



06 July 2026

The Hon Peter Malinauskas MP

Premier of South Australia
GPO Box 2343
Adelaide SA 5001

Dear Premier,

Re: Tarrkarri – Australia's National Centre for First Nations Cultures

On behalf of the South Australian Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects, I write regarding the future of **Tarrkarri – Australia's National Centre for First Nations Cultures**, and more broadly the nationally significant civic and cultural opportunity represented by the North Terrace site.

South Australia has earned a national reputation for architecture, design excellence and cultural leadership. Successive governments have invested in public buildings and places that have strengthened our State's identity, enriched our civic life and enhanced our international reputation. The Institute believes the North Terrace site presents an opportunity to continue this tradition through the delivery of internationally significant civic and cultural infrastructure that will serve South Australians for generations.

The Institute recognises the South Australian Government's aspiration to create a nationally significant institution celebrating the world's oldest continuous living cultures. From its inception, the vision for this site has represented far more than a building project. It has embodied an ambition to create a destination of architectural excellence that strengthens South Australia's cultural identity, supports truth-telling and reconciliation, enhances our international reputation, and delivers lasting economic, tourism and educational benefits.

For more than a decade, the site has been the subject of successive proposals, including Adelaide Contemporary and Tarrkarri, each reflecting a shared ambition to create a cultural destination of national significance. Throughout this period, the architectural profession has contributed through international design competitions, master planning and design excellence processes that have attracted significant national and international interest.

The Institute's concern is not that the Government sought to reassess the project's ambition. On the contrary, we supported the aspiration to ensure that any significant public investment delivered a cultural institution of genuine international standing. Our concern is that, more than three years after completion of the independent review, South Australia remains without a clearly articulated pathway for the future of this nationally significant site.



Public reporting following completion of the review indicated that the project's original vision remained appropriate while recognising that additional investment would be required to realise an institution of international significance. While the Government has not publicly released the review or its response, the absence of a clear direction has resulted in prolonged uncertainty surrounding one of the State's most important civic opportunities.

The consequences of this uncertainty extend well beyond a single project. Major civic and cultural infrastructure contributes to city identity, tourism, investment, education, economic development and public life. During the period in which this site has remained unresolved, other Australian jurisdictions have continued to invest in landmark cultural destinations, including the Art Gallery of New South Wales' Sydney Modern expansion, the WA Museum Boola Bardip in Perth, the Geelong Arts Centre redevelopment and Victoria's Melbourne Arts Precinct Transformation, incorporating The Fox: NGV Contemporary. These projects demonstrate the value governments continue to place on ambitious cultural infrastructure as a catalyst for visitation, economic activity, precinct renewal and international competitiveness.

From an urban perspective, the partially completed site occupies one of Adelaide's most prominent locations within the North Terrace cultural precinct. Continued inactivity represents a significant opportunity cost for one of Australia's premier cultural boulevards and contributes to uncertainty surrounding the future of a site long recognised as having exceptional civic and cultural potential.

The Institute also recognises that the project has evolved considerably over time and may continue to do so as Government considers future opportunities. Decisions regarding the cultural purpose, governance and interpretation of any future institution are rightly matters to be developed in genuine partnership with First Nations leadership and the cultural sector. The Institute does not seek to advocate for a predetermined project outcome. Rather, we advocate for a collaborative process that results in internationally significant civic and cultural infrastructure befitting South Australia's reputation for design excellence, cultural leadership and long-term public value.

The Australian Institute of Architects believes this site should continue to be regarded as one of the State's most significant civic opportunities. Whatever form the project ultimately takes, it should aspire to the highest standards of architecture, urban design, sustainability and place-making, while making a meaningful contribution to Adelaide's cultural life, visitor economy and international reputation.

Enclosed is a short discussion paper outlining the Institute's broader perspective on the importance of civic and cultural infrastructure to South Australia's future and the role the architectural profession can play in supporting that vision.



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We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and the Minister for Arts to discuss how the Australian Institute of Architects can work constructively with Government, First Nations leadership and the broader cultural sector to help shape a lasting legacy for this nationally significant site.

Yours sincerely,

.....
Kirstie Coultas FRAIA

President

Australian Institute of Architects – South Australian Chapter

cc:

The Hon Kyam Maher MLC

Deputy Premier

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

Minister for Attorney-General

Minister for Industrial Relations and Public Sector

Minister for Arts



DELIVERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CIVIC AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The North Terrace Cultural Site: A National Opportunity



Discussion Paper

SA CHAPTER

Submission date: 06 July 2026

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Australian Institute of Architects (Institute) is the peak body for the architectural profession in Australia. It is an independent, national member organisation with around 14,000 members across Australia and overseas.

The Institute exists to advance the interests of members, their professional standards and contemporary practice, and expand and advocate the value of architects and architecture to the sustainable growth of our communities, economy and culture.

The Institute actively works to maintain and improve the quality of our built environment by promoting better, responsible and environmental design.

PURPOSE

- This submission is made by the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) to provide input on the North Terrace Cultural Site.
- At the time of this submission the SA Chapter President is Kirstie Coultas, and the Chief Executive Officer is Cameron Bruhn.

CONTACT DETAILS

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THE NORTH TERRACE CULTURAL SITE: A NATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) believes South Australia has an opportunity to reaffirm its longstanding commitment to architecture, design excellence and cultural leadership through the future development of the North Terrace cultural site.

For more than a decade, this site has been the focus of successive proposals—including Adelaide Contemporary and, more recently, Tarrkarri – Australia's National Centre for First Nations Cultures. While each proposal has reflected different cultural aspirations and operational models, they have shared a common objective: to create a nationally significant cultural destination that enriches South Australia's cultural life while strengthening its economy, visitor appeal and international reputation.

The Institute does not advocate for a predetermined project outcome. Decisions regarding the cultural purpose, governance and operation of any future institution are rightly matters for Government, First Nations leadership and the cultural sector.

However, the Institute believes the site represents one of Australia's most significant civic opportunities. Whatever form future development takes, it should aspire to international standards of architecture, urban design and place-making, while delivering enduring public value.

This paper outlines why continued investment in major civic and cultural infrastructure matters, why the North Terrace site remains strategically important, and how the architectural profession can contribute constructively to shaping its future.

WHY CIVIC AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE MATTERS

Cities are remembered by the public buildings and places they choose to create.

Around the world, major cultural institutions have become symbols of civic identity, economic confidence and cultural ambition. They attract visitors, stimulate private investment, support creative industries, enrich public life and contribute to a city's international profile.

Investment in cultural infrastructure should therefore be viewed not solely as expenditure on the arts, but as long-term investment in economic development, tourism, education, liveability and city-making.

South Australia has long understood this relationship.

Successive South Australian governments have recognised that investment in exemplary public architecture and civic infrastructure delivers lasting economic, social and cultural benefits. Projects that have helped shape Adelaide's identity and strengthened its reputation as one of Australia's most liveable and culturally progressive cities include:

- Adelaide Festival Centre
- Adelaide Oval Redevelopment
- South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI)
- Adelaide Botanic High School
- Lot Fourteen

Collectively, these projects demonstrate how ambitious public investment, underpinned by design excellence, can create enduring civic assets that contribute to the State's identity, stimulate economic activity, attract visitors and enrich community life. Their value extends well beyond their original construction costs.

The Institute believes this same long-term perspective should continue to guide investment in the next generation of South Australia's civic and cultural infrastructure.

THE NORTH TERRACE CULTURAL OPPORTUNITY

For more than a decade, the North Terrace site has been recognised as one of South Australia's most significant opportunities for cultural investment.

The evolution of proposals for the site reflects changing priorities rather than changing ambition.

The architectural profession has participated throughout this journey through international design competitions, master planning and design excellence processes.

Major milestones include:

- Adelaide Contemporary Gallery proposal
- International architectural competition
- Government funding commitments
- Appointment of an internationally recognised design team
- Appointment of a managing contractor
- Commencement of construction
- Independent review of the project's future

While the project's direction has evolved, the underlying opportunity has remained constant:

to create nationally significant civic and cultural infrastructure on one of Australia's premier cultural boulevards.

The Institute acknowledges that future decisions regarding the site must appropriately consider financial, cultural, governance and operational matters.

Equally, prolonged uncertainty carries its own costs.

The partially completed site occupies a prominent position within Adelaide's cultural precinct and represents a significant opportunity awaiting resolution.

LEARNING FROM OTHER CITIES

Across Australia and internationally, governments continue to invest in major cultural institutions as catalysts for economic development and city transformation.

Recent Australian examples include:

City	Project	Outcome
Sydney	Sydney Modern Project	Expansion of Australia's premier public art gallery and significant visitor attraction
Melbourne	Melbourne Arts Precinct Transformation (including The Fox: NGV Contemporary)	Major investment in Victoria's cultural precinct and visitor economy
Perth	WA Museum Boola Bardip	New cultural destination supporting city revitalisation
Geelong	Geelong Arts Centre Redevelopment	Regional cultural investment supporting economic and community growth

Internationally, projects such as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, M+ in Hong Kong and the Museum of the Future in Dubai demonstrate how ambitious cultural infrastructure can reshape international perceptions of cities while delivering substantial economic and tourism benefits.

These projects differ considerably in purpose and scale.

Their common characteristic is government confidence in the long-term public value of exceptional civic architecture.

A BROADER CONVERSATION

The Institute believes the discussion surrounding the North Terrace site presents a broader opportunity.

Rather than focusing solely on a single project, South Australia has an opportunity to consider the role that major civic and cultural infrastructure will play in shaping Adelaide over coming decades.

Questions worth considering include:

- How can South Australia continue to strengthen its international reputation as a creative and culturally confident state?
- How can architecture contribute to reconciliation, education and public life?
- How can nationally significant civic infrastructure support tourism, economic development and investment?
- How should major public buildings respond to changing cultural expectations and environmental challenges?

These are questions extending well beyond any individual project.

They are fundamentally questions about the future of Adelaide.

THE INSTITUTE'S POSITION

The Australian Institute of Architects believes:

- South Australia should continue investing in nationally significant civic and cultural infrastructure.
- Major public projects should pursue the highest standards of architectural excellence, sustainability and urban design.
- Investment decisions should consider long-term public value alongside capital cost.
- Civic infrastructure should strengthen Adelaide's identity, liveability and international competitiveness.
- Projects celebrating First Nations cultures should continue to be developed in genuine partnership with First Nations leadership and communities.
- The North Terrace cultural site remains one of Australia's most significant civic opportunities.

The Institute does not advocate for a predetermined project outcome.

Rather, it supports a collaborative process that delivers civic and cultural infrastructure reflecting South Australia's ambitions and creating lasting public benefit.

HOW THE INSTITUTE CAN HELP

As the peak body representing Australia's architectural profession, the Australian Institute of Architects offers expertise across the planning, procurement and delivery of major civic infrastructure.

The Institute can assist Government through:

- advocacy for design excellence;
- procurement advice;
- design review processes;
- urban design and place-making expertise;
- civic architecture;
- sustainability leadership;
- international best practice;
- stakeholder collaboration across the built environment professions.

The Institute values its long-standing relationship with the South Australian Government and welcomes opportunities to contribute constructively to projects that shape the future of our State.

CONCLUSION

South Australia has consistently demonstrated that investment in architecture and public infrastructure can leave an enduring legacy.

Projects such as Adelaide Oval, SAHMRI and Lot Fourteen have strengthened the State's economy, enriched public life and reinforced Adelaide's reputation as a city that values design excellence and innovation.

The North Terrace cultural site presents another opportunity to continue that tradition.

The Australian Institute of Architects believes the question facing South Australia is no longer whether major investment in civic and cultural infrastructure is warranted, but how Government, First Nations leadership, the cultural sector and industry can work together to realise a project worthy of the State's ambitions.

Whatever form the future development of the site ultimately takes, it should aspire to create an enduring civic legacy—one that reflects South Australia's confidence, creativity and commitment to design excellence, while enriching the lives of future generations.

The Australian Institute of Architects looks forward to working collaboratively with Government and the broader community to help realise that vision.