



Public Service Association of SA

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Reference: #33099

4 April 2024

Dr David Gaimster  
Chief Executive Officer  
South Australian Museum  
North Terrace  
ADELAIDE SA 5000

By email: [David.Gaimster@samuseum.sa.gov.au](mailto:David.Gaimster@samuseum.sa.gov.au)

Dear Dr Gaimster

**Re: Restructure of the Research and Collections Division – South Australian Museum**

The Public Service Association (PSA) writes on behalf of our members with regard to the proposed restructure of the Research and Collections Division at the South Australian Museum.

This letter is intended to provide you with an overview of the general position of our members in relation to the proposed restructure and should not be construed as final feedback under any consultation process.

Many PSA members who are included in the affected cohort of employees have been at the Museum for in excess of 10 years – the average tenure for this group being 18.2 years. Without exception, all of our members within the Research and Collections cohort are committed to the work they perform and are, collectively, a highly respected and professional group of people who are experts in their respective fields. They have a genuine and invested interest in protecting the integrity and preservation of the valuable research and collections outcomes they have achieved over many decades, and to promoting these and future outcomes to the public in ways that are relevant, accessible and dynamic to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Museum for the education and enjoyment of South Australians.

It is the view of the PSA that although our members are ideally positioned to offer well-informed and considered expertise, knowledge and insights with respect to future directions, SA Museum leadership has failed to engage with them in a meaningful way during the development of the proposed restructure. The review process included individual interviews with many PSA members. Although the purpose of the interviews was not made clear, our members participated in the process in an open and willing manner, offering suggestions regarding strategies and actions that could be introduced to enhance 'translation' of research/collections outcomes from back-of-house to public facing front-of-house galleries and exhibitions. Sadly, these contributions from members were not reflected in the 'review summary' provided by you, seemingly indicating they were not deemed worthy of consideration.



More alarmingly, once the proposed restructure was revealed, it became apparent that they were also not deemed worthy of a place at the Museum.

There is consensus among PSA members in the affected cohort that there is a need for change at the SA Museum. There is agreement that there is an issue in recent years with the Museum's public engagement to disseminate research and collections stories effectively. However, staff are committed to improving this engagement in a genuine consultation process to develop well-grounded and responsible strategies to drive productive and positive change.

While this is the case, it is also the position of PSA members that the implementation of the current restructure proposal will have far-reaching and devastating consequences for the Museum's collections and conservation and preservation of South Australia's natural science and cultural heritage resources and materials. It is not our intention to comprehensively address all of the reasons our members hold this view in this letter. It is hoped, however, that you will engage in a genuine collaborative process in the near future that will allow concerns to be discussed and work-shopped in detail. Having said that, a broad overview of some issues of concern is set out below.

1. The wholesale demolition of the Research and Collections division has very real health, wellbeing and financial consequences for our members who have dedicated decades of service to the institution, including raising the profile of the SA Museum through nationally and internationally recognised research, discoveries and preservation of South Australia's invaluable collections. The proposed structure would see the exodus of a collective 474 years of expertise, commitment and corporate knowledge.
2. Members who work with Museum collections advise that the volume and scope of work required to care for and preserve materials and specimens is bordering on unmanageable with the current allocation of staff. They describe a backlog of work requiring immediate attention and say that while there is some progress in addressing this backlog, current staffing levels do not allow for the dedicated time necessary to complete the work within optimal time frames. The proposed drastic reduction in staffing for Collections Management is alarming and appears ill considered. There is genuine concern that, should the proposed restructure be implemented, the Museum will be unable to comply with its responsibilities under the *South Australian Museum Act*, and that there will be a very real risk of deterioration and loss of important cultural, historical and scientific material.
3. The 'First Nations First' principle described in the revised strategic framework for the SA Museum was well received by PSA members. Disturbingly, there has been a failure to engage in meaningful discussions with staff tasked with caring for important, culturally sensitive material and human remains. Of great concern, it appears that there has also been a failure to consult with First Nations communities and individuals with respect to care and protection of their cultural heritage and sensitive materials and how this can be continued in a First Nations led culturally respectful way in the context of any changes to current Museum structures. Rather than First Nations First, it seems that the proposed restructure will actually transport the care of First Nations heritage to the Museum landscape of 20 years past.
4. The abrupt shift away from research activities as proposed under the restructure will see the loss of the Museum's reputation as a world leader in biological science research and will result in a general degradation of the institution and of South Australia's place in contributing to discoveries of national and international importance. The ability to apply for and attract grant funding to the Museum will be lost under the proposed restructure. This appears contrary to promoting financial sustainability. Further, abstention from initiating and participating in research seems to be at odds with moving towards a dynamic, relevant and modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum.

The PSA and our members hold the view that the implementation of the proposed restructure would cause irreparable damage to the fabric of South Australia's scientific, natural history and cultural heritage. Further, it would severely restrict the capacity of the Museum to protect and progress the State's valuable resources to ensure relevant and accessible knowledge is preserved for future generations.

Accordingly, we seek confirmation that plans to implement the current proposed restructure will not be progressed.

As indicated in this letter, PSA members remain willing and open to genuine collaboration and consultation that leads to workable strategies to enhance the operations, reputation and public engagement of the South Australian Museum.

Please provide a response to this letter, including a time to meet and discuss this matter further, by close of business on 10 April 2024.

Please contact Sara, Team Leader – Industrial, should you wish to discuss this matter further. Sara can be reached on 8205 3228 or at [sara@psaofsa.asn.au](mailto:sara@psaofsa.asn.au). Written communication should be directed to [enquiries@psasofsa.asn.au](mailto:enquiries@psasofsa.asn.au).

Yours sincerely



**Natasha Brown**  
**General Secretary**