



INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

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The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP
Treasurer
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Budget Cuts to Collecting and Cultural Institutions

The Independent Scholars Association of Australia (ISAA) is a network of scholars whose interests span the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. We affirm the importance of libraries, museums, galleries, and archives (GLAM) in supporting scholarship; these collecting institutions are fundamental to the advancement of knowledge. At a national level, they are key to the development and maintenance of a national culture. The role of the National Library of Australia, under the National Library Act 1960 is to collect, preserve and make available documentary sources of national significance. The National Museum of Australia does the same for our material culture. Both promote a deeper community understanding and appreciation of Australia's past for the benefit of our present and future.

Therefore, ISAA expresses great concern on reading in the current Federal Budget that funding to the arts in general will decrease, and that along with the National Gallery of Australia and the National Library these national institutions will again see cuts to their funding. Of particular concern is that according to reports, the National Library goes from \$61 million funding this year to just \$47 million in 2025-26.

In 2014, a study conducted by CSIRO and the Smart Services CRC of the digitization of Australian cultural heritage asserted that the collections and services of the GLAM sector represent our accumulated achievements and experiences, and that support for these collections, and especially their digitization, was important to culture and the economy. The situation has not improved in the years since then.

In the 1950s, Umberto Eco, a very influential Italian thinker and writer known to most Australians as the author of *The Name of the Rose*, wrote a satirical piece for an Italian newspaper, which should be required reading for any politician involved in funding for cultural and learned institutions. This piece is called *Fragments* and in it, an archaeologist at some point in the future, after a cataclysmic event wiped out European life, attempts to make sense of fragments of poetry. The archaeologist laments the lack of a consolidated record of Italian culture. We might chuckle as the archaeologist considers a book cover with the title *Great Hit Songs of Yesterday and Today* as evidence of the cultural significance of poetry and the prevailing societal angst of the 1950s. But Eco's message, brought into the 21st century, is that without national collections, preserved and managed for the future, Australian culture and a knowledge of its own history and achievements will run the risk of being degraded and ignored but, worse still, lost altogether.

The government should take note of the fact that a very great part of a nation's self-perception, its sense of its place in the world, and how it is perceived internationally, lies in its intellectual, scholarly and artistic achievements. A reading of Eco's short satirical piece may bring home to politicians the significance of our national collecting institutions and create some sense of the importance for the future of Australian culture and the record of Australian achievements and experiences. It might give a jolt to the unimaginative and narrow way in which policy on these issues is managed in Australia.

The reduction of support in the budget for these activities should be reversed, and support for them should be on a continuing and improved basis, not the process of off-again on-again and of less and less support that has characterized policy in this area in the more recent past.

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cc. Dr Jim Chalmers MP, Shadow Treasurer
cc. Hon Barnaby Joyce MP, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development
cc. Hon Tony Burke MP, Shadow Minister for the Arts