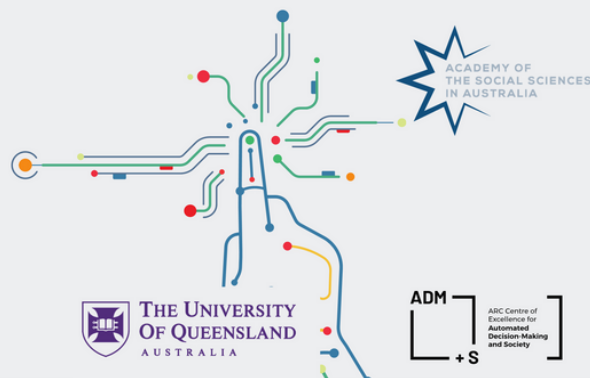


# Decadal Plan for Social Science Research Infrastructure 2023-32



## Submission # 8

Submitter(s)	<b>The Council of Australian University Museums and Collections (CAUMAC)</b>
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In light of the discussion paper for the Decadal Plan for Social Science Research Infrastructure 2023-32 that has been circulating, I thought we would introduce the Council of Australian University Museums and Collections, or CAUMAC.

Universities across Australia house nationally and internationally significant collections and research material within University Museums, as well as within academic faculties. When properly utilised, these physical assets have the potential to support and contribute to leading-edge research and innovation, enrich education, connect academic networks with cultural, public and industry networks and preserve cultural and biological heritage. CAUMAC welcomes the development of a national approach to research infrastructure for the Social Sciences, particularly as it relates to the management and activation of physical assets, or collections, held by Australian universities. We are particularly interested in the role that our organisation can play in providing a coordinated approach to resolving shared issues in our sector.

### About CAUMAC

CAUMAC is a national network simultaneously linked to AMAGA Australian Museums and Galleries Association and UMAC University Museums and Collections, itself a network body of the International Council of Museums.

CAUMAC aims to link all collections and museums staff, volunteers, researchers, and audiences, working for or interested in Australia's 200 and counting university museums and collections distributed throughout the country. Its mission is to provide professional experience and advocacy to universities in responsible custodianship of its cultural and scientific assets as part of a distributed national collection.

Coming up to its 30th year in 2023, CAUMAC came about as an outcome of an annual forum of Vice-Chancellors. It's earliest substantial contributions to the sector were to begin articulating the scope of the university's cultural assets and their cultural impact more broadly, resulting in two landmark reports: the Cinderella Collections Report and Transforming Cinderella Collections.

The current committee and ordinary members of CAUMAC:

- Jason Benjamin – Communications Officer (staff at University of Melbourne)
- Caine Chennatt – Co-Chair (staff at University of Tasmania)
- Gina Hammond – Secretary (staff at Macquarie University)
- Jacqueline Healy – Member (staff at University of Melbourne)
- Jane King – Member (staff at John Curtin Gallery)
- Claire Sheridan – Co-Chair (staff at Australian National University)
- Andrew Simpson – Treasurer (staff at Macquarie University)
- Jane Thorgersen – Member (staff at University of Sydney)
- Ethel Villafranca – Member (staff at University of Melbourne)

## Response to Discussion Paper

CAUMAC acknowledges the significant and wide-reaching work undertaken by the Australian Academy of Social Sciences and its partners in collaborating to prepare the Decadal Plan for Social Sciences Research Infrastructure 2023–32 Discussion Paper.

The Discussion Paper and accompanying stock-take highlights the plethora of storage and collection capabilities, discovery tools, and technical standards and tools already in place to manage this data.

While a federated approach to coordinating physical infrastructure and data is an evidently necessary focus, it is important to also note the significance, breadth, and potential of the physical assets (collections and research material) held across University Museums, Collections and academic areas. Sharing many of the same issues faced in the current movement towards open data (for example, embedding FAIR and CARE principles), the physical cultural and scientific assets of the University are often hidden, siloed and at risk of becoming disassociated from its cultural or academic context, at the time of creation or collection.

Due to resource constraints and the nature of the structural organisation of universities, it can be difficult to take a unified and holistic approach to the management, repatriation or restitution, and activation or realisation of collections and research material. As such, there is a tendency to duplicate work and resources both within an organisation, as well as across the university sector, rather than taking a unified and coordinated approach to ensure that this material is findable and accessible to communities and for researchers. This is not unlike the issues articulated in the Discussion Paper as it relates to the 32 discovery tools currently mapped.

There are several issues currently impacting the nationally and internationally significant collections and research material held by universities, key of which are:

- Highly variable approaches to the management of collections and research material at different Australian Universities.
- Limited awareness of Australian university collections beyond immediate user groups (e.g. within University and Higher Education leadership, cultural and/or scientific networks).
- Inability to meet rising pressures and/or to coordinate efforts in repatriation and community engagement across universities – particularly as it relates to creating long-term, institutional change in ways that First Nations communities are able to be active participants in the repatriation, use and management of their Ancestors, objects, cultural and environmental material and associated data and publications. The increasing awareness of and responsiveness by universities to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property and repatriation considerations, the lack of coordination also places considerable pressures on communities, organisations and Elders, while not providing commensurate compensation, benefit sharing or repatriation of knowledges.
- An over-reliance on short-term or project-based grants (often attached to research grants) to support ongoing work in the management, use and repatriation of physical materials.
- Lack of infrastructure to handle the ongoing physical legacy (and non-traditional research outputs) that new research projects create.
- The long-term management of data, digital-borne assets and digital reproductions related to digitised collections and research collections, and our ability to make this accessible to communities and researchers while ensuring appropriate data governance and rights management.
- Appropriate resources to make our collections accessible/interoperable to researchers and students through national and international research infrastructure platforms/initiatives.

With these issues in mind, CAUMAC would like to highlight the opportunities in developing the following areas to support collections and research material being findable and accessible to researchers, while also ensuring we are meeting our responsibilities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as communities in Asia and the Pacific region.

## **1. Support for discovery tools and national platforms, and interconnectivity between physical and digital assets**

There is an urgent need to connect the physical assets within an institution together (for example, under a unified Collection Management System, discovery platform, or an ability to link physical research material to publications, documents in the archives as well as the associated research data). This need extends to the capacity to harvest data into national and/or discipline-specific discovery and research tools (for example, Atlas of Living Australia, Digital Pasifik, TROVE, Australian Trade Union Gateway etc). Furthermore, expanding the capabilities of existing discovery tools will ensure that individual institutions are not duplicating resources and work to constantly recreate research tools that have short lifespans (for example, expanding Atlas of Living Australia to also facilitate 3D imaging of faunal specimens from zoology and zooarchaeology collections).

## **2. Coordinated approach to policies and standards (links between collections, research and data standards)**

Universities have significant work to do to ensure that ‘orphaned’ physical assets – and related data or publications – are findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable. Consistency in the way physical assets are catalogued and described (standards such as SPECTRIUM, CIDOC, Dublin Core, EXIF), embedding cultural protocols into the management of collection material and its associated data (emerging standards such as Traditional Knowledge Labels that align with CARE principles), and ensuring that university sector are pushing advancements in policies and standards are key areas of development. In addition to dealing with the legacy of research within our institution, new collections and data are constantly being created by researchers. We acknowledge that many of the issues faced in collection management, repatriation and activation are the same issues being discussed in research (for example, dealing with licencing and ownership at the beginning of the project, improvements to research design, how ‘impact’ is measured, ethics and the management of physical and digital assets during – and at the conclusion of – the research project). To ensure we do not create a new, potentially negative, legacy, it is important that advancements in collection management, repatriation and activation policies and standards mirror and support advancements in research policies and methodologies. There is significant opportunity here in refining ‘rules’ at the commencement of a project before funding from Funding Bodies such as the ARC.

## **3. Cross-institution collaboration and inter-disciplinary networks**

The physical assets held by universities across Australia exist within a complex web of international and cross-cultural, intersectoral and cross-disciplinary networks and research. It is these networks that have the potential to inform and improve research and collecting practices, push the boundaries of best practice, and use physical and digital assets to solve the toughest social problems and research questions. Unfortunately, Australia currently does not have a

platform that allows for true collaboration and debate around common problems in managing, repatriating, and activating collections and research material in the university sector. The Committee sees the potential for CAUMAC to take a strong leadership role in this space, and we are currently restructuring the entity (CAUMAC) to better meet this need, and better connect academic and collection networks together.

#### **4. Support for specialist collection expertise**

The management, repatriation and activation of university collections and research material requires specialist collection expertise working with academic networks. Currently, this critical and ongoing work is often supported by short-term or project-based funding, limiting each institution's capacity and capability to make their physical assets findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable. Recognition, support and improved career pathways within the University sector is required to ensure that institutions are able to unlock the full potential of these nationally and internationally significant assets.

CAUMAC commends the work done in the Discussion Paper, and would welcome the opportunity to further discuss potential of University Museums and Collections held nationally, and their potential for research and teaching in Australia.

Kind regards,

**The Council of Australian University Museums and Collections (CAUMAC)**