



Version Control

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1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline how the Museum will care for and manage human remains in its collection which are not identified as Ancestral Remains. Such remains have usually been recovered from historical or archaeological contexts or surrendered to the Museum.

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 should be 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
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.
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
Disposal	The permanent physical removal of either deaccessioned or unaccessioned items from the Museum's collections
Human Remains	The physical remains, whole or in part, and including skeletal, tissue material, and samples of hair, of <i>Homo sapiens</i> .
Non-Indigenous Human Remains	The physical remains, whole or in part, and including skeletal, tissue material, and samples of hair, of deceased individuals from non-Indigenous backgrounds.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

The Museum is committed to providing the highest possible standards of care and for human remains in its collections and to ensure that appropriate ethical practices are observed.

All human remains in the Museum's care are considered sensitive, and must be treated with respect and dignity. The Museum does not collect Ancestral Remains. Please see the Ancestral Remains Policy for further details on the management and care of Ancestral Remains.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Trustees

Responsible for:

- Approval of requests to deaccession Non-Indigenous Human Remains from the collections

Chief Executive Officer

Responsible for:

- Responsibility for applying and interpreting this policy and adjudicating on contentious issues
- Deciding on justification for display of Non-Indigenous Human Remains on a case-by-case basis

Director Culture and Communities

Responsible for:

- Providing justification to the Chief Executive Officer for the display of Non-Indigenous Human Remains
- Ensuring compliance with this policy by Culture and Communities staff

Heads of Department (Anthropology & Archaeology; Maritime Heritage)

Responsible for:

- Ensuring staff, volunteers and visiting researchers comply with this policy;
- Ensuring collections containing human remains are managed according to this and other relevant policies;
- Assessing and granting requests to access Non-Indigenous Human Remains, images, and/or information to independent researchers;
- Assessing and granting requests for testing on Non-Indigenous Human Remains by independent researchers;

- Requesting testing on Non-Indigenous Human Remains in the collection when deemed necessary.

Curatorial staff (Anthropology & Archaeology; Maritime Heritage)

Responsible for:

- Handling human remains respectfully;
- Undertaking research on Non-Indigenous Human Remains.
- Proposal and interpretation of human remains for public display

6. PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

6.1 Acquisition and display

The Museum has acquired Non-Indigenous Human Remains primarily through archaeological excavation. In some instances, Non-Indigenous Human Remains have been deposited with the Museum as part of its functions prior to the establishment of the *Coroners Act 1996*.

The Museum does not actively seek to acquire Non-Indigenous Human Remains, but may do so if unearthed in the course of an archaeological excavation and in accordance with the appropriate legislation. Non-Indigenous Human Remains may also be acquired through donation as part of an archaeological collection.

Non-Indigenous Human Remains will be registered and documented to the same standard as other collection items. Restrictions may be placed on some images or information.

Non-Indigenous Human Remains may be displayed for interpretation purposes, and where cultural beliefs and practices do not preclude such display. Any such display must provide sufficient and appropriate warning for visitors to inform them of the presence of human remains and be displayed in such a way that visitors can choose not to view the remains. Human remains should only be displayed when the information can be conveyed in no other way, and there is a compelling curatorial justification to do so. Consultation will be made with any known genealogical descendants, cultural communities, or nations concerned and their wishes and practices taken into account.

6.2 Housing Non-Indigenous Human Remains

Non-Indigenous Human Remains will be housed in a secure area, separate from the Museum's general collection. The storage location should be clearly marked as restricted access.

Non-Indigenous Human Remains will be housed in appropriate storage materials and not openly stored on shelving.

6.3 Access

The Museum will only provide access to Non-Indigenous Human Remains where it can be demonstrated that there are appropriate cultural or other legitimate reasons.

Researchers may request access to Non-Indigenous Human Remains for research purposes. They will make their data and other information generated through their research available to the Museum in a timely manner and acknowledge the Museum in all related publications.

6.4 Research on Non-Indigenous Human Remains

All research conducted in relation to Non-Indigenous Human Remains, by the Museum or visiting researchers, will comply with recognized and appropriate ethical research guidelines.

The Museum may undertake scientific testing on Non-Indigenous Human Remains to establish information which will assist with understanding the remains, such as dating, age, sex, and ethnicity.

It is acknowledged that testing methods may be destructive and will therefore only be pursued when due consideration has been given to the value and likelihood of information yielded as a result of testing.

Removal of material for testing should only be undertaken by those qualified to do so, and testing should be undertaken by a reputable laboratory or testing facility. Any parts which will be removed or destroyed through testing processes will be documented and photographed prior to testing taking place, and a record kept of the justification for testing, sample location and size, sampling process, and full results of the analysis.

Researchers may request testing is undertaken on Non-Indigenous Human Remains in the Museum collection. Requests must be made in writing and include scientific justification. Permission is granted at the discretion of the relevant Head of Department.

The purpose of the research, the information likely to be yielded, and the damage/destruction of the required specimen will be taken into account. All associated costs will be the responsibility of the requesting researcher.

6.5 Deaccession, disposal and return

The Museum will not normally seek to deaccession and dispose of Non-Indigenous Human Remains from its collection. In very rare instances this may occur, such as where remains were surrendered to the Museum prior to the *Coroners Act 1996* and the Coroner and/or Western Australian Police wish to take possession of the remains. In this instance, the process for deaccession should be followed as outlined in the Deaccession and Disposal Policy. Non-Indigenous Human Remains will only be

released to the Coroner and/or WA Police, or appropriate authority from the country of origin.

Requests for return of Non-Indigenous Human Remains may be received from genealogical descendants, cultural communities, and nations. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis. All other requests for repatriation for Ancestral Remains are dealt with under the Ancestral Remains Policy

6.6 Discovery of human remains during fieldwork

Where human remains are found during the course of an archaeological excavation, under the *Coroners Act 1996* s.17(1) this must be immediately reported to the police and work in that area ceased. The Police, together with appointed experts, will determine the nature of the remains and, if deemed appropriate, grant permission for their removal by the Museum. No remains will be removed or further disturbed without permission from the Coroner.

If permission is granted and remains are removed, the police will be informed of the results of any testing undertaken.

7. LEGAL AND COMPLIANCE CONTEXT

Legislation and regulations

- *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*
- *Coroners Act 1996*
- *Heritage Act 2018*
- *Maritime Archaeology Act 1973*
- *Museum Act 1969*
- *Privacy and Responsible Information Sharing Act 2024*
- *State Records Act 2000 (WA)*
- *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018*

Creative Industries Tourism and Sport policies, procedures and guidelines

- Code of Conduct

Department / Museum policies, procedures and guidelines

- Ancestral Remains Policy
- Collection Policy
- Deaccession and Disposal Policy
- Departmental Procedures
- Loans Policy and Procedures
- Return of Cultural Materials Policy
- Secret and/or Sacred Materials Policy

Other related documents

- International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics
- ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums (2013)
- National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries (2023)

8. REVISION HISTORY

Date Reviewed	Version no.	Summary of Changes / Revision	Author / Consultation / Changes by
26/03/2026	1.4	Approved by Board of Trustees.	Board of Trustees
07/04/2026	1.4	Terminology updated for consistency across Collection policies suite.	Melanie Piddocke