

Jumbunna Research Submission on Australia's New National Cultural Policy

Indigenous Archives and Data Stewardship Hub, Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney

About This Submission

The Indigenous Archives and Data Stewardship Hub (the Hub) sits within the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Technology Sydney. The Hub advocates for Indigenous rights in archives and data, including a Right of Reply to historical collections held across the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector. It develops research, engagement and learning activities to refigure libraries and archives in support of the culturally appropriate ownership, management and ongoing preservation of Indigenous knowledges, grounded in the principles of the Indigenous Data Sovereignty movement. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the renewed National Cultural Policy. This submission draws on the Hub's research and our long-standing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and the GLAM sector. The submission focuses on key areas where we see the most significant opportunities to strengthen the Policy. Our recommendations build on the foundations established under Revive and are offered as priorities to be implemented within existing Federal Government portfolio responsibilities.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Living community archives as cultural infrastructure of national significance, and provide dedicated, sustained funding to support community-led care of archives held outside major institutions.
2. Recognise access to Stolen Generations records as a national cultural and historical responsibility, and resource collecting institutions to apply trauma-informed and Indigenous-led approaches to the description, access and return of these records, in alignment with the priorities of The Healing Foundation (n.d).
3. Invest in workforce capability in the library and archive sectors to support Indigenous priorities, including support for training such as demonstrated in the Australian Library and Information Associations (ALIA) and Jumbunna *Respect and Recognition* course (2025), and in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment research/survey across the sector (2021).
4. Embed Indigenous Data Sovereignty as a guiding framework for the cultural sector's use of digital infrastructure, including emerging artificial intelligence (AI) technologies applied to collections.
5. Recognise the Right of Reply to collections as a key principle of Australian truth-telling and reconciliation, finding opportunities to articulate this in the cultural policy, so that collecting institutions can operationalise it in their activities.
6. Resource Indigenous-led research and Indigenous Librarianship as a field to support the work of the national collecting institutions, including building stronger connections between Indigenous-led research and practice.

1. First Nations First: Living Indigenous Community Archives as Critical Cultural Infrastructure

Revive rightly placed First Nations First as the leading pillar of the National Cultural Policy. The renewed policy should extend this commitment beyond the major national collecting institutions and into the community settings where significant volumes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural materials are held and cared for. Across the country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, language centres, keeping places, land councils and community organisations hold extensive collections of photographs, recordings, language materials, records and digital files, frequently without dedicated infrastructure, staffing or long-term preservation funding.

These Living Indigenous Community Archives are cultural infrastructure (Thorpe, 2025). The renewed Policy should explicitly recognise this sector and provide dedicated, sustained funding streams for community-led archival care, connected with broader Federal Government arts and GLAM programs.

Many of the communities we work with hold hard drives full of cultural content and boxes of historical material waiting to be catalogued and digitised, with no long-term management in place. To respond to this need, our Hub is currently developing a *Community Archiving Toolkit* as part of the Indigenous Living Archives on Country project, funded under the auDA 2025 Community Grant Program. The Toolkit brings mainstream archival practice into dialogue with Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles and community protocols, and is being co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community archives. Resources of this kind are necessary but not sufficient. They need to sit within a national funding and infrastructure environment that recognises community archives as an ongoing area of cultural investment.

2. First Nations First: Access to Stolen Generations Records and Support for Truth-Telling

The renewed National Cultural Policy must reaffirm and extend the Commonwealth's commitments to Stolen Generations Survivors and their descendants regarding access to records. Records relating to the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are held across Commonwealth, state and territory archives, church and non-government collections, and a wide range of community organisations. Access to records is vital to reconnect with family, culture and Country, and for the broader work of truth-telling and healing. However, access is also frequently re-traumatising, fragmented across jurisdictions, and constrained by access regimes that were not designed with Survivor needs in mind.

Jumbunna Research is currently working in partnership with The Healing Foundation on the *Better Access to Stolen Generations Records* project (2026 – 2028). This work builds on the recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997), which set out clear measures for access to records. As the Healing Foundation notes in its last report (2025), only 6% of the 1997 *Bringing Them Home Report* recommendations aimed at supporting Stolen Generations survivors and their families have been clearly implemented. Stolen Generations survivors and their families should also have the right to reply to records and information that have been written and collected about them, often without consent. The renewed Policy should explicitly recognise access to Stolen Generations records as a national cultural and historical responsibility, support the implementation of the Healing Foundation's priorities in this area

3. Strong Cultural Infrastructure: Workforce and Research Capability across the GLAM Sector

The cultural infrastructure that supports First Nations priorities is, in significant part, a workforce. Without sustained investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and in the cultural capability of the broader workforce, the commitments made under First Nations First cannot be operationalised at scale. This is particularly acute in the library and archives sectors, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff remain significantly under-represented and where many practitioners are working without the formal foundations needed to engage respectfully with Indigenous knowledges and protocols (Thorpe, 2021).

The renewed Policy should set out a concrete commitment to workforce capability across the GLAM sector. This includes sustained investment in Indigenous-led training pathways, such as the *Respect and Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Cultures and Country in Australian Libraries* course, developed by the Jumbunna Research in partnership with the ALIA (2025). Sector-wide uptake should be actively supported by renewed Policy, alongside sustained investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, traineeships and leadership pathways across the GLAM sector.

Cultural infrastructure also includes Indigenous-led research and knowledge infrastructures that support the GLAM sector in translating policy into practice. University-based Indigenous research hubs, of which this Hub is one, sit alongside the national collecting institutions and provide a distinct set of contributions: independent research, methodological development grounded in Indigenous Data Sovereignty, postgraduate training of the next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander archivists and information professionals, and trusted brokering between communities and institutions.

4. Indigenous Data Sovereignty, AI and the Cultural Sector

As cultural institutions move further into digitisation, online access, and the application of artificial intelligence to collections, the renewed Policy needs to articulate a clear position on Indigenous Data Sovereignty. Information relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is held across the national, state and

territory collections, and is often culturally sensitive, personal, or restricted under community protocols. The application of AI to description, transcription, image recognition and access in this context raises distinct risks that require management in partnership with communities.

The Policy should set out an expectation that cultural institutions apply Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property principles in the design, procurement and deployment of digital and AI systems that interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials. This includes the right of communities to know what is being done with records relating to them, to control how those records are described and made accessible, and to be involved in decisions about whether AI tools are applied to those materials at all.

5. Embed the Right of Reply as a Key Principle of Australian Truth-telling and Reconciliation

The Right of Reply, that is, the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to respond to, correct and contextualise records and descriptions that concern them, is a key principle for the ethical care of GLAM collections. It is also directly connected to the work of truth-telling and to the access issues raised above in relation to Stolen Generations records.

The renewed Policy should explicitly recognise the Right of Reply and support collecting institutions to increase Indigenous engagement with materials to enhance their meaning through descriptive practice, access frameworks, community engagement protocols, and the proper resourcing of community-led description and contextualisation work.

6. Resource Indigenous-led Research and Indigenous Librarianship

The renewed Policy should recognise the importance of the intersection between research and practice in advancing Indigenous priorities across the GLAM sector. Indigenous research, when developed in partnership with GLAM practitioners and First Nations communities, generates methodologies and approaches that respond to community priorities and shape how institutions hold and care for Indigenous materials. It also builds an evidence base that the sector needs to translate policy commitments into action. It supports accountability, by providing data and analysis to measure progress.

The renewed Policy should also support the development of Indigenous Librarianship as a recognised field of research, teaching and practice in Australia. As we argue in our recent article (Thorpe and Booker, 2026), Indigenous Librarianship is a vital yet underdeveloped field in Australia, despite the formal recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts as a key professional knowledge domain in the ALIA Framework of Skills, Knowledge and Ethics for the Library and Information Services Workforce (ALIA, n.d). Sustained investment in Indigenous-led research and career pathways, supported by formal professional development and educational programs, is needed to ensure the future care of Indigenous Knowledges in Australian GLAM institutions.

Closing

The renewed National Cultural Policy provides an important opportunity to extend the ambition of Revive into the Indigenous community archives sector, to reaffirm and resource the Commonwealth's commitments to Stolen Generations survivors and their families regarding their records. Investment in the Indigenous archives workforce and research infrastructure to strengthen the First Nations First pillar. The Hub welcomes the opportunity to continue contributing to this work in partnership with the Department, the national collecting institutions, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

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