



## Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Canberra's National Institutions

### From the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc

#### *Executive Summary*

The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc (NCACL) recognises that this Inquiry is primarily concerned with the manner in which Canberra's current national institutions are employing innovative strategies to maintain their viability and relevance. The NCACL considers that this Inquiry provides an important opportunity to promote the case for the future national institution focussed on Australian children's literature.

#### *Introduction*

The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc (NCACL) strongly supports adequate funding for Canberra's national institutions. Without these there is no history of ourselves and no future record of our achievements to share with generations to come.

The NCACL aspires to have a home for its collections among Australia's other national institutions. None of these has youth as its core business. Their collections, programs and staff are not primarily focussed on youth and programs for them. Yet today's youth are Australia's future.

We view the NCACL as the collector and promoter of Australian creators who bring story and art into our hearts and minds. These creations touch our young people who hold the future world in their hands. There must be a place to explore, exploit and share story through immersive and virtual experiences. There is no such place or organisation so recognised now within our national buildings.

*This is a Centre that preserves the past, enriches the present  
and helps create the future of Australian children's literature  
- Jackie French, author & NCACL Ambassador*

Australia's existing national institutions have either highly specific or broad briefs, which do not adequately cater for the field of story for young people. Other countries have established national centres of children's literature. So too must Australia.

An argument for a national institution for Australian children's literature can also be made from a business perspective. Australian children's literature is a major contributor to the economy. Arts and Education are the fastest growing sectors over the past three financial years for both jobs and export income, with the rate of increase climbing. Our rich children's literature and nonfiction industries are two of the keystones of our educational 'export' industry attracting students from overseas thus contributing to our economy. 'Children's literature tourism' has the potential to equal or even surpass this, as Australia's children's literature, including the film, television and theatrical productions based on it, increasingly appear on best seller lists. The Tree House series, *Possum Magic*, *Nim's Island* and *Diary of a Wombat*, to name just four, all appear in multi-formats and all are translated into over forty languages, with yearly sales of each growing overseas.

*Economist David Throsby notes that 'new generations of consumers are using the internet, mobile telephony and digital media in ways that not only expand their range of cultural experience but may actually transform them from passive recipients of cultural messages into active co-creators of cultural content.'* (Art, Politics, Money: Revisiting Australia's Cultural Policy, 2018)

There is an increasing reliance on Australian children's literature for teaching English language and literature, history, geography and multicultural studies among other subjects. There is an emphasis in the Australian curriculum on informative text and an acknowledgment that well expressed writing is essential in all areas of life. There is a growing emphasis on learning-based institutions like the Museum of Australian Democracy, the Sydney Jewish Museum's Holocaust centre, the Powerhouse Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, and the Fremantle Literature Centre, where tens of thousands of students from schools across Australia visit each year. There is thus a growing need for a central venue that can offer collections and programs for young people along with professional enhancement for adults. These would feature Australia's major literary talents and their creations to bring story in all its forms together for exploitation.

Our submission to the Inquiry then points to a new home for a national institution. We offer our achievements over four decades and address the Committee's terms of reference to demonstrate our readiness to be one of Australia's national institutions. We believe strongly in collaborating with existing organisations and institutions and point to our special strength in working with the many organisations that contribute each in their own way to Australian children's literature. A recognised national institution would harness collective strengths and achieve so much for Australia.

*Every Australian literary creation for young people requires a place to call home. The NCACL is that HOME*  
- Christopher Cheng, author & NCACL Ambassador

The remainder of this submission addresses the terms of reference for the Inquiry into Canberra's National Institutions from the perspective of the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc physically joining existing national institutions.

## Terms of Reference

### 1 CREATING A STRONG BRAND AND ONLINE PRESENCE

The NCACL has developed gradually, building up a unique, valuable collection which attracts both a national and international audience.

- **Growing national organisation**
  - > Collectively valued at over \$10 million (2018 statistics)
    - 40,000 book collection, 4,000 of these in 58 languages
    - includes works not held in the National Library of Australia or the various State Libraries
    - continuous donations by 38 Australian publishers & their imprints
    - 60 collections of authors' papers, illustrators' artworks and publisher's archive valued at over five million dollars (Cultural Gifts Program values)
  - > Deductible Gift Recipient and Tax Exempt Charity status since 1988, enabling major acquisitions
  - > Affiliate status and in kind support for growth and development over 38 years by the University of Canberra
  - > Incorporated in 2012, establishing appropriate governance

- > Name changed in 2015 to National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc, to reflect our vision
- > Registered Charity with Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, publicly stating our aims, describing collections, and demonstrating appropriate governance
- **Reaching out, communicating, and networking worldwide**
  - > TWITTER We are the international expert on Australian children's literature with thousands of people and organisations from around the world following us on [Twitter](#) since 2014
  - > FACEBOOK We promote our collections, educate on their preservation and documentation, promote our exhibitions and events with these bringing in major donations and delivering on NCACL objectives to our large audience of followers on [Facebook](#)
  - > E-NEWSLETTER We researched and built a highly targeted audience of followers including authors, illustrators, publishers and donors who are now communicating and donating as supporters
  - > WEBSITE established in 1995 continuously documents, packages and delivers electronically its unique information by and about Australian children's literature.
  - > WORLDWIDE IMPACT Visiting researchers, donations, requests to collaborate, exhibit collections and use research material result in a high profile for Australian children's literature worldwide. Examples include:
    - database of Australian children's books on cultural diversity linked to Australian national curriculum and early childhood education
    - [research files](#) on over 510 Australian authors, illustrators, publishers and critics
    - [guides](#) to the creative process through authors' papers and manuscripts, illustrators' artworks, and publisher's archive

*A national living treasure - Hesba Brinsmead, author*

## 2 EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW FORMS OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Over ten years, the NCACL has pursued engagement with the public in spite of space and resource constraints. These demonstrate capability and future potential. A sample of NCACL's collection strengths, collaborative pursuits and solo achievements include the

- forthcoming joint exhibition with the National Library of Australia, Aug 2019-Jan 2020
- *Seeing Stories and Imagine if ...* exhibitions of unique artworks exploring The Children's Book Week artwork, John Barrow Collection and NCACL's high value artists showcased at the University of Canberra, 2016-2017
  - > attracted people from three years through adults
  - > designed professional development for teachers, art educators, librarians, home schooling parents and child care workers
  - > explored art, story and the creative arts in an interactive play space
- *A Bird in the Hand! Bob Graham: A Retrospective* exhibition and associated programs at the Canberra Museum and Gallery (CM&G) was presented in collaboration with CM&G & Books Illustrated (Melbourne) in 2014. Over the exhibition period, 12,000 attended.

*Like other writers, I greatly appreciate that there is a place which preserves authors' papers, making these available for researchers, and displaying them in exhibitions*  
- Margaret Wild, author

### 3 CONDUCTING OUTREACH OUTSIDE CANBERRA

The NCACL actively reaches beyond Canberra and offers unique resources and our expertise. Examples include

- serving populations in schools, educational centres, libraries and galleries through loaning its collections to the Maritime Museum in Sydney, the Literature Centre in Fremantle, the Geelong Regional Gallery in Geelong and the State Library of Victoria as part of its three-year exhibition *Look!* traveling to seven galleries across Australia
- NCACL is borrowing from Basel, Switzerland the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) collection of 191 recent children's books in 75 languages, a unique event for Australia. These, with an accompanying kit, will travel to public libraries across Australia during 2018-2019 thus supporting multicultural communities and bilingual programs for parents and their children.
- NCACL promotes its resources Australia-wide through featuring in blogs, website profiles, public talks, published articles, research studies and university theses, with examples documented [here](#)
- NCACL has enormous potential to promote Australia on the international scene through its relationships with similar worldwide organisations including the [Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art](#) in Amherst, Massachusetts; [Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books](#) in Newcastle upon Tyne (UK); and the [International Youth Library](#) in Munich, Germany

*At last. Immortality!*  
*Morris Gleitzman, author and Australian Children's Laureate*

### 4 CULTIVATING PRIVATE SECTOR SUPPORT

The NCACL has long established relationships with related organisations and has accomplished many collaborative and successful ventures. These efforts have enabled a widespread appreciation for Australian children's literature by children and those who work with them. The NCACL has an accomplished record of sponsorship and grants, collaborative events, joint exhibitions, unique programs and resources for kits for young people. A [sample](#) is available from the website.

Our collaborative partners have included the University of Canberra, National Library of Australia, National Museum of Australia, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Museum and Gallery, Canberra Institute of Technology, Belconnen Arts Centre, Libraries ACT, Wiradjuri and Kirinari day care centres, ACT Writers Centre, Canberra's retirement communities - Kangara Waters & Calvary Haydon Retirement Community in Canberra, Australian National Museum of Education, The Children's Book Council of Australia, Australian Library and Information Association, Australian Children's Literature Foundation and Books Illustrated both in Melbourne, The Literature Centre in Fremantle, Book Links (Qld) Inc - The Centre for Children's Literature in Brisbane, *The School Magazine* in Sydney, and Primary English Teachers Association of Australia (PETAA) in Sydney. Collaborations continuously develop and reflect needs and interests over time.

### 5 DEVELOPING OTHER INCOME STREAMS

The NCACL is continuously and actively investigating and developing income streams to support its activities. Below are a range of present and future efforts with earlier achievements documented [here](#)

- website database on cultural diversity (2018)
- website database on Aboriginal resources (2019)
- professional development for teachers, librarians, art and writing groups (digital productions with collaborative organisations widening availability and enhancing income)
- apps for children and adults relating to Australian children's literature
- educational kits on the creative process, including art and writing techniques and interviews with authors/illustrators/book designers/publishers
- producing professional development material with the Primary English Teachers Association of Australia (PETAA)
- designing workshops for youth demonstrating literature as meaningful, enriching and entertaining as well as meeting curricular learning objectives
- hosting external exhibitions & curating travelling exhibitions
- offering programs/exhibits that extend stories through theatre, art, films, plays, puppets, theatrical productions, immersive and digital forms

## 6 ENSURING THE APPROPRIATENESS OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

The NCACL has strong governance structures in place, including

- Incorporation in 2012
- established Board with strong business and governance structures
- compliance as a Deductible Gift Recipient and Tax Exempt Charity from 1988
- Affiliate of the University of Canberra operating under a formal Agreement
- annual Reports and financial audits
- Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission annual submissions

## 7 SUGGESTED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR ESTABLISHING NEW NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The NCACL has considered the existing and accomplished national institutions in proposing what might be guiding principles for the creation of new national institutions. A new national institution must achieve the following

- a distinct vision and purpose not provided by any other national institution
- offer a national institution specifically collecting, documenting and exploiting the national heritage of important segments of Australia society
- potential for collaboration with other national institutions for maximum benefits
- highly relevant to all sectors of the Australian community and capable of attracting adequate visitor numbers Australian wide as well as overseas interest
- strong connections with related organisations and the ability to cultivate public and private sector support for long term sustainability
- existence of institutions around the world that demonstrate successful models

*I would like to think that some day and hopefully not too much into the future that the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature might have an enhanced space of its own, a building and facilities that will accommodate its wonderful and nationally important collection where it can give access to all people, to the work, the stories past, the stories here and now and the stories to come that will nourish the imagination of children of all ages way into the future! - Bob Graham, author and illustrator*

## Conclusion

The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc is an accomplished, knowledgeable and respected international specialist in the field of Australian children's literature. No other organisation can claim this territory. Australia has a wealth of Australian children's creators who are an essential ingredient in contributing to our financial well being. The NCACL can be the future central place bringing together the multi-talents of our creators and sharing these with youth and the young at heart.

We ask nothing of you at this point except your support for the project of providing a permanent home for Australian children's literature so that the children of today and tomorrow will be able to share more fully in their wonderful heritage of Australian stories.