

National Cultural Policy Submission

Australian Media Oral History Group

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

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

Put First Nations art and culture at the centre of our approach to the sector

A Place for Every Story

Please note that our response here applies equally to pillars 3,4 and 5.

The Australian Media Oral History Group (AMOHG) is the only Australian interest group specialising in audiovisual media-related oral history. Over its 30-year history its members have recorded more than 450 oral histories for the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), preserving the memories of media practitioners, commentators and theorists in a vast range of diverse roles. The great Australian collecting institutions (NAA, National Library National Gallery, National Museum, National Portrait Gallery and the National Film and Sound Archive) have for many years faced existential threats to their ability to carry out these central tasks. Long term commitments are required to ensure their continued ability to serve the people.

The Centrality of the Artist

AMOHG believes that the preservation of Australia's cultural, and political, collective memory via the firsthand experience of those who have contributed to it is one of the first building blocks necessary to ensure that the nation's history is recorded and preserved.

Strong Institutions

The next building block is to ensure that those who follow and seek to draw upon these memories for their research and analysis of our society should have easy and direct access to these memories and stories.

Reaching the Audience

A particular concern of AMOHG is that the huge library of oral history in the collection of NFSA – over 6,000 recordings – is little known, has serious problems of easy access and therefore is little used. AMOHG supports the provision of adequate resources and funding for the Archive by Government so that this hidden national treasure can be brought to light.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

Strong Institutions

Access to Australia's cultural memory, and the lessons and education which follow, can only come about if our great national recording and collecting institutions are adequately resourced and are able to ensure access to their holdings for all who come after by the use of the most modern, efficient and

cost effective technology. Such access will require the maintenance of well-resourced infrastructure (Buildings, IT systems, storage facilities) but also the maintenance of adequately trained and informed staff.

By definition, the task of a collecting institution grows ever greater, as newly-created material is added to existing collections - and as the range of technologies used to create and access the works continues to expand.

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Reaching the Audience

Australia should be at the forefront of international expertise in the long and costly process of bringing Australia's history, its stories, its myths and its poetry to Australia's and the world's citizenry. This can only be done by Governments and institutions, large and small, having the capacity to reach these audiences. Without an audience the creation of our cultural life and the values personified therein have no purpose.

The Federal Government should wholeheartedly embrace a responsibility to support both the creation of our cultural life via support of artists, creators, teams, production units and the physical infrastructure needed for their work,(including schools, training institutions and academies) but also the physical and intellectual infrastructure need to ensure that the artists' output reaches an audience and is not swamped by the output of other nations.

If the need is identified the Federal Government should be prepared to give long term support but also prepared to use its constitutional powers to impose requirements, quotas and any other useful measures to ensure that Australian voices are heard.

The building block of access to and the availability of our national memory through the collecting institutions is a basic requirement of such activity.

In particular, AMOHG supports the maintenance of reasonable fees paid by the NFSA and other appropriate National, State and specialist archives to professional oral historians who research, record and transcribe oral histories on these institutions' behalf.

We are, however, concerned that access fees as currently charged by the NFSA are acting as a disincentive to use the collection and are inherently unfair.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

High quality, professional and ethical management of our cultural institutions and the direction given to them by their Boards and Councils is crucial. Boards and Councils should not be the subject of appointment by political preferment. AMOHG believes it is time for the Federal Government to reform the process of appointments to the Boards and Councils of these institutions to ensure that the processes are open, transparent, competitive and subject to Parliamentary oversight and scrutiny prior to any appointment being confirmed.

We also strongly support the Federal Government's stated aims and reasoning to -

- **Put First Nations art and culture at the centre of our approach to the sector.** There can be no cultural policy without a specific focus on First Nations art and culture.
- **Revive cooperation between federal, state and local governments** to ensure we have a national approach to arts and culture.
- **Reaffirm the need for arms-length funding.** The Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison governments have used arts funding as a personal plaything. Labor is clear – the selection of funding for performance and creation of works should not be determined by the personal taste of a minister.
- **Promote Australian creators on streaming platforms.** The Liberals have gone out of their way to reduce the amount of Australian content on our screens. They have also been far too slow to move on screen content obligations for streamers. We will work with all stakeholders to determine ways Australian content can be boosted for both Australian music and screen content on streaming platforms.

Background

AMOHG is an independent, voluntary association of professional media practitioners, oral historians, academics, archivists, journalists, critics, reviewers and others. The Group aims to encourage and conduct oral histories of practitioners in audiovisual media and those with a significant memory or knowledge of the social histories, operations, cultures and sub-cultures of audiovisual media production and reception.

AMOHG represents people who have contributed to the production of Australian stories over many decades.

Our work is devoted to ensuring that their work and memory remains embedded in the national consciousness so that those who follow may learn from and appreciate the contribution of those who have made significant contributions to Australia's cultural life through their work in film, television, broadcasting and all other aspects of the media. The importance of these lives and their memories cannot be overestimated. Their stories reflect their times and the contributions made since the dawn of the Australian Federation.

Oral histories are the recorded, unedited and preserved recollections of ordinary people: their lives, their work, their experiences. They can tell us much about those individuals, and together provide opportunities for a multi-dimensional view of events of the past. AMOHG believes that integral to understanding individual histories is hearing the voice of the interviewee.

More detailed information about AMOHG can be found at <https://amohg.wordpress.com/>