

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Submission: Towards a New National Cultural Policy (5 May 2026)

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I am a 56-year-old artist living in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales. As a Regional Arts Australia (RAA) Fellow in 2025, I have experienced both the value of national investment in the arts and the reality of how fragile a creative life can be outside metropolitan centres. I am currently living on a below-poverty income without housing security. My perspective reflects not only my own experience, but that of many regional artists navigating similar conditions.

Centrality of the Artist

While policy recognises artists as workers, the reality is that many of us remain economically vulnerable. Irregular income, limited local opportunities, and rising living costs make it extremely difficult to sustain a creative practice. For older artists, these challenges are intensified by limited access to stable employment pathways and increasing health and housing pressures. Policy must address income security more directly, through mechanisms such as baseline income support for artists, better funding continuity, and enforceable standards for fair pay. Without this, many experienced artists are at risk of leaving the sector entirely.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

In regional areas like the Northern Rivers, infrastructure is inconsistent and often fragile. While there are vibrant communities and strong creative networks, they rely heavily on short-term funding and volunteer labour. Access to affordable studio space, venues, and even stable phone and internet can be limited. Housing insecurity is also a major barrier to maintaining a creative practice. Cultural infrastructure must be understood to include housing and live-work spaces for artists, particularly in regions where rental markets are volatile. Without stable living conditions, creative output cannot be sustained.

A Place for Every Story

Regional artists contribute significantly to Australia's cultural identity, yet our stories are often underrepresented. There is a need for greater investment in place-based practice that reflects local realities, including the social and economic challenges faced by regional communities. Funding models should be more accessible and less administratively burdensome, particularly for individuals without institutional support. Inclusion must also consider age and economic disadvantage, ensuring that older artists are not overlooked in favour of emerging voices alone.

Engaging the Audience

Regional audiences are deeply engaged, but access remains uneven. Touring programs, local festivals, and community-led initiatives are essential, yet often underfunded. Digital platforms offer new opportunities, but they also require resources, skills, and reliable infrastructure that are not always available. Supporting audience engagement in regional areas means investing in both physical and digital access, as well as supporting local presenters and networks.

First Nations First

Living in the Northern Rivers, I recognise the importance of First Nations leadership in shaping cultural policy. Stronger support for First Nations artists and cultural authority benefits the entire sector and enriches the cultural life of our region.

Conclusion

The next National Cultural Policy must address not only creativity, but survival. For artists like myself, the issue is not just how to create work, but how to continue living and working at all.