

# REIMAGINING AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL POLICY

The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability and the Continuity of Place

PUBLIC SUBMISSION FRAMEWORK

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## 1. Executive Summary

Current cultural policy frameworks across Australia frequently default to an economic or artist-centric paradigm. They treat culture either as a commodified export, a transactional industry, or a highly specialized niche sector. This submission advocates for a profound structural shift: **re-centering cultural policy around community, continuity, and place.**

By formalizing culture as the "Fourth Pillar of Sustainability," we can integrate spiritual and lived connections to both the built and natural environments directly into state planning mechanisms and legislation. This framework moves beyond mere material preservation, focusing instead on reclaiming the intergenerational standards, shared communal spaces, and organic ties that define the uniquely Australian experience of place over generations.

## 2. Shift from Materiality and Commodification to Spiritual Value

Culture is not merely a collection of transaction-based products, nor is heritage limited to the physical preservation of isolated bricks and mortar.

- **The Pitfalls of Commodification:** Treating culture solely as an economic asset strips it of its deeper social utility. When policies exclusively favor short-term commercial viability, communities lose the very fabric that anchors them over time.
- **Intangible and Spiritual Value:** An enduring cultural policy must recognize that connection to the land and the built environment carries an inherent, spiritual weight. For all Australians—spanning generations of lived experience—a place provides a sense of psychological, historic, and existential belonging.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATION 1

Expand heritage and cultural frameworks to explicitly recognize and protect *intangible cultural landscapes*. Protective statutory mechanisms should trigger not only for architectural isolation, but for the collective spiritual, emotional, and social history a community shares with a space.

### 3. Culture as the Fourth Pillar of Sustainability in State Planning

To survive long-term development and densification pressures, cultural value must possess legislative teeth. It should sit alongside economic, social, and environmental considerations as a co-equal, foundational baseline for all future public planning and regional strategy.

INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK: THE FOUR PILLARS OF SUSTAINABILITY			
<b>1. Economic</b> Financial viability, employment, sustainable industry growth, and regional prosperity.	<b>2. Environmental</b> Ecological health, biodiversity, climate resilience, and natural resource stewardship.	<b>3. Social</b> Equity, public health, education, and accessibility within civic institutions.	<b>4. Cultural</b> Connection to place, spiritual values, lived community identity, and built heritage.

- **Legislative Embedding:** Strategic environmental and urban governance must embed formal cultural impact assessments into State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs) or equivalent state-based legislative instruments.
- **Community-Centric vs. Artist-Centric:** While supporting professional arts practice is vital, cultural policy must fundamentally belong to the *community*. It must safeguard the organic, unforced ways everyday people interact, gather, and pass down local identity, rather than restricting cultural policy to curated creative spaces.

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATION 2

Mandate that all long-term regional, municipal, and metropolitan strategic plans include a "Cultural Continuity and Community Cohesion" impact statement, ensuring state-led developments do not fracture suburbs and towns with deep, generationally established organic ties.

### 4. Reclaiming Lost Elements of Australian Life and Standards

A forward-looking policy must possess the courage to look backward and identify what has been eroded by rapid, unsympathetic modernization. Reclaiming a distinctively Australian standard of living requires a deliberate structural focus on urban design and the public realm:

- **Human-Scale Design:** The unique Australian aesthetic—defined by its relationship with natural light, low-density green buffers, and open community interfaces—is increasingly threatened by homogenized, high-density developments that neglect local context.
- **Restoring the Public Realm:** We must revitalize civic spaces, neighborhood hubs, and natural common lands that encourage spontaneous, multi-generational interaction. Reclaiming our way of life

means designing spaces where community standards are reinforced through daily, face-to-face neighborly connection.

- **Intergenerational Continuity:** Honoring the lived experience of being uniquely Australian over decades means protecting local landmarks, community halls, historical streetscapes, and natural corridors that serve as physical anchors for collective memory.

## 5. Proposed Strategic Frameworks

1. **Enact a National 'Cultural Infrastructure' Standard:** Establish federal guidelines that assist state and local governments in identifying and legally shielding vulnerable neighborhoods where community identity is tightly bound to the existing built and natural environment.
2. **Decentralized Cultural Funding:** Shift a proportion of federal and state cultural funding away from centralized urban monuments toward grassroots community groups, local historical and heritage societies, and regional preservation initiatives.
3. **Cross-Portfolio Governance:** Create formal, institutional links between the federal arts/culture portfolio and infrastructure, regional development, and housing portfolios to treat spatial planning as a direct contributor to national identity.