

WA Museum chief says claim from “confusion”

## Description



The contemporary WA Maritime Museum at the centre of the original, incorrect claim of missing items. Image: Articlesweb.

## UPDATE – Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] T [/dropcap]he Western Australian Museum has further investigated [an incorrect claim by Flagstaff Hill](#) director **Peter Abbott** that more than 6680 items from its collection were unaccounted for and believes the damaging claim was a result of “confusion”.

As first reported by *Bluestone* yesterday, the museum strongly rejected a statement by Mr Abbott in a January 10 letter to the *Warrnambool Standard* in which he used the example of the Western Australian Maritime Museum to defend the fact that Flagstaff Hill [cannot locate more than 130 items listed in its collection](#).

Mr Abbott wrote that museums around the world “go through random collection reviews” that often reveal “items have been moved or misplaced”.

“As an example...Western Australian Maritime Museum in 2009 found over 6680 (items) unaccounted for,” he wrote.

The [Western Australian Museum](#) covers six sites, including the WA Maritime Museum.



WA Museum Chief  
Executive Alec Coles

OBE. Image: Council of  
Australasian Museum  
Directors.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] I [/dropcap]n a statement to *Bluestone* today, WA Museum Chief Executive Officer **Alec Coles** reiterated that 6680 items “are not missing from its collection nor ever were”.

He said, however, that further investigations revealed an internal report was commissioned in 2008 to “improve and harmonise the documentation and storage of the WA Museum’s extensive maritime archeology collection, as well as those collections from Western Australian wrecks held in private collections”.

Mr Coles said the report was separate to the operations of the WA Maritime Museum, which deals with contemporary material.

“(The WA Maritime Museum) was not the subject of this internal report, the purpose of which was to demonstrate the need for improved document and storage systems which have since been achieved,” he said.

“The report states that a number of items at the time were either not audited as part of the process, or that there were inconsistencies between database and object entries, not least because a number of different databases were in use at the time leading to conflicting numbers,” he said.

**Mr Coles said the total of items either not audited or with inconsistent entries was “the number cited – 6680 – but does not represent missing items”.**

“In fact, the museum conducts regular audits of its collections including two full collection audits for reporting and accounting purposes in 2009 and 2014 and in both cases there were no anomalies,” he said.

Mr Coles said the museum now understood the source of the information and “can also understand where the confusion may have arisen”.

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