

New Zealand Historical Association Submission on the National Library of New Zealand Draft Strategic Directions to 2030.

Thank you for this opportunity to reflect on the proposed strategic directions of the National Library of New Zealand until 2030. We make this submission as Council members of the New Zealand Historical Association (NZHA), and with the support of our fellow Councillors. NZHA is an incorporated society founded in 1973. Our main objective is to promote historical study, teaching, and research. Our members, who number more than 100, include academic and professional historians, history students, and secondary school history teachers.

The National Library of New Zealand, and embedded within it the Alexander Turnbull Library, is a key institution for all the members of our organisation. The National Library's core strengths are its collections and the expertise of its staff who collect, protect, manage and enable access to the collections that in turn enable the research work we all do. The National Library is indeed a puna, a source of knowledge for those of us involved in history work, as reflected in the name Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa. It provides the backbone for knowledge production about Aotearoa/New Zealand in all its forms and connections through the Pacific to the wider world. The resources of the National Library are not just utilised by New Zealand scholars and innovative thinkers, but many outside the borders of this country, as evidenced by the use of Papers Past.

Overall, the three strategic goals are valuable, but we found the use of two phrases about each goal confuses the direction. For instance, does easy access to knowledge have to mean one knowledge network; does reading for pleasure equate to a nation of readers? Does celebrating words mean words are taonga? We suggest that one statement about each goal would be more focused.

We appreciate the sentiment contained in the strategic direction on 'Words as Taonga', which builds directly on the core strengths of the National Library. However, the idea of 'words' does tend to imply the exclusion of other documentary forms contained in the library's collections, such as maps, paintings, posters, images, and recordings. Some of our members have been and are involved in He Tohu, the new exhibition housing the Treaty of Waitangi Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Women's Suffrage petition and Declaration of Independence and support public programmes that encourage conversation, learning and debate about these constitutional documents. We support further resourcing of Pacific and te reo Māori content of the New Zealand collections and ways to make them more accessible to the public. National and international partnerships to build documentary heritage sources and share information on how best to do so are excellent initiatives, and we urge the library to emphasise this aspect. Indeed, valuing our documentary heritage to learn from the past and inspire the future seems to be a clearer goal than 'words as taonga'. As an historical association, we want our National Library to remain focussed on collecting, preserving and making accessible the documentary heritage – in all its forms – of the nation.

We value the School Library Services as the most important tool the National Library has for making an impact upon literacy and encourage its strengthening. While we support making a 'nation of readers' as a laudable goal, we suggest consideration of the wider environment in which this direction has been set. Currently our low-wage economy and high levels of child poverty are preventing literacy learning. Government intervention is required to effectively resource schools and local libraries to enable connected literacy services, weekend hours and staffing. Policy change is essential to lift people's living standards and ensure their access to libraries and digitised library services.

We are also concerned that parts of the 'One knowledge network' goal would work against the National Library's ability to function as a collector and distributor of specialised collections. That is, the more general a tool (such as a digital service) is, the less specialised the knowledge it can search, communicate and record. The desire to deliver the National Library's content to everyone may undermine the key function of the library as a source of not general but specialised knowledge, and the knowledge and ability of its staff in that regard. Again, we urge that in developing its strategic directions, the National Library maintain its focus on collecting, preserving and making accessible the country's documentary heritage. The 'one knowledge network' ought to include a national documentary heritage framework in which relevant institutions are encouraged to collaborate. We would expect the National Library to play an important leadership role in such an arrangement.

The complexities of copyright law and ownership – as well as the complexities of the battles being fought over these ideas – make it a difficult terrain to enter into. We hope that future partnerships will be well resourced so that freely available digitised publications do not undermine the very important work done by New Zealand's excellent publishers.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Best wishes,

New Zealand Historical Association