ICOM international council of museums Australia

ANNUAL REPORT

International Council of Museums Australia National Committee

2026

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2026 Annual Report of the ICOM Australia Committee

1. Chairs Message

Throughout 2026, ICOM Australia focused on advocacy, international engagement and member services during a period of significant change for the museum sector. While museums and galleries continue to deliver substantial economic, cultural and social benefits, the sector remains challenged by rising operational costs, increasing expectations and ongoing funding pressures. In response, ICOM Australia continued to advocate for stronger recognition of museums and cultural heritage through the implementation of the Australian Government's Revive policy and consultation on the next phase of national cultural policy.

This year also saw increasing attention on issues shaping the future of museums, including artificial intelligence, climate adaption, cultural heritage protection and regional collaboration. Through active participation in ASPAC and ICOM International forums, contributions to policy discussions, and ongoing engagement with Blue Shield initiatives, ICOM Australia continued to represent Australian museum professionals both nationally and internationally.

Finally, I am pleased to report continued growth in our National Committees individual membership. In response to your enthusiasm, ICOM Australia has appointed a dedicated membership administrator to enhance our customer service. This has been a successful initiative with faster membership response time and quicker turnarounds for membership applications and renewals - including of course those all-important annual stickers. Thanks to the ICOM Australia Board, volunteers and members for their ongoing support and contribution throughout the year

Concluding Comments

After three and a half rewarding years as Chair of ICOM Australia, I will be stepping aside from the role and warmly welcoming a new Chair, along with several new office bearers, as they lead the organisation into its next chapter.

The ICOM Australia Committee comprises a small group of dedicated museum professionals who work above their day jobs to advocate for the sector, administer the finances, write advocacy documents, attend international meetings into the early hours of the morning and do lots of very dry but very important admin work – and we have a bit of fun. Thanks to my fellow Board members for keeping the ICOM machine going and for guiding me (as an ICOM novice) through the bureaucracy of ICOM. It has been a privilege to represent ICOM Australia internationally and to elevate Australia's voice and the profile of our region within the global museum community.

As I conclude my time as Chair, thank you for your ongoing support and membership – and of course for those that travel, I hope you are enjoying the collegiate benefits of the ICOM card as much as I do! Together, we are part of a global network that connects professionals across borders and champions the vital role museums play in our communities.

2. Executive Board

The ICOM Australia Board, 2025 - 2026, comprised:

Chair	Jessica Bridgfoot	Bendigo Art Gallery
Vice-Chair	Alex Marsden	Alex Marsden Cultural Services
National Secretary	Vicki Northey PSM	
Treasurer	Lisa Walters	SLM/Unaffiliated
Membership Secretary	Dr Lynda Kelly	Lynda Kelly Networks
Ordinary Members		
	Justine van Mourik	Castledex
	Ophelia Rubinich	AIATSIS
	Cameron Auty	University of Melbourne, ASPA
	Paul Donnelly	Chau Chak Wing Museum, Blue Shield
Ex-Officio		
	Julie Baird	Australian Museums and Galleries Association
Membership Administration		
	Elizabeth Cummins	

3. Year in Summary

3.1 Membership

ICOM Australia ended its 2026 membership year with a total of 780 Individual members and 52 Institutional members. Applications and renewals for 2027 memberships opened on 1 October. A full membership report can be found below.

3.2 Sector Collaboration and Advocacy

As well as our work in the region, International engagement remains a key priority. In May 2026, ICOM Australia was represented at the ICOM ASPAC (Regional Alliance of Asia Pacific Countries) Annual Meeting and Symposium in Malaysia, where discussions focused on climate change, cultural diversity, conflict, sustainability and the ongoing impact of the 2022 Museum Definition This participation also supported the ongoing development of ICOM Australia's Pacific Project and strengthened relationships with colleagues across the region.

The Committee has continued to advocate during consultation on the next phase of Australia's National Cultural Policy, highlighting the importance of museums, cultural heritage and history, greater support for climate adaptation and financial sustainability, as well as stronger engagement with our Asian and Pacific neighbours.

While progress under the Australian Government's Revive policy continues, the Federal Government recently released research conducted by the Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research (BCARR) finding that cultural and creative activity contributed $70.3 billion to our economy in 2024–25, an uplift of $2.7 billion from the previous year representing 2.5% of our economy and comparable to that of the accommodation and food services sector. Of that total figure $972 million per year is contributed specifically by the Museum and Gallery sector[1]. These figures are an important reminder of the economic value of our sector.However, they tell only part of the story. Museums also generate profound social, educational, health and wellbeing benefits, creating opportunities for learning, connection, creativity and cultural understanding for people of all ages.

[1] Cultural and creative activity | Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics

While public investment was estimated by Australian arts and culture think tank A New Approach (ANA) at $8.6 billion across all levels of government in 2023–24[2], it remains inadequate to address the increasing demands of a sector grappling with significantly rising operational costs. ICOM Australia will continue to review and advocate to the Federal Government as the *Revive's* actions continue.

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to raise important questions around copyright, authenticity and ethics in the museum sector. Internationally, ICOM and UNESCO have commenced work to better understand the opportunities and challenges AI presents for museums worldwide. The findings of the first UNESCO–ICOM Global Survey on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Museums was presented at the Global Forum on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (GFEAI) 2026. Surveying more than 400 museums across 90 countries, the study found that 57% of responding museums are already using AI, while 55% have no internal AI policy, strategy or guidelines. The findings point to a sector moving rapidly into experimentation, while institutional capacity, governance and training struggle to keep pace. Digital Technologies are addressed in Pillar 7 of the 2026 ICOM Code of Ethics with an emphasis on minimising harm and the protection of intellectual property rights, Indigenous rights and data sovereignty.[3]

The protection of cultural heritage remains a global concern. Through the work of Blue Shield Australia and Blue Shield International, efforts continue to support disaster preparedness, risk reduction and the protection of collections and cultural heritage threatened by conflict and natural disasters.

3.3 ICOM General Assemblies and Conference

Members from the ICOM Australia Committee attended the 27th ICOM triennial General Conference, held in Dubai from 11 - 17 November under the theme ***The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities.*** The conference saw over 4,500 participants from across the globe converge to participate in over 100 events, including the 40th Ordinary General Assembly which saw the adoption of six resolutions defining ICOM Strategic Priorities for the 2025 - 2028 period.

The conference closed by confirming Antonio Rodriguez (ICOM USA) as ICOM President for 2025 - 2028 and announcing the 28th ICOM triennial General Conference will be held in Rotterdam and center around the theme ***'Building Bridges. Connecting Worlds, Cultures and Generations'***

ICOM Australia is pleased to report that there is a significant level of interest in bidding for the **29th ICOM Triennial General Conference**. ICOM Australia will be working with the selected state to support a bid to host the conference in Australia in 2032. The conference generally attracts more than 4500 international delegates and would be a significant coup for the Australian Museum sector. Members will be notified as submissions open.

3.2 ASEAN Initiatives – Singapore and the Pacific

In collaboration with ICOM **New Zealand** and Pacific Island Museum representatives, ICOM Australia continues its work with **Sione Napi Francis** and **Aunty Sana Bala** to strengthen community relationships in the Pacific region. Following on from a research trip and detailed report submitted in 2025. ICOM Australia has applied for further funding to support Sione and Aunty Sana to progress the development of key relationships in the Pacific in 2027.

4. Working / Standing Committee Representation

4.1 International Engagement

This year saw the continuing consultations and advocacy regarding the review of the ICOM Code of Ethics as well as contributions to the ASPAC Committee lead by Board member Cameron Auty.

[2] The Big Picture Report

[3] https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/ICOM-Code-of-Ethics-for-Museums_2026_EN.pdf

4.2 International Museum Day 2026

On 18 May 2026, museums worldwide celebrated International Museum Day under the theme “Museums Uniting a Divided World.” The theme recognised the role of museums in bringing people together across cultural, social and geographic boundaries, creating opportunities for dialogue, shared understanding and community connection. This theme was also the guide to celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), commemorating eight decades of international leadership and collaboration in support of museums and cultural heritage.

4.3 Australian Museums and Galleries Association Relationship

ICOM Australia continues to work with AMaGA to advocate for the Australian Museum industry and complements the work of AMaGA by providing an international network of resources and networks in the sector.

5. Awards & Fellowships

5.1 Fellowships

In 2025 Travel Fellowship was presented to Finn Carey who in 2026 visited the Ulster Museum in Belfast and the Museum of Free Derry, as well as the Healing Through Remembering travelling exhibition at the Peace Museum in England as part of his research into how museums are presenting and interpreting difficult and contested histories. His research concluded that the value of interpreting contested histories may lie not in presenting a single authoritative narrative, but in using institutional authority to make space for complexity, dialogue and critical engagement.

ICOM Australia also provided a bursary to **Dr Erica Seccombe** to attend and present a paper at **ICOM NATHIST** Conference in Adelaide 2026.

5.2 ICOM Australia Awards

The ICOM Australia Awards acknowledge and celebrate the outstanding contributions made by individuals and Institutions in Australia that have strengthened international relations and enriched the cultural landscape of museums and galleries.

Each year ICOM Australia presents two awards, one to an institution and one to an individual museum professional who are considered to have made a significant impact on a global scale.

The ICOM Australia 2025 award winners were announced at the 2025 ICOM Australia Annual General Meeting on 10 October 2025.

Individual Award for outstanding contribution to international engagement in museums and galleries

> **Nici Cumpston OAM** for her international advocacy work in representing, promoting and championing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and First Nations arts across Australia and internationally. Most recently, Nici was appointed Director of the Kluge-Ruhe Art Collection at the University of Virginia.

Institutional Award for outstanding contribution to international engagement in museums and galleries

> The **National Gallery of Victoria** for its ***Adaptive Climate Control Strategy,*** a sustainability initiative aimed at redefining museum environmental standards by reducing energy-intensive climate control requirements while maintaining best-practice collection care. Through research, testing and sector-wide collaboration, the NGV implemented flexible environmental conditions, endorsed the Bizot Green Protocol, partnered with the Getty Conservation Institute and helped drive industry change towards more sustainable collection management and loan practices.

The 2026 award recipients will be announced at the 2026 ICOM Australia Annual General Meeting, held on Thursday 5 November.

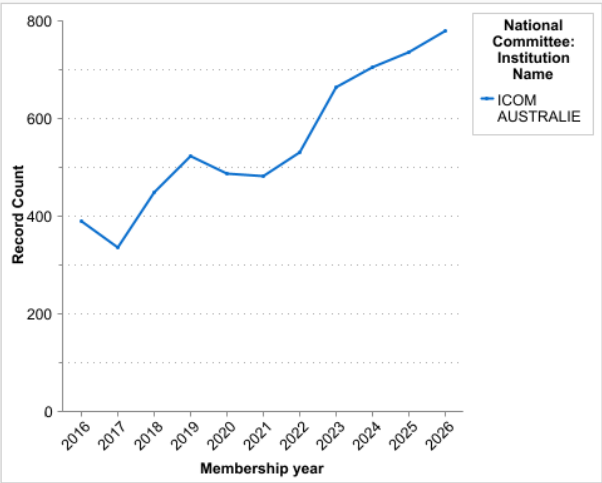
Annual Membership Report 2026

Prepared by: Dr Lynda Kelly, ICOM Australia Membership Secretary
Date: 2 November 2026

1. Membership update

2026 saw another steady growth in Individual memberships for ICOM Australia, finishing the year with 780 members (5.8% increase from 2025 memberships), and 52 Institutional memberships.

2026 Total Membership numbers	2025 Total Membership numbers
Individual = 780 Institutional = 52	Individual = 735 member Institution = 53



A focus of the Board during 2026 was to increase numbers of Institutional members, particularly the bigger organisations across capital cities and large regional centres. While numbers were slightly down we did attract several new institutional members, and some that hadn't renewed in 2025.

2. Operations

In late 2023, ICOM Australia modified our business model which saw membership administration performed in-house with the appointment of Elizabeth (Liz) Cummins as Membership Administrator, a role she will continue into the 2027 membership year.

Both Dr Kelly and Liz Cummins are in regular contact with ICOM Paris's membership team specifically for updates on progression of the planned digital membership card (which has progressed!) and checking in on any other planned changes to membership, including fees. From 2027-2028 ICOM will be moving to a new membership system (BIPOC) and Dr Kelly is involved in providing feedback to Paris and has offered to assist in user testing. This new system will include a mobile app with the digital card embedded.

As advised at the 2025 AGM, the Board has instituted an administration fee, and this year will increase this in line with CPI (3.4%). As reported at the 2025 AGM, this surcharge is necessary to support the ongoing administrative requirements of ICOM Australia as we see our highest membership numbers to date. This includes rising costs of postage and consumables, international exchange rates and Membership Administrator fees, with an increase to hourly rate, also in line with CPI and after a review of 'like' positions in the sector.

The 2026 Membership subcommittee was composed of Dr Kelly (Membership Secretary); Vicki Northey (ICOM Australia Secretary) and Ophelia Rubinich (Board member) who assess applicants and approve new members. This group will continue for the 2027 membership year.

ICOM Australia Financial Year Report

Prepared by: ICOM Australia Treasurer
Date: November 2026

1. Recommendations

That members resolve:

1. That the audited financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2026 be received and adopted.
2. That Anthony Wilson of AccountAbility be reappointed as auditor of ICOM Australia for the financial year ending 30 June 2027, subject to his consent to act.
3. That the Treasurer's Report be received and noted

2. Financial report for the year ended 30 June 2026

I am pleased to present the Treasurer's Report for the Australian National Committee of the International Council of Museums Incorporated for the year ended 30 June 2026.

This is the first regular 12-month reporting year following ICOM Australia's transition to a 30 June financial year end. The comparative figures for 2025 cover the preceding 18-month period, following the change in reporting period approved by members at the 2024 AGM

2.1 Operating Result

ICOM Australia recorded a deficit from ordinary activities of $3,291 for 2026, compared with a deficit of $31,372 for the previous reporting period. Total income was $169,397, while total expenses were $172,68

The principal sources of income were:
· membership subscriptions of $163,727;
· interest income of $4,705;

The principal expenses were:
· subscriptions paid to Paris of $143,491;
· administrative and financial support of $13,542;
· bursaries of $5,000;
· other operating costs of $8,500;
· audit fees of $1,320; and
· travel costs of $678

The result represents a substantial reduction in the operating deficit compared with the prior reporting period. Members should note, however, that the comparative period was 18 months, whereas the 2026 accounts cover a regular 12-month financial year.

2.2 Statement of Financial Position

At 30 June 2026, ICOM Australia held cash and cash equivalents of $165,749, compared with $167,441 at 30 June 2025. There were no trade or other receivables recorded at year end.

Cash holdings comprised:

- $4,419 in the ANZ Business Advantage account;
- $72,221 in the Bank Australia Saver account; and
- $89,111 in a Bank Australia term deposit.

Current liabilities were $35,993, comprising funds held for IAMPP. Net assets and total equity at year end were $129,756, compared with $133,047 in the prior period. Equity included the ICOM Australia Bursary Fund of $51,760 and an accumulated surplus of $77,996.

2.3 Cash flow and financial risks

Net cash used in operating activities was $1,692, and cash reduced from $167,441 at the beginning of the year to $165,749 at year end.

ICOM Australia receives subscription revenue in Australian dollars but pays its international subscription obligations in euros. Consequently, movements in the Australian dollar against the euro remain an important financial risk. The Association manages this exposure by maintaining cash reserves intended to cover reasonably foreseeable short-term exchange-rate fluctuations.

3. Independent audit

The financial statements were audited by Anthony Wilson, Registered Association Auditor, of AccountAbility.

The independent auditor issued an unmodified opinion that the financial report gives a true and fair view of ICOM Australia's financial position as at 30 June 2026 and its financial performance for the year then ended. The auditor also concluded that the report complies with the applicable Australian Accounting Standards and the requirements of Division 60 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 and associated regulations.

The auditor's report is dated 25 October 2026

4. Appointment of Auditor for 2026

Anthony Wilson has audited ICOM Australia's financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2026. The previous Treasurer's Report recorded that he had served as ICOM Australia's auditor for several years and had provided good service at a reasonable cost.
Subject to confirmation of his consent to act and the agreement of appropriate terms and fees, I recommend that Anthony Wilson of AccountAbility be reappointed as auditor for the financial year ending 30 June 2027.

5. Acknowledgement

I thank the members of the Executive Board and those providing administrative and financial support for their assistance during the year.