

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO

Group: 2

Program: Other Agency

Question No. BE15/075

Senator Collins asked the following written question from the 27 and 28 May 2015 hearing:

1. Digitisation is particularly urgent for the NFSA's collection, given the continuing decay of magnetic and film media and increasing obsolescence of playback platforms, from the point of view of both preservation and access. What collaboration is taking place with the other national cultural institutions?
2. What are the plans and projected costs of digitisation of the collection?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

1. The NFSA plays a leading role in defining the practical standards required for archival digitisation of all audiovisual formats. It has worked in consultation with the National Library of Australia and the National Archives of Australia in particular to share perspectives and build a solid long term plan for the massive task of digitisation of more than a century of analog audiovisual production.

Collaboration has been through ongoing inter-agency consultation at Senior Executive and operational levels and through a range of workshops and seminars involving other Commonwealth and State and Territory agencies. Examples include the workshop and public panel discussion *Digitise or Perish* in August 2013 and the workshop *Beyond Bytes* in April 2015.

The NFSA regularly provides specialised digitisation services to national and other institutions for limited numbers of highly significant items which cannot be handled format-wise by those institutions. Some examples of these are gelatin discs for the Australian War Memorial and specialist audio work for the National Museum of Australia.

2. Digitisation of sound and documents is an embedded part of the NFSA's operations which has operated well for more than a decade. The moving image field presents more challenges in relation to both volume and technical capacity and costs. Magnetic media, primarily television, is identified as the most at risk format currently with real time limits in relation to obsolete equipment availability and transfer lifetime.

Photochemical film remains the most stable original preservation format and the NFSA is building its internal digital skills and technical resources to establish a sustainable, archival quality digital duplication and access format delivery. This is in addition to established external film laboratory relationships which support creation of high end DCI compliant 2K-4K digital packages. Costs in this arena are substantial and part of the NFSA's current challenge is to maximise its internal capabilities and outputs while building the most cost-effective industry relationships with both laboratories and producers.

A public discussion paper on the digitisation of obsolete formats will shortly be completed to address the critical priority of magnetic media and the reality of a finite period within which it is possible to actively digitise. This forms a critical part of the NFSA's future prioritising of its resources considering opportunity cost and identifying the need for informed curatorial pragmatism in some of the selection decisions to be made. The total cost is not yet known and will be included in the public discussion paper.