

#fundTrove

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I'd just arrived home on Monday evening when a tweet from the local ABC radio station [appeared in my stream](#): 'NOW: @nlagovau informs its staff of budget cuts'. An all-staff email describing the impact of continuing government funding cuts on the Library had become public - it was not good news.

Everyone knows there are harsh times ahead for our national cultural institutions - the effect of the latest cuts (let's not call them 'efficiency dividends') was [vigorously discussed](#) at Senate Estimates. Although the Australian War Memorial was, rather significantly, [spared the bayonet](#). These 'dividends' have been forcibly extracted by governments of both persuasions, but the latest round has pushed the already struggling organisations beyond their capacity to adjust. Staff and services are going to be lost.

Soon after the [ABC segment](#), [more details](#) about the Library's plans appeared on the *Canberra Times* website. As the recently departed manager of Trove I was worried for my former team mates and for the service we had worked so hard to develop. The ABC referred to major cutbacks in the Library's digitisation program. The *Canberra Times* report went on to note:

The library will also cease aggregating content in Trove from museums and universities unless it is fully funded to do so.

Trove, used by more than 70,000 people a day, has previously avoided cutbacks. But no longer. Fewer collections will be added, less digitised content will appear - not quite a content freeze, but certainly a slowdown.

I started tweeting about the reports. I also invited others to share their thoughts on the value of Trove with the Minister for the Arts, Mitch Fifield, using the hashtag [#fundTrove](#). As I write this post the total number of [#fundTrove](#) tweets and retweets is approaching 3,000. Many have shared their discoveries or the details of their research - all made possible by Trove. Others have just expressed their outrage. But what is most powerful is the overwhelming sense of gratitude and affection (even love) for what Trove provides. Trove matters.

Trove & the NLA were an absolutely indispensable resource & support for our Eureka Prize-winning climate history research project [#fundTrove](#)

— Dr Claire (@pewpewlaserfire) [February 23, 2016](#)

So many historians I publish say [@TroveAustralia](#) has transformed their work, made much more possible. And they're right. [#fundTrove](#) [#ozhist](#)

— Phillipa McGuinness (@pipmcg) [February 23, 2016](#)

The [#fundTrove](#) tweets are bringing me close to tears. Is this what we've come to? How shameful.

— Molly (@madradish) [February 23, 2016](#)

Trove is unique and globally important. It is the most significant public sector DH project in the world - Australia needs to [#fundTrove](#)

— Tim Hitchcock (@TimHitchcock) [February 23, 2016](#)

[#fundTrove](#) my mum & I swap and share family history from [@TroveAustralia](#) , all the secrets out of the bag.

— The Velvet Nap (@TheVelvetNap) [February 22, 2016](#)

Let's be clear, Trove is not going to be suddenly turned off. Nor is it a particular target of government cuts. But these new limits on Trove are a clear sign of how deeply these 'efficiency dividends' are striking at one of our most important cultural institutions. And if the government thinks that's ok, what does it mean for the future of Trove?

I've [written previously](#) about the way that Trove's digitised newspapers are changing the practice of history, even changing our relationship with the past. But Trove is not just newspapers. Trove also brings together the collections of hundreds of other organisations - large and small. Together with the National Library's own digital collections these two halves of Trove create a resource profound in depth and meaning, and brimming with the capacity to surprise.

It seems the National Library has simply been too efficient for its own good. Instead of sitting back and waiting for a big pot of money, it took the decision some years ago to push ahead with the development of Trove. Many libraries, organisations and individuals have helped fund the digitisation of newspapers, but the Library built Trove from within its existing budgets - a triumph of innovation and efficiency. And now it's suffering for it.

The current round of cuts have made it clear - it's time for Trove to be appropriately funded. Not as an add-on, or a 'nice to have', but as key component in our cultural landscape.

Although [#fundTrove](#) has focused its attention on the Minister for the Arts, I don't think he's the only one in the firing line. Trove is a fundamental piece of research infrastructure, as important as a telescope or a particle accelerator. But, like most cultural institutions, the Library has limited access to infrastructure funding. That's just stupid, reflecting an outdated understanding of the nature of research. Let's fix that as well and find support for Trove in education and research budgets.

And then there's the 'ideas boom'. As I've frequently argued, Trove is not just a website or a portal, [it's a platform](#). Portals are for visiting, platforms are for building on. All those hundreds of aggregated collections, all those millions of digitised newspaper articles are available in a form computers can understand [via an API](#) (Application Programming Interface). That means clever developers, innovative industries, hackers and tinkerers can take Trove's data and BUILD NEW THINGS. **BOOM!** Ideas have to start somewhere, and Trove offers plenty to play with.

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I don't know if Senator Fifield will ever see any of the #fundTrove tweets. But it's important to talk about what we value and why. I'm a historian and a hacker and I love Trove because it helps me to [see things differently](#). Our history is not in the past - it lives as a source of inspiration and unease, understanding and critique. Trove helps me to connect to that. I want it to be safe, and I want it to grow.

So #fundTrove.

Things you can do right now:

- Tweet or post about the value of Trove using the hashtag [#fundTrove](#).
- Write to Senator Fifield (or other government members) - the folks at the eScholarship Research Centre at Melbourne University have already [drafted a sample letter](#).

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