



20 May 2026

The Honourable Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Arts
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Towards A New Cultural Policy

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission as part of public consultation to develop the next iteration of the National Cultural Policy.

The Provisional Parliament House opened in Canberra on 9 May 1927. Now known as Old Parliament House, it was the first permanent home of the Australian Parliament, a role it performed for more than six decades until the opening of the Australian Parliament House in 1988.

Old Parliament House is now home to the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD). Its purpose is to protect and conserve the nationally significant Old Parliament House, share the story of Australia's democracy and inspire Australians to participate as engaged citizens in our democracy.

Democracy is central to creating a fair, free and equal society in Australia. MoAD's submission focusses on two central principles which support democracy: social connection and civic participation.

Strengthening Civics education

Civics and Citizenship is part of the Australian curriculum, and intended to provide students with an understanding of democratic processes and build skills to participate as informed citizens.

The Parliamentary and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program provides financial support for schools to travel to Canberra. The program enables students to learn about Australia's democracy through onsite visits to institutions including Australian Parliament House, the Museum of Australian Democracy and the Australian Electoral Commission. Over 130,000 students visited Canberra in FY2024-25.

There are more than 9,500 primary and secondary schools in Australia, however only 2% of schools are able to access Canberra-based civics programs. The majority of schools who participate are from NSW and Victoria.

Civics education is essential for students to be able to understand how Australia's democracy works. It is also essential that teachers are supported to teach civics education in the classroom by accessing quality resources which are curriculum-aligned.

MoAD has developed *Democracy in A Box* which is a comprehensive educational resource designed for students and teachers in years 5 and 6, grounded in the Key Learning Area of Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), specifically Civics and Citizenship and History. The ready-to-go resource empowers students to develop a deep understanding of Australia's democratic processes and their role in shaping their communities. By fostering a sense of agency and responsibility, *Democracy In A Box* aims to inspire a new generation of informed and active citizenship.

Democracy In A Box includes Professional Development resources to support teachers in developing lesson plans. As part of the program, schools are able to participate in digital classroom lessons with MoAD's Learning team.

MoAD's ambition is to provide this resource to every primary school in Australia. MoAD also has an ambition to extend this resource to every secondary school. This will enable every Australian student to become informed, skilled and active citizens.

Reflecting First Nations and multicultural Australia

Australia is an ancient land and First Nations Peoples have lived and cared for country and practiced democracy for over 65,000 years. First Nations Peoples experiences and representation of sovereignty are part of Australia's history.

The Yolngu Yirrkala bark petitions in 1963, the Barunga Statement in 1988, and the presence of Wiradjuri elders Nangar (Jimmy Clements) and Ooloogan (George Noble) at the opening of Parliament House in 1927 are significant in the nation's democratic story. MoAD, in consultation with the First Nations Advisory Committee, is developing an exhibition on First Nations Peoples' experiences of democracy which will open in 2027.

Today, Australia is a place of many cultures, languages and faiths. Migrants have contributed to building Australia's social, economic and culturally diverse community, and value the freedoms and rights Australia's democracy provides for citizens. A priority for MoAD is to develop outreach programs for multicultural communities, which enable recently arrived migrants to explore Australia's democratic systems, so that they can participate as informed, engaged and active citizens.

Sharing stories of Australia's First Nations Peoples and culturally diverse communities, contributes to building and sustaining a strong and modern democracy.

Connecting Regional and Remote Communities

The National Collection Initiative was established as a pilot program under the first iteration of Revive, and enabled the National Gallery of Australia to loan art works to regional institutions across Australia. This program should be expanded to include all the National Collecting Institutions so that Australians in regional, remote and metropolitan communities, can access the nation's collections held in libraries, archives and museums.

Local museums play a central role in their communities. Many are volunteer run and hold collections which are important for the local community and are also nationally-significant. The new National Cultural Policy could consider ways in which to support local museums to protect and share their stories and collections for the public. An initiative could be to create a National Democracy Trail, which links key democracy collections, libraries and historic houses located across the nation.

Investing in national cultural infrastructure

Old Parliament House is heritage listed and a national icon. It will turn 100 in 2027. As part of the first iteration of the National Cultural Policy, National Cultural Institutions received an injection of capital funding to address critical infrastructure projects. The capital funding enabled MoAD to undertake a portion of critical work, including:

- repairing and conserving significant spaces in Old Parliament House, such as the House of Representatives;
- improving experiences for visitors in regard to accessibility and digital access;
- upgrading aging building systems in the Prime Minister's and Speaker's Suite, Government Party Room and education spaces;
- creating new exhibitions for the public on important aspects of Australia's democracy including the role of the press and civic participation;
- opening up spaces in Old Parliament House, previously closed to the public such as the Heritage Kitchens.

It is important for MoAD to continue this work. Additional, ongoing capital and operational resourcing will enable MoAD to continue our role to care for Old Parliament House, expand programs for the public and celebrate Australia's democracy for the next 100 years.



Stephanie Bull
Director