

National Cultural Policy Submission

Jessie Street National Women's Library

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

This submission is made by Jessie Street National Women's Library, which is a not-for profit community based cultural organisation, funded by members and donors, and staffed entirely by volunteers. The Library is supported by the City of Sydney with an Accommodation Grant.

Jessie Street National Women's Library (JSNWL) is a specialist research library and archive serving all members of the Australian public. Its name honours the pioneering feminist, activist for international peace and human rights, and contributor to social justice for the First People of this land.

The objectives of the library are to collect, preserve and promote knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage of Australia, to seek social justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to further international friendship and peace. To this end, the Library collects and preserves published and unpublished materials documenting the lives and experiences of all Australian women of all racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds and of all socio-economic and identity groups.

Our collections are regularly used by researchers, scholars and national institutions, for example the ABC and, recently, the Australian Museum of Democracy.

It will be evident that the JSNWL respects, contributes to and wishes to see furthered, each of the five pillars identified for the forthcoming National Cultural Policy.

In particular, as itself a **cultural institution**, and one committed to the preservation and celebration of the past as well as the present achievements of Australian women, the JSNWL would urge that the National Cultural Policy should recognise the importance of national institutions on which the depth and breadth of a thriving national culture depends.

Each of those national institutions is essential to ensuring all of the five pillars identified for the National Cultural Policy. Each of them depends on both the funding and independence from changing political opinions needed to meet their objectives and to ensure accessibility to all Australians.

Those institutions include:

- A National Library able to ensure continuity of and access to its essential far-reaching collections and affordable provision of its services to scholars, researchers and smaller collecting institutions such as our own. JSNWL itself discovered, for example, one such consequence of budgetary constraint in the considerably increased fee for use of the Trove facility assisting small collections like ours, and including, presumably, school libraries, with cataloguing.
- A National Archive able to achieve the essential preservation of all important national records, in paper as well as digitised forms, since digitisation alone does not ensure perpetual preservation.
- An adequately funded, truly independent and consequently respected national broadcaster (the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ABC), able to keep Australians informed of national and world affairs, without fear or favour, and to continue its rich sharing of cultural life through music, drama and informed discussion of wide-ranging issues. This also requires the restoration of the full ABC archiving service and staffing necessary not only for the

professional quality of ABC journalism, but also as part of the essential service of the broadcaster in preservation of the historical voice and life of the Australian people.

- A national system of public universities able to return to being places of innovative research and quality teaching rather than competitive big businesses. This would involve restoration of the quality and value of their teaching, with face-to-face instruction offered by experienced scholars and no longer dependent on the underpaid, limited time of casual staff. It would also involve restoration of respect for and accessibility to the studies broadly 'the Humanities' and including the literature, history, philosophies, linguistic and social studies of all world cultures. Recently, such studies have been placed among the most expensive, and consequently least accessible, of university offerings.
- A system of Technical and Further Education offering the dignity of training in respected trades and also restoring broad educational opportunities for those, including mature aged students, for whom the standard education system is not appropriate. Such opportunities should include the national cultural necessity of accessible language studies in English for newly arrived migrants and refugees.
- A national public education system at primary and secondary levels providing a broad national curriculum, including a discursive study of Australian and international history, built by educators through independent processes. The educational system should receive public funding according to the Gonski principles and at least equal to that delivered to fee paying schools and be assured of teachers receiving professional recognition and motivational pay. In order for national public schools to assist in establishing the place of Australians in international culture, the national education system should also restore language studies, particularly those of Australian Indigenous languages and the languages of Asian nations to Australian schools.

JSNWL Board and members do not believe that preservation and improvement of these great national cultural institutions should be seen as separate from or in competition with support for the many creative activities that, like them, are the lifeblood of our Australian culture.

All such activities, and those individuals who dedicate their lives to them, whether the creation of literature, the visual arts, theatre, composition and performance of music in all its forms, intellectual endeavours and, above all, the ongoing living culture of our First Peoples that is the essential foundation for Australian culture, must all be gathered into the National Cultural Policy.

In doing so, we stress the urgency of especially addressing the situation of the creative individuals and organisations neglected and hard hit during the difficult COVID years.