

South Australian Museum
**Strategic
Plan** / 2025
-2030

Discussion Paper



Government
of South Australia



SOUTH
AUSTRALIAN
MUSEUM



Acknowledgement of Country

Ngadlu tampinhi ngadlu Kurna
Miyurna yartangka. Munaintya puru
purruna ngadlu-itya. Munaintyanangku
yalaka tarrkarriana tuntarri.

We acknowledge we are on Kurna Miyurna
land. The Dreaming is still living. From the past,
in the present, into the future, forever.

Statement of Commitment

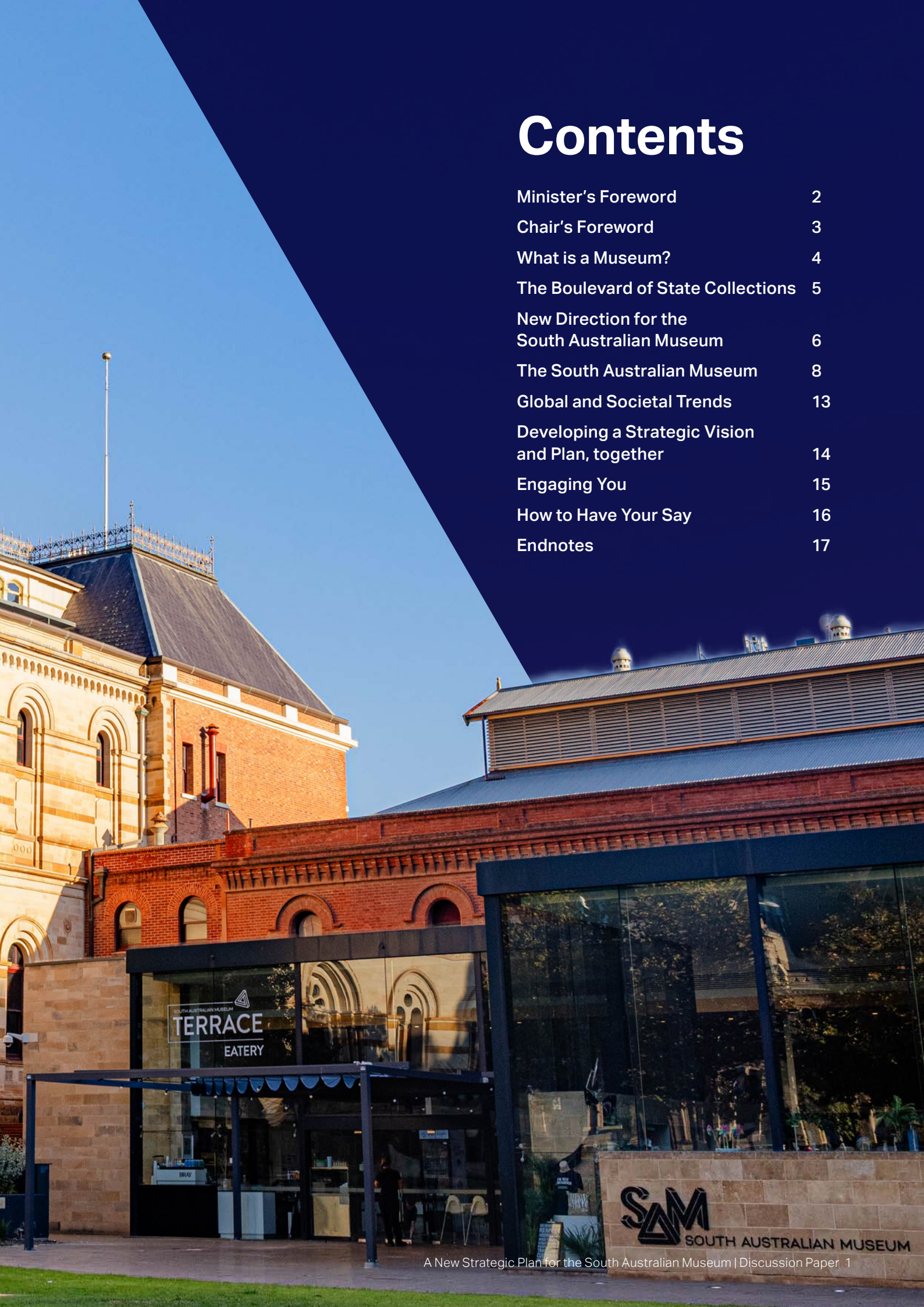
The South Australian Museum (the Museum) commits
to engaging, building and maintaining connections with
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities
to actively reconcile its colonial foundations and practices, and
to explore the truth of our shared history. These relationships will
be based on respect and equity.

The Museum recognises and upholds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
people and communities as the Traditional Owners and custodians of
their culture, cultural knowledge, language and cultural expression.

The Museum acknowledges its responsibility to support the rights
and cultural authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and
communities by ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
have leadership in the care, curation, researching and exhibiting of Aboriginal
objects. The Museum also acknowledges the cultural knowledge and wisdom
of Traditional Owners, Aboriginal community representatives and Aboriginal staff
at the Museum and the opportunity this provides to include authentic First Nations
perspectives across the Museum.

Contents

Minister's Foreword	2
Chair's Foreword	3
What is a Museum?	4
The Boulevard of State Collections	5
New Direction for the South Australian Museum	6
The South Australian Museum	8
Global and Societal Trends	13
Developing a Strategic Vision and Plan, together	14
Engaging You	15
How to Have Your Say	16
Endnotes	17





Minister's Foreword



The South Australian Museum has been at the heart of South Australia for 168 years. It has educated, informed and inspired

thousands of locals and visitors alike with its remarkable collections including the most comprehensive collection of Australian Aboriginal cultural material in the world.

South Australia is 'A Place to Create' and the State Government recently released its new 10-year cultural policy ushering in a new era for South Australia's arts, culture and creative industries.

As part of this, the State Government has dedicated an additional \$4 million to support the SA Museum including the delivery of its new Strategic Plan.

With this plan we have an opportunity to create a new way forward for the Museum that speaks to its incredible legacy and value in our state, while safeguarding the precious elements from its past and present that we want to bring into the future.

The SA Museum is for all South Australians, now and into the future, and I encourage everyone who loves the Museum across our community to have their say. We want to hear from our staff, our volunteers, our generous donors, researchers, First Nations' peoples and our South Australian community at large as we shape its future.

The SA Museum has a proud history and with your help, an exciting and innovative future.

Hon Andrea Michaels MP
Minister for Arts



Chair's Foreword



It is a privilege to serve as the Chair of the Museum, particularly at this crucial time as we seek to grow the contribution the

Museum makes to our community.

The Museum is a major holder of collections relating to the natural world, human cultures and other areas of significance to South Australian, national and international audiences. The Museum cares for, curates and imaginatively exhibits these collections to engage with the community, while also hosting visiting exhibitions that extend its impact.

Researching the collections adds to this body of knowledge, and increases the value of the Museum to those who engage with us while providing information fundamental to tackling key challenges faced today.

For over 168 years, it has been a place nestled deep in the hearts of the public, a place for research, exploration, inspiration, a place for families to gather and for people from across the globe to come and delight in the richness of the southern Australian story.

We now have an opportunity to set new directions and goals for the Museum, and to bring a new spirit of engagement and partnership that will energise us all.

After a meaningful period of reflection following the Premier's Review in 2024, the Museum Board and staff are committed to implementing all six recommendations. Museum staff have already shown great enthusiasm and insight as they helped shape our new purpose, vision and action statement and I thank them in advance for coordinating and embracing the upcoming consultations with our valued stakeholders.

Staff, volunteers, donors, members, the academic community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, supporters, government and non-government stakeholders are encouraged to contribute their views and ideas, guided by this discussion paper.

With your help we will develop a Strategic Plan that reflects our shared values and drives a pursuit of excellence. This way, we will build on our ability to inspire South Australians and all others who visit and engage with the Museum.

On behalf of the Museum Board, thank you for your partnership in guiding the future of our cherished Museum.

Robert Saint AM
Emeritus Professor

What is a Museum?

The 2022 definition of a Museum from the International Council of Museums:

“ A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”



The Boulevard of State Collections

The Museum has collected, preserved, researched and presented natural and cultural heritage since it was founded in 1856.

The Museum is a Statutory Authority, meaning legislation governs what it can do and empowers its activities. The *South Australian Museum Act 1976* says a Board appointed by the Governor, will undertake the care and management of the Museum. The Board does this by working with the Museum to set strategic goals.

The Museum is located on North Terrace on the traditional lands of the Kaurna people, in the heart of Adelaide.

The Museum shares the picturesque boulevard with the State Library, History Trust, Art Gallery and Artlab who are each responsible in different ways, to care for and share the state's collections.



The State Library of South Australia gathers, protects and shares South Australia's documented history. The collections tell the stories of our state through published material, community, business and individual archives that help us remember the past, connect with each other, and discover who we are.



Artlab Australia is responsible for the specialist conservation of the state's significant collections, working in partnership with the cultural institutions. Artlab also provides advice and support to custodians of community art and heritage.



The Art Gallery of South Australia holds one of Australia's finest collections of Australian and international art and celebrates this through exhibitions and art programs.

NORTH TERRACE

The South Australian Museum cares for and manages South Australia's natural and cultural collections, growing, researching and sharing heritage to celebrate South Australia's unique place in global history.



The History Trust manages and celebrates the state's social history at three museums: the Migration Museum, the National Motor Museum and the South Australian Maritime Museum. Complementing these is The Centre of Democracy.



New Direction for the South Australian Museum

Purpose

We care for and manage South Australia's natural and cultural collections. We grow, research and share this heritage to build a legacy that celebrates our unique place in global history and deepens our knowledge of the world.

Vision

The way we use outstanding collections and research to fascinate and educate connects people with our deep natural and cultural past, engages them with the present, and inspires them to shape the future.

Actions

We will work side by side with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to restore, repatriate and tell the story of Australia's First Peoples and their unique relationship to Country.

We will use cutting-edge science to curate and explore the collections to reveal our natural history and biodiversity.

We will engage with the community to foster learning and discovery and to inform decision-making.

Values

We exist to serve the community and through our values, we will champion:

Respect
– We value every individual

Collaboration and engagement
– We create solutions together

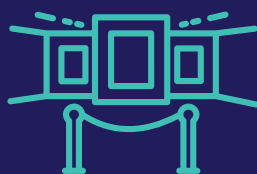
Honesty and integrity – we act truthfully, consistently and fairly

The Museum has a rich history of growing and sharing knowledge. Take a look at the Museum's impact in 2023-24:



679,578 visitors to our galleries and exhibitions

27,132 students attended as part of an organised school visit



Travelling exhibitions across Australia and overseas attracted more than **50,000 people**



Online, digital collections **downloaded** almost **27 million times**



Research output of more than **200 peer reviewed papers** and articles



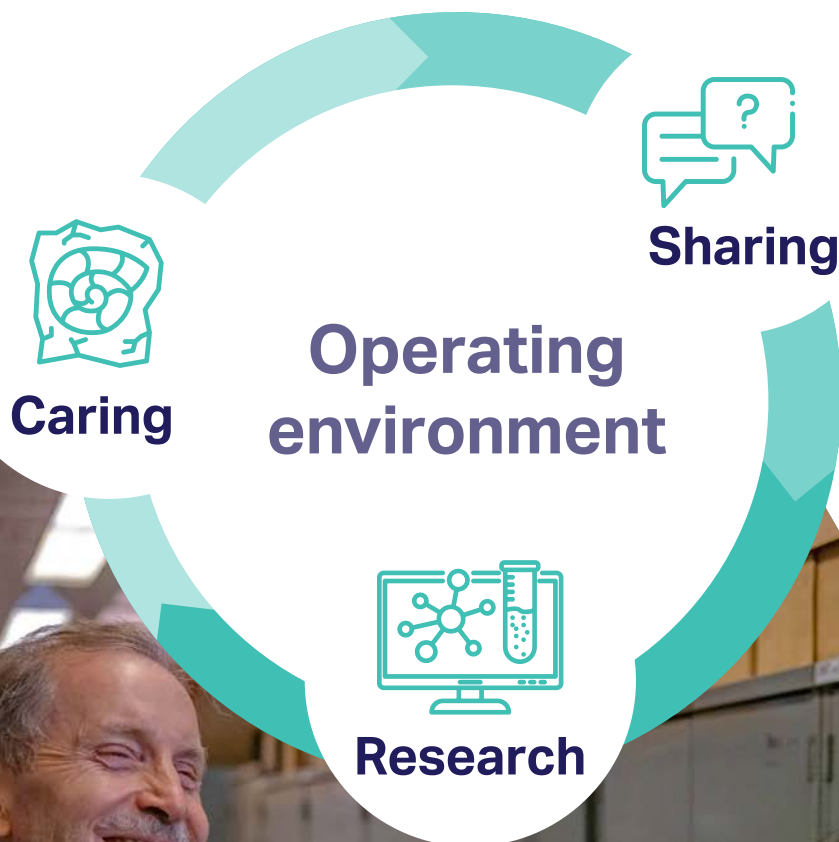
More than **70 new species** were described



Engaged in **17 multi-year federally funded research projects**

The South Australian Museum

The Museum collections are a material library of life and culture that connect people with the deep past, engage them in the present and help them contemplate future possibilities. The Museum works to care, research and share. Let's explore how the Museum does this.





Caring

Collections are the heart of the Museum. Collections hold important information and stories that advance our understanding of the world around us. Collections are vast and those not on display are cared for and preserved.

Natural science collections document biodiversity, track environmental changes and help discover new species. The Museum houses many 'type specimens'—species that have been discovered and named for the first time. Many are unique to South Australia and some represent the last remaining examples of their kind due to extinction.

From birds to reptiles, insects, spiders, mammals, minerals, fossils and beyond, these collections enable remarkable journeys of discovery:

Biodiversity & classification: Taxonomic research helps to discover, name and classify Australia's unique species, laying the groundwork for conservation and environmental science.

Earth's origins: Meteorites and minerals that are billions of years old illuminate how Earth and the Australian continent formed.

Close relatives: The toe pads of birds have been used to prove even the most identical looking ravens are not of the same species.

Ancient life: Ediacaran fossils represent some of the earliest signs of complex multicellular life on Earth 550 million years ago.

Evolutionary insights: The oldest tissue collection in Australia supports scientific understanding of evolution.

The **cultural collections the Museum cares for** connect South Australia with its deep past and show how we got here through histories of exploration, trade, colonisation and relationship building.

Aboriginal cultures: The most comprehensive collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural material in the world, including the oldest wooden boomerang ever found, dating back 9500 years, tells stories of the oldest continuous living cultures on earth.

Magnificent technique: *Kondoli: the Keeper of Fire* is a sculpture of a southern right whale woven from freshwater rushes, measuring over four metres. Kondoli was a collaboration among Ngarrindjeri community, telling one of the most important stories for the Ngarrindjeri people of the Lower Lakes and Coorong areas.

Global connections: Artefacts like Zulu beaded necklaces brought back by Boer War soldiers, and Papua New Guinea shields collected by Australian patrol officers speak to Adelaide's involvement in global politics.

Egyptian culture: The 2000-year-old Egyptian mummy and sarcophagus of Renpit-Neferet illuminates human history and cultural practices.

Being custodians of cultural collections means caring for, repairing and growing relationships to tell stories through objects with the goal of celebrating the vitality of human cultures.

Repatriation is the practice of returning cultural material and Ancestral Remains to Traditional Owners. The Museum is caring for thousands of Aboriginal Ancestral Remains and one of the world's largest repositories of Australian Aboriginal secret-sacred objects. They're safeguarded at secure, restricted Keeping Places and the Museum actively partners with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to return them.

With support from the Australian Government Indigenous Repatriation Program, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been leading the return of their ancestors and reburying them on Country. Traditional Owners have also reclaimed many secret sacred objects back to Country in Central and Western Australia and the Northern Territory, where they have been reintroduced into cultural ceremonies to teach traditional knowledge to a younger generation. Repatriation is guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988 (SA) and the Australian Government Indigenous Repatriation Policy.

Repatriation work over recent years such as *Wangayarta*, the Kaurna ancestral resting place, and hosting of the Warlpiri Project have been nation leading, prompting global discussion about the role and possibilities of the modern museum in assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities realise repatriation ambitions.

The Museum's **Archives** are the documentary memory of the institution and record its work and history. The Archives have been actively maintained since the 1940s. Archival material includes photographs, maps, journals, diaries, artwork, correspondence, film and sound recordings and can be about places, animals, nature, people and events, some dating back to 1830.

By collaborating with linguists, researchers, scientists, artists, Traditional Owners and beyond, the archives are brought to life with contemporary perspectives and knowledge. The Museum adds to the archives, ensuring they remain accessible to the public.

These archives enable the **Aboriginal Family History Unit** to conduct professional genealogical research on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so they can discover and learn about their identity, family heritage and Country. Established in 1988, the Aboriginal Family History Unit uses archives dating back to the 1890's. In this way, the Museum's collections are creating a continuing living legacy so people can know who they are and where they come from. The Aboriginal Family History Unit serves the community, supporting personal healing and strengthening of kinship connections and connections to Country.

The Australian Polar Collections are a rich archive, describing South Australia's major role in exploring the Antarctic and Arctic, through three collections. Over 100,000 items from Sir Douglas Mawson's expeditionary work in 1911 showcase the first major overseas scientific expedition to depart from Australia. Sir Hubert Wilkins' is highlighted as a South Australian trailblazer who took the first flights and submarine journeys across the Arctic, and the Rymill Collection showcases John Riddock Rymill, the South Australian who best demonstrated the art of polar exploration.

"We care for collections for people who aren't even born yet. If we care for them well, they'll be around for future generations so they can uncover amazing information about our natural and cultural world".



Research

The Museum's cultural and natural science collections gain meaning when they're understood. The Museum uncovers knowledge within these collections through **research**.

Science and humanities researchers use a wide range of methods to support discovery, including through traditional sciences, cutting-edge technologies and by drawing on cultural knowledge. Through research, collections reveal vast knowledge about our history, the present and future and inform decision making and law.

Cultural evolution: The Aboriginal collections are a key reference and resource for global research that seeks to understand cultural change over time and how these changes are recorded through cultural materials.

The arts in world history: Research on the aesthetics of the Yuendumu Doors, the Lake Eyre Toas, the Tiwi Barks and the Balgo Boards reveal the ongoing transformations of traditional designs, techniques and ideas that inform what we call 'art'.

Evolutionary insight: Fossils from Kangaroo Island reveal that the eyes of the Cambrian arthropod *Anomalocaris*, an apex predator from 500 million years ago, had even better vision than their living relatives like dragonflies.

Global recognition: The Sprigg Ediacaran Fossil Collection is among the first Geo-collections worldwide to be officially recognised by the International Union of Geological Sciences for its high scientific and historical importance.

New species discovery: In the past two years alone, Museum researchers have described over 150 new species of animals and minerals, largely from southern Australia, including frogs, insects, crustaceans, reptiles, mammals, and extinct fossilised species.

Conservation: Researchers employ modern technology to map species' habitats to inform conservation efforts and climate mitigation policy. Recent work has uncovered movement patterns of endangered spiders and confirmed extinctions among bandicoots, reptiles and insects.

Museum researchers collaborate with universities, communities and governments to expand and share knowledge. This research directly inspires galleries, exhibitions and public programs, allowing visitors to participate in discovery. Research is shared across the world through academic journals and books.





Sharing

The Museum serves diverse audiences including residents, tourists, international researchers, students, newcomers to South Australia and communities from regional and remote areas. The Museum shares the collections and research with these communities in many ways.

Open daily from 10am to 5pm, the Museum features permanent **galleries** and **exhibitions** showcasing our collections and research. fossils to taxidermy mammals, whale skeletons and precious opals, **galleries** and **exhibitions** and **public programs** are there to illuminate and inspire.

Mammals of the world provide insight into the wildlife of Asia, Africa and the Americas.

The Australian Polar Collection gives visitors firsthand experience of chilly Antarctica through its ice wall exhibition.

The Megafauna gallery features examples of mammals, birds and reptiles that lived during the past 100,000 years.

The Minerals gallery displays some of the most stunning and colourful mineral specimens of South Australia, handpicked from more than 35,000 specimens in the minerals collection.

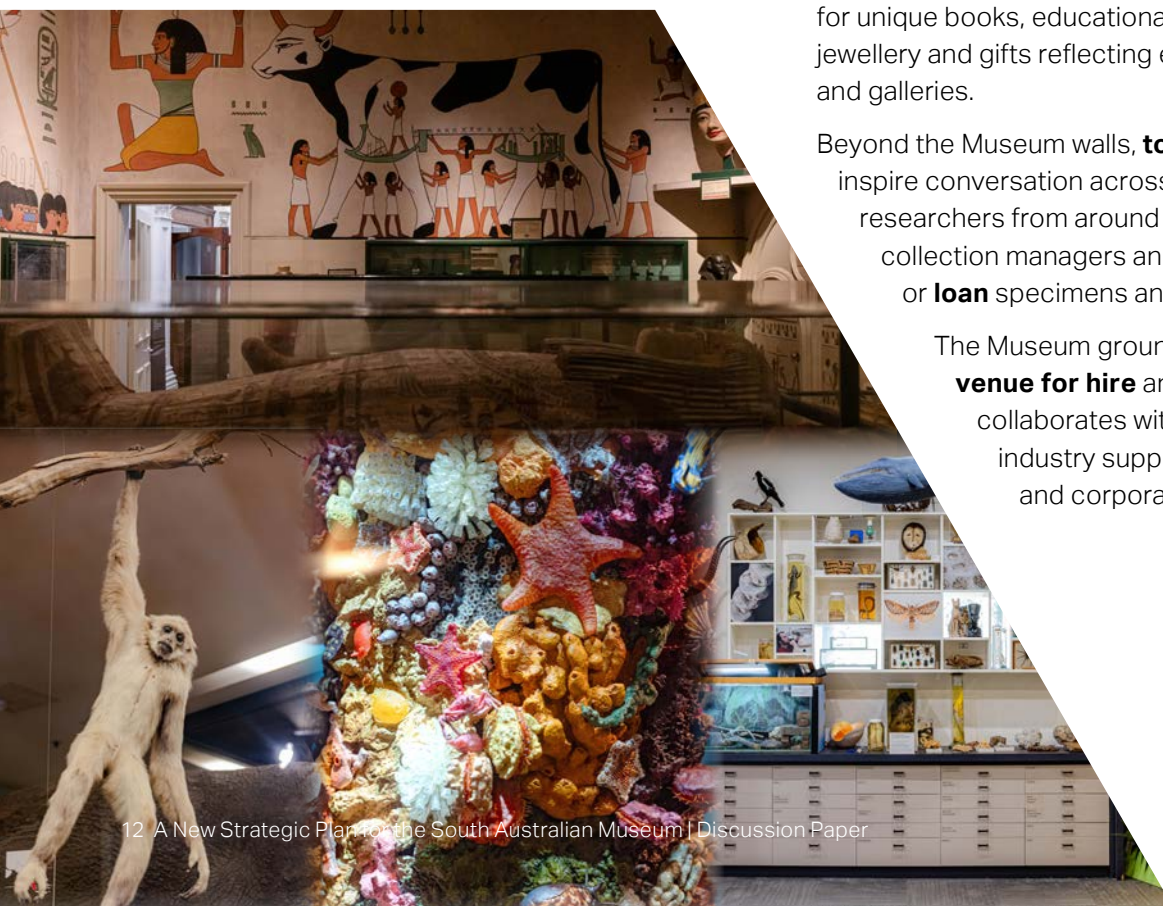
Temporary exhibitions bring some of the richest and rarest histories to the state's doorstep like homegrown exhibitions that showcase the collections and imported exhibitions like the Treasures of the Viking Age: Galloway Hoard exhibition.

The Museum has enduring relevance to the **education** curriculum, offering programs and resources for students and educators that foster learning outcomes. **The Discovery Centre** offers an interactive experience for people of all ages to connect with research, nature, and the environment. It welcomes visitors from 10:30am-2:30pm on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

Visitors can rest and recharge at the **Museum Café**, enjoying an imaginative menu of locally sourced ingredients and house-made products showcasing South Australia's finest produce. Before departing, many stop by the **Museum Shop**, a destination for unique books, educational toys, homewares, jewellery and gifts reflecting exhibitions, research and galleries.

Beyond the Museum walls, **touring exhibitions** inspire conversation across the state and researchers from around the globe engage with collection managers and **volunteers** to study or **loan** specimens and objects.

The Museum grounds are available as a **venue for hire** and the Museum regularly collaborates with the public and private industry suppliers to curate weddings and corporate **events**.





Global and Societal Trends

Museums all around the world are impacted by change and trends which explain why a Strategic Plan is so important.

Community impact

Communities are growing and changing. Museums need to seek new ways of reaching out to share knowledge in a way that is inclusive and accessible.

Technology and innovation

Technologies are constantly evolving and new technologies are appearing. Museums need to decide how to thoughtfully embrace them in a way that balances tradition and innovation to enhance experiences while honouring respectful practices.

Relationship building

Museums need to grow and nurture collaborations and partnerships to maximise community impact.

In acknowledging their historical roles in colonisation, museums need to repair and strengthen relationships to reflect societal values, including to revive and preserve cultural memory.

Navigating uncertainty

Museums need to continually consider their role in helping prepare the community for the future. For example, how to brave big issues like climate change and social justice.

In an age of increasing costs and community expectations, museums need to consider sustainability and what growth looks like as not-for-profit institutions so they can deliver their responsibilities to care for and share knowledge and do it well.

Developing a Strategic Plan, together

The Museum will embrace an aspirational approach in pursuing excellence and best practice supporting long-term growth, innovation and sustainability.

Through extensive community and stakeholder engagement anchored by this discussion paper, the Museum will develop a strong, effective and sustainable Strategic Plan for 2025-2030 with clear priorities and goals.

These goals will strengthen and grow the Museum to meet community needs and deliver better outcomes, together with the communities it serves¹.



Engaging You

The Museum's new Purpose, Vision and Action statements anchor this discussion paper.

By responding to the discussion paper questions you will directly support and shape a new and exciting Strategic Plan.

Your input is valuable to this process. We invite feedback from all stakeholders and interest groups and encourage you to visit the Museum to inspire your feedback.

Questions

- 1** What has your experience of the Museum been like?
What can we do to improve it?
- 2** What stories and topics do you want to see more of?
- 3** What are your 3 big hopes for the Museum?
- 4** How can we better support children, young people and future generations?
- 5** What can we do to help you feel welcome, valued and included?
- 6** How can we help share stories of Australia's First Peoples in a respectful and powerful way?
- 7** How can we share more with you about our collections and research?
- 8** How could the Museum use technology to make it easier for you to access our collections, research and experiences?
- 9** How can we bring the Museum to more people across South Australia and beyond?
- 10** How would you like to be involved with the Museum in the future?
- 11** Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

How to Have Your Say

Find out more:

- Read the Frequently Asked Questions
- Email strategy@samuseum.sa.gov.au

Have your say:

- Complete our short survey via YourSAY
- Scan code to register to attend the public forum, held on Saturday 17th May 2025
- Participate in a family friendly consultation activity
- Submit your responses by email strategy@samuseum.sa.gov.au

What are the next steps?

- We will collect all feedback and publish a consultation report
- We will consider your feedback to develop a draft Strategic Plan and encourage you to provide further feedback
- More information about the process we will undertake with you can be found on our website





Endnotes

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4. Janes, R, *Museums in a Troubled World* (Routledge, 2009)
5. Malde, S and Villarroel, N, *The Research Perspectives of Australian Museums and Galleries* (Australian Museums and Galleries Association and Australian National University 2024)
6. Commonwealth of Australia, *National Cultural Policy – Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place – Australia’s cultural policy for the next five years* (Office for the Arts 2023)
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8. Australian Museums and Galleries Association, *National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries* (Brisbane, National Standards Taskforce 2023) (2nd edition)
9. South Australian Government, *Better Together Principles* (Adelaide, Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2023)



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