



PO Box 9177
Deakin ACT 2600
www.historians.org.au

National Cultural Policy Submission

Professional Historians Australia

About us: Professional Historians Australia (PHA) represents over 500 professionally accredited historians across all Australian states and territories. The PHA and its state and territory associations are committed to advocating historical perspectives in public debates concerning interpretations of history and the keeping of documentary, environmental and other historical records.

What we do: We are the peak body that represents six state and territory bodies of the professional historians association. We advocate on behalf of historians, maintain and encourage adherence to professional standards and ethics among 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.

Our response to the National Cultural Policy Submission:

First Nations

PHA supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the truth-telling process it advocates. History – the understanding, sharing, listening and discussion of – is essential to this process. Historians, both First Nations historians and non-indigenous historians, have an integral role to play in our ability to recognise the power of history, the role it has played in the past oppression and silencing of First Nations people and the way it can also liberate and amplify First Nations history, culture and diversity. 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. Among its members, 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.



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The Centrality of the Artist

History is a creative practice and one that sits squarely within the creative arts portfolio. PHA strongly advocates 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. Historians are story-tellers first and foremost and the interpretation of the past requires a creative mind. Our membership of professional historians work across a variety of different fields including but not limited to museums, galleries, archives, media companies, libraries, heritage firms, educational institutions and freelance consultancies. We frequently collaborate with other creative professionals to produce history in a wide variety of formats including websites, films, tv series, exhibitions, articles, books – both non-fiction and fiction, soundscapes, podcasts and more. Historians bring the past to life and professional historians, make that past accessible for everyone.

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, 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 value volunteer historian associations provide in caring for, cataloguing and preserving important historical collections. Additionally, the crucial role volunteers play in digitising and translating historical resources in collecting institutions such as the National Archives Australia and the National Library Australia.

Strong Institutions

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



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argue that the National Archives of Australia (NAA) 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 NAA 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.

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. These institutions are not only essential for historians to continue our work, but crucial for the preservation of Australian culture. 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. PHA has advocated strongly for many years for more serious investment in our collecting institutions. Collections are left languishing awaiting registration or in danger of disintegration waiting for conservation. Research by historians and others is delayed years as timely access to records is prevented. The fact that the NAA was reduced to a crowd-funding campaign in 2021 to preserve some critical records of national significance was shameful.¹

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

History has the biggest impact when it engages an audience. PHA members produce engaging and exciting history and we want our audiences to enjoy, discuss and interrogate history. We provide training and professional development for our members and promote [the value of history](#) widely beyond our profession. Professional historians work to make stories

¹ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/archive-passes-the-hat-in-desperate-bid-to-save-australia-s-history-20210516-p57sb3.html>



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of the past accessible and to reflect the changes in Australia's population and society. This work however, is often precarious and made more so by the lack of funding and support given to historians, projects of historical significance and cultural institutions.

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

Women and volunteers

The National Cultural Policy needs to recognise the important and essential role that volunteer community members play in preserving and making accessible historical collections from a local to a national level. Without the ongoing volunteer support, professional historians would not be able to do the work that we do.

Our membership of over 500 members reflects the census data that shows women consistently outnumbering men in the occupation of historian. Investment in history is an investment in women and occupations for women. This story multiplies when applied to galleries, libraries archives and museums. Historians interact with almost all sectors of the creative and cultural sector which also skews largely female. Better job-security and more opportunities for women in these areas will enhance all aspects of society and make a better place for all Australians.