



# Towards a new National Cultural Policy

National Film and Sound Archive of Australia

May 2026

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## Introduction

Australia is a world leader in audiovisual culture. We produce films, television, music, radio, video games, podcasts and social media that reach global audiences. We have built institutions, industries and communities around the screen and the speaker. Yet our national cultural policy has, until recently, regarded the audiovisual domain as a subset of the arts rather than as the primary mode through which contemporary Australians express identity, form community and make meaning.

The next national cultural policy has an opportunity to address that. The policy comes at an extraordinary cultural moment: digital transformation has dissolved the boundaries between production and consumption, professional and citizen creator, national and global. Audiovisual is no longer a category of culture, it drives it. More Australians engage with it daily than any other form, and its influence on public life - social, political, civic - has never been greater.

This submission outlines the opportunity for the next national cultural policy to embrace the challenge of preserving and promoting audiovisual culture in the digital age.

The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) is Australia's national audiovisual collecting institution, established under the *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia Act 2008* to collect and preserve all forms of recorded sound and moving image. Our foundations date to 1935, making us one of the oldest audiovisual archives in the world. We hold approximately 700,000 unique works spanning film, television, radio, recorded music, video games, oral history and interactive media. The collection belongs to all Australians



and our obligation is to develop it to build a continuous record of Australian culture, safeguard it for future generations while making it as accessible as possible in the present.

As then Prime Minister Bob Hawke said at the opening of the new institution at its headquarters in Acton, NFSA is:

*...a new kind of national institution, an institution devoted to the popular cultural expression of our age and dedicated to the preservation of some of the best manifestations of Australian character and imagination. Australians have expressed their national identity most directly and most potently through screen and sound media.<sup>1</sup>*

Ours is an exciting brief, and one that has changed exponentially since 1984 as digital technologies have profoundly transformed the way audiovisual materials are created, distributed and consumed and, more recently, their cultural, social and even political impacts. Industry models have also changed. Lower production costs and the availability of distribution platforms have led to a democratisation and diversification of public communication. As a result, citizen creators now work outside established industry structures influencing and shaping culture and the national conversation.

Audiovisual is more impactful and nationally significant in 2026 than in 1984.

- Almost all Australian adults (91%) used an online service to watch video content in the previous 7 days, with subscription streaming services used by 68% of adults<sup>2</sup>.
- 78% of the Australian population uses social media with audiovisual heavy platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok) continuing to lead in terms of popularity and engagement<sup>3</sup>.
- 59% of Australians listen to podcasts monthly (among the highest rates in the world), with a 10% YOY increase<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Bob Hawke at the opening of the NFSA's headquarters in Canberra, 3 October 1984.

<sup>2</sup> *How we watch and listen to content*, ACMA, March 2026.

<sup>3</sup> Data Reportal, *Digital 2026: Australia*.

<sup>4</sup> Searchlab – Podcast Statistics 2026.



- 60% of Australian adults listen to traditional radio, while 72% use music streaming services<sup>5</sup>.

The five pillars of *Revive* provide a sound foundation for the next policy. This submission offers observations and recommendations under each pillar, grounded in NFSA's direct experience and informed by our view of what Australian cultural policy most needs to address in the years ahead.

## Pillar 1: First Nations First

### THE POLICY CONTEXT

Audiovisual material is an especially important dimension of the First Nations cultural record. Moving image and recorded sound have been central tools of both cultural documentation and cultural harm: used at various times to capture, extract and decontextualise First Nations knowledge without the consent or benefit of originating communities. But audiovisual materials also hold power and significance for First Nations people; they contain Indigenous Knowledge and cultural practice that can be critical for intergenerational knowledge transfer and revitalisation. When governed by First Nations authority and in line with Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols, audiovisual material can strengthen identity and wellbeing, improve education and research quality, enable ethical creative practice and economic opportunities, and foster reconciliation through respectful partnerships and, where appropriate, repatriation.

There is work to be done for all Australian collecting institutions holding First Nations material, to ensure it is properly understood, cared for and appropriately accessed – with this work firmly lead by First Nations peoples. Discoverability and accessibility are hampered by decades of incomplete, inconsistent or inappropriate cataloguing including gaps in provenance and protocol. Extensive cultural engagement is required to address these issues – work that is personal and relational. It cannot be automated or fast tracked and

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<sup>5</sup> *How we watch and listen to content*, ACMA, March 2026.



will require additional support as institutions work to establish and implement appropriate ICIP protocols which will be bespoke to each community.

The next national cultural policy should strengthen requirements for all cultural institutions to develop and implement First Nations cultural protocols, move toward community-led governance of First Nations material, and invest in the human capacity required to do this work. This is relational work. It cannot be automated, delegated or accelerated beyond the pace communities set.

**Recommendation:**

The next policy should recognise that culturally appropriate engagement, provenance research and community access programs are structurally underfunded under existing base appropriations. Addressing this would allow institutions including NFSA to scale existing work to increase services and training opportunities for First Nations communities and organisations.

NFSA'S APPROACH

The NFSA collection holds approximately 40,000 items of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander significance, including recordings of language, ceremonies, oral histories and creative work that exist nowhere else. These materials are of immense importance to communities for intergenerational knowledge transfer, language revitalisation and cultural continuity.

Addressing gaps in catalogue data is among our most important responsibilities. We have committed significant effort to research, community consultation and the redesign of access protocols, supported by dedicated funding through the Australian Government's Indigenous Languages and Arts program. This support has enabled co-designed projects with partners including the Strehlow Research Centre, the Torres Strait Islander Media Association and the Warlpiri community.

NFSA's First Nations Engagement team leads this work across the institution, shaping not only how we manage the collection but how we tell stories through it. Recent examples include the commissioned film *Winhanganha* by Wiradjuri



filmmaker and poet Jazz Money, and a display of materials relating to the Yothu Yindi Foundation presented at the 25th anniversary edition of the Garma Festival in 2025. Since 2023, our partnership with the Arts Ready traineeship program has supported five First Nations trainees, three of whom have moved into ongoing employment with the NFSA.

With sustained investment, NFSA can expand digitisation services for First Nations communities, deepen provenance research, and create new employment pathways in audiovisual preservation and storytelling. These are not peripheral activities, they are central to the institution's purpose.

## Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

### THE POLICY CONTEXT

Audiovisual storytelling is the dominant form through which Australians now express, celebrate and negotiate identity. The extraordinary democratisation of production – driven by affordable tools and accessible platforms – has extended the capacity to tell stories to communities that were historically excluded from professional creative industries. First Nations creators, culturally and linguistically diverse voices, LGBTQI+ artists and storytellers, people with disability and people from regional and remote Australia are now shaping the national conversation through platforms and channels that did not exist a generation ago.

The cultural and political consequences of this are significant. Citizen creators working on social, streaming and interactive platforms are producing content that influences public opinion, shapes community identity and constitutes genuine cultural expression. Their impact rivals and, increasingly, surpasses that of legacy media. The next policy must grapple seriously with the implications: both the opportunity (greater representation and cultural diversity) and the risk (misinformation, algorithmic manipulation, erosion of social trust). Policy that treats these as separate domains, where culture is in one silo and digital safety in another, will fail to address either effectively.



**Recommendation:** The next policy should articulate a coherent cross-portfolio framework for audiovisual culture that connects media literacy, AI literacy, online safety, national security and social cohesion. These are aspects of a single challenge, and when treated together they will contribute to a more comprehensive solution.

**Recommendation:** The next policy should explicitly recognise citizen and community creators as cultural contributors whose work has archival and heritage value and should establish mechanisms to support their inclusion in national collecting programs.

### NFSA'S APPROACH

NFSA is among a small number of institutions internationally that are collecting and preserving the output of citizen creators working on social, streaming and interactive platforms. This is urgent and complex work. The technologies, data models, platforms, rights frameworks and cultural contexts evolve faster than existing institutional models can accommodate. We are developing new partnerships – with Bus Stop Films, Music in Exile, APRA AMCOS and Stan among others – to ensure the collection reflects the full breadth of contemporary Australian cultural expression.

Media literacy is another dimension of this pillar that NFSA is well-placed to contribute to. Our Media & Me program, launched in 2021, delivers media literacy education to school-age learners, with growing engagement year on year. In 2026 we successfully piloted adult media literacy programs designed for workplace delivery. Safe and critically informed engagement with audiovisual media, such as the ability to evaluate sources, understand production contexts, and recognise manipulation, is an increasingly urgent government priority and societal need. NFSA strongly supports the Australian Government's National Media Literacy Strategy and advocates for its genuine integration across education, digital safety and cultural policy rather than treatment as a standalone initiative.



# Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

## THE POLICY CONTEXT

For most of the 20th century, the audiovisual archive was primarily a repository where stories and objects are well preserved, but not readily accessible. In the 21st century, it is an active engine of creative production. Archival material is raw material for documentary makers, feature directors, educators, researchers, artists and the growing cohort of digital content creators producing work for platforms with millions of Australian subscribers.

The Australian Government's local content requirements for streaming platforms, which took effect from 1 January 2026, are a major and welcome policy development. They create new demand for Australian stories and, with it, new incentive to draw on the richness of the historical audiovisual record. The policy should now consider how to connect the archive sector to this creative ecosystem more deliberately - including through copyright reform that better serves non-commercial cultural use, and investment in the discovery infrastructure that makes archival material discoverable and accessible to contemporary producers.

### **Recommendation:**

The next policy should consider measures to encourage use of Australia's archival collections in the production of new content, including through investment in discoverability infrastructure and review of copyright provisions affecting non-commercial cultural use.

## NFSA'S APPROACH

NFSA supports Australian creators directly through the collection. Every year, archival materials are incorporated into factual productions broadcast nationally and internationally and are used in exhibitions at institutions including the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Home of the Arts on the Gold Coast and ACMI. The Film Australia Collection, featuring government-funded documentary films spanning 1913 to 2008, is a nationally significant collection. It provides an incomparable record of Australian cultural life that continues to inspire contemporary makers. It was central to SBS's acclaimed series *Australia: An Unofficial History* (2025), demonstrating of its ongoing creative vitality.



NFSA controls copyright in less than 10% of the material we hold. We work within the Australian copyright framework to uphold third-party rights while supporting access, connecting rights-holders with users and providing professional digitisation and broadcast-ready asset services. Our Zero Fee Licence program supports independent factual makers across all platforms, with up to \$200,000 committed annually. In 2026 NFSA launched NFSA Pro, a new client services portal designed to streamline access for professional researchers and licensees.

Beyond access, NFSA actively promotes the intellectual property in its collection to potential licensors, helping to unlock economic returns for creators and rights-holders whose work we hold; ensuring the archive functions not only as a cultural resource but as an ongoing economic asset for the Australian creative industries.

## Pillar 4: Strengthening the Role of Institutions

### THE POLICY CONTEXT

Australia's national collecting institutions – the libraries, archives, galleries and museums that preserve the record of our culture – represent an irreplaceable public good. They are the memory of the nation. What is not collected cannot be studied, shared or built upon. What is not preserved will be lost. The ongoing requirement to maintain bespoke capital infrastructure for collection preservation, audience engagement and corporate operations is well established and acknowledged.

Yet, the infrastructure challenge facing collecting institutions in the digital era is qualitatively different from anything previously experienced and is not yet recognised at a policy level. The volume, velocity and variety of digital cultural production vastly exceed the capacity of institutions funded for a pre-digital world. Born-digital works, such as streaming content, video games, podcasts and social media, present preservation challenges that are technical, legal and institutional simultaneously. Formats become obsolete. Platforms disappear. Rights frameworks were not designed with preservation in mind. And, unlike analogue material, digital content can degrade or even disappear, quietly, permanently and with no warning.



Audiovisual preservation compounds these challenges in ways that deserve specific policy recognition: digitised audiovisual files are orders of magnitude larger than digitised text or images, demanding storage and processing infrastructure at a scale that has no equivalent elsewhere in the collecting sector. Further, complex digital objects such as video games and virtual reality experiences require the preservation not only of files but of the software environments, operating systems, related metadata and hardware platforms needed to activate them - a fundamentally different and more resource-intensive challenge than archiving a document or a photograph. It is highly technical work that requires new skills and specific know-how.

The next national cultural policy should recognise that cultural infrastructure investment now includes the data management, digital infrastructure, and human capacity required to keep pace with the rate of change in how culture is produced, distributed and experienced. Institutions that cannot adapt at speed will not just fall behind; they will fail in their core purpose.

**Recommendation:**

The next policy should recognise and fund the specific requirements of digital cultural infrastructure to ensure that the prevailing mode of cultural expression in Australia – digital audiovisual media - is preserved for the future.

**NFSA'S APPROACH**

The 2023 Sustainability Uplift was transformative for NFSA. After a decade of real-terms funding erosion, it restored the institutional stability needed to plan and invest with confidence. The Audiovisual Australia program, delivered through a \$42 million investment from the 2021-22 budget, is nearing completion and has preserved significant at-risk analogue heritage. Thanks to additional funding from the Federal Government the NFSA will remediate and enlarge our nitrate film storage facility, one of our most fragile and irreplaceable holdings, and address a risk that has been building for years.

Our base operational funding, however, remains below what is required to meet the demands of digital collecting and preservation at scale. The growth in the volume and complexity of our mandate is structural and permanent, not



cyclical. We have made substantial productivity gains through technology and workflow innovation, but these gains cannot indefinitely substitute for adequate resourcing.

One example of that innovation is *Bowerbird*, a machine learning-enabled transcription tool developed in-house and trained on Australian accents, vocabulary and place names. It outperforms comparable multinational services on Australian material and forms the basis of new, more intuitive search tools for the collection. We are now fielding inquiries from other organisations interested in *Bowerbird* as a service. NFSA's approach to technology is guided by our [Principles for Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence Creation and Use](#), published in 2024, which sets out our commitment to trustworthy, responsible and transparent use of these tools in the public interest.

We are also conscious of the need to diversify revenue. Our investment in NFSA's publishing platforms is a long-term strategy to grow reach, engagement and commercial opportunity, increasing financial resilience and the provision of public value.

## Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

### THE POLICY CONTEXT

Access to Australia's shared cultural heritage should not depend on where you live or whether you can get to Canberra. In an era when almost all cultural consumption is digital and on-demand, national collecting institutions have both the opportunity and the obligation to reach audiences across the country in the way audiences actually want to engage: on their phones and screens, at the time of their choosing.

But at the same time, providing opportunities for people to gather in person is the foundational purpose of culture. These experiences become even more important in uncertain times. Cultural events encourage the discovery of new perspectives and positive social encounters – both of which are critical for social cohesion and healthy communities. The next policy should sustain



investment in physical and touring programs that bring collections to regional and remote communities, recognising that digital access does not replace the particular value of in-person cultural experience for communities at a distance from metropolitan centres.

**Recommendation:**

The next policy should maintain audience reach and regional engagement as core performance expectations for national collecting institutions, with resourcing to support both digital and in person engagement capacity as well as physical touring programs.

NFSA'S APPROACH

NFSA's new website, launched in March 2026, is the centre of a publishing network that includes two YouTube channels, Facebook and Instagram, built on market research undertaken in 2024-25 to understand the preferences of a representative national audience. That research yielded an important insight: while awareness of NFSA as an institutional brand is relatively low, interest in accessing the national audiovisual collection is extremely high once people understand what it contains. The audience exists; our task is to reach it.

We actively target audiences in regional and remote Australia through marketing and through the substance of what we publish, stories that reflect the breadth of Australian experience, not just its metropolitan centres. Around one third of our current online engagement comes from outside Australia, which points to an emerging opportunity to develop a content export strategy that raises the profile of Australian creators and culture internationally.

In-person programming remains important. Regular screenings and education programs at our heritage building in Canberra, regional touring projects exemplified by *Fighting Spirit: The Art of Boxing* (with the National Portrait Gallery, touring regional Tasmania and New South Wales in 2025-26) demonstrate the continued value of physical presence, particularly for communities underserved by digital and communications infrastructure.

NFSA also contributes to Australia's cultural diplomacy through training, knowledge exchange and capacity building in the Indo-Pacific region. We have



shared expertise in preservation, digitisation and digital storytelling with partners in Papua New Guinea through the International Cultural Diplomacy and Arts Fund and conducted climate-change conservation workshops in India and Indonesia. In a region where digital connectivity and cultural identity are central to soft power, NFSA's role is both strategic and practical.

## CONCLUSION

*Revive* was instrumental in shaping, articulating and coordinating the cultural agenda. The impact of the resulting funding for Australia's National Collecting Institutions, including NFSA, cannot be understated. It helped stabilise operations and address critical backlogs of essential capital works.

Building on *Revive* creates an opportunity to engage further with the digital-first cultural experiences of the present day: with the challenge of preserving born-digital cultural heritage, with the complexity of an information environment in which audiovisual content is the primary medium of public life, and with the obligation to ensure that the institutions charged with caring for Australia's cultural memory are resourced to do so at the pace and scale the moment demands. These are issues that institutions around the world are grappling with, providing Australia with an opportunity to lead.

The policy should also be unambiguous about what cultural institutions are for. They are a central part of our national framework - the mechanism through which a society accumulates, shares and passes on its understanding of itself.

The NFSA is committed to that mission and to the national cultural policy that makes it possible. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next policy and are available to provide further detail on any aspect of this submission.