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MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

**NATIONAL FILM AND ARCHIVE BILL 2008  
SECOND READING SPEECH  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA**

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In 1935 the Government established a National Historical Film and Speaking Record Library. This was the first recognition of the importance of maintaining a collection of our film and sound heritage. The National Film and Sound Archive was established as a separate collecting institution in 1984 and until 2003 it was administratively part of the relevant Government department responsible for the arts. In 2003, it became part of the Australian Film Commission.

The national collection now contains over 1.4 million items. Recently, the Archive restored what is possibly the world's first feature-length film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* from 1906. This film is now in UNESCO's Memory of the World register which identifies cultural heritage of international significance. The Archive has launched a Centre for Scholarly and Archival Research which attracts outstanding researchers and practitioners to study and interpret the collection. It has also compiled a superb National Registry of Audiovisual Collections to document many private and public holdings of moving image and recorded sound materials.

In its arts election policy, the Government recognised the significance of the Archive and its work and that for it to operate effectively it deserved full autonomy as a national collecting institution. Accordingly, the Government undertook to establish the National Film and Sound Archive as a separate statutory authority. This Bill delivers on that commitment. For the first time, the NFSA will have independent statutory status in the same way as the other national collecting institutions, with its own governing Board and management. It will have ownership of the national collection of audiovisual and related material, and full responsibility for selection, acquisition, preservation and disposal of items in the collections.

The NFSA's functions include the development, preservation, maintenance, and promotion of a national collection. The principal duty of a collecting institution such as this is to manage the national collection in its care and ensure that posterity is able to experience and enjoy all the treasures which it holds. The NFSA will also be able to engage with other collections in Australia, for instance through the benefits of its world class technical expertise, and will be able to provide access to the finest programs from around the world.

The NFSA will not simply be an organisation focussed on preservation and maintenance. Instead, the Government will be looking to the new agency to develop a high public profile. It will be expected to develop strong access and outreach programs so that as many Australians as possible can enjoy films and recordings in the national collection, and can develop a greater appreciation and awareness of our finest films, television programs, music and spoken voice recordings.

The NFSA will be expected to emphasise the historical and cultural significance of the material which it holds, and to make the best use it can of the collection in the national

interest. It is expected that the NFSA will have a strong research focus in relation to the collection, and to collaborate with institutions in Australia and overseas. A key provision in the Bill is the need for the NFSA to, as far as practical, apply the highest curatorial standards to its activities, and thereby assume a national leadership role in relation to best professional practice.

This Bill gives the NFSA a strong statutory mandate, a clear and coherent philosophy reflecting its cultural role and importance in the archiving profession, autonomy in its own affairs consistent with other national collecting institutions, and greater accountability and transparency.