

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

DISCUSSION PAPER
SUBMISSION

SUBMISSION FROM AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION

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Do you agree to your submission being made publicly available on the www.culture.arts.gov.au website?

Yes

1. About the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)

ALIA is the peak body representing the Australian library and information services sector and represents 6000 members, and the interests of over 12 million library users. www.alia.org.au

The Australian library and information services sector operates in the local, state, territory and federal government, school, TAFE, tertiary, research, health and business sectors. Library and information professionals have a great depth of expertise in providing access to electronic resources and services, building electronic resources content, and developing users' skills.

We believe that, with major libraries holding significant cultural heritage assets, the high usage of libraries by the Australian community and the number of public access points, the library and information services sector is a major stakeholder in the National Cultural Policy.

Support for other Submissions to the Inquiry

The Submission by the Australian Library and Information Association supports the submissions made by the National and State Libraries Australasia and the National Library of Australia.

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Libraries form a 'cradle to grave' access point for all Australians, enabling literacy, freedom of information, equality of access to knowledge and technology, social inclusion, cultural identity, civic spaces, digital literacy and much more.

Within the National Cultural Policy framework the legislated role of libraries should be acknowledged and differentiated from the "core arts". It would be particularly useful to state the differences and to explicitly recognise the role of cultural collections. The network of libraries, whether they be public-funded institutions or private organisations, that preserve and make available Australia's wealth of knowledge, cultural identity and creativity should be recognised for their role and responsibilities within the National Cultural Policy framework.

Recommendation 1

Libraries and national cultural collection institutions should be recognised separately within the National Cultural Policy.

2. Do you support the development of a National Cultural Policy, and why?

ALIA welcomes the development of a National Cultural Policy. A coherent national policy can provide the leverage and the focus that channels funding to agreed national priorities. For libraries, where our role spans many sectors, a national policy can bring together the complex parts and provide a clear statement of priority and intent.

For Australian Libraries, the national priorities are digitisation and digital preservation. This has been discussed and agreed at the ALIA Roundtable meetings of library peak body associations in May 2010 and May 2011. National funding is required to digitise Australia's cultural and information collections so they can be accessible online. Only a small percentage of significant Australian library collections has been made available online. If we fail to digitise, there will be no significant Australian cultural presence on the web, for the rest of the world or for Australians.

Digitisation must be supported by effective preservation of digital assets for the future. To preserve and provide access to digital content created on many generations of technology is an evolving and critical body of work. The documentary record of Australian life in the 21st Century is now in digital form. It includes personal, government, research and company archives that are now predominantly

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born-digital, as well as the need to select and preserve web content. Websites are fluid with constantly changing content and only a small fraction are selected and preserved at designated intervals. The use of ebooks on ereaders and tablets is also shifting to mainstream and is expected to continue to rise sharply.

We refer to the 2011 commissioned report by National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) into the library digitisation funding arrangements and activities internationally.

ALIA also notes the following Recommendations from the Inquiry into the Role and Potential of the NBN House of Representatives, Report, August 2011:

Recommendation 7- That, recognising the important roles of public libraries and community centres, the Federal Government works in an appropriate capacity to implement a network of public access points connected to high speed NBN services in as many communities as possible

Recommendation 11 -That the Government develop a strategy for the digitisation of Australia's culturally and historically significant content

A lack of a clear commitment to mass digitisation of Australian content, to be made available in accessible and discoverable forms for all Australians, will be an opportunity lost if it is not included in the National Cultural Policy of 2011.

Time is of the essence in this regard as collections of significance are under threat due to age, inappropriate storage and misunderstanding of importance. The records of Australian culture, life, endeavour, innovation and creativity may not be available and accessible for future generations if large-scale action is not taken by current government.

Recommendation 2

That the National Cultural Policy clearly define the way forward for national digitisation funds and projects to ensure appropriate preservation of Australian historically significant content and how they would support and link to other government initiatives such as the National Broadband Network. This could take the form of an online cultural collections strategy.

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Recommendation 3

That the National Cultural Policy clearly define the way forward for preservation of significant born-digital Australian collections and how services such as the National Library of Australia's Trove and Pandora will be supported to preserve more online content to enable greater access in the future.

3. What are your views about each of the four goals?

The four goals align strongly with the role and strategic direction of libraries. Libraries (national, state and territory, public, university, TAFE, special and school) are uniquely placed in their access to the community and their recognition as free, welcoming, safe, open, accessible public institutions. They are online enterprises as well as physical spaces throughout metropolitan, regional and rural Australia.

GOAL 1: To ensure that what the Government supports — and how this support is provided — reflects the diversity of a 21st century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture

National Year of Reading 2012

2012 is the National Year of Reading and ALIA is a founding partner and auspicing this major initiative to develop literacy and a love of reading across Australian society. Nearly half the population struggles without the literacy skills to meet the most basic demands of everyday life and work. There are 46% of Australians who are not prose literate. Libraries will be partnering with government, the media, writers, schools, publishers, booksellers, employers, child care providers, health professionals and other organisations to promote the National Year of Reading through 2012. ALIA has appreciated the government funding support for the National Year of Reading so far. ALIA looks forward to working with the government in future years on similar national programs to support the important work of libraries and their contribution to the Australian community, including indigenous communities.

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GOAL 2: To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture

To encourage the use of current and emerging technologies is a necessary consideration in any future National Cultural Policy. Technology is not only informing changes to business practices, but also to the cultural identity of this nation with many creative outputs appearing in digital-only form.

Trove and Australian Newspapers Online

Trove is the national portal to Australian collections content, developed by the National Library of Australia. It provides easy search and access to catalogues and full-text digital content to thousands of other libraries and other collection institutions. The development of *Trove* has driven innovation in collaborative systems and workflows within the industry. The outcomes for the community have been easy access to the wealth of resources in libraries, enabling creativity and new knowledge. People are actively using the content and creativity of others, whether from last century or last week, to build new knowledge and enrich their creative output.

The most used part of the *Trove* portal is Australian Newspapers Online, a fully searchable database of more than 6 million newspaper pages. Access to this digital content has revolutionised historical and humanities research in Australia and feeds into creative and academic innovation. Crowd-sourcing techniques are used to correct the text that has been transcribed from the original newspapers. In the first 3 years of the service, there were more than 3 million unique users of the online newspapers site – a far greater number than could ever have accessed historic newspapers in their physical format.

Libraryhack

The 2011 *Libraryhack* mashup competition where library collections data and other government datasets were made available for re-mixing and re-purposing provides an excellent example of the network of libraries collaborating and co-operating together to create an internationally recognised digital event that highlighted Australian collections and the importance of providing content in digital formats and freely available.

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GOAL 3: To support excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas

If we are to have Australian stories told both here and overseas, we must take care to preserve those stories that we have currently and in the future. Digitisation of our nation's oral history would ensure that our stories – old and new – will continue to be told. Access by Australians to all formats of stories is important. We must remember that internet access and digital literacy skills are not at a high level for many Australians in regional, remote and disadvantaged communities. Access to print materials, large print, formats for the print disabled, intellectually disabled are also very important. Different library sectors ensure provision of access for these community groups.

GOAL 4: To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy

Investment in libraries already generates economic as well as social, cultural and environmental benefits. Libraries sustain the community in social, cultural and environmental terms and contribute positively in terms of economic value, benefit and activity.

The Australian Library and Information Association released the Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries in 2011. These provide guidance for all local governments in Australia to meet standards for service, facilities and infrastructure for libraries to enable them to serve the Australian community appropriately.

Several recent reports and analyses of use and impact demonstrate the economic contribution of libraries:

Dollars and Sense and Public Libraries by the Victorian Public Libraries Network, demonstrates that for every dollar invested in public libraries, the community receives an average of \$3.56 in community benefits.

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Enriching Communities Report by The Library Council of New South Wales from 2008, noted that for every dollar invested in public libraries, \$4.00 of economic benefit was returned to the community.

That databases and e-book packages are funded through the National Library of Australia's Electronic Resources Australia initiative to ensure all Australians are provided with equitable access to quality online resources in health, news and current affairs and encyclopaedias containing Australian information at a competitive price. These databases contribute to Australians being able to undertake research, information for the Australian curriculum and general knowledge.

Libraries and cultural tourism

Library buildings have always provided safe, welcoming community spaces, and they are now also highly valued for the access they provide to computers, wireless broadband (if available) and a wide range of digital literacy and community programs. Across Australia, around 12 million people are public library members and many more use them as study spaces, for online research and to browse. Libraries are part of the cultural tourism our cities and towns, with broad historical and architectural importance. Exhibitions and programming, along with partnerships with local and state governments, continue to drive and enhance this role. Grey nomads, backpackers and overseas visitors use public libraries during their travels around Australia.

4. What strategies do you think we could use to achieve each of the four goals?

As repositories of much of our cultural heritage, libraries require adequate support in order to continue to provide access not only to our rich history, but to the new material that is being produced and created in digital only format. This support comes not only in the form of appropriate operational funding, but also in supporting research to underpin practice and investing in the education of the professionals who will work in this increasingly complex digital environment.

Underlying the progress towards all four goals sits the critical imperative of shifting to the digital environment. With this shift comes the ability to achieve much more, developing and innovating from the wide range of initiatives already in place - as well as preserving Australia's culture for the future and making it accessible and visible online.

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In order to encourage the use of emerging technologies, we require professionals who have the skills to harness what is currently available and in use to best advantage, as well as the flexibility and creativity to work with future technology developments. It is essential that these professionals are able to convey to others how to access material using new digital technologies and indeed how technology can be exploited in order to create new artworks and other items of cultural significance.

A national model or strategy, supported by extensive funding, is required to achieve mass digitisation and digital preservation. The National Cultural Policy can initiate this work. Much has already been done by NSLA Libraries, University Libraries and by other cultural collection institutions and the expertise and systems are in place to begin a collaborative national process.

Investment in the arts and cultural institutions – at both national and grass-roots level - is required if people are to engage with current material and collaborate to create new content. The engagement will lead to a healthier, more informed society and the creation of new content can assist the economy with an increase in cultural tourism activities.

5. How can you, your organisation or sector contribute to the goals and strategies of the National Cultural Policy?

Libraries will continue to contribute to the goals of the National Cultural Policy and the relevant missions and goals of each library continuing to contribute to the culture of the Australian community.

Australian Libraries form a very successful and cohesive collaborative network to develop the national information infrastructure.

ALIA will continue to work with all levels of government to advocate for libraries, especially in the areas of greater support for digitisation and digital preservation, access to broadband, support for school libraries and to ensure equal access to information and technology for all Australians.

Members of ALIA will actively participate and contribute to the outcomes and recommendations of the National Cultural Policy.

Examples of the role of The National Library in National Cultural Policy

The National Library of Australia (NLA) contributes to achieving specifically Goals 3 and 4 of the National Cultural Discussion paper through the many and varied activities it undertakes with the more

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than 12 million items in its collection. Trove, Picture Australia, Music Australia and Dancing Australia promotes Australian culture and stories to the world through digitised materials accessible for all Australians. The Newspaper Digitisation project and the digitising of the Australian Women's Weekly provide just two examples of storing our national and social history. Trove provides a single access point to approximately 250 million items both Australian and international online sources. The recently opened permanent exhibition of Treasures Gallery at the NLA includes audio visual presentations from the rich Oral History and Folklore Collection. Exhibitions such as these contribute to Goal 4 by promoting and developing Australia as a valuable destination for Cultural Tourism, thus contributing to our economy.

Examples of the role of State and Territory Libraries in National Cultural Policy

As part of the "Re-imagining Libraries" project, the National and State Libraries of Australasia (NSLA) developed a vision whereby the National, State and territory libraries of Australasia aim to "become leaders in empowering people to create, discover use and transform [...] collections, content and global information resources." (National and State Libraries of Australasia, 2011).

One example is "The Edge" - the Digital Cultural Centre of the State Library of Queensland. This is an innovative world-class venture, which - aligning to Goal 2 of the National Cultural Discussion paper - "is a place for experimentation and creativity, giving contemporary tools to creative people in all fields to allow them to explore critical ideas, green initiatives, new creative practices and media making." (Queensland Government, 2011)

Examples of the role of public libraries in the National Cultural Policy

Australia's public libraries build safer, stronger, sustainable communities; promote social inclusion; support early literacy; make citizens healthier; facilitate lifelong learning; assist people to find jobs; promote innovation; provide facilities and skills to expand the digital economy; and, contribute to prosperity. Located in every local government area across the nation and at the heart of their local communities, public libraries are perfectly positioned to deliver results in Australia's digital future. Australia's public libraries continue to address the need for equitable community access to a wide range of educational, information, cultural and recreational services which are dependent on online information services.

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“With an attendance rate of 34% of the population aged 15 years and over (5.9 million people) in 2009-10, national, state and local libraries were the fourth most attended cultural venue or event in the 12 months prior to interview behind cinemas (67%), zoological parks and aquariums (37%) and botanic gardens (35%). Unlike most other cultural activities included in the survey, people tended to make multiple visits to the library. Whilst 15% of all attendees reported going to the library once or twice in the 12 months prior to interview, the majority (64%) visited more than five times. One in four people (26%) attended a library more than 20 times.”

Australian Bureau of Statistics- 4172.0.55.001 - Perspectives on Culture, March 2011

Public libraries have the potential to significantly increase user access to Australia’s cultural assets.

- There are over 1500 public libraries across Australia with over half the population as registered users
- Public libraries are attended more frequently and by more people than any other cultural and sporting venue [ABS 4172.0 2011]
- The introduction of internet access services in public libraries has seen an increase in attendance and library use
- Public libraries play an important role in ensuring equity of access in the delivery of online resources to all Australians
- Qualified and experienced public library staff deliver training and assistance to users in accessing both print and electronic information. Often this is targeted at the most marginalised groups in the community.

All libraries have been working together to increase access to quality, reliable information resources. Australians have access to quality online resources through cooperative purchasing for best price and products through www.era.nla.gov.au Electronic Resources Australia.

The Australian Library and Information Association advocates the development of an informed society that can partake and participate in skilled decision-making. Accurate, relevant and timely information is the key ingredient to effective decision-making. Australia's long-term economic development is dependent on its ability to use information to make decisions and harness innovation that enables growth, progress and productivity. The library profession contributes to an informed society by acquiring, organising, archiving, retrieving, using, synthesising and analysing information

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and thereby empowering users so that they can utilise this information in their decision-making and innovation processes.

Libraries are an important component of improving the nation's literacy rate. Literacy improves life chances, employment opportunities and therefore citizens that usefully contribute to the economy. The Productivity Commission's 2010 report *Links between Literacy and Numeracy skills and Labor Market Outcomes* is clear on the need to improve literacy for all Australians. To this end, the libraries of Australia are collaborating to undertake the National Year of Reading 2012. ALIA also organises annual literacy campaigns such as National Simultaneous Storytime.

Libraries facilitating community and social benefits

Public libraries are community hubs within rural, regional and metropolitan areas. They are at the heart of local communities. They are key providers of free access to information and services, and are recognised as trusted, friendly, neutral and non-threatening spaces for individual or group social inclusion. Public libraries are for everyone. They bring people together and foster strong community partnerships, involving local councils, businesses, community groups, not for profits, state and federal agencies, schools and individual volunteers. Unemployed and low income people are much less likely to have internet access at home compared to those in work and so are dependent on institutions such as public libraries for their access. There is considerable evidence in Australia and in other countries that public library usage increases during periods of economic downturn.

Public libraries offer:

- an environment that is language rich, stimulating, non-threatening, respectful and welcoming
- early literacy and storytelling
- storytelling visits to communities to engage those who may not take part in a more formal setting
- mobile libraries visiting remote and rural communities
- home library services in the metropolitan areas
- active involvement of the family with parent-child interactions and a partnership approach with professional library staff
- single entry point to e-government services
- a place for co-ordination of disaster recovery activities

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- support for adult literacy programs and practitioners
- involvement of the community in the development and delivery of culturally aware programs, and employment of Indigenous staff
- programs to enhance community harmony and cultural understanding
- lifelong learning opportunities
- internet skills training for library users
- availability of computers and skills training and assistance in using them
- access for disadvantaged families to job websites and computers, and skills training and assistance in using them, including resume preparation courses
- essential health information
- programs and resources for non-English speakers
- services to people with a print disability.

Young people seek out community spaces such as libraries for equity of access. Access to broadband could also potentially see our youth stay in regional areas and be able to work online from a rural community rather than moving to the city. Libraries through engagement have excellent networks and resources. Libraries work with job-seeker networks and other information networks to facilitate access to employment resources for the unemployed. Libraries provide a social benefit through the use of a group community space for accessing technology and information. Libraries provide meeting spaces, research and information sources for local businesses. Libraries have connections to enable special projects of cultural significance in the community using the NBN that are relevant to that local community. Library staff have knowledge and skills in internet searching and technologies that can enable community identity capture and curation. Library assist their communities to share local resources, local histories, link to national databases and keep cultural collateral, especially indigenous materials.

Examples of delivery of government services and government information

In some rural and regional communities, the public library is the sole resource for access to government services and publications. Government agencies are sending people to the local public library for government information such as social assistance forms, income tax forms, car/licence renewals, practice driving tests, etc. There is an expectation that public libraries have staff on hand to

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train people in all kinds of electronic access requirements. This is causing a significant strain on resources and capability to meet demands in other areas of service provision. Delivery of government services online is fundamental to local, state and federal government. While cost savings can be achieved for government agencies by providing these services online, not all Australians have the skills or knowledge to take advantage of these services. For many Australians, public libraries provide a vital role in providing internet access and supporting those wishing to use online government services and searching for public sector information.

The ANAO report, *Online Availability of Government Entities' Documents* Tabled in the Australian Parliament, noted that 10% of Australian parliamentary documents were not online. In addition, there is a lack of both metadata and a reliable government information search service.

Government information needs to be available to the public for long-term access. Current information must be accessible so that the public can use government services and participate in public debate. Historical or non-current information is equally important particularly for research purposes and must be made available for legal, cultural and historical reasons. A permanent national archive is required for long-term access, such as the National Library's Pandora service.

6 Are there any other goals you would like to see included in the National Cultural Policy?

Although National, State and Territory Libraries in Australia are directed by legislation that largely ensures the collection and stewardship of the physical documentary record in books, journals and newspapers, there are many conditions, barriers and challenges that surround the collection, access and preservation of digital content.

The four goals already outlined for the National Cultural Policy are underpinned by an assumption of ongoing access to Australia's cultural collections. In the 21st century these collections are increasingly digital.

Recommendation 4

To include an explicit goal in the National Cultural Policy in relation to preserving and ensuring ongoing access to Australia's cultural collections in both digital and physical formats.

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS – Australian Library and Information Association

Recommendation 1

Libraries and national cultural collection institutions should be recognised separately within the National Cultural Policy.

Recommendation 2

That the National Cultural Policy clearly define the way forward for national digitisation funds and projects to ensure appropriate preservation of Australian historically significant content and how they would support and link to other government initiatives such as the National Broadband Network. This could take the form of an online cultural collections strategy.

Recommendation 3

That the National Cultural Policy clearly define the way forward for preservation of significant born-digital Australian collections and how services such as the National Library of Australia's Trove and Pandora will be supported to preserve more online content to enable greater access in the future.

Recommendation 4

To include an explicit goal in the National Cultural Policy in relation to preserving and ensuring ongoing access to Australia's cultural collections in both digital and physical formats.

ALIA wishes to acknowledge the support provided by NSLA for this submission and assistance from Katherine Howard, ALIA Member.