



NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

Media Release

Digital countdown to save the things we want to keep

6 November 2019

Urgent action is required to save our digital heritage – the memories, events and documents we have kept on digital media over the past 40 years.

Increasingly, the things we want to keep have been created and stored on digital media, from floppy disks to digital video cassettes. Alarming, many once-modern formats are now considered 'critically endangered'. According to the worldwide [Digital Preservation Coalition](#), such formats include portable magnetic media more than 5 years old, including floppy disks, Zip disks, reel-based magnetic tape, MiniDV and digital audio tape (DAT).

In securing our digital heritage, the [National Archives of Australia](#) has led the way in preserving and migrating files on these at-risk media to sustainable formats.

Without an active program to save them, some of our cultural treasures might have been lost. The 1979 documentary movie, *The Things We Want to Keep*, captured a moment of community action to preserve Australia's iconic buildings and heritage sites. Its evocative soundtrack was laid down on quarter-inch magnetic reel. However, a preservation copy made in the 1990s was saved on DAT. Ironically, this format is now critically endangered, prompting the National Archives to migrate the file to a preservation-standard 96 kHz WAV file.

A video clip celebrating this music will be launched on the National Archives of Australia's [YouTube channel](#) on [World Digital Preservation Day](#), 7 November 2019.

Other materials created directly onto digital recording media have also received priority migration. These include underwater recordings made in the 1990s by the [Australian Institute of Marine Science](#). Capturing a baseline of coral and marine life on the Great Barrier Reef, these recordings were made on a MiniDV camcorder, then an industry standard. However, like the reef itself, this digital format is now critically endangered, so these precious environmental records have been migrated to a sustainable file format.

In identifying risks to our digital heritage, the National Archives of Australia is leading the way in preserving and migrating files on at-risk media to sustainable formats.

- Content saved on many once-standard digital formats is now considered to be 'critically endangered', especially portable magnetic media.
- The National Archives of Australia has allocated over \$3 million in the past three years to migrating historical material held on magnetic media to sustainable digital formats.
- Key National Archives of Australia spokespeople are available for media comment.

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Supplied images



Since the late 1970s, digital media have increasingly shaped and stored our work and social lives. Digital heritage is our shared heritage ([NAA: A6180, 14/6/79/7](#)). Available as high-res TIFF.



Great Barrier Reef documentary footage captured on MiniDV format in 1992 – both the reef and the digital format are now endangered ([NAA: J3064, 1051624](#)). Clip available as Quicktime ProRes HQ.



Digital formats classed as 'critically endangered' by the Digital Preservation Coalition include magnetic reel tape, MiniDV and DAT (Photos: David Ezzy). Available as high-res JPEG.