



## National Film and Sound Archive of Australia - Submission to the National Cultural Policy

The National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) welcomes the development of a new National Cultural Policy for Australia.

The NFSA is one of the nine national National Collecting Institutions (NCIs), which include the National Library of Australia, National Archives of Australia, National Gallery of Australia, National Museum of Australia, National Portrait Gallery, Australian National Maritime Museum, Bundanon Trust and the Museum of Australian Democracy. The NFSA is also a key part of Australia's screen sector, working in partnership with funding and training bodies - Screen Australia, the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), and the ABC, as well as the state screen funding agencies. The NFSA maintains active international partnerships with peer organisations, most recently including the Cannes Film Festival, British Film Institute and Cinémathèque Française. And, like other cultural organisations, the NFSA is heavily invested in arts and culture-based educational and health-related activities. The NFSA's remit reflects the reality that culture is intrinsically broad and inclusive, and that it does and should touch all areas of government policy.

As we go deeper into the digital age – an era when the scale and economic impact of videogames eclipse commercial film and music industries combined – audiovisual-based social media platforms shape public opinion, and the metaverse and other interactive environments are growing in complexity and reach. Yet, traditional forms of audiovisual media (film, radio, television) continue to have historic and contemporary impact. In this rapidly changing landscape, the NFSA is updating its strategic plan to make sure the institution delivers the best outcomes under its enabling legislation, and that it is of most value to all Australians. Our collection is accessed and enjoyed by a wide range of users, and we see a future in which we expand that level of connection using digital technology.

In short, the NFSA's future plan has three parts:

**Diversity** – there is more work to be done to ensure that the NFSA's collection, curatorial and sharing activities represent the cultural diversity and vitality of contemporary Australia, and that they recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as this nation's most fundamental and distinctive forms.

**Digitisation** – as the NFSA, like its national and international peers, digitises collections for long-term preservation, it must ensure that the new opportunities afforded by digitisation are realised for the benefit of the nation. These include improved searchability, accessibility, streaming and digital access.

**Dollars** – in a challenging economic environment, the NFSA must do more to augment public funding with private sources of revenue, while at all times demonstrating value for money for the Australian taxpayer, and the capacity to deliver more in a cost-effective manner.

**CANBERRA**

McCoy Circuit, Acton ACT 2601  
GPO Box 2002, Canberra ACT 2601  
P +61 2 6248 2000 F +61 2 6248 2222 Freecall: 1800 067 274

**SYDNEY**

Level 5, Building B, 33-35 Saunders St, Pyrmont NSW 2009  
PO Box 397, Pyrmont NSW 2009  
P +61 2 8202 0100 F +61 2 8202 0101 Freecall: 1800 067 274

**MELBOURNE**

Level 4, 2 Kavanagh Street, Southbank VIC 3006  
GPO Box 4317, Melbourne VIC 3001  
P +61 3 8638 1500 F +61 3 8638 1501 Freecall: 1800 067 274

With a relatively small increase in the Government's ongoing investment, the NFSA will be in a position to meet its expanding digital remit and deliver a forward-looking strategy to preserve and share Australia's cultural heritage in a way that is impactful and relevant for years to come.

The NFSA's specific responses to the five pillars of the new National Cultural Policy are attached. The NFSA looks forward to continuing its strong partnership with government, peer institutions, and Australian media and educational institutions, as one of the country's most dynamic and valued cultural institutions.

### **Pillar 1: First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.**

Of the NFSA's nearly four million collection artefacts, some 30,000 are of First Nations provenance: documentary footage, feature films, television, radio, music, home movies and oral histories. While the scale of our First Nations collection is growing – particularly works by contemporary practitioners - much of the historical collection is not currently accessible or well understood. As collecting and cataloguing protocols for First Nations materials have changed over time, more work is required to understand what is held in our collection, who has cultural ownership of the material, and who can access it.

This material represents a unique record of Australian First Nations knowledge and creative output – an invaluable resource to build understanding amongst all Australians, and for First Nations people to celebrate and revitalise Culture, including language. The work to research, catalogue, digitise and (where appropriate) repatriate First Nations content in our collection is critical. But it takes time and skill – and has to be done by and in partnership with First Nations people.

The NFSA's curatorial workforce has decreased over the years in response to resourcing constraints. Ideally, at this point the institution would be expanding its team of First Nations curators and researchers to better understand and use current collection holdings, expand the collection of First Nations material, and partner with similar institutions to establish standardised cataloguing and usage protocols under the guidance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. The NFSA conforms with recognised protocols around the management of First Nations material, including ICIP protocols. We already have skills and expertise in this area, but there is more we need to do to ensure we manage First Nations collection material appropriately.

The NFSA is an Australian leader in audiovisual preservation, with expert staff in this field. Recent Australian Government project funding has allowed the NFSA to increase its capacity to digitise at-risk material at scale. We are aware that many audiovisual collections are held by First Nations communities and organisations around the country and these represent an invaluable and fragile audiovisual record. We are positioned to partner with First Nations communities and organisations to help identify, map and preserve these collections (commonly referred to as 'distributed national collections'), including on Country. Increased operational support would allow the NFSA to use existing infrastructure and skills to lead a comprehensive national approach to this work.

The NFSA has demonstrated its ability to preserve and promote First Nations stories, working in partnership with First Nations communities, individuals and organisations. For example:

- > In 2019 the NFSA received funding through the Indigenous Languages and Arts program to digitise the Central Australian Aboriginal Men's Collection from the Strehlow Research Centre, in partnership with Traditional Custodians. This preservation work has provided the Traditional Custodians with unprecedented access to recordings of their cultural heritage and language on Country, assisting senior men to teach language, ceremony, and song in order to maintain Culture.
- > In 2021, the NFSA launched Carriberrie Online, an educational website introducing students to Aboriginal song and dance through 360-degree documentaries shot on country with nine cultural groups. The films can be watched online or with VR headsets and come with teachers notes developed with community. The project won Best in Show – Multimedia at the Museums Australasia Multimedia & Publication Design Awards.

- > In 2021, the NFSA partnered with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) to deliver the *Common Problems Shared Solutions* symposium – focusing on what is needed to support digitisation of the distributed national collections of First Nations material.

## **Pillar 2: A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.**

The ubiquity of screen-based creation and consumption means that audiovisual culture is broadly representative of contemporary Australian society. It is safe to say that, in 2022, “everyone is on their screens, all of the time”. Audiovisual consumption and participation crosses lines of age, gender, geography, language, economic capacity and ability.

The NFSA’s remit to collect, preserve and share Australia’s audiovisual culture means we are in the midst of this cultural phenomenon, with a collection of artistic, social and scientific importance. The stories we preserve include feature films, television advertisements, hit songs, sports matches, home movies, natural history and documentary footage. As digital technologies place the means of production into the hands of more and more people, the stories being made in Australia are increasingly representative of the cultural identities and interests of contemporary Australians. This creates enormous responsibilities and opportunities for the NFSA to ensure that our collection represents this diversity and cultural dynamism.

We are already ensuring that we tell diverse stories, and that our collection reflects the audiovisual content that is being created and consumed today. For example:

- > In 2019 we embarked on collecting digital games and interactive media, which are one of the most prevalent forms of screen-based content in Australia today. In 2022, we appointed our first dedicated digital games curator. While gaming is already a large, global industry, it is still a relatively new one, and there is an opportunity to ensure that we are able to document and preserve the early stages of Australian games development. The Australian Government’s Digital Games Tax Offset legislation (due to be passed in 2022) provides, for the first time in Australia, a legal deposit-style arrangement for digital games – through which supported games are required to be offered to the NFSA for inclusion in the national collection. This will supplement an extension of the existing Deliverables arrangements with Screen Australia and state and territory screen funding bodies, under which a copy of funded projects must be provided to the NFSA. Australia is one of a handful of countries internationally with such arrangements in place. While there remain technical challenges, we are well on the way to ensuring Australian digital games, and Australia’s gaming culture, are archived for the future. With additional resourcing we will be able to build fit-for-purpose digital infrastructure to manage our games collection, and to build our games curatorial team.
- > Through the *NFSA Restores* program, the NFSA undertakes high quality digital restorations of Australian films and documentaries, so that they can be seen in today’s digital cinemas. Due to the resource-intensive nature of such detailed restoration work, fewer titles are restored now than in the past. The NFSA selects titles carefully to ensure that they reflect diverse stories and creative influences. In recent years, films restored under the *NFSA Restores* banner include *Radiance*, *Floating Life* and *Storm Boy*. Documentaries include *My Survival as an Aboriginal*, *Witches and Faggots*, *Dykes and Poofers*, and *Mabo: Life of an Island Man*. With greater support in this area we could expand the scale and diversity of the program.
- > In 2022 the NFSA partnered with students from the Australian National University to design *Home of the Blizzard*, an NFSA-branded interactive game based on Sir Douglas Mawson’s Antarctic Expedition, which was Highly Commended in the Museums Australasia Multimedia and Publication Design Awards.

### **Pillar 3: The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.**

Throughout the 20th century, many of Australia's best loved and most successful artists and cultural practitioners have come from the audiovisual sector – film, television, and music. Increasingly, this includes local heroes from the burgeoning interactive games sector who, like Australian performers and creative technicians before them, achieve international success at disproportionate levels. The NFSA has long been a champion of Australian practitioners, and since 2019 has been one of the world's foremost archives in the growing area of videogame preservation.

As an active partner of other public screen institutions such as Screen Australia, AFTRS and the ABC, the NFSA preserves the work of leading Australian artists throughout history and ensures that the work of contemporary makers is preserved for future generations. We work collaboratively with these institutions to provide a career continuum, encompassing skills development, funding and creative support, revenue generation opportunities, employment and archiving of content. In future, we can generate revenue for artists by more broadly distributing collection items and identifying co-production opportunities for new archival based programs and formats.

The NFSA supports the works of Australian artists through copyright protection and licensing activities. The majority of works in the NFSA collection are owned by third-party copyright holders – usually the artists or companies that produced or created the materials in the first place. By facilitating use of copyright material, the NFSA ensures ongoing income for creators of the works being accessed from the collection. By increasing its activities, including in streaming, the NFSA can contribute more to the promotion and support of Australian audiovisual artists and works.

The NFSA has demonstrated its commitment to celebrating and supporting artists:

- > In 2022 the NFSA is commissioning two works focused on supporting an artistic interpretation of the audiovisual collection. Through the Re/Vision project the NFSA has commissioned Wiradjuri artist, filmmaker and poet, Jazz Money, to create a new audiovisual work providing a reinterpretation of collection material from a First Nations viewpoint. The resulting feature film, *Winhaghana*, is currently scheduled to premiere at the British Film Institute in February 2023. Queer Vision, delivered in partnership with Sydney WorldPride in 2023, will present a reinterpretation of the NFSA's vast digitised collection that responds to the World Pride 2023 theme 'Gather, Dream, Amplify'.
- > The NFSA operates two ongoing programs that support the development of artistic audiovisual works by reducing archival access fees. The 'Zero Fee License', and 'Take Three' initiative provide free access to material from the collection for use by Australian independent documentary makers, students, and emerging artists. As the NFSA is under increasing pressure to generate commercial revenue through its access activities, these programs remain important ways to ensure that artists and audiovisual creatives can access the collection at no cost to generate new work.
- > The NFSA's long-running oral history program records the personal stories and recollections of Australian careers in film, television, radio and music, recognising and documenting the significant input of Australian artists. In 2022 the NFSA released a series of oral histories by leading stars and filmmakers featured in the NFSA's *Australians & Hollywood* exhibition, highlighting the impact that Australian artists have had on the international film industry. These recordings reflect only a small percentage of the NFSA's full oral history collection. With further resourcing, the NFSA could digitise these materials and ensure that they are available for research and use.

#### **Pillar 4: Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.**

Like many Australian cultural institutions, the NFSA has struggled with a material decline in resourcing in real terms, particularly over the past decade. Our staffing levels have dropped by more than 20% since 2012, while the collection has almost doubled in the same period. These constraints are particularly challenging as the institution becomes increasingly reliant on digital tools for preservation, storage and distribution that necessitate a growing ICT workforce in an exceptionally competitive employment market. Further, in the decade since the release of the iPad, digital forms, technologies and industries have massively expanded the remit of the institution, which is still also responsible for the preservation of growing numbers of at-risk physical artefacts in obsolete and perishable forms. The growth in our digital business has not replaced but added to our ongoing and important analogue and onsite role.

These budgetary pressures have however curtailed our ambitions to showcase the collection and its creators through exhibitions, both onsite in Canberra and regionally through touring. Our current major exhibition, *Australians & Hollywood*, was recently extended to become a semi-permanent exhibition, and we have stopped the development of further temporary and touring shows.

In 2021, the NFSA received a welcome grant of \$41.9 million over four years from the Australian Government to fast track the preservation of at-risk items held by eight different national institutions – a vital investment to ensure that generations of content held in forms such as magnetic tape is not lost forever. However, the NFSA's ongoing ability to respond to digital technologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – including games preservation, enhanced search and discoverability tools for industry and the general public, and the provision of streaming content services – is largely unfunded.

As the national audiovisual collection is increasingly preserved in digital form, it becomes theoretically more accessible, but this requires an investment in digital infrastructure and technology. The NFSA is actively addressing the barriers to make digital access a reality which include navigating the complexity and cost of rights management, improving searchability and expanding access via streaming.

- > The NFSA is determined to be an international leader in the preservation of digital games, ensuring that the achievements of Australian developers are preserved and promoted, and that Australia is at the forefront of this field. We are well-placed to achieve this goal, having commenced concerted work to collect Australian games in 2019. Increased support would allow the NFSA to expand our games expertise and to address technical challenges of preserving more complex digital formats.
- > We are working to increase access to the national audiovisual collection through AI-enhanced search tools for practitioners, researchers and users. These tools will allow users to search the entire collection via text and object recognition, supplementing the information in our collection catalogue.
- > Long-term, we will expand access to enjoyment of the collection through dedicated curated streaming media platforms and digital access services. We see significant potential in establishing an NFSA signature streaming platform, providing access to Australian archival material to audiences in Australia and overseas – similar to those offered by the British Film Institute and the French national audiovisual archive, l'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel. We are also working with our NCI partners on options for a consolidated digital access platform for national collections that, if funded, would allow all Australians to search, view and use our national collections in one place.

## **Pillar 5: Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.**

Audiovisual media are the cultural experience platforms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Increasingly, Australians get their information, entertainment, social connections and wellbeing through audiovisual materials including film, television, radio, music, podcast, games and interactive media. Streaming media platforms and interactive games are the first and second most popular forms of entertainment in Australian households (IGEA Digital Australia, 2022). Digital forms and distribution mean that audiovisual culture is broadly accessible across the country. The NFSA is the nation's audiovisual institution, with its items already broadly seen through our licensing programs for film, television and radio production, as well as through our social and online channels and educational and public programs. Our international peers of scale typically offer dedicated streaming channels, such as the British Film Institute's BFI Player and l'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel's Madelen in France. A similar service should be a priority in Australia, either as a standalone platform or for distribution through a third-party streaming service to ensure that Australian stories are appropriately represented and enjoyed on the screens and devices of Australians.

The NFSA works closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Office for the Arts to contribute to international public diplomacy and capacity building programs. We are currently working with Pacific Island nations to preserve at-risk film collections and train staff in conservation techniques, and in the last year have presented Australian cinema at 12 international film festivals.

As Australia's national audiovisual institution, the NFSA also recognises the vital importance of critical media consumption in the digital age. It is a founding member of the Australian Media Literacy Association and provides an introduction to the concepts of media literacy to school age students through its Media and Me program. The NFSA aims to deepen its specialisation in the area of media literacy education and provide services across the country in virtual and physical forms.

- > Our media-rich social channels punch well over their weight, reaching over 21 million people in 2021-22, while our YouTube channels had 5.8 million views during the same period.
- > Our new Media & Me program - which seeks to equip school students with the media literacy skills to engage critically with media in their everyday lives - was delivered as a virtual excursion reaching over 15,000 students and teachers in just two pilot sessions.
- > Audiences at risk of exclusion are reached through bespoke projects that leverage the collection's social impact. We recently completed a multi-year initiative which saw digital interactive presentations of popular collection material from 1920 to 1970 installed in residential care facilities across NSW. Medical staff and carers testified to the clips' benefits in reducing social isolation and triggering memory cascades in residents living with memory loss. The next phase, in partnership with UNSW and Dementia Australia, will deliver customised cinema programming that provides a positive impact to those living with dementia.