



SUBMISSION to INQUIRY ON PROMOTING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL CAPITAL

The Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) applaud the establishment of this inquiry. We offer the following comments for consideration under the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

Every one of Canberra's national memory institutions (to use international UNESCO terminology) forms part of the mosaic of Australian life, telling us how we got to where we are today, and why we are who are. Canberra, as the home of these institutions (the National Maritime Museum excepted), embodies what it is to be Australian. This fundamental reality contradicts the deprecatory view of Canberra as merely a bubble full of politicians and bureaucrats.

Our particular interest is the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) which, because it preserves and makes accessible the popular media of the 20th and 21st centuries, resonates with all Australians, and comprehends our life and times, our creativity and our national character.

Requirements for the National Institutions to convey a dynamic, representative national story

The NFSA is central to our national story. Australia was the first country in the world to have its birth captured by the movie camera, when the 1901 Federation ceremonies in Sydney were filmed. In the surviving footage we can still witness our country literally coming into being. The NFSA's profile needs to be higher to reflect its national and international relevance and importance.

The Story of the Kelly Gang, made in 1906, is recognised by UNESCO as the world's first feature film. The most iconic of Australian stories, no historic figure has been more frequently dramatised on the screen than Ned Kelly.

The NFSA's historic collections of radio and television programs, Australian music and cinema newsreels cover more than a century of social change, national growth and cultural expression. Our resilient screen and sound industries have constantly overcome international cultural and financial competition to assert our national identity.

Maintaining the currency and vibrancy of Australia's national capital as a source of pride and international recognition

All of our national memory institutions matter. But the spotlight does not fall equally on them all.

The greatest media attention always seems to go to the Australian War Memorial, the National Library, the National Gallery and – perhaps to a lesser extent – the National Museum. The other institutions tend to have a lower profile, and the NFSA falls into this group. This short changes the depth and scope of what the National Capital has to offer.

Australia has a proud and innovative history in the audiovisual media. It has pioneered change and has consistently punched above its weight. It deserves a higher profile: popular culture relates to everyone.

Raising the profile of Australia's national capital and its symbolic importance in reflecting the character, values and identity of Australia

National memory institutions are the jewel of national capital cities. As the home of a nation's culture and heritage they set the tone for the city. Supporting them brings more people to the city, as is evidenced by the success of blockbuster exhibitions. These visitors then explore other features of the capital, and all institutions have the capacity to attract visitors.

It is especially vital to enthuse young people about their national capital and national heritage. In the past, the NFSA has maintained a highly successful education program for visiting school groups. In recent years, like its other public programs, it has been curtailed because of shrinking budgets. This decline needs to be reversed.

20th and 21st century Australia has in many ways been shaped and defined by its films, broadcast media, music, and more recently its social media. Radio has historically held together a sparsely populated continent. We have distinct musical traditions. Our unique and laconic sense of humour has been reflected in films, radio and television as we have asserted our cultural identity in the face of strong overseas influences.

The profile of Canberra and its institutions is underpinned by the adequacy of their funding and the quality of their leadership. It is no secret that all our memory institutions (the Australian War Memorial excepted) have been run down over the last decade, losing staff and expertise. Over this time their Boards have been politicised as well. The present Government has begun addressing these problems and is reviewing the practice of Board appointments. *The capacity of our institutions to curate and present the national story is dependent on their being adequately resourced and expertly led.*

Consider the importance of Australia's national capital in highlighting our sporting, cultural and tourism potential

The NFSA building, formerly the Australian Institute of Anatomy, is heritage listed. One of Canberra's earliest public buildings, it is reputedly haunted (yes, there are ghost tours), its courtyard is a quiet oasis for coffee or lunch and there are exhibitions to view. The Arc Cinema is

not only the best screening venue in Canberra: it one of the few remaining cinemas in Australia that can screen 35mm and 16mm film as well as provide standard digital projection.

2024 will be the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the NFSA, and its official opening by Prime Minister Bob Hawke in October 1984. It will be an important celebratory year for the institution.

The needs of existing infrastructure and identifying future infrastructure needs to facilitate a), b), c) and d) above.

Adequate parking is an issue for the NFSA as for other institutions. It limits access. Better public transport, including hop-on, hop-off bus services could be targeted as a partial solution.

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President

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