

## Resurrecting an Australian Icon: Rebuilding the Waltzing Matilda Centre in Outback Queensland

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The rebuilding of the Waltzing Matilda Centre was a project of major national significance, funded collaboratively by Winton Shire Council and Queensland and Australian Governments.*

*“Managing the rebuild of the Waltzing Matilda Centre was a career highlight” says Peak Services (formerly Local Government Infrastructure Service (LGIS)) project manager Brian Jackson, now Director, Asset and Project Services.*

*Supported by project management principles in the public works arena, delivery of a \$24M highly architectural project with an integrated world class museum experience in an outback Qld town whose community had a significant interest was made possible! The sequence of events from inception to completion yielded an immensely successful project. Process and sound management practice aside, the project could not have achieved such success without strong leadership, a vision, a can-do attitude, hard work, advocacy and resilience.*

*According to Alan Rayment, former Winton CEO, the length and uniqueness of the project demonstrated how setting clear and simple objectives helped the team make decisions for the good of the project without getting side-tracked. “You’d be naive to think you could build a \$24m project in the middle of Australia that would not have some issues.”*

*Resurrecting an Australian Icon included options for the rebuild, negotiation with the insurer, business case development, securing funding and coordination of the whole design, approvals, procurement and construction processes from beginning to end.*

*Join Mr Jackson on reliving the highs and lows of delivering the Waltzing Matilda Centre, Winton, QLD leveraging his project management expertise in the local government arena. From its loss to fire in June 2015 to its opening in April 2018, the home of Australia’s unofficial national anthem resurrected from the ashes.*

**KEYWORDS:** waltzing matilda, project management, outback queensland, australian icon.



(Images credit: Winton Shire Council)

### **1 Introduction**

Peak Services (formally LGIS) were appointed client-side project managers for the Waltzing Matilda Centre Reconstruction in August 2015 following its loss to fire in June 2015.

Under the direction of Council, Peak managed the project from inception to completion including rebuild options analysis, insurance

claim management, business case preparation and grant funding applications, planning, scoping, stakeholder engagement, procurement and management of an array of consultants, interpretive designers and building contractors.

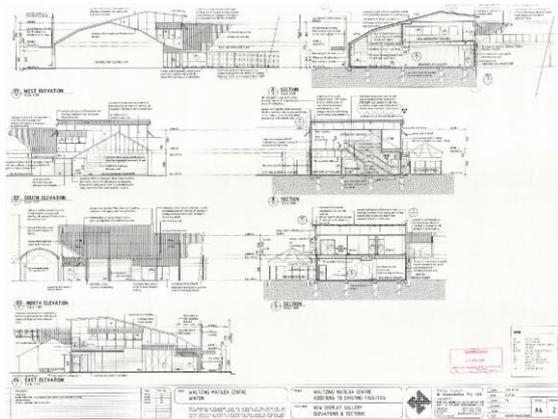
Council’s vision for the Winton community and region was to rebuild a modernized and

enhanced Waltzing Matilda Centre for the 21st Century, a facility purpose built to be the home of Australia's unofficial national anthem and to showcase the rich and diverse history of the region for generations to come.

### 1.1 Origins of the Waltzing Matilda Centre

The Waltzing Matilda Centre (the Centre) located in Winton, QLD originally opened in 1998, and was subsequently expanded to meet increasing visitor demand in 2004. The Centre included the story of Waltzing Matilda, as well as exhibiting the collection of the Qantilda Museum (of the Winton Historical Society) and providing a venue for touring displays and exhibits. It is the first museum in the world dedicated to a song. Prior to the fire which destroyed the Centre, several themes were integrated into the Centre (incorporating a museum area) to provide a multi-faceted education and tourism experience.

During its operation the Centre had strong relationships with various tourism and education providers and was well attended by tourists visiting Winton, attracting around 18,000 visitors per annum. The Centre is an iconic Queensland outback tourist attraction, and a vital part of the tourism infrastructure of the Winton region.



(Waltzing Matilda Centre Extension Plan, 1997)

### 1.2 Loss to fire. The community rallies.

The Centre was destroyed by fire in early hours of 18 June 2015. An electrical fault in the ceiling caused a fire that soon spread throughout.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/drone-footage-over-waltzing-matilda-centre-and-museum/video/772ef6f65dbb6bc6ce37bdc9cc41636e>



(Images credit: John Elliott, Winton QLD)

Winton Shire Mayor (former<sup>2</sup>), Butch Lenton said the loss of the original Waltzing Matilda Centre was a heavy blow during a major drought, but the community and visitors had rallied together to ensure it wasn't lost forever.

*"The demolition and clean-up operation in 2015 was a tough time, but there's no doubt about it, this is a town with a big heart," Mayor Lenton said.*

*"The support we had after the fire, with people coming to the town and staying in the town, from all over Australia really, was much appreciated.*

*"I can't count the number of fire-damaged objects that have been saved from the ruins through the efforts of locals, and also tourists who have happily volunteered their labour while passing through.*

*"This is one of the council's biggest projects since the North Gregory Hotel in the 1950s. The Waltzing Matilda Centre is an iconic Australian attraction.*

*"I am genuinely thankful for the community and Government support for the rebuilding of this important part of Winton's outback history."*

After recovering as much as possible, the demolition crew removed what was remaining.

### 2 Resurrecting an Australian Icon

Through strong governance, leadership and advocacy, within weeks the Project had

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-09/graham-lenton-winton-mayor-remembered/9029210>  
<https://www.northweststar.com.au/story/4960737/tri-butes-flow-for-butch/>

progressed through an initial scoping and inception phase to define what a reconstructed Centre might entail (the Project). This included the development of various scoping and planning documents and a robust project governance framework to communicate roles and responsibilities. The purpose was to establish an environment that contained boundaries for control management of the rebuild process.

The Project sat within an established governance framework that was bigger than the project team. Council engaged the services of Peak Services (formally Local Government Infrastructure Services (LGIS)) to provide project management services soon after the fire. Peak assisted Council to progress the project to meet Council's requirement for the Centre to be reconstructed as early as possible.

The Project Sponsor, Winton Shire Council Mayor Butch Lenton (former), took control of the project, establishing the project resources and set the vision and goals. He acted as the Project's Helmsman. Like a highly experienced seaman, he commanded the vessel at sea. He set the course, determined tactics, and steered the Project to its destination. A Project Control Group (PCG) was created to support the Sponsor in delivery of the Project.

A Project Management Plan (PMP) was established along with other key project control documents for planning, execution, control and monitoring of the Project. The PMP clearly articulated how Project requirements such as quality, risk, change, resources, cost and communications would be managed, controlled and executed. Essential to project success was securing the right project resources.

## **2.1 Governance**

A PCG was established as the overarching decision-making body of the project. The Project team structure had been set up strategically and specifically for the project and outlined the management framework for delivery of the project.

The Project delivery strategy and resource planning enabled establishment of accountabilities and responsibilities associated with who in the project team was responsible for a particular element or work package of the project delivery.

The team structure, key responsibilities and governance arrangements for the project were

provided to demonstrate established project governance arrangements for the Project.

Project governance was important for the successful delivery of the project and assisted to ensure the effectiveness of the project. The main activities of project governance related to programmed direction, project ownership, ensuring the effectiveness of project management functions, and reporting and disclosure (including consulting with stakeholders).

The Project Sponsor provided the leadership and established the processes, culture and systems to choose the right things to do. He had a clear view of the strategic fit of the Project driven by priorities and balancing of risk. The Sponsor exercised good judgement and wisdom, whilst considering the long and short-term interests of the community.

The PCG discharged responsibility to the Project Manager to deliver the Project. Significant trust was bestowed upon the Project Manager to get the many and often complex project work packages completed and to direct project team resources. This autonomy provided sufficient authority to progress the Project without undue delay. This trust was reinforced and supported by the reporting and the relationships established, as well as the mutual trust between all project team members.

The good governance of the Project was maintained through discipline and trust under the right leadership, strategy setting, stage-gates, decision-making and oversight.

A public interest assessment was also undertaken at the scoping stage of the project. Several workshops and public consultation were undertaken with key stakeholders and the community in general. This consultative process revealed several key issues that were considered essential to the community and informed the overall outcome of the project.

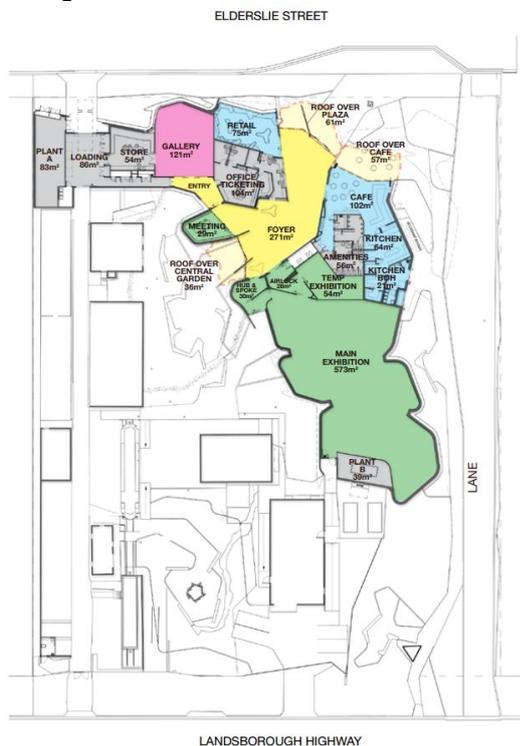
## **2.2 The Project Team**

Engagement of numerous specialist consulting and technical advisors was required to advance the project in line with defined project requirements to investigate, analyse, challenge norms, validate assumptions, interrogate options and navigate the project through the myriad of project characteristics and influences into the most advantageous outcome for the Winton community, outback Australia and the nation.





Development of building design documentation and separate packages of design works associated with interpretive fit out and multimedia installations required a collaborative project team approach. The Principal Design Consultant was required to document the full scope of building (~2040m<sup>2</sup>), and external works including exhibition areas, gallery, visitor information area, retail, ticketing / reception, café, commercial kitchen, foyer, amenities, loading dock, store rooms, plant rooms, entry plaza, bus and access ways, hard and soft landscaping. The main exhibition area (~580m<sup>2</sup>) was designed to a warm shell specification only. A lag on the development of the interpretive design by the Interpretive Design Consultant was necessary given the timing of NSRF funding. The Interpretive Design Consultant designed the interpretive fitout and multimedia contract packages into the main exhibition 'warm shell' area, requiring that the main exhibition be a black box, void of sunlight.



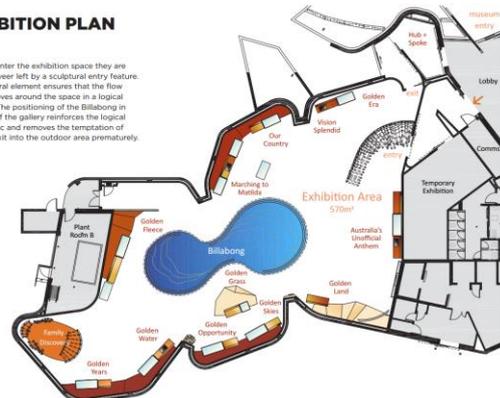
(Credit: Cox Architecture – Design Approval Presentation Plan)

The collaboration between Principal Design Consultant and Interpretive Design Consultant was essential to enable important design attributes of the base build to be incorporated into the building construction contract scope of works. This included, but not limited to, 900 to 2100 high ply noggin, hanging points in the ceiling, billabong slab in the Centre of the exhibition area, provisioning for electrical and

communications and other interpretive scopes of work.

#### EXHIBITION PLAN

As visitors enter the exhibition space they are directed to veer left by a sculptural entry feature. This sculptural element ensures that the flow of traffic moves around the space in a logical sequence. The positioning of the Billabong in the center of the gallery reinforces the logical flow of traffic and removes the temptation of visitors to exit into the outdoor area prematurely.



(Credit: Arterial Design –Main Exhibition Plan (50% Design))

Design of the fitout and multimedia interpretive design by the Interpretive Design Consultant was separated. This was based on a market sounding exercise, which determined that this was the most advantageous means of procuring value for money outcomes for constructing these work packages. This was informed by research and consultation with specialists in the museum design and installation industry and the identification of limited availability of the requisite experienced and capable specialist museum and interpretive construction contractors.

### 2.8 Risk Sharing in Contract Formation

Scoping consultant and contractor scopes of work was a key determinant in the success of the project. Outsourcing roles and responsibilities for design and construction of the Centre was required to balance the needs of the project while identifying who was best placed to be given the responsibility for specific works. Understanding who was best placed to take on and manage risk was important and identifying a project team capable of pro-actively managing risks in a trusted environment enabled successful design and construction outcomes to be achieved.

### 2.9 Learning From the Old Centre

One of the key inputs to the design of the Project was understanding the good and the bad of the previous Centre's operation and maintenance. These enabled lessons learned from its operation to be incorporated into the Project design philosophy and design outcomes. Many lessons from the previous Centre's functional layout and functionality were identified, including how staff operated the Centre and how visitors responded to the

Centre. This gave great insights into how the Project could improve in terms of operation, maintenance and visitor experience.

## 2.10 A Flexible Adaptive Approach

An important feature of the Project was how the PCG positioned the project to be able to adapt to change when appropriate. This was important due to the funding gap that existed up until September 2016. The ability of the project to step change kept the Project in a position to be able to step the scope of the Project down to Option 2 – Modernised Centre. The Option 3 Modernised and Enhanced Centre was at a funding deficit of \$8M through mid-2016 due to the delayed announcement of the NSRF grant funding. It was originally anticipated that this grant funding application would be assessed by July 2016. The delayed announcement meant the Project had to walk a tight rope between the two options. Council secured the necessary funding to progress development of Option 3 – Modernised and Enhanced Centre. The Project Manager, through the PCG, mobilized the project team to respond and adapt to this change. All available resources were put to work to progress the project to deliver much needed benefits of Option 3 to the Winton community and the region as quickly as possible.

What is not well known was the outstanding project leadership of Council through the PCG during 2016. The Sponsor took a determined and steadfast position that by any means possible it would deliver to its community the best outcomes possible from the reconstruction of the Centre. This was imbedded into the PCG culture from day one and meant that the Project was managed and planned in such a way that it could pause or change course to enable a fully funded Option 3 to be delivered.

The project team knew that the project could be put on hold in September 2016 to evaluate funding options in the event the NSRF funding application was not successful. However, owing to the significant advocacy of Council elected members and staff to secure the NSRF funding, the Project was able to transition smoothly to the full scope of Option 3.

Additional provisioned building scope and interpretive scope was unlocked, and the Principal Design Consultant and the Interpretive Design Consultant promptly designed and documented the full scope of Option 3 works.



(Credit: Extracts of Final Design Presentation – Cox Architecture)

Audio Tour Flow



(Credit: Extracts of Final Multimedia Design – Arterial Design)

## 2.11 Construction and Handover

Construction of the Centre required a Building Contractor capable of delivering such a project in a remote location and Interpretive Contractors capable of being able to fabricate installations off site for installation in a building under construction. Considerable planning was required to enable the main exhibition area to be practically complete 8 weeks prior to the remaining building works for bump in of interpretive contractor fitout and multimedia installations. This required clear construction

contract provisions and requirements to be established prior to contract formation for respective works.

A two-stage procurement approach was employed to procure the Building contractor (engaged April 2017), while a single stage procurement process was employed for each of the Interpretive Fitout and Interpretive Multimedia contracts (both engaged October 2017). First sod was turned on 27 April 2017<sup>3</sup>.



(Credit: Winton Shire Council)

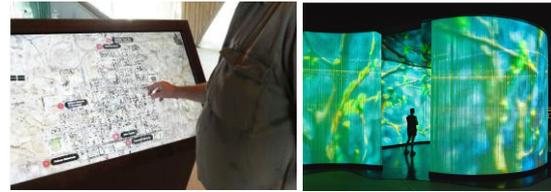
Execution of the construction contracts by Building and Interpretive Contractors was overseen by the Project Manager who also acted as the Superintendent for each of the contracts. The Project Manager engaged a full time Clerk of Works based in Winton to oversee the day to day management and delivery of construction works and who reported to the Project Manager.

The Contractors delivered their respective works under the Contract successfully to enable delivery of a finished project that is as visually impressive as it is functional. The detailed planning, execution, monitoring and control evolved to create a state-of-the-art modern facility designed by industry leading designers in their respective disciplines.



3

<https://www.northweststar.com.au/story/4626039/winton-matilda-sod-is-turned/?cs=191>



(Credit: John Elliott, Winton QLD, Arterial Design)

Training was provided to Council staff on systems operation. Council installed computing and peripheral equipment along with point of sale equipment for the retail and ticketing area. Council stocked the retail area and VIC area while the Café operator (procured by Council through an open market management rights contract) bumped into the Café to enable opening and operation by the opening day.

## 2.12 Official Opening

The new Waltzing Matilda Centre was officially opened on Friday 20th April 2018 following 3 years of planning and construction to much fan-fare and celebration. (Media Release<sup>4,5</sup>, <sup>6</sup>). It boasts state of the art interpretation, telling the story of Waltzing Matilda. Thousands of people made the trek to Winton to attend the opening. The first full year of operation coincides with final construction contract completion and the operational results of the Centre are outstanding. It is a stunning construction, both in form and interpretive installation and a multi design award winning Centre, with many more Project awards anticipated.



(Credit: RPS Group)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-20/rebuilt-waltzing-matilda-centre-opens-winton-qld/9676146>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NguRLtB8oU>

<sup>6</sup> <http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2017/4/27/winton-rebuilds-an-australian-tourism-experience>



(Credit: Arterial Design)

Since opening the visitor numbers have far exceeded what was originally anticipated, resulting in approximately 59,000 visitors in the first 14 months of trading. The economic impact of this outcome is significant to the Winton community and the region, however it will be years before the overall impact of the new Centre can be fully realised.

### 3 Conclusion

Winton Shire Council has rebuilt a modernised and enhanced home for Australia's unofficial national anthem, a building which incorporates some of the best architecture, structural, electrical, landscape and interpretive design in the nation. It boasts new state-of-the-art and innovative design and interpretive concepts to

deliver a new museum experience to meet the appetite of visitors, both local and international.

Reinventing an iconic tourist attraction such as the Waltzing Matilda Centre is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. It has been re-built to be a best-in-class 21st century venue to provide an outstanding visitor experience and deliver sustainable tourism employment for the residents of Winton.



(Credit – Foot note 2)

The rebuilding of the Waltzing Matilda Centre is a major project of national significance, funded collaboratively by Winton Shire Council and the Queensland and Australian Governments.

In rebuilding the Centre, Winton Shire Council undertook a project which comprised outstanding leadership, governance, planning, stakeholder engagement, state and federal government advocacy, procurement, management and execution. The Project offered a once in a generation opportunity to renew the Centre in a way that would provide an enhanced cultural, tourism and education asset for the community of Winton.

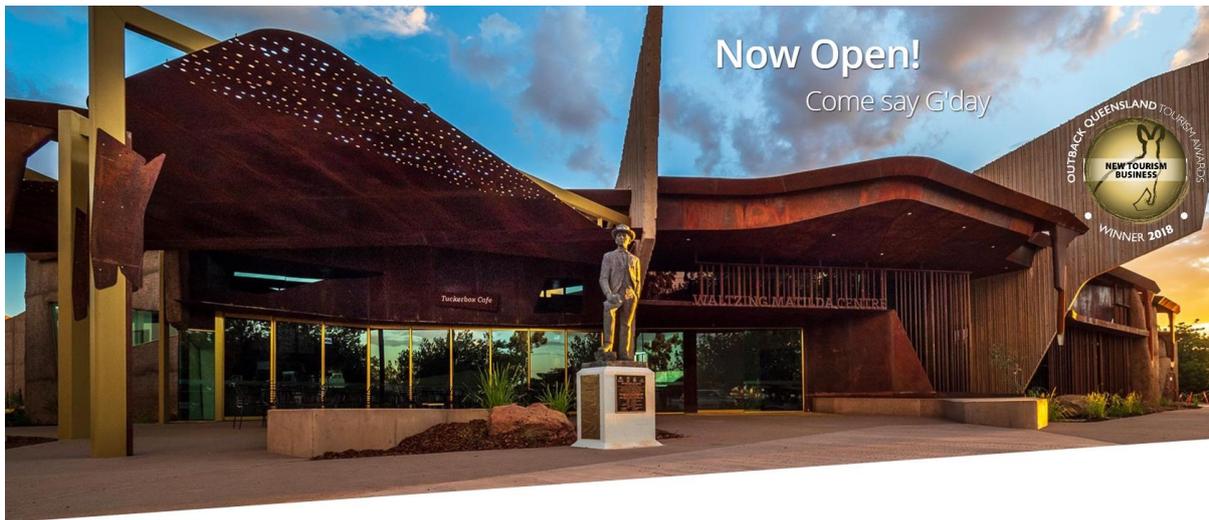
It required sound management through inception, initiation, planning, execution, control and monitoring, all in an environment of best in class local government governance and leadership.

Rigorous stakeholder engagement and research was conducted to guide design and delivery outcomes which combined leading 21st century technology to create a unique visitor experience in a contemporary museum environment that is both entertaining and enlightening. An experience for all senses using a mix of materials, construction techniques, finishes, sound, light, multimedia, and colours of the outback.

The Waltzing Matilda Centre is a centrepiece of regional tourism in Queensland and

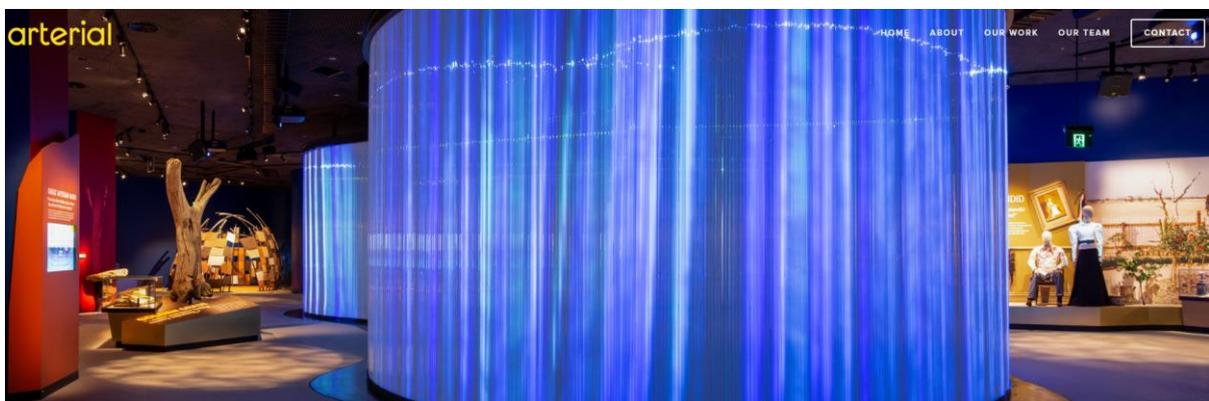
Australia far into the future, at the same time generating interest in other essential Australian experiences.

The success of the project did not occur by accident. It was enabled by strong leadership by the Project Owner and Sponsor, and the PCG under an established system of controls and mechanisms to manage system of risk, ethics, engagement, compliance and administration and all elements of the project governance framework.



*If there is one song that lives in the heart of all Australians, it is 'Waltzing Matilda'...*

(Credit: Winton Shire Council<sup>7</sup>)



(Credit: Arteria Design<sup>8</sup>)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.matildacentre.com.au/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.arterialdesign.com.au/the-billabong-experience>

## Acknowledgements

The reconstruction of the Waltzing Matilda Centre was a joint initiative of Winton Shire Council, the Queensland Government and the Federal Government of Australia.



Acknowledgement is extended to the elected members and officers of Winton Shire Council, the former Mayor Butch 'Graham' Lenton (deceased), the Winton community and all the project team members who supported delivery and realisation of Winton's vision and goals for the Project including, but not limited to:

### Project Owner:

Winton Shire Council

### Project Sponsor / Champion:

Graham 'Butch' Lenton, former Mayor, Winton Shire Council

Gavin Basket, Mayor, Winton Shire Council

### Project Management:

Project Director / Manager (Peak Services)

Clerk of Works (Peak Services)

### Cost Planner / Quantity Surveyor:

Rider Levett Bucknall (RLB)

### Initial Concept Options:

Architect: Core Architecture

### Initial Interpretive Planning:

Thylacine

### Project Design Team:

Building Design Team and Contributors

Principal Design Consultant: Cox Architecture

Architecture: Cox Architecture

Interior Design: Cox Architecture

Landscape Architecture: RPS Group

Civil/Stormwater/Structural Engineer:  
Bligh Tanner

Hydraulic/Mechanical/Electrical/Fire  
Engineer - Umow Lai

Acoustic Engineer - Resonate  
Acoustics

Building Certifier - McKenzie Group

Access consultant - McKenzie Group

Signage Design - Dot Dash

Commercial Kitchen Design - Food  
Services Design Australia

Interpretive Design Team and Contributors:

Interpretive Design Consultant: Arterial  
Design

Interpretive and Museum Creative  
Design, Graphics, Curation and  
Research– Arterial Design

Exhibition Lighting Design – Benjamin  
Cisterne Design

Exhibition Multimedia Design – Real  
Thing

Main Exhibition Photography - Peter  
Knowles (image use under license)

### Project Construction

Construction Contractor - A.Gabrielli  
Construction

Interpretive Contractors -

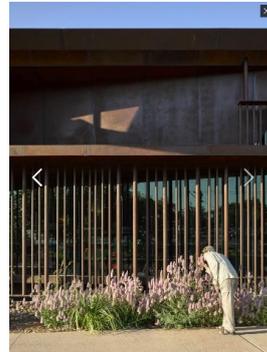
Interpretive Fit out: Show Works

Interpretive Multimedia: Rutledge AV

Superintendent & Clerk of Works: Peak  
Services

**Awards (as at 15 July 2019)**

2019 Australian Interior Design Awards: Public Design AWARD | Editorial Desk AAU (31 May 2019) - Waltzing Matilda Centre (Awarded to Cox Architecture)



2019 Australian Interior Design Awards – National Award for Public Design (Awarded to Cox Architecture)



DNA Paris Design Awards 2019 Winner

Category: interior Design

Sub Category: Installation

Project: The Billabong (by Arterial Design)

IDA International Design Awards 2018 - Honourable Mention

Category: interior Design

Sub Category: Installation

Project: The Billabong

German Design Awards 2020 - Nominated

Category: interior Design

Sub Category: Installation

Project: The Billabong

(Awarded to Arterial Design)

2019 Australian Interior Design Awards – Best in State (QLD) Commercial (Awarded to Cox Architecture)



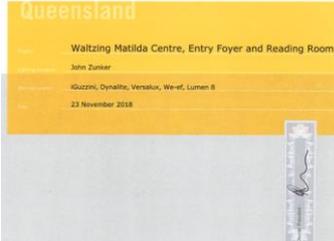
Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture (AILA) - Regional Achievement Award - Central Queensland (Awarded to RPS Group)



Award for Commendation - 2018 IES Lighting Society Lighting Design QLD Awards  
(Awarded to Umow Lai)



Lighting Design:  
Award of Commendation



OQT Tourism Award Winner 2018 (Awarded to Winton Shire Council)

