

Submission by the Western Australian Museum

Museums are among the most visited and trusted cultural institutions, engaging communities, delivering educational experiences tourism and economic benefits, leading multi-disciplinary research, and supporting international engagement and cultural diplomacy.

1. First Nations first

The Western Australian Museum, long before publication of Revive, committed to a principle of not speaking for those who would speak for themselves. This ensures voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are heard and respected. This principle should underpin the first pillar of Revive. Engagement should be meaningful, sustained, and led by First Nations people themselves not symbolic, or tokenistic.

2. A place for every story

The Western Australian Museum Boola Bardip opened in Perth in 2020. 'Boola Bardip' means 'many stories' in local Nyoongar language: any good public museum should tell many stories through many voices.

We welcome investment of significant funds into national collecting institutions but ask that due consideration is given to supporting major State and regional collecting institutions allowing them to engage meaningfully with national institutions and international partners. Boola Bardip recently co-curated the exhibition Terracotta Warriors: Legacy of the First Emperor with colleagues in Shaanxi province, China. The cultural and diplomatic significance of this exhibition cannot be overstated. Such projects receive support through the Australian Government International Exhibitions Insurance Program, which is welcome, but receive little other Federal support. A balanced approach to federal investment, supporting state and regional institutions, would strengthen collaboration across the national cultural ecosystem and enhance Australia's international cultural impact.

3. Centrality of the Artist

We support recognition of artistic practice as being a 'real job' which should receive appropriate remuneration.

4. Strong cultural infrastructure

Cultural infrastructure the country over requires sustainable funding, be it into real estate, companies, museum and gallery collections, digital assets, or other intellectual property. Investment into digitising collections and associated metadata could contribute to the aspiration of a universally accessible, distributed national collection. This would streamline research, interpretation, loans and exhibition creation.

Many museums are housed in heritage buildings, themselves significant cultural assets. Their conservation and maintenance carry high costs which could benefit from a national fund to address critical needs, like the UK Government's Museum Estate and Development Fund.

5. Engaging Audiences

Audience expectations are shifting, with demand for immersive and digital experiences, but these do not replace access to authentic collections; rather, they provide deeper, meaningful engagement.

Programs like *Visions of Australia* provide a mechanism for sharing collections nationally. This model could be expanded to encourage international touring. This would increase impact and accessibility of Australian collections nationally and internationally and create greater opportunities for collaboration between state and national institutions.

Costs associated with touring collections internationally are often prohibitive, limiting the ability of state and regional institutions to contribute fully to Australia's cultural presence abroad. Greater support in this area would unlock significant opportunities to showcase Australian stories and collections globally. Well-supported touring programs can act as powerful tools of soft diplomacy, while driving inbound visitation and deepening international engagement with Australian stories.

CASE STUDY: Marine Biodiversity Research Western Australian Museum

A long-standing collaboration led by the Western Australian Museum has delivered one of Australia's most significant sustained 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 across the cultural and scientific sectors, 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 competing 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.

CASE STUDY: ECONOMIC: Western Australian Museum's Terracotta Warriors: Legacy of the First Emperor

The WA Museum's Terracotta Warriors: Legacy of the First Emperor exhibition, presented at WA Museum Boola Bardip from 25 June 2025 to 22 February 2026, highlights how major cultural exhibitions can drive economic activity, tourism, and global engagement. As a world-exclusive, Terracotta Warriors evolved into an eight-month cultural festival, connecting audiences locally and internationally through a mix of traditional display and digital immersive storytelling, and contemporary programming.

The exhibition attracted more than 323,000 visitors, including nearly 70,000 from interstate and overseas, generated \$196.3 million in total economic activity, and \$72 million in total economic impact for Western Australia. For every \$1 invested the exhibition returned \$10 in value. This influx supported hotels, hospitality, and the broader visitor economy, demonstrating the value of large-scale cultural events in driving city activation and growth.

Its reach extended beyond the Museum through a dynamic program of events, including Jade Nights, accessible sessions, and family experiences, culminating in a five-day Chinese New Year closing festival. In partnership with the City of Perth, the Lanterns of the Terracotta Warriors transformed key public spaces into an open-air gallery, engaging more than 272,000 visitors and amplifying citywide participation.

By engaging Chinese superstar actor and director Zhang Guoli as Exhibition Cultural Ambassador, the exhibition delivered significant global exposure through promotion across his Chinese social media channels, alongside international publicity and the filming of The Nation's Greatest Treasures at iconic Perth locations. This activity reached more than 160 million viewers in the Chinese market globally.

Together, these outcomes reinforce the role of museums in delivering compelling cultural experiences while driving economic benefit, community connection and international visibility.