

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I'm a practising visual artist and creative economic development practitioner with 30+ years across the arts and creative sector in Australia & NZ. I work as a small business educator and mentor for early-stage creative businesses, assess both arts and business grants for a major council and work across governance in government and advisory roles.

Revive positioned artists as workers and explicitly encouraged them to operate as sustainable businesses. That commitment was the right one, but the next policy needs to resolve the structural contradiction Revive left in place. The problem is every Revive pillar is operating on a false picture of the sector, because the sector is not being accurately counted.

The invisible sector

76% of professional artists are self-employed sole traders or micro-businesses. The majority earn below the GST threshold, contract staff for projects rather than employ them and work multiple roles simultaneously. They are not captured by the ATO, ABS or census in ways that count them as part of the creative sector, hidden in our economic data.

RMIT-led research found that 90% of practising visual artists were unable to report 'artist', as their occupation in the last census, because the census cannot accommodate portfolio or project-based work. More than 100,000 visual artists erased from the sector.

When artists do build profitable businesses, it gets worse. In 2024, the ATO removed designers, manufacturers, retailers and wholesalers from its definition of the arts sector. A painter selling from their studio is now classified under retail, the same as Bunnings. The local potter is classified under manufacturing, the same as roof tile factories. The more successful an artist's business, as Revive encourages them, the less visible they are as an artist, the data the next policy and education will be based on.

Arts Grants reinforces the problem

Arts grants exclude business and operational expenses, treating artistic labour as fundable but the conditions that sustain or making a profit as ineligible and immoral. Business grants expect you to make a profit, but require scalability, investor-readiness or strong growth - business models many artists neither want nor need.

There is no funded pathway for tailored business support that reflects how creative enterprises actually operate: community-embedded, collaboratively structured, motivated by impact and artistic merit rather than growth then exit.

Even if their aim is financial self-sufficiency, the current system won't help them get there, and when they do, it won't see them.

Revive said artists should be entrepreneurial. The grant and support systems surrounding it, penalises artists and the whole sector when they do.

Policy must address

The next National Cultural Policy must commit to updating ABS, ATO and census methodologies to accurately count creative micro-businesses, sole traders, arts workers and portfolio workers as part of the sector they actually work in. It should fund tailored business support designed around the values, motivations and structures of creative entrepreneurship, not copy tech startups and investor focused frameworks.

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You cannot support or leverage a sector you cannot see. Every pillar of this policy depends on getting that right first.

Detailed evidence and recommendations in my submission - Senate Environment and Communications References Committee inquiry into National Cultural Policy, Oct 2025.

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