
Submission to the new National Cultural Policy

23 May 2026

The Australian Society of Archivists Inc. (ASA) is the peak professional body for archivists in Australia. We advocate on behalf of the archival and recordkeeping profession and seek to promote the value of archives and records as well as support best practice standards and services. The Society has over 900 individual and corporate members and is administered on a national basis by an elected Council. Branches and Special Interest Groups are active in all States and Territories.

The ASA is concerned with advocating not only for its members but on all matters relating to recordkeeping and archives. Archives matter because they hold much of our personal, corporate, and social memory. They increase a national sense of identity and understanding of cultures. Most importantly, archives play a key role in protecting human rights, confirming identity and entitlements, maintaining authenticity of collections, and are essential in enabling democratic accountability.

The ASA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the review of the National Cultural Policy. As we noted in our submission to the earlier National Cultural Policy consultation in 2022¹, archives preserve the memory of our nation and its people. Archives are not only physical. Archives also work to maintain digital collections, and also digitise material for broader use. Archives work at the forefront of digital preservation to facilitate discoverability and enable connection to collections for use now and into the future, for future generations, for academic research, and to help our histories be understood.

Archives are relevant to all pillars of the National Cultural Policy, whether this be for people accessing and using archival collections to create new creative works, as places where artists and creators deposit their materials, and as places for revitalisation of First Nations language and culture. Strong archival institutions are key to Australian cultural frameworks and infrastructure, and have a valuable and active role to play within the arts. The ASA is of the view that the current pillars remain relevant and useful in the articulation of a National Cultural Policy.

The ASA is heartened to see the government's commitment to culture and its progress against the actions in the original policy, including the ongoing commitment to and engagement with the National Collecting Institutions. We were also pleased to see the

¹ Australian Society of Archivists, *Submission to the National Cultural Policy*, 5 September 2022
<https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/ncp1312-australian-society-of-archivists.pdf>

provision of funding in Pillar 1 to AIATSIS to enable the preservation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content held on vulnerable magnetic tape media. This is a good starting point to ensure vital First Nations materials are preserved and accessible to First Nations communities.

We are concerned about the ongoing preservation of First Nations and other marginalised communities' materials held in a variety of organisations, and the continuing need to digitise and preserve this material. While some progress has been made in this area, particularly with AIATSIS, we recommend continuing action and funding in Pillar 1 to support ongoing work and resourcing is for many organisations to ensure this work is done in a timely and culturally safe manner while working with relevant First Nations communities.

However, there are some elements of the original National Cultural Policy actions which have not been addressed, and some important additions to be included.

We wish to flag that we are concerned that there has been no progress on the Pillar 4 action to review and modernise the *Archives Act 1983*, which is out of date and unwieldy. The National Archives of Australia is a National Collecting Institution, yet is expected to do its work while hampered by its own legislation. While legislative reform takes time, it is disheartening to see that this has not been started in any meaningful way. This must be a priority for the reworked National Cultural Policy.

We recommend the reprioritisation of Pillar 4's action to modernise the *Archives Act*. A review of the *Archives Act* needs to involve significant public consultation. A redesigned *Act* needs to include provisions for First Nations' rights over archival material, recognition of the digital environment and a reimagining of access provisions. Additionally, many parts of the current *Act* are redundant and should be removed.

We further recommend including a priority action in Pillar 4 to address strengthening cyber security protections for National Collecting institutions. Of particular concern is the exposure of the Collecting institutions, such as National Archives of Australia, managing increasing amounts of born digital material which has no physical manifestations. If lost, these will be lost forever. We note with concern the increasingly serious impact of cyber security problems encountered by National Collecting Institutions. These include the recent cyber incident at State Library NSW affecting access to the online catalogue and electronic resources and follow other significant hacking incidents which have severely interrupted digital infrastructure including collection management systems and long term impacts on research in overseas cultural institutions (British Library, 2023-2024; National History Museum Berlin in 2023, Internet Archive, 2024). The aggressive deployment of AI training bots have similarly disabled public access, as one response to such incidents has been the ironic outcome of restricting public access through APIs, hampering digital scholars from exploring and using public collections.

We also wish to draw the review's attention to the submission by the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Committee, and highlight the important place that documentary heritage materials have in the National Cultural Policy. There is a need for a high-level policy

commitment to improve nationwide and cross sectoral planning and coordination to ensure Australia's documentary heritage is properly maintained and preserved. This is an important element of the implementation of Pillar 4, and we recommend this is articulated as a priority action.

While the pillars of the National Cultural Policy remain very relevant, this revision of the Policy provides an opportunity to develop clear actions for archives and collections more broadly. They have a critical role in underpinning creative work, and strong archives and collections are fundamental to any cultural policy. Developing clear actions for archives and collections will ensure the preservation and access to Australia's social and cultural memory so that it lives beyond the Policy.

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