
Archive Forum

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Proposal for an Advisory Committee for the National Film and Sound Archive

Background

From 1981 to 1984, prior to the separation of the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) from the National Library, a 7-member Advisory Committee on the National Film Archive was established, reporting to the National Library Council. Independently chaired, members were appointed by the Council, and comprised individuals with film/ television industry connections and a known interest in the work of the Archive.

Following the creation of the NFSA, an Advisory Committee (later Council) operated from 1984 until June 2003, when control of the NFSA passed to the AFC. Membership varied from about 9 to 12. Members were appointed by the Minister, over time representing various aspects of the Archive's constituency. The Council reported to the Minister and, though technically an advisory body, it functioned very much as an executive board – consistently with the intent of formalising the NFSA's status as an independent statutory authority.

Since July 2003 the NFSA has been without such a committee or council. Based on a model in its "Stage 2 Directions" paper, the AFC is setting up an Interim Archive Advisory Committee, comprised of representatives of organisations and chaired by the Director of the Archive. The Forum sees this as very much an interim arrangement. It proposes the following model for an ongoing committee. The principles should be taken into account in framing the structure of an Executive Council at the point when the Archive achieves statutory independence.

In the meantime, it is presented in terms addressed to the current administrative arrangements, under which the status of the Archive's advisory body is, at best, returned to its pre-1984 situation and reports to the AFC Board.

Parameters

1. The committee would consist of eleven members, including 9 independent members serving in an individual capacity. Except for the first committee (see 2 below) the 9 members would each hold the position for 3 years, on a rotating basis (3 standing down each year). These members would be eligible for re-appointment for a maximum of one further 3 year term.
2. The first committee would ballot to decide which 3 members would hold the position initially for one year only, and which 3 members would hold the position initially for two years only. All 9 rotating members of the first committee, including those whose initial appointment is for less than a full term, would be eligible for only one further 3 year term.
3. Nominations for the rotating positions on the committee would be invited annually by public announcement. Nomination forms would include the name and address of the person being nominated, as well as that person's organisational affiliation/s, industry and/or academic experience, and a statement from the nominee explaining their interest in the NFSA (e.g. former staff member, client, donor, member of Friends of the NFSA). Any conflict of interest – for example, whether the nominee is a recipient of project funding from the AFC or the Archive – would need to be declared.

4. The first 9 rotating members would be recommended by the Director of the Archive, for appointment by the AFC Board, but in subsequent years new appointments would be recommended by the Archive Advisory Committee itself to the AFC Board.
5. New appointments to the 9 rotating positions would maintain the following balance across the membership:
 - at least one member from each of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland;
 - at least one member from either Western Australia, or South Australia or Tasmania;
 - at least one member with film/television/multimedia industry experience, and a demonstrated interest in archival film and/or television;
 - at least one member with radio/recorded sound experience and a demonstrated interest in archival sound;
 - at least one member with a tertiary academic background and with film/sound archival research experience;
 - at least one practising secondary or primary educationalist with a demonstrated interest in using archival film/sound in the classroom;
 - at least one member with archiving and/or library experience (for instance from past staff or from one of the other collecting institutions, but not from current staff).

The above requirements can be met in any combination. If a constituency is not covered in the course of the normal nomination process, the committee would have the right to invite nominations specifically from that constituency.

It would also be advisable (but not formally required) to include a member with legal qualifications and experience; to ensure that both genders are well represented; to include at least one indigenous member; and to ensure that both commercial and creative industry areas are represented.

6. As nine members is a small number, and there will always be some who are not available for specific meetings, alternate members from the same constituency should be selected through the same process. The alternate member would attend in the place of the member who is unavailable for a particular meeting. Each such alternate member would have exactly the same rights and responsibilities as the person for whom they alternate, except that in the event that the Chair of the committee sends an alternate a substitute Chair for that meeting will be selected from among the continuing committee members.
7. Though representation of constituencies is the governing principle of selection of the rotating members, these would be appointed as individuals, with no special responsibility or right to speak for any specific organisation.
8. The committee would meet every month for the first year, and at least every two months thereafter. Their brief would be to make recommendations to the AFC Board on anything referred to them by the Board or the Archive Director, or on any other matter which they consider relevant to the effective functioning and development of the Archive.
9. The committee would elect a chair and deputy chair annually, from within the nine rotating members. There would be no limit on the term of office of the chair (which, given that no member can serve for more than two terms, should not be a problem).

10. The Director of the Archive would be an ex officio member of the committee, but would not be eligible to be chair. The staff of the Archive would be entitled to elect annually one of their number to serve on the committee. Together with the nine independent members, this would bring the total committee membership to eleven.
11. The secretariat for the committee would be provided from within the office of the Director of the Archive.
12. Members of the committee would have their expenses covered and be paid a sitting fee commensurate with normal Government standards.

Comments

The principle of appointing individuals rather than representatives of organisations is normal for committees and boards of cultural organisations; it reduces the total number of people required to cover the potentially large number of constituencies; and it yields individuals who can make informed contributions to discussion. The performance of past NFSA committees and councils has demonstrated that a well chosen group of individuals, with an informed interest in the Archive, can effectively represent a wide spectrum of constituency interests and bring valuable expertise and contacts to bear on the Archive's work.

The mechanism outlined here offers a way of achieving this objective and ensuring that all committee members have some knowledge of, and on-going interest in, the Archive. It requires reasonably frequent meetings, allowing for an effective committee.

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