

Art

Tenacity

Democracy

TEST PATTERN

SUBMISSION

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY *REVIVE*: 2026 CONSULTATION

Test Pattern welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important work.

For the first time in history, 2025 saw an Australian arts and cultural policy endure into a next term of government. Given that no such policy has ever survived a change in government, this 2026 consultation marks a nation-building moment: Australia's first-ever opportunity to safeguard and enhance the area of policy that's most crucial to how we create our future.

A national cultural policy speaks with a powerful voice. In his foreword to *Revive*, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese characterises the arts as “central to our being”, supported now by a policy “to deliver a better future” so that “our extraordinary and diverse Australian stories continue to be told with originality, wit, creativity and flair.”

Crucial to its success is effectively embedding the national cultural policy across all relevant portfolio areas. Given Test Pattern's focus on cultural policy, strategy and practice, this submission limits its scope to articulating that opportunity alone.

Of *Revive*'s five key pillars, this submission focuses on Pillars 3 and 4 – the Centrality of the Artist, and Strong Cultural Infrastructure – to characterise critical issues and propose ways forward.

CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

In his foreword to *Revive*, Minister for the Arts Tony Burke champions the role of artists in “fostering the creative forces which live here” – artists who must be “respected as both workers and as creators.” The policy has begun to achieve this by endorsing industry standard conditions for engaging and paying artists, expanding award coverage, and introducing initiatives to strengthen safe workplaces. “There is no pathway forward for cultural policy”, *Revive* cautions, “unless arts businesses thrive and arts workers are able to find pathways for long-term career options.”

At the time of writing, the policy's framing of critical issues shaping artists' working conditions did not yet include AI: it's mentioned just once, describing “[c]reativity and design thinking” as valuable inputs for “advanced manufacturing, scientific research and artificial intelligence.” Since that time, AI has rapidly emerged to become at best, a disruptive opportunity, and at worst, an existential threat, impacting every way that artists live and work, as well as how they're valued and respected.

Currently, the focus of Australian government policy and strategic initiatives in this area are weighted in favour of AI developers and aimed at facilitating their market penetration. Given the overwhelming

evidence that AI tools have been developed on the basis of IP theft, are not sufficiently market-ready and pose significant risks, this is precipitous:

- Two recent American studies, for example – one published in *The Wall Street Journal* on 21 January 2026, the other a partnership between Stanford Social Media Lab with AI-driven workplace coaching platform BetterUp, reported in *The Guardian* on 15 April 2026 – surveyed thousands of white-collar workers to find that sloppy AI outputs are costing workers even more time than having done the work themselves;
- An extensive literature review and empirical study based in Finland that examines the workplace impacts of AI, published last October in the *Journal of Business Research*, also raises serious wellbeing concerns for employees forced to use poor-quality AI products;
- The 2025 MIT report *The GenAI Divide: State of AI in Business* finds that 95% of companies who've made workplace AI investments have yet to see any financial return whatsoever: they describe this as a “95% failure rate for enterprise AI solutions”;
- Despite these flaws, employers are pressing on, prioritising AI development over their human workforces. A concerning example of this normalisation comes from News Corp CEO Robert Thomson, who recently claimed that News Corp is “essentially an input company” for AI development. In a 2 March 2026 presentation at the Morgan Stanley Technology, Media and Telecom conference in San Francisco, Thomson described the collective work of thousands of writers, editors, designers, photographers and illustrators as an AI input “in the way that semiconductors are an input, in the way that datacentres are an input, in the way that energy is an input”. An indictment rather than a characterisation of the global News Corp workforce, this sets a disturbing precedent for how creative work will be valued in the immediate future;
- In the middle of a housing crisis, AI developers are displacing land for homes in the same way that property developers once displaced arable land. Datacentres that power AI engines are increasingly being built in close proximity to residential zones, alarming local communities with their disproportionate use of electricity and scarce water, inappropriate visual bulk, and disruptive resonant frequencies, as is increasingly being reported in the Australian media;
- Back in 2023, an open letter hosted by the Future of Life Institute implored every AI lab in the world to “immediately pause for at least 6 months the training of AI systems more powerful than GPT-4” to achieve the global cooperation on regulation that would avoid “profound risks to society and humanity”. At the time of writing, the letter has 33,705 signatories including co-founder of Apple Steve Wozniak, co-creator of Skype Jaan Tallinn, and head of SpaceX, Tesla and X (Twitter) Elon Musk. The pause was not enacted, despite its predicted risk of “loss of control of our civilization”;
- In the meantime, AI developers are pursuing granting the rights of personhood to AI in ways that could trump the rights of the artists whose work has been ingested with neither consent nor compensation to create generative AI apps, as noted by *The Yale Law Journal* on 22 April 2024;
- In the years since, we've all become accustomed to hallucinated references, pretend legal precedents, ghoulish images, fake news and fake “Aboriginal-style” art – all generated by AI products produced via intellectual property theft to which Australian artists have not consented and for which they have not been compensated.

The ground has shifted considerably in this space since the moment when belatedly-discovered industrial-scale IP theft was AI developers' most egregious infraction.

To redress AI's threats and truly maximise its opportunities, a comprehensive policy approach is needed that bridges IP, ICIP, copyright and licencing, data sovereignty, privacy, energy, infrastructure, resources, and urban, outer-suburban and regional planning.

The recent National Urban Policy, for example, makes no mention of AI and datacentres: the policy document refers only once to AI and its “numerous city applications, including automated city traffic and waste operations, strategic workforce planning, and disaster resilience.”

There's good work to be done in this area to get the balance right. To reference just some of the current Australian government AI initiatives, the next national cultural policy should connect with and influence:

- The **National Artificial Intelligence Centre**, which maps “Australia's artificial intelligence ecosystem” and normalises the “acceleration of AI adoption” without any reference to creators and rights holders and without any artists or creators in its governance;



- The **Australian Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute** – recently announced, currently in development – which will be “working directly with regulators to make sure we’re ready to safely capture the benefits of AI with confidence” but does not yet have artists or creators in its governance;
- **Education integration** policies and initiatives such as the Australian Framework for Generative Artificial Intelligence in Schools, which guides that “generative AI tools are used in ways that respect the cultural rights of various cultural groups, including Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights” without reference to the fact that these tools have been developed on the basis of IP and ICIP theft, and therefore no way to prevent this in future;
- **Workplace integration** policies and initiatives such as the Policy for the Responsible Use of AI in Government and the National Framework for the Assurance of Artificial Intelligence in Government, which are premised on the normalisation of AI without reference to the workplace and workforce impacts of displacing artists, journalists, editors as well as entry-level workers;
- **Datacentre approval processes** including their locations and resource use, reflecting the essential role of cultural policy in urban and regional development (more on this below).

Let’s be ambitious. Australia should be renowned across the world as a nation that values intelligence that’s *creative*, not *generative*, centring *human*, not artificial intelligence. Following last year’s under-16s social media ban and refusal to allow a Text and Data Mining exception to the *Copyright Act*, all eyes are on Australia to continue to lead the world in this space. This next policy iteration is the place to focus that ambition.

RECOMMENDATION 1 Extend the centrality of the artist to national cultural policy across all government policy-making, most urgently in the areas impacted by AI.

Centring the artist in this context means championing the expertise of artists and the public value of their intellectual property. It also means actively countering the normalisation of flawed AI and reframing its impact on critical thinking, public knowledge and democratic engagement.

To strengthen the Centrality of the Artist in Australian policy-making, the next iteration of *Revive* should:

- a) **Identify all areas of policy that are enabled by the work of artists and that impact on artists** by preparing a high-level list or map of relevant policies across key portfolios;
- b) **Harmonise policy development processes** that impact artists’ work and artists’ rights e.g. copyright, ICIP, data sovereignty, the integration of AI into education and workplaces;
- c) **Centre artists in all policy and strategy** that’s premised on the use of their intellectual property by ensuring artists inform the relevant policy and/or are represented in the governance of any strategic initiatives.

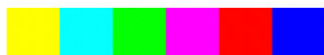
Just as a national cultural policy cannot succeed as a standalone policy, championing the centrality of the artist cannot be limited to cultural policy alone.

STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

As is appropriate for a government policy, *Revive*’s fourth pillar focuses on government infrastructure: Creative Australia, the National Collecting Institutions, the work of Creative Partnerships Australia continuing following its merger into Creative Australia, and arm’s-length decision-making affirmed as a “core principle”.

Revive recognises, however, that cultural infrastructure is provided by “[o]rganisations of all sizes and types” that are “spread across all levels of government”, as well as “independent creative practices and the communities and practices of art and culture that these institutions foster” which are “embedded within geographic, cultural, professional and social communities” well beyond government, each performing “a critical function” premised on effective “collaboration between them”. Often referred to as Australia’s “arts ecology”, this essential interconnectedness is what makes arts and culture possible.

Cultural infrastructure encompasses all the platforms that present, support and strengthen the centrality of the artist. It secures artists’ rights and livelihoods, evolves creative practice, ensures high-



quality audience and community engagement, and enriches urban and regional development. While all of this work goes beyond what any government can provide directly, cultural infrastructure is impacted and regulated by policy at all levels of government. As Minister for the Arts Tony Burke puts it in his foreword to *Revive*: “Artists need strong infrastructure that provides training, development and space to share new works.” This includes but is not limited to:

- **Major venues** including theatres, galleries, museums, libraries, concert halls;
- **Small venues** such as bars, shopfronts, maker and residency spaces;
- **Creative spaces** both conventional and unconventional, both public- and privately-owned, including temporary, pop-up artisanal retail, installation, rehearsal and residency spaces;
- **Cultural masterplanning** as part of urban, outer-suburban and regional development where artists and creative organisations explicitly shape vibrant neighbourhoods, community safety and night-time economies, spanning the regulation of zoning, liquor licensing and major events;
- **Multi-year operational funding** that gives security for creative organisations to engage artists and work at ambitious, long-term scale;
- **Education and professional development** including specialist arts training bodies, higher education offerings, and curriculum across foundation, primary and secondary schooling;
- **Policies and frameworks that address intellectual property and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property** including copyright and AI.

Seeing the scope of cultural infrastructure set out in this way begins to give us a sense of the scale of the policy opportunity that this consultation affords.

Whether written or unwritten, **cultural policy is central to all government policy-making**. An effectively embedded national cultural policy is essential to the success of any whole-of-government policy approach.

Cultural infrastructure is the most tangible implementation of the policies that shape our culture. A comprehensive focus on cultural infrastructure is therefore indispensable to the success of cultural policy.

RECOMMENDATION 2 Take a comprehensive approach to cultural infrastructure that offers whole-of-government and multi-jurisdictional policy direction, including frameworks to guide policy-making at the local, state and territory government level.

Given that cultural infrastructure is provided by “[o]rganisations of all sizes and types” that are “spread across all levels of government”, the next iteration of *Revive* should:

- a) **Define cultural infrastructure comprehensively** as the “strong infrastructure that provides training, development and space to share new works” and set out its scope;
- b) **Identify all areas of policy that impact on cultural infrastructure** by preparing a high-level list or map of relevant policies across key portfolios, explicitly including policy areas that are the domain of other jurisdictions and marking these as local, state or territory policies;
- c) **Identify as cultural infrastructure those areas of policy that may not yet be recognised as such**, including cultural masterplanning as part of urban, outer-suburban and regional development, and advocate this comprehensive approach across government;
- d) **Harmonise policy development processes** that create and/or maintain cultural infrastructure by providing frameworks for use across government and at all levels of government;
- e) **Promote cultural change within government that centres the cultural dimension of policy-making** for a truly nation-building approach.

**CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST + STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE =
NATION-BUILDING WORK**

Policy is embedded most effectively across government portfolios through the institutions that carry out its work. Given its complexity and its breadth, enhancing Australia’s national cultural policy requires an innovative approach to institutional architectures. Such approaches have included:



- **Cultural Ministers Council** (1984-2011), the organisation for ministerial-level intergovernmental engagement between Commonwealth, state and territory governments, with New Zealand added in 1991, and observer status granted to representation from local government as well as the governments of Norfolk Island and Papua New Guinea. The Cultural Ministers Council promoted “cultural and artistic expression to enhance national civic, social, political and economic development... by co-operating, co-ordinating and collaborating on policies and initiatives of national significance relating to culture and the arts in Australia”;
- **Meeting of Cultural Ministers** (2011-2019, ad hoc 2020-2022), the successor mechanism, disbanded as a result of the 2020 Review of COAG Councils and Ministerial Forums;
- **Data and Digital Ministers Meeting** (2018—), the forum to “achieve cross-government collaboration on data and digital transformation to ensure smarter service delivery and improved outcomes”, setting an annual workplan and reporting to National Cabinet;
- The NSW Government triennial **Creative Statement to Parliament**, due to be presented in September 2026, which mirrors *Revive*’s commitment to a triennial **State of Australian Culture** report, based on survey data and “the improvement to data on arts and culture being led by the Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research through the update of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts”, and developed by “Creative Australia in partnership with Screen Australia”. These reports, presented to their respective parliaments as well as for a public audience, are valuable opportunities to exercise a culturally ambitious statecraft.

External bodies and government agencies are also able to facilitate intergovernmental cooperation in more limited capacities, for example:

- **UNESCO Observatories**, such as the Melbourne UNESCO Observatory of Arts Education, facilitate local and global knowledge exchange on the impact of cultural policies, indirectly forming valuable professional networks across and beyond government;
- **Creative Australia’s Public Value and Cross-Portfolio Partnerships**, which in 2025 prioritises the “three strategic cross-portfolio priority areas” of “Artificial intelligence (AI), Education [and] Health and wellbeing”. These initiatives are currently under-resourced and explicitly call for private sector contributions via the partnerships’ webpage.

The nation-building work of embedding cultural policy requires a sustained, long-term approach. It is important to note that neither Creative Australia nor the Office for the Arts is currently resourced or structured to provide the comprehensive, ongoing work of facilitating intergovernmental cooperation at the scale required. This work requires dedicated resourcing to actively identify opportunities, build robust partnerships and achieve lasting policy outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 3 Establish an impactful, highly visible mechanism or entity dedicated to the intergovernmental cooperation that permanently embeds cultural policy.

A national cultural policy needs a national cultural advocate. A new, intergovernmental National Cultural Commission, for example, would engage with and be responsible to multiple ministers, led by a commissioner who actively connects across relevant portfolios. Structures familiar to the human rights context could readily integrate a cultural commissioner into existing frameworks. An enhanced intergovernmental approach has featured among the Test Pattern recommendations to both the 2022 consultation and the 2023 inquiry into the national cultural policy, consistent with all Test Pattern arts, cultural and creative industries policy work for all levels of government across the past two decades.

The next iteration of *Revive* should:

- Determine the most viable mechanism for intergovernmental cooperation** e.g. taskforce, ministerial council, inter-jurisdictional body, National Cultural Commission;
- Undertake a comprehensive mapping** of arts, cultural and creative industries policy across to all Commonwealth portfolios and down to all jurisdictions to identify alignment, harmonisation and integration opportunities, as well as unlocking resourcing and investment opportunities;
- Identify, prioritise and timeline policy areas** to target, starting with
 - The Centrality of the Artist and intellectual property, AI, education etc.
 - Strong Cultural Infrastructure and urban policy, cultural masterplanning etc.;



- d) **Present an annual cultural policy summit** as a forum to promote industry, policy and public engagement that feeds into the triennial State of Australian Culture report, welcoming artists, arts leaders, researchers and policy-makers so as to enhance the policy literacy of the community, and facilitating constructive contributions to the ongoing intergovernmental work that embeds cultural policy. This nation-building forum should involve all relevant ministers in championing Australian culture across the continent and across the globe.

CREATING AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE

Culture is who we are. It's our past and it's our future.

Our present is fraught, with artists' rights and livelihoods jeopardised like never before. *Revive* has set strong foundations, making now precisely the right time to build on them with dedication, expertise and great ambition. Failing to seize this moment will have lasting consequences for generations to come.

Once in place, an effective intergovernmental entity committed to the centrality of the artist can enhance our cultural infrastructure strengths, building a lasting legacy for all Australians.

A future made in Australia is premised on the work created by Australians. Let's commit ambitiously to the nation-building work of national cultural policy.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1 Extend the centrality of the artist to national cultural policy across all government policy-making, most urgently in the areas impacted by AI:

- a) **Identify all areas of policy that are enabled by the work of artists and that impact on artists** by preparing a high-level list or map of relevant policies across key portfolios;
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ABOUT TEST PATTERN

Test Pattern develops the ideas, the platforms and the places where creative practices lead public agendas. Established by Esther Anatolitis in 1999, recent clients include the City of Maribyrnong, the City of Melbourne, the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, Midsumma, the Melbourne School of Design, the Australian Museums & Galleries Association, the NSW Government, and the ACT Government, for whom Test Pattern's ten-year strategy for Kingston Arts Precinct was recognised with a forty-year funding commitment.

Prof Esther Anatolitis is one of Australia's most influential advocates for the arts. Esther has held leadership roles with the National Association for the Visual Arts, Regional Arts Victoria, Melbourne Fringe, SYN Media, Craft Victoria, SBS Radio Melbourne, the Emerging Writers' Festival, Express Media and the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council. She has held governance and committee roles with Contemporary Arts Precincts, ACMI, Melbourne Writers Festival, Musica Viva, Elbow Room Productions, Open Spectrum, the National Gallery of Victoria, the National Gallery of Australia and the Arts Industry Council (Victoria). Esther has served policy committees including the inaugural Victorian Government Creative Industries Policy Expert Reference Group and the Arts Victoria Small-to-Medium Sector Review, and has been an independent panellist on university faculty and school reviews. She has taught in the fields of architecture, art, philosophy, media and professional practice, and her long-term curatorial focus is Frameworks for Practice (frameworksforpractice.art).

As a commentator and facilitator, Esther has contributed significantly to the national conversation on arts and cultural policy as the host of national leadership networks and industry forums, as a policy columnist for *Meanjin* and *Arts Hub*, and via the media, where she has been published extensively. Esther is the author of *Place, Practice, Politics* (2021) and *When Australia Became a Republic* (2025), editor of *Meanjin* (2022-2005) and *Essays that Changed Australia* (2023), co-editor of *Contretemps* (2006-2008) and *100 Years of Australian Songwriting* (forthcoming 2026), and has chapters in *Visual Arts Work* (2025), *The Routledge Companion to Creativity in the Built Environment* (2024), *The Relationship is the Project* (2020, 2024), *Permanent Recession* (2019) and *The Emerging Writer* (2012). A former arts policy columnist for *Meanjin* and *Arts Hub*, her work has been published in *ABR*, *Griffith Review*, *Overland*, *un Magazine*, and all major newspapers (collected at estheranatolitis.net). Esther is Adjunct Industry Professor at RMIT School of Art.

ATTRIBUTION

This submission is made on the understanding that it will be made public. Please redact contact information prior to publication, and attribute any quotations to Esther Anatolitis.

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