

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Australia's new National Cultural Policy, Creative Australia, arrives with considerable fanfare but leaves many citizens feeling sidelined by a document that appears less interested in celebrating the full breadth of Australian culture and more focused on advancing a narrow ideological framework.

While few would dispute the importance of investing in the arts, the policy's heavy emphasis on identity-based criteria for funding and representation raises legitimate concerns. Rather than allowing artistic merit and community interest to guide cultural investment, the policy appears to subordinate these principles to a prescriptive social agenda. Australians from all walks of life contribute to this nation's rich and diverse cultural fabric — yet the policy's framing suggests that culture must first pass through an ideological filter before it is deemed worthy of support.

The document's repeated prioritisation of particular demographic and political frameworks risks alienating the very communities it claims to serve. Culture, at its best, is organic — it emerges from the lived experiences, creativity, and shared values of ordinary people. When government steps in to direct what stories should be told, whose voices should be amplified, and which values cultural institutions must reflect, it moves from facilitating culture to engineering it. That is a significant and troubling overreach.

Many Australians will find it frustrating that a policy supposedly designed to unite the country instead reads as a top-down directive from Canberra, telling artists, arts organisations, and audiences what Australian culture ought to look like. The hundreds of millions of dollars in funding attached to this policy gives the government enormous leverage to shape cultural output — and that leverage appears to be wielded with a particular worldview firmly in mind.

There is also a meaningful equity argument being overlooked. Regional and rural Australians, whose cultural traditions and ways of life differ significantly from inner-city perspectives, risk being marginalised by a policy built around an urban, progressive lens. A truly national cultural policy should reflect the country in all its complexity — its bush traditions, its working-class heritage, its immigrant success stories, its religious communities — not only those experiences that align with current political fashions.

The policy's treatment of free expression also warrants scrutiny. Art has always thrived on provocation, disagreement, and the freedom to challenge prevailing assumptions — including government ones. A policy that ties funding to adherence to specific social values creates a chilling effect, however unintentionally. Artists who fear defunding are not truly free.

Australians deserve a cultural policy that trusts them — trusts artists to make meaningful work without ideological guardrails, trusts audiences to engage critically with diverse perspectives, and trusts communities to define their own cultural priorities. Creative Australia, as it stands, falls short of that standard.

The government would do well to revisit this policy with genuine openness to the full spectrum of Australian voices — not just those who already agree with it. Culture belongs to the people, not to Canberra.