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GUEST EDITORIAL

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: From Declaration to Implementation

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration (the Declaration) is a milestone document that was launched by the International Council on Archives (ICA) and the National Archives of Australia (NAA) on 25 October 2019. Developed by the ICA Expert Group on Indigenous Matters (EGIM), the Declaration was handed down at the inaugural ICA Indigenous Summit, *See us, Hear us, Walk with us: Challenging and Decolonising the Archive*, held at Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Centre on Kaurna Country (Adelaide, Australia). The Declaration called on 'the jurisdictional archives of the world to acknowledge and adopt the themes and commitments of the Declaration for immediate action'.[1] The Declaration was developed in the context of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as the key 'framework for the resurgence of Indigenous peoples, free to self-determine their destinies independent of external authority',[2] specifically recognising 'UNDRIP articles of direct archival relationship to cultural self-determination'.[3]

The Declaration opens its preamble with the ICA's Universal Declaration on Archives, stating the importance of archives to the promotion, protection and expansion of society, democracy and rights. However, the Universal Declaration on Archives sits in tension with the realities of archives and archival practice for First Nations peoples. For First Nations peoples 'across the global colonial encounter, dispossession occurred in the public archive as it occurred on the land'.[4] The Declaration marked a moment of recognition across the archives profession globally that archives and archival practice, particularly in colonial contexts, have had significant and lasting impacts on First Nations peoples. There was an urgency in the Declaration, calling for 'immediate action'[5] across archive organisations and placing the ICA as holding a key responsibility in the re-imagining of archives.

The Declaration outlines the commitments to First Nations archival practice across five themes: Knowledge Authorities, Property and Ownership, Recognition and Identity, Research and Access and Self-Determination. Through these themes, the Declaration highlights how unsuitable Western archival frameworks are for First Nations materials held in colonial archives. It articulates the need for 'reciprocal respect' in engagement between archives and Indigenous worldviews and calls for archives to fundamentally change how they work so that the themes of the Declaration can be understood and enacted.

1. International Council on Archives Expert Group on Indigenous Matters, 2019, *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration,* available at https://www.ica.org/ica-network/expert-groups/egim/ica-naa-indigenous-matters-summit/, accessed 4 June 2026.

2. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, p. 2.

3. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, p. 4.

4. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, p. 1.

5. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, p. 2.

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In 2024, in recognition of the 5-year anniversary of the Declaration's publication and with a goal of renewing a focus on implementation, a small programming committee consisting of members from the Australian Society of Archivists' (ASA) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Special Interest Group and the Indigenous Archives Collective (IAC) collaboratively curated a 1-day Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Symposium on Ngāi Tahu lands in Ōtautahi/Christchurch, following the joint conference of the ASA, the Archives & Records Association of New Zealand Te Huinga Mahara (ARANZ) and the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA). The Symposium opened with a presentation by the Ngāi Tahu Archive on 'Me manatu te maumahara: We must remember to remember', followed by 16 speakers from across Australia, Aotearoa, and the Pacific reflecting on different aspects of the Declaration. The Symposium aimed to engage critically with the Declaration, to reflect on how it has been a useful tool in theory and practice, to consider its gaps and opportunities, and to examine how it has – or has not – been taken up by the archival community. Some speakers shared their use of the Declaration to drive change in their organisations; others highlighted how structural issues in the archives sector had meant the Declaration had not received their full attention.

While conversation and calls for action regarding First Nations priorities and Indigenous self-determination in archives and the archival profession are not at all new, the Declaration has provided a vehicle for global and sector-wide conversations about the structural and systemic barriers that need challenging and dismantling. As raised by Barrowcliffe et al:

> In translating the Declaration into transformative practice, the archives and recordkeeping sector will need to address difficult questions, including how the settler-colonial status quo is too often buried under the rhetoric of decolonisation and reconciliation. It will need to move beyond the sentiments expressed in the preamble of the Tandanya Declaration to focus on Indigenous-led transformative action and structural reform. Recognising that the answers to the difficult questions raised by the Tandanya Declaration may not be found inside our current institutions – that they may be the problem rather than the solution – will be critical.[6]

This Special Issue, *The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: From Declaration to Implementation,* brings together reflections and articles that build on the previous conversations held at the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Symposium. The Guest Editors of this issue are again drawn from IAC and the ASA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Special Interest Group. The Guest Editors deliberately did not define terminology or a methodological approach for this Special Issue, and invited community, organisational and institutional perspectives on the implementation and use of the Declaration. The goal was to gather submissions that brought together international dialogue on the Declaration, including its reach, relevance and implementation in the archives sector globally.

The following contributions showcase a wide range of perspectives, highlighting how the Declaration has been engaged across various institutions, nations and contexts. From national archives and collecting institutions to digital preservation frameworks, pedagogical projects and community-led practice. This Special Issue brings together multiple insights into the Declaration, and in doing so, shines a light on both the potentials and tensions of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration. These insights include critical reflection on the limits

6. Rose Barrowcliffe, Lauren Booker, Sue McKemmish, and Kirsten Thorpe, 'Activating and Supporting the Tandanya Adelaide Declaration on Indigenous Archives', Archives and Manuscripts, vol. 49, no. 3, 2021, pp. 167–85, 181. http://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2021.1961086.

Figure 1. Lauren Eiko, Container Type 1, 2026, Digital scan of 120 mm negative.

of a framework of this nature and the ongoing structural issues impeding endorsement and comprehensive implementation of the Declaration.

To open this Special Issue, Raymond Frogner, Head of Archives for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, and an author of the Declaration, offers essential context in his reflection 'On the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: "Reach, Relevance and Implementation"'. Frogner's reflection article situates the Declaration within the broader struggle for Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty, arguing that its international reach derives from its recognition of the direct impacts of colonisation on Indigenous peoples worldwide. Reflecting on how the Declaration was developed, Frogner describes the principles that shaped its drafting, grounded in his work with Indigenous residential school survivors in Canada. It offers a transparent account of the work undertaken in building the Declaration, providing an invaluable foundation for the reflections and articles that follow.

This Special Issue then turns to the need for accountability and transparency in the archives and recordkeeping sector globally, and in the Declaration itself. Archives and archival practice continue to have serious ramifications for First Nations communities, and without an ongoing commitment to action and change, these issues will persist. More than 5 years after its publication, it is still important to critically consider the Declaration and ask how it has been implemented and what change this has resulted in. The Tracking Tandanya project, the subject of the next article, was created to ask these questions. Foregrounding the need for accountability and transparency also means critiquing the Declaration and considering what gaps and silences it contains, as does the reflection by Opeta Alefaio.

Lauren Booker, Monica Galassi, Narissa Timbery and Kirsten Thorpe explore how the uptake and impact of the Tandanya Declaration can be tracked and assessed in Australia in their article 'Indigenous Archival Futures and the International Council on Archives Tandanya -Adelaide Declaration: Indigenous Perspectives from Australia'. The authors introduce the Tracking Tandanya project, which has gathered data from archives in Australia about their endorsement and implementation of the Declaration, noting that 'systematic tracking' is the only way to assess whether archives are genuinely implementing it, and whether the Declaration has had an impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The authors call for increased transparency from archives and highlight the need for archives to prioritise Indigenous rights in records that lead to self-determination.

Opeta Alefaio's powerful reflection, 'Wilful Ignorance, Invisibilisation and Coloniality: A Pacific Practitioner's Reflection on the Tandanya Declaration', introduces a necessary critique of the Declaration. The piece highlights that in drafting a document intended to foreground the rights and lived experience of Indigenous peoples in archival practice, the Declaration's authors overlooked the needs of smaller Indigenous populations in under-resourced nations. It asks how the Declaration can work in contexts where colonial neglect has left archival infrastructure under-funded and data governance frameworks absent or imposed. Alefaio pointedly questions the role of archival organisations such as the ICA and its regional branch, the PARBICA, that support the drafting of declarations while remaining unresponsive to calls for practical assistance from archival practitioners in smaller member nations.

Following this, Tammi Gissell and Becky Bligh's articles firmly assert their perspectives as First Nations women and share reflections on their personal experiences working in the GLAM sector in Australia. Collectively, these two articles provide unique insight into implementing the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration across the interconnected yet distinct institutional contexts of museums and archives. In her paper-yarn 'The Powerhouse & Blak Collections: Sitting with Trouble and Standing Up for Truth', Tammi Gissell reflects on the use of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration at the Powerhouse Museum. She charts the origins of the Powerhouse as a colonial collecting institution to an organisation prepared to 'sit with the trouble' and problematise its historical collecting practices, while recognising the care needed to properly steward its collection today. Gissell shares her own experience as an Aboriginal woman coming into the Powerhouse as a creative practitioner who was drawn into museum work through the leadership of an Elder at the museum. She discusses how the Declaration provided a framework to enable the disruption of 'the way things have always been done', showing how it can be used to ground strategy and also enact practical change. Gissell shares several examples of how the Declaration has been enacted at the Powerhouse, showing how they have embedded many of the principles of the Declaration, arguing that Indigenous sovereignty must be a priority for all collections work.

In her reflective essay 'The long road to self-determination', Becky Bligh explores the ongoing transformation of the Queensland State Archives (QSA) as it implements the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration to confront its colonial legacy and support Indigenous self-determination. By weaving institutional reforms alongside her lived experience as a Gunggari/Kullilli woman, Bligh illustrates how archival records, originally created as tools of state surveillance and control under 'Protection Acts', are being reclaimed by communities for truth-telling, healing and family reconnection. The article highlights significant milestones, including the development of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols and community-focused initiatives like 'Mob on Mondays'. Ultimately, Bligh argues that self-determination in archives is an ongoing, relational journey that requires shifting authority from the state to Indigenous knowledge holders, transforming the archive from a 'locked vault' into a culturally safe space of shared stewardship and restorative justice.

Shared stewardship is a theme running through the following articles, which provide case studies on the Declaration in different settings. Steven Gagau and Jodie Kell consider the Declaration in the context of a long-running university-based archive, the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC). Margaret Farmer describes the use of the Declaration at the Australian War Memorial, a national museum that has had a complex history of acknowledging and discussing the Frontier Wars in its galleries. Jenny Mitcham and Robin Wright then provide a case study demonstrating how the Declaration can be used by a peak body focused on digital preservation, in a cross-sectoral and international context.

In 'Reflections on Creative Responses to Archival Collections in PARADISEC', Steven Gagau and Jodie Kell reflect on the Declaration's themes of 'Recognition and Identity' and 'Research and Access' through a collaborative project between the Papua New Guinea Peroveta Singers of Canberra and PARADISEC. They discuss how the collaboration, which included creative responses from the PNG Peroveta Singers of Canberra, demonstrates how the Declaration's themes can be implemented. Gagau and Kell also discuss their perspectives as insider and outsider researchers working with the group, and how the Declaration is 'a call for action' to reflect on roles and work in decolonising archival practices and 'embracing Indigenous approaches to preserving and transmitting knowledge'.

Margaret Farmer offers insight into the history of the Australian War Memorial and the evolution of the organisation's thinking about the way it represents Australian conflicts involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in her reflection 'Implementing the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration at the Australian War Memorial'. The piece focuses on the Memorial's eventual recognition of the Frontier Wars in its galleries. The Memorial used the Declaration to guide their re-reading of the records, noting that, 'each is part of a much larger national story of violence, dispossession and defence of country, and provides opportunities for truth-telling'. Importantly, this reflection shares the Memorial's process of having to 'go backwards, in order to move forwards', a process that involved adopting ICIP protocols and involving staff from across the organisation.

In 'A reflection from the Digital Preservation Coalition on implementing the Tandanya Declaration in DPC RAM v.3', Jenny Mitcham and Robin Wright from the Digital Preservation Coalition reflect (DPC) on how the Tandanya Declaration shaped the latest revision of their Rapid Assessment Model (DPC RAM), a maturity modelling tool used by organisations across the world to evaluate their digital preservation practice. The authors trace how the DPC's growing presence in Australasia brought them into conversation with the critical work happening around Indigenous Data Sovereignty, and how the Declaration provided a framework to centre ethical considerations, particularly around description, access and custodianship, into a tool that had previously been built on largely technical foundations. What is significant about this piece is that it shows the Declaration's reach beyond traditional archives and into the global infrastructure of digital preservation. It demonstrates that colonial assumptions about preservation, description and access do not only live in limestone walls and filing cabinets but also in the digital tools and frameworks we are building now, and that the Declaration's principles are necessary in shaping how those tools engage with Indigenous knowledges.

Finally, this Special Issue concludes with a critical discussion on the potential strength and reach of the Declaration. The Declaration can be engaged with beyond institutional walls and sector parameters to be a tool for communities to bolster archival self-determination and sovereignty. Jamila J. Ghaddar, Ana Roeschley, Mariam Karim, Hanine Shehadeh, Rima Ghanem, Fatima el-Bazzal and Rami Zurayk show how the Tandanya Declaration also has use as a pedagogical tool to train memory workers and heritage stewards in the context of their Fighting Erasure project, in 'Teaching Tandanya in Palestine and Lebanon: Liberatory Pedagogy for Archival Sovereignty' Focussing on training to deliver digitisation and archival stabilisation skills to memory workers in Lebanon and Palestine, they discuss how the Declaration offers a way to 'teach hope' against a background of genocide, settler colonialism and erasure. The authors discuss their work to translate many key archival frameworks, including the Declaration. Drawing on participants' experiences during the training workshops, they show how the Declaration can be used to problematise Western archival concepts and push for Indigenous archival self-determination and justice.

Since the Declaration was launched in 2019, much has shifted in the world. Yet many of the structural and systemic issues it identifies persist, while others are intensifying with increasingly devastating impacts. At a time of rapid technological change, including the expanding use of artificial intelligence, the stakes of this work are rising. The growing global momentum of Indigenous Data Sovereignty movements has raised the bar for what the Declaration must now address. Calls for community authority and ethical stewardship are more urgent than ever, and the responsibility sits with the archives sector to be proactive and accountable.

In creating this Special Issue, our aim was not to develop an overall narrative or cohesive set of ideas about the Declaration, but instead to share the complexities of the application of the Declaration both across First Nations contexts *and* settler-colonial contexts. As is evident across these articles, there are a multitude of perspectives on opportunities and obstacles to implementation, as well as what constitutes actual implementation beyond rhetoric. The guest editors hope this Special Issue and the tensions and unspoken conversations between these articles provide fuel for further conversation and action off the page.

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Nathan Mudyi Sentance
Narissa Timbery
Kirsten Thorpe
Kirsten Wright