

Version Control

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1. PURPOSE

This Policy details how the Western Australian Museum develops, maintains, and makes its collections accessible. The purpose of the Policy is to ensure that the WA Museum develops and manages its collection in accordance with all relevant legislation, industry standards, and ethical guidelines, and that the collection is developed and managed sustainably.

2. SCOPE

The Policy applies to all Western Australian Museum employees (whether by way of appointment, secondment, casual contract, fixed term contract or traineeship). It also extends to Honorary Associates, Research Associates, Fellows, volunteers, and members of the Board of Trustees. The Policy is a publicly accessible document and is available to members of the public on the museum website and will be supplied on request.

3. DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this document, the following definitions apply:

Term	Definition
Acquisition	The process by which collection material is obtained by the Museum. This may be by donation, bequest, purchase, field collection, or transfer.
Acquisition Committee	A committee comprising relevant Museum staff which decides upon proposals of object(s) donation and deaccession and disposals. The Acquisition Committee is managed by a Terms of Reference
Ancestral Remains	The physical remains, whole or in part, and including skeletal, tissue material, and samples of hair, of deceased individuals from past generations of Indigenous peoples.
Archaeological antiquity	Object(s) of cultural significance created in ancient times, usually before the Middle Ages (c. 500CE), retrieved from archaeological contexts, often from sites which are now protected.
Collection	The Western Australian Museum's collection of acquired items. This includes objects, archives, photographs, film, audio, and born digital formats. Items on loan or held on behalf of a third party are not included.

Corporate Collection	Items gifted to the Museum in the course of events or corporate exchange visits. They may not meet the criteria for acquisition to the State Collection but nevertheless demonstrate important moment or relationship in institutional history.
Custodial Care	An arrangement where an individual, community, or organisation has requested the Museum holds an object on their behalf for the purpose of care and storage. This may be on a short or long term basis, but does not involve a transfer of ownership to the Museum. Most often used in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections.
Deaccession	The formal process of permanently removing an accessioned item(s) from the Museum's collections
Deed of Gift	A deed, signed by both the Museum and the owner/legal representative, in which legal title of an object(s) is transferred to the Museum on donation of that item to the collection
Destructive analysis	The destruction of part or whole of an object or specimen for research purposes, resulting in either irreversible changes to the item to be analysed or its complete destruction.
Disposal	The permanent physical removal of either deaccessioned or unaccessioned items from the Museum's collections
Loans	The temporary physical transfer of specimens or object(s) to or from the Museum to another organisation for exhibition purposes or scientific research, where no transfer of ownership is involved.
Preventive Conservation	Indirect, non-interventive actions take to mitigate, slow, or prevent damage and deterioration to the Museum's collections
Registration	The process of numbering and recording information about an object(s) or specimen(s)
Secret and/or sacred material	Objects that are secret or sacred to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples and therefore have access restrictions placed upon them based on knowledge recognised by custom and ceremony as established by Traditional Owners, and often determined by gender
Specimen(s)	A portion, piece, or segment of tissue, meteorites, zoological, botanical, or geological material.

State Collection	The permanent accessioned collections of the Western Australian Museum, central to its mission of research, exhibition, and community engagement.
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4. POLICY STATEMENT

The Museum is committed to sustainable, intentional, and ethical collecting practices. This policy describes the rationale, definitions, collecting principles and structure of the Museum's collections. It establishes the intellectual and administrative principles that support the collection of scientific, historical, and cultural material by the Museum.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Trustees

Responsible for:

- Delegating responsibility to designated Museum staff for the acquisition, care and management of Museum collections
- Approval of proposals for deaccession and disposal of collection material
- Decisions on items valued above the CEO's financial delegation level

Chief Executive Officer

Responsible for:

- Responsibility for applying and interpreting the policy and adjudicating on contentious issues.

Director Culture and Communities

Responsible for:

- Management and administration of Acquisition Committee.
- Overseeing the development, documentation, interpretation, research, and care of the Anthropology & Archaeology, History, and Maritime Heritage collections
- Ensuring staff knowledge and compliance with this policy, and other relevant legislation and industry guidelines

Director Science

Responsible for:

- Overseeing the development, documentation, interpretation, research, and care of the Aquatic Zoology, Terrestrial Zoology, Earth and Planetary Sciences, and Genetic Resources collections
- Ensuring staff knowledge and compliance with this policy, and other relevant legislation and industry guidelines

Director Collections Management and Conservation

Responsible for:

- Management of the collection storage spaces and Collections and Research site
- Management of conservation resources and staff
- Ensuring staff knowledge and compliance with this policy, and other relevant legislation and industry guidelines
- Overseeing development, documentation and care of Library collection

Curatorial staff

Responsible for:

- Research, assessment and recommendation of items for acquisition to the collection;
- Appropriately registering and documenting items according to processes outlined in departmental procedures;
- Obtaining appropriate permits;
- Undertaking research on items in the collection;
- Providing access to the collection and associated information for members of the public and researchers.

Conservation staff

Responsible for:

- Undertaking environmental and pest monitoring activities for storage and display spaces;
- Undertaking preventive conservation and treatments of items in the State collection;
- Provide advice on conservation implications of proposed acquisitions.

6. PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

6.1 Ethics and collecting practices

Museum employees must abide by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics with regard to collecting practices and procedures. Materials Conservation work will be carried out in line with the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM) – Code of Ethics.

Museum employees must not be in conflict of interest with the collecting purposes and interests of the WA Museum and must declare any such potential conflict.

6.2 Legislation

Some areas of the Museum's collecting activities are directed by legislative responsibilities. The Museum administers the *Maritime Archaeology Act 1973*, and is the delegated authority of the Commonwealth *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018*.

The Museum only acquires material for its collections in accordance with relevant international, national and state legislation. In addition, the management of First Nations collections is consistent with relevant articles of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

Under the *Museum Act 1969*, meteorites found in Western Australia are the property of the Crown and are vested in the Museum, regardless of location.

Materials Conservation is undertaken within the AICCM Code of Ethics and Code of Practice.

6.3 Western Australian Museum's collections

The collections of the WA Museum are central to its purpose, vision, and strategic endeavours and enable the performance of its functions, and are central to its governing Act. They fall into three broad categories:

6.3.1 Culture and Communities

The humanities collections are administered through the Culture and Communities Directorate, comprising the following departments:

- Anthropology and Archaeology, including Aboriginal Cultures, archaeology, and World Cultures collections
- History, including social history collections relating to the history of Western Australia
- Maritime Heritage, including maritime archaeology and maritime history

The collecting focus of each of these departments is outlined in the Associated Procedures.

6.3.2 Science

Science collections comprise both wet and dry specimens, as well as tissue and DNA obtained from specimens, across the following departments:

- Aquatic Zoology
- Terrestrial Zoology
- Earth and Planetary Sciences
- Genetic Resources

The collecting areas of each of these departments are outlined in the Associated Procedures.

6.3.3 Library

The library collection consists of published and unpublished materials used for research. It includes books, journals and periodicals, old and rare books, field notes, archives and other published and unpublished material relating to the research activities and history of the Museum. The Librarian also manages a small art collection.

6.3.4 Corporate collections

From time to time the Museum is offered items which do not meet the criteria for acquisition to the State Collection but which nevertheless have institutional significance. These items form a corporate collection, and are usually those associated with individuals or events at the museum, e.g. gifted to or collected by a member of the executive team at a Museum or other public event, or which detail a person or event from the Museum's history and events. Items acquired to the corporate collection are not processed through the Acquisition Committee, but can be referred to the corporate collection by the Committee. The collection is documented separately to the State Collection. Disposal of such items would be considered disrespectful.

7. ACQUISITIONS TO THE COLLECTION

The Museum may acquire items for the state collection through donation, purchase, bequest, surrender (where items are subject to legislation administered by the Museum, or others), exchange, or through field collecting activities. The Museum may collect scientific specimens, tissue samples, 3D object and archives, as well as associated metadata and intangible cultural heritage such as oral histories, songs, stories and rituals.

As outlined in the Museum's Ancestral Remains Policy and Secret and/or Sacred Materials Policy, the Museum does not actively collect and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human remains or secret and/or sacred Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Material.

The Museum may in appropriate circumstances hold material on behalf of traditional owners. Such instances will be managed through a custodial care agreement between the Museum and the relevant community.

The Museum does not generally acquire material to which conditions are attached, such as a requirement for permanent display. Exceptions may include instances where custodial care is necessary, statutory obligations apply, or there are community sensitivities.

Once a donor has signed a Deed of Gift form, legal title is wholly transferred to the Museum. The donor retains no legal rights in objects donated to the Museum without restriction.

Unaccessioned items for which no acquisition documentation can be found may be designated “found in collection”. All avenues for documentation must first be exhausted, including historic registers, records, receipt books, and contact with other possible sources of information. For items in the Culture & Communities collections, these should be assessed by the Acquisition Committee where appropriate, and accessioned or disposed of following the Committee’s decision, in accordance with the Deaccession and Disposal Policy. For specimens in the Science collections, these may be registered into the collection at the discretion of the relevant curator.

The Museum adheres to the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* and the *Animal Welfare (Scientific Purposes) Regulation 2003* in the collecting of animals relevant to the legislation. The Museum will hold authorised collecting permits from appropriate regional, state, and commonwealth authorities relevant to its collecting activities.

7.1 Due diligence

The Museum exercises all possible means to establish the veracity of previous ownership before acquiring material for its collection. It exercises due diligence before acquiring material, including undertaking extensive research on the item’s provenance, as set out in the *Australian Best Practice Guide to Collecting Cultural Material*. Due diligence also extends to thoroughly evaluating and acting upon any new information that raises questions about the provenance or authenticity of previously acquired objects. The Museum pays particular attention to provenance information associated with periods or locations of known conflict, or where material is covered by state or federal legislation.

The Museum does not seek to acquire for its collections any material through any means unless satisfied that it can acquire valid title to the material and understands the history and provenance of that material.

The Museum does not acquire any material unless it is satisfied that it has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin in violation of that country’s law.

The Museum does not acquire archaeological antiquities where there is any suspicion that the circumstances of the recovery of the item involved a failure to follow appropriate legal procedures, such as reporting finds to the appropriate authorities, or where the site is subject to legal protections.

The Museum does not acquire any material that has been collected, sold, or otherwise transferred in contravention of applicable national or international laws, regulations, or treaties.

7.2 Significance criteria

The Museum uses the methodology and criteria outlined in *Significance 2.0* to establish the significance of items proposed for acquisition to the Culture and Communities collections.

In order to be considered significant, an item must meet at least one of the primary criteria. Degree of significance is then further established through the comparative criteria. The criteria as outlined in *Significance 2.0* and applied to potential acquisitions are:

Primary:

- Historic: the item/s is associated with a particular person, group, event, place or activity of importance; demonstrates an historic theme, process or pattern of life; contributes to understanding a period, place, activity, industry, person or event.
- Aesthetic or artistic: the item is well designed, crafted or made; is a good example of a style, design, artistic movement or artist's work; original or innovative in its design; beautiful, pleasing, or well proportioned; shows a high degree of technical accomplishment; depicts a subject, person, place, activity or event of interest or importance.
- Scientific or research: the item is currently or will be of interest to researchers
- Social or spiritual: the item is of particular value to a community or group today; the item is kept in the public eye or its meaning is still kept alive for a group or community; the community has been directly consulted on the importance of the item to them; it embodies beliefs, ideas, customs, traditions, practices or stories that are important to a particular group or community

Comparative:

- Provenance: the item is well documented or recorded for its class or type; it can be established who made, owned, or used the item; its place of origin is well documented; there is a clear chain of ownership; the provenance is reliable
- Rarity or representativeness: the item has unusual qualities that distinguish it from other items in its class or category; it is an unusual or particularly fine example of its type; it is singular, unique, or endangered; it is typical or characteristic; it is particularly well documented for its class or group. Note, an item may be both rare and representative.
- Condition or completeness: the item is in good condition for its type; it is intact or complete; it shows repairs, alterations, or other evidence of the way it was used; is in original, unrestored condition
- Interpretive potential: the item is relevant to the Museum's mission, purpose, policy and programs; it relates to other items in the collection or a collection theme; it helps to interpret aspects of its place or context

7.3 Other considerations

Alongside the significance of the item, consideration must be given to:

- Capacity: the ability of the WA Museum to provide appropriate storage and/or display facilities according to the specific requirements of the item (size, materiality, ongoing maintenance or conservation etc). This includes capacity of the Museum or donor to safely deliver the item from its location to the Museum.
- Conflict of interest: if any previous relationship of the donor to the museum or other undue influence is brought to bear on acceptance of an item(s)
- Collection context: how the proposed item(s) compliment, duplicate, or fill gaps in the existing collection, or is better suited to another institution or community.
- Hazardous materials: if the item contains any substances which may be hazardous to human health or safety. Advice should be sought from relevant authorities where necessary.

7.4 Acquisition Committee

Decisions on the acquisition of items to collections in the Culture and Communities Directorate will be made by the Acquisition Committee, consisting of curatorial staff from across the Directorate. The Committee meets once a month to consider offers of donation and is chaired by the Director Culture and Communities. Curators are required to prepare a significance assessment proforma in order to present their recommendation to the Committee. Roles, responsibilities, and the processes of the Committee are laid out in the Acquisition Committee Terms of Reference.

7.5 Acquisitions to the Science collections

The addition of specimens to the Science Directorate collections occurs in a number of ways including field collecting by Curatorial and Collections staff, through collaborations with other scientific institutions, industry partners bound by permitting requirements, or donations from individuals. Because of the diversity of collections within the Directorate that span all of the animal kingdom, as well as fossils, minerals and meteorites, the decision as to accept a specimen into the collection is made by the Curator responsible for that collection, who is the expert in their discipline. The decision to add to the collection on a field trip is done with the view to address specific gaps in the collection in question by targeting particular geographic areas or geological formations, species that are poorly represented or to include those that are required for current research projects by taxonomic experts.

7.6 Custodial or Repository Care

The Museum may be requested to take custodial care of items on behalf of an individual, organisation, or community. Such arrangements are made in order to ensure the ongoing care of items which are unable to reside, for either the short or long term, with their relevant legal owners.

Such items are not formally accessioned into the collection, nor are they considered part of the state's collection. They are managed through custodial care agreements, which are different to loan agreements.

Items subject to a custodial care agreement will be given the same level of care as that given to accessioned material in the state collection.

Further procedures for custodial care arrangements are outlined in the Loans Policy and Procedures.

8. DEACCESSION AND DISPOSAL

The Museum recognizes that deaccession and disposal are a necessary part of intentional and sustainable collections management and strategic collection development. Both processes are undertaken at the WA Museum with full transparency and within the framework of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics and industry guidelines. Deaccessioning and disposal of collection material is governed by the Museum's Deaccession and Disposal Policy.

8.1 Destructive analysis

An item's primary significance may lie in the information which can be obtained through analysis, which may result in partial loss of material or complete destruction. In the event an analysis requires complete destruction, the information obtained from the analysis will remain part of the collection record for the specimen or item, and the specimen or item will be treated as a deaccession following the Deaccession and Disposal Policy.

The Museum will not carry out or approve the conduct of invasive research on any human ancestral remains, modified remains, or burial goods in its care, unless approved by the relevant source community. Communities may undertake scientific testing such as DNA analysis on cultural material in the Museum's care but are advised to seek reliable information on the risks and limitations of such testing.

Further information on destructive analysis may be found in the Loans Policy and Procedures and the Disposal and Deaccession Policy.

8.2 Repatriation

As outlined in the Museum's Ancestral Remains Policy, Secret and/or Sacred Materials Policy, and Non-Indigenous Human Remains Policy, the Museum supports the principle of repatriation of ancestral remains and secret and/or sacred materials.

The Museum undertakes an active repatriation programme to return ancestral remains and secret and/or sacred items to source communities.

Requests for return of material other than ancestral remains and secret and/or sacred items is covered in the Return of Cultural Materials Policy.

9. ACCESS

Under the *Museum Act 1969* Section 9, the Museum is required to make its collections accessible “through display and other use of collections and through knowledge derived from collections”. The Museum can make its collections accessible through:

- Display at its public sites
- Loans to approved institutions or organisations
- Provision to researchers and members of the public on request
- Online databases, exhibitions and other digital initiatives, including provision of faunal collection data to the Atlas of Living Australia and faunal genetic data to the International Nucleotide Sequence Database Collaboration
- Dissemination of research findings through academic and general avenues

The Museum is committed to making information about its collections, and the process by which it acquires its collections, available to the public. This includes this policy, which is a public document.

Conventions and protocols may restrict access to some information, including that related to the location of vulnerable cultural or environmental sites. Access to and use of historical, ethnological and archaeological items must consider cultural sensitivities.

Some items in the Museum’s care, such as ancestral remains or secret and/or sacred material, may have restrictions imposed upon them. Such restrictions extend to digital information and images relating to those items.

The Museum may also make its collections available for commercial purposes, provided that such use does not compromise the integrity and/or preservation of the items in question, nor expose the museum to the risk of loss of its reputation, or impinge on intellectual property rights.

9.1 Research

The Museum will undertake research on its collections, and make its collections accessible to other researchers. All research is to be conducted within legal and ethical frameworks. External researchers accessing the collection must comply with all use and handling directions from Museum staff, will supply the museum with data or other information generated through their research, and will include credit/acknowledgement of the Museum in any publication, performance, artwork, or public outcome. The Museum will make its research findings accessible through exhibition, public programs, academic papers, media, training, or any other public and professional avenues as appropriate.

9.2 Exhibitions, display, and outreach

The Museum interprets its collections and shares its research with visitors and remote users through exhibitions, publications, demonstrations, events, and digital and virtual means.

The Museum will use its collections for permanent, temporary, and travelling exhibitions, and maintain displays of its collections at its public sites.

When selecting objects for exhibition/display, consideration must be given to its condition and suitability for display, as well as any restrictions or cultural considerations.

9.3 Loans

The Museum will lend items from its collections to other organisations (outward loans), and will seek to borrow items from other organisations or individuals (inward loans). All loans are administered through the Loans Policy and Procedures.

Loans, both inward and outward, must be for a purpose (such as exhibition, research, education etc.), and must be for a fixed term.

Items or specimens may be deposited with the museum for identification, comment, attribution, or other investigation. Such deposits are managed through the Loans Policy and Procedures.

10. COLLECTIONS CARE AND CONSERVATION

To achieve long-term preservation of the collections the Museum will:

- Provide systems and staff to monitor the state of the objects, environments and buildings.
- Ensure that the conservation of collection objects will be carried out or overseen by appropriately qualified professional conservators.
- Take measures to slow deterioration and to manage and improve the state of the objects, environments and buildings where monitoring indicates deficiencies in current practices.

While all conservation activities are directed towards prolonging the existence of objects and specimens, minimal intervention and preventive conservation is practiced by Museum staff to safeguard as far as possible the material integrity and significance of each object. Museum staff may however, intervene to change an object in the following circumstances:

- To ensure the long-term preservation of an object by carrying out stabilisation procedures

- To aid the interpretation of an object which may involve the reassembly of displaced components, the removal of extraneous matter or re-integration using new materials, and
- To enable the study of an object by taking minimal samples.

All changes made to an object will be justified and recorded by Museum staff, with the information included in the relevant object database. The intervention chosen will have the fewest long-term effects and will be the minimum necessary to achieve the stated aims. When dealing with material of other cultures, where possible, conservators will carry out treatment following prior consultation with the owner community.

Items coming into the collection, either as acquisitions, loans, or transitioning between Museum sites, will be quarantined to prevent pest or other infestation within the collections. Storage and display facilities will provide environmental conditions and security arrangements compatible with the preservation of the collections. Environmental monitoring and Integrated Pest Management will be maintained.

11. LEGAL AND COMPLIANCE CONTEXT

Legislation and regulations

- *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*
- *Animal Welfare Act 2002*
- *Animal Welfare (Scientific Purposes) Regulation 2003*
- *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES Convention)*
- *Heritage Act 2018*
- *Maritime Archaeology Act 1973*
- *Museum Act 1969*
- *Privacy and Responsible Information Sharing Act 2024*
- *Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*
- *State Records Act 2000 (WA)*
- *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018*
- *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property 1970 (1970 UNESCO Convention)*

Creative Industries Tourism and Sport policies, procedures and guidelines

- Code of Conduct

Department / Museum policies, procedures and guidelines

- Ancestral Remains Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Deaccession and Disposal Policy

- Departmental Procedures
- Loans Policy and Procedures
- Non-Indigenous Human Remains Policy
- Return of Cultural Materials Policy
- Secret and/or Sacred Materials Policy

Other related documents

- Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM) Code of Ethics
- Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities: principles and guidelines for Australian Museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage
- International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics
- National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries (2023)