Kent Fitch
30 June 2019

Mr David Tune AO PSM
Independent Reviewer
c/o Tune Review Secretariat
National Archives of Australia
Queen Victoria Terrace
Parkes ACT 2600

By email: review@naa.gov.au

Submission to the Tune Review

Dear Mr Tune,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to your review.

I am a computer programmer who has worked almost exclusively on projects within the Australian humanities over the last 20 years, including AustLit, the AIF database and Trove, and in the course of that work have had cause to use the NAA's web site and data.

Based on this experience, my comments for this review are:

1) The current NAA system for search and delivery of publically available digitised content should be decommissioned and the content should be made available for discovery and delivery by the NLA's Trove.

   The NAA's "RecordSearch" facility is antiquated and its content is isolated from other resources and hence lacking context. The capabilities expected by the public of modern search systems have grown far beyond those of 20 years ago when RecordSearch was designed.

   Whilst Trove also lags behind public expectations, its gap is narrower and the NLA actively plans to enhance Trove as a national resource; maybe as a country we can only adequately fund one such effort. Most importantly, Trove is a very large repository that not only provides a context for much of the digitised information held by the NAA but also is a well known and widely used search "target" for Australians looking for Australian content.

2) Funding to perform digitisation of all NAA-held content deemed worthy of retaining should be a high priority. Digitisation makes discovery and access much more efficient and reduces long-term physical storage and access costs. Hence digitisation should be classified as an investment rather than a cost.

"The perfect is the enemy of the good" applies to digitisation. The digitisation services of the Internet Archive are a good example of a competent yet low-cost approach to digitisation (see https://archive.org/scanning).

3) Lodgement of digital materials by Commonwealth agencies with the NAA must be made simple, secure and as efficient as possible.

As much of this material will need to be embargoed or assessed for public availability, effective and low-cost workflows to facilitate classification by the submitting agency and the NAA are crucial. Whilst it is vital that material which cannot immediately be made public is rigorously isolated from public access systems, it is equally important for the health and efficiency of our democratic and open society that as much documentary evidence of the decision-making and operations of our Commonwealth is made publically discoverable and accessible as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Kent Fitch