



### SUBMISSION ON NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

This submission is made by the Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive Inc., an independent not-for-profit association supporting the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) in the fulfilment of its mandate under the *National Film and Sound Archive Act 2008*.

While all five pillars of the original *Creative Australia National Cultural Policy* are relevant to the NFSA, for the purposes of this submission we focus on the fourth pillar: ***strong institutions***.

#### Context

Created in 1984 by the Hawke government, the NFSA is one of the great national memory institutions, a group which includes the National Library, National Museum, National Gallery, Museum of Australian Democracy et al. The Friends believe strongly that the Federal Government has a duty of care to protect, preserve and provide access to their collections - and to ensure their proper governance, nurture their expertise and adequately fund their operations. This has not happened in a long time, leaving the memory institutions in a state of decline, struggling to meet their core objectives.

The current parlous state of our institutions was recently surveyed by opinion writers: Gideon Haigh's [Neglected heritage how could it happen](#) in *The Australian*, and Karl Quinn's [crisis in the arts](#) in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*. The *Inside Story* article [Crunch time at NFSA](#) details the specific situation at the NFSA.

#### Resource base

Over the last decade, government funding for the NFSA has declined by 20% in real terms. Staffing has declined at a similar rate, resulting in the loss of both skills and corporate memory. While there has been additional, short term project funding to speed up digitization, this does not solve the need for stable and adequate ongoing permanent funding for the totality of the Archive's responsibility, as well as for career-based skills development. This relentless decline urgently needs to be reversed.

#### Access

The Friends supports the greatly increased accessibility of the collection by digital and other means, complemented by appropriate cataloguing, historical and curatorial information. We would like to see a review of the current excessive fees levied for the use of collection material in new productions which inhibits public access to the national collection.

## **Governance**

The governing Board defines the culture and the policy base of the NFSA. The original board of 2008 exemplified the academic and professional backgrounds, as well as the connections to the NFSA's stakeholder base, that were essential to the leadership of the institution. The maintenance of this skills matrix has been ignored by successive governments, to the great concern of the NFSA's supporters, as board appointments have become politicised and increasingly remote from the stakeholder base. The politicisation of the Board needs to stop with new board appointments merit based and consistent with the necessary and appropriate skills matrix. The Friends have written to Minister Burke on this matter ([attachment 1](#)).

## **Public opinion and consultation**

The Friends has made known its views on the critical development needs of the NFSA (see [attachment 2](#)).

Prior to the recent Federal election, the Friends questioned selected candidates for their policy stances on critical issues facing the NFSA. The questionnaire, with responses, is at [attachment 3](#).

## **What the Friends would like to see in a National Cultural Policy**

- 1 A recognition of government's "duty of care" for the national memory institutions, and hence a commitment to adequate funding and governance beyond the considerations of the immediate election cycle.
- 2 An enhanced profile for memory institutions within the Policy framework. At present they appear to have a very subordinate place, when their effective operation is in fact fundamental to a healthy arts and cultural sector.
- 3 A separate and definable Culture Department reporting to a dedicated Minister for Culture to embrace the arts and cultural institutions. Traditionally "the Arts" have been hooked on, in desultory fashion, to an often unrelated mega-department - and have been prioritized accordingly. Comparable countries see the importance of promoting the status and accessibility of their culture. Why not Australia - if we are indeed proud of our cultural heritage?
- 4 Legislating for an arms-length, non-politicised model for appointments to institutional boards, as (for example) proposed by the recent Grattan Institute study [New politics public appointments](#)

*Dr Ray Edmondson OAM, President*

*19 August 2022*

## **Attachments**

- 1 Letter to Arts Minister, Hon Tony Burke, 11 July 2022
- 2 Friends advice on the future 21 November 2021
- 3 Response to Friends Policy Questionnaire 18 April 2022



Hon. Tony Burke MP,  
Minister for the Arts,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra 2600

Dear Minister

Congratulations on your appointment to the Arts portfolio.

We, the Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), are concerned about the present composition of the NFSA Board. We ask you to address its serious deficiency in skills and expertise.

You were recently quoted (Quinn\*) as recognizing the raft of inappropriate appointments, many with strong Liberal Party links, made to cultural institutions by the previous government, and welcoming the fact that a small number of such appointees had honorably offered you their resignations. The generally parlous state of our institutions was recently canvassed in another timely article. (Haigh\*\*)

All over the world, national audiovisual archives like the NFSA are specialised one-of-a-kind institutions in their respective countries. They have the critical responsibility of preserving their national screen and sound memory to the highest standard, and providing effective and affordable access to it. After it was created by the Hawke government in 1984, the NFSA quickly became the leading institution of its type across South East Asia/Pacific, mentoring and training others in the region. In recent years, its profile – like its resource base – has steadily declined.

All current NFSA Board members will reach the end of their three year terms during the period of this government, allowing you the opportunity to re-populate the Board appropriately.

The Friends believe the NFSA Board should comprise a mix of people who represent the institution's stakeholders in the screen, sound and new media industries, as well as being appropriately credentialled in academia and the collecting professions. Among them, one or more individuals with strong managerial, financial and philanthropic backgrounds are needed. While previous boards have aspired to this profile, the present Board is far from it.

Given the specialised nature of the NFSA, there would also be a virtue in having a staff-elected member on the Board. This would raise staff morale and overcome the Board's remoteness from the hands-on workplace.

Board members should see themselves as advocating for the NFSA and publicising its work at every opportunity. The Chair and Deputy Chair, in particular, should be able to work closely with the CEO to assertively communicate the Archive's needs to Government and the media, and build and maintain its reputation as a national treasure to be protected. In that way, they will be able to attract corporate and individual donations and ensure that philanthropic organisations keep the NFSA on their lists of possible beneficiaries.

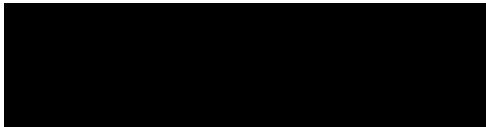
To prevent the future danger of inappropriate appointments, the *National Film and Sound Archive Act 2008* needs to be amended to ensure that the required skill sets for Board members are set in concrete and cannot be changed without Parliamentary approval. There is also a case for increasing the standard term of appointment to more than the 3-year election cycle, to help prevent any future Board stacking. The Government could telegraph its intent, because once in place such legislative changes would render current unqualified Board members ineligible to continue, and hence encourage their resignations ahead of time.

Prior to the federal election, the Friends carried out a survey which identified strong support for the generality of the above needs and changes among independent candidates and the Greens, and several of these candidates are now members of Parliament.

The Friends would be happy to assist the Minister's staff in identifying the appropriate Board skill sets and having these reflected in legislative changes. It would also be happy to help in progressing those changes by briefing the cross-bench and, if necessary, the Opposition. In due course, it would also be happy to suggest the names of potential Board appointees for your consideration.

Finally, I would add that improving the quality of the NFSA's Board is essentially a budget neutral exercise. The NFSA has serious resource needs, as do most of the other collecting institutions, and we know that at present it will be difficult to address those. However, an effective Board should be able to make the best use of the existing resource base and begin attracting philanthropic support.

Yours sincerely



Dr Ray Edmondson OAM  
President

11 July 2022

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\* <https://www.theage.com.au/culture/movies/culture-in-crisis-arts-minister-tony-burke-slams-decade-of-neglect-20220630-p5ay3z.html> (Karl Quinn, *The Age*)

\*\* <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/neglected-heritage-how-has-this-been-allowed-to-happen/news-story/f00eeb5b0192b244c009cc5bf09b4e4b> (Gideon Haigh, *The Australian*)

## FEDERAL ELECTION 2022

# CANDIDATES' POLICY STANCES ON THE NFSA

Updated 18 April

The Federal election has been set for 21 May.

In recent weeks, the Friends has been approaching the main parties, as well as a sampling of independent members and candidates, inviting them to state their policy positions in relation to their support of the National Film and Sound Archive.

This has been done by email contact, including sending them a short questionnaire and inviting them to indicate their support – or otherwise – of five policy positions. These related to the composition and appointment process of the NFSA's Board; the restoration of funding and staffing levels; the rebuilding of neglected functions and the lowering of access fees. *The questionnaire can be read in full at the end of this post.*

Below is a summary of the responses received to date.

## THE PARTIES

Questionnaires were sent to the relevant spokespersons for the Liberal/National Coalition, Labor Party, The Greens, One Nation and the United Australia Party.

Labor's response came from the office of **Tony Burke MP**, Shadow Minister for the Arts:

*Labor has yet to announce our arts and culture policy, and we will have more to say before the election. Unlike the government, which has subjected national institutions like the National Film and Sound Archive to a succession of cuts, Labor respects the important role our cultural institutions play in our shared history, as well as the special place they hold in our national capital.*

A response was also received from the Greens' ACT candidate for the Senate, which is featured below. No response has yet been received from the other parties.

## SITTING INDEPENDENTS

It was **Zali Steggall MP** who originally raised the issue of the composition of the NFSA's Board, and funding and staffing levels, in a question on notice to the minister, Paul Fletcher, in October 2021. *She supports the policy positions proposed in all five questions.*

**Dr Helen Haines MP** and **Rebekha Sharkie MP** have each responded that they *support the policy positions proposed in all five questions.*

**Andrew Wilkie MP** has advised that he would *support amendments to the NFSA Act to mandate a public appointment process for members of the board* (Question 1). He supports the policy positions proposed in Questions 2,3 and 4. In response to Question 5 he says *I believe access fees to NFSA resources should be lowered and priced appropriately to ensure all researchers can afford to access archival documents and that the collection is used to its full capacity.*

## **INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES**

**Nicolette Boele** and **Janine Kitson** are both candidates for the Sydney electorate of Bradfield (currently held by the NFSA's Minister, Paul Fletcher from whom no response to the Questionnaire has yet been received). They hold similar policy positions on NFSA:

**Janine Kitson:** *As someone who has been a student of history I know the work of the National Film and Sound Archive is of critical importance. I welcome the opportunity to support, strengthen and fund the National Film and Sound Archive if elected as the member for Bradfield.*

**Nicolette Boele's** response was provided by her husband, Jonathan Geraghty:

*I have worked as a television director for over 25 years and I advise Nicolette regarding policies relevant to the Arts. I have reviewed your questionnaire and the supporting document links.*

*Should Nicolette be elected, she would support and advocate for all of your policy points whilst in government.*

*We feel very strongly about transparency and integrity in government, and do not agree with "jobs for mates". The gradual erosion of budget support for all the arts in Australia has been very distressing. Particularly the short-term thinking regarding our history and the sharing of stories with an Australian voice.*

Former journalist **Zoe Daniel** is standing in the Melbourne electorate of Goldstein. She has advised that due to overwhelming commitments, she is not in a position to respond to this survey right now. She would be more than happy to engage after the election, should she be successfully elected.

Professor **Kim Rubenstein** is a candidate for the Senate from the ACT. She supports *all five policy points in the Questionnaire* and draws attention to her Op Ed in the Canberra Times concerning independence, transparency and accountability in board appointments <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7634801/we-need-to-ensure-trust-in-government-heres-what-we-need-to-do> 1 March 2022)

**Jane Caro AM** of Reason Australia is a candidate for the Senate from Victoria. She affirms the importance of supporting a vibrant Australian arts and media sector, including the preservation of our rich media history, and hence the importance of the NFSA. *She supports all five policy priorities* proposed by the Friends.

**Dr Monique Ryan** is standing in the Melbourne electorate of Kooyong. She advises that she does not have the resources to respond adequately to the many policy questions she is receiving at present. She adds *I'm aware of the NFSA and sympathetic to its aims but am not at this point able to commit to supporting specific policies regarding its staffing or future funding. [I] would be interested in discussing things further should I be successful in the election.*

## **A VIEW FROM THE HEART**

ACT Greens candidate for the Senate **Dr Tjanara Goreng Goreng** developed a personal connection with the NFSA and its collection over several years during her doctoral research at the Australian National University. Here are some edited excerpts from her extensive response to the Questionnaire:

Question 1: *This does not surprise me! Transparency must occur in everything we do in the public sphere and non-political appointments are best for our community and country.*

Question 2: *Many of our institutions have had their funding cut over the past few years. I'm not sure that a federal budget surplus is more important than funding communities and important national business such as supporting NFSA. I'm not happy ever hearing about efficiency dividends when we choose to spend billions of dollars on nuclear submarines – just shows the priorities.*

Question 3: *If you cut staffing you lose corporate knowledge, expertise and productivity. You can't do the work you need to do without people.*

Question 4: *As a Greens candidate our platform makes it very clear that people in the creative and arts spheres must be supported - without the anxiety of not knowing where their support will be coming from.*

Question 5: *I'd make sure this is changed if I was in the Senate and I'd support any Senator or Member who would bring this forward.*

**Go to the next page to read the questionnaire.**



[www.archivefriends.org.au](http://www.archivefriends.org.au)

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### **POLICY STANCE ON THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE**

The Friends of the NFSA is asking parties and independent candidates for the forthcoming Federal election to state their policy position in relation to the support of the National Film and Sound Archive, one of our key national collecting institutions. We invite you to respond to each of the questions below.

1 The NFSA's governing Board is ministerially appointed. It is important that the board contain expertise in the relevant professional and academic disciplines, and have active connections with the audiovisual communities and industries. Would you support a transparent, non-political public appointment process for members of the board? Would you support amendments to the NFSA Act to mandate such a process?

2 The NFSA's base budget has declined about 20% over the last decade, while its task has grown larger. To restore the budget to the previous level will require an increase of \$6 million to the base, irrespective of additional, short term project funding. Would you support such restoration?

3 Permanent expert staff are the backbone of the NFSA. In 2010 the approved permanent staffing level (ASL) was 220. Now it is 20% lower, at 164. Would you support restoration of staffing to 2010 levels?

4 Ideally the NFSA should be rebuilding functions and profile that have been wound down because of budget and staff reductions, such as scholarship and research



awards and international connections. Would you support the restoration of these functions?

5 Should access fees for NFSA resources be lowered to encourage research and use of the collection?

***Explanatory information:***

**Question 1:** On 18 October 2021 Zali Steggall MP asked the NFSA's Minister, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, whether he would fill two current vacancies on the NFSA Governing Board by appointing experts with academic and professional credentials appropriate to audiovisual archiving, and whether he would seek to amend the NFSA's *Act* to ensure future appointees satisfied such criteria. On 17 December 2021 the Minister chose to appoint close relatives of former Liberal Party leaders to fill the two vacancies, and stated that he had no intention to amend the NFSA *Act*. Bios of all current NFSA Board members are at <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/about/corporate-information/governance/nfsa-board>. The new appointees are Ms Caroline Elliott (chair) and Mrs Lucinda Brogden.

**Questions 2, 3, 4 :** "Efficiency dividends" over the last decade have severely shrunk the NFSA's capacity, activities and services and have caused a brain drain of expertise. This urgently needs to be reversed. Although the Government recently announced new project funding over 4 years to address the task of digitisation, this is a temporary band-aid and does not fix the underlying problem of growing long term career staff. There are solutions. For more detail go to <https://insidestory.org.au/time-for-another-visionary-moment-at-the-nfsa> and <https://insidestory.org.au/promises-promises>

**Question 5:** Fees for access to the NFSA collection, over and above fair cost reimbursement, are having a crippling effect – notably on new productions that re-use archival footage. <https://johnmenadue.com/changes-to-federal-government-film-funding-could-cripple-production-of-historical-documentaries>

**Other strategic issues:** On the pressing issues facing the NFSA the Friends have prepared a discussion paper for further information:  
<http://www.archivefriends.org.au//images/stories/2021/FRIENDS%20ADVICE%20ON%20THE%20FUTURE%202021%20November%202021.pdf>



**To:** Patrick McIntyre, NFSA CEO

**From:** Ray Edmondson, President NFSA Friends

**Subject:** NFSA priorities

This document sets out some comments on the issues currently facing the NFSA, with suggested steps that might be taken to address them.

The comments have been prepared by the Canberra and Melbourne committees of the Friends, whose elected members and patrons are, in many ways, representative of the NFSA's stakeholder base. They arise, in part, from the experience of Friends members during day to day contact with the NFSA, and in part from the Friends' experience in advocacy work over recent years.

The Friends are happy to help in the implementation of these suggestions where they have the capacity to do so.

Ray Edmondson

30 Nov 2021

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The following comments cover:

- The NFSA's official strategic position
- Strengthening the NFSA's intellectual base
- Strengthening its depth and expertise
- Strengthening its community
- NFSA's public presence and place
- NFSA's profile
- Restoring the resource base

Much of what is suggested will take time to implement, so priority issues have been identified.

## NFSA's OFFICIAL STRATEGIC POSITION

The following extracts are taken from three documents currently on the NFSA website, with our comments in brackets:

From the **Strategic priorities** statement:

“increase our international reach through partnerships and digital opportunities” - emphasising exporting access to the collection rather than broader collaboration.

From the **2021 Statement of intent**

“... central themes which are at the core of everything we do:

- Collective genius: we foster a community that is willing and able to generate new ideas, encouraging our internal and external stakeholders to contribute to finding solutions to our challenges
- ...build a brave and passionate team of world-class experts and thought leaders

From the 2020/21 to 2023/24 **Corporate Plan**

- Our environment: “Working in an inclusive, collaborative way with creators, users, communities and partners.....
- Key cooperative relationships are with the Minister, the Office for the Arts in the Portfolio Department, fellow cultural institutions. (**Comment:** supportive groups and the broader constituency are evidently not seen as key relationships)
- There are references to “working to the highest international archival standards” but no indication of what these are, or identifying actual reference points - such as UNESCO, FIAF ethics, CCAAA
- Recognition that the NFSA relies on staff with unique skill sets, and that NFSA will work to ensure that staff have expertise in digital and analog AV formats into the future (**Comment:** there is no reference to other skills, such as historical knowledge, research, intellectual development)
- Reference is made to the CSU Graduate Certificate in AV Archiving and “Cultural Competency Training” (**Comment:** no reference to other courses)

The following important issues are missing from these documents and we would propose that future revisions take account of them:

1 It must surely be an aim of the NFSA to increase its inadequate resource base, by restoring the ground lost over the last decade and by building philanthropic support beyond that. Admittedly this may have to be carefully phrased, but there needs to be a recognition that the present resource base is insufficient for the NFSA to fulfil its legislated mandate and that this must change.

2 There is no explanation of NFSA's intellectual, ethical and philosophical basis. This is fundamental for an institution that has global professional standing while being unique within Australia. It is the foundation on which its professional operations are built.

3 Corporate and curatorial memory lost through staff attrition and generational change is the common experience of memory institutions and is now recognised as an operational issue. Because of recent history it is a significant issue for the NFSA.

4 Staff training and development needs to reflect a larger vision beyond such a specific focus. Audiovisual archiving is a recognised profession in its own right, while its norms and principles are also part of librarianship, archival science and museology.

5 There should be well developed recognition of the NFSA's own history and heritage as one of the world's oldest audiovisual archives.

## **STRENGTHENING THE INTELLECTUAL BASE**

The NFSA is the primary manifestation in Australia of the global audiovisual archiving profession and movement. Its intellectual and professional reference points are those established by the member federations of the CCAA and UNESCO, as well as by the other memory professions of archival science, librarianship and museology.

Although becoming an independent statutory authority with the passage of the *NFSA Act* in 2008, its corporate history goes back to 1935. The NFSA is hence a public institution, formally accountable to Parliament, though its practical operation depends on its day to day relationships with a range of stakeholders through which support, trust and confidence is built. That range includes the Friends of the NFSA, among others.

As a unique institution within the Australian context, the NFSA constantly needs external intellectual input to avoid becoming an isolated echo chamber. Whether that input comes in the form of advice, discussion or criticism, it should be sought and encouraged by the NFSA (rather than being initiated by frustrated stakeholders!)

The Friends believe the following areas need **priority** attention, with stakeholder consultation and input:

- **Consolidated philosophy, policy and standards update** (Collection development, preservation, research, access and outreach, ethics, international relations etc) clearly linked to international norms and standards and coordination with other institutions. A comprehensive, consultative revision does not appear to have been done for many years.
- As part of this, the **collection development policy**, especially, needs greater depth and specificity. It is unclear what the NFSA does, and doesn't, collect – and why. What areas are collected comprehensively, and what are selective? How are formed collections treated? How is significance assessment applied? A good policy underpins the offers of donated materials and philanthropy.

The NFSA is, like the other national memory institutions, *a research institution*. It supports the research of users and clients, but as a healthy institution it also needs to be driving its own research agenda. This area has suffered from attrition over the last decade, and now appears to be dormant – at least in terms of visible published output. It cannot be resurrected quickly, but it can be progressively encouraged.

- **Research projects** can be supported in a variety of ways and past research work needs to be accessible. One successful reference model is the NFSA's former *Scholars and artists in residence* program, which produced tangible outcomes, but there are many others. There is room for volunteer and philanthropic support here.
- Research projects require a library and the **NFSA Library collection** needs to be made accessible again to complement on-line professional resources and documentation holdings. Internal as well as public use should be encouraged. Again, there is room for volunteer and philanthropic assistance here.

## **STRENGTHENING DEPTH AND EXPERTISE**

The turnover of staff, and the specialist focus of the NFSA, means that staff training needs to be a constant focus of NFSA management. Staff reductions, retirements and redundancies in recent years have meant considerable and evident loss of corporate and curatorial memory.

Given the historical sweep of the audiovisual industries there is a standing need to educate and motivate young staff, especially, to relate to those parts of that history that pre-date their own life experience. Without wishing to be critical of any staff members, our experience suggests that the present depth of essential knowledge is less than it ought to be.

We are not aware of what training regimes currently operate within the NFSA but as a **matter of principle and priority** we suggest that all professional staff should be grounded in:

- The history of NFSA and its collections
- The history of the Australian audiovisual industries
- The essentials of the audiovisual archiving profession: structures, forums, concepts, standards, ethics, principles, literature

and that formal training in these topics should be certificated in accordance with Public Service standards and procedures. In addition we suggest:

- The NFSA should regularly sponsor selected staff to undertake the Charles Sturt University Graduate Certificate in Audiovisual Archiving and/or other appropriate courses in the memory disciplines here or overseas.
- Staff should be encouraged to individually join one or more of the professional associations relevant to the audiovisual archiving profession and participate in their communities

- Become familiar with relevant professional literature

Training modules created by the NFSA could usefully be made available to the general public in order to increase knowledge and understanding of the field.

Members of the Friends with training and teaching background would be happy to voluntarily consult on the design and delivery of this training.

## **STRENGTHENING THE COMMUNITY**

***“Build a brave and passionate team of world-class experts and thought leaders”***

The Friends absolutely supports the above sentiment (from the 2021 *Statement of intent* above). It is a demonstrable description of the NFSA *yesterday*. But what about now? Is it a future aim but not a current reality? And is it taken to heart?

The NFSA is, by nature, history and circumstance, a ‘lonely’ organisation. Unlike the other national memory institutions it lacks the corrective and counterbalance of direct state-based counterparts. Without the leadership and informed support of advocacy groups over decades, it would not even exist – and Australia would still lack a public institution dedicated to the audiovisual heritage. Consequently, the NFSA has always been vulnerable to the dangers of insularity, political indifference and bureaucratic insensitivity.

Stakeholders need to be brought back “into the tent” in a structured way. They are distributed across the audiovisual industries, the creative and memory professions, academia, collectors, donors and users.

Moreover, unlike its peers, the NFSA has never developed a volunteer culture integrated with its operations. It only has to look around to see how this is done, both on site and remotely. Volunteers do have to be managed, appreciated and recognised – it involves a certain commitment of management time – but the increase in productivity and moral support it creates is palpable.

- The Friends supports the ***NFSA alumni*** and ***Share that knowledge*** initiatives, and any similar schemes, and will cooperate with them.
- **As a priority**, other structures, such as **consultative forums and expert advisory groups**, need to be developed and accorded a recognised role in relation to management and the NFSA Board. Today, these are easily and cheaply organised electronically.

## **NFSA PUBLIC PRESENCE AND PLACE**

It is understood that the business case for a new Canberra HQ, first proposed about 4 years ago, is still being developed.

The front portion of the NFSA building, a heritage structure, was opened in 1931. It is a prestigious Canberra landmark. The back half was purpose designed for the NFSA and was opened in 1999 by Prime Minister John Howard. It is not clear in what way the proposed new building will be an improvement on the present arrangement, or indeed whether it is really needed. The NFSA's **funding priority** must surely be to rebuild its base budget and staffing toward 2011 levels. The cost of a new building should not work to the detriment of this.

When NFSA was created in 1984, the original intention had been to headquarter it in Sydney. This would have disadvantaged Melbourne, so the political solution was the one we now have. NFSA's physical presence in both cities was initially an accessible shopfront, but subsequently a series of less visible and less accessible office-space locations.

Stakeholders in both of the nation's major population and production centres have long sought a more obvious and accessible public presence for the NFSA, but instead there has been a slow retreat over the years.

The Friends therefore raise the following issues:

- The fact that NFSA is headquartered in a city that is remote from major population centres, and from its major clientele and stakeholder bases, has always been a problem for its public profile, service provision, stakeholder interaction and staff development. Technologically, decentralisation is now much easier and it is time to review the way its three physical locations are developed.
- **As a priority**, the business case, the proposed design and location for the Canberra HQ should be open to public discussion and engagement, including revisiting its necessity and considering alternative developments on the current site.
- Irrespective of what happens in Canberra, serious thought should be given to enhancing NFSA's public presence, services and accessibility in Melbourne and Sydney. There are stakeholders in both cities who would want to engage in the discussion.
- An enhanced, accessible and visible NFSA presence in Melbourne is surely essential. There is a perception that Commonwealth government film funding and cultural organisations are too centred in Sydney and Canberra and are absent in other capitals.
- The aftermath of covid-19 has changed past certainties about travel, and there are now new national security implications relating to centralisation of infrastructure and collection holdings.

## **NFSA PROFILE**

The NFSA has been a fixture in its current location since 1984, yet when the media focuses on Canberra's memory institutions it is rarely top of mind. It is the National

Library, National Gallery and National Museum – plus, sometimes, the National Archives – that get the limelight and are seen as the senior and symbolic institutions. Is this simply a natural bias? Is more the NFSA can do to change it?

NFSA has a **natural advantage** in its media presence, which includes films and programs generated from its collections and for which it receives a clear and obvious credit. The current strategy of regularly releasing media items about new “finds” or restorations is clearly successful, although it takes more than this to communicate a sense of scholarly substance. The *Sounds of Australia* notably gets a consistent profile for its annual listings (and a moving image counterpart should be established). However, this is countered by the inhibiting effect of high user fees for the use of footage documentaries, giving the collection and the NFSA itself less public exposure. Cost of footage and other access services need to be set at a reasonable level which encourages, rather than discourages, fair access to a public resource, and is delivered without undue delay.

- The reinstatement of its prestigious annual award and lecture fixtures – such as the **Ken G Hall Film Preservation Award**, the **Cochrane-Smith Award for Sound Heritage** and the **Longford Lyell** lecture series – would return some gravitas to the NFSA as the guardian of the nation’s audiovisual memory. We regard these as a **priority**.
- The NFSA’s **screening program** – whether in Arc in Canberra, or on tour, or streaming - should have an underlying logic that gives it a distinctive character and a national/international presence above the ordinary, and can be linked to a standing resource like an expanding Australian Screen website, with its curatorial content. A cycle representing the whole sweep of Australian film history, for example? Arc is one of the few places in Australia where projected film can still be experienced. The knowledge of volunteers can be utilised in these activities.
- It is good that the NFSA has been able to produce a new **original exhibition** rather than being a way-station for imported exhibitions and we hope this can continue. In any event, a **standing** exhibition which puts the history of sound and moving image technology would be a vital educational resource for children and adults alike - perhaps accompanied by a small rotating exhibit of NFSA “treasures” – objects, props, posters etc. (This is a constant suggestion heard by the Friends.)
- NFSA was once the energiser and standard setter for **AV archiving across S E Asia** and active in the affairs of the CCAAA federations. But its international presence has been in decline for years. Ironically, the deficit has been partly filled by *former* staff members whose expertise is now actively sought. This is not a situation which should continue. International networking is now easier than ever. If NFSA regards itself as a centre of excellence, rebuilding its global presence is vital to NFSA’s reputation and to the stature of its staff.
- High access fees being a source of complaint, there is a proper debate to be had about what it is reasonable for a public institution to charge in facilitating access to the national audiovisual memory. This is a **priority**.



- The Friends are periodically reminded of responses to requests for information or access that are either ignored or subject to long delays. This suggests the need for internal review and a commitment to stated service standards.
- **School visits** to the NFSA are crucial to building an awareness of Australia's audiovisual heritage in young people. Post-covid, this appears to be an area in which the NFSA needs to recover its position as a primary destination for visiting school groups, bearing in mind that this is a subject area which does not figure significantly in school curricula.

## RESTORING THE RESOURCE BASE

The level of government resourcing for the NFSA has been declining for years and is clearly insufficient to support its legislated obligations to “the highest curatorial standards”. Years of compounding “efficiency dividends” have, inter alia, reduced public accessibility and collection development and have caused the cessation of vital activities.

Since a high point circa. 2010, government funding (including ASL) has declined by about 20%. This needs to be restored. The initiative lies with the NFSA Board, whose role is to lobby the government for adequate funding. It is clear that this can work, as the recent experience of National Archives of Australia attests. Obviously the Friends would support any such future initiative, as it has in the past.

Philanthropic funding is the normal way for public institutions to complement their government subventions. *The NFSA seems to now be the only national memory institution without a base of philanthropic support*, although it used to have one. Building it can't be done quickly: support bases have to be methodically grown, and much depends on the profile and reputation of the institution and its leadership, and on personal relationships and connections.

The Friends suggests the establishment of a **NFSA Foundation** to encourage public and corporate donations. It is hardly a new idea, but it does work and it allows high profile and respected individuals to associate themselves with the work of the institution.

## SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES

- Consolidated philosophy, policy and standards update, including a revision of the collection development policy.
- Review of internal training regime
- Establishment of consultative forums and expert advisory groups.
- Open the business case, proposed design and location for the Canberra HQ to public discussion and engagement.
- Reinstate the annual award and lecture fixtures
- Review the access fee structure

## **CONCLUSION: A SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE**

The Friends of the NFSA Inc. was established in 2000, impelled by a conviction among stakeholders that the NFSA had lost its way. The Friends' initial goal was to save the institution's name – National Film and Sound Archive – after a mistaken re-branding, and to press for its reinstatement, which happened in 2004. Along with other advocacy groups, it successfully lobbied for the creation of the NFSA as a statutory authority in 2008. The Friends, in turn, stands on the shoulders of earlier groups, such as the Association for a National Film and Television Archive, whose work originally led to the separation of the NFSA from the National Library in 1984. The NFSA has always needed its friends.

It is instructive to compare the NFSA's first annual report as a statutory authority (2008/9) with its latest counterpart, to see how the NFSA's scope and circumstances have changed. We cannot go back to the past, but the past can be an inspiration. If that were not so, bodies like the NFSA would not need to exist.