

SUBMISSION TO AUSTRALIA'S NEXT NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY **– prepared by [REDACTED], Executive Manager, Creative Communities & Experiences, Tamworth Regional Council**

Australia's cultural and creative sector is one of our nation's greatest strengths. It reflects who we are, tells our stories, drives economic activity, and builds social cohesion across metropolitan, regional and remote communities. Tamworth prides itself on being a leader of arts and culture in Northern Inland NSW. While the *Revive* National Cultural Policy has delivered important progress and renewed confidence across the sector, there is now a clear need for a refreshed, forward-looking policy framework that responds to a rapidly changing environment.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be felt across the sector, particularly in live performance, events, and regional cultural economies. At the same time, shifts in audience behaviour, digital consumption, and emerging technologies are transforming how content is created, distributed, and experienced. A new National Cultural Policy must respond to these realities while positioning Australia as a leader in creative innovation.

The current *Revive* policy established five important pillars that have helped refocus national attention on the value of arts and culture in Australia:

1. **First Nations First** – recognising and respecting the central place of First Nations stories and creativity.
2. **A Place for Every Story** – ensuring Australians see themselves and their stories reflected in our cultural life.
3. **Centrality of the Artist** – valuing and supporting artists as workers and creators.
4. **Strong Cultural Infrastructure** – investing in the places and platforms where culture is created and shared.
5. **Engaging the Audience** – growing participation and access to arts and culture across the nation.

These pillars remain highly relevant and should continue to underpin the next National Cultural Policy. Importantly, the issue of regional cultural infrastructure directly aligns to all these pillars but for Tamworth there is a sharper focus with both **Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story** and **Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure**.

Without equitable investment in regional hard and soft cultural infrastructure, regional communities risk being excluded from fully participating in Australia's cultural future. Stories from regional Australia matter deeply to our national identity and should be supported through access to appropriate spaces, specific training and wages of parity, that allow those stories to be created, developed and shared professionally.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

From a regional perspective, the cultural and creative industries are not just a “nice to have”—they are essential to economic diversification, tourism, and community wellbeing. Cities like Tamworth, recognised as Australia's Country Music Capital, demonstrate how culture can underpin an entire local economy. Major festivals, live music, visual arts, and creative enterprises generate significant visitation, create jobs, and foster identity and pride.

Tamworth also demonstrates the important role that regional cultural institutions play in nurturing creative practice and connecting regional communities to the national cultural landscape. **Tamworth Regional Gallery** has a long and respected history as one of regional Australia's leading public

galleries. Established in 1919, the Gallery has built a strong reputation for supporting artists, presenting high-quality exhibitions, and developing nationally significant collections and programs.

The Gallery is particularly recognised for its nationally important textile collection and for curating the Tamworth Textile Triennial — one of Australia’s most respected contemporary textile art awards and exhibitions. Since its inception in the 1970s, the Textile Triennial has become a major national platform for contemporary textile practice, showcasing innovation and artistic excellence from across the country. Following its presentation in Tamworth, the exhibition tours nationally for an extended period, taking the name and reputation of Tamworth into galleries and cultural institutions throughout Australia.

Importantly, Tamworth Regional Gallery also plays a vital role in supporting and developing visual artists across the New England North West region and beyond. Through exhibitions, commissions, professional development opportunities, education programs and community engagement, the Gallery provides pathways for regional artists to exhibit, connect and grow their practice. It demonstrates how regional cultural infrastructure can deliver both local community benefit and national cultural impact.

Tamworth Regional Council’s **Entertainment Venues** team has also played a significant role in strengthening the region’s performing arts and live entertainment landscape over the past 18 years. Through strategic programming, industry partnerships and a strong commitment to audience development, the team has worked consistently to lift the quality, scale and diversity of performing arts experiences available within regional New South Wales.

This sustained investment in programming and audience engagement has contributed greatly to the growth of the region’s creative industries and has helped create pathways for regional artists, performers, musicians, technicians and creatives to develop and showcase their work locally. Importantly, it has demonstrated that regional communities have both the appetite and the capacity to engage with high-quality professional arts experiences when they are made accessible.

The annual season of events curated and delivered by Entertainment Venues provides a broad and diverse range of performances and experiences across theatre, music, dance, comedy, family entertainment and community productions. It also plays an important role in supporting and elevating local arts organisations, schools, independent creatives and community-based performing arts companies by providing professional venues, technical support and opportunities for collaboration and presentation.

Beyond the economic benefits, this programming contributes significantly to the livability of the city and the social fabric of the community. Shared cultural experiences help bring communities together, foster social connection and contribute positively to community health and wellbeing. In regional communities especially, the arts play a critical role in reducing social isolation, strengthening community pride and creating a sense of belonging.

In centres such as Tamworth, live music thrives because of strong community support, venue goodwill and the momentum generated by major events like the Tamworth Country Music Festival. However, the long-term growth of the creative industries is increasingly constrained by the lack of contemporary, fit-for-purpose performance, rehearsal and production spaces.

Unlike metropolitan areas—where sustained infrastructure investment is supporting the next generation of creative economies—regional NSW often relies on ageing multipurpose facilities that were not designed for modern live performance, touring productions, or music industry development.

STRATEGIC CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE – A NATIONAL PRIORITY

Tamworth Regional Council’s planned Performing Arts Centre and wider creative precinct provides a clear and compelling example of the need for a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to funding large-scale cultural infrastructure.

This project is not simply about building a venue—it is about enabling long-term industry growth, supporting workforce development, and unlocking regional economic potential. Importantly,

Tamworth is currently the only inland regional city of its size in New South Wales without a purpose-built performing arts centre.

The project strongly aligns with *Revive's* commitment to **Strong Cultural Infrastructure**, recognising that infrastructure is fundamental to supporting artists, audiences, cultural participation and industry sustainability. It also reflects the goals of **A Place for Every Story**, ensuring regional communities have access to professional cultural spaces where local stories, artists and identities can be celebrated and shared.

While programs such as the Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program (RPPP) are strongly supported and represent a positive step forward, the current process highlights the need for greater coordination and timeliness. Tamworth has been waiting for over 18 months for an outcome under Stream One funding to support further detailed design work and progress the project to a shovel-ready stage. Delays of this nature create uncertainty, stall momentum, and limit the ability to leverage co-investment opportunities.

A strategic project such as the **Tamworth Performing Arts Centre** and creative precinct should be recognised as **economic infrastructure**, not solely cultural infrastructure.

A Whole-of-Government Opportunity

To fully realise the potential of national and state initiatives—including live music reforms, the NSW Contemporary Music Strategy, and Create NSW's Creative Communities policies—a whole-of-government approach to regional cultural infrastructure is required.

This approach should recognise that creative infrastructure intersects with multiple policy domains, including:

- Jobs and skills development
- Regional economic growth
- Tourism and visitation
- Education and training pathways
- Night-time economy activation

A contemporary performing arts precinct in a regional hub such as Tamworth would:

- Support career pathways for musicians and creatives
- Create employment for technical, production and event workers
- Enable sustainable regional and national touring circuits
- Attract new festivals, performances and cultural events
- Provide professional rehearsal, recording and training spaces
- Support the growth of creative and cultural businesses

Importantly, this type of infrastructure plays a critical role in talent retention, ensuring that emerging artists and creative practitioners do not need to relocate to metropolitan centres to pursue viable careers.

REGIONAL TOURING AND THE NEED TO REFORM PLAYING AUSTRALIA

A key issue facing regional arts presentation and audience development is the growing unsustainability of the current *Playing Australia* model. While the intent of the program remains important and valued, the reality on the ground is that the model is increasingly failing to adequately support presenters, venues and communities in regional Australia.

Over recent years, escalating touring costs, freight, accommodation, technical production expenses and workforce shortages have made it significantly more difficult for regional venues and communities to access high-quality touring productions. At the same time, many regional presenters are carrying increasing financial risk in order to maintain cultural access for their communities.

Programs such as *Playing Australia* were originally designed to improve access and equity for regional audiences. However, the current funding settings often place the majority of resources around the touring producer or touring party, while the regional presenters and venues — those with the strongest connection to local audiences and communities — receive limited direct support.

Regional presenters such as Tamworth Regional Council's Entertainment Venues team invest significant time and resources into audience development, community engagement, venue operations, marketing and local partnerships. These are the organisations that understand their communities, build long-term audience relationships and create sustainable cultural participation at a local level. Yet too often they are expected to absorb increasing costs without corresponding operational or programming support.

There is a growing need for greater federal investment at the ground level — directly supporting regional presenters, venues and local cultural organisations that are delivering year-round cultural outcomes within their communities.

A refreshed national approach should consider:

- Increased direct investment into regional presenting organisations and venues;
- Greater operational support for audience development and engagement activities;
- Funding models that recognise the true cost of regional touring and presentation;
- Incentives for longer touring circuits and deeper regional engagement;
- Support for co-presenting and regional consortium models;
- Reduced administrative complexity and more responsive funding timelines.

Importantly, regional arts presentation cannot simply be viewed as “touring delivery.” Successful regional cultural engagement relies on trusted local organisations that know their audiences, understand local context and can build meaningful participation over time.

Without stronger support for regional presenters and venues, there is a risk that audiences in regional Australia will experience declining access to high-quality arts experiences, despite growing demand and strong community appetite.

If Australia is serious about cultural equity and ensuring “a place for every story,” then investment must extend beyond capital cities and beyond project-based touring models. It must support the organisations and people embedded within regional communities who are doing the long-term work of building creative ecosystems, developing audiences and sustaining cultural life year-round.

FIRST NATIONS FIRST – A GENUINE COMMITMENT

Tamworth Regional Council strongly supports the *Revive* pillar of **First Nations First** and recognises the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as central to Australia's identity, storytelling and creative future.

Council's commitment is demonstrated through both strategic action and ongoing programming across its cultural facilities, festivals and community initiatives. Across the Tamworth Regional Gallery, Capitol Theatre and Tamworth Country Music Festival, there is a strong curatorial and programming focus on presenting and celebrating First Nations artists, works, stories and productions.

Tamworth Regional Gallery regularly showcases First Nations visual artists and exhibitions, creating important opportunities for cultural expression, truth telling and community connection. Similarly, the Capitol Theatre season continues to include First Nations productions, performances and artists as a key part of its annual programming, ensuring regional audiences have access to diverse and culturally significant contemporary works.

Within the Tamworth Country Music Festival, Council has continued to strengthen opportunities for First Nations musicians and cultural practitioners through dedicated programming, new partnerships with NATSIMO, APRA – AMCOS, Creative Australia and Create NSW, performances and cultural

engagement activities. This has systematically been increasing visibility and representation for Aboriginal artists within one of Australia's largest and most significant music festivals.

Through Council's Visitor Experience Team, and in partnership with local First Nations people and organisations, there is also a strong focus on developing new and building upon existing cultural tourism experiences that showcase the region's rich Aboriginal history, culture and stories. These initiatives are helping to strengthen cultural understanding, create authentic visitor experiences, and support economic opportunities connected to cultural tourism within the region.

Tamworth Regional Council also recognises that supporting First Nations communities extends beyond programming and must be embedded within organisational leadership and practice. Council is strongly committed to Closing the Gap outcomes and continues to implement actions through its Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

A significant demonstration of this commitment was the signing of the historic **Mara Ngali Agreement** between Tamworth Regional Council and the Tamworth Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (TACCO). This agreement represents an important step forward in strengthening relationships, shared decision-making and collaboration between Council and the local Aboriginal community.

Council further demonstrates this commitment through dedicated staffing resources, including the employment of two Aboriginal Liaison Officers who play an important role in community engagement, cultural guidance and supporting stronger relationships across Council operations and initiatives.

These actions reflect a genuine commitment to ensuring First Nations voices, stories and leadership are embedded within the cultural life of the Tamworth region and demonstrate how local government can play an active role in advancing reconciliation, cultural inclusion and cultural tourism development.

LOCAL POLICY ALIGNMENT AND STRATEGIC VISION

Tamworth Regional Council has demonstrated a strong commitment to the arts and creative industries through the adoption of its long-term cultural strategy, ***A Thriving Creative Ecosystem – Tamworth Region Creative Communities Plan 2024–2029***.

The Plan recognises the arts, culture and creative industries as key contributors to community wellbeing, regional identity, tourism, economic development and social connection. Importantly, it acknowledges that investment in creativity is not simply about entertainment or cultural participation — it is about building a vibrant, resilient and future-focused regional community.

The Creative Communities Plan was developed with clear consideration of both the Australian Government's *Revive National Cultural Policy* and the NSW Government's *Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Policy*, ensuring strong alignment between local, state and federal strategic directions.

The Plan directly responds to the priorities and aspirations outlined within *Revive*, particularly:

- **A Place for Every Story** — by championing regional voices, supporting local artists and celebrating the unique identity and stories of the Tamworth region;
- **Strong Cultural Infrastructure** — through advocacy for contemporary cultural facilities, creative precincts and fit-for-purpose infrastructure that enables participation, production and industry development;
- **Centrality of the Artist** — by supporting professional development, pathways and opportunities for creative practitioners;
- **Engaging the Audience** — by encouraging access, participation and cultural experiences across diverse communities.

Similarly, the Plan aligns strongly with the NSW Government's vision for a vibrant and connected creative ecosystem by prioritising:

- Creative workforce development;
- Regional cultural tourism;
- Night-time economy activation;
- First Nations cultural engagement;
- Young people and emerging creatives;
- Creative industries growth and investment.

A key objective of the Plan is to strengthen Tamworth's position as a leading regional creative centre and to ensure the region can continue to attract, retain and develop creative talent. However, achieving these aspirations requires the infrastructure and investment necessary to support long-term growth.

The proposed Tamworth Performing Arts Centre and wider creative precinct is identified as transformational infrastructure that would help deliver the ambitions of these aligned policy frameworks at a practical level. It represents an opportunity for all levels of government to work collaboratively to realise shared cultural, economic and community outcomes.

This alignment between local, state and federal policy demonstrates that the need for regional cultural infrastructure is not isolated or aspirational — it is a clearly identified strategic priority supported across multiple levels of government policy.

NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY AND THE ROLE OF ARTS AND CULTURE

Tamworth Regional Council has demonstrated a strong commitment to growing and strengthening the city's **night-time economy** through a range of strategic initiatives and policy development that recognise the important role arts, culture, live music and entertainment play in creating vibrant, active and economically sustainable regional centres.

A key example of this commitment is Council's work toward establishing **Special Entertainment Precincts** (SEPs) within Tamworth, which are scheduled to enter a 12-month trial phase in June 2026. This initiative aligns strongly with the NSW Government's vibrancy reforms and represents a proactive approach to supporting live music, entertainment venues, cultural activity and a more diverse evening economy within a regional context.

In parallel, Council has developed the ***Tamworth Night Time Economy Strategy 2026–2031***, which provides a long-term vision for a safer, more connected and economically active city after dark. The Strategy recognises that a successful night-time economy extends beyond hospitality and retail alone and requires a balanced ecosystem of arts, culture, entertainment, food, tourism and public activation.

While both the Special Entertainment Precinct initiative and the Night Time Economy Strategy have a broad economic and social remit, a key cornerstone of their success relies heavily on the strength of the theatre, music and entertainment sector. Live performance, festivals, creative programming and cultural activity are critical drivers of visitation, social interaction and evening activation.

One of the key projects identified within the ***Tamworth Night Time Economy Strategy 2026–2031*** is the establishment of the Tamworth Performing Arts Centre and Arts Precinct. This project is recognised as transformational infrastructure that would become a central anchor for the region's cultural and creative future.

Federal investment toward this project would act as the key lever to position the Performing Arts Centre as the fulcrum of the arts and cultural landscape across the region — bringing together and connecting the many plans, strategies and long-term visions that support the Creative Communities of the greater Tamworth region. It would provide the infrastructure platform required to fully realise the ambitions of Council's Creative Communities Plan, Night Time Economy Strategy, live music activation initiatives and broader regional economic development goals.

Importantly, the secondary economic benefits generated through arts and cultural activity must not be overlooked in national cultural policy discussions. The positive flow-on effects delivered to surrounding hospitality, accommodation and retail businesses located near entertainment and

cultural precincts are well documented. Restaurants, bars, cafés, hotels and retailers all benefit from increased foot traffic and longer visitation generated by theatre performances, concerts, exhibitions and festivals.

Arts and cultural investment therefore supports a much broader economic ecosystem. Funding directed toward creative activity does not operate in isolation; it contributes directly to economic diversification, city vibrancy, tourism growth and business confidence. In regional communities particularly, arts and entertainment activity can play a transformative role in activating city centres, encouraging social connection and supporting safer and more vibrant public spaces after dark.

The development of Tamworth's night-time economy initiatives demonstrates how local government can successfully integrate arts and cultural planning within broader economic development strategies. It also highlights the importance of ensuring future national cultural policy frameworks continue to recognise the interconnected relationship between cultural investment, regional vibrancy and economic growth.

LOOKING AHEAD

The next National Cultural Policy presents an important opportunity to build on the strong foundations established through *Revive* while responding to the evolving realities facing Australia's cultural and creative sector.

For regional Australia, this next phase must move beyond recognition alone and toward long-term structural investment that enables communities to fully participate in and contribute to the nation's cultural future. Regional centres such as Tamworth are already demonstrating leadership through strategic planning, creative programming, First Nations engagement, live music activation, cultural tourism development and investment in creative industries growth. What is now required is the infrastructure and coordinated government support needed to unlock the next stage of that potential.

Tamworth Regional Council's *A Thriving Creative Ecosystem – Tamworth Region Creative Communities Plan 2024–2029*, Night Time Economy Strategy, Special Entertainment Precinct initiatives and commitment to First Nations cultural development all align strongly with the ambitions of *Revive* and the NSW Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Policy (as well as the recent regional plan, *Heartland*). Together, these strategies present a clear regional vision for how arts, culture and entertainment can drive economic growth, strengthen social cohesion, support wellbeing and create sustainable career pathways.

However, these ambitions cannot be fully realised without contemporary, fit-for-purpose cultural infrastructure.

The proposed **Tamworth Performing Arts Centre and Arts Precinct** represents a transformational opportunity not just for Tamworth, but for regional New South Wales and Australia more broadly. As the only inland regional city of its size in NSW without a purpose-built performing arts centre, Tamworth is uniquely positioned to demonstrate how strategic cultural infrastructure can support creative industries development, regional touring, audience growth, education pathways, night-time economy activation and cultural tourism outcomes simultaneously.

Importantly, this project embodies the principles of *Revive*'s pillars of **A Place for Every Story** and **Strong Cultural Infrastructure**. It would provide a home for regional stories, artists and communities while creating the infrastructure platform needed to support long-term industry sustainability and growth.

A future National Cultural Policy should recognise that cultural infrastructure is economic infrastructure. Investment in arts and cultural facilities delivers benefits far beyond the creative sector alone — supporting hospitality, tourism, retail, employment, education and broader community wellbeing. The economic ecosystem generated through live performance, festivals, exhibitions and entertainment activity is substantial and should be recognised accordingly within future funding frameworks.

There is also a clear need to strengthen support for regional presenters and local cultural organisations who directly connect with communities and audiences year-round. Programs such as

Playing Australia remain important, but reform and increased investment are needed to ensure regional venues and presenters can sustainably continue delivering access to high-quality arts experiences across Australia.

The future success of Australia's cultural policy will depend on adopting a genuinely whole-of-government approach that connects arts and culture policy with regional development, tourism, education, employment, infrastructure and social outcomes.

Recommendations

Tamworth Regional Council recommends that the next National Cultural Policy:

1. Recognise regional cultural infrastructure as essential economic and social infrastructure.
2. Establish coordinated whole-of-government funding pathways for major regional cultural infrastructure projects, including performing arts centres and creative precincts and develop a tripartite funding agreement across governments.
3. Prioritise investment in regional cultural infrastructure projects that align with local, state and federal strategic policy frameworks.
4. Increase direct federal investment into regional presenting organisations, entertainment venues and local cultural institutions that maintain long-term audience relationships and deliver year-round programming.
5. Reform and expand the *Playing Australia* program to better support presenters, audience development and the true cost of regional touring.
6. Continue to support and expand initiatives that strengthen live music ecosystems, Special Entertainment Precincts and night-time economy activation in regional communities.
7. Recognise and support the significant secondary economic benefits generated through arts and cultural activity, particularly across tourism, hospitality and retail sectors.
8. Increase support for regional workforce development, technical production training and creative career pathways to retain talent within regional communities.
9. Continue investment in First Nations arts, cultural tourism and truth-telling initiatives, particularly those led in partnership with local Aboriginal communities and organisations.
10. Support regional galleries, museums and collecting institutions as critical cultural, educational and tourism assets that preserve and share Australia's stories. Establishing a Visual Arts Board within Creative Australia would give this a strategic approach.
11. Ensure future national cultural policies maintain a strong regional lens so that regional communities are active participants in shaping and contributing to Australia's cultural identity and creative economy.

Regional communities are not peripheral to Australia's cultural identity — they are central to it.

With coordinated investment, strong partnerships and a long-term vision, regional centres like Tamworth can continue to lead the way in demonstrating how arts, culture, live music and creative industries contribute to vibrant, resilient and prosperous communities.



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