



PO Box 9177
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23 September 2022

Hon Dr Brett Mason
Chair, Library Council
National Library of Australia

Dr Marie-Louise Ayres FAHA
Registrar General
National Library of Australia

Minister for Communications
Hon Michelle Rowland MP

Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Hon Tony Burke MP

Treasurer
Hon Jim Chalmers MP

National Library Australia Submission

Professional Historians Australia

About us: Professional Historians Australia (PHA) represents over 500 professionally accredited historians across all Australian states and territories. The PHA and its state and territory associations are committed to advocating historical perspectives in public debates concerning interpretations of history and the keeping of documentary, environmental and other historical records.

What we do: We are the peak body that represents six state and territory bodies of the professional historians association. We advocate on behalf of historians, maintain and encourage adherence to professional standards and ethics among historians, provide professional development and networking opportunities, and liaise with businesses, organizations, communities, and all levels of government who seek the work of professional historians.

Our response to the National Library Manuscripts closure and limited access to other collections:

Professional Historians Australia (PHA) is deeply concerned about the little advertised closure of access to almost all manuscripts held by the National Library of Australia from the current month until late March next year. The inability to access manuscripts, as well as other collections on a “rolling basis” until November next year, will limit the work of our



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members undertaking projects requiring access to these unique research materials and will likely require contracts and deadlines to be renegotiated. Compounding the devastating effects of COVID-19 and associated lockdowns identified in surveys of our members, the closures will further impact their livelihoods.

Furthermore, it is of great concern to find that this valuable collection has been stored where it is vulnerable to damage. The fact that the building requires work to prevent further damage suggests that there has been a failure to prioritize the protection of the research materials that are fundamental to our cultural heritage, and the needs of researchers who interpret and disseminate our nation's history. PHA fully supports the efforts of the National Library of Australia staff to protect the nation's cultural heritage but is concerned that the state of the building housing the collection indicates that NLA's corporate plan and strategic risk management goals have not been met.

While the National Library of Australia Corporate Plan of 2022-23 (p.16) states that the "Library faces critical physical collection storage risks from 2025" and that the "Library has strategies to preserve physical and digital collection material, including in the face of threats emerging from climate change, and to futureproof accessibility of digital collection material against cyber-attacks, and technology obsolescence", these strategies clearly do not prioritize the requirements of researchers. Given that the structural deficiencies of the building have been evident for some time, why was there not a plan to temporarily house the collection in a more secure, accessible location?

Our concerns also extend to other collections which will also be closed to access as the NLA attends to building repairs and replacing heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems. The statement on the NLA website that availability of items "can change at short notice" creates further difficulties for our members undertaking research projects.

Professional Historians Australia joins the Australian Historical Association in calling on the present government to address the shortcomings of previous governments and inject emergency funding into the national cultural institutions which protect the nation's cultural heritage before irreplaceable materials are lost forever.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Black".

Dr Carmel Black, President, Professional Historians Australia
<https://www.historians.org.au/contact-us>