



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **OUR MUSEUM MATTERS! RENEWAL IS CRUCIAL**

### **THE HISTORY COUNCIL OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA WARNS THAT THE SA MUSEUM IS IN TROUBLE AND ATTACKING ITS NEW DIRECTOR WON'T HELP**

Seldom has so much attention been paid to the SA Museum. After decades of harmful neglect, the museum is suddenly back in the news. South Australians, it seems, greatly value their museum and are anxious to ensure it not only remains functioning, but that it once again becomes an institution of which we can all be proud.

The recent well-funded campaign of a group of SA notables attacking the SA Museum's new leadership has succeeded in generating a great deal of heat but, sadly, precious little light. The question that remains unanswered by their recent open letter is what has happened to our museum?

Constant underfunding by Labor and Liberal governments over decades means that the SA Museum as it stands is simply no longer fit for purpose. Starved of revenue, it has staggered on well past the point when something should have been done to rescue it.

What is the result of this? The museum's collections remain a mystery to all but those who work behind its locked doors. Its research rarely reaches out beyond a handful of scientists. Its displays, supposed to engage the public, are embarrassingly antiquated. To enter the museum now is to be disappointed by a tired, unchanging and frankly uninteresting institution with its best days behind it.

Given the sweeping changes to museums that have occurred around the world in the past 30 years, a continuation of the museum's broken operating model means handing over an impoverished museum to future generations. We could not blame them if they simply shuttered its doors rather than bear the expense of carrying out the renewal we would not undertake when we had the chance.

The museum and those who love it find themselves at a crossroads. Either they can embrace renewal, find ways to constructively engage with the modernisation of its practices and help open it up to the public. Or they can condemn the museum to continue its insular irrelevance.

To this end, the HCSA calls for:

- A commitment by museum management to continue the work of renewing a much loved but moribund cultural institution.
- A substantial and ongoing injection of targeted funding by government to assist in modernising and digitising the museum's collections.
- A commitment by all political parties to adequately fund the museum to allow it to conduct its core business.
- A guarantee from the management of the SA Museum that research (in a variety of forms) will remain integral to the future work of the museum.
- A commitment by the management of the SA Museum to minimise redundancies resulting from institutional change and seek to redeploy affected staff where possible.
- An end to destabilising public attacks aimed at derailing the renewal process.