

# NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

DISCUSSION PAPER  
SUBMISSION

## NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY DISCUSSION PAPER: SUBMISSION FROM NATIONAL & STATE LIBRARIES AUSTRALASIA

Name Mr Alan Smith  
Chairman, National & State Libraries Australasia

Organisation National & State Libraries Australasia  
www.nsla.org.au

Email nsla@slv.vic.gov.au

Phone (business hours) 03 8664 7512

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Yes

No

### 1. About National & State Libraries Australasia (NSLA)

National & State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) represents the National, State and Territory Libraries of Australia and New Zealand. The combined collections held in these ten major research libraries constitute a significant portion of our nations' culture, knowledge and research infrastructure. These collections are our irreplaceable assets, currently valued at more than AUD5 billion, and they are being added to continuously. We collect and provide access to physical and online information; to the born-digital and turned-digital record of our communities in many languages; to the research data sets, creative works and complex media now being generated and repurposed; as well as to unique treasures of literature, history and the arts.

In 2010-11:

- 9.4 million people visited our libraries;
- 240 million pages were viewed on our websites;
- 1,491 terabytes of digital collections were stored;
- \$34.7 million was spent purchasing resources for our collections;
- \$5.6 billion was the total asset value of our collections; and
- \$1.08 billion was the total asset value of our buildings/sites.

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NSLA Libraries have a unique and practical collaboration, with an integrated program of work and common strategic goals. This is a mature partnership, working together to achieve more than each member library can achieve on this own.

Libraries, particularly national and state library collections, have a broad purpose and mission. They enable education, innovation, business development, literacy, critical thinking, social cohesion, freedom of information, equality of access to knowledge, equality of access to technology, creativity, cultural identity, civic spaces, digital literacy and much more. People engage actively with our collections. They repurpose what they find to create new research, new ideas, new knowledge and new works of art.

In the National Cultural Policy framework, libraries are defined as “core arts”, and as part of the cultural industries. This aligns with where libraries sit within most government structures in Australia. It is important to note however that libraries, and the other major cultural collections institutions such as museums and galleries, are significantly different to the other “core arts” such as music, performing arts, literature, visual arts, etc. The legislated role for libraries carries us across jurisdictions into many parts of the education, community development, social cohesion, multiculturalism, rural and regional services, and business development sectors.

For the National Cultural Policy, it would be particularly useful to state these differences and to explicitly recognise the role of cultural collections. They are the major public-funded institutions that preserve and make available Australia’s wealth of knowledge, cultural identity and creativity.

### **Recommendation 1**

National cultural collection institutions should be recognised separately within the National Cultural Policy. The mission and purpose, the scale and reach, the overlap into so many sectors of government and community, and the challenges for the future, demonstrate that these institutions cannot be encompassed in the broad “core arts” definition.

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## **2. Do you support the development of a National Cultural Policy, and why?**

NSLA welcomes the development of a National Cultural Policy. A coherent national policy can provide the leverage and the focus that channels funding to agreed national priorities. For libraries, where our role spans many sectors, a national policy can bring together the complex parts and provide a clear statement of priority and intent.

For NSLA Libraries and the other major national cultural collections institutions, the national priorities are digitisation and digital preservation. National funding is required to digitise Australia's cultural and information collections so they can be accessible online. To date, digitisation has concentrated on selected parts of the heritage collections of pictures, manuscripts, historic newspapers and rare or unique items, with great achievement, though still only a fraction has been made available online. Australia lags many other countries in directing extensive public funding to mass digitisation and the pressure to address this is growing. If we fail to digitise, there will be no significant Australian cultural presence on the web, for the rest of the world or for Australians.

Digitisation must be supported by effective preservation of digital assets for the future. To preserve and provide access to digital content created on many generations of technology is an evolving and critical body of work. The documentary record of Australian life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is now in digital form. The digital content that requires preservation for the future is increasing exponentially, encompassing more types of materials and collections. It includes personal, government, research and company archives that are now predominantly born-digital, as well as the need to select and preserve web content. Websites are fluid with constantly changing content and only a small fraction are selected and preserved at designated intervals. The use of ebooks on ereaders and tablets is also shifting to mainstream and is expected to continue to rise sharply.

In 2011, NSLA commissioned a report into the library digitisation funding arrangements and activities internationally. While many models of partnerships and funding exist, the countries with the most progress and success in digitising cultural collections, and thereby broadening the access and use through their societies, are supported by national Information Policies or Cultural Policies. These policies emerge as drivers of focus and funding.

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*Government support for mass digitisation activities undertaken by cultural institutions is quite clearly influenced by the status of the political, economic, social, technology, and legal environments. Typically, countries that are highly ranked by the OECD for ICT/connectivity indicators have opted to integrate mass digitisation as a specific strategy within an overarching national digital or information policy: this approach combines public investment with quantifiable targets for the large-scale digitisation of cultural heritage materials. Similarly, some governments have chosen to fund mass digitisation as a means to deliver economic efficiencies and/or stimulate employment during periods of economic decline.*

Digitisation Research Report, National & State Libraries Australasia,  
September 2011

In Australia, the national priority of digitisation has been recognised in a number of recent government forums and inquiries. Bringing this recognition together into the new National Cultural Policy, can clearly demonstrates Australia's strategic intent.

*Digitising the collections of Australia's major national institutions by 2020*  
Top Ideas – Creative Australia Stream, Australia 2020 Summit  
Government Response, April 2009

*That the Government develop a strategy for the digitisation of Australia's culturally and historically significant content (Recommendation 11)*

Inquiry into the Role and Potential of the NBN  
House of Representatives, Report, August 2011

### **3. What are your views about each of the four goals?**

These four goals align strongly with the role and strategic direction of libraries. Support for libraries is support for the achievement of these goals. Libraries, whether they are national and state libraries or public libraries, are uniquely placed in their access to the community and their recognition as free, welcoming, safe, open, accessible public institutions. They are online enterprises as well as physical spaces throughout metropolitan, regional and rural Australia.

Broadly, the strategic directions for NSLA Libraries are - to reflect the diversity of Australian communities in our collections and services, to focus on improving literacies and expanding our

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reach through all parts of the country, as well as the three NSLA [Re-imagining Libraries](#) Strategies endorsed by all our libraries in 2008:

***One Library** aims for a welcoming, easy, open and consistent experience for those using our libraries and our collections, with services available at the point of need and community contributions collected and valued.*

***Accessible content** All our content must be easily discoverable online as information-seeking is now centred in the digital sphere.*

***Transforming our culture** to ensure that the evolution of our culture reflects the way people interact with our content and services. New skills are required for a new mix of roles. We need more flexibility, agility, innovation opportunities and rapid response capability.*

Below, under each goal, are examples of approaches, programs of work and initiatives by NSLA Libraries.

**GOAL 1:** To ensure that what the Government supports — and how this support is provided — reflects the diversity of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture

Examples in NSLA Libraries:

## **A. My Language**

The [My Language](#) website provides access to search engines, web directories and news in over sixty languages, supporting the diverse Australian community. It is a highly successful site, developed by a partnership of NSLA Libraries and hosted by the State Library of Victoria. It is an example of the shift in libraries to a co-curation model of engaging communities, working with different groups to document and provide services that extensively reflect our multicultural society.

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## **B. National Year of Reading 2012**

2012 is the [National Year of Reading](#) and all NSLA libraries are foundation partners in this major initiative to develop literacy and reading confidence across Australian society. Nearly half the population struggles without the literacy skills to meet the most basic demands of everyday life and work. There are 46% of Australians who can't read newspapers; follow a recipe; make sense of timetables, or understand the instructions on a medicine bottle. Libraries will be partnering with government, the media, writers, schools, publishers, booksellers, employers, child care providers, health professionals and other organisations to promote the National Year of Reading through 2012.

This builds on a wide range of reading and literacy initiatives across NSLA Libraries, including [Better Beginnings](#) family literacy program in Western Australia, [Summer Read](#) in Victoria, the [Australian Centre for Youth Literature](#), and many more.

Digital literacy is also a focus of library programming. As the September 2011 Demos (UK) report, [Truth, Lies and the Internet](#) demonstrates, young people have confidence in their skills in finding information online but not the necessary critical skills to recognise bias, propaganda, misinformation, disinformation, half-truths and mistakes. The State Library of Victoria's [ergo](#) website for senior secondary students is one initiative that addresses these significant digital literacy challenges.

## **C. Indigenous Knowledge Centres**

Libraries, services and programming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are provided extensively through NSLA Libraries, and we are key partners in Indigenous language projects. The State Library of Queensland in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local government councils have established 18 [Indigenous Knowledge Centres](#) in remote and regional areas of Queensland. They provide library services and the technologies required to preserve, share and create local knowledge collections.

*"Knowledge centres are breathing places ... they keep our culture strong for our children... a meeting place for traditional business with modern library services"*

State Library of Queensland website, accessed 14 October 2011

The Northern Territory Library supports 22 remote communities through the [Libraries and Knowledge Centres](#) program. The program was developed in response to requests from

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Indigenous communities who wanted assistance to preserve their cultural heritage and provide appropriate access to it.

## D. National Framework for Indigenous Library Services and Collections

In 2007, NSLA develop a national policy [framework](#) for services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The framework guides the aims and practices across NSLA libraries and provides a model for other libraries and cultural organisations. A revised framework will be developed in 2012.

## E. Bringing them home – Oral History Project

In December 1997, in response to the first recommendation of [Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families](#), the Commonwealth Government funded the National Library of Australia to develop and manage the Bringing Them Home Oral History Project. It ran from 1998 to 2002 collecting and preserving the stories of Indigenous people and others, such as missionaries, police and administrators involved in or affected by the process of child removals. Additional funding in 2009-2010 has enabled the Library to now provide access to many of the interviews [online](#). The Library has also been able to do follow-up interviews with some of the original Bringing Them Home interviewees. The interviews undertaken as part of this project are of immense historical significance and contribute to community cohesion.

**GOAL 2:** To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture

Examples in NSLA Libraries:

## A. Trove and Australian Newspapers Online

[Trove](#) is the national portal to Australian collections content, developed by the National Library of Australia. It provides easy search and access to catalogues and full-text digital content in all the NSLA Libraries as well as to thousands of other libraries and collection institutions. The development of Trove has driven innovation in collaborative systems and

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workflows within the industry. The outcomes for the community have been easy access to the wealth of resources in libraries, enabling creativity and new knowledge. People are actively using the content and creativity of others, whether from last century or last week, to build new knowledge and enrich their creative output.

The most used part of the Trove portal is Australian Newspapers Online, a fully searchable database of more than 6 million newspaper pages. Access to this digital content has revolutionized historical and humanities research in Australia and feeds into creative and academic innovation. Research that used to take many hours on microfilm or through old hardcopy newspapers now takes seconds. Articles can be tagged by users for their later use, and crowd-sourcing techniques are used to correct the text that has been transcribed from the original newspapers. In the first 3 years of the service, there were more than 3 million unique users of the online newspapers site – a far greater number than could ever have accessed historic newspapers in their physical format.

A recent example of the many uses of newspapers online is by actor Felix Williamson, rehearsing for his role in the new *Underbelly: Razor* TV series. As quoted by [The West Australian, September 9, 2011](#) he began his research on Trove.

## **B. Libraryhack**

In May 2011, NSLA ran [Libraryhack](#), a mashup competition where library collections data and other government datasets were made available for re-mixing and re-purposing by anyone. Prizes were awarded for the top contributions from experts and non-experts and work is underway to build on the ideas received. Libraryhack was recognised in the [National Digital Economy Strategy](#) released in May 2012, highlighting this competition for the innovative reuse of data and engaging the community with the opportunities that become available when information is provided in digital formats.

## **C. Free and open access to digital content**

NSLA Libraries support free and open access to digital content wherever possible within copyright and other legislation. The national innovation and education agendas centre on the concept of open and flexible use of information. Recently across government agencies in Australia and internationally, there has been a realization that innovation begins with open access to prior intellectual and research endeavours and to the growing global stores of data.

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This principle is applied in partnerships with commercial agencies and in the development of systems and practices. NSLA Libraries are adopting common plain-language approaches to copyright and associated information, to make it easier to know the conditions around the use of information from our collections. NSLA also supports use of open licensing and Creative Commons.

**GOAL 3:** To support excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas

Examples in NSLA Libraries:

## A. Australian Stories

Library collections are alive with stories of endeavour, creativity, innovation, hardship, exploration, imagination – and continuing to grow. We are collecting the stories of today for tomorrow. The record of life today, the raw material of the stories and creative arts that explore Australian culture and identity, is now predominantly in digital form. It can be the blogs of new communities arriving and settling into different parts of the country, or the personal records of those in niche fields of expertise or excelling in their sporting endeavour.

In 2007, the Northern Territory Library was successful in attracting funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support the development of [Our Story](#), an extensive range of stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the Northern Territory collected and made available online.

Many of the NSLA Libraries are drivers, hosts, supporters and key partners in the writing festivals, writers organisations, creative fellowships and literary awards in their state. For example, the Premiers' and Prime Ministers Literary Awards, the Queensland [Ideas Festival](#), and the [Miles Franklin Literary Award](#).

**GOAL 4:** To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy

Examples in NSLA Libraries:

## A. The economic impact of libraries

Several recent reports and analyses of use and impact demonstrate the economic contribution of libraries:

- [Dollars and Sense and Public Libraries](#), released in April 2011 by the Victorian Public Libraries Network, demonstrates that for every dollar invested in public libraries, the community receives an average of \$3.56 in community benefits.
- The Library Council of New South Wales, [Enriching Communities Report](#) from 2008, concluded that for every dollar invested in public libraries, \$4.00 of economic benefit was returned to the community.
- In 2008, Access Economics estimated for the National Library (using the ‘user approach’) that for every dollar invested in the digitisation of cultural collections, \$20 of economic benefit was returned.

International reports on the economic impact of libraries and digitisation show a similar ratio of investment and return, see the British Library’s, [Measuring our value](#) report. The [Inspiring Research, Inspiring Scholarship](#) report produced by JISC in the UK in 2011 on the “value and benefits of digitised resources for learning, teaching, research and enjoyment” also highlights the new fields of research that are opened up by digitisation, providing far-reaching research and economic benefits.

## B. Libraries as valued public spaces and centres of cultural tourism

Library buildings have always provided safe, welcoming community spaces, and they are now also highly valued for the access they provide to computers, wireless broadband and a wide range of digital literacy and community programs. Across Australia, almost 10 million people (around 46% of the population) are public library members and many more use them as study spaces, for online research and to browse.

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During 2010-2011 there were more than 9.4 million visitors to NSLA libraries. State and National Libraries are part of the cultural tourism and civic centres of our major cities, with broad historical and architectural importance. Exhibitions and programming, along with partnerships with local and state governments, continue to drive and enhance this role.

## C. Building communities

In 2005-2008, a series of reports analysing the social inclusion and community benefits of libraries were released in Victoria, [Libraries Building Communities](#). These reports showcased not just the importance and value that people place on libraries but also best practice in connecting and providing services to hard-to-reach communities inside cities and in regional and rural areas.

## 4. What strategies do you think we could use to achieve each of the four goals?

Underlying the progress towards all four goals sits the critical imperative of shifting to the digital environment. With this shift comes the ability to achieve much more, developing and innovating from the wide range of initiatives already in place - as well as preserving Australia's culture for the future and making it accessible and visible online.

A national model or strategy, supported by extensive funding, is required to achieve mass digitisation and digital preservation. The National Cultural Policy can initiate this work. Much has already been done by NSLA Libraries and by other cultural collection institutions and the expertise and systems are in place to begin a collaborative national process.

National & State Libraries Australasia recommends the following commitment be clearly articulated in the National Cultural Policy:

### Recommendation 2

Digitisation of Australia's cultural collections and preservation of our digital assets are national priorities. The National Cultural Policy should commit Australia to the development of an online cultural collections strategy.

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## **5. How can you, your organisation or sector contribute to the goals and strategies of the National Cultural Policy?**

NSLA libraries are contributing to these goals through all our programming, collecting and services to the community; through our collaborative work to develop the national information infrastructure; and through our advocacy for digitisation and digital preservation.

NSLA and our member libraries will actively participate and contribute to the development of a national strategy for online cultural collections.

## **6. Are there any other goals you would like to see included in the National Cultural Policy?**

Although National, State and Territory Libraries in Australia are directed by legislation that largely ensures the collection and stewardship of the physical documentary record in books, journals and newspapers, there are many conditions, barriers and challenges that surround the collection, access and preservation of digital content.

The four goals already outlined for the National Cultural Policy are underpinned by an assumption of ongoing access to Australia's cultural collections. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century these collections are increasingly digital.

### **Recommendation 3**

Missing from these four goals is the imperative to 1) preserve, and 2) ensure ongoing access to, Australia's cultural collections and creative output for the future - in digital and physical formats. NSLA recommends this is included as an additional goal.

Without commitment to mass digitisation and to effective digital preservation systems, access to our cultural collections will be diminished and the record of Australian culture, life, endeavour, innovation and creativity will not be available and accessible for future generations.

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## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendation 1

National cultural collection institutions should be recognised separately within the National Cultural Policy. The mission and purpose, the scale and reach, the overlap into so many sectors of government and community, and the challenges for the future, demonstrate that these institutions cannot be encompassed in the broad “core arts” definition.

### Recommendation 2

Digitisation of Australia’s cultural collections and preservation of our digital assets are national priorities. The National Cultural Policy should commit Australia to the development of an online cultural collections strategy.

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Please note: NSLA represents the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand, and the State and Territory Libraries across Australia. Each library works within different jurisdictions. The views expressed in this letter do not reflect positions of the National Library of New Zealand (part of the Department of Internal Affairs) and are not New Zealand Government policy.