

PO Box 1101,
Aitkenvale Q. 4814
8 May 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to make a submission to the Tune Review.

I am an historian who has visited the National Archives of Australia (NAA) for research purposes since 2001. I am most familiar with the Canberra and Sydney branches of the NAA, although I have also visited the Melbourne and Brisbane branches. I have referenced NAA files on numerous occasions in my work, most notably in published research on international education policy, as well as in my history of Northern Australia, *Northern Dreams* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018).

The National Archives of Australia is one of the great treasure troves of historical research. The NAA employs efficient officers to assist with research inquiries and delivery of documents to reading rooms in capital cities around the country. It also provides some excellent fee-for-service products, especially in relation to high quality digital copies of historic photos held by the NAA. I always enjoy visiting the archives and engaging with the friendly staff.

Nevertheless, the NAA could be much better at serving the interests of Australia's historians, who collectively are adding knowledge to Australian history and offering new interpretations of the past. Our history is too important to be left to the mythmakers and sensationalists who seem to be increasingly dominant in the media these days.

There are a number of steps which the National Archives of Australia could take to enhance its relationship with the historical community and public researchers generally:

1. The process of examining records theoretically open under the 20-year access rule needs to be sped up. As a number of scholars have complained, failure to clear certain files may well inadvertently affect the scope, balance and accuracy of historical publications which rely on archival sources for their veracity. There are surely numerous categories of documents that do not contain embarrassing or dangerous security or diplomatic data which could and should be presented to the general public without being examined first by a research officer. It should be acknowledged, however, that many defence and foreign affairs documents need to be examined for security and other issues, and this clearance work involves, necessarily, the employment of more research officers at the NAA to avoid research delays.
2. A fellowship/scholarship scheme involving study, visits and presentations by historians at NAA branches should be re-introduced. The NAA needs to be aware of new trends in history and areas where their resources could be used. The NAA/Australian Historical Association scholarship scheme facilitating the digital copying of records for postgraduates is useful, but I believe that there is a need to foster personal and professional links between the NAA and the history profession. The Frederick Watson Fellowship and the Margaret George Award should be reinstated as a means for the NAA to gain better knowledge of its holdings and to also support excellence in archival research.
3. The NAA could play a leading role in increasing access to historical photographs of recent decades, perhaps in collaboration with news media, government departments and New Parliament House. For historians publishing their research, it is greatly frustrating that many photographs of the last 50 years are locked up in copyright restrictions and excessive fees to news organisations. The NAA's collection of readily available government-generated

photographs is consequently a great national treasure: this is a strength that the NAA could build on.

4. The NAA and other government agencies would do well to remember that the future cannot be just digital. The preservation of precious physical archival resources for historians and other citizens is a goal that is just as important as 'digital transformation'. Furthermore, the importance of the reading room as a place of study, the value of NAA research staff and the NAA's place as a national research institution are institutional considerations which should receive great attention from organisational stakeholders.

I hope that more resources, especially human resources, are made available to the NAA to help make its important contribution to understanding Australia's past.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Lyndon Megarrity