

# National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation, On behalf of an arts peak body

**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

**Note:** All initiatives involving First Nations culture and community must be based around First Nations voices and wishes. Initiatives requiring First Nations consultation should pay First Nations people for their time and expertise.

**Challenge:** First Nations cultural sites are at risk of damage and loss from mining and development – such as the recent destruction of the Juukan Gorge rock shelters in WA. Disasters such as these are a loss to the cultural memory of humankind.

- Opportunity: Revise heritage protection legislation and the process by which development proposals are assessed and approved, at a Commonwealth, State and Territory level, and embedding true consultation with First Nations peoples.

**Challenge:** Many First Nations arts centres, keeping places and cultural sites are under-resourced and remote. Specialist conservation training and/or expertise that could help sustain heritage collection and arts practitioners is concentrated in urban centres.

- Opportunity: In partnership with First Nations peoples, create preservation training opportunities (which may include funded, recognised qualifications and internships) located *in* communities and collections, linked to conservation support networks, and structured to suit local cultural and intangible needs.

References and case studies:

- ANKA Harvesting Traditional Knowledge <https://www.anka.org.au/assets/Archive/Project-Publications/ANKA-HTK-Booklet-A5-sml.pdf>
- ANKA Arts Worker Extension Program <https://anka.org.au/projects/arts-worker-extension-program/>
- Australian Museums and Galleries Association Community Museums National Network <https://www.amaga.org.au/community-museums/>

**Challenge:** In some cases, First National arts centres, keeping places and cultural sites hold significant cultural material that is at risk of degradation and loss.

- Opportunity: In partnership with First Nations peoples and First Nations governed organisations, create funded preservation projects to identify and address the needs of at-risk cultural heritage – including, where appropriate, digitisation projects.

Reference and case study:

- *When magnets collide: Digital preservation and access of at-risk audiovisual archives in a remote Aboriginal community*

**Challenge:** First Nations secret and sacred cultural objects and collections are held in Australian Federal, State, regional and overseas organisations, removed from their cultural and intangible meaning, connection, care and governance by First Nations communities.

- Opportunity: Create a nationally funded program to employ First Nations peoples to assist with provenance research and the application of cultural protocols, in order to support preservation and access to First Nations culture.
- Opportunity: Create a national inventory of First Nations collections so that First Nations people know what materials museums and galleries hold.
- Opportunity: Through continued support of a Repatriation Policy, create a strategy to identify cultural materials in need of repatriation and develop and deliver an annually funded action plan to meet targets identified by First Nations peoples.
- Opportunity: Develop a National First Nations Keeping Place governed and managed by First Nations people to protect and preserve secret and sacred First Nations cultural materials.
- Opportunity: Through continued financial support and development of museums, galleries, art centres, keeping places and cultural sites governed and managed by First Nations people, provide First Nations communities with employment opportunities and other economic, cultural, social and environmental opportunities.

**Challenge:** Many First Nations collections held in Australian Federal, State, regional and overseas organisations are not accessible to First Nations communities.

- Opportunity: Fund a national program to document and digitise First Nations collection held in Federal, State, regional and overseas organisations through the employment and training of First Nations community members.

### **A Place for Every Story**

**Challenge:** Significant cultural heritage is held outside of State and Federal cultural collecting organisations – for example, by universities, churches, historical societies, private businesses and by individuals – yet there is little sustained support for their documentation and preservation.

- Opportunity: Commission research to identify and document significant cultural heritage outside of State and Federal collecting organisations.
- Opportunity: Create regional conservation centres in partnership with local councils (see Bathurst pilot project reference below), or other suitable conservation support networks.

References and case studies:

- Sustainable conservation: a regional pilot program for regional NSW and emerging conservators <https://aiccm.org.au/network-news/sustainable-conservation-a-pilot-program-for-regional-nsw-and-emerging-conservators-aiccm-and-bathurst-regional-council/>
- Re-org Bathurst <https://aiccm.org.au/network-news/re-org-bathurst/>

**Challenge:** Digital access to cultural heritage and knowledge is increasingly important to Australians – to identity, education and livelihoods. Access to digital culture and to digitised resources creates a fairer, more innovative and more inclusive society but requires significant investment in infrastructure and in conservation, registration, imaging and digital preservation expertise.

- Opportunity: Revitalise and refund existing digital access platforms such as Trove and PANDORA (National Library of Australia)
- Opportunity: Invest in innovative infrastructure systems that support born digital arts and culture, such as video games, digital apps, and time-based media – such as that modelled by the Emulation as a Service Infrastructure (EaaS) network and the *Play it Again* project.
- Opportunity: Create a national program to fund the registration, conservation and digitisation of analogue formats, starting with those most at risk – as described by the National Film and Sound Archive's *Deadline 2025* plan.

References and case studies:

- *Play it Again: Preserving Australia's video game history of the 1990s*  
<https://transformativemedia.swinburne.edu.au/projects/play-it-again-preserving-australian-videogame-history-of-the-1990s/>
- *The Australian Emulation Network: Accessing Born Digital Cultural Collections*  
<https://isea2022.isea-international.org/event/long-paper-the-australian-emulation-network-accessing-born-digital-cultural-collections/>
- *Deadline 2025: collections at risk* <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/corporate-information/publications/deadline-2025>

**Challenge:** Without diverse perspectives, lived experience, and cultural knowledge in conservation we cannot expect equitable or fair decision-making around the heritage we preserve. Increasing diversity in the field of conservation will help to ensure that the future cultural record of Australia is truly reflective of our shared histories.

- Opportunity: Increase professional diversity by supporting school programs that expose the next generation of Australians to a career in conservation, heritage management and allied professions.
- Opportunity: Increase professional diversity by researching and investing in work-based training / higher degree apprenticeship-style education pathways into conservation, heritage management and allied professions that are more accessible for more Australians.

References and case studies:

- ICON Conservation Apprenticeships <https://www.icon.org.uk/careers/conservation-apprenticeships.html>
- Belle da Costa Greene Curatorial Fellowships  
<https://historyprogram.commons.gc.cuny.edu/belle-da-costa-greene-curatorial-fellowships/>
- Diversifying the Conservation Profession through Paid Internships and Training  
<https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/diversifying-the-conservation-profession-through-paid-internships-and-training/>

## The Centrality of the Artist

Cultural organisations such as art galleries, libraries and museums require systems, storage space (physical and digital) and expertise to collect, preserve, store and make accessible the enormous range of Australian creative and artistic output. NB This work occurs within government-supported cultural organisations *and* organisations outside this network.

Contemporary creative and artistic output is incredibly diverse - including literary and text-based works, film and TV, radio, music and audio, games, the visual arts, and the performance arts. These works may take traditional physical forms (e.g. paintings, sculpture, manuscripts), digital forms requiring physical devices to access (e.g. video games, ebooks, music and film recordings) or some combination of the two (e.g. time-based media).

Keeping creative and artistic works within cultural organisations supports artists and preserves their work for future generations. Due to ageing systems, limited storage space (physical and digital), and a lack of staff, the capacity to collect and provide access to contemporary creative and artistic works at many institutions is limited. See further discussion under 'Strong Institutions'.

## Strong Institutions

**Challenge:** Our national cultural and research organisations have suffered under two decades of 'efficiency dividends', resulting in staff and service cuts. This has severely reduced their ability to preserve our national identity and memory and to make it accessible to all Australians.

In April 2019, the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories released its findings and recommendations in the report *Telling Australia's Story — and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions* (Commonwealth of Australia 2019). The Committee addressed concerns such as the impact of efficiency dividends on cultural institutions. The report found that:

- Cultural institutions are struggling to complete core business in addition to growing their collections.
- Imposed staffing caps have forced organisations to hire temporary staff to cover shortfalls, a process more costly than hiring permanent staff or staff on longer contracts.
- Increased workloads for existing staff.
- Loss of corporate knowledge and specialist skills.
- Severe storage limitations for continuously growing collections.

The Committee recommended the Australian Government adopt measures to offset the impact of budgeting pressures, reassess imposed staffing caps, and develop permanent collection storage facilities 'in close consultation with relevant institutions to ensure it is fit-for-purpose to meet their current and future needs' (Commonwealth of Australia 2019, p. 123).

- Opportunity: Remove and reverse the budgetary cuts to our National cultural organisations, allowing a new era of intellectual innovation and growth.
- Opportunity: revisit the recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee's 2019 report *Telling Australia's Story — and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions*.

Reference:

- *Telling Australia's Story —and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions*, Commonwealth of Australia 2019:

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/National\\_Capital\\_and\\_External\\_Territories/NationalInstitutions/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/National_Capital_and_External_Territories/NationalInstitutions/Report).

**Challenge:** education and experimentation are key to the creative arts and workers in the creative economy. Yet over the last two decades, tertiary education of any kind (university, TAFE, apprentice-based etc) has become less accessible, through narrowing of study paths and cost increases. Australia's cultural heritage sites and institutions rely on a strong relationship with Higher Education institutions to train current and future professionals for the ongoing care, management and interpretation of Australia diverse cultural heritage.

- Opportunity: Reverse the increases to university fees, in particular those in the Humanities, and promote educational pathways in collection care and heritage management.

**Challenge:** As with many other professions, conservation flourishes when it is able to draw on people from diverse backgrounds – chemistry, archaeology, visual arts, engineering, carpentry etc. Some of the skills we need are increasingly rare – such as horology, traditional bookbinding, gilding, and video repair. The current education system does not support 'career switching' or 'career combining', whereby (say) someone with excellent trade or artisanal skills could add a conservation qualification or vice versa.

- Opportunity: Create more flexible and affordable education pathways, which allow students to combine skills and qualifications in unique ways.
- Opportunity: establish a registry or central network of practitioners of arts, crafts, technology and engineering 'heritage' skills and connect with existing apprenticeship / traineeship systems

**Challenge:** Regional Australia is growing, and regional collecting institutions have proven to be key contributors to regional economic growth through exhibitions and other cultural events, which create demand in hospitality, retail and tourism sectors. Yet the vast majority of funding for these 250 or so regional public collecting institutions comes from local governments with limited resourcing, despite many of these institutions acting as custodians over nationally significant cultural materials.

- Opportunity: Provide national level funding for regional collecting institutions, to improve display and storage facilities in line with conservation standards, and to enable improved access to cultural and artistic heritage.

Reference:

- Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries and Institutions  
[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House/Communications/Arts/Report/action?id=committees%2Freportrep%2F024535%2F78293](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Communications/Arts/Report/action?id=committees%2Freportrep%2F024535%2F78293)

## Reaching the Audience

In 1996, the Heritage Collections Council (HCC) was established as a collaborative national venture between the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the museum sector. The HCC lead data collection projects, published key resources such as *reCollections* (collection care), *Be Prepared*

(disaster preparedness) – still key resources for the GLAM sector – and played a key advocacy role with the Cultural Ministers Council and other bodies.

- Opportunity: establish a new equivalent to the Heritage Collections Council, to play a leading role in data collection, networking and advocacy, across all three levels of government.

**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:**

### **First Nations**

The AICCM supports First Nations peoples seeking to protect and sustain their cultural heritage. We aim to make conservation and preservation activity outward-looking, participatory, and centred around people and community, respecting traditional modes of caring for cultural collections. We seek to foster environments where conservation decisions are led by the meaning and value of objects and by those to whom they mean the most.

### **A Place for Every Story**

[See 'Strong Institutions', noting that conservators in a private practice do much to conserve, preserve and make accessible cultural heritage outside of government organisations]

### **The Centrality of the Artist**

As material and craft experts, conservators work with living artists and makers to help them achieve their vision and record their work for posterity – through material selection, documentation, exhibition installation, and cleaning and repair.

### **Strong Institutions**

A significant percentage of our members work for State and Federal cultural organisations, to conserve and preserve Australia's cultural heritage and to make it accessible for Australians.

Their work also supports those engaged in smaller and volunteer-based cultural work, through the provision of advice and expertise.

Australia's cultural organisations and conservators have frequently been world-leading in terms of innovative practice – e.g. the National Archives of Australia and the National Library of Australia have been world leaders in digital preservation and concepts of distributed national collection – but budgetary and resource constraints limit further possibilities for innovation.

### **Reaching the Audience**

AICCM seeks to make conservation expertise and knowledge available to individual Australians, by helping them to care for their personal archives and keepsakes.

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

### **Scope and terminology**

Materials and heritage conservation requires a broader view of culture than may be implied by 'the arts'. Conservators work with the material record of all areas of human endeavour – the creative and performing arts, crafts and trades, built heritage, medicine and health, technology and engineering, the sciences, politics, sport, and war. The National Cultural Policy framework at times emphasizes the creative and performing arts, and at others appears to reference culture in a broader sense.

The Policy should clearly outline its scope (preferably the broadest possible) and include definitions of words and concepts that may be interpreted differently according to the background of the reader.

### **A National Conservation Policy**

In 1995 Australia introduced a National Conservation Policy for the Conservation of Moveable Cultural Heritage, a first in the world – since lapsed. The Policy provided a framework for government, private, community and individuals involved in the care of cultural heritage. Renewing this policy would advance the conservation of cultural heritage in remote and regional communities and in non-government organisations, delivering significant benefits and addressing inequality.

Reference:

- The National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Moveable cultural Heritage, 1995 – Cultural Ministers Council and the Heritage Collections Committee (available at [https://aiccm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NationalConservationandPreservationPolicyforMovableCulturalHeritage1995\\_compressed.pdf](https://aiccm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NationalConservationandPreservationPolicyforMovableCulturalHeritage1995_compressed.pdf))

### **Disaster Preparedness funding for culture at risk from climate change and natural disasters**

Our cultural heritage is increasingly at risk from extreme weather events, floods, bushfires and coastal damage. The AICCM helps keepers of cultural heritage to navigate and manage the effects of climate change and natural disasters.

- Embed conservation into State and Federal emergency preparedness networks to help prevent losses and to aid timely salvage and recovery of damaged material.
- Fund disaster preparedness for regional collections and keeping places, to protect Australia's dispersed cultural heritage and cultural memory from climate change.
- Fund emergency assistance grants to assist the salvage and recovery of cultural heritage damaged in disasters.
- Establish a network similar to the National Heritage Responders group in the US, who respond to the needs of cultural institutions and the public during emergencies and disasters through coordinated efforts with first responders, state agencies, vendors, and the public.

Reference and case study:

- National Heritage Responders – United States  
<https://www.culturalheritage.org/resources/emergencies/national-heritage-responders>