

Name: History Council of Western Australia

Submission:

National Cultural Policy Submission

The History Council of Western Australia (“HCWA”) was incorporated on 5 June 2003. The HCWA seeks to promote the study, preservation and use of history in Western Australia and represents about 13,000 historians and interested parties throughout the State. Our membership is wide ranging and includes academics, professional historians, librarians, museum professionals, archivists, family historians and a number of corporate groups, such as the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, the Swan River Pioneers, the WA Genealogical Society, and the Professional Historians Association (WA). As an organisation we seek to raise the profile of history at all levels of government and the community and to provide advocacy for history and heritage collections. We seek to ensure that Arts related agencies such as the State Records Office, the State Library and the WA Museum are adequately funded. We also seek to achieve greater recognition of the value of historians’ professional knowledge in heritage, education, government processes and the value of historical studies both at school and at University.

The HCWA strongly supports the creation of a National Cultural Policy and is keen to ensure that history is an integral part of that Policy. Engaging with history is not about nostalgia for the past, but is inherent in understanding today’s world.

Culture assists in shaping communities through recreation, celebration and learning. It is the 'social glue' that brings people together, enhances quality of life and health, provides education and training opportunities, and brings economic benefits such as tourism to our cities, towns and regions. History and heritage are fundamental aspects of culture and assist in defining our sense of place.

Culture must be at the heart of national life and everybody should have the opportunity to take part in a rich and varied cultural life as both part of the audience and as a participant. Museums, libraries, art galleries and other organisations are key institutions in the cultural sector, adding vibrancy to our communities and must be considered in any cultural policy. Museums in particular are storehouses of culture and sites where research into Australian history and culture, both Indigenous and non Indigenous is undertaken. Support for Aboriginal language and culture should also be a key element of an Australia’s cultural policy. An understanding of and support for Indigenous history and culture is important for the future of our communities and our nation.

There are many ways in which a National Cultural Policy could further an interest in and appreciation of Australia’s history. In practical terms, a coherent Policy could assist in ensuring the preservation of and adequate funding for State Museum and library collections, including State records. We have been disappointed with funding cuts for cultural institutions in Western

Australia and at the Federal level, with the proposed closure of National Archives offices in Darwin, Adelaide and Hobart. A Cultural Policy could provide a framework that ensures that the role of these institutions in enriching, connecting and inspiring communities, is recognised. We welcome the government's initiative and reiterate that history is an essential component of cultural practice and understanding. We look forward to further involvement in the development of the Policy.