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Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Inquiry into Canberra's national institutions

Issue date: 3 April 2019

Telling Australia's story: committee reports on Canberra's national institutions

Canberra's iconic Parliament House served as a fitting backdrop as the federal parliamentary committee examining Canberra's national institutions released its [report](#) today.

Chair of the Committee, [Mr Ben Morton MP](#), said the Committee found that national institutions play an invaluable role in preserving and promoting Australia's history, culture, arts, science and democracy.

"Canberra's national institutions are a treasure and are worthy of our continued support and patronage", Mr Morton said.

"But they need to do more to recognise their shared value to the nation as a cohesive group, rather than as individual entities. A shared narrative should directly connect national institutions with Australia's story, and should underpin all the work they do."

Outlining some of the report's 20 recommendations, Mr Morton said that the Committee was keen to see various measures taken to enhance national institutions' engagement with the public. These include encouraging new migrants to visit national institutions, reviewing and improving access to educational programs for the more than 165 000 school students who visit Canberra each year, and promoting the science education offered by some institutions.

"The Committee particularly welcomed Australians' genuine interest in being informed about their democracy through visiting and accessing Canberra's national institutions", Mr Morton said. "We have therefore recommended reviewing, enhancing and better aligning the work of institutions in this area, as well as offering more parliamentary and electoral education programs to the general public."

Mr Morton highlighted the Committee's recommendation to relocate and expand the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), effectively creating a new national institution focused on the history, culture and heritage of Australia's first peoples. "A major national institution focused on positive and comprehensive recognition of Australia's rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is long overdue", Mr Morton said. "An expanded AIATSIS, located within the Parliamentary Zone, would include public exhibition facilities to tell this important Australian story in a bigger way, to more people. It would also be home to a national resting place for repatriated ancestral remains that cannot immediately return to Country."

The Committee also recommended that the Government develop a business case for the establishment of a natural history museum in Canberra.



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Among other recommendations in the report, the Committee identified measures to strengthen national institutions' governance, including through better collaboration, and to help ease pressures on their budgets and resources. These include recommendations that the Australian Government work with Canberra's national institutions to:

- establish a formal consultative structure for Canberra's national institutions, to work on aligning their planning, policy, marketing, and sharing resources;
- develop shared collection storage and public exhibition spaces for Canberra's national institutions;
- develop a whole of government strategy to ensure that analogue audio-visual items held by national institutions are digitised, before it is too late; and
- consider measures to offset the impact of financial and staffing pressures on small agencies, including Canberra's national institutions.

"This was a large and complex inquiry, and an important one", Mr Morton said. "I hope the Committee's report will contribute to making Canberra's national institutions even more effective in their work to preserve, and tell, Australia's national story."

Media enquiries:

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For background information:

Further information about the inquiry, including the terms of reference, is available on the Committee's [webpage](#). Interested members of the public may wish to track the committee by clicking on the blue 'Track Committee' button in the bottom right hand corner of the website and using the forms to login to My Parliament or to register for a My Parliament account.

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