

National Cultural Policy Submission

The Australian National Maritime Museum (ANMM) is uniquely placed to capture and communicate the spirit of our island nation. Situated at Darling Harbour in Sydney, on the Bamal and Badu of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, we are home to a distinctive floating fleet and the National Maritime Collection. Our exhibitions, programs and educational activities are dedicated to telling the stories that explore who we are as a nation and as a culture, as shaped by the seas.

Our current approach engages all five pillars shaping the National Cultural Policy, and we support the vision and objectives of a National Cultural Policy, recognising its social, cultural and economic impact at a time of geopolitical and climate uncertainty.

Australia has a diverse, skilled and talented creative sector that produces powerful art and culture, and supports many forms of storytelling. At its best it builds engagement, wellbeing and cohesion within and across communities, and drives innovation. It can bring people together, encouraging us to explore new ideas, to examine different perspectives and to engage with change.

Museums are well placed to play a leadership role in realising the sector's potential for connecting and enriching all Australians. Research¹ undertaken in 2021 shows that *at a time when trust in most sources of information is declining, museums have proven resilient, retaining their status as super trusted institutions. Australians see museums as a trusted social intermediary with the citizenry uniquely placed to perform five key roles in community governance:*

- *fostering critical educated citizens in their areas of expertise;*
- *combating 'truth decay' in their areas of expertise;*
- *providing safe spaces for enabling community participation on historical, social and environmental issues;*
- *ensuring that the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented; and,*

¹ Museums as guardians of our civic culture – what museums could and should do by Prof Mark Evans and Council for Australian Museum directors

- *there is majority support for delivering programmes of various kinds to help integrate marginalised groups into the community and give voice to their current needs and aspirations for the future.*

However current funding levels threaten the capacity of the Australian National Maritime Museum to contribute to the revitalization of Australia's economic and cultural activities.

1. First Nations first

Stories of First Nations maritime culture, both Saltwater and Freshwater, are woven through all that we do. The museum has a wealth of knowledge and expertise on First Nations histories and stories. Examples include *Mariw Minaral (Spiritual Patterns)* by Alick Tipoti and *Deep Time*, which reveals our continent's deep time history through sharing Indigenous knowledges as well as through modern science and archaeology.

Improving and increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander storytelling and employment within the sector is essential. Developing industry specific vocational training opportunities in cultural institutions would be advantageous. Collecting institutions need capacity to provide more opportunities for First Nations staff development and training, across all areas. For ANMM, collaborations with organisations such as Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, the National Art School, TAFE and beyond the sector, will allow us to create employment and education opportunities for First Nations cultural workers. We are also looking for ways to work with and recruit from regional communities.

Collecting institutions with established First Nations collections need the resources to work with communities through their collections and ensure communities tell their own stories. There should be close collaboration with Indigenous organisations and communities to protect and promote their cultural heritage and increase Indigenous participation in museum activities. This in turn allows museums to think of how we manage our collections in a more contemporary way that may include repatriation and distributed models of ownership. As more Indigenous people seek to engage with international museums that hold Indigenous collections, National Collecting Institutions can provide support and understanding of institutional processes. A unified approach to terminology and continuous improvements in digital access to collections will create further learning opportunities.

2. A place for every story

National Collecting Institutions are places for telling the stories of all Australians, reflecting the diversity of Australia and building social cohesion. They allow people to come together to share and address relevant issues, providing a space for all voices.

The ANMM is dedicated to telling the stories of Australia's maritime history and making its collection accessible to all. In particular, our storytelling about settler cultures and migration and its impact to our Nation, in dialogue with First Nations peoples, presents a powerful tool for exploring belonging and identity in the island nation.

The *National Monument to Migration* collects the stories of migration to Australia. The story telling is both physical and digital in this national commemorative and interpretive program. Digital technologies are tools for museums to tell stories and share collections to new audiences as well as giving voice to all Australians through co-creation and engagement.

Another example is the Australian Register of Historic Vessels, a national collaboration with water-side communities around Australia featuring local storytelling to articulate national themes in a web program, events and exhibitions.

3. The centrality of the artist

Australian cultural institutions have a key role in supporting Australian artists as vital to our economic and cultural landscape. The ANMM is committed to working with artists to tell our maritime stories and interpret our collection. We provide space for artistic collaborations and performance, supporting both established and emerging artists:

- *Mariw Minaral (Spiritual Patterns)*: Alick Tipoti.
- *Deep Time*: includes many collaborations with First Nations artists such as Dhunna Dhukkar by Mulka Project, Yidinji Dancers commission, Sheldon Thomas' "Ninger".
- *Acoustic Life of Boatsheds*: in partnership with big hART and Sydney Festival, a site-specific music composed by musicians and sound artists inspired by the harbour's shipwrights and boatbuilders.

Ensuring strong institutions will enable a framework of national venues that can share and celebrate the work of our artists. It will allow institutions to support diversity of programming and be safe environments for art practice of all kinds.

People are the core asset of all cultural institutions. ANMM employees and volunteers are creative and dedicated. Artists and storytellers need support, and the cultural sector employs people with a variety of expertise, who all need professional development opportunity and to be celebrated, to generate a vibrant cultural sector. Fostering broad success will result in a thriving sector that supports artists and organisations.

4. Strong institutions

As strong and resilient national institutions, the ANMM and other NCIs can lead in building mutuality and connection between all Australians. Strong institutions, as keepers of our cultural memory and imagination, provide a safe space for people to explore the world and their place within it. Investing in these institutions will enrich people's lives.

ANMM is an 'audience focused' organisation, placing our visitors in the centre of all we do. Our water side location is our greatest asset, but it also creates challenges. Complex asset management requirements need ongoing investment and maintenance if we are to achieve our objectives and be a strong institution.

Sustainable, long-term collaborations and ongoing partnerships will be one of the ways we can strength our institutions collectively. Cooperation across all levels of government is essential for cultural institutions to realise their potential.

Strong NCIs can in turn foster and help strengthen smaller regional institutions around the country. For example, our Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme (MMAPS) supports other institutions through a grant and internship program (in consultation with OFTA). The scheme offers funding to regional museums and organisations to help preserve or display objects of national and historical maritime significance. It also supports staff or volunteers, from remote or regional organisations, to spend time learning specific skills and making valuable connections.

5. Reaching the audience

Museums are transforming into places of interaction, participation and engagement. The ANMM aims to be a lively and inspiring place to visit, at our Darling Harbour site, our travelling exhibitions and online. We aim to create meaningful and sustained interactions with people and communities wherever they may be in Australia and overseas.

The ANMM has a long history of collaboration, touring exhibitions and outreach programs with regional museums and organisations across Australia. The opportunity to expand on this program and integrate with our digital outreach strategies would allow our stories to reach even more people both in Australia and abroad. For example, our upcoming Indigenous web portal will showcase the museums history of engagement with Indigenous culture through images, text, video and most importantly the stories of people and their contributions.

The ANMM has always had a strong international profile. There are many opportunities to draw on the museum's collections, reputation and skills to promote international cultural engagement and diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy enables connections with other nations and cultural links build understanding. It is recommended that NCIs work more collaboratively with DFAT, increase investment and maximize the opportunities for NCIs to support Australia's diplomatic, trade and defence priorities.

The National Collecting Institutions underpin Australia's cultural and knowledge economies. They can provide the infrastructure for innovation, and investing in their future will support artists and creative practitioners, stimulate the appreciation and the growth of the cultural sector and Australia.