

Oral History



Oral histories are carefully structured recordings in which an interviewee works with an expert oral historian to tell their own story in their own words.



They are an effective way of capturing individual perspectives and experiences that may not be found in other historical sources such as books and documents.



HOW WELL ARE WE DOING?

We are on track and are meeting all strategic collecting priorities



OVERVIEW

Size of Collection

Oral History is measured in total number of interviews (items) and total number of hours.

1,570 items were acquired 2017-2022, comprising 5,502 hours of material.

Just over one-quarter of the total Oral History collection is available online.

1,570

Items acquired 2017-2022

25,528

Total items in the collection

Accessibility of collection online

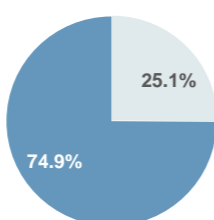
Accessible Online
Total Hours

5,502

Hours acquired 2017-2022

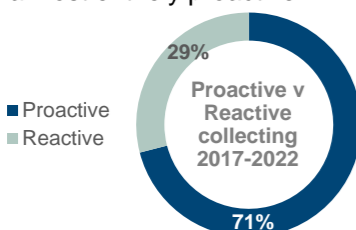
55,637

Total hours in the collection



Proactive v Reactive Collecting

Oral History within the Library is primarily commissioned and therefore almost entirely proactive.



COVID-19 limited opportunities to conduct interviews in 2020-21, therefore there was a higher than usual focus on formed collections in this period. Collecting still involved proactive engagement rather than reactive responses to offers.

Gender Diversity

Commissioning is making consolidated gains towards full gender equity in the collection.



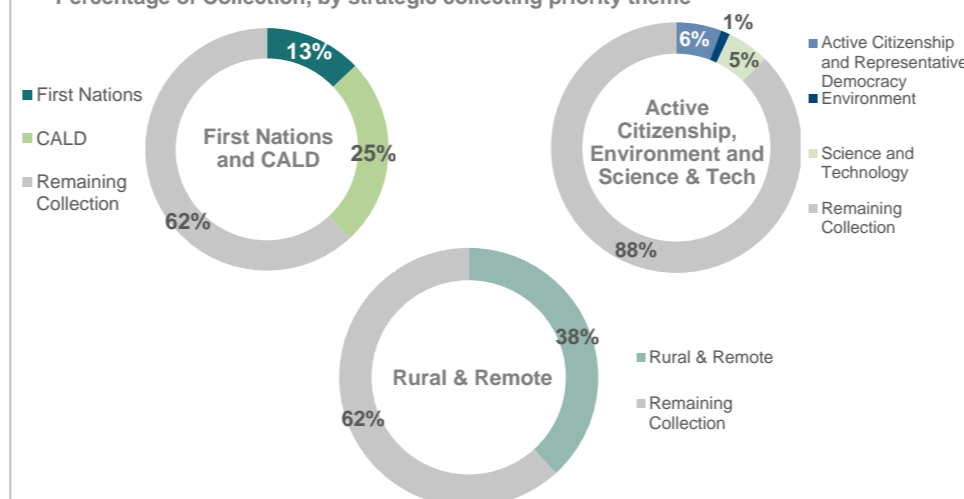
Strengths of the Collection

- **World-leading collection** - holds Australia's very first oral history collection from the 1950s and 19th century voices.
- **Fully digitised** - a challenge institutions such as the British Library have still to meet!
- **The very first cultural institution in the world to pioneer an online delivery system for synchronised audio and time-indexed summaries and transcripts** from 2008 onwards, allowing audio interviews to be text searchable.
- Allocated funding by the Commonwealth government to run **nation-defining projects**, such as \$1.6 million for the *Bringing them Home oral history project* (1998-2002) and \$1.6 million for the *Forgotten Australians Former Child Migrants oral history project* (2009-2012).

STRATEGIC COLLECTING PRIORITIES

The program is making significant gains in achieving benchmarks against all strategic collecting priorities. In particular:

Percentage of Collection, by strategic collecting priority theme



EXTERNALLY FUNDED PROJECTS

1.27%

Funded Partnership - Grant

10.25%

Funded Partnership - MOU

CASE STUDY: NORFOLK ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Norfolk Island is a site of global significance and has been critically important to Australia's history. It was a convict settlement from March 1788 to February 1814, and again, from 1824 to 1853.

In 1856, descendants of mutineers from the Bounty and their Tahitian wives, who were then living on Pitcairn Island, were given the Island by Queen Victoria. Descendants of these Pitcairn Islanders continue to play a major role in contemporary Norfolk Island society, with a distinctive history, culture and language.

Since 2019, the Library has been conducting an oral history project which will consist of 90 interviews.

This will be a world-leading oral history project, the largest of its kind, and has been a Library aspiration for three decades.

Through interviews, some which capture the Norfolk language, the project will provide deep insight into this highly significant site, 1,899 kilometres away from Canberra.

SIGNIFICANT COLLECTING PROJECTS 2017-2022



Interviews with individuals such as:

Rosie Batty AO, 2015 Australian of the Year; **Leigh Clifford AC**, Australian businessman and Chairman of Qantas, 2007-2018; **Li Cunxin AO**, ballet dancer and stockbroker, **Helen Garner**, critically acclaimed Australian author; **Jenny Kee AO**, fashion designer and advocate for Australian multiculturalism; **June Oscar AO**, Indigenous rights activist and community health and welfare worker of Bunuba descent; **Brett Walker AO SC**, Australian Barrister and former independent national security legislation monitor and **William Yang**, one of Australia's leading documentary photographers.



Yawuru Deep History oral history project

Ten interviews. The Library worked closely with and trained members of the Yawuru community in Broome in oral history and many interviews contain Yawuru language.



Great Barrier Reef oral history project

16 interviews. Sheds light on those who live, work and protect the world's largest coral reef system and the world's biggest single structure made by living organisms.



Australian Muslim Women oral history project

Eighteen interviews. Brings to the fore experiences of women from many different ethnic groups. Interviewees include Australian Muslim leaders, as well as academics, artists and entrepreneurs, as well as those with an Indigenous background.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES



Continue to reflect significant historical milestones, for example with a major project on the Australian experience of COVID-19.



Increase diversity of interviewees to include more First Nations, CALD and underrepresented groups.



Ensure delivery technology continues to evolve to match collecting (for example, allowing the online delivery of video interviews). Benefits of this include being able to interview and make accessible oral histories with deaf and hard of hearing people).



Increase gender parity in the collection to reflect Australian society.



Increase collection and delivery of material in languages other than English.

