



THE
CHILDERS
GROUP

AN
INDEPENDENT
ARTS FORUM

22 February 2016

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2602

Dear Prime Minister

The Childers Group (an independent arts support group in the ACT) strongly endorses the letter recently written to you by the Chief Minister of the ACT, the Hon Andrew Barr MLA, regarding the continuing reduction in funding to the national cultural institutions through the ongoing imposition of dividend efficiencies. We know 'efficiency dividends' are far from efficient in terms of making meaningful savings, and we strongly urge you to consider the serious impact this decision continues to have on our leading cultural institutions and on national and international cultural tourism in the ACT.

The function of Australian collecting institutions is to develop and maintain their national collections and to exhibit, or make these collections available for exhibition or use in the national interest. There is inherent rigour in their collection policies, and their obligations continue to increase as material accumulates, needing conservation, preservation, cataloguing and exhibition by specialist library and curatorial staff. The Childers Group believes that the continued imposition of efficiency dividends is now affecting the capacity of collecting institutions to fulfil their core functions.

These functions differentiate their role from all other government agencies. As relatively small agencies their capacity to make efficiencies is far more limited than organisations with large budgets, especially as collections are housed in buildings open to the public all week, and in some cases in the evenings. Our national cultural institutions humanise and bring an added and important dimension to our lives – they value the importance of story telling, and are repositories of tradition and cultural identity.

Cultural tourism also plays a large part in the ACT's economy; the exemplary reputations of the collecting institutions in Canberra are recognised world-wide, bringing large numbers of national and international tourists to the ACT.

We note that travelling exhibitions are also now in danger, and fear that any reduction will severely limit public access to collections, impacting on regional galleries, museums and libraries Australia-wide, i.e. on *all* people living in regional Australia (*see regional stats at the conclusion of this letter).

The Canberra institutions are already reducing the number of flagship publications and cutting back on their collection-based publication programs. One of the savings measures taken by the NLA is to cease publication of the *National Library of Australia Magazine*, with June 2016 to be the final issue. These cutbacks limit the institutions' capacity to disseminate important cultural research and more general information, while their leadership role in international and national cultural dialogue through scholarly conferences and symposia may also end. Spiralling costs in

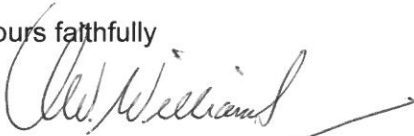
leading edge digitisation programs would also endanger public access as institutions try to limit expenditure.

The Childers Group rejects the assumption that collecting institutions have an infinite capacity to do more with less – there is a point at which they are no longer able to meet their legislative requirements and the public's expectations.

Australia's cultural heritage should be valued, sustained and shared. It represents our identity, our history and our future. In imposing such severe and ongoing financial constraints, there must be recognition that collecting institutions are different from most other government agencies. The Childers Group strongly recommends that they be exempted from the impost of the efficiency dividend and that funding levels be reinstated in the May Budget.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss this matter further. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully



Emeritus Professor David Williams AM
Spokesperson, the Childers Group
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***Australians living outside capital cities: regional statistics**

Regional Australia holds the keys to a sustainable future for Australia. It is where solutions can be found to key national and global challenges such as: food security; biodiversity; climate change; water solutions; preservation of Indigenous cultures and Indigenous economic development and social inclusion.

- 34% of Australians live outside greater capital city areas and 30% live outside major cities.
- Despite common misconceptions, the population of regional Australia is rising. Between 2007 and 2012, the population outside of Australia's major cities grew by 6.6%. The Australian Bureau of Statistics projects that the population outside capital cities will grow by 26% between 2007 and 2026.
- Regional economies are based on a diversity of industry sectors, with the majority of employment concentrated in the services, health, education and infrastructure sectors.
- Regional Australia is the major source of Australia's export earnings, accounting for 67% of the value of Australia's exports.
- Regional Australia plays a critical role in the Australian tourism industry, which makes a direct contribution to Australia's GDP of \$35 billion annually. Around 45% of tourism expenditure occurs in areas outside of Australia's capital cities.

Cc Hon Senator Mitch Fifield, Minister for the Arts
Hon Bill Shorten MP, Leader of the Opposition
Hon Mark Dreyfus QC, MP, Shadow Minister for the Arts
Mr Andrew Barr MLA, Chief Minister of the ACT
Dr Chris Bourke MLA, Minister for Small Business and the Arts, ACT
Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA, Leader of the Opposition, ACT
Mr Brendan Smyth MLA, Shadow Minister for Arts and Tourism, ACT
Directors of national cultural institutions:
National Library of Australia
National Gallery of Australia
National Film & Sound Archive
National Museum of Australia
National Portrait Gallery
Museum of Australian Democracy
National Science Museum – Questacon
Australian War Memorial
Australian Maritime Museum