

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

15 May 2026

Dear Minister

**Submission to inform the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy
Libraries Board of South Australia**

I write on behalf of the Libraries Board of South Australia to contribute to consultation informing Australia's next National Cultural Policy. The Libraries Board has statutory responsibility for the State Library of South Australia and LibrariesSA, the statewide public library network serving metropolitan, regional and remote communities. Together, these institutions form a connected cultural system – preserving collective memory, supporting creativity and knowledge, fostering a lifelong love of reading, writing, research and storytelling, championing access and rights and ensuring culture is open and accessible to all Australians.

We strongly support the continuation of the five-pillar framework established under *Revive*. The pillars matter because they recognise culture as an interconnected system of stories, creators, institutions and audiences, and provide a shared structure through which responsibilities and investment can be aligned. For libraries, this framework reflects how national cultural priorities are delivered locally and sustained over time through trusted, accessible, place-based institutions.

We recognise the strong outcomes achieved through *Revive*, particularly the targeted investment in strengthening the sustainability of national collecting institutions and arts training organisations. This delivers meaningfully on the commitment to restore, build and maintain cultural infrastructure, including libraries, and reinforces the essential role this infrastructure plays within the broader cultural landscape. While this progress is widely welcomed, we note that much of the policy's implementation to date has focused on the performing arts and creative production. Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to more clearly foreground the role of cultural institutions and their collections as the foundation of a healthy cultural ecosystem—ensuring that Australia's creative output is not only made, but also preserved, made accessible and carried forward for future generations.

Across the pillars, a persistent challenge is equitable access. Cost-of-living pressures, geography, disability, language barriers and digital exclusion continue to limit participation in cultural life. Libraries play a critical role in addressing these barriers, particularly in regional, remote and disadvantaged communities, and for children and families where early access to books, stories, digital tools and cultural experiences is foundational to literacy, creativity and lifelong cultural participation. Libraries are also uniquely positioned to push back against inequality in social participation by offering free, trusted and local points of entry to culture, learning and civic life—an antidote to exclusion that strengthens

civic trust and belonging. Yet national policy does not always fully recognise or resource this delivery function. The next National Cultural Policy should more clearly position libraries as essential partners in achieving inclusive cultural and civic participation at scale.

Under **First Nations First**, *Revive* has established important foundation, however challenges remain in consistently embedding First Nations cultural authority across institutions, systems and jurisdictions. Realising this pillar in practice requires acknowledging not only its ambition, but the structural and historical complexities that continue to shape cultural collections and institutional practice. Libraries hold records of profound significance to Aboriginal peoples, including language, cultural knowledge, family histories and evidence of lived experience. Yet many of these have been collected, described and made accessible without the full involvement or consent of the communities to whom they belong. This legacy, and its ongoing impacts, underscores the scale of cultural and institutional change required. Progress in this area is necessarily resource-intensive and remains constrained by policy, legislative and funding settings that have not always enabled culturally safe, community-led governance of knowledge and access. It is further complicated by the limited recognition and legal protection of First Nations cultural rights, including rights relating to traditional knowledge and cultural expression now held within institutional collections. Addressing these challenges is essential to rebuilding trust and supporting genuine, long-term partnerships between First Nations communities and institutions established within colonial frameworks.

We recommend increased and sustained investment to support the complex and resource-intensive work of reviewing, re-describing and managing First Nations collection materials in culturally appropriate and community-informed ways. Additionally, the next policy should more clearly position libraries as custodians of this material and as critical partners in advancing self-determination. This includes strengthening First Nations leadership through the embedding of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property and Indigenous Data Sovereignty as system-wide principles across libraries, archives and collecting institutions. It also requires enabling Aboriginal communities to determine how their knowledge is described, accessed, preserved and shared, and supporting Aboriginal-controlled archives, language and knowledge centres as integral and enduring components of Australia's cultural infrastructure within national and state library systems. In doing so, the next policy can support a shift in the role of libraries—from access providers to culturally safe institutions grounded in authority, trust and sustained partnership with First Nations communities. This includes strengthening the conditions for truth-telling: ensuring communities have culturally safe pathways to access records, shape description, and lead how histories are preserved and shared across generations.

A Place for Every Story presents both significant opportunity and material risk. While digital technologies have expanded who can create and share stories, many local, community-generated and contemporary narratives—particularly born-digital material—remain fragile, under-resourced and vulnerable to loss or invisibility. Without sustained stewardship, these stories risk being excluded from the national and state record. Libraries play a critical role in addressing this risk by providing trusted, non-commercial infrastructure for collecting, preserving and enabling access to community knowledge over time.

Continued fostering of literacy, writing and storytelling is therefore essential: it supports individual expression, strengthens community identity, enables intergenerational knowledge transfer and ensures that children and future generations can access authentic records of lived experience alongside historic collections as they come to understand who

they are and where they belong. In South Australia, libraries already play a practical role in this pipeline—from early years story and literacy programs that ignite a love of reading and establish the foundations for lifelong literacy, critical thinking and learning, to supporting writers and community storytellers to create, develop and share new work in local places. By nurturing reading for pleasure alongside writing and storytelling, libraries create the conditions for improved literacy outcomes, stronger educational participation and deeper cultural engagement across the lifespan.

State libraries, in particular, have a unique responsibility to collect, preserve and share collections that tell the story of their state—past, present and emerging—bringing together published works, archives, digital content and community voices to create a coherent and enduring record for current users and future generations alike. For the State Library of South Australia, this includes the stewardship and access role of the historically significant Mortlock Chamber (recently recognised as the world’s second most beautiful library), alongside contemporary collecting and digital preservation that ensures the stories of South Australia remain visible, discoverable and usable over time.

The next National Cultural Policy should strengthen long-term cultural stewardship by funding and enabling libraries to support community-generated content, place-based heritage and diverse cultural expression. This includes investment in digital and archival preservation capability, ethical collecting frameworks and partnerships that empower communities to write, tell, steward and access their own stories. In doing so, the policy can ensure Australia’s cultural record genuinely reflects the breadth, diversity and evolving experiences of its people and communities—now and into the future. In South Australia, this can be advanced through targeted initiatives such as increased support for proactively building contemporary collections (including born-digital content and under-represented community voices), investment in new systems and technologies that enable engaging digital exhibitions and broaden access to treasured collection items, and resourcing the end-to-end pipeline from acquisition and description to preservation and discovery so that new South Australian histories are not lost to time.

Under **Centrality of the Artist**, the next policy must respond to the reality that creative practice is increasingly hybrid, digitally mediated and shaped by emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence. Many creators work across community, education and library contexts—developing new work, engaging with audiences, testing ideas and sustaining creative practice—yet policy frameworks often focus narrowly on formal arts venues, markets or industries. This overlooks key settings where creativity is nurtured, accessed and sustained.

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise the broader cultural ecosystem in which creative practice occurs, including the role libraries play as enabling spaces for imagination and experimentation, access to collections, knowledge exchange and public engagement. Policy responses to artificial intelligence, copyright reform and digital platforms should explicitly protect creative rights, attribution and consent, while supporting sustainable livelihoods. Libraries can be critical partners in this work, providing education, practical tools and ethical frameworks that empower creators to navigate technological change without undermining cultural or economic rights. Given the growing influence of AI on discovery and cultural production, the next policy should also be overt about bias risks—particularly the reproduction of Western and historically dominant cultural lenses—and support approaches that surface diverse voices, respect ICIP, and promote transparency, provenance and attribution in AI-enabled systems. Libraries can also help strengthen the ‘artist-to-audience’ pathway by attracting and hosting exhibitions that are authentically embedded in State Library collections—supporting new creative

interpretation, commissioning contemporary responses to collections, and ensuring exhibitions are grounded in evidence, place and the lived experience of communities.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure represents a defining challenge for the coming decade. Libraries face compounding pressures, including rising operational costs, ageing facilities, climate risk and rapidly accelerating demands for digital preservation, systems interoperability and discovery. Short-term, project-based or siloed funding models are misaligned with the long-term responsibility of stewarding both physical and born-digital heritage. The next decade will also require a stronger climate lens: library buildings and collections face increasing risks from heat, smoke, flood and extreme weather, while communities need trusted places to build climate literacy and practical resilience. In South Australia, public libraries are increasingly valued as accessible “public shelter” infrastructure—cool, safe and welcoming spaces during heatwaves and other climate events—alongside their ongoing cultural and learning roles.

The next National Cultural Policy should explicitly recognise state and public libraries as essential cultural infrastructure and assets. Commonwealth funding programs must be accessible to state and local cultural institutions, supporting long-term sustainability, shared digital systems, workforce capability and coordinated national investment. Strengthening libraries as infrastructure will ensure Australia can meet its obligations to preserve cultural memory, be accessible to every Australian and respond to technological and environmental change with resilience and coherence. It should also avoid an artificial and unhelpful divide between institutions that “collect” and institutions that “tell stories”. State and National libraries do both: we collect and preserve so that stories can be told, retold and reinterpreted; and we support storytelling, so collections remain relevant, visible and meaningful to diverse communities. Policy and funding settings should therefore support the ‘AND’—sustained collecting and preservation capacity, alongside interpretation, access, programs and community-led storytelling that activate collections for public value, truth-telling and inclusion. In South Australia, a clear example is the proposed uplift of the Mortlock Chamber, including engaging, interactive digital displays that capture and celebrate South Australia’s stories and communities, while maintaining the Chamber’s role as unique and globally loved a place of accessible heritage. This is ‘collecting AND storytelling’ in practice—activating collections for public value while strengthening preservation, discovery and reach to diverse audiences.

Finally, **Engaging the Audience** requires recognising that cultural participation is increasingly ongoing and relational, not transactional. As discovery, learning and engagement are reshaped by digital platforms and artificial intelligence, libraries function as critical access points for trusted information, cultural participation and media literacy across all ages and communities. They provide free, welcoming and locally grounded spaces where people encounter culture repeatedly over time.

The next National Cultural Policy should support sustained, place-based engagement through libraries, alongside innovation in digital access and inclusion. As civic institutions, libraries also contribute to social trust and institutional legitimacy as a public good—underpinning democratic participation, informed decision-making and confidence in cultural and knowledge systems. This role is increasingly vital in an environment shaped by misinformation, artificial intelligence and platform-mediated discovery, positioning libraries as essential partners in building an informed, engaged and culturally confident society. In practice, this is where libraries’ civic role becomes an antidote to inequality: by providing trusted information, digital and media literacy, and inclusive civic spaces, libraries strengthen participation for people who are otherwise left out of cultural and democratic life—building civic trust, reducing exclusion, and supporting informed community decision-making. To sustain this role, policy should also enable responsible

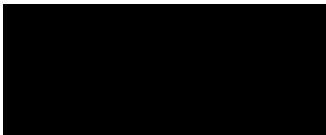
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own-source revenue opportunities—such as attracting touring or partnership exhibitions embedded in collections, venue and program partnerships, philanthropy, and other appropriate revenue streams—where proceeds are transparently reinvested to protect free access, strengthen collections, and sustain critical public services.

Taken together, these priorities point to the need for a National Cultural Policy that builds on *Revive* while more clearly recognising the role of state and public libraries as essential cultural infrastructure within Australia’s cultural system. With statewide reach, deep community trust and long-term stewardship responsibilities, libraries are uniquely positioned to translate national cultural ambition into inclusive, place-based outcomes—supporting creativity, participation, cultural continuity, democratic engagement and early engagement for children, while preserving knowledge and stories for future generations. This includes practical, locally-deliverable action in South Australia—strengthening stewardship of collections (including South Australiana), building shared digital preservation capability, supporting community-led storytelling and truth-telling, and ensuring library infrastructure is climate-resilient and fit for purpose as both cultural and civic space. It also includes investable, tangible initiatives—such as uplifting the Mortlock Chamber with interactive digital experiences that celebrate South Australia; increasing proactive contemporary collecting so today’s stories become tomorrow’s heritage; attracting exhibitions that are deeply grounded in State Library collections; and enabling sustainable revenue strategies that help safeguard the services and collections communities rely on.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this important policy and welcome continued engagement to ensure Australia’s cultural policy settings fully reflect the role libraries play in sustaining culture, knowledge and storytelling for current and future generations.

With kind regards



Chair, Libraries Board of South Australia