



Australian Library and Information Association: Submission to the inquiry into the National Cultural Policy “Revive”

9 March 2023

Introduction

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) warmly welcomes the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place* (the Policy). This significant and strategic investment in Australia's arts and cultural sectors delivers important immediate reforms and lays a solid foundation for further development to grow and sustain Australia as a cultural nation.

The Australian library sector nurtures creators and public engagement with arts and culture. ALIA Member libraries span public, school, TAFE, university, special and national and state institutions. ALIA Members ensure that Australian stories support the curriculum, preserve and provide access to Australia's history and provide a community space where everyone is welcome to enjoy and build culture and knowledge.

Even during the COVID restricted 2020-2021, in just the public library sector Australians borrowed more than 100 million physical books, and almost 50 million digital items. Public library staff answered more than 6 million inquiries, and 3.9 million people attended programs, from storytimes through to author-led bookclubs.¹ Millions more Australians accessed some of the more than 6 billion digital items from the collections of hundreds of Trove Partners from across Australia, from the Mount Gambier Library through to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

Below we highlight some of the significant advances under *Revive* of particular importance to Australia's library community, and areas where we are looking to build by working further with the Australian Government, creators, the book industry, the cultural heritage sector and the wider community as the plan is iterated.

First Nations First

ALIA strongly supports the first pillar of the Policy, First Nations First. As Dr Kirsten Thorpe, Chair of ALIA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Advisory Group, and Senior Researcher at the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education & Research, University of Technology Sydney said:

First Nations people are the first Storytellers. This policy will support First Nations stories in Australia's libraries and archives, and support work already underway in the sector to

¹ National and State Libraries Australasia (2021) *Australian Public Library Statistics 2020-2021* <https://www.nsla.org.au/news/2020-21-annual-public-library-statistics>



implement cultural protocols and cultural safety training, founded on the principle of self-determination. The work of the First Nations led body within Creative Australia has the potential to support the essential work of First Nations workers in the library and archives, addressing issues of workplace safety and promoting pathways for more First Nations people to join and advance in the sector.²

ALIA looks forward to working with Government and the First Nations led body within Creative Australia to advance the action of “support the telling of First Nations histories and stories in Australia’s galleries, libraries, archives and museums” and notes the following opportunities and challenges.

ALIA acknowledges the colonial history of libraries and archives has led to past separations and dispossession of First Nations people from their culture, and a lack of cultural safety for First Nations people accessing collections leaves significant work yet to be done.

As a starting point, we look forward to working with the government to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can find and access collections. Technology and collaboration have exponentially increased opportunities in this area, a needed redress to previous exclusion. As First Nations GLAM professionals Nathan “Mudyi” Sentence and Josie Dowd write:

Digital repositories like Trove increase access to collections without the need for communities to visit multiple organisations that they may otherwise be unable to access due to the cost of travel.³

The Policy provides groundwork to improve First Nations access, partnering with communities on collection management, preservation and digitisation, upskilling of First Nations workers, sharing knowledge and improving national cultural infrastructure like Trove.

Further than access, the library sector acknowledges the work needed for safe, respectful and appropriate preservation and access, sovereignty, cultural safety, right of reply and discoverability. The library sector is committed to ongoing First-Nations led work in the sector to address these essential issues, including progressing work on sovereignty, cultural safety, truth-telling, right of reply, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), and discoverability.⁴

² Australian Library and Information Association (2023) *ALIA Celebrates Revive*
<https://www.alia.org.au/Web/News/Articles/2023/1-January-2023/ALIA-celebrates--Revive-.aspx>

³ Dowd, J & Sentence, N (2023) *Rodeo Baby! Archives and returning love to our Ancestors*
<https://www.acmi.net.au/stories-and-ideas/rodeo-baby-archives-returning-love-ancestors/>

⁴ See for example the University of Sydney Library Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols, [https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2022/06/03/library-adopts-sector-leading-indigenous-protocols.html#:~:text=The%20protocols%20%E2%80%93%20the%20first%20of,First%20Nations%20voices%20and%20perspectives](https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2022/06/03/library-adopts-sector-leading-indigenous-protocols.html#:~:text=The%20protocols%20%E2%80%93%20the%20first%20of,First%20Nations%20voices%20and%20perspectives;); the joint library project to develop First Nations Collection Description Guidelines <https://www.nsla.org.au/news/library-sector-unites-first-nations-collection-description> and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Resource Network protocols for libraries, archives and information services <https://atsilrn.aiatsis.gov.au/protocols.php>



We look forward as well to the Policy informing other government policy processes, for example the university accord and the skills reform agenda, to prioritise First Nations peoples' education and training opportunities, including in library and information services.

A Place for Every Story

Libraries are often the first story place that people encounter. Libraries serve all those within the community, and ALIA commends the government for identifying specific action to support diverse sectors of the community, including working on the Arts and Disability Associated Plan and undertaking a Multicultural Framework Review. ALIA hopes that the library experience and work will be of support to the government in developing these policies.

Libraries serve their communities, no matter where they are located. Public and school libraries are the hearts of many local communities, from the inner-city through to regional areas. Libraries not only provide a space for those communities to come together and share in creation, culture and information, they also collect and preserve the local stories of place and celebrate local artists. Through national infrastructure such as Trove, people can remain in touch with their communities even if they are geographically distant, and new arrivals can discover the true rich tapestry of culture across the country.

For a story place to work, we need a nation of readers. Books and storytelling are how we connect, understand and find joy in the world around us. And we know that reading for pleasure reduces stress, improves memory and increases feelings of wellbeing. However we also know that almost a quarter of Australians did not read a book last year⁵ and that not all Australian children have access to a school library,⁶ deepening inequity. The Policy provides a strong platform to develop actions to address these declines and transform Australia into a reading nation, and ALIA looks forward to working with our book industry partners to support this work.

Centrality of the Artist

ALIA congratulates the Government on the \$12.9 million extension to library lending rights, to include audiobooks and e-books. ALIA has been advocating with the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) for this change for many years, and it was wonderful that the Australian Government heard and acted to support our writers and readers. The extension will support Australian authors across genres and career stages, better provide for those with access issues or disability, and ensure that creative talent is nurtured through fair remuneration.

⁵ Australia Reads (2021) *National Reading Survey* <https://australiareads.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Australia-Reads-National-Reading-Survey-2021-KEY-FINDINGS-SUMMARY.pdf>

⁶ Australian Library and Information Association (2023) *Literacy will continue to lag without school libraries* https://www.alia.org.au/Web/News/Articles/2023/1-January-2023/Literacy_lag_without_school_libraries.aspx



As Chair of the Public Lending Right Committee Eve Woodberry noted:

Australia's print lending right scheme is world's best practice and the inclusion of digital will bring it in to the 21st century. It will broaden the scope of the scheme to local authors, publishers and members of the book industry, some of who may not have been eligible previously."

ALIA also welcomes key initiatives and commitments for the literary and cultural sector, including \$19.3 million for the creation of Writers Australia within Creative Australia, a much-needed focus on writers, readers and the wider book ecosystem. Specific support for poets, currently the lowest paid Australian authors, through the National Poet Laureate is also welcomed.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

As the Policy acknowledges, Australia must "preserve the structures and facilities that make cultural memory possible: our libraries and museums, our galleries and archives, our national broadcasters." ALIA congratulates the government on this recognition, especially considering the challenging financial circumstances that have faced libraries and curtailed services over previous years. The library sector is keen to support the government in efficient investment of resources to ensure that Australia's cultural infrastructure is retained and strengthened so that Australian stories continue to be heard, shared and preserved.

The existing network of libraries across the country means that in almost every town, whether it be in a school, as part of a council, in a university or as part of a community association, there is a place for every story to be shared, enjoyed, debated and celebrated. The library sector sees the opportunities for this essential public infrastructure to work with the Policy to ensure a place for every story and a story for every place.

Engaging the audience

ALIA was very pleased to see a recognition of the importance of digital and media literacy to empower people to become critical, responsive and active citizens online. ALIA is a founding member of the Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA), recognizing the critical role libraries play in media and information literacy. Librarians work to teach people the tools they need to be able to navigate the information systems in their lives and to locate, assess and use media. Some of the most common activities that library patrons asked for help with included finding information online, general internet use, and using digital devices.⁷

There is a need for media and digital literacy programs for adults, as well as children. The Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs (2021) report found 61% of Australians don't feel confident they can take steps to identify misinformation and just over three quarters of adult Australians are unfamiliar with the term 'media literacy'. Only 22% of Australians

⁷ Currently unpublished research from University of Canberra and ALIA, but can be provided to the committee in advance of publication.



felt they had received media literacy education at school, and adults aged more than 55 years, from regional areas, with low incomes, with a disability or with low levels of literacy were more likely to have low media literacy skills.⁸

As the arrival of generative AI shows, media literacy is a lifelong skill; it has to be continually updated and refreshed, it can't be taught once at school and then forgotten. Challenges around bias and ethics, as well as transparency, will continue to grow.⁹ As champions of lifelong learning, and the hub of community and organisational learning, libraries need support to ensure that library staff are up to date with the latest information, resources to support and teach, and adequate resourcing to support shifting community needs.

Conclusion

ALIA thanks the Committee for the opportunity to voice our thanks and support for Revive the National Cultural Policy, and would be happy to provide any further information of use to the Committee.

⁸ Tanya Notley, Simon Chambers, Sora Park & Michael Dezuanni (2021) *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*, Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra.
https://westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1824640/Australian_adult_media_literacy_report_2021.pdf

⁹ Fiona Bradley (2023) *AI and the future of information literacy and information ethics*.
<https://www.fionabradley.com/posts/ai-future-information-literacy-information-ethics/>