

500-Word Submission: Australian South Sea Islander Contributions - National Cultural Policy

Queensland United Australian South Sea Islander Council (QUASSIC) is the peak advocacy organisation for Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) peoples in Queensland. QUASSIC leads statewide advocacy, cultural preservation, governance strengthening and community engagement for descendants of the more than 50,000 Pacific Islanders brought to Australia through blackbirding between 1863 and 1904. As custodians of this distinct cultural identity and history, QUASSIC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next National Cultural Policy and ensure ASSI voices, stories and cultural rights are meaningfully reflected in Australia's cultural future.

The consultation paper highlights that arts and culture “shape how we see ourselves and how the world sees us,” and that participation strengthens belonging, wellbeing and national identity. ASSI communities—whose history remains one of the least understood in Australia—seek a policy that recognises our unique cultural heritage, supports our creative practitioners, and strengthens pathways for visibility, truth-telling and cultural continuity.

Under **Pillar 1: First Nations First**, QUASSIC acknowledges the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as Australia's first and enduring cultural foundations. While ASSI peoples are not First Nations, our history is deeply intertwined with the nation's development. We seek recognition of ASSI cultural rights, revitalisation of languages and oral histories disrupted by the blackbirding labour trade, and support for ASSI-led cultural authority structures to ensure our communities determine their own cultural priorities.

Under **Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story**, QUASSIC emphasises the need to embed the ASSI story within the national cultural narrative. The policy calls for reflecting “the breadth of our stories,” and the ASSI experience must be included in this vision. We call for greater representation in national collecting institutions, exhibitions, festivals and digital storytelling platforms. Place-based cultural practice should be supported in regions with significant ASSI populations, and improved Census identification is essential to ensure accurate data for cultural investment and policy design.

Under **Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist**, ASSI artists, cultural educators and creative workers require targeted support to ensure fair remuneration, safe workplaces and recognition of their cultural labour. As digital environments reshape creative practice, ASSI youth are emerging as storytellers, musicians, designers and digital creators. Investment in skills development, arts education and protection of Pacific cultural intellectual property will strengthen creative pathways and ensure ASSI cultural expression continues to evolve.

Under **Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure**, QUASSIC seeks sustainable structures that support cultural continuity. This includes long-term funding for ASSI organisations, the establishment of an ASSI cultural centre or hub, and partnerships with national institutions to preserve and share ASSI collections. Digital infrastructure is also critical for safeguarding genealogies, archives and oral histories.

Under **Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience**, QUASSIC emphasises the need for national and international storytelling that elevates ASSI culture. Digital-first engagement, ASSI-led festivals, touring programs and cultural exchanges with Pacific nations will strengthen cultural diplomacy and ensure Australian audiences understand the legacy and ongoing contributions of ASSI peoples.

QUASSIC stands ready to work with government to ensure the next National Cultural Policy reflects a truthful, inclusive and forward-looking cultural landscape where every story has a place.