

ARTS ON TOUR

SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

May 2026

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Arts on Tour is Australia's largest touring service organisation for the performing arts. In 2026 we will deliver 16 national tours, injecting \$3.5M directly into the performing arts sector and local regional economies, and reaching over 100,000 audience members across Australia by partnering with a network of over 80 performing arts centres (PACs). AOT is committed to diversifying the touring sector, particularly with First Nations, CALD and regionally-made productions, as well as leading on best practice touring initiatives such as *Green Touring*, introduced in 2022 and including the award-winning Green Touring Toolkit; and *Tour Ready, Tour Fit*, a training and mentoring program for the next generation of touring crew being piloted this year.

PERSPECTIVE FOR THIS SUBMISSION

AOT's vision is of a vibrant and diverse national touring landscape that is environmentally and financially sustainable. A healthy touring sector is vital to the health of the performing arts sector as a whole. For example, AOT's touring activity alone will provide \$1M in wages to unsalaried artists and crew in 2026.

Touring at the best of times is a balancing act, made even more precarious since 2020 due to the forces-at-large affecting our everyday: climate change and the devastating and disproportionate impact this is having on regional communities across Australia; inflation and interest rate rises causing both higher costs for making work and reduced household discretionary income for buying tickets; and still the impact of Covid, on local government's ability to absorb financial losses on programming at their venues, on tech labour shortages, and on the more permanent changes to consumer behaviour, taking another hit currently due to the US-Iran war. These ongoing external pressures have brought the performing arts touring sector to breaking point.

WHY INVEST IN A THRIVING AND SUSTAINABLE PERFORMING ARTS TOURING ECOLOGY?

Touring drives prosperity and innovation.

Touring has a big economic impact, for artists, the sector, and regional towns and cities. Touring makes up nearly 30% of the work presented by PACs*, and contributes significantly to the liveability of regional cities.

Touring connects people and builds resilience.

Live performance, and the arts centres that stage it, are still irreplaceable hubs of connection that are vital to promoting social connectedness and social cohesion – particularly in regional areas. Increasingly, participation in arts and culture is also an essential component of recovery in climate-impacted communities.

Touring defines who we are.

Regional PACs select touring work that resonates with the specific demographics of their community. Taken as a whole, the national touring landscape plays an important role in reflecting back to us who we are as a contemporary multicultural Australia.

REVIVE TO DATE – WHAT IS THE STATE OF PLAY?

This review of Revive is an opportunity to address systemic issues prevalent across all Pillars to ensure touring, and performing arts more broadly can play a key role in celebrating artistic expression and creating liveable cities, as well as building community resilience, social cohesion and contributing to climate mitigation and adaptation.

The commitment to a Cultural Policy, and to its review, is to be loudly applauded. Revive boldly established Creative Australia and its new councils and funding streams for Music, Writing, First Nations and Workplaces. However, for the performing arts sector and touring, key issues remain:

- **Arts project funding** for the performing arts sector was only restored to ‘pre-Brandis raid’ levels, which translates to a colossal under investment in these funding programs with success rates for some rounds being as low as 2%. This creates an impossibly precarious existence for artists;
- **Playing Australia funding** has also remained constant, despite the heady increase in touring costs over the last 6 years and the fact that this is the only mechanism for many regional communities across Australia to access professional performing arts;
- **The policy void on climate mitigation and adaptation** in Revive ignores the leadership potential for arts and culture in community resilience and recovery, and neglects the responsibility of the sector to transition to low carbon infrastructure and practices;
- **The under investment in a Climate Action Delivery Partner** of just \$600K over three years to deliver climate action services across all of Australia to all sectors is an impossible task and demonstrates a lack of commitment to climate action.

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE AND THRIVING TOURING ECOLOGY – RECOMMENDATIONS

Pillar	Recommendation	Detail	Target
1. FUND THE ENGINE ROOM OF THE PERFORMING ARTS SECTOR TO THRIVE.			
<i>Key words: Arts Projects and Four Year Investment funding, artists, S2M orgs, First Nations, CALD, Disability-led</i>			
3	Support performing arts artists to have sustainable careers.	Recognise that independent artists and S2M orgs are the R&D engine room of the sector which benefits major orgs upstream and the sustainability of the sector as a whole. Recognise the need for sustainable careers for artists.	Artists/ Producing orgs
3	Increase investment into the performing arts sector.	Address the long-term under investment in the performing arts sector by increasing funding for both Arts Projects and Four Year Investment programs.	Artists/ Producing orgs
2,3	Support artists and projects that are reflective of contemporary Australia.	Remove barriers to accessing funding for First Nations, CALD and disability-led projects and artists to ensure the art we make is reflective of who we are.	Artists/ Producing orgs
4	Recognise the role of service organisations.	Recognise peak bodies are the facilitators, enablers and amplifiers that increase the return on the Government's investment in orgs and projects.	Sector
4	Structure programs with reasonable success rates.	Support the sector to thrive by ensuring arts project funding programs have success rates of at least 20% (currently as low as 2%).	Sector

Pillar	Recommendation	Detail	Target
2. INVEST IN PERFORMING ARTS EXPERIENCES FOR AND BY REGIONAL AUSTRALIANS.			
<i>Key words: Regional touring funding, Playing Australia, tech workforce shortages, audience-centric and local programming</i>			
1	Establish a coordinated First Nations touring and audience development framework.	A specific First Nations touring framework would embed cultural protocols and community engagement, enable relationship-based delivery, support audience development and strengthen touring as a workforce system. (This is a recommendation of the First Nations Performing Arts Companies and Blak Futures' submission.)	Govt. / Sector
2,4,5	Increase investment for regional touring (currently funded through Playing Australia).	While touring costs have risen dramatically, Playing Australia funding has remained stagnant, reducing . This reduces opportunities for is a huge burden on the touring pipeline which is unsustainable. <i>89% of presenters are now paying touring costs on top of performance fees, 69% of which are due to unsuccessful tour funding applications*</i> .	Producers /Regional PACs
2,4,5	Cap the amount of Playing Australia funding per tour.	The number of tours funded by Playing Australia has decreased due to the increasing trend of awarding grants of over \$700K for one touring project. This translates to less work touring and less access for regional audiences. Cap the amount requested to \$400K, in line with multi-year touring organisations.	Producers /Regional PACs
2,4,5	Maintain the structure of three rounds of Playing Australia funding per year.	The current structure of three rounds per year mitigates programming risks for presenters and supports demand-driven touring.	Producers /Regional PACs
2,4,5	Design touring funding to support the entire remounting-touring-presenting pipeline.	Traditionally touring funding covered net touring costs and presenters (PACs) paid the performance fee, which would be covered by box office. With increasing costs and decreasing audiences this model no longer holds, necessitating funding that is designed to support the whole pipeline. <i>20% of presenters will be programming less in 2027 due to this trend*</i> .	Producers /Regional PACs
2,3,4,5	Invest in regionally-made work.	Recognise and provide funding for regionally-made work for local presentation and regional-regional & regional-metro touring. <i>33% of regional PACs are producing work in-house, or investing in work as co-producers*</i> .	Regional PACs & Producers
3,4,5	Develop and fund a national market strategy	Develop a national market strategy to steer policy development across the making, touring and presenting new Australian work, including investment in national market mechanisms that make touring happen. <i>78% of presenters plan to attend a performing arts market and intend to purchase shows*</i> .	Regional PACs & Producers
4	Harmonise Federal & State/Territory touring funding.	Touring is a major contributor to the sustainability of S2Ms and artists' careers and social cohesion in regional towns and cities. National tours require both state and federal funding to go ahead, yet these mechanisms aren't aligned. This results in an inefficient allocation of government funding and the frequent jettisoning of whole tours.	Producers /Regional PACs
4	Prioritise workforce training for technicians to address shortage.	The technical workforce is at a breaking point. The chronic shortage of technicians post-Covid is particularly challenging in regional areas where it is a critical safety issue and presents major risks. <i>19% of presenters have cited labour shortages as a driver for programming fewer shows*</i> .	Sector
5	Ensure that touring funding is demand-driven and audience-centric.	The role of Playing Australia is to support performing arts experiences reaching regional audiences and contributing to social connectedness and social cohesion. Ensure this aim is realised, by prioritising audience-centric selection criteria, rather than what is the 'best art'.	Producers /Regional PACs
5	Recognise the role of performing arts experiences in promoting social cohesion.	Facilitate regional presenters to stage work by a diversity of artists that promote social cohesion, by supporting community engagement and audience development initiatives - in turn ensuring there is demand for work by a diversity of artists.	Regional PACs

3. EMBED CLIMATE POLICY ACROSS ALL FIVE PILLARS OF REVIVE.			
<i>Key words: First Nations leadership, policy gap, global community, decarbonise, country centred, community resilience and recovery</i>			
1	Recognise First Nations leadership on climate action.	Recognise and be led by First Nations cultural knowledge systems in the development of climate mitigation and adaptation policy.	Govt. / Sector
1	Embrace a Country centred approach to making and touring work.	We have the opportunity to model a shift from being human centred to Country centred in our approach to making and touring work; centring First Nations knowledge systems, ecological kinship, and cultural responsibility for long-term cultural and social impact.	Govt. / Sector
1,2,4	Make decarbonising the performing arts sector and touring ecology a top priority.	This is a leadership opportunity for Australia's arts and culture sector which has zero downsides. As a country, we are unique in having the world's oldest living culture to be led by. As a sector, we have a responsibility to inspire and lead on change. As a continent, we are extremely ecologically vulnerable, and the devastating effects of climate change are all around us.	Govt. / Sector
1,2,3,4,5	Address the policy gap and make climate central to policy and funding.	Recognise that rapid climate change is a critical issue which must be central to arts and culture policy. Embed climate risk, mitigation and adaptation into all policy delivery, funding criteria and evaluation.	Govt. / Sector
2,3,4,5	Fund and embrace low carbon touring models.	Traditional touring is a carbon-intensive activity. Invest in and incentivise low carbon touring models such as no freight/no flight tours, suitcase touring, engaging local actors/crew, and licensing a production's IP to local creatives.	Govt. / Producers
2,3	Recognise live arts experiences are essential to community resilience and recovery.	More frequent and more extreme weather events translates to devastating loss, and regional communities are consistently the hardest hit. Recognise the role of live arts experiences in building resilience and supporting recovery by providing disaster response funding to artists and communities.	Sector
3	Support artists to adopt climate-conscious practices.	As leaders, artists want to adapt to eco-centred and low carbon practices. To do this, they need opportunities and resources to increase their eco literacy.	Sector
2,3,4,5	Provide funding for climate-related tour cancellations.	Touring now requires a climate risk mitigation strategy, avoiding activity from Nov-March due to higher frequency of flood and fire disasters. Even still, climate related performance cancellations still happen, and this income loss hits both presenter and producer. Provide cancellation crisis funding to alleviate this.	Producers /Regional Venues
4	Invest in sustainable and regenerative performing arts infrastructure.	Ensure new regional performing arts infrastructure adopts regenerative design principles, with a minimum 4 star Green Rating. Invest in existing PAC infrastructure upgrades to transition to renewable energy and reduce waste and water usage.	Regional Venues
5	Align with the global arts community and prioritise responding to climate change.	Revive identifies the importance of Australia's cultural exports. Recognise that Australia's laggard response to climate responsibility limits these cultural export opportunities, and prioritise climate action to align with the global arts community.	Govt. / Sector

**Data source: PAC Australia 2026 National Presenter Outlook*

Arts on Tour welcomes the opportunity to provide further information or to appear before the consultation panel.

Arts on Tour's intersecting recommendations are endorsed by the following peak bodies, academic institutions, Festivals, theatre and dance companies, and performing arts centres that Arts on Tour works alongside with. In addition, of the organisations listed who have also written (or a party to) a submission, we endorse the intersecting recommendations relating to the performing arts sector, the national touring ecology, and climate action.

Griffith University, Performance and Ecology Research Lab, P+ERL, QLD
Creative Climate Action Alliance
Regional Arts NSW
Museum & Galleries of NSW
Theatre Network Australia
Moogahlin Performing Arts, NSW
Darwin Festival
CircuitWest, WA
Dance Makers Collective, Western Sydney
Queanbeyan Performing Arts Centre

Antonia Seymour
Executive Director, Arts on Tour

