



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL MATERIAL INC.
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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

8 May 2018

To the Committee Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into Canberra's national institutions

On behalf of the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM), I would like to make a submission to the 'Inquiry into Canberra's national institutions' by the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories.

About the AICCM

The AICCM is a not-for-profit organisation concerned with the conservation, preservation, research of, and access to Australia's tangible and intangible cultural, historical and scientific heritage. Since 1973, the AICCM has actively worked to promote the long-term care of Australia's heritage in recognition of the role that it plays in developing and enhancing our national, community and familial identities.

The AICCM is committed to preserving Australia's heritage as a resource for present and future generations. We recognise the knowledge, skills and stories that our heritage embodies, and its role in creating a vibrant, rich and resilient society. We research and care for objects, artworks, documents and digital media of cultural, social, scientific and personal significance from the past and present and acknowledge these as agents of memory, inspiration, information, evidence and discovery through which personal and collective stories are told through time.

The AICCM Strategic plan can be viewed at:
<https://aiccm.org.au/news/aiccm-strategic-plan-2016-2020>



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Our concerns

The collecting institutions located in Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, Australian War Memorial, National Portrait Gallery, National Museum of Australia, National Library of Australia, National Film and Sound Archive and National Archives of Australia are trusted to care for the nation's moveable cultural heritage. They hold objects that define us as a nation and tell our history in a tangible and immediate way.

A basic responsibility of any collecting institution is the care of the collection it holds. This responsibility is the first and most important duty of a collecting institution and without it no other program can succeed.

The AICCM is currently very concerned about the state of these Canberra-based institutions. Over recent years they have been subject to a slow reduction in their funding base through the efficiency dividend. In more recent years additional cuts have also been made. The cuts are resulting in losses of staff and other resources, including those very staff and resources required to ensure the collections survive. They are putting at risk the collections at the heart of these institutions and breaking a covenant with the Australian people by putting at risk the very things that define us as a nation.

Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums hold collections of physical materials, which are subject to deterioration and damage. Ensuring the preservation of such collections is an active process that requires constant attention and targeted activity performed by trained professionals who understand the nature of these materials, how they deteriorate and how to conserve them. Without such professionals collections will deteriorate and fall into disrepair and be lost. Funding cuts are resulting in a significant loss of professional conservation staff in these institutions with the resultant diminution of conservation programs, with the resultant increase in the danger of loss of collection materials.

Conservators are trained in a range of scientific and technical skills that are required to ensure the survival of collections. This starts with the active conservation of materials as broad as: textiles, paintings, documents, prints, photographs, metals, ethnographic objects as well as emerging digital formats.

Conservators also work in the field of 'preventive' conservation. This is a strand of conservation that aims to preserve collections in holistic terms through proper storage and display environments (temperature, humidity and light), proper storage housing and display furniture and protection from insects, mould, vermin, flood and fire. The recent flood at the ANU serves to show just how vulnerable our collections are.

Conservators are also necessary for enabling access to collections, whether through research, community visits, digitisation requests, or through exhibitions and loans. Any use of collections places them at risk. Conservators are trained to manage and mitigate



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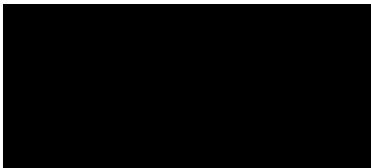
risk factors such as unsuitable environmental conditions, potential physical damage during handling, display and transport, security issues, and poor quality storage and display materials. Conservators are essential to ensuring collections are preserved for both current and future generations.

The AICCM feels that without addressing these fundamental needs of the collections held by the Canberra-based institutions many of the strategies outlined in this Inquiry cannot progress or succeed. For example, in response to **1. Creating a strong brand and online presence**, the national institutions require digital images of collections and up to date registration records which require both registration and conservation staff to maintain. This then ensures the data is available to create a strong online presence. Digitisation in itself does not ensure the survival of a collection, however, it is important for access, record keeping and to promotion of cultural and natural history collections.

The AICCM would encourage the Committee to take into consideration staff cuts under efficiency dividend and look at the flow on effect this has on the ability of national institutions to maintain viability and relevance, to sustainably grow their profile, visitor numbers, and revenue. These goals can only be addressed by the provision of sufficient professional staff. Furthermore it requires the provision of appropriate conservation, storage and display facilities that meet international standards.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [REDACTED] or on mobile [REDACTED].

Yours faithfully,



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President
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