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The Honourable Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Arts
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email 

Dear Minister

PUBLIC CONSULTATION: TOWARDS A NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

Museums are essential national infrastructure. They safeguard Australia's cultural and natural heritage, generate knowledge that informs decision making, and create shared spaces for connection, learning and belonging. They drive research, education, tourism and community resilience—and play a critical role in helping Australians understand who we are and who we are becoming.

In a world defined by rapid change, uncertainty and division, museums provide trusted spaces to reflect, learn and connect. They help communities interpret the past, engage with the present and navigate the future.

Museums bring people together across generations, cultures and perspectives. They foster dialogue, inclusion and understanding, and act as social anchors—building connection and shaping the identity of the communities they serve. They elevate underrepresented voices, support lifelong learning and provide continuity in times of disruption.

Despite this, museums remain under recognised in current national policy settings. The next National Cultural Policy should position museums as critical infrastructure and as active contributors to national priorities—including research and innovation, reconciliation, education and economic development.

Queensland Museum (QM) demonstrates the scale and value museums deliver when positioned in this way.

Founded in 1862, QM has grown into a leader in cultural heritage and scientific discovery, and a trusted institution for communities across Queensland. At our heart is the State Collection—a permanent and verifiable record across morphology, genetics and time that holds living knowledge of Queensland, its surrounding waters and nearby regions. It is critical research infrastructure, underpinning scientific discovery, environmental management and cultural heritage

The State Collection embodies the intersection of science and culture and is brought to life through evidence-based research, immersive exhibitions and statewide programming across five locations, welcoming more than 2.5 million visitors each year. As the state's leading body for repatriation, QM

carries significant responsibility for the care of Ancestral Remains and Secret Sacred material belonging to Aboriginal peoples, Torres Strait Islander peoples and First Nations peoples of the Pacific.

Today, QM is a trusted source of connection—bringing collections and knowledge together with communities to deepen understanding of culture, science and the natural world, now and into the future. This direction, reflected in our *Strategic Plan 2026–30*, aligns strongly with the ambitions of the National Cultural Policy.

There is a clear opportunity to position museums as an integrated national system—connecting collections, communities, knowledge and creativity at scale.

The following outlines where targeted policy settings can strengthen this role across the five pillars.

First Nations First

First Nations stories, leadership and cultural authority must sit at the centre of Australia's cultural framework.

QM is embedding this through delivery of its *First Nations Strategy 2024–28* across governance, workforce capability and operations. This includes nationally significant repatriation outcomes, supported by governance structures that place cultural authority at the centre of collection care and interpretation.

National action should:

- Establish a standardised ICIP framework for the GLAM sector;
- Create a coordinated, whole-of-government repatriation working group; and
- Invest in a First Nations cultural workforce strategy that supports career pathways, work on Country and cultural authority.

Place for Every Story

Museums reflect the full breadth of Australia's stories—cultural, scientific and environmental—across communities and generations.

QM advances this through a coordinated approach to access, digitisation and cultural governance. Work is underway to establish a Distributed Access Framework that connects the State Collection with regional partners, alongside a whole-of-collection digitisation program focused on high-value and high-demand materials. This is supported by a Cultural Authority Framework ensuring appropriate governance and access to culturally sensitive content.

Scaling this impact will require:

- A national framework supporting distributed collections, including those held by regional and volunteer organisations; and
- Targeted investment in digitisation and digital repatriation.

Centrality of the Artist

Artists, researchers and creative practitioners are central to a strong cultural ecosystem.

QM contributes by presenting and commissioning new work, enabling interdisciplinary practice, and connecting creative endeavour with scientific research and public engagement. Through initiatives such as the World Science Festival Brisbane, exhibitions and public programs, Queensland Museum supports and celebrates Australian artists. Structured pathways—including university partnerships, internships and postgraduate programs—build future capability. Initiatives such as the First Nations Undergraduate Student Research Program are fostering the next generation of cultural and research

leaders. These programs not only support emerging talent but also help transform research and creative outputs into public experiences that engage and inspire audiences.

System-wide impact requires:

- Stronger support for humanities and creative arts in secondary and tertiary education; and
- Embedding UNDRIP principles to safeguard First Nations cultural expression.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Resilient, fit-for-purpose infrastructure underpins long-term cultural and economic value.

QM is progressing this through long-term asset planning, collection stewardship and digital resilience. This includes a Strategic Asset Management Plan, a Collection Storage Master Plan, and targeted investment in digital systems and cybersecurity. Capital upgrades and new visitor and First Nations experiences position infrastructure for future demand.

National settings should:

- Establish a unified database for cultural heritage collections;
- Strengthen disaster preparedness and climate resilience; and
- Align with ESG principles to support sustainability.

Engaging the Audience

Audience expectations are evolving rapidly.

QM is responding through an integrated digital and physical engagement model. This includes a new website and content strategy, immersive experience development, major statewide programming, such as World Science Festival Brisbane, and exhibitions aligned to Brisbane 2032. Co-design is embedded through audience research, accessibility planning and community reference groups.

Greater national impact would require:

- A commissioning model connecting artists with collections; and
- A Cultural Vitality Indicator to measure sector impact.

The next National Cultural Policy presents a clear opportunity to reposition museums as essential national partners—integral to delivering outcomes across culture, science, education and the economy.

QM stands ready to work with the Australian Government and sector partners to realise this opportunity. With the right policy settings, museums can operate as a connected, resilient and forward-looking system—one that strengthens cultural identity, drives innovation, and delivers lasting public value for all Australians.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important work.

