

THE DIGITAL ECONOMY: OPENING UP THE CONVERSATION
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National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) welcomes the opportunity to be part of the national conversation that will inform Australia's Digital Economy strategy.

Libraries are a vital part of the Australian education, research and innovation infrastructure, and they provide broad reach into the community - a pathway to improving digital skills and inclusion.

Libraries fuel the Australian digital economy through:

- Developing digital literacy and general literacy capability through all sectors of the community;
- Providing access to computers and connectivity for Australians at more than 1600 sites across the country;
- Enabling learning outside, or in partnership with, the formal education sector through specialised and general services;
- Managing and improving connected digital research infrastructure and tools; and
- Collecting and preserving Australia's digital cultural heritage.

This submission responds particularly to Q1 and Q21. NSLA also supports the submission from the **Australian Library and Information Association** (ALIA) with attachments including *Australian Libraries: the digital economy within everyone's reach*.

Question 1: How are advances in digital technology changing the way you work, your industry and your community?

Digital research and library infrastructure

The National, State and Territory libraries manage key parts of the nation's digital research collections and infrastructure, providing access to distributed data from across many fields of research, and supporting new juxtapositions of cross-disciplinary data.

In particular, through the [Trove](#) platform, NSLA libraries are integral to innovation in the digital humanities, social and economic sciences, policy development, education and industry. Trove links to 550 million items including a huge and growing corpus of digitised and born digital publications, newspapers, images and websites.

The [2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap](#), and subsequent investment planning processes, recognises the priority of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) and Indigenous platforms, including links to Trove and the Atlas of Living Australia.

The National, State and Territory libraries (with some differences from state to state) collect material published in Australia under Legal Deposit legislation, to build and preserve the national collection. With many print formats now available in digital, and new digital-only formats proliferating – websites, social media, data sets – the challenge for libraries is to collect, describe, preserve, store and make this digital content available for researchers and the community for the long term. Digital formats undermine geography and provide opportunities for efficiencies across jurisdictions. A national approach to collecting digital publications is being developed in 2018. In 2016-2017, NSLA libraries increased the size of digital collections held to 7,217 terabytes.

NSLA is a founding member of [GLAM Peak](#) where the broader cultural sector (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) comes together to strengthen digital access to cultural collections. Through Trove and other platforms, GLAM Peak is working to move Australia's small to medium sized cultural collections online, to open up and connect these collections for research benefits. GLAM Peak has also initiated the development of state-based digital access policies.

Library users and researchers are impacted by the slow pace of change to copyright legislation to serve the digital economy. Changes to remove limitations for some formats and complex clearance steps would improve the flow of creative reuse and innovation. In 2017, the Productivity Commission in its [Intellectual Property Arrangements](#) report, recommended the introduction of a modern, flexible and adaptable fair use provision. This is widely supported in the cultural collections sector.

Question 21: What opportunities do we have to bridge the 'digital divide' and make the most of the benefits that digital technologies present for social inclusion?

Libraries empower all Australians through digital skills and inclusion

The [Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2017](#) found there is inequitable digital access, digital affordability and digital ability across the nation. One in five Australians access the internet solely through a mobile device and experience a high degree of digital exclusion.

People in country areas experience more digital disadvantage than those living in the capital cities, and people living with disability, Indigenous Australians, low income earners, seniors, unemployed and school-leavers have the most barriers to digital services.

Libraries provide internet connectivity and access to computers for those who are not connected, or only partially connected; they offer literacy skills programs; one-to-one help to use [digital government services](#); and they are increasingly providing specialised [business hubs](#) for entrepreneurs and start-up companies. Libraries foster education, innovation, and experimentation.

In 2016-2017, 12.5 million people visited NSLA libraries. With more than 2 million visitors, State Library Victoria is one of the busiest libraries in the world.

Good literacy, which is increasingly in the digital context, improves quality of life. A person is more likely to have a job, to earn an income, to be in good health, and to be involved with the local and global economy if they have functional literacy skills. Businesses of all sizes are more productive with a more literate workforce and greater digital capability. Digital literacy is vital to using online government services and to navigating regulatory and commercial environments.

Libraries provide practical and flexible literacy services to allow the whole community to access services and improve their skills. An important example is the [26 TEN](#) program, Tasmania's strategy for adult literacy and numeracy – a whole-of-state initiative led by LINC Tasmania.

Australia has a distributed network of more than 1600 sites across the nation with free public access to technology and the internet. They are a place for learning about [cyber-safety](#) and an essential part of the early childhood literacy initiatives across Australia. [Better Beginnings](#) in Western Australia, [First Five Forever](#) in Queensland and equivalent programs in other states are bedrock services in the development of a literate community.

About NSLA

National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) is the active collaboration between the ten National, State and Territory libraries in Australia and New Zealand. We achieve more by working together, delivering greater value to our jurisdictions through collaboration.

NSLA Member Libraries:

- Libraries ACT
- LINC Tasmania
- National Library of Australia
- National Library of New Zealand
- Northern Territory Library
- State Library of New South Wales
- State Library of Queensland
- State Library of South Australia
- State Library Victoria
- State Library of Western Australia

During the 2016-2017 financial year:

- 12.5 million people visited our library buildings
- 47.2 million people visited our websites including Trove
- 14.7 million people visited our online catalogues
- 7,217 terabytes of digital collections were stored
- \$33.5 million was the total spend on collections
- \$5.3 billion was the asset value of our collections
- \$997 million was the asset value of our buildings/sites

Please note: Each of the ten NSLA member libraries works within different government jurisdictions. The National Library of New Zealand is part of the Department of Internal Affairs, a New Zealand government department. The views expressed in this letter should not be taken to reflect the views of the National Library of New Zealand nor of the New Zealand Government.

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