

To the Secretary of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament of Australia

I have been researching Indonesian history and politics for more than four decades. As an active researcher of Indonesia, I wish to express my extreme concern at the prospect that the National Library of Australia is proposing to make major cutbacks in its Indonesian Acquisitions Project as a means of meeting its 'efficiency dividend'. As I understand it, the NLA intends to replace its representative in Jakarta with locally engaged staff and to cease collecting on behalf of other Australian libraries. This will have serious consequences for Australian expertise on Indonesia. Australia has long been a world leader in the study of Indonesia, the world's fourth largest country, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world and Australia's near neighbour. The NLA's Acquisitions Office in Jakarta has been a key institution in ensuring that Australian researchers have access to a comprehensive collection of newly published material in the Indonesian language. It has done this in two ways: (1) through the acquisition of materials for the NLA's own collection in Canberra; and (2) through the acquisition of materials for a number of participating libraries around Australia. The so-called 'efficiency dividend' will reduce the effectiveness of the first and eliminate the second. If this happens, Australians' ability to study contemporary Indonesia will be seriously reduced. This is no 'efficiency dividend': it is an 'inefficiency dividend'.

In my home city, there is a cooperative agreement between the University of Melbourne and Monash University with regard to Asian library collections (ALIM - Asian Libraries in Melbourne). This does produce a true 'efficiency dividend' by cutting out unnecessary duplication of acquisitions. At my own university (the University of Melbourne) we rely heavily on the Monash Indonesian collection of new books, current serials and newspapers all of which are acquired through the NLA Indonesian Acquisitions Program run by the National Library Jakarta Office. The Monash Indonesian collection has been built up through its participation in the Program since its inception in 1973. There is no adequate alternative method for acquiring new Indonesian publications. Cancellation of the Program will significantly reduce the research value of the Monash Indonesian studies collection. This will impact severely on all in Victoria who need to access current Indonesian language publications whether or not they are at Monash University. It will seriously undermine research among academics and research higher degree students. In fact, it is predictable that such an outcome will reduce the flow of higher degree students coming to Australia from Indonesia when library resources in North American and Dutch institutions are more comprehensive and up to date. I sincerely hope that this short-sighted false economy can be nipped in the bud (if you can pardon the mixed metaphor). Yours faithfully, Charles A. Coppel

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