

Deaccession and Disposal Policy

Version Control

Version	1.0
Approved by	Board of Trustees
Approval date	26 March 2026
Document owner	Director of Collections Management and Conservation
Rescissions and replacements	N/A
Next review date	26 March 2029
Museum Records Folder No.	26/418
Contact for queries	Scott Mitchell Director of Collections Management and Conservation E: scott.mitchell@museum.wa.gov.au

The electronic version of a Policy is the approved and most current.
Any printed version is uncontrolled and may not be current.

Contents

1. Purpose	3
2. Scope	3
3. Definitions	3
4. Policy Statement.....	4
5. Responsibilities	4
6. Legal and Compliance Context	5
7. Principles or guidelines	6
7.1 Deaccession criteria.....	6
7.2 Assessment of collection items for deaccession from Culture and Communities	7
7.3 Assessment of collection items/specimens for deaccession from Science collections	7
7.4 Disposal methods	7

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for the administrative and physical removal of an item from the WA Museum Collections, outline criteria for deaccession and methods of disposal and ensure compliance with legal, ethical, and cultural considerations.

2. SCOPE

The Policy applies to all Western Australian Museum employees (whether by way of appointment, secondment, casual, 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 should be made 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 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
Deaccession	The formal process of permanently removing an accessioned item(s) from the Museum's collections
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
Unaccessioned	Items which have not been formally accessioned into the Museum's collection. They typically do not have formal documentation and are not recorded in the database.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

The Museum recognises that deaccession and disposal are necessary activities 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 other industry guidelines. This policy ensures that any deaccessioning and disposal activities undertaken by the Museum are neither unwarranted, nor ill-considered.

All Museum employees are bound by the Creative Industries Tourism and Sport Code of Conduct.

Museum staff must be aware of and agree to the Museum's policies and procedures, as well as any state, national and international legislation relevant to the collections for which they are responsible. New staff are to be trained in the procedures of their department.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Trustees

Responsible for:

- Approval or rejection of the recommendation, based on curatorial expertise and advice and information provided by the CEO

Chief Executive Officer

Responsible for:

- Responsibility for applying and interpreting the policy and adjudicating on contentious issues
- Presenting recommendation for deaccession and disposal to the Board of Trustees for approval

Director Culture and Communities

Responsible for:

- Assist curatorial staff with the assessment of the legal, ethical, and policy context of proposed disposals
- Preparation of briefing note to the CEO providing the case made by the applicant and curatorial recommendation
- Chair Acquisition Committee
- Ensure adherence to this policy by Culture & Communities staff

Director Science

- Assist curatorial staff with the assessment of the legal, ethical, and policy context of proposed disposals
- Ensure adherence to this policy by Science staff

Acquisition Committee

Responsible for:

- Assessing and endorsing curatorial recommendations for deaccession and disposal for progression to CEO and Board of Trustees (for Culture and Communities collections)

Curatorial staff

Responsible for:

- Identifying items for potential deaccession and/or disposal
- Researching, compiling, and preparation of documentation to support recommendation for deaccession and provide suggested method of disposal
- In the case of Science departments, Heads of Departments are responsible for approving items for deaccession and disposal

6. LEGAL AND COMPLIANCE CONTEXT

Legislation and regulations

- *Firearms Act 1973*
- *Firearms Regulations 1974*
- *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*
- *Weapons Act 1999*

Creative Industries Tourism and Sport policies, procedures and guidelines

- Code of Conduct

Department / Museum policies, procedures and guidelines

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

Other related documents

- Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities: principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage
- *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (CITES Convention)
- ICOM Code of Ethics
- ICOM Guidelines on Deaccessioning
- National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries (2023)
- *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property 1970* (1970 UNESCO Convention)

7. PRINCIPLES OR GUIDELINES

All deaccession and disposal processes must take place in a transparent and ethical manner, according to the guidelines laid out in this document.

No member of Museum staff, volunteer, or member of the Board of Trustees may personally benefit from the removal of an item from the State collection. No member of Museum staff, volunteer, or member of the Board of Trustees may obtain an item deaccessioned and disposed of from the State collection.

Objects whose trade, movement, and ownership is governed by applicable laws or agreements, should only be disposed of in accordance with such laws or agreements. This may apply to weapons, natural history specimens, or archaeological or some cultural material.

7.1 Deaccession criteria

Items or specimens may be considered for deaccession under the following criteria:

- Understanding of the item's significance has changed, the item is no longer relevant to the Museum's mission and does not comply with the current collection policy, or is better suited to a more appropriate institution
- It is damaged beyond repair or the practical abilities of the Museum to undertake or fund the repair
- The conservation and storage costs are beyond the means of the Museum
- The item poses an unacceptably high risk to human safety or other items in the collection
- It lacks supporting information to enable proper identification or to establish its provenance and relevance to the collection
- In the case of biological or geological material, may be exchanged for the purposes of scientific research
- The item may be more valuable for advancing knowledge by destructive analysis

- A substantiated request for the return of the object to its original owner or their family is received. Further information on this process can be found in the Return of Cultural Objects Policy.

There is a strong presumption against deaccessioning of items obtained under the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program or Australian Tax Office Philanthropy Program. Gifts under the program are made on the basis that the item(s) will form part of the permanent collection. The donor has received a tax benefit for donation of the item, and therefore should not receive the item back through a deaccessioning and disposal process.

7.2 Assessment of collection items for deaccession from Culture and Communities

Relevant curatorial staff will assess items for deaccessioning using the categories in section 7.1. The assessment will be conducted with reference to this policy and the Collection Policy, and will outline the item's significance in comparison to the reason for deaccession. The assessment will also include the proposed method for disposal.

The prepared assessment will be presented to the Acquisition Committee. If the proposal is agreed to, the assessment will be approved by the Director Culture and Communities and forwarded to the CEO for presentation to the Board of Trustees.

Following approval of deaccession, a cooling off period of six months will normally be observed.

7.3 Assessment of collection items/specimens for deaccession from Science collections

Recommendations for deaccession from Science collections are to be made by the relevant Curator or Collection Manager, and approval sought from the relevant Head of Department. Destructive sampling of tissues is approved by Curator and Manager Genetic Resources. This is detailed in the Loans Policy and Procedures.

7.4 Disposal methods

Items approved for deaccession under the criteria outlined in Section 7.1 then need to be disposed of following any applicable cooling off period. Disposal should take place in a timely manner following the completion of the cooling off period.

There is a strong presumption of retaining items of significance, but which do not fit with the Collection Policy, in the public realm.

Items may be disposed of only using the following methods:

- Offer return to the donor, or donor's family where they are still contactable,

- Transferred to another appropriate public institution for the purposes of display or research.
- Transferred to another non-core collection within the Museum (e.g. handling or education collection)
- Destroyed or recycled (in the instance of deaccession due to condition, health risk, or destructive analysis)
- Sold by public auction if no other option is available. There is a strong presumption against this option and it is only to be undertaken as a last resort. Any funds raised must be reinvested in the collection from which the item was removed.

Method of disposal is determined by rationale for deaccessioning. Items deaccessioned due to potential health hazards should be destroyed and not returned to the donor or offered to another institution.

Hazardous materials should only be disposed of in accordance with the relevant safety requirements and by certified suppliers.