

Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield
Minister for the Arts
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Fifield,

In the context of the forthcoming election and our previous correspondence with you I am writing to seek the views of your Party on the future of the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia. In my capacity of the President of the Friends of the NFSA I will provide your views and those of your opponents to members for their information.

As one of the pioneers in the creation of the audiovisual era, and a contributor that punches above its weight in creating sound and visual content, Australia deserves a world leading institution devoted to the popular cultural expression of our age.

The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) is Australia's national audiovisual archive – the custodian of its film, radio, television, audio and born-digital heritage. It is the largest institution of its kind in South East Asia/Pacific and is internationally respected.

Unfortunately a decade of “efficiency dividends” and associated funding cuts has led to a significant reduction in the resources devoted to the NFSA. Between 2008/9 and 2016/7 annual government funding – currently about \$24 million - has been static, and therefore declining by about 20% in real terms. Staffing has also declined by about 20%.

This has resulted in loss of public profile, the closure of some public services and activities, and slow progress in digitisation. The best efforts of its CEO and staff cannot compensate for the continuing reduction in its resource base, and for the management of a growing collection on a shrinking budget. Its funding level of a decade ago needs to be restored and then appropriately incremented for the challenges ahead.

It is difficult to reconcile this budgetary attrition (which has also affected, to varying degrees, other major memory institutions) with the \$500 million grant recently allocated to the Australian War Memorial. A fraction of that figure would make all the difference to the NFSA.

An issue of particular concern is that the NFSA's existing collection of analogue audio and video tapes must be digitised if their content is to survive. As a working technological museum the NFSA is engaged in this transfer process now, but it is proceeding at one third of the rate necessary if the work is to be completed by the internationally adopted benchmark of 2025.

The NFSA is in a Catch 22 situation. It cannot increase digitisation without further reducing other activities. It cannot increase its public profile and accessibility without reducing preservation and acquisition work.

We believe the NFSA can be returned to its position of prominence and world leadership by:

- Restoring the NFSA's original funding levels (inflation-adjusted to 2008/9 levels: that means an increase in current dollars from \$24 million to \$30 million per annum) so that it can turn its attention to rebuilding its activities and public profile nationally and internationally, plus a "special" appropriation to the NFSA to enable it to fund the ongoing major digitisation program at a sustainable level without disruption to its other functions (\$10 million is proposed).
- Encouraging an ongoing political and stakeholder discussion about the cultural value of the NFSA and its worth to Australian society as the central standard setter and custodian of the nation's audiovisual heritage, so that policy and funding decisions are consistent with of this role.
- Opening appointments to the NFSA Board to transparent public application to ensure it will always have the best range of appropriate expertise and experience needed for the institution's strategic development
- Obtaining agreement in principle from the major political parties about the long term benefits of housing the NFSA in a purpose built building fully expressive of its character and services

I look forward to your response to the above issues

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Edmondson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Ray Edmondson OAM
President
Friends of the NFSA

6 March 2019