



The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Arts
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

Friday, 15 May 2026

Dear Minister,

RE: Australia's National Cultural Policy

National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) Inc. welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this public consultation to shape the next iteration of the National Cultural Policy.

NSLA's Australian members—our national, state and territory libraries—are the trusted custodians of Australia's documentary heritage, and are **essential cultural infrastructure** that exist at the heart of Australia's cultural, knowledge and information ecosystems. The collections our member libraries hold on behalf of the Australian people, with a combined asset value exceeding \$4.5 billion, comprise books, artworks, historical manuscripts, photographs, cultural objects and 7.5 petabytes of digital records, almost all of which is Australian content and together forms the social and cultural memory of our nation. Our member libraries collectively welcomed 7.4 million visitors in 2024-25 which, together with 53.8 million visits to our websites and digital catalogues, makes our member libraries among the most accessible and accessed parts of Australia's cultural infrastructure.¹

In responding to this consultation, we draw on our contributions to the original National Cultural Policy consultation (2022),² and the subsequent Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications Inquiry into *Revive* (2025).³

We commend the success of *Revive* and particularly welcome the investment of funding to secure the future of our national collecting institutions as the delivery of the commitment in *Revive* that "Cultural infrastructure, including [...] libraries [...] is restored, built and maintained."⁴ The guiding value of *Revive*, that "all Australians, regardless of language, geography, age or education, have the opportunity to access and participate in arts and culture,"⁵ is in fact an expression of the core value of libraries, which is the commitment to equitable access to information and knowledge for all as a fundamental right and an essential driver of social, educational, cultural, democratic, and economic wellbeing.⁶ The National Cultural Policy notes that "a healthy democracy must strive to make culture available to us all,"⁷ and as custodians of Australia's memory and enablers of its stories, our libraries are essential partners in this effort. Indeed, NSLA's strategic vision for 2026-30 is that "**Libraries are trusted institutions of memory, knowledge and discovery that empower every person to full participation in a democratic society.**"

¹ See NSLA Annual report 2024-25, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-4004654904/view>.

² Response: A new National Cultural Policy (2022), https://www.nsla.org.au/wp-content/uploads/nsla-submission-national-cultural-policy-2022.pdf?rt=NnwxfG5hdGlvbmFslGN1bHR1cmFslHBvbGljeXwxNzc3NTI4NTM2&rt_nonce=053a75a42f

³ See https://www.nsla.org.au/wp-content/uploads/251002-National-Cultural-Policy-submission_final-2.pdf

⁴ *Revive*, p. 19.

⁵ *Revive*, p. 19.

⁶ See the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) 'Statement on Defending Inclusive Knowledge Societies,' 9 July 2025, <https://www.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/IFLA-statement-on-defending-inclusive-knowledge-societies.pdf>.

⁷ *Revive*, p. 12.

While we welcome the significant progress delivered through *Revive*, we note that its implementation has been oriented towards the performing arts and other acts of creation. We recommend that **the next iteration of the Policy be strengthened by:**

- (1) **Further acknowledgement of the digital contribution of libraries to the national cultural infrastructure** via discovery, access, and engagement with Australian creativity;
- (2) **Recognition of the contribution of libraries as critical democratic infrastructure**, as the custodians in Australia of the collective memory—both critical and inspired—of our national story; and
- (3) A renewed **emphasis on Australia’s cultural institutions and their collections as foundational to a thriving cultural ecology**, ensuring that Australia’s cultural and creative output is preserved and sustained.

We further offer the following perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in the pillars of the Policy, and why these matter to our institutions and our practice:

First Nations First

We applaud the Government's continued recognition and respect for the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia’s arts and culture. *Revive* has delivered significant initiatives that respond to our sector’s calls for action. Meeting this pillar’s promise, however, presents enduring challenges. The Policy’s ambition of “recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia’s arts and culture”⁸ should recognise the historic harm and injustice, and the ongoing reality that our nation’s cultural infrastructure and collections include materials created by and about First Nations people that have, in many cases, been acquired and made available without the explicit consent of the creators and/or the people and cultural knowledge represented. Addressing this requires sustained cultural and structural change in our institutions, is resource intensive, and is complicated by the absence of strong mechanisms that recognise cultural rights and ensure the protection by law of First Nations peoples’ rights over their traditional knowledge and cultural expression that have, at times without consent, become a part of library collections. (We offer the perspective that developing such mechanisms would strengthen our cultural infrastructure, below.) This work is critical to strengthening genuine trust and partnership between First Nations communities and institutions such as libraries that were founded in colonial contexts.

NSLA’s previous strategy called for the strengthening of “respectful and responsive relationships between libraries, and First Nations library graduates, leaders and professionals.”⁹ A critical next step is the development of structured pathways into the profession and sector for First Nations colleagues at all levels, including leadership. The opportunities presented are profound and NSLA libraries have demonstrated leadership to the sector via the Culturally Safe Libraries Program, which delivered cultural capability training (online and in-person) to over 2,000 staff, and produced a suite of practical online resources for the broader library sector alongside the ATSLIRN Protocols.¹⁰ At the time of writing, many of our libraries are undertaking work to expand these best-practice cultural protocols, particularly the implementation of Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols, to ensure that First Nations’ cultural intellectual property is respected, while simultaneously providing opportunities for sharing and engagement. The success of this work will depend on long-term partnerships, not short-term, project-based engagement with communities.

We recommend:

- **Additional investment and adequate resourcing** for the complex, intensive work of reviewing and re-describing First Nations collection materials in culturally appropriate ways;
- **Further development and promotion of robust best-practice cultural protocols** throughout Australia’s creative sector;
- **Clear legislative frameworks recognising Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP)** and mechanisms to safeguard the integrity of collections that it protects (see also ‘Strong Cultural Infrastructure,’ below);

⁸ *Revive*, p. 18.

⁹ For NSLA’s strategic plans, see <https://www.nsla.org.au/about-nsla/strategic-plan/>

¹⁰ See <https://www.nsla.org.au/resources/cslp-collections/>

- **Investment and support for First Nations pathways to employment and leadership** across the cultural and collecting sector; and
- **A commitment to long-term partnerships with communities**, moving beyond short-term projects as models of engagement.

A Place for Every Story

NSLA’s member libraries are natural partners in realising the Policy’s vision of a cultural landscape that reflects the breadth of Australian stories and the contribution of all Australians to our shared cultural record. As Australia’s legal deposit institutions, our member libraries collect and preserve copies of all material published in Australia, without social, artistic, political or moral judgement. To this is added other published and unpublished materials that represent the diversity of the Australian experience (e.g., diaries, oral histories and other communications, the Australian Web Archive, artworks) that ensure a collection that is representative of Australia’s diversity and in which all Australians can see themselves reflected. NSLA’s previous strategic goal to evolve our understanding of, and approach to the development and stewardship of our collections prepared the foundation for the priority of our current strategy, which is to activate these collections as civic infrastructure that “empowers citizens and readers.”

Australia’s public libraries represent a large-scale network in which culture is accessed and practiced every day, as sites of participation that welcomed 87.6 million onsite visits in 2023-24 with visitors engaging with stories, culture and programming.¹¹ Yet we do note that cost pressures and competing priorities have seen a decline in real terms of funding for libraries; we note that, adjusting for inflation, there has been a 12% funding decrease for public libraries nationally in real terms over five years.¹² Australia’s network of 1,411 public library branches are critical cultural venues in regional and rural communities.¹³ Public libraries represent a form of distributed, place-based cultural infrastructure with a proven track record in delivering programs aligned with broader national objectives (for example the recent Community Cohesion Programs delivered in partnership with the Australian Library and Information Association and Department of Home Affairs’ Office of Social Cohesion¹⁴).

We recommend:

- **Federal Government funding streams be made available** alongside existing local and state government funding for libraries, in recognition of libraries as cultural venues and ‘places for every story’ and as national infrastructure capable of delivering targeted outcomes aligned with broader national objectives.

Centrality of the Artist

Library collections and services directly support artists and creation. Writers, historians, visual artists, filmmakers and musicians draw on library collections as raw material and inspiration for new work, and our libraries offer research and creative fellowships (representing up to \$1 million in philanthropic and institutional funding annually) that support intellectual and artistic creativity by connecting researchers, writers and other artists to cultural resources held in our member libraries’ collections. Furthermore, libraries are themselves supporters of Australian writers, as large-volume purchasers of Australian authors’ works and through active promotion of Australian writing via author events.

The library and information sector centres the rights of artists when making content available for use and reuse. Our sector has deep expertise in balancing the centrality of the artist with the public interest of accessing, using and reusing content; our member libraries employ rights management specialists that navigate the complex intersection between maximising public benefit and respecting the rights, including economic rights, of Australia’s creatives.

We acknowledge the deep reservations, especially in artistic communities, of the impact of AI technologies on creation and creative livelihoods. Where our member libraries have innovated and experimented with emerging

¹¹ Australian Library and Information Association and National and State Libraries Australasia, Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report 2023-24 (via Trove: <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3921043747/view>), 9.

¹² *Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report 2023-24*, p. 21.

¹³ *Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report 2023-24*, p. 24.

¹⁴ See <https://alia.org.au/Web/Web/Partnerships/Community-Cohesion.aspx>.

technologies,¹⁵ these innovations have centred the artist and respected creators' rights by only making use of collection material that was clearly in the public domain, or where s200AB of the *Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)* applied, or where access rights were negotiated with rights owners. We celebrate the ambition of the Policy that "creative talent is nurtured through fair remuneration,"¹⁶ and we reiterate our previous recommendation (made to the Productivity Commission¹⁷) that Government explore models akin to the Public Lending Right for new forms of digital usage, including the training of generative AI.

We recommend:

- **Exploration of models like the Public Lending Right scheme to ensure economic compensation for creators** alongside the development of Australian LLMs and generative AI solutions.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

We acknowledge investments made by the Government under *Revive* to secure the future of national collecting institutions, which have underpinned the continuity of vital national services like Trove, maintained by the National Library of Australia in collaboration with NSLA libraries as principal partners as a cornerstone of shared digital infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic radically accelerated expectations that services would be delivered digitally, the pace of which is not matched by current levels of funding for national digital infrastructure. We emphasise the importance of public investment and increased resourcing relative to the scale of our digital infrastructure, to ensure that digital access to collections (including collections in digital form) can be sustained. We draw attention to stresses that are being placed on our members' digital infrastructure by crawlers and bots,¹⁸ which will likely be exacerbated by text and data mining being deployed on our collections and online repositories at a scale for which our infrastructure and servers are unprepared and under-resourced, and which may jeopardise our members' ability to deliver their mandated services to the Australian people. Furthermore, climate change presents additional risks to physical collections from natural disasters such as fire and flooding, adding to the costs of disaster recovery and sustainable storage. Building truly fit-for-purpose, resilient and adaptable cultural infrastructure requires investment in disaster preparedness, sustainable storage solutions and digital backups alongside physical facilities.

We note that copyright law and information policy are among the key infrastructure on which the health of our creative sector rests. We commend the Policy's recognition that "arts and culture are generative (creating new works and supporting emerging artists)."¹⁹ Our member libraries have been champions of the public domain, and we have previously advocated for modest reforms to Australia's copyright regime that would better achieve the balance between the interests of access, use and innovation with the centrality of the artist and recognition of creators' rights, discussed above. We congratulate the Government on the *Copyright Amendment Act 2026*, which has given new confidence to library users as the generators of cultural content. We further recommend that the Government progress a stand-alone fair dealing exception for quotation in the *Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)*, applying broadly to any copyrighted material, any user acting in good faith (including fairness factors, respect for ICIP and moral rights) and any purpose. Expanding on the points made above (see 'First Nations First'), we again emphasise that strong cultural infrastructure must include legislative frameworks recognising Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP).

We also call for strengthened recognition that librarians and library technicians are themselves part of Australia's cultural workforce. Library jobs are arts sector jobs: our staff are skilled professionals dedicated to connecting people with culture, yet our sector faces workforce challenges, including limited, expensive training pathways into the library profession and the capacity for libraries to offer competitive salaries. We recommend that the Policy acknowledge the importance of a strong library and information workforce and consider measures to support its development, including endorsement for the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)'s Professional Pathways

¹⁵ Innovative examples of presentation include, for example, State Library of Queensland's 'Virtual Veteran' project (2024), which trained an LLM chatbot on diaries, letters, newspapers and historical sources that speak to the Australian experience of the First World War.

¹⁶ *Revive*, p. 19.

¹⁷ See <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/data-digital#report>.

¹⁸ For a recent sector conversation of this problem, see <https://wiki.lyrasis.org/display/cmytgp/Aggressive+AI+Harvesting+of+Digital+Resources>.

¹⁹ *Revive*, p. 19.

initiative as an exemplar response to evolving work patterns and the roles of creative skills and lifelong learning. NSLA builds on this in our current strategy with the vision of fostering “a new generation of diverse, confident leaders who reflect the communities we serve.”

We recommend:

- **Increased resourcing** relative to the scale of libraries as critical digital infrastructure;
- **Federal Government funding streams be made available** alongside existing local and state government funding for libraries, in recognition of libraries as critical cultural infrastructure (including in regional communities);
- The **introduction of legislative frameworks recognising Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP)** (see ‘First Nations First,’ above);
- **A stand-alone fair dealing exception for quotation in the *Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)***, applying broadly to any copyrighted material, any user acting in good faith (including fairness factors, respect for ICIP and moral rights) and any purpose; and
- **Acknowledgement of the importance of a strong library and information workforce** and measures to support its development.

Engaging the Audience

Australia’s national, state and territory libraries are among the most accessible and accessed parts of Australia’s cultural infrastructure. Our member libraries collectively engaged in 2024-25 with 7.4 million on-site visitors to our reading rooms, exhibitions, and public programs, and an additional 53.8 million visitors who engaged with our websites and open digital catalogues, with millions more engaged with our collections on social media and other platforms. Furthermore, in 2023-24 Australia’s public libraries delivered a record 409,000 programs that engaged over 7 million attendees.²⁰ We commend the strength of our sector’s network to engage audiences and deliver programs at scale that will strengthen civic engagement and, through our collections and cultural institutions, our democracy.

A key opportunity under this pillar is harnessing technology to capture and share Australian narratives more easily and widely than ever before. We face an increasingly digital environment with greater complexity and new systems required to manage content. Our member libraries have led by example through National eDeposit (NED), a world-first platform developed by our member libraries in partnership and hosted by the National Library of Australia, which securely collects, preserves and provides access to born-digital publications across all states and territories. As of 30 March 2026 more than 944,000 items have been collected through NED, each one a piece of the contemporary Australian story preserved through cooperative infrastructure. Yet this digital content is fragile, and without sustained investment in digital infrastructure and expertise, we risk losing much of our national cultural memory to inaccessibility or invisibility. NSLA’s current strategic priority of “transforming discovery and access” recognises the challenge of ensuring that these myriad voices—increasingly digital—are preserved and remain discoverable for future generations, and we recommend that the next National Cultural Policy explicitly acknowledge and bolster collaborative, long-term digital preservation and discovery efforts as foundational to engaging audiences. There exists an opportunity to encourage and make investment in partnerships across jurisdictions and between institutions to ensure that Australia’s diverse creative output—including new and emerging forms of expression—can be collected now, preserved securely and shared through platforms including our members’ library catalogues, digital collections, and Trove.

With our sector’s vast experience in engaging with all Australians (including culturally- and linguistically-diverse communities), additional opportunities for consideration in the next Policy include the utilisation of libraries as partners in fostering community literacy and engagement, combatting mis- and disinformation, and developing a reading nation. These opportunities are reflected in NSLA’s vision that “our role in building reading cultures empowers informed participation in society and ensures equitable access to knowledge.”

²⁰ *Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report 2023-24*, p. 6.

We recommend:

- **Investment in partnerships across jurisdictions and institutions** to ensure that Australia’s cultural output is collected, preserved and shared;
- A strengthened acknowledgement of the **role of libraries to build and support community literacy and engagement**, including provision of contemporary collections and safe spaces for learning; and
- **Consideration of Australia’s library network as a key partner** in engaging audiences and delivering programs on national priorities, including to culturally- and linguistically-diverse and multicultural communities.

Summary

National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) Inc. congratulates the Government on the progress made under *Revive* and welcomes the historic commitment to develop consecutive National Cultural Policies. In this next Policy, we call for:

- (1) **Recognition of the contribution of libraries as critical democratic infrastructure**, as the custodians in Australia of the collective memory—both critical and inspired—of our national story;
- (2) A renewed **emphasis on Australia’s cultural institutions and their collections as foundational to a thriving cultural ecology**, ensuring that Australia’s cultural and creative output is preserved and sustained;
- (3) The strengthened recognition of cultural rights and **support for First Nations cultural self-determination and Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) protections**;
- (4) **Additional investment in the sustainability of cultural and digital infrastructure** as discovery pathways, modes of engagement and innovative examples of presentation;
- (5) **The continued modernisation of copyright and other legislative settings to empower both creativity and access**; and
- (6) **The utilisation of the existing reach and public trust of library networks, together with further resourcing, to deliver targeted national objectives including the promises of inclusion, literacy and participation for all Australians.**

We believe these recommendations will build on the vital work that commenced with the first iteration of the National Cultural Policy and will further strengthen the creative sector in Australia and with it, our democracy. We are committed to working with the Government and across the cultural sector to realise a future where Australia's cultural policy remains bold, inclusive and forward-looking, and ensures a place for every story and a story for every place, for generations to come.

For more information, contact

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