



## Australian Heritage Strategy: Public Consultation Submission, June 2012

### About National & State Libraries Australasia

National & State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) represents the National, State and Territory Libraries of Australia and New Zealand. These ten major public research libraries work together to enable people to access, use and share local and global knowledge and ideas. The combined collections held in these libraries constitute a significant portion of our nations' cultural heritage and research infrastructure.

The collections in NSLA Libraries are our irreplaceable public assets, currently valued at more than AUD 5 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, stories and new media being generated and repurposed; as well as to unique treasures of literature, history and the arts.

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, and much more. People engage actively with our public programs and collections: they repurpose what they find to create new research, new ideas, new knowledge and new understanding of local and global history and culture.

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.

### Libraries and Australian heritage

#### A. Defining “heritage”

As defined in the Australian Heritage Strategy Public Consultation Paper, heritage “includes stories, traditions, languages, events and experiences inherited from the past; it comprises both natural and cultural places with tangible and intangible values”.

NSLA Libraries are the legislated custodians of the documentary record of Australian life, which is in itself a significant part of our cultural heritage. The collections include primary and secondary documentation, archives, photographic and other images, maps, websites, digital media, ephemera, architectural plans, environmental and urban planning documentation, government publications, oral histories and other formats.



## National & State Libraries Australasia

The understanding of Australian history and heritage is achieved through research using these collections. The evaluation and interpretation of our incomparable Indigenous heritage, the built environment, natural sites, and the other elements of our national heritage, in many cases rests on the quality and accessibility of the collections in NSLA Libraries.

Libraries are repositories of ideas, stories, languages, and experiences documented in publications, manuscripts, maps, photography, sound recordings, artworks and many other formats. They are an essential part of seeking to understand and appreciate our heritage - for the professionals working in the heritage sector, for government agencies, and for the community. The dual role of libraries as both custodians and enablers of interpretation should be recognised in the Australian Heritage Strategy as a key hub in the heritage system.

### **B. Community participation; Recognising and valuing heritage**

Through our services and programming, libraries support extensive public engagement with cultural heritage. Genealogy and local history services, online newspaper services, learning programs, exhibitions and events demonstrate the extensive interaction of the community with their heritage. Libraries are actively-connected agencies, building partnerships and linking to local, regional and national communities of interest and expertise.

These webs of relationships frequently lead to the deposit of significant heritage materials which further record the Australian experience whether they be a collection of photographs showing the transformation of rural areas to suburbs, oral histories of migration, the personal papers of prominent individuals, business records or much else.

Often the outcome of people's deep engagement with their heritage is a published work (digital or physical), which is in turn preserved and made available at a State or National Library, contributing to the development cycle of new knowledge and ideas.

As more of the historical record is digitised by libraries and as more of our culture is born-digital, digital literacy becomes the key to accessing information; and preservation of digital objects so that they can be usefully accessed in a century from now becomes the critical challenge.

The use of libraries and their collections demonstrates the recognition and value Australians place on their heritage. 9.4 million people visited NSLA Libraries in 2010-2011 and there were 240 million pages viewed on our websites. The number of people using libraries in Australia is continuing to grow.

### **C. Protecting and managing heritage**

Aside from the collections, NSLA Libraries are also the stewards of significant public heritage buildings, notably the National Library in Canberra, and the State Libraries of New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria.

These buildings and the other State and Territory Libraries are central, visible, open civic spaces where everyone has a right to information, to the opportunity to develop skills, and to engage with their heritage and with the world's culture and knowledge.

## National & State Libraries Australasia

NSLA affirms the significance of Australia's cultural heritage and the role that libraries play in preserving and making it accessible for all. This role should be recognised in the Australian Heritage Strategy as a key part of the heritage system.

We look forward to commenting on the draft strategy when it is released.

Yours sincerely,



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Please note: Each of the ten NSLA member libraries works within different government jurisdictions. The National Library of New Zealand is part of the Department of Internal Affairs. The views expressed in this letter do not reflect New Zealand Government Policy.