



The Hon. Peter Malinauskas MP  
Premier of South Australia  
Member for Croydon  
[Premier@sa.gov.au](mailto:Premier@sa.gov.au)

11 July 2024

Dear Premier,

We write to you on behalf of the Australian Historical Association (AHA), the peak national organisation that has represented historians working in all fields of history since 1973. South Australian academics, professional historians, archivists, museum curators and teachers are among our 1,000 members. Some of our members are also fellows of the learned academies: the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia.

We wish to express our deep concern over aspects of the proposed restructure at the South Australian Museum (SAM). We are particularly concerned about the plan to abolish the positions of Anna Russo, the Museum's Aboriginal Heritage and Repatriation Manager, and Professor John Carty, Head of Humanities.

As you're no doubt aware, Aboriginal remains were collected by SAM from the late nineteenth century, although the practice began from the moment the British arrived in Australia in 1788. Private and state institutions throughout Australia and overseas hold vast collections of human remains and ethnographic material which, in the name of scientific racism and an allegedly superior British civilisation, were either traded, raided from resting places and burial sites, souvenired during the frontier wars, or stolen from Aboriginal people across the continent. By the early twentieth century, the South Australian government declared that 'all native remains found on Crown lands' were to be brought to the Museum in Adelaide, a policy which continued until as late as the 1960s. These racist policies resulted in SAM holding the largest collection of Indigenous remains in Australia.

Since SAM's repatriation program was re-launched in 2018, Professor Carty and Anna Russo have guided the return of more than 600 Indigenous remains to their ancestral lands. This program has been widely recognised throughout Australia and internationally, while some of our members, who have worked closely with Carty and Russo on the exhaustive work of repatriation – extensive research and cross-checking, collaborating with Aboriginal families, land councils, local government and media – have been inspired by their determination to 're-humanise' remains and strengthen communities, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

To undermine this program at such a critical juncture would be a tragedy not only for South Australia, but for the nation as well. Under Professor Carty and Anna Russo's leadership, SAM's repatriation program has helped to empower Indigenous elders and communities to bury their dead with dignity. Its collaborative nature has also powerfully demonstrated that truth-telling is much more than learning about the past – that it has a living, local and human scale that carries the potential to change and enrich our understanding of Australia's history.



We are aware that the museum has recently been placed under new management, and that a planned restructure is currently under review by your government. Given the urgency and importance of the matter, we ask that you think carefully before sanctioning any changes that would undermine the museum's capacity to work closely with Australia's First Nations on questions of repatriation, research and collection management. At a time when your government has committed to the 'implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart - Voice, Treaty and Truth - commencing with the South Australian First Nations Voice to Parliament', it is imperative that the work of the State's leading example of *truth-telling in action* be supported and continue.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Michelle Arrow FASSA  
President, Australian Historical Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michelle Arrow', written in a cursive style.

Professor Kate Fullagar FAHA  
Vice-President, Australian Historical Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Fullagar', written in a cursive style.