

Public Galleries Queensland

National Cultural Policy Submission

Executive Position

Public art galleries in Queensland are foundational cultural infrastructure for Australia's future. They are not passive venues for display, but active, publicly accountable institutions that support artists as workers, strengthen regional economies, advance reconciliation, and ensure that every community—regardless of geography—has access to Australia's cultural life.

As the Australian Government develops the next National Cultural Policy, public galleries are uniquely positioned to deliver across all five enduring pillars, particularly in regional, remote and climatically vulnerable contexts that are central to Queensland's identity.

Without strong, sustainable public art galleries—especially outside capital cities—the ambitions of the policy cannot be realised.

Public Galleries Queensland (PGQ) celebrates the fact that this process marks the first time in history that Australia will have consecutive national cultural policies. We echo the call for bi-partisan support for the national cultural policy to ensure its survival regardless of a change in government. We need a renewed cultural policy to be more than a once-in-a-generation opportunity; we need it to be the status quo. Which means this process must be both collaborative and consider its impact beyond the next four-year term.

We call on the federal government to ensure that the visual arts are strongly represented and supported by this historic policy.

1. Public Galleries Deliver “A Place for Every Story” in a Vast State

Queensland's scale and diversity means that place-based cultural institutions are essential, not optional.

Public art galleries:

- Present local, regional, national and international stories in direct dialogue with communities
- Champion artists whose practices are shaped by tropical/sub-tropical, mining, agricultural, coastal, arid, regional and remote realities
- Provide culturally safe spaces for intersectional, migrant and community-led narratives.

In regional Queensland, galleries are often the only professional arts institution permanently embedded in a community. They enable participation that is:

- Free or low-cost
- Ongoing, not event-based
- Deeply connected to local identity and history.

The financial burden for regional galleries falls largely to local government. Without sustained investment in public galleries, cultural participation risks becoming increasingly centralised, episodic, and metropolitan, undermining the stated aim of ensuring access for all Australians.

2. Public Galleries Are Critical to “First Nations First” in Practice

Public art galleries in Queensland play a crucial role in embedding First Nations leadership, visibility and cultural authority within Australia’s cultural system.

They:

- Work with local Traditional Custodians over long periods, developing sustained and trusting relationships that provide greater cultural safety than project-based engagements
- Provide platforms for contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in their own communities
- Support employment, curatorship, and decision-making pathways for First Nations people.

In regional and remote Queensland, galleries often hold the most sustained relationships with First Nations artists and communities and therefore are well positioned to operationalise the Policy’s commitment to self-determination and cultural rights in meaningful, everyday ways.

This work requires stable operating funding and workforce investment, not short-term project grants.

3. Public Galleries Centre Artists as Workers—Especially Outside Capital Cities

Queensland public galleries are critical to delivering the policy’s pillar on the centrality of the artist.

They provide:

- Paid exhibition, commissioning and acquisition opportunities
- Paid public programming and education delivery opportunities
- Professional development, mentoring and curatorial support
- Entry points into the national arts economy for emerging and mid-career artists.

For many visual artists living outside metropolitan centres, public galleries are the primary employer, commissioner and advocate. They translate national policy commitments to fair pay, safe workplaces and career sustainability into real outcomes on the ground.

A National Cultural Policy that values artists as workers must therefore:

- Recognise public galleries as key labour-market institutions
- Fund the administrative, curatorial and technical teams that enable ethical artist engagement
- Address cost-of-living and touring pressures specific to regional visual arts practice.

4. Public Galleries Are Essential Cultural Infrastructure

Public galleries are long-term civic assets, not discretionary services.

They:

- Safely care for collections of national, regional and local significance
- Maintain buildings in challenging climatic conditions (cyclones, humidity, flooding)
- Provide creative infrastructure and professional development for artists and artworkers, helping to sustain the visual arts sector and reduce burnout caused by growing pressures and declining support
- Positively impact education, health and tourism sectors
- Support social cohesion and build community resilience.

Queensland galleries face disproportionately high infrastructure and maintenance costs due to climate and distance yet often operate with constrained local government funding bases.

To achieve the policy's aim of resilient, adaptable and fit-for-purpose cultural infrastructure, the next National Cultural Policy must include:

- Indexed, predictable operating funding
- Capital and climate-adaptation investment
- Recognition of regional galleries as part of Australia's national cultural system.

5. Public Galleries Are Trusted Platforms for Audience Engagement

Public galleries are among the most accessible cultural institutions in Australia.

They:

- Welcome audiences who may not identify as “arts audiences”
- Provide intergenerational, educational and community-driven engagement
- Offer free entry, outreach and learning programs.

In Queensland communities, galleries often function as:

- Civic meeting places
- Educational and vocational partners with schools and TAFEs
- Vocational training grounds for visual artists and artworkers
- Cultural first-access points for young people and new audiences.

They are ideally placed to respond to evolving audience behaviours—digital, hybrid and participatory—outlined in the consultation paper, provided they are resourced to innovate rather than simply survive.

Key Policy Asks for Queensland Public Art Galleries

Queensland public galleries strongly recommend that the next National Cultural Policy:

- Formally recognise public galleries as essential national cultural infrastructure
- Invest in stable operating funding, not just project-based programs
- Prioritise regional and climate-impacted contexts in infrastructure and workforce planning
- Embed First Nations leadership pathways within funded gallery systems
- Support artist employment pipelines through exhibitions, commissions and collections
- Support vocational and professional pathways for arts workers through investment in arts-specific training and education in regional areas
- Align federal, state and local government investment, reducing duplication and sector fragility.

While the National Cultural Policy includes support for visual arts, Creative Australia's investment profile demonstrates a strong structural emphasis on music and performing arts. In 2024–25 (*Creative Australia Annual Report*), the visual arts attracted just 6% of investment, compared with Orchestras: 26%, Theatre: 13%, Opera: 10%, Dance: 9% and Music: 9%.

The current *Revive* national cultural policy advisory architecture is structurally weighted toward the performing arts, particularly theatre, music and live performance. Visual arts and gallery expertise are plainly underrepresented, despite the size, economic contribution and infrastructure demands of the visual arts sector. The current Policy Advisory Group also lacks adequate regional representation, reinforcing a metropolitan bias in national cultural policy development and weakening the policy's capacity to respond to the realities of cultural life, infrastructure and access outside capital cities.

This has strongly influenced state arts funding in Queensland, with no industry-specific peer assessment groups and a very distinct decline in funding of visual arts related projects in the last 4 years.

The public gallery sector in Queensland is grateful for the federal government's Sharing the National Collection initiative. However, the initiative was too logistically challenging for many Queensland regional galleries, even with the reduction to 12-month loans in the latter half of the program. The National Gallery of Australia (NGA) loan initiative put a great onus onto local governments to have suitable resources and infrastructure to support these longer-term loans. The unidirectional nature of the initiative also infers that quality art, and important stories are held in the capital cities, rather than championing regional stories and providing more platforms for regionally based artists to share their work locally and further afield.

Public Galleries Queensland advocates for the focus to be switched to supporting tours of exhibitions showcasing regional collections and living contemporary visual artists, as well as increased funding for capital and operational costs for regional galleries.

Visual Arts are a very important part of the Australian cultural ecosystem and are currently suffering from decreased funding from federal and state governments. This is paired with decreased opportunities and increased costs for artists and artworkers to undertake regional university visual arts-specific courses. Local governments are often left to do the heavy lifting for their local communities. They realise that visual arts are an important part of liveability and attracting talented people to their region but find it increasingly difficult to bear the full cost of providing this vital resource. In parallel to local-government supported regional galleries, independent regionally based galleries are under increased pressure due to their reliance on diverse (but as noted, reduced) funding and income mixes, and increased operational costs. As a result, visual arts in regional areas are suffering.

Closing Statement

Public art galleries in Queensland are already delivering the ambitions of Australia's cultural policy—often with limited resources, stretched teams and rising costs.

With targeted, sustained national investment, they can do far more. They can:

- Strengthen Australia's cultural identity
- Ensure regional voices shape the national story
- Support visual artists as workers and employment opportunities for artworkers
- Build resilient, inclusive communities.

The future of art is decentralised, and support must reflect changing demographics and geographic spread of Australia's population. Public and regional galleries in Queensland offer high-impact return on investment, fostering connective, creative and thriving communities across the state. Greater support is required to deliver these outcomes on the ground for and by the communities themselves. To truly support a thriving cultural landscape across Australia the importance of public galleries must not be ignored.