

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

The consultation paper for the next National Cultural Policy highlights the importance of culture in shaping how Australians see themselves, strengthening communities, and contributing to economic and social wellbeing. This is a strong foundation. Culture in Australia is not static—it evolves through shared experience, storytelling, and participation across generations. As the paper notes, arts and culture are central to our national life and sense of belonging, and the next policy must build on this in a way that reflects the full breadth of the Australian story.

The continuation of the five pillars from Revive provides a clear framework. In particular, “A Place for Every Story” is critical; it recognises that culture is created collectively by all Australians. This principle should guide the entire policy. Australia’s cultural identity has been shaped by many voices: the ancient traditions of First Nations peoples, the legacy of colonial-era storytellers such as Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson, and the diverse contributions of migrant communities. Together, these form a shared national narrative that should be preserved, not segregated.

The first pillar, “First Nations First,” as currently framed, risks division rather than strengthening unity. While the consultation paper rightly recognises First Nations cultures as a defining source of Australia’s heritage and cultural strength, structuring the policy in a way that places one group “first” creates a hierarchy within what should be a shared national framework. Cultural policy should unify Australians, not segment them.

Recognising First Nations cultures and ensuring they are supported, respected, and preserved does not require the diminishing or sidelining of other parts of Australia’s history. The consultation paper itself emphasises that culture connects people, fosters belonging, and enables shared experience across communities. This goal is best achieved through inclusion rather than prioritisation of any single group.

Australia’s colonial and post-colonial history is an integral part of the nation’s cultural development. The works of early Australian writers and artists helped define a distinct national identity and continue to influence how stories are told today. Removing this history risks creating an incomplete narrative. A mature and confident cultural policy should acknowledge all aspects of Australia’s past—its achievements, its complexities, and its evolution—without elevating one narrative at the expense of others.

The remaining pillars—supporting artists, strengthening infrastructure, and engaging audiences—are essential to ensuring a sustainable and forward-looking cultural sector. As the paper notes, the sector is evolving through digital transformation, changing audience behaviours, and global opportunities. These challenges require a cohesive national approach that brings Australians together around a shared cultural vision.

In conclusion, the next National Cultural Policy should reflect the full spectrum of Australia’s cultural identity. It should strongly support First Nations cultures while also recognising the enduring and on-going contributions of all Australians. Focusing on unity, inclusion, and shared storytelling—rather than division or the prioritisation of one narrative—the policy can deliver a cultural future that is both representative and unifying for the nation as a whole.