

LEADING COLLECTIVE ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

As trusted information sources, museums are ideally placed to facilitate climate change discussions and solutions.



Zaria Forman's Whale Bay No. 4 was the subject of a multimedia installation in the Climate Museum's first exhibition and the first work to be shown by the new museum.

This research was partially funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council. © Zaria Forman

NEED TO KNOW

- Museums are seen as trustworthy and impartial by the public
- They could be utilised to communicate science and policy on climate change

Western Sydney University researchers

have identified museums and science centres as important contributors to global discussions and decision-making on climate change.

Research by Dr Fiona Cameron, a senior research fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society, and her colleagues, found that museums are seen as trustworthy and impartial — even more so than government communication — making them ideal platforms for taking a lead in climate change conversations and decisions.

“We need to do more about tackling climate change. I feel very passionate about it,” says Cameron.

Ninety-one per cent of those surveyed in Australia and eighty-nine per cent in the US feel powerless to influence climate change policy and decisions, with a similar number stating that citizens’ views should be included in policy decisions.

Cameron and her research team surveyed communities, museum audiences, staff and management, and relevant politicians both in Australia and the US. They found that all groups thought it was important that museums are recognised as key players and cultural brokers in tackling climate change and its politics.

“Not only should museums talk critically about climate

science, they can act as collection points for policy and encourage debate and discussion. Museums can maintain trust in the community as long as they present a range of options and aren’t too political,” she says.

“MUSEUMS CAN ACT AS COLLECTION POINTS FOR POLICY AND ENCOURAGE DEBATE AND DISCUSSION”

Cameron and her team created a framework for museums to help address climate change in their exhibitions and through global multi-stakeholder alliances. Input into the exhibition guidelines came from conversations between communities, humanities researchers, climate scientists and museum staff.

Museums around the world, including Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand, are now using Cameron’s framework.

The work has gone on to support the creation of a dedicated climate change museum in New York, among the first such museums. It’s a reflection of the cultural shift that is needed to address such an urgent and multifaceted problem. ■