



Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories  
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**Re: Inquiry into Canberra's National Cultural Institutions**

NAVA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

The National Association for the Visual Arts leads advocacy, policy and action for an Australian contemporary arts sector that's ambitious and fair. Through the Code of Practice for the Professional Australian Visual Arts, Media, Craft and Design Sector, we set national best practice standards for the contemporary arts industry. Our vision – that artistic courage ignites Australian culture – is one that aligns strongly with the work of Australia's national cultural institutions. The National Gallery of Australia is a NAVA Member.

Australia's national cultural institutions are the custodians of the artefacts, stories and works of art that define our identity as a nation. They are national treasures, prized by Australians and global visitors alike. The Inquiry invites submissions to consider how Canberra's national institutions might best develop their viability, relevance, profile, visitor numbers and revenue. NAVA recommends:

1. That the Australian Government explicitly recognise our national cultural institutions as a public good, by:
  - a. Championing their work publicly;
  - b. Articulating their value through a public document such as a national cultural policy; and
  - c. Committing to support them as a public good through ambitious recurrent investment.
  
2. In virtue of this recognition, that the Australian Government exempt our national cultural institutions from the application of efficiency dividends.
  - NAVA has strong concerns about the erosion in public value that is being caused by these cuts, as well as the detriment to Australian culture and national pride;
  - NAVA recognises the damaging impacts on program, audience development, staffing levels and workplace culture that have been caused by successive unstrategic budget cuts, as outlined in the submissions of the Questacon Advisory Council, the National Film and Sound Archive, the National Gallery of Australia, the National Library of Australia, the National War Memorial and others;
  - NAVA endorses the submissions of the Australian Academy for the Humanities, the Community and Public Sector Union, GLAM Peak, Museums Australia and others in calling for our national cultural institutions to be exempt.

3. That no new national cultural institution be considered until the Australian Government has committed to establishing, building and sustaining a First Nations cultural institution which is:
  - a. Developed under the self-determined leadership of First Nations Elders and cultural leaders;
  - b. Governed by a decision-making model that is in alignment with the Uluru Statement;
  - c. Located on site that is culturally appropriate and culturally safe.
  
4. That ambitious investment in our national cultural institutions be recognised by the Australian Government as vital local as well as global investment, because:
  - Both emblematic of our national cultural identity and also utterly Canberra, these institutions are burdened by the unique challenge to be at once locally significant, nationally valuable and internationally impactful;
  - Our national cultural institutions have untapped potential in creating a welcoming sense of place through high quality public spaces that welcome visitors because locals already feel at home there. Currently, key institutions sit independently of or alongside one another as self-contained monuments of discrete form. Creating connections through public space enhancement and collaborative programming can transform Canberra's sense of local place, as well as introducing new income streams;
  - Such connective and place-making work needs to be locally driven and ongoing. Externally imposed events of scale such as Canberra Centenary risk leaving no legacy when they are not led by the cultural institutions themselves, whose work is focused on articulating and championing the local values of the communities they foster.
  
5. That the Australian Government investigate the significant work already undertaken by our national cultural institutions to attract and sustain alternative income sources – and in doing so, recognise the limitations on those non-government funding sources to sustain the operations of our national cultural institutions, namely:
  - a. That no further income can be generated from venue hire and other external uses of our cultural infrastructure without significant investment by the Australian Government;
  - b. That this investment must commit explicitly to the high-quality maintenance of these buildings – which are in and of themselves among the nation's key architectural treasures, independently of their program and collections – and then, exceed that investment by committing to a cycle of improvements –
    - For example, Budget 2018/19's \$16.5m/3yrs to the National Gallery of Australia is a modest allocation that can support only overdue, urgent repairs and maintenance. It falls well short of the amount required to fulfil the Gallery's vision to develop its public spaces in ways that will build existing audiences and attract new audiences as outlined above;
  - c. That institutions such as the National Gallery of Australia and the National Portrait Gallery are already highly successful fundraisers who attract significant private money for acquisitions and programming. This means that the Australian Government and indeed the taxpayer are already enjoying the benefits of high-level private investment in our national cultural institutions; and
  - d. That philanthropy will never substantially fund the operations of our national cultural institutions. Along with the taxpayer, philanthropists rightly see this as the responsibility of government – and indeed, one of the responsibilities of which the Australian Government should feel most proud.
  
6. That the appointment process for the boards of our national cultural institutions aim at achieving the highest quality governance for each institution by:
  - a. Establishing a gender quota target year by which to achieve 50% female representation;
  - b. Implementing enhanced due diligence processes following the findings of the Royal Commission into the Financial Sector, and the APRA into the Commonwealth Bank; and
  - c. Recognising that high-quality decision-making is developed in a range of professions across public practice;

- d. Recognising that artists embody our national ambition as well as our national conscience, and that artists on boards offer deep insights and demonstrate leaps of resourceful, innovative thinking that stimulate critical thinking among all board members.
7. That the Australian Government set performance measures for our national cultural institutions that inspire rigorous national leadership in their respective fields, for example:
- a. Championing best practice by endorsing the codes of practice developed by industry bodies in their fields, covering practitioner contracting terms, use of intellectual property, industry rates for the fair payment of artists etc.;
  - b. Leading national conversations on cultural leadership and the evolution of library, gallery, collections or other institutional practice;
  - c. Demonstrating the highest national best practice standards in their fields on accessibility, gender equity, cultural diversity and workplace culture;
  - d. Fostering the local independent scene of relevant practitioners and researchers, further embedding the national cultural institution into the local cultural fabric as well as the local urban fabric; and
  - e. Regularly interrogating and actively questioning what it means to be a national cultural institution. What does it mean to be national? How does each articulate and contribute to Australian cultural identity? What are the key questions and challenges facing each institution and indeed all institutions? This is an important opportunity to welcome the Australian Government into a set of ongoing conversations that regularly restate the value of our national cultural institutions as a public good.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any further information I can provide.

Sincerely



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