

# **ABC Submission on National Cultural Policy**

**August 2022**



## 1. Introduction

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The ABC welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of a new National Cultural Policy. As Australia's national public broadcaster, the ABC is a significant cultural institution and plays a central role in sustaining and contributing to the cultural life of Australia.

## 2. Challenges and opportunities

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**2.1. First Nations:** recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.

The ABC recognises the critical place of First Nations perspectives, cultures and stories in Australian culture and is committed to reflecting them. Indigenous content has never been more popular with audiences. Demand is high for fresh new voices who embrace contemporary subjects while celebrating their Indigenous culture, for scripted drama driven by Indigenous creatives, and for Indigenous contemporary music and arts stories. The ABC has embraced and developed strong Indigenous on-air talent across audio and screen programming.

The ABC's biggest challenge is around recruiting First Nations content makers and continuing to support mid-level talent and Indigenous creatives. Demand is high for Indigenous talent, and it is competitive to retain them. There is an opportunity to invest more in building capability, upskilling, mentoring and placements to accelerate mid-level talent and creators.

**2.2. A Place for Every Story:** reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

Reflecting the increasing diversity of Australia is a challenge that the ABC has embraced. In 2021, the ABC launched its Commissioning for Diversity and Inclusion Guidelines to embed the consideration of inclusion in content decision-making. Through industry collaborations and partnerships, the ABC works across a range of initiatives, such as talent programs, scholarships and Indigenous placements, to provide opportunities for diverse stories to be told.

The Fresh Blood initiative, the Kaleidoscope Project with Screen Australia, and partnerships with the Information and Cultural Exchange (I.C.E) in Western Sydney have provided opportunities to invest in underrepresented groups. The ABC contributes to an evolving national identity by discovering and supporting young and new artists through broadcasting their songs and supporting their work across its networks and platforms.

**2.3. The Centrality of the Artist:** supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.

The ABC recently celebrated the rich diversity of the arts from around the country with ABC Arts Week allowing audiences to immerse themselves in art that uplifted, inspired, educated, and entertained under the theme "Art is Everywhere". Alongside a huge collection of content on ABC iView, the ABC offered arts-themed programs and documentaries, thought-provoking articles, and talks and performances across all of its platforms.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on live performance and the broader creative and cultural industries. There is a skills shortage affecting the production sector, which has had a significant impact on ABC commissioning. The challenge is to find a consolidated approach to training and skill development across the cultural industries – to grow the creative workforce.

#### **2.4. Strong Institutions:** providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

With regular programs dedicated to arts and culture across all of its platforms, the ABC provides multiple opportunities to connect with cultural institutions and organisations, artists, festivals, and the issues that specifically affect the arts sector. As many of these institutions invest in the creation of digital content, partnerships with the ABC provide an opportunity to allow these concerts, plays, artist and exhibition profiles to be seen by a far broader audience on ABC broadcast and digital platforms.

#### **2.5. Reaching the Audience:** ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

As the ABC continues to move towards a digital future, it is uniquely positioned to fulfil a vital and unique role in Australian arts. Its reach across the country is unrivalled and its developing digital capabilities around personalisation give it the potential to bring arts events to a truly national audience. Key strategic partnerships with existing cultural organisations provide opportunities to livestream and broadcast major events nationally.

As platforms proliferate and audiences are overwhelmed with choice, it will be important to ensure the ABC has prominence on devices and that brand awareness is maintained to ensure that its content can be found on multiple platforms (broadcast, on-demand and third-party platforms).

The ABC faces challenges around digital licensing and industry agreements. Music licence agreements are still broadcast-focused with supplementary digital rights, limiting the ABC's ability to deliver services via digital platforms to Australian audiences. Global digital service providers have no regulation around their support of Australian music and record label industry restrictions in the local market make it harder for the ABC to provide music content to audiences for free.

### **3. Importance to ABC practice**

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#### **3.1. First Nations:** recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.

The ABC has a proud history of giving a voice to Indigenous Australians. The ABC Indigenous team works exclusively in this space and is vital to its practice. Its role not only grows the audience for the ABC, but also informs other content areas within the ABC. The work positively impacts social, political and cultural understandings of First Nations communities within the broader community of Australia, as well as empowering First Nations audiences to celebrate their perspectives and meaningfully contributing to the zeitgeist of evolving, diverse, contemporary First Nations identities.

The strategic partnership between the ABC and First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) will see both organisations share knowledge and staff to increase the number of Indigenous voices and stories seen and heard in Australian media. The media collaborations will include news-gathering, festivals and events, and content co-production to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in media and to increase the number and diversity of Indigenous stories for a national audience.

First Nations children must see themselves reflected within Australian stories and artforms to reinforce their sense of self and to celebrate, understand and engage with Indigenous cultural practices. Non-Indigenous children's engagement with this content strengthens their understanding of Indigenous history, cultural practices and helps them see the world through the eyes of Indigenous children.

The ABC has Indigenous music quotas across its radio networks. To support the growing First Nations music sector, across genres and audiences, the ABC has a partnership with the National Indigenous Music Awards and NITV, amplifying and celebrating First Nations music excellence with Australian audiences.

### **3.2. A Place for Every Story:** reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

For Australians young and old, seeing representative stories on screen contributes to individual identity and collective culture-building. The ABC plays an important role in ensuring this representation occurs.

In 2020-21, 77 per cent of a nationally representative panel of Australians agreed that the ABC is doing a good job at 'producing and sharing programs that reflect the cultural diversity of Australia'. 78 per cent of respondents felt the ABC is doing a good job at 'being distinctively Australian and contributing to Australia's national identity'.

### **3.3. The Centrality of the Artist:** supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.

The ABC contributes economic benefits as a significant employer of artists, creatives, and content-makers, as well as through partnerships/interactions with other organisations (including in the screen, music, arts sectors) and through regional production and events. It also contributes broader social benefits by providing a national platform upon which local artists and content makers can be "discovered and celebrated", as a primary way for audiences to discover and enjoy Australian creative and cultural content, and by supporting Australian storytelling (whether through the screen, music, written word, or other creative outlets) and events that contribute to Australia's national identity.

The ABC's investment in commissioning drama is crucial to ensure Australian stories continue to grace our screens. By sourcing Australian stories, ABC-commissioned productions help to build the capability, capacity, and support current and future talent across the creative industries. The role of the ABC is important in providing a relatively steady stream of production funding that directly employs and indirectly supports roles for workers in the Australian production sector. A 2021 report by Deloitte Access Economics found that for every 5 FTE roles employed and working

on ABC-commissioned screen productions, an additional 2 FTE roles were supported throughout the rest of the economy, on average, across the 2017-18 to 2019-20 period.

### **3.4. Strong Institutions:** providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

Without strong institutions that are able to contribute to national life, community, wellbeing and the economy, and support from government for these institutions, the ABC could not exist. The ABC's ability to broadcast and promote Australian arts and culture is sustained not only by the direct funding it receives, but by the support of Screen Australia, the state agencies and creative stakeholders that invest in ABC projects. The ABC is the only broadcaster in Australia that regularly engages with content about arts and culture at a local, national, and international level and, as such, is a vital institution in the vibrant Australian cultural sector.

### **3.5. Reaching the Audience:** ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

The ABC's 2020 Five-Year Plan commits to evolving its services to meet the needs and expectations of contemporary audiences. Its music and culture content is created and distributed to find audiences wherever they are, across platforms – audio, screen, online, digital and social both in Australia and on the ABC's International Services.

## **4. Developing a National Cultural Policy**

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The Australian Government has a range of policy tools at its disposal to support the activities of Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions. Some have recently been deployed in response to the challenges presented by COVID-19. Adequate and sustainable funding for public broadcasters remains one of the most direct and proven ways to help support and sustain these industries and institutions.

The ABC is at the heart of Australia's creative and cultural industries, which deliver significant economic and social benefits for Australian society. As an engine of creative development, employment and innovation, the ABC helps to support and promote these industries in line with its Charter obligations. It offers a long-standing, effective means that can be used to achieve policy outcomes. A well-funded public broadcaster delivers a range of high-quality content available to audiences for free.

The prominence of Australian content is an important issue in any on-demand digital environment. The ABC is supportive of the Government's commitment to determine the best way to ensure that Australian audiences can readily discover and access Australian content.

The ABC relies on its creative partnerships with industries and institutions to deliver on the ABC Charter's responsibilities to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic, and other performing arts in Australia and to contribute to a sense of national identity through arts and culture. A strong, well-funded ABC remains a key mechanism for supporting and growing the creative and cultural industries and can underpin a new National Cultural Policy.