

National Trust of Australia (NSW) Position Paper – De-funding of Trove



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SUMMARY

Trove, one of the most well-respected and accessed GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) services in Australia with over 70,000 daily users, is an essential research tool that provides equitable access to significant Australian research collections. The National Trust strongly urges the government to recognise and protect Trove by ensuring adequate and ongoing funding for its operation and continued expansion.

NATIONAL TRUST INVOLVEMENT

Trove is an Australian online library database aggregator; a free faceted-search engine hosted by the National Library of Australia, in partnership with content providers including members of the National & State Libraries Australasia. It is one of the most well-respected and accessed GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) services in Australia, with over 70,000 daily users.

The site has been described as “a model for collaborative digitization projects and serves to inform cultural heritage institutions building both large and small digital collections” and the reach of Trove’s newspaper archives makes the service attractive to genealogists. Many of the digital public libraries in the United States came from investigations of Australia’s Trove and seeing what a nation could achieve by investing in a platform that would hold museum, gallery and library archives collections and make them accessible to the world.

As well as providing a service to people overseas, Trove has been an important educational resource for academics and rural communities in Australia and a fundamental element of Australia’s national research infrastructure. Trove was invaluable during the Covid lockdowns, allowing researchers and professionals to continue to access sources necessary for their work.

In February 2016, potential funding cuts to the National Library of Australia’s Trove budget triggered a public campaign and resulted in a government funding package for Trove. However, the National Library has recently indicated that without additional and ongoing government support, it is once again faced with shutting the service down. Currently, Trove has funding only until July 2024.

From the viewpoint of the National Trust, Trove is an essential research tool for historical research into people and places of heritage significance; allowing for assessment of that significance, listing on the National Trust Register, statutory heritage listing and informed comment on legislation and planning and development proposals. De-funding and downgrading of Trove would result in libraries Australia wide having to employ additional staff to deal with inquiries which are currently handled through the Trove system - a very retrograde step.

NATIONAL TRUST POSITION

From the viewpoint of the National Trust, Trove is an essential research tool for our staff, volunteers and members. It allows historical research into people and into places of heritage significance, allowing for assessment of that significance, listing on the National Trust Register, statutory heritage listing and informed comment on legislation and planning and development proposals.

The Trust requests that our government ensures the recognition and protection of Trove as an Australian cultural asset and as part of the national infrastructure. The Trust believes that it would be unfortunate for such an innovative platform as Trove to be defunded at a time when innovation is being promoted at the national level. Trove’s ongoing funding for its operation and the growth of its digitisation program should be a bipartisan commitment of the Australian government.

ACTION TO PROMOTE THE TRUST’S POSITION

The Trust will promote its views on this issue with heritage professionals, museums, the National Library of Australia, National & State Libraries Australasia, and genealogists.