framework for cultural heritage that encompasses the needs of the Australian museum sector and our distributed national collections. This would provide the platform for current and future policy development and associated programs as data is collected, priorities are negotiated and funding becomes available.

A key step is establishing a national body to address this significant gap in the arts and cultural sector. There are several models. One is the USA's National Endowment for the Humanities, which is a grant-making companion to their national arts body. Alternatively, the remit and resourcing of Creative Australia could be expanded to include strategic and funding support for cultural heritage. (It currently explicitly excludes the museum sector). This would align with the remit of Arts Council England. Other options would be to establish a new strategic investment program for museums, collections and cultural heritage either adjacent to Creative Australia's Australian Cultural Fund, or in the department, perhaps in a renamed Office for Culture and the Arts.

- An easy and early down payment on this policy change would be to expand over the next three years the Government's Distributed National Collections annual program, which comprises three grants programs which are invariably over-subscribed.

2. The cultural policy should include priorities or goals for:

- **Sustainability** – both for cultural infrastructure and the cultural industries, and in our contributions to national and global environmental sustainability and adaptation to the impacts of climate change. This would include disaster preparedness for cultural collections and mitigation strategies and funding. Recent flood and bushfire events in Australia have had devastating impacts on cultural institutions and more must be done to strengthen our infrastructure for the future.
 - ICOM Australia, together with ASPAC - ICOM's Asia Pacific Regional Alliance - is currently investigating the needs of the Pacific nations' cultural collections sector, responding to requests for a long-term collaborative and respectful relationship that supports capacity building and addresses the very real effects of climate change in the region.
- **Training and Work Pathways**
 - Expanded and affordable training and education pathways in arts, culture and the humanities are urgently needed. Museum workers are significant and under-valued contributors to the nation's social, economic and civic infrastructure.
- **Research and Implementation** – a collaborative and focused national research program into the challenges and opportunities facing the sector, including repatriation and de-colonisation, and such new technologies as AI, along with the support to implement key research findings.
 - AMaGA's 10-year *First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries* has been adopted by the sector in Australia and acknowledged world-wide, but lacks sufficient implementation support. This is a clear opportunity for the federal government to build on its earlier investment and to also promote this successful framework internationally through networks like ICOM.
- **Strengthened interactions and co-funding** with key national priorities in infrastructure and regional development, health, education, social cohesion, community well-being and *Closing the Gap* programs. This Whole-of-Government approach would include contributing to *Measuring What Matters*, the Treasurer's Wellbeing Indicators. The submission from GLAM Peak, of which ICOM Australia is a founding member, expands on the scale of influence and portfolio connectivity of the cultural heritage sector.
- **International impact** – strongly promoting international and intercultural exchange, export and co-operation in the cultural sphere. Well-resourced cultural institutions and creators carrying out cultural diplomacy in these times of global insecurity and misunderstanding are more vital than ever.

3. The national collecting institutions must have increased and ongoing funding

The national collecting institutions have much ground to make up due to sustained underfunding over many years. This has been clearly stated in the many public and industry submissions to Parliamentary Inquiries over the last decade. While recent Federal Budgets have allocated some catch-up funding, institutions need to be able to rely on appropriate and ongoing CPI increases in operational funding and continued capital investment to maintain and improve their infrastructure in order for them to fulfil their national and international responsibilities and to safeguard our nation's valuable cultural assets.

Conclusion

A new national cultural policy must include, consider and embrace the cultural heritage and museums sector and take into account the needs of our distributed national collections in the face of recent global events and the ever-present threats posed by climate change.

Our new national cultural policy should also explicitly reference and adhere to those international cultural and human rights conventions, standards, benchmarks and bodies which are essential to a credible national policy that embraces international responsibilities. Australia has contributed to the development of many of these conventions, and should act as an exemplar nation, aiming to achieve the best possible outcomes.

ICOM Australia, drawing on the principles, models, experience and perspectives of the national and international museums and galleries sector, continues to be ready to provide expert advice to better enable decision making by the government and to support our institutions and cultural workers to thrive and deliver their invaluable contributions to our nation and the global community.

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