

**Submission Number: NND.001.00881**

**Submission Of: Esther Anatolitis**

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What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my professional knowledge, qualifications or experience or on behalf of a group or organisation

What is your area of professional expertise? Arts and culture

If you are lodging your submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation? National Association for the Visual Arts

### Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?

Australia's regional arts community is creative, highly connected and resilient. NAVA congratulates the artists and artworkers whose above-and-beyond work inspired communities, coordinated local businesses, raised funds, boosted mental health, and saved lives:

- Artists across our regions rapidly presented fundraisers, art auctions and other events, even when they had their own work damaged or destroyed in studios or galleries;
- An outstanding example is Bundanon, the historic homestead/art gallery near Nowra in southern NSW, which evacuated its most valuable artworks to Sydney before the fires hit, and was a key focus for local firefighters who put "significant resources" into successfully protecting the property. Federal and state grants are now funding the construction of a new fire-proof gallery. See <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-17/bushfire-risk-triggers-arthur-boyd-picasso-art-relocation/11871004>;
- A small number of museums were destroyed completely, such as the Genoa Schoolhouse Museum at Mallacoota in Victoria, and the Mogo Machinery Museum in NSW. A much greater number of historic sites and open-air museums were lost, such as the Kiandra Heritage Precinct, and 16 historic huts in Kosciuszko, all in NSW;
- Many museums, galleries and historic sites were in areas affected by bushfires, including by hazardous levels of smoke. These air hazards affected cultural institutions in cities at great distances from the bushfires, requiring them to close;
- Galleries, museums, libraries, performing arts centres and public art sites serve as evacuation centres, refuges, and spaces of respite. Artists and staff step up to help their communities when natural disasters strike, showing compassion and dedication, often while facing challenging situations in their own homes;
- NAVA commends the work of Blue Shield Australia, the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross, to promote disaster preparedness and share knowledge and lessons learned about disaster response and recovery. See <http://blueshieldaustralia.org.au/>

However, a reliance on the resilience of our most innovative practitioners is not a long-term strategy for emergency preparedness. It is vital that the nation not rely on the outstanding one-off work of already disadvantaged people who continue to seek ways to redress physical and mental health and their financial situation following the bushfires.

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?

Australia's arts community responded to the bushfire emergency under very difficult circumstances, themselves constituting a crisis of arts policy and investment:

- The collapse over a decade of adequate regional arts funding, ever since the Regional Arts Fund was halved in 2014;
- Poor infrastructure planning, poor gallery maintenance, and building stock inadequate to Australia's increasingly extreme environmental conditions;
- Poor disaster preparedness and response plans, disconnected between national, state and local governments;
- Inadequate policies, such as when to close because of the appalling air quality due to smoke, exposing staff, visitors and objects and artworks to danger.

As a result:

- Blue Shield Australia survey results show that many smaller organisations had insufficient resources to cope with a disaster on the scale seen during the summer period. See <http://blueshieldaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Impact-of-Fire-and-Storm-Events-on-GLAM-Institutions-in-Australia-2020.pdf>
- The survey report concludes that "The scale of the bushfire and storm disasters experienced from 1 November 2019 to 31 January 2020 across Australia caught everyone by surprise. It highlighted weaknesses in disaster preparedness and business continuity planning and provided the impetus to revisit these with increased understanding."

The cumulative impact of disasters and under-resourcing has increased hugely with the advent of COVID-19 since March 2020. Work to support and help re-build bushfire-affected communities and organisations must not be relegated, rather it is even more important to understand and support comprehensive recovery plans for these areas.

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

EMERGENCY RESPONSE THAT PUTS ARTS AND CULTURE FIRST

Effective emergency response and disaster recovery are two separate processes that must be delivered closely together and strategically. Both are designed to create cultural change that gives people the confidence to modify their behaviour, knowing that their values, their sense of identity, and their ability to express themselves, won't be compromised.

An arts and cultural approach is vital to securing this.

This means working with community-engaged creative practitioners at the outset, and not merely as an afterthought.

- The Creative Recovery Network is a specialist service provider and advocate for culture and the arts within the emergency management sector. They partner with government, community service, and private sector providers who work in disaster preparedness, response and recovery. See <https://creativerecovery.net.au/>
- Regional Arts Victoria are national leaders in disaster recovery work. See <http://www.rav.net.au/> for their work in creative recovery training and post- Black Saturday regional projects led by specialist disaster recovery facilitators
- Edited by Jade Lillie, *The Relationship is the Project* (2020) is a handbook offering an excellent set of starting points for embarking on this work. See <https://therelationshipistheproject.com/>

#### NAVA ENDORSES AMAGA'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cultural institutions are central to wellbeing, identity, and maintaining social cohesion. They connect Australians with the stories, art, heritage and histories of their community at a local, regional and national level. They are also critical contributors to economies at every level. For example, arts are a key driver of regional tourism, with more domestic tourists attending the arts than organised sport, amusement parks or wineries. See <https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/domestic-arts-tourism-connecting-the-country/>

Change needs to occur both in the short and longer term, and encompasses policy, co-ordination, land management, infrastructure planning, and priority investments. There are opportunities to both repair and create anew.

#### Short term:

The critical things that are needed as soon as possible in affected communities are: artists' support; conservation of collections; oral history projects and provision for historical societies, museums and libraries to offer other cultural outreach and community re-building activities; and support for cultural organisations to undertake systematic planning. Such planning would include assessments of damage, business planning, collections management and acquisitions, including digital access, disaster preparedness, and community engagement. Support includes providing professional expertise, such as conservation advice, and access to resources. This is all quite apart from the work required on the conservation of historic sites and the natural environment.

#### Longer term:

##### National Policy

We strongly recommend the development by the Commonwealth of a confident and aspirational national cultural policy framework that sets aims and priorities, delineates roles, undertakes research and enables funding for implementation. It should include cross-governmental strategies and programs and link to state and local government strategies. It should also include support for Australia's cultural institutions to contribute to the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

As with other national policy making (for example in industry or social policy) a national cultural policy both demonstrates the public value of culture and provides a structure for strategic investment and impact. It would provide a framework for the inclusion of cultural voices in government responses to emergencies and natural disasters. In particular, an injection of targeted funding for long term strategic planning for resilience and sustainability is now required.

Increased funding to accelerate the digitisation programs of work by the national cultural institutions is also critical, both in terms of better disaster mitigation but also in providing better online content during other times of crisis, such as the current pandemic.

##### National Co-ordination of Cultural Recovery in Disaster Responses

These sorts of disastrous events will recur. National co-ordination in disaster recovery for cultural organisations will be required. A proven model is the United States' Heritage Emergency National Task Force (HENTF), which is co-sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Smithsonian Institution. It is a partnership of 42 national service organizations and federal agencies. See <https://culturalrescue.si.edu/hentf/> and for an account of how and why it was formed, see <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-haitis-devastating-earthquake-prompted-worldwide-effort-safeguard-cultural-heritage-180973942/>

Cultural projects also play major roles in regeneration, adaptive reuse of heritage assets and tourism development. Latest research suggests this works best as part of integrated planning.

##### Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and Land Management

There is a growing understanding of the importance of traditional ecological knowledge and Indigenous ways of managing land: "caring for country". Many museums are adopting, researching and promoting Indigenous environmental knowledge and management – through re-interpreting their collections and looking out to country to better support collections, communicating Indigenous science, culture, ways of knowing and practices alongside Western concepts, having an eco-system approach to research, and more sharing of knowledge and information. Indigenous land and waterways management is clearly necessary to better understand, conserve and protect the environment. The directors of Australia's leading natural history museums state that "The bushfire climate change crisis has reinforced that we have much to learn from our First Nations people and that First Nations understandings of our natural species and land management is to be respected, understood and embraced in our research."

Further, providing support to organisations in bushfire-affected communities to implement relevant actions in the 10-year sector plan *First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries* would be a highly effective strategy for community rebuilding and environmental resilience and sustainability. See <https://www.amaga.org.au/indigenous>

##### State Policy

The intermittent and comparatively low level of Commonwealth, state and local support and interest in the museum and gallery sector is reflected in both the lack of strategic planning for the sector and in the ongoing poverty and struggle of many regional and local community museums, galleries and keeping places.

Most museums in Australia are small, volunteer-managed community organisations which are embedded in their local communities and provide a range of social and economic benefits, including a sense of belonging to their community, and of contributing to society. These museums are generally woefully under-resourced. One of the most useful and cost-effective actions that governments at all levels could do for rebuilding disaster-affected communities is to provide professional advice and an adequate level of funding support for these and similar arts, heritage and cultural organisations in the regions.

There are opportunities to make strategic national and state investments in digital access to the full range of collections large and small. Strategies and support for the digitisation of collections in regional and community galleries and museums would also be an invaluable contribution to Australians' wellbeing and social engagement and contribute to community rebuilding.

In sum, there is a need for a more coherent and equitable cultural strategy for Australia that guides and prioritises both capital and capability investment in all levels of cultural activity, and in this case especially digital technologies and capacity building for institutions and communities.

##### Disaster Planning included in Infrastructure Planning

Some assets are irreplaceable – these include the collections held in museums, galleries and historical societies. Infrastructure planning must include programs to disaster proof our arts and heritage institutions and communities. The cultural impact of natural and human made disaster

can be catastrophic. The increasing rate of climate-induced destruction of irreplaceable cultural collections, particularly in regional Australia, must be recognised and local organisations need advice and support to both reduce the risk and mitigate the consequences. Planning should include:

- o Resources for disaster planning and disaster response capabilities nation-wide
- o Formal and funded linkages between national, state and local capacities

The challenges posed by climate change, a re-ordering of the world economy, years-long cumulative under-investment in infrastructure, and widely variable service delivery between urban, regional and remote areas, necessitate newer ways of thinking about and assessing the infrastructure needs of Australians. In particular, a user-centred focus on the cultural as well as physical needs and aspirations of local communities is critical.

Priority National and State Investments

#### 1. Digitisation of collections

Museums and galleries hold a wealth of knowledge in their collections. A longer term investment in helping museums, galleries and historical societies to provide digital access would speed up the current erratic and under-funded process and help mitigate against catastrophic losses caused by future disasters. A national investment plan would include:

- o the adoption of national, state, territory and local government digital access to collections strategies and plans, which link to a national collaborative research infrastructure plan
- o initiatives to help build the capacity of smaller cultural institutions
- o dedicated funding for digitisation and digital access at every level
- o support for state digital collections platforms such as Victorian Collections and WA Collections
- o steady support for the National Library of Australia's Trove platform

#### 2. Biodiversity research

Australia's leading natural history museums hold invaluable reference collections for the nation. They are "the 'ark' of information on Australian species with collections that date back as early as the 1850s... The impact of the recent fires on Australia's biodiversity is on a scale not previously seen since record-keeping began..." These great state institutions are committed to finding out how species have been affected, to implementing and supporting programs to restore those species that can be saved, and to engaging the public in mitigation strategies. This requires increased funding and co-ordinated national action. See <https://australianmuseum.net.au/about/organisation/media-centre/statement-australia-natural-history-museum-directors/>

#### 3. Purpose built safe storage

Digitisation of collections will retain some critical information, however, museum and gallery collections - objects, artworks and documents - need protection through secure storage facilities. These can be purpose built at the larger institutions, or co-located with others in specific local government premises. Assistance will be required for transport as well as construction and security.

[Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?](#)

ABOUT NAVA

The National Association for the Visual Arts is Australia's professional body for contemporary arts practice spanning visual arts, craft, design, experimental, ephemeral and public practice. Our 50,000-strong community includes some 4,250 professional individual or organisational Members, subscribers, colleagues, donors and social media followers. Through the Code of Practice for the Professional Australian Visual Art, Craft and Design Sector, NAVA sets best practice standards for the industry.

NAVA is the custodian of the Artists' Benevolent Fund, a fund available to artists via competitive application, supporting artists whose careers have been jeopardised by disasters and emergencies such as last summer's fires and floods.

NAVA is a member of the National Climate Change Cultural Response Roundtable, convened by AMaGA.

#### ENDORISING THE SUBMISSIONS OF COLLEAGUE ORGANISATIONS

NAVA endorses the submissions of:

- Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) – NAVA is indebted to AMaGA National Director, Alex Marsden, and the guidance of her comprehensive submission
- Blue Shield Australia
- Creative Recovery Network
- The Galleries, Libraries and Museums peak body, GLAM Peak
- Regional Arts Australia.

#### A MORE STRATEGIC APPROACH TO AUSTRALIA'S CULTURAL LIFE

Weather, health and other national and global emergencies are very much the way of life now in this era of climate emergency and global contagion. It is vital that the Australian Government no longer sees bushfire response as an unexpected or one-off event. It is equally crucial that the Australian Government adopts a culture-led approach to all such work.

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