

# **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

## **BUDGET AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Old Parliament House Chamber, Old Parliament House

Wednesday, 3 April 2024 at 2:40pm

BY AUTHORITY OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL



**WITNESSES**

CHEATER, KIM, Chair, South Australian Museum Board, South Australian Museum .....875  
GAIMSTER, DAVID, Director, South Australian Museum .....875



## MEMBERS:

Hon. H.M. Girolamo MLC (Chairperson)  
Hon. M. El Dannawi MLC  
Hon. T.A. Franks MLC  
Hon. L.A. Henderson MLC  
Hon. J.M.A. Lensink MLC  
Hon. R.B. Martin MLC  
Hon. F. Pangallo MLC

## WITNESSES:

CHEATER, KIM, Chair, South Australian Museum Board, South Australian Museum  
GAIMSTER, DAVID, Director, South Australian Museum

6506 The CHAIRPERSON: Welcome to the meeting. The Legislative Council has given the authority for this committee to hold public meetings. A transcript of your evidence today will be forwarded to you for your examination for any clerical corrections. The uncorrected transcript of your evidence today will be published immediately upon receipt from Hansard, but the corrected transcript, once received from you, will replace the uncorrected transcript.

I advise that your evidence today is being broadcast via the Parliament of South Australia website. Should you wish at any time to present confidential evidence to the committee, please indicate and the committee will consider your request. Parliamentary privilege is accorded to all evidence presented to a select committee; however, witnesses should be aware that privilege does not extend to statements made outside of this meeting. All persons, including members of the media, are reminded that the same rules apply as in the reporting of parliament.

Good afternoon. I am Heidi Girolamo, the Chair of the Budget and Finance Committee. I will introduce you to my colleagues: the Hon. Michelle Lensink, the Hon. Laura Henderson, the Hon. Tammy Franks, the Hon. Reggie Martin, the Hon. Mira El Dannawi and the Hon. Frank Pangallo.

If you would like to start with a brief opening statement and introduce your team, then we can go straight into questions.

Mr CHEATER: Thank you, Chair. My name is Kim Cheater; I am the Chair of the South Australian Museum. I would like to introduce Dr David Gaimster, who is the Chief Executive Officer of the South Australian Museum; and Justine van Mourik, who is the Director of Public Engagement at the South Australian Museum. With your leave, Chair, I would like to make an opening statement.

6507 The CHAIRPERSON: Yes, please.

Mr CHEATER: In mid-2023, the Museum initiated a program of work to reimagine and transform itself to better serve the needs of the South Australian public. Following a series of workshops with staff from across the Museum, a draft strategic framework and vision for the future of the Museum has been endorsed by the board. Community engagement and public and stakeholder consultation on this new strategic vision is expected to commence in May 2024.

This draft strategic framework aims to better convert the Museum's research outcomes and to showcase the strengths and diversity of its collections much more effectively through gallery renewal, through education and learning that is aligned to the school curriculum, through special exhibitions and multiple digital platforms and the development of public programs and wider engagement offerings. A proposed reimagination of the Museum aims to transform the way research outcomes are conveyed to the wider public while tackling global challenges, such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

In 2023, the board of the Museum also began a process of reviewing the operations of the Museum's Research and Collections Division, with a view to aligning the structure and outcomes of the division with the proposed future direction of the Museum. The findings of this review were endorsed by the Museum board in September 2023 and shared with staff in December 2023 for feedback.

In February 2024, after consultation with staff and external stakeholders, the Museum's director, Dr David Gaimster, communicated to staff a proposed reform of the existing organisational structure of the division for further consultation and for feedback. It is important to note that, whilst this has been launched as an internal management process, there have been a series of media stories in circulation about the proposed changes within the Museum and the impact that they will have on how the Museum operates. Unfortunately, we have seen the circulation of a great deal of misinformation.

This process is an industrial one that has a very specific framework established by the Public Sector Act 2009 and the enterprise bargaining agreement, and is supported by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to ensure that we meet all of our industrial obligations. Consultation with staff and the Public Service Association has not yet concluded as the Public Service Association has lodged a dispute with the South Australian Employment Tribunal and we have agreed to proceed to conciliation to resolve the issues raised. It would be premature for us to discuss what the final structure looks like. However, I would like the committee to be assured that this industrial process has no impact on the services, programs or visitor experience we currently provide for the wider South Australian community, including our First Nations communities.

This board initiated a review of research and collections and made three headline recommendations that are intended to strengthen our capability and create a sustainable museum for the future. Firstly, that the Museum transition from an academic to a curatorial model for research. This will enable Museum staff to engage more effectively with the wider research community and to embrace a more interdisciplinary approach to the development of knowledge and understanding that can be shared more widely than at present.

Secondly, that our collection's management capability be strengthened and broadened to ensure that all collections under the Museum's care are maintained to the highest standard, and is focused on the most critical priorities for development of the collection. The review committee suggested a portfolio model for the management of related collections. Finally, the review committee recommended greater investment by the Museum in digitisation to enable the widest possible access to the state's valuable collections.

The future focus of the Museum will be on converting new discoveries and research into the visitor experience both on site and online, and refreshing that experience through new research. Our collections are globally unique sources that contribute to many areas of scientific research and endeavour. As a museum, our focus must be on promoting and encouraging research on those collections that we hold in trust for all South Australians. By increasing our focus on digital and physical access to collections, along with an emphasis on broader communication of our research outputs, we are intending to reach broader communities than at present.

We understand that there are some who are very invested in the Museum's historic track record in academic research; however, for the most part, this research has tended to be very focused in its scope and highly specialised. Much of the Museum's academic output is published in scientific journals and only a limited amount is shared with South Australian audiences, and it has not significantly informed or changed the Museum's visitor experience over the past 20 years.

There has also been some public misinformation circulating about the amount of research grant funding received directly by the Museum. It should be firstly stated that the Museum is not eligible to apply or directly receive Australian Research Council funding, but there have historically been co-sponsored grants applied for by universities with the Museum listed as a contributing partner.

In these instances, the Museum provides both in-kind staffing resource and occasionally direct financial support towards these research projects. However, in almost all cases the Museum receives little to no remuneration in return for these efforts. We have commenced

consultation with the university sector to ensure our stakeholders understand what is being proposed, and the Museum will continue these conversations with the tertiary sector over the coming months.

Suggestions have also been made that the Museum will no longer be collecting into the future. This is also not correct. The Museum will continue to collect as it is part of our functions under the South Australian Museum Act. The Museum is, however, currently reviewing its collecting priorities to ensure that what we collect can be maintained, documented and cared for properly and sustainably, and that collecting activity contributes to the Museum's strategic priorities. Collecting will always be core to our mission both to preserve and promote the scientific and cultural heritage of South Australia and also to support research and the visitor experience for all South Australians.

The South Australian Museum is a beloved institution with a long history of preserving and sharing natural and cultural heritage, fostering learning and engaging in the important conversations of our time. This will not change, and there are no planned immediate changes to our visitor services or amenities at this time. These proposed changes to our workforce are about taking important steps now that will make our Museum more sustainable, more relevant and more accessible for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thank you.

6508 The CHAIRPERSON: Thank you, Mr Cheater. From the start, we would just like to ask a series of questions around the research and collections review. Under freedom of information we were able to review the board minutes from SA Museum. Would it be fair to say that this review commenced originally under the previous director, was put on pause in December 2022 until the appointment of that director and was restarted with board member Chris Daniels chairing in March last year—is that correct?

Mr CHEATER: Chair, just a couple of clarifications. The review that we undertook only commenced in 2023. It commenced at the time Ms van Mourik was acting director. It was at a time when the new director had been appointed but had not commenced, and the new director was able to be involved in some of the early interviews that occurred as part of that review and then was heavily involved as the review came to culmination. You are correct: the committee that was established for the review was chaired by Professor Chris Daniels.

6509 The CHAIRPERSON: Was there a process of communication internally proceeded until July? What was happening during that time and what involvement did staff and the reviewers have within that space?

Mr CHEATER: Sorry, chair, could you clarify what time frame you are talking?

6510 The CHAIRPERSON: The September board meeting suggests that the director has at that point put forward his recommendations to the board arising from that review, and from subsequent board papers and public statements it appears that this presentation in September is that the reform program is currently underway—is that correct?

Mr CHEATER: The review that was presented to the board in September outlined the current state of research and collections at the Museum, made some key findings about the current activity and work of the Museum in terms of research and collections and certainly pointed to some future direction for the board to consider in relation to what future restructure may occur as part of that division. But the review itself did not make specific recommendations about restructure or the outcomes—that work followed.

6511 The CHAIRPERSON: Which internal and external stakeholders were invited to participate in the review and which Museum staff from other departments contributed to the review?

Mr CHEATER: Chair, I'd say two things: we collected significant information via questionnaires from staff across the entire research and collections division of the Museum. We then also held interviews with a significant number of those staff members of the Museum. I couldn't tell you all of the names and all the individuals who were directly spoken to in that process—I would need to take that on notice.

6512 The CHAIRPERSON: If you could take it on notice that would be appreciated. From the board minutes of the May meeting it suggests that a questionnaire was to going to be forwarded to all staff, and the July board minutes suggest that there was a full day of interviews specifically with

research staff. Other than a questionnaire and the interviews, was there any other consultation to staff?

Mr CHEATER: I wouldn't mind clarifying what you mean or intend by 'consultation'.

6513 The CHAIRPERSON: What other consultations, discussions, meetings? Was the questionnaire circulated to all staff?

Mr CHEATER: No, we used two specific questionnaires that were designed for both the research staff in the Research and Collections division, and the collections staff in the Research and Collections division, so there were two different questionnaires used, depending on the area of focus for the staff who were involved. There were two sets of meetings that were held: again, a set of meetings that were held with research staff, and then a set of meetings that were held with collections staff.

In terms of the committee undertaking, equally there was a significant amount of content that was provided to the committee from a range of sources, but the extent to which material—through written submissions or others—was received and where it was from, again, I would need to take that on notice.

6514 The CHAIRPERSON: You will take that on notice. The board minutes of 27 September clearly identify that the restructure proposals that were put to the board were the Director's proposals. Were the recommendations based purely on the review conducted by Chris Daniels' committee, or were there other processes put in place to inform these recommendations?

Mr CHEATER: The report of the review into the Research and Collections division—the report that was tabled at the board—was as a result only of the information and work that was done as part of that review, the input from both the members of the committee conducting that review and the new Director of the Museum, Dr David Gaimster.

6515 The CHAIRPERSON: In regard to the consultation, did the Director engage or consult with other stakeholders: internal, external, people like donors and other scientists? What sort of consultation did the board conduct relating to that?

Mr CHEATER: Sorry, I am not quite sure I understand the question.

6516 The CHAIRPERSON: What consultation did you have with external parties in regard to this review?

Mr CHEATER: It is my recollection that we didn't undertake direct consultation with external parties. The reason why I hesitate, Chair, is that it is possible that external parties may have contributed information to the committee through either directly writing to the committee members or through other means, so that would involve some level of consultation, but certainly it wasn't part of the remit of the review to directly go to external parties.

6517 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Supplementary, Chair: we did talk before—you asked what the definition of 'consultation' was. Would you consider it consultation if somebody hasn't been asked for their opinion but they found a way to provide you their opinion, or is that actually a lack of consultation?

Mr CHEATER: You are right; I would not necessarily call that consultation.

6518 The CHAIRPERSON: Just to confirm for the record, did the Director consult with any other stakeholders, internal or external, in putting together the proposal that went to the board on 27 September?

Mr CHEATER: Should the Director answer that question?

6519 The CHAIRPERSON: Yes, please.

Dr GAIMSTER: Thank you for the question. Good afternoon everyone. Could you repeat that question again, please?

6520 The CHAIRPERSON: Did you consult with other stakeholders, both internal and external, in putting together the proposal that went to the board?

Dr GAIMSTER: The process for the review produced a terrific amount of information. Staff from right across the organisation were consulted. Heads of departments and heads of sections were interviewed at length. We had input from board members themselves, two of whom are senior academics at two universities in Adelaide. There was the terms of reference for the whole process, and the objectives of that process had been met. It was part of my job and my colleagues' job to collate that information, review that information, make due analysis and provide some findings for the board to discuss at that September meeting. There were no recommendations; it was mainly a set of findings that the board had determined in its conversations.

6521 The CHAIRPERSON: But no consultation with external stakeholders?

Dr GAIMSTER: No. That was not part of the terms of reference or the objectives of this particular board review.

6522 The CHAIRPERSON: The opposition has been advised that staff were informed of the proposed new structure at a staff meeting on 26 February and were given four weeks, which was later extended to six weeks, to provide feedback. Is the proposal that went to the board on 27 September the same proposal that was put to the staff on 26 February 2024?

Dr GAIMSTER: Sorry, could you just repeat that again? Apologies, Chair.

6523 The CHAIRPERSON: Is the proposal that went to the board on 27 September the same as the proposal that was put to staff on 26 February?

Dr GAIMSTER: As I mentioned before, Chair, the findings and recommendations of the review were tabled to the Museum board in September 2023. The review formally concluded in November. On 6 December 2023, the Museum provided staff and the Public Service Association with a summary of those findings that came out of that review of research and collections.

6524 The CHAIRPERSON: So in regard to the board minutes report, it noted that it was agreed that the paper would form the basis of a briefing document for meetings with the minister, Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Treasury and Finance to gain approval for the proposed restructures. When were the minister, DPC and DTF provided this briefing document, and when did they provide approval?

Dr GAIMSTER: In terms of that particular time line, Chair, I will take that question on notice and get back to you.

6525 The CHAIRPERSON: So you are not aware of when the approvals were provided?

Dr GAIMSTER: I would just like to double-check the dates, if you don't mind.

6526 The CHAIRPERSON: The board minutes also report that this briefing would also outline the support required by the Museum, including dedicated and experienced change management resources, which would be run from DPC, funding to cover the direct costs of the restructure and interim funding to cover the operating deficits of the Museum until such time as a new structure was in operation. Did DPC provide a dedicated and experienced change manager to effectively run this project?

Dr GAIMSTER: The department has supported us to appoint a dedicated change manager, yes.

6527 The CHAIRPERSON: Did DPC and/or Treasury provide funding to cover the direct cost of the restructure and, if so, how much and on what terms?

Dr GAIMSTER: We have been in discussion with various parts of government, but I am not able to provide you with the detail of that at the moment.

6528 The CHAIRPERSON: Why is that?

Dr GAIMSTER: It's confidential.

6529 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: It's confidential to who? Are you citing commercial-in-confidence? What sort of confidential do you mean? This is a parliamentary committee. It has the powers of the parliament. What sort of confidential do you mean?

Dr GAIMSTER: If I could just explain. Thank you for that question. In mid-February the Museum shared the principles of functional change with employees, the Public Service Association and the Museum's stakeholders and partners. On 26 February, a proposed new structure of the Museum's Research and Collections division was released to employees and the Public Service Association for consultation.

Consultation with staff and the Public Service Association has not yet concluded, as the Public Service Association has lodged a dispute with the South Australian Employment Tribunal, and we have agreed to proceed to conciliation to resolve the issues at hand, so it is very difficult and premature for us to discuss what that final structure would look like and the arrangements that we are discussion over for funding.

6530 The CHAIRPERSON: In regard to that, has any interim funding been provided to cover the costs for current negotiations and discussions that are underway from DPC or DTF?

Dr GAIMSTER: We have had those conversations. They have been proactive. We have done some preliminary analysis but, as I said, we are still in a consultation process. Final decisions about the final structure that we are proposing have not got beyond this point. We don't know what the final structure will look like yet—it's all a proposal—and, in this scenario, all I can say is that we are in those conversations.

6531 The CHAIRPERSON: Can we just go back to one of your earlier answers. When I asked whether the September proposal was the same proposal as provided to staff in February, you said that the review was provided to staff in February. Are you able to clarify: was the staff restructure proposal presented to staff on 26 February the same as the proposal that went to the board in September? Yes or no?

Dr GAIMSTER: No.

6532 The CHAIRPERSON: Why, and what were the differences?

Dr GAIMSTER: Thank you for the question. To clarify, meetings at the end of December enabled us to present the findings of the review to staff. The staff meetings in February allowed us to present the first stage of our proposals resulting from that review to the staff.

6533 The CHAIRPERSON: What date was that that the staff became first aware of this proposal?

Dr GAIMSTER: I may have to come back to you. I can't remember the precise date. It was mid-February.

6534 The CHAIRPERSON: Was it this year or last year?

Dr GAIMSTER: This year.

6535 The CHAIRPERSON: Who wrote the review document and the summary of the review that was ultimately presented to the staff in February?

Dr GAIMSTER: I did.

6536 The CHAIRPERSON: Why wasn't Chris Daniels given the opportunity to write the review document and a summary of the review, as he chaired the original review panel?

Dr GAIMSTER: I worked very, very closely with Chris to draft the findings of the review. Those were presented to the board and then with Chris we agreed the summary of findings that we shared with staff. I supported Chris and did the drafting.

6537 The CHAIRPERSON: But you wrote the review?

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes.

6538 The CHAIRPERSON: What involvement did Chris Daniels and other members of the review panel have in reviewing this document before it went to the staff?

Dr GAIMSTER: They were kept abreast and informed at every stage, and the final document, the summary of findings of the review, was one that was sighted by the board.

6539 The CHAIRPERSON: The September presentation also noted that a stakeholder and communications strategy would be developed. Did this take place?

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes, we have worked on that.

6540 The CHAIRPERSON: When was the Public Service Association briefed on the restructure?

Dr GAIMSTER: Coincidentally with the announcement to staff.

6541 The CHAIRPERSON: In February?

Dr GAIMSTER: In February, that first occasion in mid-February.

6542 The CHAIRPERSON: Why did it take so long to brief the PSA, given the board had given advice in September, per the minutes, that it would be necessary to communicate early with the PSA so they could support their members?

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes, we have two processes here. We have the findings of the review of Research and Collections. That was shared with staff in December, alongside the PSA. The second stage is the recommendations for organisational change, again shared with staff and PSA simultaneously in February.

6543 The CHAIRPERSON: How would you characterise the feedback that you have had from relevant stakeholders to the proposed restructure of the Museum, including from members of the scientific community around Australia and further afield?

Dr GAIMSTER: How would I describe it, Chair?

6544 The CHAIRPERSON: What has the feedback been like from relevant stakeholders?

Dr GAIMSTER: It has been very focused on one or two particular issues.

6545 The CHAIRPERSON: What are those issues?

Dr GAIMSTER: I think there is a lot of concern around the future of science infrastructure in the state of South Australia, the Museum's role in supporting science infrastructure, and funding for that infrastructure. They are concerned that—if you want me to talk about some of the concerns that we picked up?

6546 The CHAIRPERSON: Yes, concerns that have been raised by stakeholders.

Dr GAIMSTER: We have seen quite a few. It is all very much in a set of different categories, but other areas include the Museum's absolute priority for the Museum is scientific research. None of these comments address the Museum function in the round. They are very focused on one particular feature of our operation and there is a lot of concern around the future of that particular operation.

6547 The CHAIRPERSON: Are there valid concerns specifically around the scientific research side of things?

Dr GAIMSTER: I think there is a lot of concern and, as the chair mentioned in his opening statement, there is a lot of misinformation that is circulating, particularly around the so-called potential devaluation of natural sciences research at the Museum. But I'm sure that everyone around this table has probably looked at the Museum Act. The board of the museum has a whole range of functions to carry out research or promote research into matters of scientific and historical interest. So it's a very, very broad manifesto, you could say.

The act: our objectives don't prescribe any of the structures, priorities or outcomes for Museum research. These are practices that are developed over decades. Of course, there's been huge investment in certain areas, and there are a lot of concerns amongst those parties that those particular activities may be at risk. So that is what we've seen from some of the comments that we've seen going around on the internet and so on.

But I can assure you, Chair, and I can assure members of this committee that our role and our objective is not to stop or devalue research on our collections or related areas, but as part of our proposals we're anticipating that new models of operation will enable us to evolve from a

highly academic research model to what we are describing as a curatorial research model in our organisational change proposals, which will have the following benefits:

- increased access for the scientific and academic community to Museum collections, both on site and on line;
- greater access for the South Australian public to the outcomes of research on the Museum's collections;
- greater promotion of the Museum's collections locally and globally through digitisation and digital collections access; and
- greater use and research on all the Museum's collections by the widest range of scientists and scholars, institutions and communities of interest.

6548 The CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. Ms Franks.

6549 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: There's a lot to unpick here. I'd like to start with the concerns that you've raised about misinformation. I will go back to research in a minute, but I'm going to start with collections. Why was the decision made to temporarily suspend the collections services? What's the purpose of that temporary suspension?

Dr GAIMSTER: We, like many institutions, from time to time have what libraries used to call a closed week, where we pause a lot of services so that we can actually audit collections and make sure that we have proper documentation, locations and all of that information in place. So that is a temporary pause.

I've seen it for myself out there—there is a lot of concern that we're going to stop collecting. State museums don't stop collecting. What we are going to do is to have a focus on refining our collections' priorities. The SA Museum is not a museum of last resort. Our collecting needs to be strategic, and it needs to be carefully planned so that we can align collecting with our strategic direction and with the resources that we have.

A lot of that collecting has been rather unplanned for quite a long time, and we are just taking stock of our collections so that we can make sure we can accommodate future collecting effectively and efficiently for the state. So that is the root reason for a pause. We're not quite sure how long we will take to undertake that audit. We're in the middle of the moment, but it could be a few more months.

6550 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Well, on your website—

Mr CHEATER: Would I be able to add to that?

6551 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: This pause started in November 2023—and if you want to add some more, that would be gratefully appreciated.

Mr CHEATER: Thank you. The committee may be aware that the Auditor-General's Report made some comments and observations in relation to collections at the Museum. As Dr Gaimster has identified the size and scale of collections at the Museum is not necessarily unusual, but nonetheless it really did highlight that some significant focus and attention needed to be given to the number of uncatalogued items that have been received by the Museum but through capacity limitations within collections management had not yet been able to be processed within our systems.

So, in late 2023, we temporarily suspended external access to a range of collections while staff undertook the essential audit work in response to those findings. During this period the Museum did not accept any new acquisitions or requests for loans or viewing of those collection items that are not on public display. But it is important to note that all pre-existing bookings and commitments that were made prior to December were honoured and, in particular, it was really important to note that we continued to honour any request from Aboriginal communities for access to their cultural heritage material during this period and particularly in relation to repatriation activity. As Dr Gaimster has flagged, that work continues and it is anticipated or hoped to continue until mid-2024.

6552 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: On your website it doesn't refer to Aboriginal cultural material; it only refers to Aboriginal communities being able to access the repatriation activities. It

doesn't talk about cultural materials still being able to be accessed. Do you think you have added to the misinformation, then, by providing incorrect information compared to what your statement was just then, as opposed to what the website currently says?

Mr CHEATER: Aboriginal communities are engaged through the dedicated officers in that area, and that information that I have to shared is what has been shared with communities who do reach out and access the Museum for those purposes. However, if what you are flagging is that the information in response to a frequently asked question on our website is not as fulsome as it could be, we will take that on notice, and thank you for flagging that.

6553 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: You might want to cut the meaning of the term 'fulsome'. You have also said on this temporary suspension of collection services, which was I believe posted around November 2023, that this situation was expected to continue until mid-2024. In your answers just now it has been indicated that may not be the case. Do you have an anticipated end date?

Mr CHEATER: I think my answer did say that we expected it to continue until mid-2024.

6554 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: I think Dr Gaimster's didn't. He said it was still to be determined.

Dr GAIMSTER: That's still our ambition.

6555 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Anyway, you have also spoken about not accepting requests for viewing of collection items. What is the purpose for not accepting requests to view collection items? It is on your website.

Dr GAIMSTER: So that we can undertake an appropriate audit of the collections.

6556 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: So nobody can look at anything until you have properly catalogued everything else?

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes, because all our resource needs to be dedicated to the audit process and stocktake; that's correct.

Mr CHEATER: To be clear, though, these are collections that are not on public display. So these are the collections in storage.

6557 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Yes, I am very clear on that. It is quite clear as well that the galleries do remain open to the public on all days except for Christmas Day and Good Friday. How many uncategorised items are there currently within the Museum and how many were identified by the Auditor-General as of concern, and what is the plan to address that issue?

Dr GAIMSTER: In response to the question about the Auditor-General's findings, the Auditor-General has identified areas in which the Museum needs to improve its management of its heritage collections, and the Museum is actively addressing each issue raised by the Auditor-General. This is an absolute priority for the Museum, which will also be addressed in part through the proposed organisational changes to the division of research and collections and the greater focus on investment on collections management.

The Auditor-General did identify a number of uncatalogued items which have accumulated over time and so that is one of the reasons, as the chair has just explained, that in late November 2023 the Museum temporarily suspended external access to a range of collections while staff undertake essential audit work, very much in response to those findings by the Auditor-General. We are not, it is true, accepting new acquisitions to the collection or requests for loan or the viewing of the majority of collections during this time. However, as the chair has said, we are honouring all pre-existing bookings and commitments.

6558 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: This is also on the website.

Dr GAIMSTER: As we say, we—

6559 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: I asked for the number of items.

Dr GAIMSTER: I will just go into that; thank you for prompting. The Auditor-General's Report detailed that approximately 50 objects that were unable to be located at the time of the

2022-23 financial year stocktake included several high-value items. Since then, through the audit process, 29 of the 50 flagged objects from the report have been located. We anticipate that the status of the remaining items of a small number of items in relation to the millions of objects and specimens that we have in our care will be resolved soon.

Some of the items highlighted by the stocktake report are on loan to other institutions, while other issues are a result of administrative error. The Museum is developing a new collections management policy, which will include a lot of detail on the nature, the frequency and the type of stocktake activity to be undertaken each year.

Mr CHEATER: May I add to that response as well, just to note that Dr David Gaimster has just taken through what was a really important part of the Auditor-General's finding, which was around the stocktake process and some of the items that have been flagged in the stocktake process. Your question went to the number of items that haven't yet been catalogued, which is one of the other aspects of the Auditor-General's finding. We don't have that exact number to hand today, so we will take on notice what the number of uncatalogued items are—

6560 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Thank you; if you could take that on notice.

Mr CHEATER: —to the extent that it's known, because there is some challenge, at times, in terms of knowing the full number of items that are yet to be catalogued.

6561 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Thank you. I understand that that has been taken on notice, Chair. I want to move to the staff salaries and numbers for the last couple of financial years. If you could go over those for the previous two financial years.

Mr CHEATER: Sorry, what is the specific question?

6562 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: The question is: how have staff numbers, by FTE, and salaries changed over the last three years? You can start three years ago, then go for two years ago and then tell us what it is now.

Mr CHEATER: Thank you. Chair, through you, I do not have in front of me the data of FTE or salaries for staff over the last three financial years, so we would need to take such information on notice.

6563 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Is it fair to say that in 2021 management staffing was 20, front-of-house staffing was 25 and research and collections staff was 46; that in 2023 it was 19 in management, 23 in front of house and 34 in research and collections; and that the proposal is 20 in management, 23 in front of house and 20 in research and collections—down from 46 two years prior? Is that a fair summation?

Mr CHEATER: As I mentioned before, I don't have the numbers in front of us, so we would need to have the detail of that information, and in particular as to whether that is comparing apples with apples.

6564 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: If you take that question on notice, it would be good. Chair, as you know, I do want to move to Aboriginal affairs at some stage, but I think we are still in the general ballpark of staffing and funding and so on, so I am happy to wait my turn for the next round.

6565 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Thanks for coming in. I have been doing a bit of research into museums around the world—places like the British Museum and those in Europe. They put a lot of emphasis on their research staff and their scientists. In fact, they are very proud of the work they do. From what I have been hearing, and hearing in the media, it seems to me that the South Australian Museum, in trying to dispense with key research staff, is actually looking at dumbing down research.

Dr GAIMSTER: I am happy to take that question. All I can say is that I can absolutely state clearly that the Museum is not devaluing research or science research. What we are aiming to do is to evolve this to mobilise our resources to translate the latest scientific research to a wider South Australian public, in real time, through—

6566 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Give me some examples of that, Dr Gaimster. I am trying to get a view of what I can expect to see under your new revised plans.

Dr GAIMSTER: We have over 780,000 visitors a year; that is, certainly 786,000 in the last 12 months. We serve a very broad audience and range of interests, not just those of the scientific or academic communities. Our collections are, of course, a very rich resource for many different areas of research. So we will have an increasing focus on access to those resources for research and wider purposes, such as—

6567 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: How are they going to do that? Just give me—

Dr GAIMSTER: For example, one of the areas that we really want to focus on—and you can see that in our change proposal—is a greater focus on digitisation and collections asset access. We know that these are globally unique collections, both in terms of natural history and human history. We have, for example, one of the if not the largest collection of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material culture in the world. There's huge interest here—

6568 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: It is the largest, isn't it? Are you not sure of that?

Mr CHEATER: It is.

Dr GAIMSTER: It is the largest. The interest in this is both local and global, and the use for this is wide right across the globe. So one of our hopes and ambitions going forward is to invest in the digital assets. I think we could describe ourselves as rather dark to the rest of the world, and we really want to enable the rest of the world to engage with our collections. That will be a way of—

6569 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: How are you going to that, Dr Gaimster? I am just asking you. Give me a visual impression of how a punter off the street is going to be able to benefit from what you are saying? You are giving me all these generalised statements of what you would like to see, but what is the vision—that's what I want to see—what is the vision here?

Dr GAIMSTER: In the area of digitisation, digital access management, that means that people around the globe can actually find our content. At the moment, as I said, most of what we have, you can't go onto the Museum website. There isn't a collections portal to investigate and interrogate.

6570 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: So you are saying you were going to increase the visibility online—

Dr GAIMSTER: This is one of the investments we would love to make because actually of all the state museums in Australia we have the smallest footplate. What we show on the floor of the Museum is a very, very tiny sliver or fragment of our eight million collection's assets. The big opportunity for us is investing in the virtual space to create a stronger online museum. That's one of the ambitions that we would like to pursue in the next few years.

One of the areas in which we can help to do that will be to change some of the role description within the collections and research team: people who will be able to curate that content more effectively for our audiences more broadly and the diversity of audiences that we serve. Really, it's about a different research model and new investments in collections management, better documentation and access. We could be a much higher performing institution in terms of our reach both locally and globally through these developments and these proposals and objectives.

Mr CHEATER: May I add a couple of aspects to both parts of your question?

6571 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Yes.

Mr CHEATER: The first one was around how this looks and feels differently from a research and valuing of research. If I can give a practical example: there is some really important research and researchers here at a university in South Australia whose work is directly connected and relevant to significant components of the collection that we have in the Museum, and today they actually go interstate in order to be able to access information on other collections in order to do their research because we don't have the sufficient capacity amongst our collections' management resources to actually enable that research to occur on the collections, and secondly, because—as Dr Gaimster has flagged—the digital information available to researchers to understand the extraordinary depth of those collections, and understand the targeted information they might need to be able to access collections, is not existing at the moment.

So those two things on their own are about enabling more research to be undertaken on these collections to be able to strengthen the information that flows from that research on these critical South Australian cultural assets and then, through the curatorial research, to be able to actually take that knowledge and information that's not just being done by researchers in the Museum but by a wide range of researchers based on the Museum's collection, to be able to then translate and communicate that information to the public of South Australia.

Whether that's through the public of South Australia through their experience at North Terrace or through online resources for many who aren't able to actually get to the Museum on North Terrace, that's a significant outcome then of that work and that broader reach. Now that needs curatorial researchers who have a broad network of who are the researchers in South Australia, nationally or around the globe who are doing research that is relevant on the collections and for what we are doing here in South Australia.

6572 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: But they are going to be paid less than the researchers you've got now aren't they?

Mr CHEATER: It is a different role, a different skill set.

6573 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Explain to me who they are, what are their qualifications? What are we talking about when we talk about curatorial staff as opposed to the expertise that is currently there?

Dr GAIMSTER: I think the Chair of the board has just introduced this whole change, this evolution, from single subject specialist research into curatorial research at the Museum. So this is not about devaluing research, this is broadening the role and responsibility for our researchers—colleagues who will no longer be simply the single source of knowledge we have around those collections but also help to mediate between different knowledge holders, and enable transdisciplinary research as well, where we can bring our natural sciences stories together with our human culture stories. At the moment it is all very compartmentalised, very siloed.

The Museum experience on the floor is really effectively the result of Victorian compartmentalisation of the disciplines. We want to actually bring natural sciences and human cultures into dialogue, and that is something that is unique and authentic to this part of the world. A shift in the curatorial research model will enable that more effectively and work with a range of different knowledge holders, not only those in the Museum, or necessarily those in the university, but the community as well. So it's a broader scope, a broader base. We believe there will be stronger outcomes for the Museum, particularly in terms of education and public engagement.

6574 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: I am just going to go to something you said earlier when you were asked about scientists or researchers at the Museum who actually do publish their research, and they went into certain publications. You seemed to be rather dismissive of the fact that, well, they do get published, but—if I can just use some language here—'who cares anyway, does anyone read it?'

Mr CHEATER: Oh, we've never said that.

Dr GAIMSTER: Definitely not, but thank you for the question. I think we are concerned, like most museums, about where we publish and how we distribute and circulate the information, the investment we are making in research and the information we are generating. The Chief Scientist for Australia just the other week in *The Guardian* wrote a very interesting article about how difficult it is for ordinary people, people like us, to access this information. It is published usually behind a paywall in academic journals and articles. We need to really think how we disseminate findings and discovery and share them with our audiences.

The Museum is a site of investigation and public engagement. Yes, research is part of the ecosystem, but our duty and responsibility is to make that more widely available and to inform the Museum and its story. At the moment we are running two museums: one research institute, one public museum—there is no connection between the two. You are not seeing the result of any of that research investment on the Museum floor or online.

So, thinking about where we publish, thinking about how we might inform the Museum experience, the visitor experience, more effectively, these are the things that we are

discussing. This is what came out of our findings and discussions on the review of research and collections, and have informed the proposals for change.

6575 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Will any of these staff that are losing their jobs be able to apply for these curatorial positions?

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes.

6576 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Yes?

Mr CHEATER: Absolutely.

6577 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Will they lose any of their existing benefits, perhaps?

Dr GAIMSTER: The answer to whether they will be losing benefits, I can say that where those employees have been impacted by the proposals, when we come to that decision down the line, we will do everything we can to place as many colleagues in the new structure at their substantive classification level, where this meets the requirements of the new structure. Where possible, existing employees at the same classification level with the necessary skills will be matched into roles.

Where there are more ongoing employees than positions, quarantined merit-based selection processes will be conducted. Any unplaced employees will receive priority consideration for all the suitable roles at their substantive level, prior to the roles being filled. Should a suitable role not become available within a reasonable period, employees unplaced may be declared excess to requirements at a point in time in the future and managed in line with the requirements of the South Australian Public Sector Enterprise Agreement: Salaried 2020-21. And, yes, VSPs will be offered to employees who become excess to requirements and express an interest in a separation package.

6578 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: So there is no guarantee that they will find work—

Dr GAIMSTER: Just to finish, on that final point that you asked about—

6579 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Yes, go on.

Dr GAIMSTER: —will employees be paid less or be worse off because of the structure, those that are placed into the new structure? So, employees who become excess at higher substantive levels may also apply for any vacant role at a lower classification. That is a scenario that is possible. If a higher classified excess employee is successful in gaining one of those positions, income maintenance provisions may apply in accordance with Commissioner's Determination 2: Excess Employees—Income Maintenance. So in principle, they won't lose out in terms of pay.

6580 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Will you still be able to access grants like the Australian Biological Resources Study?

Mr CHEATER: Which ones were they, sorry?

6581 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: The Australian Biological Resources Study. These are grants made available by the commonwealth.

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes, I think that you have opened up quite an interesting question for us. There has been a lot of speculation that we have seen out there around the future of the grant mechanisms. I would just like to respond on that broader question. It is not true that the Museum receives any recurrent funding from either state or federal governments to specifically support scientific research activity conducted by its researchers. At present, the Museum allocates, from its state government funding, approximately \$1.15 million per annum to support salaries and oncosts for a cohort of 10 ongoing research staff employed by the Museum.

In addition to this, the Museum also provides further resourcing and support in the form of accommodation, equipment, services, consumables, training, travel and administrative overheads to facilitate research activities conducted by these staff. As a result of this, the Museum's research activity is largely dictated by external partners, depending on the success of university partners in attracting that funding. The proposed changes to the Museum would see these arrangements discontinued. The Museum has commenced consultation with the university sector to

ensure our proposed stakeholders understand what is being proposed. The Museum will continue these conversations over the coming months.

As I say, there have been quite a few suggestions in the media that the South Australian Museum is in receipt of significant amounts of federal grant funding to support activities within the division of Research and Collections, but the Museum is not eligible to apply for or directly receive Australian Research Council funding or ABRIS funding from the federal government. The funding is not awarded directly to the Museum for activities undertaken by its researchers or to support salaries for research staff. The Museum has, historically, supported grant applications from a range of Australian universities as a contributing partner, providing both in-kind staff and resource and financial support towards these external research projects.

6582 The CHAIRPERSON: If there is a report or something that you are reading from, you are welcome to table it for our reference.

Dr GAIMSTER: It is a comprehensive note on how it is working.

6583 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Supplementary on that: how much money is currently owed to Australian universities by the Museum, and which ones are they—as in, how many invoices are currently outstanding with regard to research from Australian universities?

Mr CHEATER: If I can make one general comment first, which is to say that, as we referred to in a previous answer, with some of the research work that is undertaken and research grants the contracts for those grant amounts do involve the Museum contributing both in-kind and financial support, so there are some of those grants where—

6584 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Yes, which is why I am asking for how much is currently owed to Australian universities by the South Australian Museum as we meet today?

Mr CHEATER: I would need to take that question on notice to get the specific number.

6585 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Is all this revision or this reform—everything that is going on—also linked to the Malinauskas government's decision to effectively axe, even though they haven't formally announced it, the Aboriginal gallery at Lot Fourteen—

6586 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Tarrkarri. It's called Tarrkarri, and it means future.

6587 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: —to axe the gallery at Lot Fourteen, and will the Museum be accessing any funds that may have been made available to perhaps create a new gallery at the Museum? Has it got anything to do with that?

Mr CHEATER: The answer to both your questions is no.

6588 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: No, not at all? Okay.

6589 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: I have a supplementary on that: was the collection of the South Australian Museum in any way in play for Tarrkarri, and for use in Tarrkarri?

Mr CHEATER: Absolutely part of the—sorry, let me answer that in two ways. First of all, Tarrkarri and its implementation, its curatorial direction and exactly what it is going to do is not something that we have familiar knowledge with, so there is a proviso around knowing exactly what Tarrkarri would or wouldn't do, but the Museum has absolutely been always clear that we are supportive of the Tarrkarri development and therefore any time that they needed to do exhibitions or galleries that were leveraging or using the Museum's collections we would be absolutely supportive and cooperative and collaborative in enabling Tarrkarri to do that.

6590 The Hon. J.M.A. LENSINK: Can I ask a supplementary on that? Can the chair and the director categorically rule out having had any discussions with the government about Tarrkarri and funding?

6591 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Or capital city funding.

Mr CHEATER: First of all, that's a very broad question over a long time frame. At different times, certainly as a chair of the Museum, have I been in conversations with members of the government—both governments that I have served under? The answer is yes.

6592 The Hon. J.M.A. LENSINK: If I could perhaps rephrase and be a little bit more specific for you. The funding that was allocated to Tarrkarri, can you rule out having had any discussions in relation to that being repurposed for the Museum?

Mr CHEATER: Yes.

6593 The CHAIRPERSON: How recently were those discussions?

Mr CHEATER: Sorry, I have just ruled out having had any discussions.

6594 The CHAIRPERSON: So you are ruling out having had any discussions around Tarrkarri?

6595 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Or the funding?

6596 The CHAIRPERSON: The funding.

Mr CHEATER: The specific question I think I was asked is ruling out any conversations with the government on funding of Tarrkarri and repurposing it; is that right? The answer was: I have not been involved in any of those conversations with the government.

6597 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Just one more: are we also likely to see a change in the exhibitions at the galleries, Dr Gaimster? I know you told the ABC listeners recently that nothing much has changed in the galleries for 30 years; is that correct?

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes. Thank you for the question. We have been looking at the schedule of gallery developments from the 1920s and it is true to say that with the exception of a few small areas of some galleries there have been no major transformations of our gallery infrastructure for over 20 years. The last major interventions to the Museum were around 2000. That's several generations ago in museum terms.

6598 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: When was that?

6599 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Supplementary on that: the one you referred to was in 2000; the Australian Aboriginal cultures gallery, Mawson gallery and minerals gallery were opened. Is that what you are referring to?

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes.

6600 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Since then, in 2001 the Pacific cultures and foreign mammals displays were updated. In 2005, the opal fossils display was launched. In 2010, the biodiversity gallery was launched. In 2013-14, the Ediacara gallery was refurbished. In 2014, the Mawson gallery was transformed into the Australian polar collection's gallery, using funds from the Mawson Collection Trust, and in 2018 the Cambrian display was renewed. Are you aware of those factors?

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes, I am.

6601 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Do you regret your words in InDaily, as well as on the ABC?

Dr GAIMSTER: No, I would still stick by my words that no major transformation of the gallery footprint or the Museum has been made. Those are not major transformations of the Museum.

6602 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: In your opinion.

Dr GAIMSTER: Some are bigger than others but not in terms of the overarching museum.

6603 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: In your opinion.

Dr GAIMSTER: In my opinion, yes.

6604 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: You have employed a change management professional in regard to where you are now with this change management process, but you are quite experienced with change management, are you not, with previous gallery experience?

Dr GAIMSTER: I have done a number of galleries, yes, I have.

6605 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Most recently, the Auckland war memorial gallery or the Auckland gallery?

Dr GAIMSTER: The Auckland War Memorial Museum, which is the largest museum in New Zealand.

6606 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Indeed. Is that currently borrowing money to stay open?

Dr GAIMSTER: I beg your pardon?

6607 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: What's the financial position of the Auckland museum? Certainly, there is a media report from 17 October 2022, which said it was asking ratepayers for financial help and was seeking \$35 million a year, a significant increase for the rates of Auckland to continue the gallery. Are you aware of that media report? Is it incorrect?

Dr GAIMSTER: I am very happy to set the record straight in what you present. I am not quite sure you presented that correctly. Auckland museum is one of those metro museums that is supported through its council, through the metropolitan supercity council. It has a service level agreement with that council. Every year, it submits a business plan for a budget, and that budget is a single number percentage increase around.

The overall service level agreement grant awarded to that institution—as I said, the largest museum in New Zealand—is in the order of between \$30 million and \$40 million a year. It is legislated to recover a portion of the rates to support it. It is not a national museum. There is only one national museum in Aotearoa New Zealand, and that's Te Papa. All the major metros of New Zealand—there are no state institutions—are funded through ratepayers. The financial position of that institution is pretty stable and sustainable.

6608 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: This media report—and you might want to take this on notice, I guess, and provide a response—for the museum spokesperson said the museum had been borrowing money to keep the doors open for the last three years and that without a significant increase in the levy it will be impossible to continue to maintain core museum services. I find that interesting.

Dr GAIMSTER: Do you want me to comment on that?

6609 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Yes.

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes, post COVID, the museum had to close its doors three times over several months. It relies very much on the revenue it generates from overseas visitors and from retail and commercial activity. The museum lost millions of dollars. Those conversations were around yes, the museum borrowed money commercially to reboot the institution following COVID. It has been very successful, and the positioning it undertook at that time was to enable a better understanding of the museum's post-COVID financial position.

6610 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Yes, the headline was, 'Auckland Museum borrowing up to \$8 million a year to stay open'.

6611 The CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

6612 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Chair, I do have the Aboriginal issues to go to, and I realise that we are running short of time.

6613 The CHAIRPERSON: I know Mr Martin has two questions, then Ms Lensink, and then we will go back to Ms Franks.

6614 The Hon. R.B. MARTIN: Thank you. I just want to get a couple of questions in before 4 o'clock. I want to go back to something you said before, Mr Cheater, in response to Mr Pangallo's question. Did you suggest that some of the proposed changes will actually have a positive impact on the broader scientific community?

Mr CHEATER: Sorry, I am just collecting my thoughts. It is my view that absolutely it will have a positive impact. First of all, I think it's important to restate the comment that I made to the earlier question: it's really important to note that the Museum is not devaluing science or research. It's also really important to note that we are still in the middle of a consultation process on a proposed restructure and that the final form of that is still to be determined.

But what we are doing is proposing to really mobilise much more resources and access to the collections to enable much greater levels of research to be undertaken on the collections of the Museum. So I think your question absolutely goes to one of the core drivers of these changes and proposed changes, which is that we want to be able to much broaden out the extent of research that is actually undertaken.

When you think about the scale and size and breadth of the Museum's collections, the research that is undertaken solely within the Museum at the moment by definition becomes very focused and in a very narrow field. Now, that's valuable in that specific field, but it then struggles for us as a Museum to fulfil our broader remit about the extent and promotion of research across the entire collection and then making that research and that knowledge available to a broader audience than the specific scientific community that are interested in it.

We don't devalue any of the work that's been done historically in that area or any of the research publications that have occurred, but we are absolutely convinced that these restructures and this change of direction enables a public institution like the Museum to much better fulfil its act and its ambitions and actually provide value for the taxpayers of the state.

6615 The Hon. R.B. MARTIN: Thank you. And I think my next one might segue straight over to something—

6616 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: A supplementary on that: have any previous or existing research grants or contracts with universities and other bodies been cancelled by the South Australian Museum management or ignored despite having previously been signed in the last two years?

Mr CHEATER: I am not aware of any grants having been cancelled, which was the first part of your question. What was the second part of your question, sorry?

6617 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Discontinued or ignored.

Mr CHEATER: So, again, there have been none that have been discontinued. I'll say two things in relation to research grants. Only in recent history, while we've been undertaking this review, we did stop having new applications for new research grants, because those grants, as we've described, require the Museum to contribute in-kind resources and financial resources that we didn't have. Therefore what we did was put a pause on any new grant applications whilst going through the review process and then ultimately going through a restructure process so that we could land on those outcomes before actually progressing. That has only been very recent.

6618 The Hon. R.B. MARTIN: My last one. I wonder if you could give us some idea of the Museum's future or ongoing commitment in relation to repatriation of Aboriginal remains?

Dr GAIMSTER: As part of our reimagining work that we're doing our intention and ambition is to develop a First Nations first approach to all our relevant activities. The Museum will not be reducing its commitment or services for any of our First Nations communities and stakeholders. Our globally significant collections of First Nations cultural and archival material together with our world-renowned repatriation program remain an essential priority for the Museum now and into the future, and that will not change.

We've maintained the services and accessibility of our family history unit, our collections and repatriation program for our First Nations communities and will continue to do so in the future. The South Australian Museum will remain a careful and conscientious custodian of these important collections and legacies. Our work with First Nations communities is guided by our Aboriginal Partnership Committee and our board. The South Australian Museum works very closely with Aboriginal communities to return ancestors to country and rebury them and to repatriate significant objects. Our ambition is to keep supporting Aboriginal communities and return all our ancestors to country, where they can be reburied and remembered. Support for this work will not change, and it will be a vital part of our mission into the future.

6619 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Apart from Aboriginal remains do you have other remains in the collection?

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes, we do.

6620 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: You do? What are they?

Dr GAIMSTER: Are you referring to human remains?

6621 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Yes. What other ones do you have?

Dr GAIMSTER: We have collections of human remains from around the Pacific that have been collected—

6622 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: How many?

Dr GAIMSTER: —as long as the Museum has been collecting. We have a global number, if you want to have it, but we do have those collections as well.

6623 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: Are you aware there is a push from Pacific nations that are wanting there remains returned?

Dr GAIMSTER: We are open to any approach for the repatriation of those remains to country.

6624 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: But you haven't been approached at this point?

Dr GAIMSTER: No, we haven't actually. We have no active repatriation requests at the present time from the Pacific region, but it is very likely that they will come in the future.

6625 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: I have one last question. In all the discussions in relation to the costs and everything that is involved, was it ever discussed about posting an admission fee to the Museum?

Mr CHEATER: If I went back some years, certainly in looking at options around budgets and meeting our financial targets, it was certainly something amongst a range of ideas that were at least considered but we did not progress it very far because we think the free access to the Museum for South Australians is a critical part of our responsibilities as a museum. I would say that would be the primary focus.

6626 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: So it hasn't come up recently again?

Mr CHEATER: No.

6627 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: That's been ruled out. And you are not going to change the Egyptian room, are you, Dr Gaimster?

Dr GAIMSTER: It's one of your favourites, I see.

6628 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: I don't think it has changed since I was a lad.

Mr CHEATER: And your father was a lad.

Dr GAIMSTER: We have no plans at present, but I think what we want to engage in is a broader public conversation about the future of the Museum. These are really great questions. We need to talk about the future of the Egyptian room and other parts of the Museum that haven't changed since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Egyptian room was designed in the 1940s. It is one of the most museological spaces we have—you could term it like that. I think that's the conversation we want to have, and we are looking forward to a broader conversation with the South Australian public about the future of the Museum and the importance of those spaces to everybody in the community.

6629 The Hon. F. PANGALLO: What about becoming entrepreneurial and hosting specific exhibitions like we see in other museums.

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes, well, we would need some investment for that because we need the real estate for those kinds of exhibitions. We do what we can with—as I said before, this is, in terms of footplate, the smallest state museum in Australia. It has not had a new gallery since 1915. On that basis we do what we can, but we would love to operate in that territory along with our counterparts in the future for the benefit of all South Australians.

6630 The Hon. J.M.A. LENSINK: In relation to the galleries and exhibitions, there are some specific ones that I just wonder if you could advise us whether you can guarantee their continuation. We talked about Egypt. Can you guarantee that Egypt will continue, minerals, foreign

mammals, the biodiversity gallery and the polar collections? Are they going to continue in their present form or with enhancements?

Dr GAIMSTER: The answer is that we are undertaking a reimagining of the Museum of the future, of a contemporary, compelling museum experience for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are not asking to build brand new, shiny new buildings but it's about what is the Museum's story? How can we tell that more effectively and cohesively for all South Australia's and those who visit this city and this state to learn more about its landscapes, its biodiversity and its peoples. At the moment we have a sequence and a range of very compartmentalised single disciplinary exhibits—you could term some of them as cabinets of curiosity—but it is not a modern museum.

What we are looking at is a broader public conversation about how we can bring all of these elements together into a more cohesive story. It's not about dispensing with any of that content: it is how we can bring that together into something more cohesive, more translatable and more relevant to the community that now absorbs information and knowledge in very different ways from previous generations. That is the conversation we want with the community, and it's not about dispensing with the past; it's about how we can adopt and bring the best of what we have into a modern context—a new dialogue.

6631 The Hon. J.M.A. LENSINK: Would it be unfair for me to characterise your response as being you can't rule out those changes?

Dr GAIMSTER: I can't guarantee they are going to stay as they are, no. It would be wrong of me to do that.

6632 The Hon. J.M.A. LENSINK: Can you advise whether the Museum has provided any internal funding, or whether the government has provided any funding to the Museum, for the reimagining of the Museum? If so, what quantum?

Dr GAIMSTER: The answer is: no, not yet. We are building a case for support. We are building a concept and a case for support that will follow our public engagement exercise, which we hope to launch in the next few months. Once we are at that stage we might have a clearer picture of what it might cost to reimagine the Museum and to tell our story more effectively within the existing footplate. But we don't have that number yet, and we have had no conversations on that basis. This is all about ideas, new meanings and the future.

6633 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Just a supplementary on something you said before, Mr Cheater: you said that the South Australian Museum would not be charging entry to South Australians. Are you considering charging non-South Australians? Yes or no? Are you considering it?

Mr CHEATER: No, we are not considering that at this time.

6634 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: With regard to Aboriginal culture and repatriation, of course the repatriation of ancestors is a key commitment of the South Australian government. Last year, it committed a further \$1.5 million of repatriation projects to South Australia, to be delivered by the South Australian Museum. Over the last six years, the Humanities team has successfully returned more than 700 ancestors, compared with only 49 in the previous 10 years. With the loss of expert knowledge and fewer staff positions, how will the Museum continue these responsibilities? What is the time frame involved in these eight Aboriginal communities and almost 2,000 ancestors being repatriated? Will it slow down?

Dr GAIMSTER: We have retained that resource within our new structure. That has not changed. We are still absolutely committed to repatriation, and that role is dedicated as permanent and ongoing within our new structure. At the moment, we have one repatriation manager, and that will continue. We leverage other resources from federal sources and others to support that program of work. We are not intending to change the pace of that work at this stage, no. That has not been the purpose of this change.

6635 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: So the person in the current role is guaranteed their position?

Dr GAIMSTER: The process will be that that person will be able to apply for that position.

6636 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Which has led to the State Aboriginal Heritage Committee writing to Mr Cheater—and cc'ing yourself in—expressing their concerns that that person has taken a long time to develop relationships of trust. So that person's job is actually not guaranteed, is it?

Dr GAIMSTER: As you know, in that change process all of the roles within the division have been re-scoped, but we have a dedicated position, an expert position, for repatriation that has not changed.

6637 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: What happens if that goes to another person who takes a lot longer to develop relationships of trust?

Dr GAIMSTER: That is always a risk of change, but at the moment that whole proposal is still under consultation. The final structures have not been finalised. We have heard a lot of those arguments in the consultation process. We will take them very, very seriously.

6638 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: When did you hear the arguments of the State Aboriginal Heritage Committee in the consultation process? They have written, with regard to media reports that they have read—

Dr GAIMSTER: I think we received that particular letter.

6639 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: You received this letter.

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes. I recognise it from where I am sitting.

6640 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: This letter was from 27 March, and it states that they have read, with interest, media reports of the proposed restructure. Shouldn't they have been consulted directly by the South Australian Museum? This is the State Aboriginal Heritage Committee, a key stakeholder. Should they not have been consulted directly?

Mr CHEATER: If I can, we do have an Aboriginal Partnership Committee of the Museum that is connected very strongly with the board. That actually does have ex officio members from the heritage committee, and the ambassador for Tarrkarri, who are ex officio members on that partnership committee. The particular role is vacant at the moment because of changes that were occurring within the Aboriginal heritage committee.

I can restate what Dr Gaimster said, which is that our commitment as a museum is to repatriation, and the repatriation work is unwavering. It is absolutely our intent that nothing that we're doing through this process will slow down the work that the Museum has done in that space and the work we are continuing to do with relevant communities.

6641 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: They have asked for the staff member that they have got a trust relationship with to be kept, and for that position not to go through this process. Have you responded to this letter?

Dr GAIMSTER: No, we haven't responded to that letter as yet. We're taking that onboard as part of our consultation process.

6642 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Your consultation process that didn't include them?

Dr GAIMSTER: There is no public—

6643 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: There isn't a public process yet?

Dr GAIMSTER: Effectively, there is no official consultation process.

6644 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: This is probably the beginning of the public process.

Dr GAIMSTER: This is an internal industrial relations process at the moment—

6645 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Yes.

Dr GAIMSTER: —and, as such, we didn't consult the community more widely.

6646 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: Have you consulted the foundation about all of this—foundation members and major donors?

Mr CHEATER: Yes.

Dr GAIMSTER: Yes.

6647 The Hon. T.A. FRANKS: What has their response been?

Dr GAIMSTER: The foundation board is—

Mr CHEATER: I would say two things: the foundation board has been kept closely informed of each of the steps of the different processes that we have described to you today. As Dr Gaimster previously advised, a range of different views have been expressed by external stakeholders to the Museum, which includes major donors, and we are responding to each of those accordingly.

6648 The CHAIRPERSON: Thank you for your time today. A copy of your transcript will be provided to you for your review. Also, we will have a number of questions on notice to all. That will be circulated along with the questions from today, so we would appreciate a prompt response in regard to those questions. Thank you very much.

Dr GAIMSTER: Thank you, Chair.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW

## STATE ABORIGINAL HERITAGE COMMITTEE

27 March 2024

Mr Kim Cheater  
Chairperson  
Board of the South Australian Museum  
[museumboard@samuseum.sa.gov.au](mailto:museumboard@samuseum.sa.gov.au)

The Hon Andrea Michaels MP  
Minister for the Arts  
[enfield@parliament.sa.gov.au](mailto:enfield@parliament.sa.gov.au)

Dear Mr Cheater and Hon Andrea Michaels MP

### **Re: Proposed restructure of Research and Collections Division**

The State Aboriginal Heritage Committee (Committee) has read with interest media reports of the proposed restructure of the South Australian Museum's (SAM's) Research and Collections Division.

At its meeting on Thursday 7 March 2024, Committee members present resolved to approach you with their concerns about the information contained in the reports.

The Committee understands that the restructure, including a net loss of positions and the reclassification of all positions as curatorial positions that will attract lower salaries, has the likely effect of making all current employees redundant with the opportunity, should they choose, to reapply for positions that will ultimately lead to a net loss of employee benefits that may not reflect the value of work they undertake.

The Committee's interest is focused on SAM's Aboriginal heritage practices and collections, including particularly SAM's work to repatriate Aboriginal Ancestral remains, and the work of SAM's Family and Community History Consultant, who facilitates research into individual and family histories for people seeking to understand their place within Australia.

SAM has held some 4,600 Aboriginal remains over the past 165 years. Many of these Old People found their way to SAM because of what are now recognised as abhorrent and dehumanising practices, with which SAM was in many cases complicit.

SAM's recent apology for its past practices and its concurrent commitment to repatriation were both well overdue and exceedingly well welcomed by the state's Aboriginal Community. SAM's role here is unique and cannot be replicated or delegated, including because only SAM is eligible to apply for the Commonwealth funding to support the return of Ancestral remains from overseas.

SAM's first major step in repatriation in supporting the Kurna Community to establish Wangayarta, a final and perpetual Resting Place for some Kurna Old People who were treated with such disrespect for so long, has been exceptionally successful.

The Committee is aware that SAM and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs have made commitments for similar repatriations for the First Peoples of the River Murray and Mallee and for the Ngarrindjeri, and that planning for these projects has begun. The needs of other Communities' Ancestors, still kept away from Country by SAM, also await.

The Committee wishes to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of Ms Anna Russo, Aboriginal Heritage and Repatriation Manager, and those supporting her at SAM, in realising Wangayarta. The Committee provided advice to Ms Russo and had ongoing involvement in the project.

The cross-cultural work required to repatriate Ancestors, especially in the very large numbers held by SAM, is exceedingly complex. It requires advanced expertise in Community consultation, legislation, planning, procurement, project management, fund raising and more. It also requires significant patience, empathy, cultural knowledge, and interpersonal skills.

Ms Russo and others working with her at SAM have deftly tempered unrealistic expectations, fostered achievable goals, and balanced the always fraught Community politics in these circumstances to achieve results after centuries of inaction. Wangayarta has directly contributed to the healing of past wrongs and reconciliation.

The Committee has serious concerns that devolving Ms Russo's repatriation role to a mid-level archaeologist will almost certainly hinder progress and damage the nascent trust that Ms Russo and her team have carefully built over recent years.

While SAM leadership has every right to decide to prioritise curation over research, SAM's historical collection of Old People, relatives of living people today, can never be displayed in a curated event at SAM. It is the Committee's unanimous and strong view that SAM should nonetheless continue to provide at least the current level of support for the Repatriation Team, notwithstanding any wider imperatives.

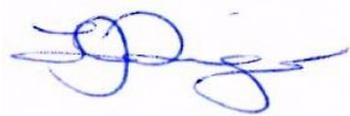
Similarly sensitive is the work of Mr Ali Abdullah-Highfold as Family and Community History Consultant. Mr Abdullah-Highfold's unique work was only very recently acknowledged when he won the 2024 Premier's Excellence Award for 'Connecting Communities'.

In writing to express its concern about the apparent de-prioritisation of repatriation and Aboriginal family history research, the Committee decided to include the names of the above two SAM employees because they are well known to members and to the broader Aboriginal Community. Their experience and achievements in handling matters that are deeply painful for Aboriginal people cannot be readily replaced, especially by someone of limited skills and experience.

SAM has bravely acknowledged that its past treatment of Aboriginal people continues to be a source of contemporary regret. SAM has publicly, and through policy, undertaken to reconcile with Aboriginal people. The proposed restructure appears to resile from this commitment by failing to maintain suitably senior, qualified, experienced personnel to perform the work.

The Committee urges SAM not to devalue in any way the services that it currently provides to the First Nations Communities of South Australia.

Yours sincerely,



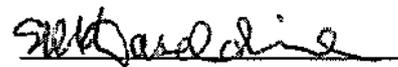
Fiona Singer (Arabana / Arrernte)  
Chairperson



Michael Coughlan (Peramangk)  
Member



Joshua Haynes (Yandruwandha / Yawarrawarrka)  
Vice Chairperson



Suzanne Haseldine (Kokatha)  
Member



Ken Jones (Boandik)  
Member



Vicki Dodd (Dieri)  
Member



Kym Thomas (Nukunu)  
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