



Australian Policy and History

Submission to Tune Review of National Archives of Australia

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) is a vital Australian civic institution. In providing public access to official documents and facilitating the production of rigorous academic research, the NAA performs a significant role in maintaining the rule of law, and holding the state to account. The role of the NAA as a pillar of our democratic society is especially pronounced in the current climate of political volatility, with research revealing historic levels of disillusion with democratic government.

Our submission addresses the Tune Review’s charge to make recommendations on how the NAA might best perform its enduring role in promoting the use of Commonwealth information. We submit that the NAA can better perform its enduring role in Australian society by promoting the use of its collections in tackling important issues of contemporary public policy.

In light of our objective to promote greater awareness of the NAA’s holdings pertaining to issues of contemporary public policy, Australian Policy and History (APH) has three specific proposals:

1. NAA Policy History Project

In making our submission, we are inspired by the [Singapore Policy History Project](#) developed by the [National Archives of Singapore](#) (NAS). The Singapore Policy History Project aims to increase awareness among Singaporeans about their national development and national history. The NAS promotes themes in Singaporean history on its website, such as ‘[The Making of a Nation—Forging a Singapore Identity](#)’, and ‘[Baby Steps—Childcare in the Early Years \(1946-1976\)](#)’. Each theme contains an introductory essay, which links to photographs, newspaper reports, government records and oral history interviews held within the NAS collection. Members of the public can enjoy the contextual essays and explore the records, while researchers can delve more deeply into the archival collections.

Such an initiative within an Australian setting would be relatively low-cost, and serve to enhance public knowledge of the collections held by the NAA. Crucially, it would promote knowledge of the history and development of Australian democracy. Given the emphasis on Australian military history in recent decades, this project would, at relatively low cost, provide an opportunity to showcase other aspects of our national history.

Working in collaboration with experts drawn from the Australian Policy and History network, we propose that the NAA promote collections of records that pertain to particular policy issues; for example, publicly funded healthcare, refugee settlement services, national security, education and federalism. These policy themes would be presented on the NAA

website, in a style that appeals to a general readership. Contextual introductory material, interspersed with archival photographs, would provide links to the NAA records that allow a more in-depth investigation of policy issues.

2. National Archives of Australia-Australian Policy and History Fellowship Scheme

In order to develop the nexus between the National Archives and Australian policy history, we also propose the creation of an NAA-Australian Policy and History Fellowship. The fellowship will be awarded annually to a candidate to undertake historical research pertaining to an issue of contemporary public policy. It will be valued at \$25,000 and administered jointly by APH and the NAA. The fellowship will be funded by a partnership of public institutions and universities.

Applications will be judged by a panel comprising senior academic historians and NAA officers on the following criteria:

- A project concerning the historical background of a policy issue that significantly affects the lives of Australians
- A cohesive program of research using NAA records that can be achieved within twelve months
- A track record that indicates the candidates' ability to realise their research objectives.

Fellows will attend Australian Policy and History's annual 'History and the Hill Conference' where they will present their research and receive training about how to communicate with policy makers.

Measurable Outcomes

- a scholarly journal article for publication in the *Journal of Applied History*
- an opinion piece for publication on the [Australian Policy and History website](#)
- a presentation at annual Australian Policy and History 'History and the Hill' Conference
- a digital exhibition for publication on the NAA website

Other Outcomes

- increased public awareness of the resources held by the NAA and its role as a vital public institution
- development of historians' ability to contribute constructively to policy debates
- historical insights into contemporary policy issues, leading to improved public policy outcomes
- enhanced profile for policy and political history as a counter to emphasis on military history.

Acknowledgement of NAA

- naming of fellowship
- all publications will acknowledge NAA
- acknowledgement of NAA on APH website and advertising.

3. National Archives of Australia-Australian Policy and History Oral History Project

Australian Policy and History believes that our senior public servants represent an under-utilised source of knowledge and expertise about Australian policy and political history. We propose that APH and the NAA collaborate in the preparation of an Australian Research Council Linkage funding application to collect a series of oral history interviews with people who have served at

the executive level in the Australian Public Service. These interviews would be made available to researchers and the public, and stand as an invaluable record of our national development. We note a precedent for this kind of undertaking in *Queensland Speaks*, a project in which interviews with Queensland politicians, unionists and public servants from 1968 to 2008 were collected and made publicly available; <https://www.queenslandspeaks.com.au/>.

About Australian Policy and History

Australian Policy and History is a network of historians that provides politicians, bureaucrats, journalists and the public with historical knowledge in the pursuit of better public policy outcomes. Australian Policy and History was founded in 2010 by a group of historians including Professor David Lowe, Professor Melanie Oppenheimer and Professor Nicholas Brown. We operate a [website](#), which publishes research about contemporary policy issues and runs seminars, conferences and workshops. Australian Policy and History is run chiefly by historians at Deakin University, with support from the University of Melbourne and the Australian National University.

Australian Policy and History encourages historians to be bold and constructive participants in the public policy debate. It seeks to equip us with skills to communicate beyond the academy—to connect with policy makers, the media and the public, and to consider the ways that our knowledge and expertise can contribute to the advancement of Australian society.

We have recently collaborated with international counterparts including [History and Policy](#) in the United Kingdom and the [National History Center](#) in the United States to establish an international network of policy and history organisations. The [International Network for History and Policy](#) promotes international good practice for the incorporation of history into public policy-making.

In conclusion, Australian Policy and History seeks to underline the vital role that the National Archives of Australia plays in Australian civic society. We would be delighted to work collaboratively with the NAA, including in the ways outlined above, to enhance its enduring role in Australian society because it stands as a vital resource in tackling important issues of contemporary public policy.

Professor David Lowe, Deakin University
Dr Carolyn Holbrook, Deakin University
Dr Lyndon Megarrity, James Cook University

1 June 2019