

Office of the Arts  
Department of Infrastructure Transport,  
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
GPO Box 594 CANBERRA ACT 2601



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## **INTRODUCTION**

My name is Cassandra Ramsay - I am a freelance creative producer, playwright, and artsworker. I have spent most of my adult life in regional areas, and am currently based in Yuwi Country / Mackay, Regional Queensland. I have over fifteen years' experience across theatre, arts development, and audience engagement. I currently work as a Regional Arts Advisor – Theatre through the Regional Arts Services Network (RASN), supporting artists and arts workers across regional Queensland.

My practice sits at the intersection of storytelling, audience strategy, and regional arts development. I am particularly invested in building sustainable creative careers outside metropolitan centres - where the challenge is not a lack of talent or ambition, but a lack of structural support.

I am grateful that I and my colleagues and peers can contribute a submission for consideration during this consultation. Based on my experience, the challenge regarding the evolution of our National Cultural is the growing disconnect between policy ambition and lived reality and should prioritize conditions of the creative workforce.

The content of this submission reflects my own experiences and professional perspectives and should not be taken as representing the views of my employers, clients, or affiliated organisations.

## **CORE TENSIONS**

Across my work, several recurring tensions emerge:

### **1. Activity vs Sustainability**

The sector is busy - producing, touring, delivering - but not necessarily becoming more stable. Artists and organisations remain structurally precarious.

### **2. Access vs Creation**

Policy and investment often prioritise access to arts experiences (touring, festivals), rather than supporting the people who create the work locally.

### **3. Representation vs Power**

Diversity is frequently framed as visibility, rather than decision-making authority, resourcing, or leadership.

#### 4. Recognition vs Reality

Artists are increasingly recognised as workers in policy language - but their working conditions do not reflect this.

#### 5. Infrastructure vs Ecosystems

Infrastructure is often understood as buildings and institutions, excluding the infrastructure of people, skills, and relationships that sustain cultural life.

These tensions sit beneath all five pillars of *Revive*.

## KEY THEMES

### 1. ARTISTS AS WORKERS: FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY

*Revive* positions artists at the centre of the policy. However, this centrality is not yet materially realised.

Artists continue to:

- work project-to-project
- earn below a living wage
- subsidise the sector through unpaid labour
- absorb financial and emotional risk

Creative Australia data shows that artists earn, on average, \$23,200 from creative work annually, requiring additional income streams to survive. If artists are central, they must be structurally unsupported.

What's missing

- Payment for time, not just outputs
- Stable income mechanisms
- Consistent minimum standards across the sector

Opportunity

- Pilot a living wage / guaranteed income model for artists
- Fund development, thinking, and collaboration time
- Strengthen enforceable minimum standards and contracts

### 2. REGIONAL AUSTRALIA: FROM DELIVERY SITE TO CREATION CENTRE

Regional Australia is often framed as a place where arts are delivered, rather than where arts are made.

Despite strong participation and cultural engagement, regional artists face:

- limited local opportunities

- reliance on touring models
- fewer career pathways
- higher costs and isolation

Programs such as touring initiatives and festivals improve access, but do not necessarily build local creative ecosystems.

What's missing

- Long-term investment in locally-led creation – allowing artists to work and grow in their own communities
- Regional workforce development (producers, technicians, marketers)
- Long-term place-based strategies

Opportunity

- Shift from touring-only models to creation and presentation ecosystems
- Treat regional cultural workers as infrastructure
- Embed arts within broader regional policy (migration, housing, connectivity)

### 3. PATHWAYS: THE MISSING MIDDLE

There is strong participation in the arts - through schools, community groups, and amateur practice - but weak progression into professional careers.

I am thoughtful about the structural gap this creates. People can engage with the arts but cannot see how to build a sustainable career within them – we are forced to accept participation without progression.

Embracing other sector pathways, for example sporting or health, there are already existing initiatives and frameworks that can be adapted and utilised in the Arts sector, such as talent identification, development systems and long-term investment models.

What's missing

- clear and visible career pathways
- early-career employment opportunities
- structured mentorship and development
- mechanisms to retain artists beyond entry-level practice

*A critical gap: retention, not just entry*

Much policy attention is focused on getting people into the arts, but far less on keeping them there.

In practice, many artists reach a point, often mid-career, where they are producing work independently, gaining recognition and momentum, but operating without structure, income stability, or support.

This has become particularly visible to me since advising and supporting artists in my role as Regional Arts Advisor for Queensland's Regional Arts Services Network. At this stage, artists are at high risk of burnout or exit from the sector altogether.

#### *Opportunity: Regional Creative Practice Incentive Scheme*

To address this gap, there is an opportunity to introduce a national scheme modelled on rural workforce incentives used in sectors such as health and education.

This could include:

- multi-year financial incentives for artists and cultural workers based in regional areas
- relocation and housing support
- additional loadings for remote practice
- structured professional development and mentorship
- return-of-service models tied to community or regional contribution

Without intervention at this level, the sector will continue to lose experienced practitioners, rely on unpaid labour and personal sacrifice, and concentrate opportunity in metropolitan centres.

This approach would support retention, not just participation; recognise artists as essential contributors to regional communities; and create clearer, more sustainable career pathways outside metropolitan centres.

## 4. FIRST NATIONS PRACTICE: BEYOND INCLUSION

*Revive* has made important progress through the First Nations Board and commitments to self-determination.

I would encourage a more visible commitment to decolonisation - not just representation, but in the redistribution of power.

First Nations artists continue to navigate systems not designed for them, often carrying the burden of cultural translation and consultation.

What's missing

- structural embedding of First Nations leadership
- long-term, community-led investment
- expansion beyond trauma-based narratives

Opportunity

- legislate ICIP protections
- embed First Nations decision making across all areas
- support full spectrum of First Nations storytelling

## 5. MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA: REPRESENTATION VS REALITY

Australia is one of the most multicultural nations in the world, yet this is not consistently reflected in cultural production or leadership. Who is telling the story of Australia?

Diversity Arts Australia identifies persistent underrepresentation, systemic barriers, and need for racial literacy.

What's missing

- culturally diverse leadership
- place-based multicultural investment
- narratives beyond trauma and migration

Opportunity

- fund multicultural arts as core infrastructure
- invest in anti-racism capability
- support regional multicultural practice

## 6. AUDIENCES: FROM TRANSACTION TO RELATIONSHIP

Audience development is still largely treated as a marketing function. Rather than building audiences, which like any relationship take time, effort, and the opportunity to make mistakes without critical dismissal or abandonment, our sector's measure of success, for both institutions and individuals, is to sell tickets.

In regional areas particularly, audiences are expected to 'come to the art,' rather than being engaged through relevant, localised practice; and opportunities to move beyond this are localised and confined to one-off activations (eg annual festivals). This leads to short-term campaigns, transactional engagement and limited long-term relationship building.

What's missing

- long-term audience strategies
- shared frameworks and data
- commitment to ambitious, repeat, locally led audience development

Opportunity

- embed audience strategy across organisations beyond marketing and sales
- invest in place-based engagement
- develop national audience frameworks

## 7. CLIMATE: THE SILENT POLICY GAP

Climate change is already impacting:

- touring viability
- festival delivery

- infrastructure resilience
- artist livelihoods

Yet climate remains underdeveloped without cultural policy – essentially our cultural Policy is ignoring the conditions in which culture is made.

What's missing

- sustainability frameworks
- climate-adapted funding models
- sector-wide infrastructure support

Opportunity

- embed climate across all cultural policy areas
- fund sustainable production systems, noting touring is no longer sustainable for artists, presenters, and communities
- support climate storytelling and preparedness

## **A WAY FORWARD FOR OUR POLICY**

To shift the needle from activity to sustainability in the areas of artist, work, and place, my recommendations for the direction of our National Cultural Policy are:

### *1. Long-term investment in artists and creative work*

- multi-year investment models supporting development through to presentation
- stronger emphasis on presenting work within the communities where it is created, reducing reliance on unsustainable touring pathways
- investment in the artist as well as the work (including time, process, and collaboration)
- living wage / income stability pilots
- structured career development support

### *2. Strong regional ecosystems and place-based practice*

- locally led creation and programming
- workforce investment across regional areas
- place-based strategies that reflect local identity and context
- leveraging national and international moments (eg Olympics) to build lasting regional capacity, not just short-term programming outcomes

### *3. Investment in producers and cultural workers*

- targeted investment in creative producers and regional cultural leaders
- recognition of cultural workers as essential infrastructure
- training, employment, and career pathways across producing, technical and administrative roles
- enabling artists to focus on their practice while strengthening the broader ecosystem

### *4. Whole-of-system audience development*

- embedding audience strategy across all areas of organisations (not siloed within marketing)
- long-term relationship building with regional communities
- investment in locally relevant audience development approaches

5. *Structural commitment to representation and cultural leadership*

- embedded First Nations leadership and decision-making
- sustained multicultural investment and culturally diverse leadership
- anti-racism frameworks and sector capability building

6. *Climate-responsive cultural policy*

- support for sustainable creative practice and production models
- investment in climate-resilient cultural infrastructure
- adaptive delivery models that respond to environmental conditions

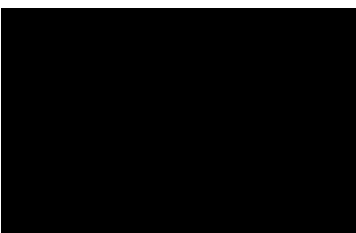
## **Conclusion**

A National Cultural Policy is essential, and I am grateful for the opportunity to submit reflections informed by my own experiences as a regionally based artist.

For many artists, especially in regional locations, the lived experience remains one of instability and exhaustion. Our sector is not lacking ideas, talent, demand, or commitment; but it is lacking conditions required to sustain them.

I look forward to a policy that translates aspiration to action, investing in the structural conditions needed to sustain artists, cultural workers, and the ecosystems they operate within.

With thanks,



Cassandra Ramsay