



Professional Historians Association (Vic & Tas) Inc.
PO Box 1223
Carlton VIC 3053
Australia

National Cultural Policy Submission

Professional Historians Association (Vic & Tas)

About us: The Professional Historians Association (Victoria & Tasmania) Inc (the PHA) is a membership community of over 230 accredited historians. We work to support professional historians and act to raise the profile and value of history and historians in the community in order to achieve excellence in the discipline.

What we do: We advocate on behalf of historians, provide professional development and networking opportunities, and liaise with businesses, organisations, communities and all levels of government who seek the work of professional historians.

Who our members are: Professional accredited historians. The occupation of historian is defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as social professionals who 'research and study human behaviour, society and institutions from current and historical perspectives'. The indicative skill level is 'commensurate with a bachelor degree or higher qualification' and the ABS classes the role of a historian as a cultural and creative occupation using the ANZSCO code.

Our response to the National Cultural Policy Submission:

First Nations

The PHA supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the truth-telling process it advocates. History holds a central role in the truth-telling process, a role that must be recognised, discussed, and heard. As professional historians we recognise the ability of history to oppress. History, however, can also act to liberate. Among its members, the PHA supports First Nations historians and researchers, believing that their histories are vital. We support First Nations people and their culture through research via traditional primary sources, by gathering oral histories, by assisting with the interpretation and care of cultural objects, heritage places, and events. Support is required for First Nations communities and First Nations historians to tell their stories, to be heard and for action to be taken, to enable the wider Australian people to listen and respond. Non-indigenous historians help facilitate such processes, working with First Nations communities to ensure their stories are told collaboratively and in meaningful and powerful ways.

The Centrality of the Artist

Too often, the role of the historian has been defined by the misconception that history is solely a scholarly pursuit, detached from the cultural and creative domain. Within the varied role of a historian lies a creative artist and storyteller. Professional historians work across multiple categories of education, media, libraries and archives, literature, museums, heritage, publishing

and film in any given project. Professional historians welcome opportunities to collaborate with other creative practitioners and often do so in ways that are not always obvious. Our work can be found in private homes, in schools, at all levels of government, in collecting institutions, community archives, and historical societies. Historians through their work build bridges to understandings from vast collections of raw historical data. They bring to life stories of the past to connect people, places, events and perspectives. As articulated by Professors Michelle Arrow and Frank Bongiorno, 'History is both a scholarly pursuit and a widely shared leisure activity. Millions of Australians visit museums, archives, libraries and galleries each year, both in person and online.'¹

We strongly advocate that history and the work of the historian be seen as a cultural and creative activity. It is not only a subject in the education curriculum, or a way to describe our collective national identity and past, but a widely practiced discipline and lifelong activity.

A Place for Every Story

Throughout Australia's post settlement history, there has not been a place for every story. Stories have been lost to time, hidden, silenced, embellished, mythologised, embraced and nationalised. History has uncovered stories, exposed myths and interrogated well known stories. History is always evolving, changing form as new evidence and new perspectives come to light.

The value of tertiary education in history, humanities and the arts has been declining. Funding cuts are well documented and unlike the benefits of compounding interest from financial investment, the GLAM sector is experiencing compounding neglect.

We question if the nation is affording adequate respect and financial investment in the discipline of history, whether it be a paid occupation, volunteer organisation or leisurely pursuit. Recognition needs to be provided to the significant market of family history. The digitisation and increased access to records is of immense value to professional and amateur historians.

Strong Institutions

For historians to continue their important work, strong institutions are needed. Fundamental to every history are the collections from galleries, libraries, archives and museums. These institutions hold primary material that informs and contributes to Australia's collective and diverse identities. Collections are ever-growing as each generation creates new records related to contemporary times. Historians are the specialists who research, disseminate, interpret raw historical material converting vast and complex concepts into formats understood by the community. More than ever historians are the bridge between the vast repositories of information and people who want to know about the past.

Under investment in collection institutions has whittled away resources available for specialist staff to ensure access to collections or the care of historical artefacts. Collections languish in backlogs of registration or conservation. Historical interpretation of collections is hindered as access requests take years to process. Cultural institutions specific to the GLAM sector usually

¹ <https://theconversation.com/what-good-is-a-new-national-cultural-policy-without-history-188741>

need a mix of infrastructure for collection storage, collection presentation, collection access and care as well as digital infrastructure to provide people access to historical material whether it be in person or online.

The PHA strongly believes that greater financial support is needed for Australia's national cultural institutions to ensure our national and state archives, libraries, museums, and galleries long term security, capacity to function and to meet legislative requirements. In particular, we argue that the National Archives of Australia should be provided with a purpose-built facility and allocated sufficient funding to preserve its collections, staff its premises, and provide greater access to archives. Secure funding is needed for the National Archives of Australia to thrive into the future with certainty.

The PHA also calls for the government to appoint experienced and accredited historians to more boards and councils of major national cultural institutions.

We strongly urge that the National Cultural Policy be written with other government portfolios in mind to assist in making history more accessible. We also urge reconsideration of the former Government's Job-Ready Graduate's Package 2020, which has had disastrous results for the humanities at universities.

Reaching the Audience

Our histories do their greatest work when they are being engaged with, discussed and interrogated. The PHA works to support its members to bring exciting and engaging work to diverse audiences. We provide training to our members and advocate on their behalf to promote the value of history. Professional Historians work to make stories of the past accessible and to reflect the changes in Australia's population and society. However, the work of a historian is often precarious, made more difficult by the lack of support and funding available towards historians, cultural institutions, and history departments at universities.

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

Women Standing Strong

Women consistently outnumber males in census numbers for the occupation of historian and this is reflected in our membership. Investment in history is an investment in women and occupations for women. This story multiplies when applied to galleries, libraries archives and museums.

The ABS's Discussion Paper: *Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts, Australia, 2013* discusses the concepts in defining cultural and creative activity. Creative activities were grouped in a concentric circle. The activities at the centre were considered to produce the highest degree of cultural and creative content in their output relative to the output's commercial value.² The two central rings comprised music, literature, performing arts, visual arts, museums, galleries, archives, libraries, film and photography. Historians and history intersect and interact with all these disciplines, most of which have a mainly female cohort.

² 5271.0.55.001 - Discussion Paper: *Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts, Australia, 2013*, ARCHIVED ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 14/06/2013.

There are countless opportunities and countless stories that could be generated, providing the means for women to build more stable careers and to work towards tackling important women's issues, such as gender-based domestic violence. Making a place for historians to weave the stories from their research in these creative and cultural activities enriches Australian identity, Australian knowledge, Australian pride, Australian acknowledgement of uncomfortable truths and histories, and ultimately providing the means to move forward towards a better future for all Australians.