

South Australian Museum

Strategic Plan

2025
-2030

Consultation Report



Government
of South Australia



SOUTH
AUSTRALIAN
MUSEUM

A note on 'culture' in this report in the context of information relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

While culture is generally defined as the shared customs, beliefs, and social practices of a group, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it holds a deeper meaning.

Culture in this context is a living system rooted in Country, kinship, spirituality, language, and law - interwoven with ancestral knowledge and responsibilities.

Unlike mainstream views that emphasise change and diversity, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are grounded in continuity, sacred connection and the enduring care of land and community. The Museum acknowledges the heterogeneity and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as the diversity of culture, cultural knowledge, language and cultural expression. This diversity exists not only between different communities, groups, and individuals but also within those communities and groups.

WARNING: First Nations peoples are warned that this publication may contain culturally sensitive material, including images of persons who have died. We offer our apologies for any distress caused if this occurs.

Acknowledgement of Country

Ngadlu tampinthe ngadlu Kurna Miyurna yartangka. Munaintya puru purruna ngadlu-itya. Munaintyanangu 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 commits to engaging, building and maintaining connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 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 owners and custodians of their culture, cultural knowledge, language and cultural expression.

We have a responsibility to support the rights and cultural authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to lead, control, protect and develop cultural heritage in today's world.

The South Australian Museum commits to ensuring Aboriginal issues will be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all Museum policy, practice and operations.

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Yuendumu Doors, Australian
Aboriginal Cultures Gallery, image
by Repeater Productions.

Cover: Minerals and Meteorites
Gallery, Image by Sia Duff.



Chair's Foreword



The comprehensive consultation process we have undertaken has been enriching, enlightening and educational. The response from staff, volunteers, donors, members, the academic community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, supporters, government and non-government stakeholders has provided invaluable insights and perspectives that will fundamentally shape our path forward. Through countless conversations, workshops, our public forum and submissions received, we have gained a deeper understanding of what our Museum means to the community and how we can better serve South Australian, national and international partners and audiences. A prevailing theme is how beloved the Museum is and how important it is to get this Strategic Plan right.

This consultation has demonstrated the transformative power of genuine engagement and listening. The diverse voices and ideas shared have challenged us to think bravely and inclusively about our future direction. We have taken time to process feedback with great care, so we can develop the best possible way forward. At times, our synthesis of feedback proved complex, with many different ideas adding to a rich foundation of community wisdom and aspirations. We are now well-positioned to develop a Strategic Plan that truly reflects our values and vision. On behalf of the Museum Board, I thank everyone who participated in this process and look forward to translating these insights into a Strategic Plan that will guide our cherished Museum into its next chapter of excellence and community connection. I particularly wish to thank staff, honorary researchers and volunteers of the Museum who contributed significant time to the consultation process, and to Clare Mockler who acted in the position of Director, offering stable and learned leadership through this vital time.

Robert Saint AM
Emeritus Professor

Introduction and Background

The Museum has undertaken extensive community and stakeholder engagement to support the development of a new Strategic Plan for 2025-2030, to drive a strong, effective and sustainable way forward, to strengthen and grow the Museum's ability to meet community needs and to deliver better outcomes, together with the communities it serves.

Consultation began in early November 2024 when staff began collaborating with the Board to develop new purpose, vision and action statements. This early consultation was instrumental in producing a

co-designed discussion paper that launched the new statements, new priority values and posed 11 questions to the community.

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

Discussion paper 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?

Opal Fossils Gallery, image by Repeater Productions



Engagement Summary

The Museum provided several ways for staff, stakeholders and the public to contribute feedback and ideas.



Survey

From 5-26 May 2025, the discussion paper was released for public consultation. The survey recorded demographic data and provided free text ways for respondents to contribute feedback on the discussion paper questions.

Online

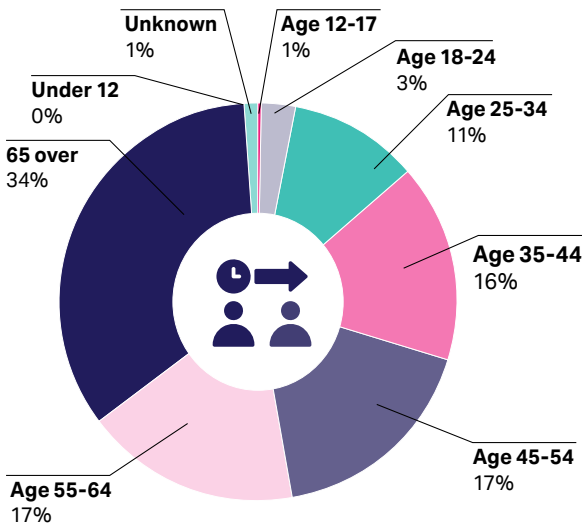
201 online responses were received through a survey on the Government’s engagement platform, YourSAy.

This survey performed in the top five (5) in the state during the consultation period and above average overall for visibility and engagement.

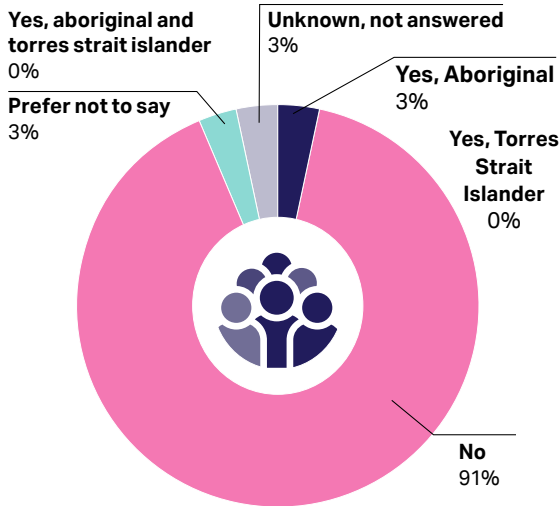
Hard Copy Surveys

51 hard copy responses were collected from surveys made available at the Museum and the public forum.

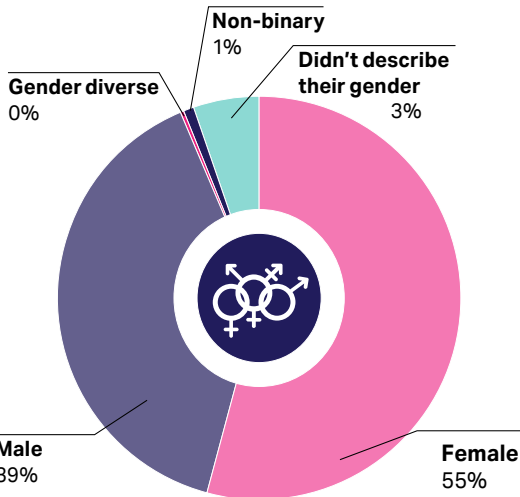
Age of Survey Respondents



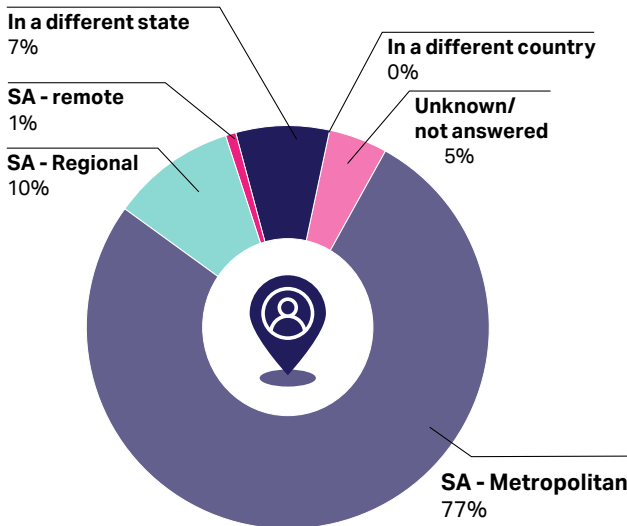
Percentage of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Survey Respondents

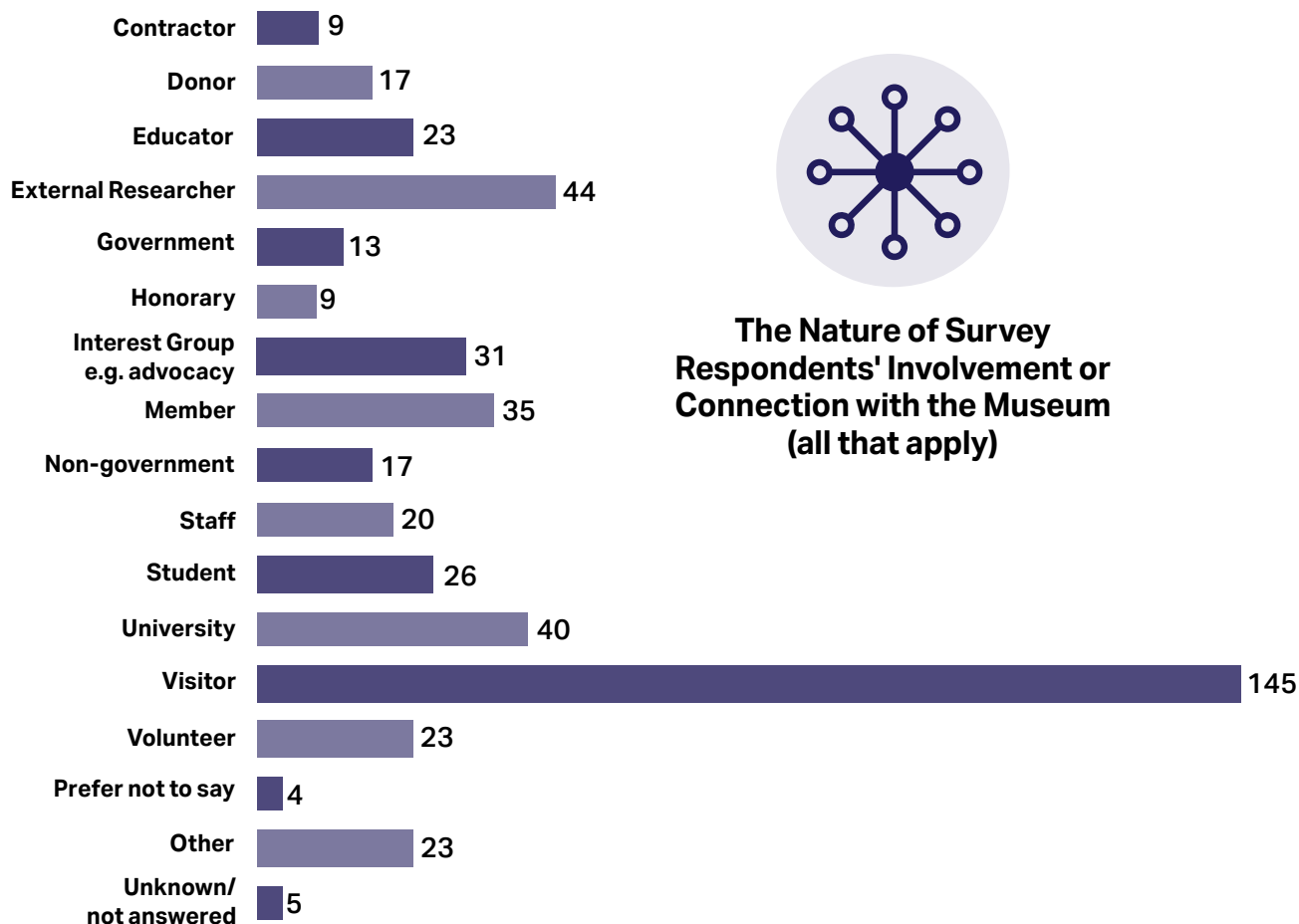


Self Described Gender Identity of Survey Respondents

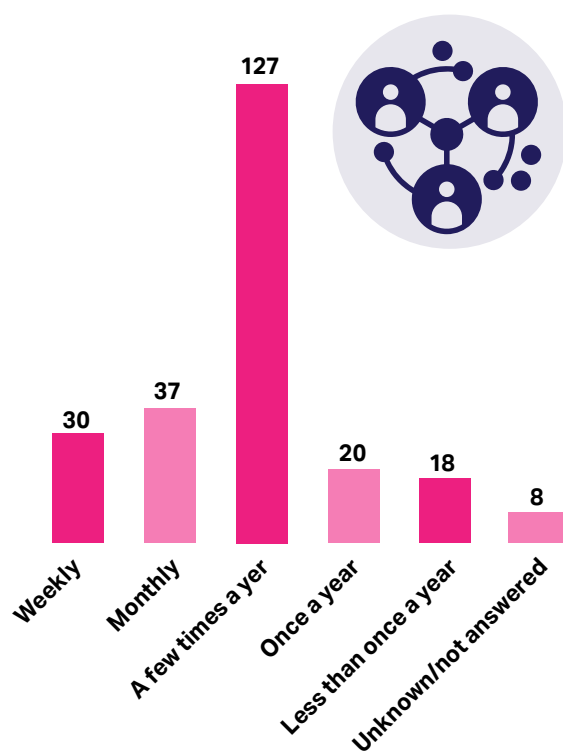


Location of Survey Respondents

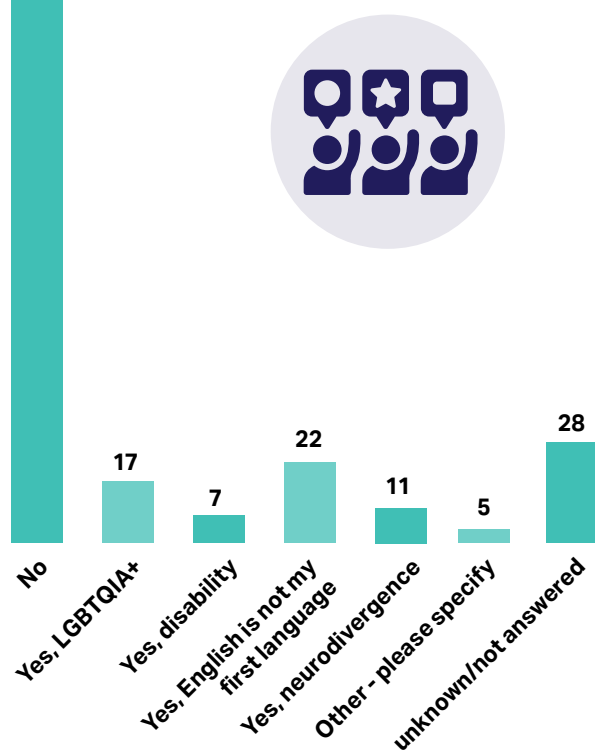




Frequency of Survey Respondents' Engagement with the Museum



Diversity that Applies to Survey Respondents (all that apply)





Public Forum

Held on Saturday, 17 May 2025 at the Adelaide Convention Centre, the public forum attracted around **90 attendees**. Emceed by Dr. Mat Trinca, former Director of the National Museum of Australia, the public forum offered an opportunity to hear from the public and featured a display curated by the Museum's Exhibitions and Programs team.

Museum staff presented on the discussion paper themes of Caring, Research and Sharing to guide discussion.

The public gave unique insights over this five-hour forum to help the Museum Board understand their concerns, hopes and ideas for how the Museum can move forward.



South Australian Museum Public Forum, images by Dream Team Imaging



Family Friendly Consultation Activity

Open from 9 May to 26 May 2025, the family friendly consultation activity in the Museum's Learning Centre attracted over **180** contributions from children and families who used building blocks to describe what they'd like to see and do around the Museum.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement and Outreach

The Museum wrote to 75 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to begin knowledge sharing and engagement. Throughout the consultation period and beyond, the Museum engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders in government and non-government settings, across the State and met with eight (8) groups including Elder Councils and Aboriginal Corporations.

The Museum understands that engagement and sharing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities needs to be ongoing to ensure consultation is true and genuine. The Museum will continue to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a draft Strategic Plan is developed.



Email

The Museum received **29 email submissions** from individuals, groups and organisations including an Aboriginal advisory committee, associations, government bodies, statutory bodies, universities, peak bodies, associations, research groups and interest groups.



Workshops with staff, volunteers and honorary researchers

Staff were invited to provide feedback at five strategic planning sessions held between 28 April and 12 May 2025 at the Museum. Volunteers and honorary researchers were also invited to participate in a workshop. Staff were able to provide additional feedback through an online, confidential survey following the sessions.

A workshop was also conducted with the Museum's Aboriginal Partnership Committee to receive their feedback on the discussion paper and guide engagement strategy for other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups.

Summary of feedback received:

Online respondents to YourSAy survey	201
Hard copy surveys	51
Email submissions	29
Public forum attendees	90
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagements	9
Youth participants of the Family Friendly Activity	180+
Government agency representatives consulted	8
Workshops with museum staff	5
Workshops with volunteers and honorary researchers	1



Museum staff, image by Repeater Productions



Executive Summary of Feedback

Feedback received during the consultation period was diverse and vibrant. At times, opinions and viewpoints were varied across multiple discussion paper questions, highlighting the complexity associated with this engagement. The Museum means different things to different groups of people who hold varying expectations, beliefs and hopes for its future. While some ideas were in direct competition, others reflected opinions widely held:

Foundation & Purpose

- The Museum exists to serve the community and carries immense responsibility.
- The full extent of what the Museum does is not widely understood by the general public and more can be done to shine a light on Museum impact including collections management, research and curation of programs, galleries and exhibitions.

Cultural Inclusion

- Embracing First Nations cultures and building culturally safety should be the foundation and priority lens through which the Museum views its work and should be led in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- The Museum's repatriation and restitution initiatives are making a difference in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and support the Museum to redefine its role and deliver its commitments to shape a new legacy of partnership and trust.
- To achieve meaningful change the Museum must proactively involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Museum leadership to create culturally safe environments for staff and visitors.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities seek greater access to cultural material and feel the Museum has a responsibility to connect people with their cultural heritage.

Collections & Research

- The Museum should champion collections it holds by enhancing collections management practices including storage, preservation, documentation, maintenance and public access.
- The research output of the Museum is considered to be significant and critical for supporting priority areas, such as education and biodiversity. It should continue, with a defined focus guided by its collections and South Australian Government priorities.
- Digitisation of collections is highly complex and requires a measured approach to ensure the reasons for digitisation and methods are clear and prioritise the Museum's objectives to preserve and document collections and enhance access and visitor experience.
- Change is necessary to achieve a higher standard of museology practice, including to protect items on display from degradation and damage, to communicate science and heritage in more accessible ways that reflect societal priorities, and to showcase more of the collections.

Leadership & Governance

- The Museum should grow its capability to seize strategic opportunities through governance and visionary leadership to drive excellence and institutional transformation.



People, Partnerships & Community

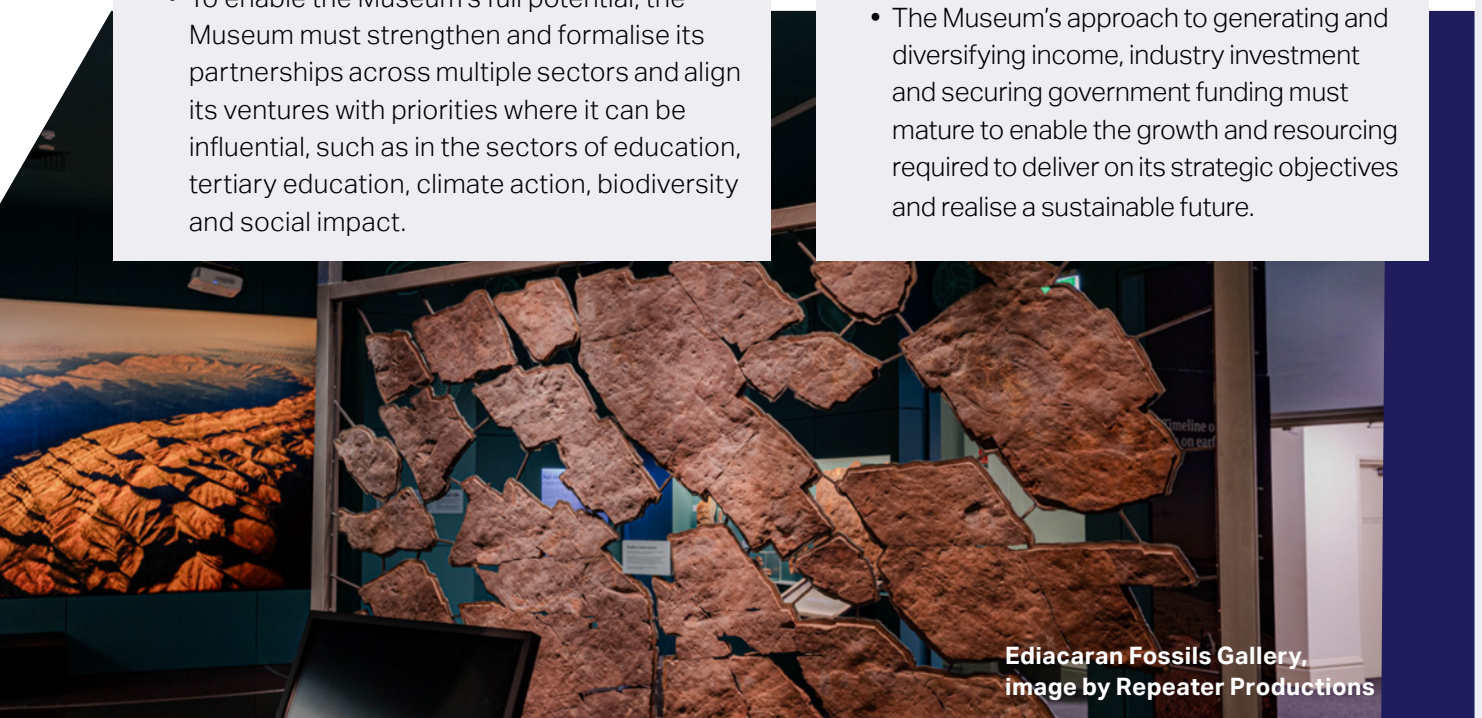
- The Museum employs passionate professionals and benefits from the dedication of its staff, volunteers and honorary researchers. Supporting the Museum's workforce through clear leadership and direction, job security, modern technology infrastructure, professional development and a psychologically safe work environment is fundamental to delivering on the vision and achieving a standard of excellence.
- For some communities and groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, donors and members, trust in the Museum needs to be rebuilt.
- Programs offered by the Museum have been well received by the public who want more ways to get involved through events and interactive experiences .
- Community connections should be revitalised, and the Museum could achieve this through expanded volunteer programs, strengthened membership offerings, enhanced youth engagement and deeper partnerships with schools, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, migrant and refugee communities and regional areas. These networks can advise the Museum on its initiatives and programs.
- To enable the Museum's full potential, the Museum must strengthen and formalise its partnerships across multiple sectors and align its ventures with priorities where it can be influential, such as in the sectors of education, tertiary education, climate action, biodiversity and social impact.

Digital Technology, Infrastructure & Experience

- The Museum should pursue opportunities to enhance visitor experience with a new website, improved cleanliness, refreshing permanent galleries, expanded interactive programming, and enhanced physical accessibility that will help the Museum be a more dynamic, inclusive and inviting destination.
- Broadening ways to experience the collections using digital platforms and outreach programs will enhance the experiences of young people and learners, aid affordability, improve equitable access and benefit people no matter where they live.

Sustainability & Growth

- Respondents noted the importance of appropriate levels of funding to cover activities such as partnerships, stakeholder and volunteer management, and core activities and business obligations.
- It is important to empower the Museum following the consultation period, so it may manage its strategic and operational priorities and move beyond historical instability with an energised agenda.
- The Museum's approach to generating and diversifying income, industry investment and securing government funding must mature to enable the growth and resourcing required to deliver on its strategic objectives and realise a sustainable future.



Summary Analysis

Of all feedback collected throughout the consultation period, one of the strongest, overarching messages from respondents to the Museum is that a united, 'one museum' is required – 'one museum' is made up of different, collaborative parts, but should always remain a connected network, united by shared purpose.



Feedback reveals a need for the Museum to build relationships, trust and collaboration through reframed and nurtured expectations about what the role of the Museum is, so all stakeholders feel empowered to engage and connect to the fullest.

Feedback included sweeping statements, such that *everything* at the Museum needed to change to sentiments that *nothing* should change, highlighting a tension between nostalgia and modernisation, evident throughout all discussion paper questions.

Concepts of change differed throughout the feedback. A majority of people believe the Museum needs to change. Of those who believe change is necessary, ideas ranged from minor improvements and upgrades to galleries to major works, mostly centred around the visitor experience. Of those who had suggestions for strategy, vision and ways of working, significant change was suggested to enable the Museum to grow, uplift and mature its approach to operations, resourcing and future opportunities.

The feedback highlighted a desire for a physically and digitally accessible museum driven by collections to foster connection, engagement and appreciation for natural and cultural heritage. Feedback emphasised the importance of an inclusive museum as an enabler for science communication and for sharing research and cultural knowledge in the most meaningful way.

Feedback highlighted the importance of leveraging technology and innovation to communicate science and research in relatable ways, through galleries, exhibitions and programs that enhance the visitor experience. The use of technology is suggested to be a critical tool for engaging populations and providing equitable, inclusive access to the Museum. Respondents

feel galleries are static and they want more research-backed, collections-centred, story-based, immersive experiences. Respondents felt strongly that the website and other basic digital infrastructure should be a priority to begin to improve visitor experience, followed by the development of more immersive, curated experiences. It speaks to a strong desire for greater engagement within and beyond the existing Museum footprint, including greater regional and rural engagement.

Feedback called for greater focus on collections management and care so collections can be more accessible, particularly for culturally diverse communities with significant cultural connections to collections such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Pacific Island communities. For this to happen, feedback suggests collections management practices should be prioritised, with an emphasis on cultural leadership and recruiting and employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as it relates to caring for ancestors, caring for the Aboriginal cultural collection, and for matters relating to cultural authority.

Research was a topic that received significant feedback. Research should be championed by the Museum and driven by the collections, to uncover information about the collections which can contribute in important ways to understanding the past, navigating the present and preparing for the future. Many examples were given in relation to the criticality of research for supporting current priority areas, such as education outcomes, biodiversity, climate action and the history of Southern Australia's relationships and partnerships across the world.

Another major theme throughout feedback was the importance of relationships and engagement. Trust and genuine partnership with Aboriginal and



Discovery Centre, image by Repeater Productions

Torres Strait Islander communities, universities, other scientific and research organisations, other cultural institutions, with community, current and potential donors, and with current and potential volunteers - is critical. Partnerships must be strengthened and formalised for the Museum to deliver on its purpose, vision and action statements with clear systems put in place to repair, build and maintain relationships.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and those from other culturally diverse backgrounds, trust and genuine engagement was a theme of concern and opportunity for the Museum. The Museum's repatriation efforts, while not widely known in the broader community, are recognised as being critical to support the Museum to meet its reconciliation commitments and that those efforts should be led in partnership with Aboriginal people working in the Museum, and Aboriginal community leaders. Respondents believe increasing the Aboriginal workforce by creating a culturally safe workplace is an urgent priority.

Most respondents feel it's possible to modernise "static" and "tired" displays, and move towards curated, engaging experiences without compromising on research-based exhibitions featuring real, contemporary voices. A minority of respondents discouraged the Museum from adopting entertainment as a focus instead of education. Majority of respondents see good, inspiring education as inherently linked to entertainment and engagement, especially for young people. The Discovery Centre is widely praised for its ability to deliver engaging exposure to natural and cultural heritage, and it was regularly stated the Discovery Centre should be expanded and open more regularly.

The Museum's infrastructure and facilities including floor space, shop and café, while not a major theme of feedback, indicate revitalisation is desired with respondents wanting greater benefits for members and more convenient and inviting infrastructure.

Feedback highlights a strong desire for the Museum to expand the ways it can use volunteer and community partnerships to enrich the visitor experience, such as through guided tours and the value of volunteers

for supporting Museum operations. At the same time, respondents noted the administrative costs of partnership, the need for paid staff, the importance of stakeholder and volunteer management, and the importance of appropriate levels of funding to facilitate these activities and meet core business obligations.

Feedback highlights the importance of restating the role of the Museum within the community and its position within the public sector. Strong leadership and clear communication were seen as essential to enabling access to the collections, engaging with the public and securing resources, and removing internal barriers that hamper cross-disciplinary work. Staff say this is crucial if a 'one, united Museum' is to be possible.

Feedback suggests a desire for stronger links across Museum departments to facilitate collaboration and capitalise on opportunities for efficiencies by leveraging existing systems, processes and procedures. There was also discussion about the importance of empowerment for the Museum following the consultation period, so it may manage its strategic and operational priorities and move beyond historical instability and unrest, into a positive, solutions focussed and energised agenda.

The feedback indicates the Museum grow its capability to seize strategic opportunities through exceptional governance and visionary leadership capable of driving excellence and institutional transformation. Feedback describes long term unrest that has led to loss of corporate knowledge and morale, disjointed operations and unclear or ambiguous strategic direction.

There's strong emphasis on "caring and staff-focused" leadership, and genuine value for expertise. Staff particularly talked about the importance of having clearer communication and collaboration to meet its obligations to the collections, Traditional Owners, donors, members and the public. There is growing optimism about the Museum's trajectory, noting positive changes in direction, resilience and morale, inspired in part by the Museum's new articulated values and an improved track record of communication as it progresses with the development of a new Strategic Plan.

Our Purpose

The Museum's new purpose statement will guide its efforts in fostering greater community understanding of the Museum's role, focus and functions.

PURPOSE STATEMENT: 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.

Feedback demonstrated varying levels of understanding about the Museum's purpose, with some focussing only on the civic gathering place that is the building with galleries and exhibitions, and others recognising the larger system of connected functions such as collections management, research, repatriation, and community engagement, as integral to the Museum's operations.

Many respondents reaffirmed the Museum's vital importance to South Australia and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to its future direction. This appreciation was coupled with calls for clearer governance structures, including a transparent business plan, accountable leadership selection

processes, and more explicit communication about how the Museum's various functions from research and collections to public engagement, will work together to serve the broader community.

Feedback called for greater intention in the way the collections are displayed, with visitors wanting to understand the meaningful connections between displays and natural and cultural heritage, rather than viewing displays as isolated exhibits. This feedback resonated with the direction set by the new Purpose and Vision statements.

Respondents strongly appreciate the value and importance of the Museum's role as a carer of South Australian heritage and natural history, with particular recognition of world-class collections including Ediacaran fossils and opal specimens and the significance of the Aboriginal cultural materials and Pacific collections.

A significant theme emerged around transforming the Museum's perceived relationship with the public

South Australian Museum (former Mounted Police Barracks and Armoury buildings), image by Repeater Productions



from a traditional “holders or owners of collections” to “caretakers in partnership with the public.” This shift would position the Museum as a caretaker and catalyst for conversation and exploration of natural and cultural heritage and identity—past, present, and future—rather than simply a repository of objects. This feedback aligns with feedback from staff and Aboriginal respondents who want to foster greater appreciation of the sensitivity and significance of the Museum’s role and responsibility to care for Ancestral Remains and Secret Sacred objects.

Many respondents emphasised the Museum’s critical function as a research institution, noting its international significance in taxonomy and biodiversity discovery and documentation. Equally, feedback suggests research should be driven by collections and collections management must be championed as fundamental for the Museum to deliver on its purpose and vision.

Respondents’ interpretation of the Museum’s vision varies, with some asserting “museums are a place for knowledge... not amusement centres”, while a majority view sees entertainment as a legitimate component of what it means to engage and inspire audiences, acknowledging this must still be backed by research and is fundamental for supporting younger generations and fostering more physical and digital accessibility.

QUOTES

“Be more transparent about [the Museum’s] role and purpose”

“Return to being a ‘whole’ Museum where there is common vision”

“The Museum should be a beacon of SA for collection-based knowledge”

“Please reinstate collections-based research as an important endeavour of the Museum”

“Caretakers in partnership with the public”

“Thank you for giving the public this opportunity”

“The SAM is such an important institution in SA and indeed in Australia”

“There must be a robust business plan that leaves the Museum in charge of its own destiny”

“We need the science behind the displays to be visible”



The Collections

This area generated the most passionate responses, with staff, researchers and external academics highlighting both the importance and value of collections, and the tensions and challenges in this area of the Museum's operations. The feedback consistently refers to understaffing in collections management across natural and cultural collections areas, with staff managing entire collections that would normally require multiple professionals. This has created bottlenecks for research and community access, with delays in specimen loans and material identification.

The value and expertise of collection managers is widely evident in feedback, noting their importance to the Museum's operations and a pattern of under-resourcing. There's strong emphasis on the dependency of collections and collections managers to facilitate the Museum's research output and international collaborations, with calls for increased funding to restore staffing levels and rebuild the Museum's capacity and reputation towards best practice collections management. Multiple responses emphasise the need for improved and proper storage, digitisation, and a long-term strategy.

Importantly, feedback emphasised the Museum's role in collections should not be about ownership, rather it should be about caretaking, preserving and exploring for the benefit of the public. This is particularly relevant in the space of cultural materials that are held and cared for by the Museum. The Museum works with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to repatriate and return cultural materials, Secret Sacred objects and Ancestral Remains to their communities of origin.

Some respondents felt there was tension between the role of a museum in collecting, holding, researching and displaying collections, with the practice of repatriation. A majority of feedback agrees the historical role of a museum, and past emphasis on 'ownership' is antiquated. Being open about how parts of the collection were acquired, through truth-telling, and repatriation practices and that truth-telling and repatriation practices are an opportunity for the Museum to live out its vision to share heritage, build a legacy that deepens our knowledge of the world and rebuild relationships.

Collections management was also discussed in the context of displays. Staff and visitors say there should be greater appreciation for management practices and updates to galleries is urgent, to protect collections from degradation and damage in line with good museology practice, for example in the Pacific Cultures gallery.

Feedback emphasises collections should underpin and drive what the Museum does. The prevailing sentiment was "collections first"—prioritising research, care, and access as the primary functions that give meaning to all other Museum activities, with access to collections via galleries, programs and exhibitions further discussed in the context of visitor experience.

Preferences and ideas from respondents strongly support collections-based storytelling, backed by research, with requests for exhibitions that showcase "stored pieces in the collection, their provenance and significance." Visitors want to understand how collections are used in research and for those processes to be emphasised in galleries, programs and exhibitions that are designed to "bring collections to life" and communicate the science and stories of collections, rather than simply "displaying objects behind glass".

QUOTES

"Bring collections to life"

"More First Nations culture in a living way rather than a static"

"Collections has been overlooked and undervalued"

"Open up tours of storage facilities, prep labs, archives"

"Exhibits like Galloway [provide] opportunities for young and old to experience world class treasures"

"Vlogs from curators / researchers would make for great resources pre and post visit"

"It's a shame that so much of what we do... is behind locked doors"

Our Research

Feedback on research was significant in detail and volume. It is suggested research should be driven by the collections and championed by the Museum to uncover important information about collections which can contribute in important ways to understanding the past, navigating the present and preparing for the future.

Many examples were given in relation to the importance of research for supporting current priority areas, such as education outcomes, biodiversity, climate action and the history of Southern Australia's relationships and partnerships across the world.

Research is identified as both a strength and advantage of the Museum, and an area the public want more involvement in, with some respondents highlighting it was research from the Museum that inspired their careers.

Respondents overwhelmingly prioritise collections and research as an area requiring support, with detailed calls for increased staffing and resources. Strong emphasis emerges on partnerships for gaining access to funding and resources to enable research.

Feedback suggests the Museum should partner more with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to assist research outcomes and employ Aboriginal researchers for their unique cultural knowledge, truth-telling, expertise in handling sensitive materials and to enable vital repatriation efforts.

Respondents advocate for research outcomes to be accessible to the public and communicated in interactive ways, with respondents showing great interest in researcher profiles, new discoveries and updates to galleries to reflect latest research. They envision research being showcased through videos, live demonstrations, and other engaging formats that help visitors understand the ongoing scientific work that gives collections their contemporary relevance and connects past discoveries to present-day challenges and opportunities. Feedback also highlights interest in researchers contributing to developing citizen-science capacity through the Discovery Centre, supporting the development and interest of future researchers and students.

Feedback advocates a clear research strategy, paired with greater resourcing for personnel management to enable greater impact from the current honorary research model, as with volunteers. This strategy should prescribe mutual objectives and priorities so the Museum may enhance its research output, seize funding opportunities and reinforce its former reputation as a state government authority in scientific research.

QUOTES

"A Museum that is able to showcase in a dynamic way the research that is done here"

"Celebrate the research work of the Museum and share research with the community"

"I would like to see more stories about our endangered species... and biosecurity success stories"

"Working within the research and collections team to help promote science communication outreach"

"Traditional knowledge could be included in the natural science – it doesn't need to be kept exclusively in Aboriginal Cultural Galleries"

"Why bother putting money into research if it isn't shared... use technology such as 3-D scans and educational videos"

"Live streaming of researchers at work"

Cultural Inclusion

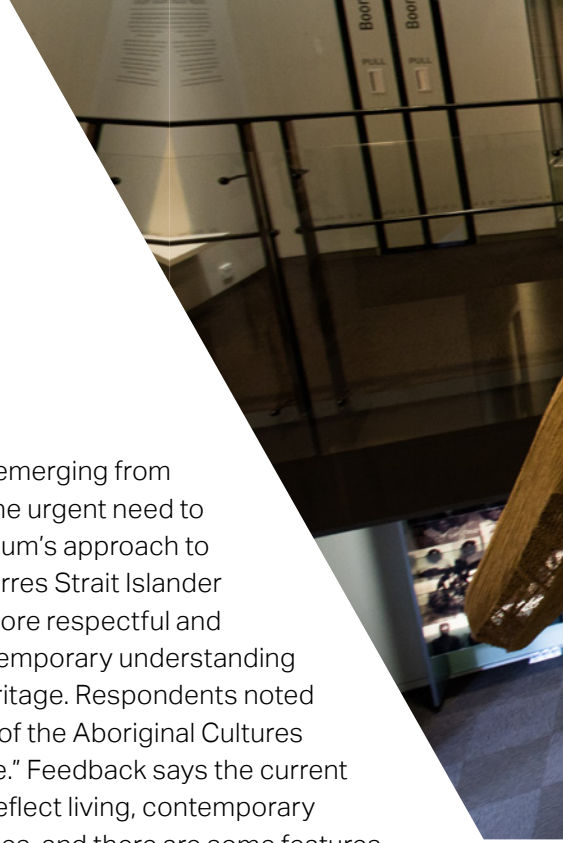
Feedback reveals an overwhelming agreement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural representation must be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Respondents consistently say that “Aboriginal stories must be told by Aboriginal people” and stressed the critical importance of employing more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in meaningful positions of leadership. There is a clear call for genuine community consultation and co-curation as standard practice, moving toward authentic partnership where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and communities, and other diverse cultural communities such as Pacific Islanders have real decision-making power in how their cultures are represented.

A strong theme throughout feedback is the need to represent culture as living and evolving. Respondents want to see past, present, and future represented, moving beyond a static approach that focuses solely on exhibiting objects. There are calls for more interactive, hands-on, and digital experiences that engage younger generations, as well as integration of cultural perspectives throughout all galleries rather than confining them to dedicated spaces. The feedback emphasises the importance of showing contemporary First Nations voices, traditional ecological knowledge, and the ongoing vitality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and communities, and other diverse cultural communities such as Pacific Islanders cultures.

A central theme emerging from the feedback is the urgent need to change the Museum’s approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures so it is more respectful and reflective of contemporary understanding of culture and heritage. Respondents noted that “a re-design of the Aboriginal Cultures Gallery is overdue.” Feedback says the current displays should reflect living, contemporary cultures and stories, and there are some features that are outdated and offensive. Feedback is aligned with recent government initiatives around co-design processes and say Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities would welcome change in this area. Respondents also called for “a decolonisation of the Pacific Islands displays”.

There is strong advocacy for the Museum to acknowledge its colonial legacies, for example how objects came to be at the Museum and how, through historical practices, the Museum is caring for thousands of Ancestral Remains and cultural materials. Aligned with feedback about reframing the Museum’s role from “holder or owner of collections” to “caretakers in partnership with the public”, feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups wants the Museum to champion repatriation and caretaking, to enhance communities’ access and connection to cultural heritage and legacy.

The feedback reveals significant support for repatriation processes, emphasising the importance of respecting community wishes regarding repatriation, with several respondents noting how it can empower communities and support healing. Feedback describes long-term relationships built “at the speed of trust” and are essential for meaningful engagement. Repatriation of cultural materials, Ancestral Remains and Secret-Sacred objects support this relationship building and repair.





**Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery,
image by Repeater Productions**

There are calls for formal methods for embracing and weaving cultural knowledge from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and communities, and other diverse cultural communities such as Pacific Islanders, in all areas of Museum practices, not just in dedicated spaces. Ideas suggest how this could enhance research and science and create meeting spaces where community members can work directly with collections in culturally appropriate ways.

Feedback describes expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and communities, and those reflecting other diverse cultural communities such as Pacific cultures, are calling for comprehensive institutional transformation rather than superficial adjustments. Respondents want the Museum to implement systemic changes that address historical harm while building towards future collaboration. This includes not only updating displays and hiring practices but also establishing new governance structures that empower and drive truth-telling, genuine leadership and decision making around cultural representation. The feedback suggests that successful transformation requires long-term commitment to building trust, respecting cultural protocols, and creating sustainable partnerships that benefit communities economically and culturally while serving the Museum's purpose and vision.

QUOTES

"A re-design of the Aboriginal cultures gallery is overdue"

"Aboriginal stories must be told by Aboriginal people"

"A decolonisation of the Pacific Islands display"

"Acknowledge its imperialist origins and seek to repatriate wherever possible"

"By giving the items back ... it has empowered them [Aboriginal communities] to create tourism and local job opportunities"

"Can it be more engaging for younger generations to increase education + understanding?"

"Capture past and acknowledge the wrongs... look to the future and what we hope to create together."

"Co-curation with Aboriginal communities must be standard practice."

"Develop protocols and practices for western science / Indigenous wisdom knowledge co-production."

"It is vital to have a way to tell our history but it is also vital to do this is a way that moves beyond the colonial - it is about far more than exhibiting 'things'"

"Long-term relationships are key which are fostered over many years 'at the speed of trust'"

"Indigenous spokespeople... named, credited and speak for their cultures"

"Process should be led by First Nations people so they can share it in the ways they want it shared."

"Some [First Nations] staff feel isolated and alone in their work."

Our Programs

There's significant enthusiasm for expanding engagement beyond the Museum's physical walls through citizen-science initiatives and remote community partnerships. Feedback highlights a vision of the Museum as a collaborative hub rather than a one-way information source.

A clear theme emerges around returning to the Museum's fundamental strengths and research capabilities. Many participants express fatigue with "barely relevant exhibitions", preferring content that "celebrates our own research and collections." There's particular enthusiasm for exhibitions featuring marine invertebrates, Cambrian fossils, minerals tied to South Australian geology, and megafauna. This feedback suggests visitors are hungry for authentic experiences that showcase local expertise and collections, paired with practical actions around issues like biodiversity loss that demonstrate the Museum's relevance to contemporary challenges. Feedback notes there is often a balance to be struck to provide free and accessible programs and to generate revenue.

The community expresses strong interest in hands-on learning experiences that go beyond traditional visits. Requests span from children's craft sessions to specialised skills training in taxidermy, conservation, and Indigenous culture, reflecting a desire for the Museum to serve as a comprehensive educational resource. The repeated calls for "hands-on workshops, citizen-science projects and volunteer hubs" indicate people want to be active participants in the Museum's operations rather than passengers or observers. Night-time events like Night at the Museum and various workshops suggest an appetite for novel, immersive experiences that renew expectations for how museums can engage their communities.

The Museum is already recognised as a key destination for school visits in South Australia, and feedback highlights strong demand to build on this role through more facilitated sessions, outreach programs, and digital access for regional schools.

Perhaps the strongest nostalgia in the feedback centres on the former "Out of the Glass Case" roadshow, with numerous proposals for reviving mobile programming through a "museum bus or travelling caravan." This reflects a deep appreciation for the Museum's role in reaching diverse

communities and bringing expertise directly to schools and regional areas.

Vision extends to using technology to help regional and remote schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities contribute knowledge and access expertise, suggesting a model where the Museum serves as a facilitator for broader knowledge exchange. Combined with requests for more school outreach and the sentiment that travelling exhibitions, videos and films in schools and libraries can be of great value, this feedback positions community outreach as central to the Museum's future success.

Programming in the context of venues and events or services for hire does not feature prominently in feedback, however, those who report they've toured Museum grounds or hired venues say the prominent and picturesque location of the Museum is a special opportunity and the Museum could do more to partner with sponsors and investors to increase what they can offer people who seek a venue with catering and event management services.

QUOTE

"Children want to be challenged... given the opportunity to learn difficult concepts."

"Exchanges with remote communities—the museum shares and listens"

"Live streaming of researchers at work"

"Online resources are great, but they can't substitute for talking with a curator."

"Short courses on specimen preparation would be amazing."

"Show how the Museum walks the talk on climate—solar panels, green exhibitions, zero-waste café."

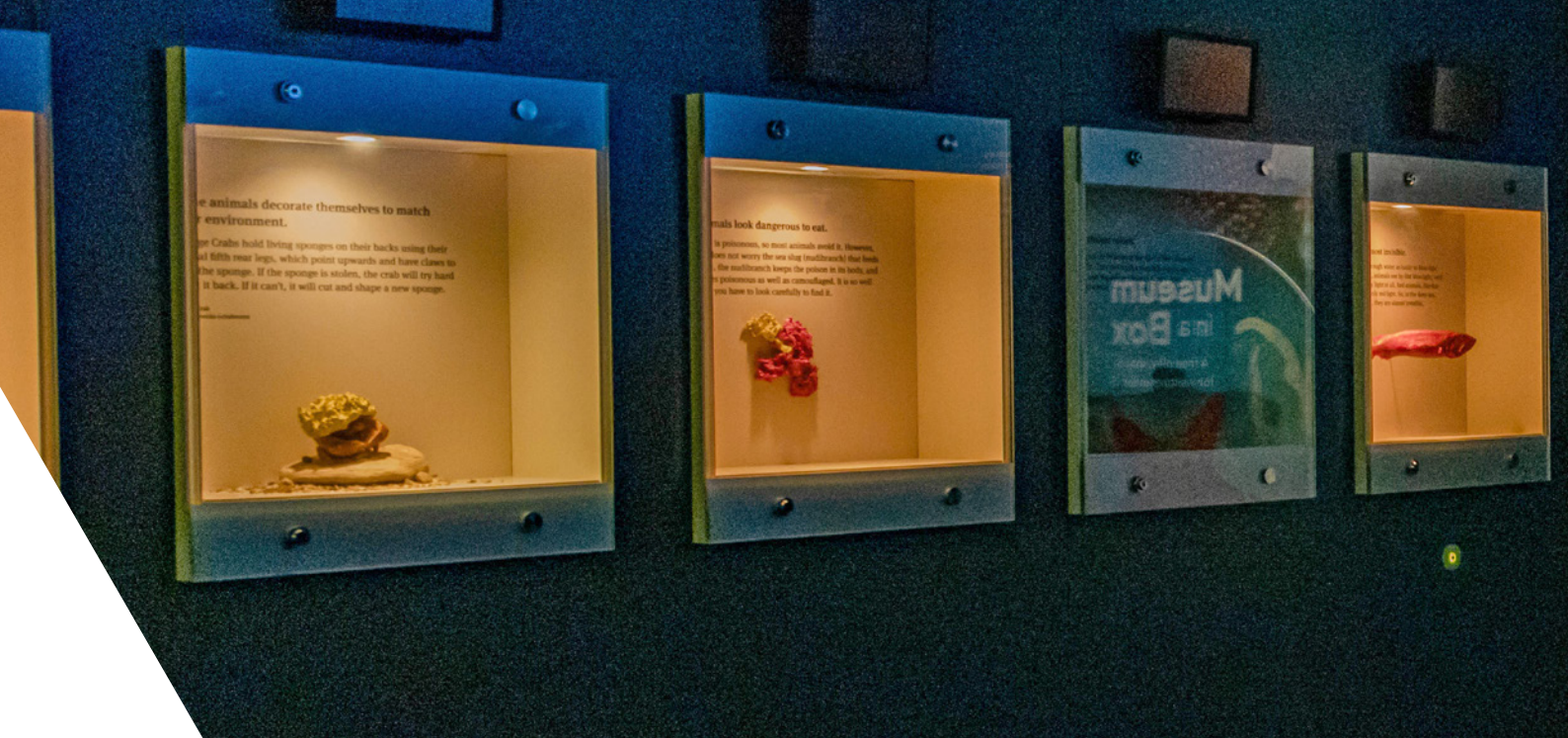
"Travelling exhibitions, videos and films in schools and libraries... can be of great value."

Arborea arborea

This rock slab preserves two of the finest known specimens of *Arborea*. The slab was quarried from a ridge-top in the Flinders Ranges National Park by Australian fossil looters in 1991 and illegally exported to Japan. It was returned to South Australia in 2002.

P9690 a, b – *Arborea arborea*
P32317 – *Spriggina ovata* (upper left)





The Visitor Experience

The visitor experience dominates much of the feedback, with consistent descriptions of displays as “tired,” “outdated,” and unchanged since the 1980s-2000s. Feedback about the visitor experience is closely linked to collections and research feedback, and suggestions for the use of technology and innovation.

While visitors appreciate the Museum’s nostalgic quality and free admission, they want more dynamic content and regular rotation of displays. Respondents provide specific direction for visitor experience improvements, emphasising targeted updates rather than wholesale changes, to achieve change over time. Feedback speaks to a strong hope that the Museum will modernise to remain relevant in social fabric, while preserving beloved elements and themes.

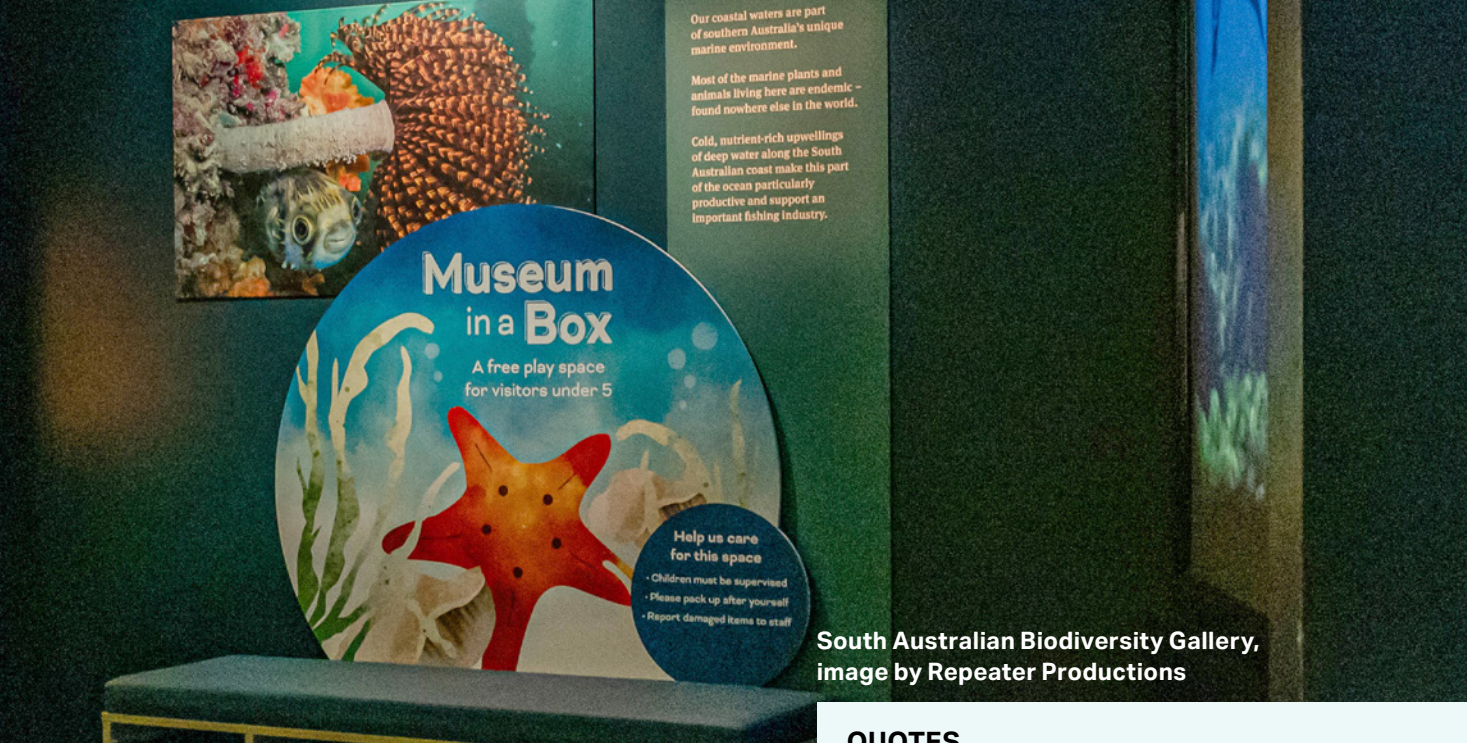
Concerns were raised about the presentation of galleries and displays, labels, descriptions and lighting. Visitors, students and younger demographics describe some labels as “academic and confusing”, with calls for

plain-language, story-driven interpretation that makes collections, their history and accompanying research accessible to diverse audiences. Some feedback suggests changing galleries that display cultural material such as the Aboriginal gallery and Pacific gallery is important to show respect and appreciation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and ways of living and thriving throughout history.

The feedback emphasised the importance of inclusive storytelling that amplifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and cultural knowledge. Visitors also suggested more diverse perspectives could be woven into galleries to foster conversation about current issues such as disability experiences, gender histories, and migrant and political narratives.

Feedback also highlighted there are risks to collections and galleries if change is not supported. Small changes to galleries such as swapping out items and upgrading display cabinets can protect against damage and degradation and align better with museology standards.

Practical requests were made about lighting, maintenance issues, and areas where accessibility of infrastructure should be increased to support wayfinding and navigation. Feedback sympathises the



South Australian Biodiversity Gallery,
image by Repeater Productions

QUOTES

"A Museum that is able to showcase in a dynamic way the research that is done here."

"A very clear directory of museum galleries and exhibition themes"

"Discovery Centre hours increase."

"Show how the Museum walks the talk on climate—solar panels, green exhibitions, zero-waste café."

"Ensure exhibits cater for visually impaired visitors."

"Families with prams, mobility scooters and chairs all need the same wide, obstacle-free paths."

"Keep some spaces original; they're part of our story."

"Keep the museum as educational and engaging"

"Later opening times would let working parents attend."

"Let me scan an object and hear its story instantly."

"Make discoveries exciting and not too sciencey so people can understand them."

"The Museum needs a larger building footprint."

"The Museum shouldn't look the same as it did during people's childhoods."

"Visitors want refreshed exhibitions and a livelier experience."

"Your guides made the visit unforgettable."

Museum lacks critical floor and room space and this is a barrier for attracting popular touring exhibitions. Feedback reminisced about tours and tour guides and suggest these should be brought back, balanced with technology to support individual learners.

The café and shop receive mixed reviews and suggestions for improvement, with some respondents noting their appreciation for its central location and others wanting a more exciting experience. Feedback calls for the Museum to consider how to best integrate natural and cultural heritage, exhibitions and current events with curated shop and café offerings.

The Discovery Centre is highly valued for its practical, interactive ways to engage and inspire, but often closed due to staffing limitations which respondents find frustrating as there's strong emphasis on becoming "a fun and engaging place for children" which is linked to feedback provided on technology and the digital experience.

Respondents hold hopes that the Museum will balance nostalgia with modernisation so it can update experiences and encourage more visitation, while preserving elements that create emotional connections across generations.

Technology and the Digital Experience

Visitors consistently call for modernisation through digital technology, comparing the Museum unfavourably to more interactive institutions in Australia and overseas. The current digital infrastructure is seen as limiting, with poor integration of technology into existing displays. There's strong demand for touch screens, interactive displays, QR codes for additional information, better online databases and digitisation of specimens and galleries. However, some caution is offered against over-reliance on technology at the expense of authentic 'real life' experiences. Majority of people don't want the Museum to replace in-person experiences with too much technology, and emphasise a desire for reinstating guided tours, supported by technology.

The feedback speaks to the importance of leveraging technology and innovation to communicate science and research in relatable ways, through galleries, exhibitions and programs that enhance the visitor experience. It speaks to a strong desire for greater engagement within and beyond the existing Museum footprint, including greater regional and rural engagement. Feedback repeatedly calls for urgent improvements to the website and the improvement of the digital footprint is suggested to be a critical tool for engaging populations and providing equitable, inclusive access to the Museum for those who don't attend in-person. Respondents felt strongly that the website, Wi-Fi and other basic digital infrastructure should be a priority to begin to improve visitor experience including to help audiences plan their visits.

Responses revealed competing and oppositional perspectives on technology integration. Some support technology that enhances rather than replaces hands-on experiences and in-person tours of collections. Other feedback suggested to "get rid of all the computer displays" and minimise digital screens and interactive "noisy things." However, this feedback is inconsistent with strong support for technology as a means for improving accessibility for diverse groups including linguistically diverse populations and those with disability or neurodiverse learners and visitors.

Interest emerges in "more use of technology in exhibitions" and "digital interactive elements" that provide deeper understanding, alongside recognition that the museum needs more space and updated facilities to support both displays, acquisition of profitable touring exhibitions and public engagement.



South Australian Biodiversity Gallery,
image by Repeater Productions

Emphasis remains on maintaining a balance where technology compliments rather than dominates the experience, with particular interest in tools that provide access to collections and research data.

There is strong support for digitisation of collections and specimen data to enable a greater online catalogue. Feedback proposes the Museum determine its priority collections to ensure a measured and focussed approach that best serves objectives of preservation of collections and enhancement of public access. Digitisation of collections and funding required for cataloguing and technology integration in galleries is an area of concern for respondents who fear the enormity of this task cannot be underestimated by the Museum.

QUOTES

"Create a virtual SA Museum so collections are accessible by all"

"Let me scan an object and hear its story instantly"

"Create more interactive online exhibitions so distance isn't a barrier"

"Researchers can connect with school children anywhere in the state"

"We would like to see digitisation and the mobilisation of that data"

"The point of a museum is to allow people see objects first-hand - technology should be used to enhance that experience and not replace it"



Special Exhibitions Gallery,
image by Sia Duff

Our People and Communities

The creation of 'one, united Museum' starts with its people. Feedback reveals multiple communities across South Australia, the country and the world, are deeply connected and dedicated to the Museum. Many describe the Museum with enthusiasm, hope and passion. They reached out through feedback offering their support. Individuals and their families over generations have enjoyed the role of the Museum in their lives and the Museum sector is viewed by many as a place they long desired to work.

There is strong appreciation for passionate, knowledgeable staff and their resilience and dedication in recent years. The feedback reveals a strong desire to rebuild the social fabric that once connected different areas of the museum network. Respondents consistently call for the reinstatement of events that bring staff together, recognising that these connections strengthen the institution's overall workplace culture and effectiveness. There is great desire to move away from terminology such as "front of house" and "back of house" and be one, united Museum.

Feedback is adamant that investment in people and culture should be a priority, including career progression and training to better integrate and retain corporate knowledge and talent. The recent decline

in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is called out as a specific concern the Museum should address.

A cross-cutting theme is that of research and human resourcing, with feedback describing tension and conflict within the Museum's staffing model comprising paid staff, volunteers and honorary, volunteer researchers. Research and collections personnel possess a shared passion and dedication for the collections and research but there is a significant need and opportunity to develop a shared understanding and mutually beneficial way of working. It is felt this would be strengthened by a clear vision through the new Strategic Plan and a clear Research Strategy to bring out the best in people.



Museum staff member and visitors, Discovery Centre, image by South Australian Museum

Opportunities for volunteers are a regular feature of feedback which advocates for more engagement opportunities and improved volunteer management. The Museum's role in inspiring scientific careers is frequently mentioned, with many crediting childhood visits for sparking lifelong interests in natural and cultural history. There's desire for more regular community events and better integration of researchers with public programs to showcase the Museum's ongoing work.

Respondents have identified several opportunities for the Museum to build on its engagement with diverse audiences such as to establish a youth council or connect with youth advisory groups. This feedback is similar to that of advocacy groups representing the interests of the disability community and beyond.

A major theme throughout feedback was the importance of relationships and engagement. Trust and genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, universities, other scientific and research organisations, other cultural institutions, with community, current and potential donors, and with current and potential volunteers, is critical. Partnerships are critical for the Museum to deliver on its purpose, vision and action statement, enrich research, generate funding opportunities and enable a range of volunteer-led activities. At the same time, the respondents noted the administrative costs of partnership, the need for paid staff, the importance of stakeholder and volunteer management, and the importance of appropriate levels of funding to facilitate these activities and meet core business obligations.

Quotes

"A leadership capable of driving strategic vision and listening to staff."

"Give us stability so we can plan long-term community impact."

"Current KPIs... don't fully encompass the Museum's purpose."

"I feel immensely privileged to be involved with the Museum every day of my working life."

"Listen to front-of-house insights – we're the first to hear visitor praise and complaints."

"We are ONE not many."

"We were unsure how to communicate with leadership."

"Would gladly give a few hours a week assisting with cataloguing or front-of-house."

"Create active partnerships beyond our walls."

"Happy to volunteer as a gallery guide."

"Partner with local Elders for language and cultural sessions."

Funding, Sustainability and Partnerships

Financial sustainability emerges as a priority, with widespread recognition that a lack of resources affects all aspects of operations. Comparisons to other museums with greater amounts of government, private and philanthropic funding are regularly made.

Many respondents understand the Museum's reliance on government funding is unhelpful and more needs to be done to build fruitful relationships with members, donors and other key stakeholders to create diversified opportunity. Universities and the private sector are identified as major stakeholders the Museum could partner with to enable its reinvigoration and achievement of its goals.

Staff, honorary researchers and volunteers contributed significant feedback about the impact of insufficient resources on staff morale and service delivery. There is recognition that proper investment and business acumen could transform the Museum into a major tourist attraction and major partner in supporting government, non-government and private sectors to deliver on ambitions and projects.

The feedback suggests that the Museum should mitigate risk of further decline. Despite its world-class collections and dedicated staff, a robust financial strategy is critical for the Museum's growth and development. Several respondents explain funding is essential for the Museum to fulfill its statutory obligations and maintain its international reputation. Staffing across collections, research and galleries is advocated to be prioritised, with references to collections managers, researchers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Vibrant ideas emerge from respondents who suggest travelling exhibitions, donor expedition experiences, volunteer programs and fee-for-service opportunities that the Museum should investigate to harness opportunities in the private sector. Support exists for more international exhibitions and "blockbusters" that could drive tourism revenue, while maintaining free general admission.

Feedback is emphatic that while fee-for-service opportunities exist and the Museum could champion negotiations with organisations and private sector, the Museum should remain affordable to visitors and community groups to remain ethical and aligned with its obligations and mandate as a public service.

Respondents encourage the Museum to align its ventures with priorities where it can be influential, such as in the sectors of education, climate action, biodiversity and social impact, to enable the Museum's full potential. There's recognition that proper investment by government and other stakeholders could make the Museum a major tourist attraction and a go-to place to get reliable, trusted information if the Museum focuses on its unique strengths – building experiences around collections and research.

QUOTES

"Help the Museum win funding to enable technological upgrades"

"Protecting and strengthening these relationships will help the Museum to win funding"

"A sufficient budget which would allow the Museum to meet various governmental obligations"

"Adequate staffing would help bring the Museum up to date with modern museological capabilities"

"Cost-cutting is short-sighted; invest in people instead"



South Australian Museum
(exterior view), image by
Repeater Productions



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