

Submission to the National Cultural Policy

From: Tree Veneration Society Inc. (TVS)

The Tree Veneration Society Inc. (TVS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's National Cultural Policy. As an interdisciplinary environmental arts collective and registered charity, founded in 2011, TVS operates at the nexus of art, science, and community engagement. Our work is grounded in the belief that cultural practice plays a vital role in shaping public consciousness and behavioural change in response to the climate crisis.

Environmental Art and Cultural Value

Environmental art remains under-recognised within Australia's cultural landscape, despite its growing prominence internationally, particularly across Europe. As a practice, it offers a powerful means of translating complex ecological issues into embodied, accessible experiences. By engaging audiences emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually, environmental art fosters deeper understanding of climate change and encourages stewardship of the natural world.

TVS has demonstrated this through its Tree Festivals, which bring together artists, scientists, local councils, and communities in multidisciplinary exhibitions and events. These initiatives not only celebrate Australia's unique arboreal heritage but also highlight the urgent need for conservation in the face of climate-driven environmental degradation.

Alignment with the Five Pillars

1. First Nations First

TVS acknowledges the profound knowledge systems of First Nations peoples and the cultural and spiritual significance of trees and Country. We advocate for deeper collaboration with Indigenous artists and knowledge holders, ensuring environmental art practices are informed by, and respectful of, these perspectives.

2. A Place for Every Story

Environmental art expands the scope of storytelling by foregrounding non-human narratives, trees, ecosystems, and landscapes, within cultural discourse. TVS supports diverse artistic voices that interpret environmental concerns across disciplines, from visual arts to performance and sound.

3. Centrality of the Artist

Artists are essential contributors to public dialogue on climate change. However, there is a critical need to recognise and support artists working in interdisciplinary and environmentally focused practices, which often fall outside traditional funding frameworks.

4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure

There is a need for greater institutional support for environmentally engaged art, including residencies, exhibition platforms, and regional initiatives. TVS's proposed collaborations with councils and cultural institutions demonstrate how such infrastructure can foster meaningful community engagement.

5. Engaging the Audience

Environmental art is uniquely positioned to engage broad audiences in urgent global issues. Through participatory and site-responsive works, TVS has successfully connected communities to their local environments, encouraging both reflection and action.

The Challenge of Ageism in the Arts

A significant barrier within the Australian arts sector is the under-recognition of artists over the age of 50. This cohort often brings decades of experience, technical mastery, and deeply developed conceptual practices. Yet, they frequently encounter systemic bias in funding, exhibition opportunities, and institutional support.

For organisations such as TVS, which include many mature practitioners, this presents a structural challenge. Addressing ageism is not simply an equity issue, it is essential to maintaining a robust and diverse cultural ecology. The loss of experienced voices diminishes the sector's capacity for mentorship, continuity, and depth of practice.

We recommend that the National Cultural Policy explicitly recognise age diversity as a priority area, with targeted support mechanisms to ensure equitable access to opportunities for artists at all stages of their careers.

Conclusion

Environmental art is critical to Australia's cultural response to climate change. As an interdisciplinary collective, TVS demonstrates the capacity of artists to bridge science, culture, and community in meaningful and transformative ways. To fully realise this potential, the National Cultural Policy must expand its recognition of environmentally engaged practices and address systemic barriers, including ageism, that limit participation and innovation within the sector.

We urge the Government to support initiatives that integrate environmental art into the national cultural framework and to ensure that artists of all ages are valued as vital contributors to Australia's cultural future.