

CAMD Case Study – INDIGENOUS CULTURES: *Keeping Places*

South Australian Museum

2011



Like many CAMD museums, the South Australian Museum maintains an active programme of repatriation of cultural material and human remains to Indigenous communities respecting their cultural and spiritual significance. The museum recognises the primary rights of Indigenous people to their cultural material held in museum collections, self-determination for Indigenous people in respect of cultural heritage matters, and consultation with Indigenous people in the management of those collections. The South Australian Museum is now a recognized world leader in repatriating ancestral remains, secret/sacred objects and other cultural materials to Indigenous Australian communities. This programme is in partnership with the Federally-funded Return of Indigenous Culture Programme (RICP).

Through the RICP, several Government-funded museums are engaged with community consultations in Arnhem Land concerning the future of Secret Sacred Object collections from this region. In response to Aboriginal community interest, the Northern Land Council (NLC) and the South Australian Museum's RICP project have jointly developed architectural plans and sought funding to establish a purpose built facility to look after western Arnhem Land ceremonial objects.

Following consultation, a keeping place is to be built at Warruwi on South Goulburn Island to contain a large storage facility with cabinets to separate Yirritja and Dhuwa moiety ceremonial items, and a bench to enable collection items to be inspected, decorated and ritually treated. Apart from objects returned by government-funded museums through the RICP, this facility will also look after material prepared for contemporary ceremonial use. The keys for this area within the building will be held by nominated clan leaders, rather than day staff members. The storage facility will be built in accordance with best museum practice and the specific needs of the community.

The keeping place will also embrace secular activities, and therefore will require a family history database, shop facility, tourist guide information and a museum display. To cater for these diverse heritage needs, the keeping house development will require a skilled designer and consultant curator, among other specialists. Once established, the museum should be adequately maintained by trained staff from the Warruwi community. To assist in training and to provide future support, an ongoing relationship between the keeping place (via the NLC) and the South Australian Museum will hopefully be established through a memorandum of understanding.