From 34 databases to just one: lessons from the successful conversion to Specify at Iziko Museums

"Could you tell me why you love me ... without resorting to a Powerpoint presentation?"

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388 532 collection object records converted so far

= 86% of total records to be converted

Only Cenozoic Palaeontology collections remain.

There are additional data sets that could be imported.

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Conversion process

- Conversion of databases to flat file Access format
- Field mapping – matching each field with where it will be located in Specify
- Resolving inconsistencies across databases – e.g. catalogue numbers
- Data cleaning and conversion (Willem Coetzer)
- Customising of forms (Willem)
- Training
- Checking of converted data by users
- Fine-tuning of forms
- Data gone live
- Resolution of backing up process
- Production of user manual
- Further in-house training of users (Erika Mias)
- Image conversion
- Loan management system (to be implemented this year)

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Field mapping

Seqno	Database	Old field name	Table in Specify containing field	New field name (corresponds to Specify field)	Notes
28	Vert	AF_COL3_S	Agent	Last Name	Collector 3 surname. Linked to Collection Event table via Collection table where Order number = 3
29	Vert	AF_COL3_I	Agent	Initials	Collector 3 initials. Linked to Collection Event table via Collection table where Order number = 3
30	Vert	AF_SDATE	Collecting Event	Start Date	Note that AF_SDATE is in text format
31	Vert	AF_SDATE_P	Collecting Event	Start Date precision	0 = no value; 1 = nearest day; 2 = nearest month; 3 = nearest year\
32	Vert	AF_EDATE	Collecting Event	End Date	Note that AF_EDATE is in text format
33	Vert	AF_EDATE_P	Collecting Event	End Date precision	0 = no value; 1 = nearest day; 2 = nearest month; 3 = nearest year\
34	Vert	AF_CONT	Geography	Name	Geography.Rank = 100
35	Vert	AF_COUNTRY	Geography	Name	Geography.Rank = 200

Specify has 154 different tables

Collection Object table – example of fields:

Number2	Float	24	User definable.
Object Condition	String	64	
Project Number	String	64	
Remarks	Memo	4096	Additional Comments.
Restrictions	String	32	
Phenology	String	300	User definable.
Text2	String	300	User definable.
Timestamp Created	Timestamp		The timestamp the record was created.
Modified Date	Timestamp		The timestamp the record was last modified.
Total Value	BigDecimal		
Version	Integer		
Visibility	Byte	10	
Yes No1	Boolean		User definable.
Yes No2	Boolean		User definable.

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Resolving inconsistencies in catalogue numbers

• SAM-HYM-C009876	HYM-C009876
• SAM-ENT-0009876	ENT-009876
• SAM-HYM-C009876a	HYM-C009876a
• SAM-HYM-C009876df	HYM-C009876df
• SAM-ZO-52088	ZO-052088
• SAM-CT-0275.23	CT-000275.023
• H-4114	MB-H004114
• SAM-A-19702	MB-A019702
• SAM_MBR_A007400	MB-A007400
• SAM-MBM-A003557	MB-A003557
• SAM-MBM-001096	MB-X001096

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Criteria for success

- Funding by SABIF to Willem Coetzer for data conversion
- The quality of expertise and support provided by Willem
- The flexibility of Specify in handling different types of data
- The setting of standards for data input (ongoing)
- Adequate training of staff (ongoing)
- Communication (monthly meetings)
- Ongoing support
- Data manager position (we don’t have one yet)

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Challenges

- Image management – room for improvement
- Recording of relationships between different collection objects: possible but not perfect
- Analysing trends across collections: possible but not straight forward
- Data management and conservation

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