

## **ICOM Australia**

### **Outgoing Chair's Report – Dr Mathew Trinca AM FAHA**

ICOM Australia has enjoyed a marked recovery this year after the challenges of the previous years dominated as they were by the global coronavirus pandemic. The national committee was able to re-establish key programs and deliver a major collaborative training program over the course of the year, as well as contributing strongly to global issues affecting museums and their interests.

The year following the last AGM began with our sponsorship of a keynote speaker at the AMAGA conference, Dr Sabah Abdel Razek, General Director of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and the presentation of the ICOM International Awards after a two-year hiatus. We were delighted to recognise the work of Dr Gaye Sculthorpe and the Bendigo Art Gallery for the major contributions they have made to international relations from the Australian museum sector. ICOM Australia has also established a new Travel Fellowship for early career professionals and museum studies students worth up to \$5000 to cover travel costs associated with a research project focusing on key questions in museum theory and practice. The intention is to present the award annually from 2023.

ICOM Australia also joined with ICOM New Zealand and the Pacific Islands Museum Association to convene a panel at the Prague ICOM General Conference. The discussion focused on Decolonization in museums: new perspectives on ownership, custodianship and restitution and featured speakers from around the world, moderated by the vice-chair of ICOM Australia, Alex Marsden. This panel represented a continuation of work that ICOM Australia has continued to pursue in this area and points to the increasing focus on issues of ownership and custodianship of museum collections globally.

The Prague Conference also saw the adoption of a new museum definition after many years of debate and discussion about the need to update our view of museums and their role in society. Gratefully, the global museum community decided upon the new museum definition after many years of work following Kyoto Conference in 2019. I was pleased to play a role as a member of the international committee that worked on the new definition in recent years, ICOM Define, and to have represented the interests of members in Australia on the ethics committee, ETHCOM. At the same time, other Australian members are making major contributions to other standing committees of ICOM, including Alec Coles (chair of the Finance and Resources Committee), Andrew Simpson (Strategic Allocation Review Committee), Robin Hirst (Strategic Plan Committee), and Fiona Cameron (Working Group on Sustainability). Of course, many members are also engaged in the work of the International Committees of ICOM. Notably, ICOM Australia assisted and supported the successful election of Deborah Tout-Smith, a long-time contributor to the national committee and ICOM more generally, to the Executive Board of ICOM - a great result all round.

Importantly, the Prague Conference was also notable for the adoption of a new Strategic Plan for the organisation which sets out the ambitions and key priorities for the next six years. Pleasingly, ICOM Australia has been able to review its own strategic plan for the next five years to be consistent with the over-arching directions of the global organisation. Our plan, through to 2028, will seek to address those global priorities with specific reference to circumstances in Australia and our wider region, and will help to direct and focus our energy in coming years.

This year, ICOM Australia was able to proceed with the planning for the collaborative program with ICOM Singapore to develop and deliver a pilot conservation training program for ASEAN nations. With support from the National Museum of Australia, the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, the Western Australian Museum, the Queensland Museum Network, and the Australian

Museum, the pilot program was held recently in Singapore under the auspices of the National Heritage Board of Singapore. Again, the Vice-Chair Alex Marsden was in Singapore representing ICOM Australia over the course of the week and the program was attended by representatives from 10 ASEAN nations, covering a wide variety of subjects related to the particular challenges of heritage conservation in the wet and dry tropics. After years of delay due to COVID, it was especially pleasing to have developed this program with our Singaporean colleagues and we look forward now to working similarly with ICOM New Zealand and the Pacific Islands Museums Association to deliver a similar program in the Pacific.

Perhaps one of the most pleasing aspects of the past year has been the great work done to maintain and grow our membership in Australia. Despite what have been very challenging external circumstances in the years affected by COVID 19, ICOM Australia membership has held up well and is now showing strong signs of recovery. In no small part this has been due to the fine work of our Membership Secretary Toner Stevenson and the work of the rest of the Board. As the outgoing chair, I want to take this opportunity to thank her, and indeed all the National Committee for their work in recent years to achieve what has been a fine year for our organisation. My thanks to Alex Marsden, the Vice-Chair; Vicki Northey, Secretary; Lisa Walters, Treasurer; Toner Stevenson, Membership Secretary; committee members Liz Gehde, Robyn van Dyk, Justine van Mourik, Rebecca Georgiades, Linda Byrne, Eric Archer and Jessica Bridgfoot, and ex officio members Seb Chan, Tarisi Vunidilo and Sana Balai.

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