



Professional Historians Australia Inc.

PO Box 9177
Deakin, ACT 2600
admin@historians.org.au
www.historians.org.au

About us: [Professional Historians Australia](http://www.historians.org.au) (PHA) is a peak body that represents incorporated associations of professional historians across all Australian states and territories with a membership of over 500 professionally accredited historians.

What we do: We 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. The PHA and its state and territory associations advocate for the collection, preservation and retention of historical records in all forms, and develops dialogues with institutions and bodies involved in the areas of history, culture and heritage.

Our submission on the 2023-24 Pre-Budget Priorities:

We believe the 2023-24 Budget priority should address the wholesale shortcomings of previous governments and bring funding for national cultural institutions back up to the standard it was a decade ago. Sensible funding provisions and financial investment safeguards the primary and secondary sources of records professional historians rely on to do their job, protects the nation's cultural heritage and prevents irreplaceable materials from being lost forever.

The Insight Reports published by independent think tank, A New Approach, has shown funding for the archives and cultural sector has seen a steady decline from the Federal Government on a per capita basis and remains below the OECD average. The findings from Insight Report 1 speak for themselves:

- From the ABS and MCMO-SWG dataset, local and state and territory government per capita expenditure on culture has increased, while federal expenditure has decreased. Local government per capita expenditure has increased by 11.0 per cent, while state and territory government expenditure has increased by 3.9 per cent. The federal government is committing 18.9 per cent less expenditure per capita to culture compared with a decade ago.
- Responsibility for cultural expenditure is split more evenly between the levels of government than it was a decade ago. As a proportion of the total, the federal government now contributes 39.0 per cent, down from 45.7 per cent, while state and territory governments contribute 34.8 per cent, up from 31.9



per cent, and local governments contribute 26.2 per cent, up from 22.4 per cent.¹

We live in an information and knowledge economy and at present, Australian initiatives like TROVE are leading the world in digital innovation as information aggregators. These innovations have supercharged the outputs of professional historians and other researchers and creative practitioners using historical records.

The National Library's Annual Report (2021-22) states that it is facing a funding shortfall from 1 July 2023 when several short-term government funding measures totalling approximately \$14 million will lapse.

Over the past year the National Library of Australia has recorded 12.6 million sessions on Trove website and public engagement is evidenced by the 437.2 million lines of text corrected by website visitors. The Library collected more than 19,000 digital-born publications and is approaching 107 terabytes of web archives, most of which are made immediately available online.

To date, over 26,000 people have signed a petition (on www.change.org) to maintain and extend the funding of Trove. The diversity of Trove users is vast and includes people like professional historians who are small business owners and freelancers, to hobbyists dabbling in family history, academics including sessional teachers and tutors, educators and so many more.

Libraries, archives and other cultural institutions are crucial systems within an information economy and without adequate support and funding, we cannot even provide access to our own community, let alone compete on an international level.

The constant devaluation of our national cultural institutions reflects the devaluing of our own cultural heritage as a nation. A country that has a strong sense of their own history, identity and shared cultural heritage, is a country that has pride and confidence. As we emerge from the challenging years of the global Covid-19 pandemic and face a future that requires strong leadership and action, we need to know where we stand as a nation, as a community and as individual Australians. To do that, we need our cultural institutions to be able to meet their mandates and obligations as cultural repositories.

Funding priorities:

National Library Australia

- Funding Trove in line with the Trove Strategy that will make Trove a world-leading platform. The maintenance of this world-renowned national infrastructure is critical to preserving the past investment of Australian taxpayers dollars in creating this digital asset that democratises access to records.

¹ A New Approach, 'Insight Report 1: The Big Picture: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia One' by A New Approach, p.5., <https://www.humanities.org.au/new-approach/report1>



- Adequate facility management funding that rectifies the critical physical collection storage risks and deals with other asset maintenance backlogs impacting access to collections.

National Archives Australia (NAA)

- Carefully consider the cumulative impact of a long term reduction in funding to the NAA as outlined in the [Tune Review](#).
- As mandated in the Archives Act 1983, the NAA must preserve the nation's historical record. Therefore, the NAA must be funded adequately to meet its obligations under the Act.
- Undertake the structural reform recommended by the Tune Review to bring the NAA up to world class standards that would cost \$167 million to ensure continued preservation and access to government records.

National Gallery of Australia

- Addressing the \$265 million budget shortfall to avoid extensive job losses and reduced opening hours.

National Film and Sound Archive

- Budget for the National Film and Sound Archive to preserve thousands of hours of film, television and audio stored on obsolete and deteriorating media.

All federal cultural institutions

- In the absence of any material improvement to the base funding that addresses any amount of the 18.9% less expenditure per capita for cultural institutions, the removal of the efficiency dividends for all cultural institutions should be made a priority to offset budget shortfalls.

Why prioritise funding our cultural institutions?

The History Councils' Statement about the Value of History:

History shapes our identities, engages us as citizens, creates inclusive communities, is part of our economic well-being, teaches us to think critically and creatively, inspires leaders and is the foundation of our future generations.

Professional historians rely on access to the records held and collected by cultural institutions such as National Archives Australia, National Library Australia, National Museum of Australia as well as state archive and library branches, to do their jobs as historians.

Professional historians work across a wide range of industries and areas. These roles include but are not limited to:



- Write and contribute to the development of government policy
- Capture and curate collections that document our social history
- Write, develop and teach education curriculum
- Archive, preserve and conserve records and collections of significant cultural, social and political value
- Provide access to information to the wider general public through creative storytelling and interpretation
- Work alongside First Nations people to better understand our shared past
- Provide critical historical context and information for land/development sites
- Work with local councils and state governments
- Produce content for media outlets including newspapers, radio, television and film

The work for many professional historians is precarious and certainty in access to records improves the economic prospects for this cohort (and no doubt that of many other professional cohorts who use historical records as part of their job).

Maintaining adequate funding for our national cultural institutions is not only critical for the work that we do as professional historians, but more importantly it is essential for the preservation and understanding of our own cultural heritage as a nation. Not only do these institutions provide access to important records, archives, artwork and objects which open up opportunities for research and education, they also provide a sense of pride and cultural identity that is fostered and encouraged through an awareness of shared history and community.

Lucy Bracey
President, Professional Historians Australia

admin@historians.org.au