

Personal National Cultural Policy Submission Joanne Kee – Artistic Director, Seymour Centre, formerly National Theatre of Parramatta, co-founder of Sydney International Women’s Jazz Festival and Critical Paths, choreographic lab in Sydney



### **Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation 2026**

Over more than three decades working across theatre, music, dance and community cultural development, I have seen the extraordinary capacity of arts and culture to bring people together, create opportunity, shift perspectives and strengthen belonging.

The next National Cultural Policy must more strongly recognise the evolving ways people engage with creativity and culture. Audiences are changing rapidly, particularly younger generations who are increasingly seeking participation, collaboration, interaction and shared experience rather than passive consumption alone.

This presents an important opportunity for the cultural sector to evolve how work is created, presented and experienced. Increasingly, people are seeking spaces that feel welcoming, social, participatory and connected to contemporary life — places where creativity is experienced collectively and where audiences feel part of the cultural conversation rather than separate from it.

Cultural policy and investment frameworks must evolve alongside these changes. This includes supporting flexible and multi-use cultural spaces, co-created and community-led activity, interdisciplinary practice, digital engagement and new models of participation that reflect how people gather, connect and engage with creativity today.

Investment in arts and culture should prioritise not only presentation and outcomes, but the broader ecosystems that allow creativity to flourish. This includes supporting artists, producers, technicians, educators and communities through long-term pathways, mentorship, skills development, creative infrastructure and accessible opportunities to experiment, collaborate and grow.

At a time of increasing division, social isolation and economic uncertainty, the role of culture has never been more important. Arts and culture are not simply entertainment or discretionary activity; they are essential to how we connect with one another, understand different experiences, and imagine ourselves as a nation.

I believe the next National Cultural Policy presents an important opportunity to think more expansively about what cultural participation can look like in contemporary Australia. This includes recognising that creativity happens in many forms and in many places, not only on stages and in galleries, but in communities, schools, public spaces, digital environments, as part of everyday life and through everyday acts of storytelling, collaboration and expression.

A strong cultural future depends on creating genuinely inclusive and welcoming environments where people from all backgrounds feel seen, valued and invited to participate. This is particularly important for all groups that have been marginalised, that includes but is not limited to migrant, refugee, multicultural, First Nations, gender, economic, regional and historically underrepresented communities whose stories and creative contributions have been and continue to be vital to Australia's cultural identity.

In recent years, I have become increasingly aware of the importance of cultural spaces that foster empathy, participation and connection. In a climate where anti-immigrant rhetoric and social division are becoming more visible globally and locally, the arts have a critical role to play in reinforcing the idea that Australian identity is enriched by diversity. The stories we elevate, the people we support and the spaces we create matter deeply in shaping social cohesion and belonging.

Australia is also facing increasing workforce shortages across technical and production areas including lighting, sound, stage management, production management, digital production and live event delivery. Alongside supporting artists, there must be sustained investment in the broader workforce and infrastructure that enables creative work to be made, presented and experienced.

Particular attention should be given to people and organisations that build community, create opportunity and support artists throughout all stages of their careers. These spaces, programs and leaders play a vital role in sustaining participation, nurturing talent, building confidence and creating pathways into the sector.

While institutional frameworks and policy structures are important, success must ultimately be measured through tangible creative and community outcomes, artists making work, audiences participating, skills being developed, communities feeling connected and people seeing themselves reflected in Australia's cultural life.

I strongly support a future facing National Cultural Policy that embraces creativity as essential national infrastructure: one that invests in people, encourages experimentation, supports participation, and recognises arts and culture as central to Australia's social, cultural and economic future.

## **Recommendations**

That the Australian Government:

1. Ensure investment and funding models directly support artists and organisations to make and present work, while also investing in those who build community, create opportunity and develop pathways for artists at all stages of their careers, delivering tangible creative, workforce and community outcomes.
2. Recognise creativity, cultural participation and audience engagement as essential national and civic infrastructure, contributing to innovation, education,

social cohesion, wellbeing, belonging and future workforce development, while supporting evolving forms of cultural participation that increasingly prioritise shared experience, interaction, collaboration and connection over passive consumption alone.

3. Strengthen long-term pathways for artists, producers, technicians and arts workers through increased investment in mentorships, traineeships, apprenticeships, paid creative development opportunities and stronger partnerships between schools, universities, training providers, cultural institutions and industry.
4. Address workforce shortages across the cultural sector, particularly in technical and production fields including lighting, sound, stage management, digital production and live event delivery, while supporting sustainable producing and arts administration pathways.
5. Support arts and creative education as fundamental to innovation, communication, critical thinking, collaboration and future workforce readiness, ensuring equitable access to creative learning and participation across Australia.
6. Support the development of creative hubs, rehearsal infrastructure and flexible community based cultural spaces that enable participation, collaboration, experimentation and co-created engagement across artforms, generations and communities.