

NatureArt Lab

Submission – Australia’s National Cultural Policy

Australia’s story is inseparable from its natural world. At a time of accelerating biodiversity loss, climate change, and environmental degradation, cultural policy must recognise that the arts are not peripheral to these challenges—they are essential to how we understand, communicate, and respond to them.

NatureArt Lab works at the intersection of art, science and environmental education. Through immersive, place-based creative practice, we support artists and communities to engage deeply with the natural world. This perspective informs our response to Pillars 3, 4 and 5.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Artists are critical interpreters of ecological change. They translate complex environmental science into emotional, accessible and human narratives that can shift perception and inspire action.

However, many artists working in environmental spaces face structural challenges:

- limited funding for interdisciplinary practice
- insecure income streams
- undervaluation of education and community engagement work
- lack of recognition for the social and environmental impact of their practice

Cultural policy must:

- **recognise artists as essential contributors to environmental literacy and public discourse**, not only as content creators
- **support cross-disciplinary practice** between artists, scientists and environmental organisations
- **expand definitions of creative labour** to include teaching, facilitation, fieldwork and community engagement
- **protect creative integrity in the digital environment**, particularly where nature-based work is vulnerable to appropriation or misrepresentation

Investment in lifelong learning is especially important. Nature-based artistic practice requires ongoing skill development—both creative and ecological. Supporting this strengthens not only artists, but the broader cultural and environmental sectors.

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Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Australia’s cultural infrastructure must extend beyond traditional institutions to include **place-based, nature-embedded and regionally distributed models**.

Organisations like NatureArt Lab operate in landscapes, not just buildings. Our “infrastructure” includes:

- national parks and natural reserves
- regional communities
- field-based learning environments
- partnerships with scientists, conservationists and local custodians

To remain resilient and fit-for-purpose, policy should:

- **recognise natural environments as vital cultural infrastructure**
- **support regional and remote delivery models**, where connection to place is strongest
- **enable long-term partnerships between arts and environmental sectors**
- **invest in low-impact, sustainable program delivery**, aligned with environmental values

There is also an opportunity to align cultural infrastructure investment with climate adaptation and ecological restoration—ensuring that arts funding contributes to broader national resilience.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Audience engagement is shifting toward **meaningful, participatory and values-driven experiences**. In our work, audiences are not passive viewers—they are active participants in creative and ecological discovery.

Nature-based arts experiences respond directly to this shift by:

- offering **immersive, sensory engagement** with the natural world
- fostering **wellbeing, connection and stewardship**
- creating **pathways for lifelong engagement with both art and environment**

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Policy can strengthen this by:

- supporting **experiential and participatory models of engagement**, particularly in nature-based contexts
- recognising the role of the arts in **building environmental awareness and behavioural change**
- investing in **innovative distribution and storytelling**, including digital platforms that connect audiences to place without replacing it
- promoting Australian stories that reflect our **unique biodiversity and ecological identity** on the global stage

Why These Pillars Matter

For NatureArt Lab, these pillars are interconnected. Supporting artists (Pillar 3), rethinking infrastructure (Pillar 4), and engaging audiences (Pillar 5) are all essential to building a cultural ecosystem that can respond to the defining challenges of our time.

The environmental crisis is also a cultural crisis—one of disconnection from the natural world. The arts play a vital role in repairing that relationship.

What We Would Like to See in the Next National Cultural Policy

- Recognition of the **arts as a key contributor to environmental awareness, education and action**
- Dedicated support for **nature-based and environmentally engaged artistic practice**
- Investment in **cross-sector collaboration** between arts, science and conservation
- Expansion of **regional and place-based cultural models**
- Alignment of cultural policy with **sustainability and climate goals**

Australia’s cultural future depends on how we care for both our creative communities and our natural environments. These are not separate priorities—they are deeply interconnected. A forward-looking cultural policy has the opportunity to lead globally by recognising and supporting this relationship.