

## National Cultural Policy Submission

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Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I write as Head of the School of Languages and Cultures at The University of Queensland and Chair of the Australian Academy of the Humanities' Languages and Cultures Committee. My submission focuses on Pillar 1, First Nations First, while addressing the framework as a whole.

Culture and language are inseparable

My central point is foundational: culture cannot be supported in isolation from language. Language is not merely a vehicle for culture; it is constitutive of it. The way a community names Country, sings, mourns, and reasons is inseparable from the language in which those acts occur. A National Cultural Policy that does not place language at its centre risks supporting the surface expressions of culture while neglecting the medium through which culture lives and renews itself. I urge the government to make explicit, throughout the next Policy, that investment in languages is investment in culture.

First Nations languages: the urgent case

The needs of language communities in Australia are not uniform. The most acute needs sit with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, which have suffered profound and deliberate damage through colonisation. Revitalisation, reclamation, and intergenerational transmission are not optional cultural activities; they are obligations flowing from this history and from Australia's commitments under the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Drawing on the priorities of First Languages Australia and the Language Policy Partnership, the next Policy should commit to:

- Dedicated Commonwealth legislation to recognise and protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, providing a durable foundation beyond electoral cycles.
- Sustainable, long-term funding for the Indigenous language centre network and community-led programs, with expansion to communities currently without coverage — aligned with the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan.
- Resourcing the everyday speaking and teaching of languages on Country, recognising that languages live through use, not preservation alone.
- New systems enabling communities to access and manage language materials held in archives and institutions.
- Career pathways and professional recognition for First Nations language workers, teachers, and linguists.

Languages and the social fabric of multicultural Australia

A successful multicultural society does not rest on assimilation but on the coexistence of many cultures. Languages — community, heritage, and additional languages alike — are critical infrastructure for that coexistence. They allow communities to maintain identity across generations, enable genuine intercultural understanding, and equip Australians to engage with the region the government's economic and diplomatic strategies presuppose. Recent declines in language provision across Australian schools and universities are a cultural-policy concern, not merely an education-portfolio one.

I encourage the government to ensure the next Policy speaks coherently with the Voices of Country plan and Australia's IDIL commitments. Cultural policy, languages policy, and education policy must be read together if any is to succeed.