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National Archives win \$67m in urgent funding

EXCLUSIVEBy **TROY BRAMSTON**, SENIOR WRITER12:00AM JULY 1, 2021 •  6 COMMENTS

The National Archives of Australia will receive a significant immediate funding boost to ensure documents, photos, maps, audio and film recordings that tell the story of Australia will be preserved for future generations and digitised to make them more easily accessible.

The Australian can reveal that on Wednesday the Morrison government's Expenditure Review Committee approved \$67.7m in new funding for urgent digitisation and preservation, additional staffing to speed-up access to records, and enhanced cybersecurity and digital record custody measures.

Attorney-General Michaelia Cash said the urgent funding recommended by the Independent Functional and Efficiency Review by former senior public servant David Tune would be provided over four years rather than the recommended seven years to ensure at-risk records are safeguarded without delay.

"This funding will be critical to preserving our history, the national treasures that define it, and increasing the public's access to it," Senator Cash told The Australian. "I am proud that the Morrison government can provide additional funding to the National Archives so that they can continue their important work."

Josh Frydenberg strongly advocated for the additional funding. The Treasurer's mother, Erika Strausz, fled Hungary's communist regime and was granted a certificate of exemption from the Immigration Act and declared "stateless" when she arrived in Sydney in 1950. The Archives holds the original of this certificate.

Mr Frydenberg read the Tune Review and met with the director-general of the National Archives, David Fricker, last week for a briefing about records that are in danger of deterioration and permanent loss, and the funding required to preserve them, boost access and digitise the high value items.

An open letter to Scott Morrison, signed by more than 150 leading writers and researchers, also played a critical role in persuading the government to reverse a decade of underfunding. The letter, revealed

by The Australian last month, was organised by Monash University's Graeme Davison and prominent writer and author Gideon Haigh.

The signatories urged the government to provide emergency funding identified in the Tune Review. It was prompted by there being no funding increase to the archives in the May budget despite other collecting institutions receiving additional funding.

The National Archives is the custodian of Australia's official records. The collection comprises cabinet and departmental papers, military service records, immigration records and census data.

The Tune Review identified 11 million photographic negatives, prints and films along with 400,000 audiovisual items that were at risk of being lost because of deterioration and also because of ageing playback equipment. Magnetic audiotapes, photos and moving pictures on nitrate and acetate film are especially susceptible to deterioration.

These include recordings of indigenous languages and ceremonies, native title legal proceedings, scientific research material, and ASIO surveillance footage. The new funding will allow these records to be digitised and better stored, cyber-secured, preserved and catalogued.

The funding boost approved on Wednesday will also allow for the development of the National Archives' 5th Generation Digital Archive that will provide for the transfer of records into their custody and ongoing preservation and digital access.

The Tune Review recommended an additional \$167.4m to establish this initiative.

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