



PO Box 9177  
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[www.historians.org.au](http://www.historians.org.au)

## National Cultural Policy 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 professional historians associations. 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, organisations, communities and all levels of government that work with professional historians.

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### Our response to the National Cultural Policy Submission:

#### First Nations

PHA supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the truth-telling process it advocates. History – the understanding, sharing, and discussion of – is essential to this process. Both First Nations historians and non-indigenous historians have an integral part to play in our ability to recognise the power of history, the role it has played in the past oppression and silencing of First Nations people, and the way it can also liberate and amplify First Nations history, culture and diversity. Support is required for First Nations communities and First Nations historians to tell their stories, to be heard and for action to be taken to enable the wider Australian community to listen and respond. Non-indigenous historians help facilitate such processes, working with First Nations communities to ensure their stories are told collaboratively and in meaningful and powerful ways. Among its members, PHA supports First Nations historians and researchers. We believe that their histories are vital. We also support First Nations people and culture through research using traditional primary sources, by gathering oral histories, and by assisting with the interpretation and care of cultural objects, heritage places, and events.



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### **The centrality of the artist**

History is a creative practice and one that sits squarely within the creative arts portfolio. PHA strongly advocates that history and the work of the historian be seen as a cultural and creative activity. History is not only a subject in the education curriculum, or a way to describe our collective national identity and past, but a widely practiced discipline and lifelong activity. Historians are storytellers first and foremost, and the interpretation of the past requires a creative mind. Our membership of professional historians work across a variety of fields, including but not limited to museums, galleries, archives, media companies, libraries, heritage firms, educational institutions and freelance consultancies. We frequently collaborate with other creative professionals to produce history in a wide variety of formats, including websites, films, television series, exhibitions, articles, books (both non-fiction and fiction), soundscapes, podcasts and more. Historians bring the past to life and strive to make history accessible to everyone.

### **A place for every story**

Throughout Australia's post settlement history, there has not been a place for every story. Some stories have been lost to time, hidden, silenced, embellished, mythologised, and nationalised. Historians have uncovered stories, exposed myths and interrogated well known interpretations. History is always evolving, changing form as new evidence and new perspectives come to light.

Resourcing of tertiary education in history, humanities and the arts has been declining. Funding cuts are well documented and unlike the benefits of compounding interest, the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) sector is experiencing compounding neglect.

We question if the nation is paying adequate respect to, and financial investment in, the discipline of history, whether it be a paid occupation, volunteer organisation or leisurely pursuit. The important work of volunteer history organisations in caring for, cataloguing and preserving significant historical collections must be recognised. Additionally, volunteers play a crucial and under-valued role in digitising and translating historical resources within collecting institutions such as the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and the National Library of Australia.

### **Strong institutions**

Fundamental to every history are the rich collections of galleries, libraries, archives and museums. These institutions hold primary material that informs and contributes to Australia's



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collective and diverse identities. Collections are continually growing as each generation creates new records related to contemporary times. These institutions are not only essential for historians to continue our work, but crucial for the preservation of Australian culture. Historians are the specialists who research, disseminate, and interpret raw historical material, converting complex concepts into formats that can be more easily understood by the community. More than ever historians are the bridge between vast repositories of information and people who want to know about the past.

PHA strongly believes that greater financial support is needed for Australia's national cultural institutions to ensure our national and state archives, libraries, museums, and galleries long term security, capacity to function and to meet legislative requirements. In particular, we argue that the NAA should be provided with a purpose-built facility and allocated sufficient funding to preserve and facilitate access to its collections, and to staff its premises. Secure funding is needed for the NAA to thrive and plan for the future with certainty.

PHA also calls for the government to appoint experienced and accredited historians to more boards and councils of major national cultural institutions.

Under-investment in collecting institutions has whittled away resources available for specialist staff to ensure access to collections and the care of historical artefacts. Collections are left languishing awaiting registration and are in danger of disintegration waiting for conservation. Research by historians and others is delayed by years as timely access to records is prevented. The fact that the NAA was reduced to a crowd-funding campaign in 2021 to preserve critical records of national significance was shameful.<sup>1</sup>

We strongly urge that the National Cultural Policy be written with other government portfolios in mind to assist in making history more accessible. We also urge reconsideration of the former government's Job-Ready Graduate's Package 2020, which has had disastrous results for the humanities within universities.

### **Reaching the audience**

History has the biggest impact when it engages an audience. PHA members produce engaging and exciting history, and we want our audiences – generally members of the public – to enjoy, discuss and interrogate history with us. PHA provides training and professional development for our members to ensure they maintain, improve and update their skills. We promote [the value of history](#) widely beyond our profession. Professional historians work to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/archive-passes-the-hat-in-desperate-bid-to-save-australia-s-history-20210516-p57sb3.html>



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make stories about the past accessible and to reflect changes in Australia's population and society. This work, however, is often precarious and made more so by the lack of funding and support given to historians, projects of historical significance and cultural institutions. We can only reach our audience in a meaningful way if we are supported to do so.

### **Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?**

#### **Women and volunteers**

The National Cultural Policy needs to recognise the important and essential role that volunteer community members play in preserving historical collections from a local to a national level, and making them widely accessible. Without ongoing volunteer support, professional historians would not be able to do the work that we do.

PHA's membership of over 500 professional historians reflects the census data that shows women consistently outnumbering men in the occupation of historian. This story multiplies when applied to galleries, libraries, archives and museums. Historians interact closely with the creative and cultural sectors, which are also largely female. It is essential for the National Cultural Policy to recognise that investment in history is an investment in occupations, job security and opportunities for women, which will in turn benefit all Australians.