

National Cultural Policy Submission

National Museum of Australia

Introduction

The National Museum of Australia is pleased to have this opportunity to make a submission to the public consultation process for a new National Cultural Policy. It welcomes the decision to establish a new policy based on the foundational pillars of *Creative Australia*, launched in 2013, and offers its suggestions in respect of its five key themes.

The creation of a comprehensive cultural policy is especially important at this time, as the nation undergoes a period of transformational change and emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, the Museum believes the new policy for the cultural sector has wide ramifications for the nation – in inspiring people and improving their lives, in establishing a sense of belonging and equity in nation, in helping people learn to live digitally, in pump-priming creative enterprise and the knowledge economy, and in communicating Australian stories across the nation and to the world.

The Museum strongly endorses the view that this is a National *Cultural* Policy and not a national arts policy. Such an approach addresses the complex web of relationships between traditional arts domains and the wider cultural life of nation. More specifically, the Museum believes the new policy should reflect the breadth and the quality of inter-relationships between diverse genres, practices and functions in Australia's diverse cultural ecologies, and the strength and breadth of community participation and engagement in the sector. In 2017-18, for instance, the last time the Australian Bureau of Statistics measured visits to cultural venues and events, 82.4% of Australians aged 15 and over had attended at least one cultural venue or event, increasing to 94.3% among those aged under 15¹.

The GLAM sector (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) is responsible for the movable cultural heritage of nation – a vast collection of manuscripts, books and other publications, audio-visual resources, documentary archival records, works of art, and artefactual collections which altogether comprise a peerless record of our national story. Ours is a story like no other on Earth, encompassing more than 65,000 years of First Nations history, and the institutions and life experiences of all who have subsequently made this continent their home. The cultural heritage of our nation provides in so many ways the inspiration for our writers, musicians, performing artists and visual artists who comprise what is more traditionally understood as 'the arts'. Yet the two categories – the arts and cultural heritage – which together offer enormous potential to reciprocally enrich and foster the other, are often considered separate and distinct.

Key Issues

- 1. To better realise the potential of the GLAM and arts sectors to work together, the Museum supports development of cultural infrastructure that deals directly with the concerns of both these categories.** The establishment of a Cultural Heritage Council, as a twin to the Australia Council, would serve the GLAM institutions and organisations across the country and allow for strategic policy development and funding streams for specific program outcomes. Alternatively, the remit of the Australia Council might be widened to properly address the GLAM sector and allow for development of strategic and operational approaches that join these institutions productively to the traditional arts genres. Either approach – establishing a Cultural Heritage Council or enlarging the sphere of operations of the Australia

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events, Australia 26/03/2019
[Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events, Australia, 2017-18 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/australian-bureau-of-statistics/publications/attending-at-cultural-venues-and-events)

Council – would have the additional benefit of connecting Australia’s National Collecting Institutions to like organisations in the states and territories.

2. **Better connect other elements of the cultural heritage sphere, principally agencies and organisations which deal with place-based cultural heritage, with GLAM sector institutions and professionals.** The present division of these interests at a Federal Government level (and in many other Australian jurisdictions) is peculiar to this country. In the United States and in the United Kingdom, there are clear, unambiguous examples of cross-sectoral bodies which join all facets of cultural heritage practice practically and intellectually – that is, they connect the moveable cultural heritage of nation to the study, preservation and communication of place histories. Such reform would be consistent with the Government’s stated ambition for a truly National *Cultural* Policy and achieve an historic coherence of the arts and cultural life of Australia.

3. **Improve school children and youth engagement with the nation’s cultural heritage through expansion of the PACER schools visits program and development of online access and resources for schools and young people.** There are compelling reasons why a new national cultural policy should focus on improving primary and secondary student access to arts and cultural programs across the breadth of music, literature, performance, art and cultural experiences of all kinds. Access to the National Collecting Institutions, and the wider GLAM sector institutions more generally, is fundamental to building a creative culture and in introducing future generations to the fundamental benefits of cultural and creative activity. Also, it will assist in promoting a sense of citizenship and belonging to meet the challenges of complex and diverse global cultural influences.

4. **Fundamentally, the wider cultural sector needs vision and a level of investment that can realise its potential in the national interest.** The health of the creative and cultural enterprise of our nation is critical to our well-being, our sense of possibility and opportunity, to the quality and innovation of our ideas, to our standard of living, and to our economic strength. Many of our competitors in the Asia Pacific are investing in this area, emboldened by a 2015 UNESCO report which found that the region was the most valuable in the world in terms of creative industries.² Yet the past decade has been marked by declining investment in the cultural sector despite our growing population.³ As an example, the funding situation of National Collecting Institutions, such as the National Museum, now threatens their capacity to deliver services and programs commensurate with public expectations and legislative obligations.

²² A 2015 report showed that the creative industries were worth US\$743 billion in the Asia Pacific, from a global total of US\$2.2 trillion, making it the most valuable region in the world (greater than North America, and greater than Europe). *Cultural Times*, UNESCO, 2015. Accessed at https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/media_thumbnails/cultural-times_cover.png

³ A New Approach, *The Big Picture 2: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia 2007-08 to 2018-19*, 2020. Accessed at <https://newapproach.org.au/insight-reports/the-big-picture-2/>

1. First Nations: recognizing and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture

The National Museum of Australia has long placed First Nations stories and culture at the centre of its work and program. The Museum has played a central role in fostering shared understanding of the nation's history and through its work has helped build strong mutual relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In the process, the Museum has learned much from partners in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia. The Museum is now a cultural institution in which First Nations stories are told by First Nations people, best exemplified by the recent *Endeavour Voyage* and *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters* exhibitions, both co-created with First Nations communities.

The Museum endorses the primacy of this theme in building a new National Cultural Policy and emphasizes the value of bringing together cross-portfolio First Nations cultural programs and priorities.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **The National Museum supports development of a *Ngurra* First Nations Cultural Precinct in Canberra and the creation of a dedicated resting place for the ancestral remains of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.** The Museum considers that its own work in collaborative programs over two decades with First Nations communities across Australia, in fulfillment of its legislative responsibilities, will complement the work anticipated in the new Cultural Precinct proposal.
- **Support educational and employment opportunities for First Nations arts and cultural workers, particularly in remote and regional communities,** based on the *Cultural Connections/Encounters* models developed by the National Museum. This recognises that culturally strong communities are key to the wellbeing of peoples and communities. The NMA's program enables Indigenous cultural practitioners to undertake work placements in National Collecting Institutions, learn about cultural heritage practices more generally, and take these skills back into community to enable them to protect, share and enhance their cultural stories.
- **Develop measures to improve protection of First Nations Intellectual Property and Cultural Rights.** The recent Productivity Commission [draft report into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts and Craft](#) has identified alarming examples of exploitation of First Nations art and culture and an inability of the existing legal framework to adequately respond.
- **Improve access by First Nations communities to their collections, research and information held by government bodies** including all National Collecting Institutions in the Arts portfolio, together with the Australian War Memorial and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. The National Cultural Policy could usefully provide for new agreements to be struck between these collecting organisations and First Nations communities.
- **Establish best-practice principles for the cultural sector to ensure that benefits and returns from collaborations and partnerships are properly shared with First Nations communities.** The Australian Museums and Galleries Association's *First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries*, developed after extensive consultation with First Nations communities, offers clear guidelines to best practice in this area.

CHALLENGES

- Arts and cultural institutions, professionals and practitioners can lead public discussion that addresses our past and builds a shared awareness of the long, unbroken human history of this continent. This is a key example of the social value of the cultural sector in building cohesion and belonging in the national community.
- At the same time, First Nations access to arts and cultural institutions and experiences needs to be widened and stimulated, to ensure that the cultural life of the nation is effectively shared and equitable for all. This requires all institutions and organisations across the sector to have active programs to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in cultural activities and enterprise.
- Recognition and support for the role of cultural institutions in 'truth-telling' can assist discussions and debate about establishing a Voice to Parliament and promoting reconciliation.
- Future redevelopment of the National Museum of Australia's *Gallery of First Australians*, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, can build cultural worker capabilities across the country and ensure that this story is told by First Peoples themselves, in their own voice.
- Development of a sustainable model for copyright and broader intellectual property rights is urgently needed. It is critical that Indigenous communities and organisations receive appropriate revenue for copyright licencing of their cultural and intellectual property and are supported in developing collaborations with commercial interests.

2. A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

Australia's diverse society, founded on successive waves of migration over more than two hundred years, is one of its greatest strengths. Recognising the essential value of pluralism and diversity in the nation in turn builds a shared sense of belonging among all peoples in this land and fosters social cohesion. Similarly, a diverse and variegated cultural sector, which ranges across traditional and contemporary arts practice, and connects with cultural institutions and the heritage industry, can demonstrate that the nation welcomes all stories and all modes of storytelling, encouraging the participation of all peoples in the cultural life of nation.

The National Museum has a broad mandate to tell the stories of Australia and bring the varied experiences of our peoples to life. The architecture of our building is founded on the idea that all strands of our story are brought together and shared in our national community. The Museum and other cultural institutions therefore validate the place of all people in the national story and can fulfill the promise of ensuring that there is a 'place for every story' in our cultural life.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Develop a Collecting Contemporary Australia program with the National Collecting Institutions and appropriate consultation and community support** from existing multicultural associations and organisations, such as the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia, and other organisations and associations that deal with discrimination and differences, such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, and socio-economic circumstance. Collecting Institutions such as the National Museum of Australia have an unrivalled capacity to represent and affirm the cultural diversity of the nation through their collections.
- Establish a **participatory program, *Your Story is Our Story***, to build a compendium of narratives demonstrating Australia's pluralism and diversity online,

offering a pathway for people to contribute their story as part of the national story, and help connect young people from diverse backgrounds to wider community interests. The National Museum's award-winning *Australia's Defining Moments Digital Classroom*, the pre-eminent online resource for the teaching of Australian history in primary and secondary schools, can be usefully developed to include a national story-telling program among primary and secondary students.

CHALLENGES

- The lack of a coordinating and strategic body for cultural heritage is an obstacle to development of coordinated national programs around collecting and storytelling that might address the atomised character of current programming in this area.
- Communities of difference within the wider national community are under-represented in the collections of nation held by major institutions. In part, this is because employment opportunities in these institutions are under-representative of the actual numbers of people from diverse communities in the nation.
- All National Collecting Institutions face challenges in the proper preservation and storage of the nation's heritage collections for which they care. Contemporary collecting at scale, focused upon celebrating our pluralism and diversity, would require re-investment in adequate facilities in all NCIs to meet this need.

3. The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.

The GLAM sector directly and indirectly supports the creation of diverse cultural experiences and products, through supporting the work of artists and other creative enterprises. Conscious of its role to foster creativity and cultural enterprise, the National Museum has worked to directly support artists during the COVID-19 pandemic by commissioning new works, exhibitions and performances. Its ambition is to serve as an instigator and underwriter of cultural work across a range of genres and to continue assisting the wider cultural sector as it rebuilds after the disruptions of the last two years, as funding permits.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Since 2020, the National Museum has commissioned a range of musicians, performers, filmmakers and digital media creatives to create new work for audiences onsite and online.** In this way, it is maximising the value of the Commonwealth's investment in the cultural sector and developing and supporting art and cultural practice across a range of disciplines.
- **The Government can have a reasonable expectation that its National Collecting Institutions work supportively in the interests of artists and creatives, particularly in a time of challenge for this arts community.** This leads to diverse and engaging Australian-made art experiences and content for the wider public and supports arts industries and practice more generally.
- **Moreover, a dedicated funding stream to enable these cross-sectoral engagements would see institutions such as the Museum able to widen the scope of its support for artists in this way.** This recognises that the artist and the cultural institution are key elements of a wider cultural ecology that can be mutually sustaining in ways from which the public derives additional benefits and value.

CHALLENGES

- The capacity of key institutions to support the work of artists and creatives is wholly dependent on the adequacy of financial support and funding received by these organisations.
- The separation of the GLAM sector and art and creative genres such as music, performance, film etc. militates against the kind of cross-sectoral support that is outlined above. Instead, it tends to silo arts practitioners from the institutions from which they might derive both creative inspiration and material support.

4. Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

Creative Australia in 2013 recognised the importance of strong cultural institutions to serve collectively as a bedrock for the cultural life of Australia. Institutions, whether they are National Collecting Institutions, local galleries, an Indigenous art centre or a performing arts company, are fundamental to the vitality and resilience of the cultural sector in this country. Ensuring the sustainability and resilience of our institutions is critical to the future of our nation's cultural life.

The National Museum has taken a lead role in fostering relationships between like institutions, and across genres, notably by supporting creative partnerships with the Arts Centre Melbourne and Adelaide Festival Centre. Additionally, the Museum has worked to support important sectoral networks, such as the Council of Australasian Museum Directors, the Australian Museums and Galleries Association, ICOM Australia, the Australia Singapore Arts Group and *A New Approach* arts 'think tank'.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **As noted in the 2013 *Creative Australia* policy document, there would be great value in establishing a national network for museums and galleries**, to be managed in partnership between the National Museum of Australia and related peak bodies. Moreover, this network might form part of a new **Cultural Heritage Council**, established to drive strategic and organisational linkages and support for these institutions within the wider GLAM and Cultural Heritage sectors (as outlined above).
- **Policy measures in support of building stronger connections and collaborative endeavour** between the institutional pillars of our cultural life is needed if we are to maximise the value of the investments we make in these bodies. There is more that connects our cultural institutions, irrespective of whether they are a collecting institution, arts company, or local gallery, than separates them.
- **Strong cultural institutions are important drivers of urban and regional economies and would benefit from better connection with tourism and other parts of city or country visitor economies.** Recognition of the economic value of cultural agencies does not detract from their intrinsic and social worth. Instead, it adds to the case for improved strategic and master planning for these organisations.
- **Cultural institutions, such as the National Museum, play an important role in stitching together communities of difference in times of challenge or adversity.** The experience of the Museum in the 2020 bushfires demonstrated that people turn to these institutions in times of need for affirmation and relief, in the knowledge that they are safe and supportive spaces for communities. Policy recognition of this would ultimately support community resilience and capabilities.

- **The GLAM sector is home to institutions that provide more cultural experiences for mass audiences than almost any other part of the wider cultural economy.** In 2020-21, major museums in Australia received over 10 million visits. Museums encourage a broad base of public participation in arts activity, demonstrating the democratic nature of cultural engagement in these institutions.
- **Policy development and investment leading to digital cultural heritage access for all Australians, and around the globe, is a fundamental part of building a strong and vibrant cultural life for this nation.** The vast cultural heritage collections of Australia, encompassed by the collections of the NCIs and all other institutions in the GLAM sector across the country, constitute altogether one of the greatest cultural assets of the nation and should be accessible online.

CHALLENGES

- **Financial sustainability has been a major risk to all National Collecting Institutions, including the National Museum,** over recent years. It is essential that the National Collecting Institutions are adequately funded to ensure that they can operate sustainably and meet their legislative requirements. For the National Museum, sustainable funding will ensure the institution can continue to meet its legislative requirements to collect, develop and preserve the National Historical Collection, and share the stories of this nation through exhibitions, research and programs across Australia and around the world.
- **The Efficiency Dividend (ED) has had a disproportionate impact on small agencies, particularly the National Collecting Institutions,** as outlined in the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee Report *Telling Australia's story - and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's National Institutions*. The application of the ED contributes to the budgetary pressures the NCIs face, and further compounds their inability to meet their legislative functions.
- **At the same time, the Government faces growing challenges to address the preservation and storage needs of its cultural collections,** with many of these works presently stored inadequately or in facilities that do not meet international standards. Safeguarding assets worth in total nearly \$11 billion is needed to ensure that these cultural treasures are available to people for all time.
- Australia is now lagging behind other nations which have made **major investments in developing and enhancing digital access to collections,** establishing cultural infrastructure that helps to underpin the emerging knowledge economy. Europe, North American and Asian nations have all moved to ensure that digital access to artefactual, library, audio-visual and documentary collections are enabled as a fundamental element of building a strong cultural sector in those countries.
- **There is need for improved data relating to cultural activity and the work and value of cultural institutions more generally.** Australia trails other nations in data collection related to cultural engagement, such as the 'Taking Part' survey in England which includes engagement across a number of sectors not currently covered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/taking-part-survey>). To that end, the re-establishment of statistical collection in the cultural sector by the Australian Bureau of Statistics will help in long-term strategy development in this area.

5. Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad

Enabling opportunity and access to the arts and cultural heritage of nation is all about serving the public. As a result, community usefulness and social value are the key prisms through which we should see all our work in this sector. We exist as a diverse community of artists, practitioners, companies and institutions precisely because of our relationships to the people who come to us, in person and online, to participate in the cultural life of Australia. Given that, it is important to promote access for all peoples to arts and cultural experiences as not just something that is 'nice-to-have' but a key human right. To have a cultural life is to be affirmed personally and collectively as human beings whose own experience resonates with that of others. Arts and cultural participation enlarge the self and helps us find our place in a wider human story. The question of access, which also involves broadening and deepening the palette of cultural experiences in this country, is central to reaching and serving audiences.

At the same time, telling our stories to the world is a keystone of cultural diplomacy. Cultural exchanges and linkages are a way in which the nation can express its interests at a time of geopolitical challenge or instability. The NMA has an established international program, developed in partnership with DFAT over the last decade which takes the Australian story to the world, through international tours of works such as the award-winning *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters* and the *Old Masters: Australia's Great Bark Artist* exhibitions.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **The PACER program that enables school students from across Australia to visit Canberra and learn about their place in the nation through visits to the Parliament and the National Collecting Institutions should be widened and extended** to properly support visits to *all* NCIs, rather than focusing upon a limited number of mandatory sites for the program.
- **Moreover, the NCIs can collaborate to offer online visits under PACER or through the extension and development of existing cultural heritage online resources, such as *Australia's Defining Moments Digital Classroom*.** At present, such online resources are atomised and operate independently rather than being brought together in coordinated fashion to allow primary and secondary school students to visit our institutions virtually, as much as physically.
- **The nation needs a Cultural Heritage digital platform, and associated support for digitisation of collections to ensure our stories are available for all Australians and around the world.** We lack adequate support for a coordinated and comprehensive program to create online digital access to the cultural heritage of nation, as a cultural counterpart to the *Atlas of Living Australia*.⁴
- **The promise of digital access to heritage resources of the nation should be complemented with programs that allow communities and individuals holding cultural material to contribute their own holdings to the national estate.** Such a program would recognise a fundamental shift enabled by these technologies, which empowers people wherever they are to build our cultural assets, contributing their own ideas, stories and artefacts to wider public notice and interest.
- **Greater support for cultural diplomacy can address Australia's place in the world from a position of strength and confidence.** Such support bringing together cultural workers, institutions and audiences abroad is a powerful statement

⁴ Department Infrastructure Transport Regional Development and Communications Annual Report 2020-21 <https://www.transparency.gov.au/annual-reports/department-infrastructure-transport-regional-development-and-communications/reporting-year/2020-21-52>

of our national interests and helps build and maintain connections with other States, even in circumstances that become adverse or problematic. This can include:

-Support people-to-people links in the cultural sector through established models to create a funding pool allowing for artists, practitioners and cultural worker exchanges and workshops between key target countries and Australia.

-Creation of a dedicated funding pool for supporting major international touring exhibitions. Taking Australian themes abroad to key identified countries or regions, to help build ongoing relationships with priority nations.

-Cultural Diplomacy International Roundtable meeting - establish a platform to facilitate an ongoing dialogue with the national cultural institutions and DFAT.

-Fostering education and engagement through a network between Australian Study Centres and key cultural institutions, linking key centres for the advancement of ideas about Australian life and experience.

-Greater connection between Tourism Australia, DFAT and key national arts companies and institutions, with an aim to promote Australian culture and society.

CHALLENGES

- Participation in formal and funded cultural experiences by some communities of difference in Australia is lower than it should be relative to the rest of the population, though their engagement in informal arts and cultural activities is often much higher. We can address the considerable formal/informal barriers to raising these levels.
- Access to cultural heritage online using digital technologies is inadequate because of the lack of coordinated funding for these activities across the States, Territories and Commonwealth. The danger is that Australian stories and content will be less accessible in the future to coming generations accustomed to living digitally and who expect to be able to access this kind of content seamlessly wherever they are.
- Australia has a natural advantage internationally because of its distinctive First Nations and multicultural history and experiences, yet we are not presently addressing this opportunity in a way that coordinates our interests in diplomacy, trade and tourism.

