

PREMIER'S REVIEW OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES REPORT

August 2026

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 matters will be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all Museum policy, practice and operations.

A note on 'culture' in this document 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 dynamic, living system embedded in Country, kinship, spirituality, language, lore and responsibility; interwoven with ancestral knowledge passed down across generations by the teaching of complex oral traditions throughout millennia. The Museum acknowledges that both Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples have their own unique diversity of culture, cultural knowledge, language and cultural expressions both collectively, within individual communities and within individual groups.

Executive Summary

In September 2024, the Premier's Review Panel made six recommendations in response to community concerns about proposed organisational changes at the South Australian Museum (the Museum).

The South Australian Government accepted all six recommendations and assigned responsibility to the Board and Museum, with support from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC), to implement a comprehensive program of work addressing the review findings.

All recommendations have been implemented as of August 2026. Collectively, these reforms have repositioned the South Australian Museum for the future. The Museum now has a clear strategic direction, strengthened governance, renewed partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and South Australian communities, an integrated framework for research and collections stewardship, and a stronger foundation for long-term financial sustainability and infrastructure investment.

These reforms arising from the Premier's Review are now embedded within the Museum's governance, strategic and corporate planning, budget development and performance reporting. No outstanding actions remain within the scope of the six recommendations. Longer-term initiatives arising from the Review, including financial sustainability and infrastructure renewal, will continue through established Museum and South Australian Government planning, business case and investment processes. On this basis, the Premier's Review can be formally closed.

The Premier's Review Panel noted, in the Recommendations section of their report, that "Following the successful implementation of these recommendations the government may consider it appropriate to review the SAM's level of state funding. This review could include an examination of the SAM's funding relative to population and visitor numbers, and a comparison with similar publicly funded museums across Australia" (South Australian Museum Review Panel report, page 14).

The Board is firmly of the view that this review should now be undertaken.

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide assurance that the six recommendations of the Premier's Review have been fully implemented, to outline the benefits and broader reform activity arising from implementation, and to articulate the Museum's future direction for sustaining and building on these outcomes.

Context of the review

In response to community concerns about proposed changes at the Museum, the Premier's Review Panel was established in April 2024 and chaired by the then Chief Executive of DPC, Damien Walker, with expert membership of the Chief Scientist for South Australia Professor Craig Simmons, and Chief Executive Officer of the Queensland Museum Dr Jim Thompson PSM. The Panel reviewed the proposed changes and engaged with stakeholders to explore options for the Museum's future.

The Panel delivered its final report in September 2024, identifying opportunities to strengthen governance, stakeholder engagement and organisational decision-making, and made the following six recommendations for implementation by the Board and Museum:

- Recommendation 1. Cease all proposed changes
- Recommendation 2. Develop a new strategic vision
- Recommendation 3. Develop a research strategy and explore sustainable research models
- Recommendation 4. Develop a collections management plan
- Recommendation 5. Investigate financial and commercial opportunities
- Recommendation 6. Conduct an asset management and infrastructure study

The South Australian Government accepted all six recommendations and assigned responsibility to the Museum, with support from DPC, to oversee their implementation.

This report outlines the actions taken in response to each recommendation, the outcomes achieved and the governance and delivery arrangements through which those outcomes will be sustained.

Implementation approach and governance

Implementation of the Premier's Review recommendations was led by the Board and Museum Executive, with project management support provided by DPC.

The implementation process was governed through a robust oversight framework, with strategic guidance, oversight and advice provided by the Museum's Board and Executive team, the Premier's Review Recommendations Steering Committee (chaired by the Executive Director, CreateSA, DPC) and the Museum's Aboriginal Partnership Committee throughout the implementation period.

Delivery of the recommendations was informed by extensive consultation and engagement. This included Museum staff and honorary researchers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, donors, universities, government agencies, members of the public, and other key stakeholders. Feedback and insights gathered through this process helped inform implementation decisions and ensure outcomes were responsive to stakeholder perspectives and the Museum's strategic objectives.

This collaborative and transparent approach supported the successful implementation of all six recommendations of the Premier's Review. The process also rebuilt trust and strengthened relationships among the Museum, government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, staff, researchers, donors and other stakeholders, providing a stronger foundation for collaboration, accountability and future organisational development.

Implementation progress

Recommendation 1. Cease all proposed changes

The Panel recommends that the SAM cease all proposed changes and concentrate on implementing the key foundational recommendations listed below. This should be done in collaboration with stakeholders, supporters, donors, and employees to co-design future solutions. The Panel recommends that no functional or structural changes should be proposed until these recommendations are completed. For any future changes, the Panel advises a carefully planned implementation and change management process, including early and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

Date implemented: This recommendation was implemented immediately.

Implementation outcomes

No functional or structural changes were made during the implementation of the recommendations. The Museum continued to assess operational needs and address any immediate identified workforce gaps.

During the implementation period, the Museum deliberately prioritised organisational stability while rebuilding trust and confidence across the organisation and with key stakeholders. Rather than progressing structural reform, the focus was on establishing the governance, strategic planning and consultation processes required to support future organisational change.

This period of stability enabled the Museum to develop its Strategic Plan, Research Strategy, Collection Management Plan (CMP), Financial Sustainability Plan and Corporate Plan. Together, these frameworks ensure that future organisational decisions will be guided by clear strategic priorities, meaningful consultation, sound evidence and carefully planned change management.

Recommendation 2. Develop a new strategic vision

Create a new strategic vision and plan for the SAM through a comprehensive and collaborative co-design process involving employees, stakeholders, donors, and supporters.

Date implemented: December 2025

Implementation outcomes

The South Australian Museum Strategic Plan 2025-2030 was released on 18 December 2025.

The Strategic Plan was developed following extensive consultation throughout 2025 with staff, stakeholders and the public, through numerous mechanisms including:

- 201 online responses to a YourSAy survey
- 51 hard copy surveys
- 29 email submissions
- 90 public forum attendees
- 180+ family friendly activity participants
- Engagement with 75 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders in government and non-government settings
- Meetings with eight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups including Elder Councils and Aboriginal Corporations
- Eight government agency meetings
- Five staff workshops and staff survey
- One workshop with volunteers and honorary researchers.

The Strategic Plan outlines a new Vision, Purpose, Actions and Values, and the following four Strategic Priorities:

- Care for and share our collections.
- Research to serve our community.
- Lead with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander embodied knowledge.
- Educate, engage, inspire and connect communities.

The Strategic Plan establishes a single strategic framework aligning the Museum's purpose, collections, research, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, public engagement and organisational development. It provides the basis for investment, decision-making and performance through to 2030.

The Strategic Plan and the underlying Research Strategy and Collection Management Plan (Recommendations 3 and 4) are operationalised through the Corporate Plan 2026-2028, which translates the Museum's strategic priorities into defined workstreams, deliverables, performance measures and budget alignment. This ensures a clear line of sight between strategy, governance and day-to-day operations.

Recommendation 3. Develop a research strategy and explore sustainable research models

Establish a research strategy and agenda for the Museum in collaboration with universities, research institutions, and other key stakeholders. Explore sustainable research models and funding options by partnering with South Australian universities and analysing successful models used by similar museums both in Australia and internationally.

Developed concurrently with Recommendation 4

Recommendation 4. Develop a collections management plan

Develop a collections management plan for the SAM's collections, guided by the research strategy.

Developed concurrently with Recommendation 3

Date implemented: August 2026

Implementation outcomes

The release of the Strategic Plan initiated the concurrent development of a new Research Strategy and CMP. The Museum requires a Research Strategy and CMP to support it to meet legislative requirements, guide its functions including resource allocation, partnerships and future development of business cases.

The Research Strategy and CMP were informed by independent advice from a time-limited Expert Advisory Panel (the Panel), chaired by Emeritus Professor Robert Saint (Chair of the Museum's Board) that met in May and June 2026.

The Panel's membership comprised:

- Ms Franchesca Cubillo, Executive Director, First Nations Arts and Culture, Creative Australia
- Dr Leo Joseph, Retired, formerly Director, Australian National Wildlife Collection, CSIRO
- Mr Cameron Slatyer, Program Manager - National Biodiversity Data Initiatives, CSIRO
- Dr Mariko Smith, Senior Specialist (Research & Publications), First Nations, Australian Museum
- Professor Mathew Trinca Talalin AM FAHA, Head, Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies, Australian National University
- Dr Nurin Veis, Curator Emeritus and member of Museum Victoria's Research Sub-Committee (previously Director, Research Institute, Museums Victoria).

The Panel identified the Museum as a critical and substantial component of the research infrastructure of South Australia. The Panel noted that Museum research supports South Australian industries, agriculture and health and underpins the effectiveness of a

wide range of South Australian laws, for example, those relating to biodiversity and is a key contributor to the case for the establishment and maintenance of World Heritage sites in South Australia.

The Museum also undertook extensive consultation with staff, honorary researchers, South Australian universities, Aboriginal stakeholders, relevant government agencies and other partners across education, environment, health, industry, tourism, science and cultural affairs.

The Research Strategy and CMP provide a clear, integrated framework to align the Museum's research priorities and collection stewardship with its strategic goals, and to strengthen the Museum's role as a trusted research, collections and cultural institution.

The Research Strategy and CMP support:

- Government priorities by aligning research and collections with education, biodiversity, climate and cultural outcomes.
- University partnerships through clearer collaboration pathways, co-funded research and shared infrastructure.
- Public value by improving access to collections, supporting knowledge sharing, and strengthening the translation of research into community outcomes.
- Sector leadership by embedding best practice in collections care, research governance and First Nations cultural authority.

These documents establish the foundation for sustained partnerships, funding opportunities and research impact through to 2030 and beyond.

The Museum plans to launch the new Research Strategy and CMP in August 2026.

Next steps

The Research Strategy and CMP will be implemented through the Corporate Plan 2026-2028, annual business planning, budget development and performance reporting. Research priorities will be assessed against their contribution to the Museum's strategic objectives, government priorities, public engagement, education, partnerships and measurable cultural, scientific, environmental, social and economic outcomes.

Collection priorities will be established annually using a risk-based approach to collection care, documentation, digitisation, access, acquisitions and research support. Delivery of both strategies will be supported by workforce planning, defined performance measures and reporting through the Museum's Executive and Board, ensuring that investment decisions remain strategically aligned, accountable and sustainable.

Recommendation 5. Investigate financial and commercial opportunities

Investigate financial and commercial opportunities to support the SAM's long-term viability, including reconnecting with donors, philanthropists, and major corporations to secure new funding sources.

Date implemented: June 2026

Implementation outcomes

The first part of the response was the engagement of professional advisory services firm BDO Services (BDO) in July 2025 to conduct financial and commercial analysis to provide advice for the development of a new financial strategy.

BDO delivered its draft report 'Financial review over financial and commercial opportunities' in October 2025, with the report finalised in January 2026. The report provides recommendations to enhance existing revenue streams and explore new ones, and to prioritise the development of a comprehensive commercial strategy to guide future financial and commercial decision-making.

Key themes and opportunities

BDO identified the need for clearer commercial governance, improved management reporting and a coordinated strategy for each revenue stream. This includes clearer responsibilities and financial arrangements between the Museum and its affiliated entities, stronger internal capability and accountability, and more consistent assessment of profitability, cost, risk and return.

The review also identified opportunities to improve existing income streams and develop new ones. It recommended that commercial decisions be supported by reliable performance information and appropriate financial analysis so that resources could be directed to activities that provide sustainable financial and public value.

The second phase of the response was investigation by the Board, supported by the Museum Executive, of financial and commercial opportunities, taking into account the baseline information and recommendations provided by the BDO report. Consideration was given to exhibitions and ticketing, retail, café and venue hire, tourism products, education and school programs, public programs, philanthropy, corporate partnerships, competitive grants, external research funding, fee-for-service opportunities and investment income, with a range of possibilities and strategies identified.

These have since been incorporated into a Financial Stability Plan, establishing a broader and more resilient revenue model, which will substantially improve the Museum's financial position. Recognising that exhibitions and commercial activities alone cannot sustain the Museum, the plan combines core government investment with cross-government funding. The objective is to diversify income, improve the Museum's

operating resilience and generate ethical, mission-aligned revenue from the public value it creates.

The Board and Premier's Review Recommendations Steering Committee agreed that Recommendation 5 had been implemented through completion of the BDO review and the Museum's subsequent development of a broader Financial Sustainability Plan, supported by renewed engagement with donors, philanthropists, corporate partners, government and other funding partners.

Next steps

Implementation of the Financial Sustainability Plan has commenced through the Corporate Plan 2026-2028, which identifies Commercial and Partnerships as a core organisational workstream. Delivery will be supported by annual operating plans, defined accountabilities, performance measures and regular reporting to the Board. This will enable the Museum to monitor revenue growth, net financial contribution, visitor yield, philanthropy, grants, partnerships and delivery risks, and to ensure that income growth remains diversified and aligned with the Museum's public purpose.

The first phase of implementation focuses on strengthening existing commercial operations and developing new revenue opportunities. This includes improvements to retail, café and venue hire; stronger integration of exhibitions, public programming and secondary visitor spend; curriculum-linked education and school holiday programs; tourism and premium visitor experiences; digital products; research and fee-for-service opportunities; and more active pursuit of cross-government and competitive grant funding.

The Museum has also reinvigorated donor engagement and fundraising, strengthened its partnership with the South Australian Museum Foundation, expanded its pipeline of grant applications and research funding opportunities, and commenced developing new corporate partnerships and sponsorships. This work will be supported by clearer cases for support, improved donor stewardship and project-specific investment propositions.

Financial sustainability has also been embedded within the Museum's major transformation initiatives. The temporary use of the Pacific Cultures Gallery as an Exhibition Hall, made possible by a need for removal and restoration of displays, will test the audience, financial and operational case for a regular touring exhibition program. The proposed Education Centre will create opportunities through school programs, teacher professional learning, school holiday activities, philanthropy and government and industry partnerships. The Living Cultural Garden is being developed as a Kaurua-led project with opportunities for grant, philanthropic, tourism, partnership and public program investment.

Together, these measures provide a disciplined and diversified approach to long-term financial sustainability. They reduce reliance on any single source of income while ensuring that revenue generation supports the Museum's public purpose, research excellence, collections stewardship and service to the South Australian community.

Whilst the Premier's Review Panel report did not include a recommendation to investigate the level of government funding for core Museum operations, it did note that, "Following the successful implementation of these recommendations, the government may consider it appropriate to review the SAM's level of state funding. This review could include an examination of the SAM's funding relative to population and visitor numbers, and a comparison with similar publicly funded museums across Australia".

The Board strongly encourages the South Australian Government to review the level of funding, to ensure that the Museum can operate as a world class, free entry museum that, among other things, cares for the largest collection of Aboriginal cultural material in the world and whose research and collections underpin at least seven Government Acts and legislative requirements.

Recommendation 6. Conduct an asset management and infrastructure study

Perform a study to assess and enhance galleries, public spaces, and touring exhibition spaces, evaluating the current state of the SAM's facilities and explore options for infrastructure improvements.

Date implemented: February 2026

Implementation outcomes

Recommendation 6 was substantively implemented through a structured, two-stage asset and infrastructure study led by Adelaide-based architect and design practice Swanbury Penglase, supported by technical sub-consultants and national museum experts.

Stage One (December 2025) provided a comprehensive assessment of the current condition of the Museum's built assets, galleries, and public spaces, identifying key constraints and opportunities. Stage Two (February 2026) progressed this into tested options, including feasibility analysis and indicative costings for infrastructure improvements.

This work has provided a clear, evidence-based understanding of infrastructure limitations, particularly regarding the lack of facilities required for major exhibitions, opportunities for improved space utilisation, and priority investment areas aligned to visitor growth and program activation.

The study has enabled the Board to identify priority initiatives for staged development, subject to detailed business cases and future funding. These include the interim activation of a temporary Exhibition Hall, development of a new Education Centre within the Science Centre footprint, and longer-term planning for a purpose-built facility capable of hosting major national and international touring exhibitions. These priorities are embedded within the Corporate Plan 2026-2028 and aligned with the Strategic Plan 2025-2030.

Next steps

Although Recommendation 6 has been fully implemented, the asset and infrastructure study establishes the evidence base for the Museum's longer-term asset renewal and future capital investment. The Corporate Plan 2026-2028 provides the immediate delivery framework, while larger infrastructure proposals will progress through detailed business cases and the South Australian Government's established infrastructure planning, assurance and capital investment processes.

In the interim, the Museum will make responsible use of its existing spaces to address immediate visitor, education and operational needs while building evidence for longer-term investment. As part of the conservation and preservation program for the Pacific Cultures Gallery, the Gallery will be temporarily used as a proof-of-concept Exhibition Hall. This is an interim use of the space, not a permanent change to the Gallery's purpose. The Pacific Cultures Gallery will be reinstated in future years following the conservation program and the development of the Museum's longer-term infrastructure solution.

A staged program of accessible, family-focused touring exhibitions will enable the Museum to test audience demand, visitation growth, ticketing and secondary spend, operational requirements, partnership opportunities and broader cultural and economic benefits. Each exhibition will be supported by appropriate business planning and evaluation, enabling the Museum and government to assess the viability and value of an ongoing touring exhibition program before committing to major capital investment.

The evidence generated through this proof of concept will inform a comprehensive business case for a new, purpose-built exhibition facility capable of hosting major national and international touring exhibitions. The business case will define the preferred scope, location, operating model, costs, benefits and delivery pathway, and will provide the basis for seeking future government investment supported, where appropriate, by philanthropic contributions, corporate partnerships and competitive grants.

In parallel, the proposed Education Centre will continue to be developed as a curriculum-linked learning destination through collaboration with government, the education sector, philanthropy and industry. Detailed planning will establish the educational model, operating requirements, funding strategy and long-term public value of the Centre.

This staged approach enables the Museum to respond to immediate needs, make more effective use of existing public assets and reduce the risk of future investment decisions, while progressing a coherent long-term vision for infrastructure renewal.

Sustaining the outcomes

The Premier's Review has provided the catalyst for a significant period of renewal at the Museum. All six recommendations have been implemented, and the resulting reforms are now embedded within the Museum's governance, strategic and corporate planning, budget development, workforce planning and performance reporting.

The Museum now has a clear strategic direction, stronger governance and accountability, renewed relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, an integrated framework for research and collections stewardship, a disciplined approach to financial sustainability, and an evidence-based pathway for infrastructure renewal.

Responsibility for sustaining these outcomes has transitioned from the time-limited implementation program into the Museum's established governance and operating arrangements. Progress will continue to be overseen by the Board and monitored through the Corporate Plan 2026-2028, annual business and budget planning, performance measures and regular reporting. Longer-term initiatives requiring government consideration will progress through appropriate business case, infrastructure planning and investment processes.

The implementation of the Premier's Review has therefore achieved both its immediate purpose and a broader institutional outcome: it has restored stability, strengthened trust and established the foundations from which the Museum can pursue its long-term vision with greater confidence, discipline and accountability. On this basis, no further actions remain within the scope of the Review, and the Premier's Review can be formally closed.