

*FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETIES
RESPONSE TO NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY FRAMEWORK*

The Federation of Australian Historical Societies, the umbrella body for Australia's more than 1000 community history and heritage societies and nearly 100,000 members, wishes to endorse the main thrust of the Minister's proposal for a National Cultural Policy. It appropriately expresses and affirms the importance of culture and its role in our society.

However, we note that in the Minister's speech to the National Press Club in which he announced this initiative, the emphasis was almost solely on the creative arts as manifesting culture.

Only in items 5 and 8 of the Framework is there a general reference to the importance of the past.

The FAHS urges that cultural heritage be included in the definition of culture, and that cultural heritage issues are covered by the policy as it is developed.

To this end we emphasise that while 'culture' has many meanings, the following definition is indicative of the central role of both history and moveable cultural heritage objects that are implicit within understandings of the term:

'Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action.' [Kroeber, A.L., & Kluckhohn, C. (1952). *Culture: A critical review of concepts and definitions*. Harvard University Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology Papers 47.]

The community heritage movement plays a major role in the collecting, conservation and the retelling of Australia's cultural heritage. There are, for example, about 500 cultural heritage museums across the nation.

All too often, cultural heritage 'falls between the stools' when government recognition and assistance is given to built heritage and to the arts. With the likely demise of the Collections Council of Australia, this cultural sector will be even less recognised and assisted.

We therefore urge the need to incorporate cultural heritage into the National Cultural Policy.

Don Garden
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Discussion framework - Towards a national cultural policy

1. Culture is at the heart of our nation and the arts are at the heart of our culture, feeding, and in turn, being fed by it. Australian culture is unique, diverse and vital to our present and future wellbeing.
2. Culture is expressed in many ways and reflects our way of life. It encompasses our values, traditions, attitudes and expressions and is shared by us all.
3. It provides the intellectual and imaginative ground for broad understanding and connections. An education rich in culture and arts provides a strong foundation for learning, social engagement and skills development.
4. There is a primary value in creative expression through the arts which governments actively support. Our democracy is strengthened by the diversity of cultural and artistic expression.
5. Australian culture speaks to our identity, it is an important area of common interest which enriches our quality of life and defines us to ourselves and others. Its rich legacy provides knowledge of the past and hope for the future; above all it engages with the moral principles to which we jointly aspire.
6. The culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is the unique backbone of Australian identity; it brings meaning to our nation with a culture unbroken in song, dance and stories over millennia.
7. Culture is a powerful source of wealth for the nation, contributing significantly to the economy and employing hundreds of thousands of Australians. It adds value, attracts students and tourists, provides valuable exports and is essential to sustainable economic activity.
8. Australian culture is a conversation between past understandings and future vision. Culture must both preserve and innovate, ensuring that the links between the present and past remain strong, able to incorporate new and varied perspectives.
9. Our culture draws on the creativity found in many walks of life, in traditional forms which should be preserved and new forms yet to be imagined.
10. Australian culture is produced by its people. The role of government is not to directly shape culture but to enable all Australians – whatever their background, beliefs and abilities – to explore and nurture their creativity and draw on the wealth of our culture to enrich us all.