

South Australian Museum

Strategic Plan / 2025 -2030



Knowledge. Truth. Connection.





Jackie Saunders, *Joining Together*, 2025

Acrylic on canvas

Artist Statement

Like the South Australian Museum brings diverse cultures together, this painting is representing two cultures coming together through the story of my parents. The painting talks about my mum and dad's story. This artwork is about love and about how my mum and dad meet and how they got together. My mum came from Raukkan the Coorong, the Ngarrindjeri mob, and my dad came from Ceduna like the desert, from the Wirangu mob. So it's like the dots are from my dad's side and the lines are from my mum's side. It's like they are joining together. There's the brown and creamy coloured dots that represent the desert, and the yellow and pink represent the salt lakes. The circles represent the waterholes and maybe the lines represent spirits like my mum and dad's spirit. Because now they've both passed, they are together now.

Artist Biography

Jackie Saunders is a contemporary Ngarrindjeri and Wirangu artist living on Kurna land. Jackie describes herself as 'the daughter of a saltwater woman and a desert dwelling man.' Her work draws on her strong sense of family and culture. It reflects her connections to both the human and natural world, exploring different weathers – internal and external – and the shape and movement of land, light and water. Jackie has had works featured in ACE Open's exhibition *If the Future is to be Worth Anything: 2020 South Australian Artist Survey*. In 2020 Jackie won the Dawn Slade-Faull Award, which enabled her to present her debut solo exhibition, *Salt & Sand*. Her work was featured in the Tarnanthi festival in 2021, and she presented a solo exhibition *Land, Light and Water* in the 2023 Tarnanthi festival. In 2022, Jackie was part of Tutti Arts *Reaching Out* project which saw her collaborate with Laura Wills and present *Mineral Lines* at the South Australian Museum. In 2024 her work *Desert Sundown (Alice Springs)* was acquired by the Art Gallery of South Australia. In 2025 Jackie had a residency at Nexus Arts which resulted in a solo exhibition *Ngarrindjeri Nukkan: Threads of Connection*.

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.

WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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.



South Australian Museum,
Image by Sam Noonan

Chair's foreword



It is with both pleasure and purpose that I present the South Australian Museum's Strategic Plan 2025–2030.

This strategic plan addresses the core purpose of the Museum as well as issues that challenge the Museum's future. It is informed by the Museum's long and distinguished contribution, through collections and research, to an understanding of the deep past and present state of South Australia's natural and cultural history. Most importantly, it is guided by the enormously valuable feedback received over the past year by the Museum Board through its extensive consultation process summarised in the document 'South Australian Museum Strategic Plan Consultation Report'.

This strategic plan sets out a clear intention to deliver public value through the growth and maintenance of our valuable collections, the high quality, relevance and impact of our research, our inspired contributions to learning, the expertise and professionalism of our staff, and the enhancement of productive and mutually beneficial partnerships.

It reflects a deep commitment to shaping a future where our collections, research and knowledge are accessible, inclusive and deeply connected to the stories of this land, and where the Museum serves the people of South Australia by the application of research outcomes to present and future challenges.

Central to this strategic plan is a commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. With this strategic plan, the Museum will ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authority, perspectives and cultural knowledge guide and shape collections, research, exhibitions and programs in ways that are transformative and enduring.

The strategic plan seeks to strengthen our role as a trusted public institution - one that fosters scientific inquiry, cultural understanding and meaningful connection with communities in South Australia, across Australia and around the world. It reaffirms our responsibility to ensure that the Museum is a place where all people feel respected, welcomed and valued and affirms our ambition to create experiences that are more dynamic, accessible and reflective of the communities we serve.

I extend my deepest thanks to my fellow Board members, the members of our Aboriginal Partnership Committee, the Museum's Director, recent Acting Directors, staff, honorary researchers, volunteers, our donors, partners and stakeholders and so many members of the public for their insights and generosity throughout the comprehensive consultation process. The diverse voices and ideas shared challenged us to think bravely about our future direction. We are confident that this plan truly reflects your feedback and our values and vision.

Robert Saint AM

Emeritus Professor and Chair, SA Museum Board



South Australian Biodiversity Gallery,
image by Repeater Productions

South Australia's Museum

The South Australian Museum is a hub of community identity that preserves cultural, zoological, and geological heritage, safeguards collective memory, and generates knowledge through research. The Museum educates across generations and presents many different scientific and cultural perspectives and ideas, offering accessible, lifelong learning that encourages engagement and critical thinking through multiple perspectives. Through the sharing and exhibiting of our collections and knowledge born of research, the Museum connects us to the past, helping us understand who we are, where we come from, how our environment has changed, and continues to change, and how to approach present and future challenges.

The Museum fosters democratic dialogue by creating spaces where complex issues can be explored safely and respectfully. It also strengthens social cohesion and belonging by documenting shared experiences as well as the diversity that shapes our society. Through careful research, thoughtful interpretation and inclusive programming, the Museum transforms its collections into meaningful experiences, bridging scholarship and everyday life, empowering the public to reflect on the past and imagine better futures.

The Museum also acknowledges that its history is entwined with colonial systems and practices that have shaped how collections were formed, interpreted and displayed. Many collections were acquired during periods of profound injustice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other First Nations people, including dispossession, cultural disruption and the removal of ancestors and cultural materials. Truth-telling about this history is essential to creating a safe, just and respectful place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Marine South Australia



Our coastal waters are part of southern Australia's unique marine environment.

Most of the marine plants and animals living here are endemic - found nowhere else in the world.

Cold, nutrient-rich upwellings of deep water along the South Australian coast make this part of the ocean particularly productive and support an important fishing industry.

Museum in a Box

A free play space for visitors under 5

Help us care for this space

- Children must be supervised
- Please pick up after yourself
- Report damaged items to staff

By openly examining our past, listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and committing to culturally grounded governance and practice, the Museum strengthens its role as a place of honesty, healing and shared responsibility. The history of the past will be reconciled and our engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities will be improved.

The Museum is a dynamic archive of the State's cultures, stories, science, and history, connecting generations through illumination of Country, culture and discovery. Its iconic North Terrace building is a cherished civic landmark where memory and learning meet. Within its sandstone walls, South Australians encounter Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, First Nations cultures from other countries, our deep natural history and world-class research that fosters curiosity and understanding. The Museum's physical presence anchors community identity and public access to heritage, offering a space for reflection, learning and inspiration.

As a custodian of state, national and international collections of cultural and natural heritage significance, the South Australian Museum has a proud 169-year history as a place where families learn and grow together.

The Museum is part of the State's critical infrastructure for education, health, environment and economy. Its collections are evidence for use in scientific and humanities research; its research informs biodiversity and climate policy; its programs develop the next generation of scientists and innovators.

The Museum's strategic plan is the roadmap for a future where outstanding collections and research fascinate, educate and connect us with our deep natural and cultural past, engaging us with the present and inspiring us to shape the future.

Strategic Plan overview

Our 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.

Our 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.



Our 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.

Our values

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

2025-2030 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

Delivery of the strategic priorities

- Enable people and build a thriving workplace culture
- Create a sustainable future



Ediacaran Fossils Gallery,
image by Repeater Productions

Strategic Priority

Care for and share our collections

Museum collections are dynamic knowledge systems, expanding in scale, relevance, and the insights they generate. The Museum cares for globally significant, irreplaceable collections and maintains authoritative datasets that deepen our understanding and inform effective management of complex natural systems.

We will care for our cultural and scientific collections to the highest international standards. We will share them through access and partnerships and establish priorities for collection growth that inform and are informed by research priorities.

Objectives

- Set clear priorities for the development and management of collections that inform and are informed by research priorities.
- Strengthen the long-term care, protection and sustainability of collections.
- Digitise priority collections and make data globally discoverable.
- Deliver increased access to collections across South Australia through partnerships with regional and remote communities.

Outcomes

- Collections are safe, digitised and accessible to communities, researchers and educators.
- Growth in collections is strategically planned, and collection size is proactively managed.
- Touring and loan programs and On Country access models operating.

MINERALS

Minerals and Meteorites
Gallery, image by Sia Duff





**Museum staff member,
image by Randy Larcombe**

Strategic Priority

Research to serve our community

Research at the Museum is foundational to our purpose and public value. We will serve the public by prioritising research that is of importance to South Australia, informs the Museum's collections, enhances policy relevance and positions research as the engine that connects collections to discovery, learning, conservation and societal benefit.

We will make science and research visible, inclusive and transformative, bringing discovery to life and inviting people to explore, question and learn.

Objectives

- Provide strategic direction for research that informs and enhances the Museum's collections, aligns with Government priorities and serves the South Australian community.
- Formalise mutually beneficial collaboration agreements with universities, and other partners.
- Develop innovative approaches to enhancing public engagement with, and contribution to, research to inspire new generations to understand and explore research.

Outcomes

- The Museum is recognised nationally for research, research translation and public science.
- The Museum is a hub for public engagement with research through a high level of visitation and participation in citizen science.
- Policy influence in biodiversity and conservation, geodiversity, climate, health and culture is evident.

Strategic Priority

Lead with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander embodied knowledge

Leadership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff will ground decision-making in cultural authority and ethical stewardship, transforming the Museum into a responsive and trusted cultural partner and place of belonging.

We will place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural authority and knowledge at the core of all that we do. Truth-telling, restitution, healing, governance and cultural continuity will guide our relationships, decisions and outcomes.

Objectives

- Provide enhanced career pathways and leadership roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through employment, capacity building and professional development programs.
- Develop partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that respect cultural authority and provide transparent and robust engagement to the benefit of all partners.
- Deliver repatriation and restitution with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, guided by local protocols and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP).
- Strengthen the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge in collections and public programs and explore appropriate intersections with research.
- Co-design education and learning experiences that amplify truth, healing, cultural knowledge and expertise.

Outcomes

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and roles integrated at governance and operational levels.
- Increased productive and mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations established between the Museum and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Community trust restored, national reputation for truth-telling and cultural integrity established.
- Tangible reciprocity through community-led research, access and care.



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



Strategic Priority

Educate, engage, inspire and connect communities

Engagement, education and public access transform collections and research into experiences that spark curiosity, build skills and deepen cultural understanding across all ages.

We will be a welcoming, vibrant and inclusive civic space, where everyone feels a sense of belonging, wellbeing and connection to science, culture and each other. We will enhance our engagement with school students through innovative programs.

Objectives

- Deliver a dynamic, engaging, inspiring and relevant exhibition program that draws on collections and research and responds to contemporary issues.
- Strengthen partnerships with universities, industry, educational organisations and diverse communities to enable co-designed public programs and support research, education and collaboration.
- Renew and enhance permanent exhibitions to improve both on-site and online access and engagement.
- Engage with the cultural precinct and broader cultural sector to support cross-institutional and cross-sector collaboration.

Outcomes

- Broadened audience reach and growth in engagement, visitation and inclusivity.
- Increased regional and school participation.
- Active collaboration agreements with key partner organisations and closer collaboration with other cultural precinct institutions.

Delivery of the strategic priorities

Enable people and build a thriving workplace culture

We will create a workplace grounded in trust, respect and purpose, where staff, volunteers and Honoraries feel valued and aligned to a shared mission.

Objectives

- Align our people, culture and ways of working with the Museum's values and strategic direction.
- Ensure transparency, accountability, collaboration and consultative decision-making across the organisation.
- Support excellence through ongoing professional growth and development.
- Maintain effective workload planning and prioritisation to support strategic objectives and a safe, sustainable work environment.

Outcomes

- United, motivated, collaborative workforce with a high rate of staff satisfaction and wellbeing.
- Volunteers and Honoraries engaged as essential partners with a high level of retention and satisfaction.
- Strategic staff recruitment in place.



Museum staff members,
image by
Repeater
Productions

Create a sustainable future

We will operate ethically and efficiently to achieve financial stability. We will optimise the usage and activation of Museum assets and infrastructure and champion environmental sustainability.

Objectives

- Ensure financial stability to support the Museum's strategic objectives.
- Maintain transparent financial planning, budgeting and reporting, including accountability to donors in collaboration with the SA Museum Foundation.
- Enhance operational efficiency and drive continuous improvement across all functions of the Museum.
- Advance environmental sustainability through strategic planning and organisational practices.

Outcomes

- Transparent financial planning, budgeting and reporting, including working with the SA Museum Foundation to provide transparent reporting to donors, in operation.
- Agile, efficient, accountable and responsible decision making occurs throughout the Museum.
- A reduction in utilities and waste intensity.
- Balanced revenue mix and operating resilience improved.



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