



## National Archives of Australia

### Tune review

#### Submission from Dr David Stephens, editor, Honest History website

This brief submission addresses the first term of reference of the Review: ‘The Review will assess the efficiency and effectiveness of all aspects of the National Archives’ operations, programmes, administration, governance and authorising environment’.

Within that term, the submission focusses particularly on effectiveness. I believe the Archives will be most effective if it curates, and offers to users, resources on the wide range of influences on Australia, the many streams of our history. This emphasis on breadth reflects the mantra that Honest History has promoted: Australia is more than Anzac – and always has been.

Honest History existed as an incorporated association for over five years (ending February 2019), under the presidency first of Professor Peter Stanley and then Professor Frank Bongiorno AM. The Honest History website ([honesthistory.net.au](http://honesthistory.net.au)) continues under the editorship of Dr David Stephens.

The Honest History enterprise grew from the anticipation that the Anzac centenary would see a disproportionate emphasis on military aspects of Australia’s history. And so it proved, though Honest History was able through its website and *The Honest History Book* (NewSouth 2017) to present many strands of our Australian history to balance to some extent the khaki tinge of the centenary years.

The Honest History website now contains more than 3000 posts on Anzac and war history, ‘The land we live in’ (geographical and environmental influences), ‘People like us’ (social history), ‘The sweat of our brows’ (economic history), ‘Ruling ourselves’ (political history), ‘Learning and improving’ (science and technology), ‘Expressing ourselves’ (cultural), ‘Getting on with the world’ (foreign and defence policy), as well as posts about teaching history and the use and abuse of history.

Similarly, *The Honest History Book* had a number of chapters under the heading ‘Putting Anzac in its place’, followed by chapters on ‘Australian stories and silences’, covering environmental influences, immigration and multiculturalism, economic boom and bust, egalitarianism, women, the invasion of 1788, the Frontier Wars, republicanism, and foreign and defence policy. The book was well received and has sold more than 2000 copies.

An effective National Archives would be one which offers easily accessible and rich resources relevant to the study of all of the streams of our history, not just those that take a temporary prominent place, as military history has done over the last few years, or whose advocates make the loudest noise. Where resources are directed by public cultural institutions like the National Archives profoundly influences the balance of Australian history and thus the attitudes of all of us.

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28 June 2019

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