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The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

# **Telling Australia's Story —and why it's important**

**Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions**

**Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories**

April 2019  
Canberra

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## Foreword

I am pleased to present the Committee's report on its inquiry into Canberra's national institutions.

This report is tabled without dissent or additional comment and in doing so demonstrates the support across the political spectrum for its conclusions and recommendations. A strong and vibrant collection of national institutions is critically important for the continued success of our democracy and nation.

Canberra is the heart of the nation, and home to some of its most iconic national institutions. These institutions tell our Australian story. It is essential that we understand that story, learn from it and use it to build confidence and pride for the present and future.

The primary role of the institutions is to preserve and promote Australia's history, culture, arts, science and democracy. The Committee's inquiry examined a range of institutions, from those that are internationally recognised such as the Australian War Memorial, National Gallery of Australia and National Portrait Gallery, to those with a lower profile such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), National Archives of Australia and National Electoral Education Centre (NEEC).

This report considers the shared value of Canberra's national institutions in conserving, interpreting and facilitating engagement with Australia's history, culture and national identity. To unlock this value, institutions must provide Australians with the opportunity to identify with their national story, as collected and told by these institutions. Many national institutions are also economic and tourism drawcards, and are key assets in Australia's international engagement. The Committee has recommended that national institutions develop and articulate a shared narrative that directly connects them with Australia's story and that underpins their individual and collaborative work.

The inquiry considered institutions' engagement with the public. Evolving societal expectations and significant technological advances mean that people want a more

engaging, flexible and interactive experience of institutions' offerings. Many institutions have obliged, using digital technologies, social media and an enhanced online presence. However, the Committee was concerned that our institutions are not working together to communicate the shared importance of their telling of our national story, and why that is important to our society and our future. As such, the Committee considered that there was potential for a stronger concerted effort to be made on collective branding and marketing by national institutions. Scope also exists for national institutions to better engage with under-represented visitors, particularly to encourage new migrants to visit national institutions.

More than 165 000 school students visit Canberra's national institutions each year, and more than half of these do so with the help of funding provided by the Government's Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program. However, the Committee heard that some school programs had waiting lists of up to two years, and that the PACER program was disproportionately used by schools from Australia's east coast. The Committee has recommended a comprehensive review of PACER to consider how to address increasing demand, the adequacy of PACER subsidies, the criteria for prioritising applications and funding, and the program's governance. The Committee has also recommended the development of a program encouraging school visits to the national institutions that provide excellent education programs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The Committee heard that Australians are genuinely interested in being informed about their democracy. Understanding and being inspired about the role that individuals can play in our democracy is essential. The NEEC, run by the Australian Electoral Commission for school students, is one great example of success in educating, inspiring and empowering our next generation of voters. Likewise the Parliamentary Education Office provides successful programs for students to learn about the operation of our Parliament. The Committee would like to see these programs made more accessible to the general public.

The Committee is concerned that relevant institutions may not be presenting a shared and consistent vision about Australian democracy, nor is there a clear delineation of the programs and activities conducted. Some roles and functions are duplicated and some important aspects of the story of Australian democracy are missed. This report recommends a review of the objectives, roles and functions of those institutions that facilitate engagement with civics and democracy, giving consideration to their closer administrative and operational alignment. This may provide an opportunity to return parts of Old Parliament House to being a working extension of Parliament House.

2019 marks ten years since the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) was established and therefore it is timely to assess its focus and effectiveness in achieving its core role and responsibilities. The Committee has concerns about the disconnect between MoAD's fundamental strategic role, and the direction of some of its engagement with the public. MoAD's scope has crept from its core focus and role. Its current and emerging focus on critical debates and discourse about democracy is best left to academic, think tank or media analysis. In addition to conserving and presenting Old Parliament House and telling the story of Australia's remarkable democratic heritage, MoAD should improve its focus on developing visitors' understanding of our nation's democratic history, inspiring faith in our democracy, and leaving visitors educated and excited about their agency in Australia's political system and how they can play a more active part in it.

Our political parties have played an essential role in the strength and stability of our democracy yet their story is not being told: there is a need for enhanced understanding and engagement with Australia's political party system. The Committee has recommended the creation of centres for each political party, to add their important role in Australia's democratic history to the story told by our national institutions.

National institutions are accountable to the Australian Government and Parliament for their strategic direction, governance and use of public resources. Audits conducted by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) in 2005 and 2018 found issues with institutions' governance, risk management and records management relating to the national collection. The Committee has recommended that the ANAO conduct a follow-up audit on institutions' implementation of relevant recommendations from both audits. The Committee has also supported the establishment of a formal consultative structure for national institutions, to improve collaboration in such areas as planning, policy, marketing and operations.

The Committee received many proposals for new national institutions in Canberra. Out of these, we have recommended that a business case be developed for a new national history museum.

Sadly, the present representation of Indigenous Australia within the precinct of the Parliamentary Zone is chiefly one of protest and does not provide for a broader acknowledgement and demonstration of Australia's rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, language, heritage and culture. The Committee has recommended that AIATSIS be expanded with a new home in the Parliamentary Zone and a broader role in presenting the story of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The new facility should include a national resting place for repatriated ancestral remains that cannot immediately return to country.

Successive governments have sought to curtail government spending as part of exercising responsible fiscal management over a number of years. This has been legitimate and necessary to ensure a strong economy, a balanced budget and an accountable public sector. As a result, many institutions have struggled to deliver key programs and services. The Committee has recommended that the Australian Government consider adopting measures to offset the impact of budgetary pressures on small agencies including Canberra's national institutions.

National institutions' facilities are vital to their operations and as such, the Committee has made recommendations to provide a more strategic and coordinated approach to the management and maintenance of facilities; the development of a permanent shared collection storage facility; and a shared exhibition space to be developed on suitable national land in Canberra.

I would like to sincerely thank the many contributors to the Committee's inquiry, which was a large and complex one. The Committee carefully considered all of the evidence it received, along with its own observations following visits to some institutions' facilities, in reaching its findings and recommendations. Canberra's national institutions are excellent, invaluable, and worthy of our support and patronage. I hope that this report will contribute to making them even more effective, vibrant and cohesive as the keepers, authors and champions of Australia's national story.

**Mr Ben Morton MP**  
**Chair**



## Membership of the Committee

**Chair** Mr Ben Morton MP

**Deputy Chair** Ms Gai Brodtmann MP

**Members**

Senator Jonathon Duniam	Senator Malarndirri McCarthy
Senator Mehreen Faruqi (from 13/9/2018)	Hon Dr John McVeigh MP (from 10/9/2018)
Senator Katy Gallagher (to 9/5/2018)	Senator James Paterson
Mr Kevin Hogan MP (from 26/3/2018)	Senator Lee Rhiannon (to 15/8/2018)
Mr Julian Leeser MP*	Senator David Smith (from 28/6/2018)
Hon Sussan Ley MP (to 28/8/2018)	Hon Warren Snowdon MP
Senator Sue Lines	

\* Mr Leeser did not participate in this inquiry.

## **Committee Secretariat**

<b>Secretary</b>	Ms Peggy Danaee Ms Shennia Spillane
<b>Inquiry Secretary</b>	Mr Muzammil Ali
<b>Research Officer</b>	Ms Stephanie Lee
<b>Administrative Officer</b>	Ms Kathleen Blunden



## **Terms of reference**

The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories will inquire into and report on the range of innovative strategies that Canberra's national institutions are using to maintain viability and relevance to sustainably grow their profile, visitor numbers, and revenue, including:

- Creating a strong brand and online presence;
- Experimenting with new forms of public engagement and audience participation;
- Conducting outreach outside of Canberra;
- Cultivating private sector support;
- Developing other income streams; and
- Ensuring the appropriateness of governance structures; and

Any other relevant matter the Committee wishes to examine, including the process for establishing new institutions.



## List of abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AIS	Australian Institute of Sport
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
ANBG	Australian National Botanic Gardens
APS	Australian Public Service
ARC	Australian Research Council
AWM	Australian War Memorial
CCSSC	Cultural and Corporate Shared Services Centre
Copyright Act	Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DCA	Department of Communications and the Arts
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DIIS	Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
DoF	Department of Finance
DPS	Department of Parliamentary Services

DSS	Department of Social Services
MoAD	Museum of Australian Democracy
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NCAA	National Capital Attractions Association
NCETP	National Capital Educational Tourism Project
NCITO	National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach
NEEC	National Electoral Education Centre
NFSA	National Film and Sound Archive
NGA	National Gallery of Australia
NLA	National Library of Australia
NMA	National Museum of Australia
NPG	National Portrait Gallery
PACER	Parliament and Civics Education Rebate
PEO	Parliamentary Education Office
PBS	Portfolio Budget Statements
PGPA Act	Public Governance Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (Cth)
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics



## **List of recommendations**

### **2 The shared value of national institutions**

#### **Recommendation 1**

The Committee recommends that Canberra's national institutions develop and articulate a shared narrative that directly connects them with Australia's story. That expression of shared value should underpin the work of all of the national institutions, individually and in collaboration.

### **3 Public engagement**

#### **Recommendation 2**

The Committee recommends that Canberra's national institutions make a stronger concerted effort to undertake collective branding and marketing, including the use of joint campaigns capitalising on major events and exhibitions occurring during the same season. These initiatives should be organised through structured collaboration, and based on the best available visitor data.

#### **Recommendation 3**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Department of Social Services and in conjunction with Canberra's national institutions, develop a program that encourages new migrants to Australia to visit Canberra's national institutions.

**Recommendation 4**

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training undertake a comprehensive review of the PACER program, to include consideration of:

- ways to increase capacity to enable participation by all interested schools and students;
- criteria for prioritising applications and funding support;
- the funding level provided to the program overall and for each student; and
- governance of the program including membership of its education advisory committee.

**Recommendation 5**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in conjunction with Canberra's science-focussed national institutions, develop a program to encourage and promote engagement in science education by school students visiting Canberra.

**Recommendation 6**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government review the objectives, roles and functions of the Museum of Australian Democracy, the National Electoral Education Centre and the visitor and education services at Parliament House; and consider the merits of their closer administrative and operational alignment.

**Recommendation 7**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider expanding the facilities and resourcing of the Parliamentary Education Office and the National Electoral Education Centre, to allow them to offer regular programs to public visitors as well as school groups, and the NEEC to also offer a walk-up experience for impromptu visitors.

**Recommendation 8**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government examine the present objectives and activities of the Museum of Australian Democracy, with a view to ensuring that the Museum is appropriately focused on its core responsibilities: to tell the story of Australia's remarkable democratic heritage, and inspire citizens' engagement in democracy.

#### **Recommendation 9**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with political parties to create centres for each political party, located at MoAD, to collect, preserve, research and make available publications and exhibitions on the parties' history, campaigns, policies and achievements.

### **4 Governance**

#### **Recommendation 10**

The Committee recommends that during the 2019-2020 financial year the Australian National Audit Office conduct a follow-up audit of Canberra's National Collecting Institutions, with a particular focus on monitoring their implementation of relevant recommendations made in the ANAO's 2005 and 2018 reports relating to the national collections.

#### **Recommendation 11**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with Canberra's national institutions, the National Capital Authority and the ACT Government, develop a formal consultative structure for national institutions, to pursue the alignment of their strategic planning and policy, explore efficiencies and sharing resources where appropriate, and provide for joint advocacy, negotiation and collaborative marketing.

#### **Recommendation 12**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop a business case for the establishment of a natural history museum in Canberra.

#### **Recommendation 13**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government relocate the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) from its current location on the Acton Peninsula to a new location in Canberra's Parliamentary Zone; and expand the remit and facilities of AIATSIS to constitute a comprehensive national institution focused on the history, culture and heritage of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This should include public exhibition facilities, and a national resting place for repatriated ancestral remains that cannot immediately return to Country. The institution should be developed under the leadership and in comprehensive consultation with Indigenous Australians.

## **5 Resourcing Canberra's national institutions**

### **Recommendation 14**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government revisit the recommendations of Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit Report 413, *The Efficiency Dividend: Size does matter*, with a view to adopting measures to offset the disproportionate impact of the efficiency dividend on small agencies including Canberra's national institutions. This may include setting a threshold amount for institutions' annual expenditure below which the efficiency dividend would be excluded or reduced.

### **Recommendation 15**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government reassess the Average Staffing Level caps on Canberra's national institutions, to reduce the cost and skills-retention impacts these are presently having, and avoid the need for institutions to undertake less efficient temporary labour hire arrangements.

### **Recommendation 16**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider the adoption of a strategic and coordinated approach to the management and maintenance of national institutions' buildings and facilities.

### **Recommendation 17**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government coordinate and support the development of a permanent shared collection storage facility for Canberra's national institutions, to replace the current piecemeal and inadequate arrangements and create maximum efficiency. This should be developed and implemented in close consultation with relevant institutions to ensure it is fit-for-purpose to meet their current and future needs.

### **Recommendation 18**

The Committee recommends that Canberra's national institutions ensure that their plans and budgets include clear and documented processes to account for the whole-of-life costs of collections and acquisitions. Assessments of whole-of-life costs need to form part of strategies for managing institutions' existing collections, and also consideration of potential new donations and acquisitions.

**Recommendation 19**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in conjunction with national institutions, develop a new shared exhibition space on suitable national land in Canberra.

**Recommendation 20**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government acknowledge the need for the digitisation of analogue audio-visual items in the collections of the institutions, to ensure that all such material is digitally preserved by 2025, and develop a clear and coherent whole of government strategy across institutions to get this done.



## **National institutions examined by the Committee**

The following is a list of the Canberra-based national institutions considered by the Committee:

- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies;
- Australian Institute of Sport;
- Australian National Botanic Gardens;
- Australian War Memorial;
- CSIRO Discovery Centre;
- High Court of Australia;
- Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House;
- National Archives of Australia;
- National Electoral Education Centre;
- National Film and Sound Archive of Australia;
- National Gallery of Australia;
- National Library of Australia;
- National Museum of Australia;
- National Portrait Gallery;
- Parliament House; and
- Questacon – The National Science and Technology Centre.

For further detail, please refer to ‘Scope of the inquiry’ in Chapter 1.

