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COMMITTEE SECRETARY

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
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**SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL
MATTERS (JSCEM) INQUIRY INTO AND REPORT ON CIVICS
EDUCATION, ENGAGEMENT, AND PARTICIPATION IN AUSTRALIA**

We thank the Joint Stading Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia is the national audiovisual cultural institution. We tell the Australian story by collecting, preserving and sharing audiovisual media, the cultural experience platforms of our time.

NFSA Learning programs utilise the rich national AV collection to build vital media literacy skills for today's digital world. In 2023, the NFSA engaged with more than 11,000 teachers and students through structured media literacy activities. Providing students with equitable access to media literacy education is something the NFSA sees as vital to underpinning Australian democracy.

Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life and is a critical thinking skillset recognised as an essential component of any comprehensive national strategy for combatting the impacts of misinformation. Media literate citizens are empowered to participate actively in social and democratic processes, without influence or interference.

The NFSA are committed to making an impact on media literacy education at a national level through a range of activities.

The Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA) was formed in 2020 as an unincorporated group of organisations whose objectives are to enable a media literate society that is equipped to face challenges and seize the opportunities in a world increasingly defined by media. The NFSA is a founding member of AMLA and committed to supporting media literacy efforts on a national level.

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The NFSA is a partner in the Australian Research Council funded project Addressing Misinformation with Media Literacy through Cultural Institutions. The project involves a range of innovative research activities to explore how misinformation and media literacy intersect in the Australian context. This research will then inform the development of evidence-based approaches to the development of adult media literacy interventions by the NFSA and other partner organisations.

In the modern digital and media saturated world, the notion of civics education must be broadened to consider how we equip all Australians with the critical skills that will continue to be essential for full involvement in society now and into the future.

We appreciate your consideration of this submission.

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Response to the Terms of Reference of the inquiry:

- **the effectiveness of formalised civics education throughout Australia and the various approaches taken across jurisdictions through schools and other institutions including electoral commissions, councils, and parliaments; the extent to which all students have equitable access to civics education; and opportunities for improvement;**

The NFSA advocates for broadening of the scope of the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program, which provides financial assistance to schools to support onsite learning at democratic, historic and cultural institutions in Canberra. The PACER program is essential to allowing students from across Australia, including small, rural, remote and disadvantaged schools, to visit Canberra to experience cultural institutions and engage with democracy and civics education firsthand. We know this visit, as opposed to participating in online programs or digital excursions, is a valuable learning experience with a profound and lasting impact on students from all over Australia.

All PACER approved institutions provide educational programs that directly align to the Australian Curriculum and have been deemed valuable in the content of civics education, however, only some count towards a rebate under the current system. Broadening the program so all institutions offering PACER approved programs are eligible for a school rebate will ensure students can engage in diverse learning experiences that genuinely meet their learning needs.

Class teachers are best placed to determine the civics and citizenship programs that will be most impactful for their students, based on their deep knowledge of their students and how they learn, the prior knowledge they have developed and what is needed to underpin future learning. Enabling teachers to select the programs that will have value, and still access the rebate, ensures equitable access to civics education through national institutions in Canberra.

Formal civics education in the Australian Curriculum focusses on systems, process and histories, as opposed to skills needed in the 21st century to actively engage in all aspects of public life. Developing these important critical thinking skills, including media literacy, should be a core component of civics and citizenship education in Australia. Teachers must be resourced to teach these skills using evidence and research-based toolkits and drawing on best practice internationally.

Four out of five Australians believe that children should receive media literacy education in school.¹ Yet without a well-resourced national approach to teaching critical thinking and media literacy in schools, there remains a significant gap in equitable access to learning for all Australian students. Education remains the key component for populations to withstand the negative impact of fake news and misinformation. This is evidenced by countries such as Finland, Sweden and Ireland who have implemented effective policies and funded programs in this space and are recognised as having some of the most literate populations in the world².

¹ Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. 2021, [Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs](#). Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra

² Lessenski, M., 2023, [Bye, Bye Birdie: The Challenges of Disinformation – The Media Literacy Index 2023](#), European Policies Initiative of Open Society Institute – Sofia Foundation



- **the vast array of informal mechanisms through which Australians seek and receive information about Australia’s democracy, electoral events, and voting; and how governments and the community might leverage these mechanisms to improve the quality of information and help Australians be better informed about, and better participate in, the electoral system;**

Media is all pervasive in our current world and have transformed the ways we work, learn and engage with one another. The daily media practices of adult Australians most commonly involve the use of either two or three different types of media. Social media dominates our daily media use practices of Australian adults, with more than 4 in 5 adults using social media daily.³

When it comes to news practices about one quarter of news consumers primarily use social media for news⁴ and almost one in ten Australians are now using TikTok to get their news.⁵ However, depending on the platform, audiences pay attention to different news sources. On Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube people pay most attention to news from mainstream media and journalists. In contrast, TikTok news users pay more attention to news from ordinary individuals and social media personalities.⁶

There is a correlation between daily use of multiple types of media with higher levels of civic engagement. Additionally, those who use a greater number of social media platforms are more likely to be critical media consumers.⁷

Developing the critical skills to engage with multiple forms of media, through targeted media literacy interventions, is key to helping Australians avoid the threats of misinformation and be better informed about, and participate in, our electoral system.

- **the mechanisms available to assist voters in understanding the legitimacy of information about electoral matters; the impact of artificial intelligence, foreign interference, social media and mis- and disinformation; and how governments and the community can prevent or limit inaccurate or false information influencing electoral outcomes;**

Internationally there has been significant attention directed towards media literacy in light of pressing concerns such as misinformation and its ramifications on democracy, the rising influence of digital and social media in our media landscapes, and the implications of digital media for fostering fair and just societies.

³ Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. 2021, [Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs](#). Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra

⁴ Park, S., Fisher, C., McGuinness, K., Lee, J. Y. and McCallum, K. (2021). [Digital news report: Australia 2021](#). Canberra: News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra

⁵ Park, S., McGuinness, K., Fisher, C., Lee, J., McCallum, K., Cai, X., Chatskin, M., Mardjianto, L. & Yao, P. (2023). [Digital News Report: Australia 2023](#). Canberra: News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. 2021, [Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs](#). Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra



The European Commission recognises that media literacy is critical to allowing citizens of all ages to be empowered to participate in open and informed democratic debate and counter the effects of disinformation campaigns and fake news spreading through digital media. This has resulted in legislation to strengthen the role of media literacy and the provision of frameworks and guidelines through which member states can consistently report on, and share best practices in, media literacy.

The 2021 Australian Senate Inquiry Report into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy recommended that the Australian government work with AMLA, through a co-design process, to develop a national strategy to tackle fake news and misinformation.⁸ While this signals support for lifelong media literacy for all Australians, no concrete progress towards this has yet been made and no national Australian media literacy programs launched.

Lifelong media literacy strategies and policies in Australia are long overdue. An ongoing, comprehensive, and coherent national strategy for media literacy in Australia is required to deliver media literacy opportunities that appeal to, and are appropriate for, diverse groups and communities. AMLA continue to advocate for the development of such a strategy and have set out eight recommendations for delivery, based on national consultation and research they conducted.⁹

While there is a tendency to see media literacy as the solution to a particular problem such as misinformation, this can be problematic as it narrows the focus, and leads to short-term thinking.¹⁰ What is needed instead is long-term planning and funding for coordinated strategies and the development of sustainable, evidence based intervention programs.

A co-designed, government endorsed national media literacy strategy is critical step in supporting governments and the community to reduce influence of inaccurate or false information on electoral outcomes and allow citizens to assess the information they encounter online, identify sources they can trust, and make well-informed decisions.

- **opportunities for supporting culturally diverse, geographically diverse, and remote communities to access relevant, appropriate, and culturally suitable information about Australian democracy, electoral events, enrolment and voting to promote full electoral participation;**

Adult Australians living in regional areas, Australians with lower education levels, older Australians, people living with a disability, Indigenous Australians, and lower income Australians are more likely to use fewer types of media, have less interest in engaging with new technologies and have a lower level of media ability.

The 2021 Adult Media Literacy Survey found there is a direct correlation between involvement in civic engagement and low levels of media ability; almost half of all people with lowest level of media ability had not undertaken any civic engagement activities, like keeping up to date on

⁸ The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee. 2021, [Nationhood, national identity and democracy](#). Commonwealth of Australia

⁹ Dezuanni, M., Notley, T., Di Martino, L. (2021). [Towards a National Strategy for Media Literacy. Research report](#). Australian Media Literacy Alliance

¹⁰ Goodman, E. 2021, European Digital Media Observatory: [Media literacy in Europe and the role of EDMO](#)



politics or talking to others about issues, in the past year. Targeted media literacy programs for adults should specifically cater to groups that are more likely to have lower levels of media literacy.

A national strategy for media literacy should focus on how community organisations can access funding, resources and support to develop community-specific media literacy experiences. This should be guided by evidence-based strategies and a shared impact evaluation framework, which could be co-developed with AMLA to ensure measurable success.

Additionally, it should consider how AMLA can be resourced to create evidence-based materials, training packages and educational experiences based on its framework and appropriate for use in community contexts throughout Australia.

Through a coordinated, informed and networked approach to media literacy there are considerable opportunities to engage diverse communities across the country to develop the critical thinking and media literacy skills critical for full participation in society.