

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Individual

Wes Morris



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

The release of Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place marked an important shift in Australian cultural policy. Positioning “First Nations First” as the opening pillar acknowledged an essential truth: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are foundational to Australian cultural life. The policy also recognised the relationship between culture, identity, wellbeing, truth-telling and self-determination.

While Revive represented meaningful progress, the next phase of national cultural reform involves translating recognition into enduring structures, relationships and long-term cultural investment.

There remains a significant disconnect between the language of cultural centrality and the institutional architecture supporting First Nations cultural rights, governance and development. Australia still does not have a stand-alone First Nations Cultural Sector Policy, nor a peak body representing the First Nations arts and cultural sector nationally, despite decades of advocacy. Cultural maintenance and revitalisation continue to sit at the margins of broader policy systems, rather than being recognised as core national infrastructure connected to wellbeing, identity, language continuity and intergenerational resilience.

Culture is deeply interconnected with wellbeing, belonging, healing and community strength, and operates as foundational social and cultural infrastructure that strengthens resilience, participation and continuity across generations.

This submission positions the next National Culture Policy as an opportunity to strengthen the cultural, governance and institutional foundations that sustain living First Nations cultures.

This submission also argues that Australia’s cultural policy framework can be more explicitly aligned with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly in relation to shared decision-making, community-controlled sectors, data sovereignty and transforming government systems.

The Close the Gap Campaign’s 2023 Report called for the development of a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Policy that:

- complements and reinforces Revive;
- asserts the centrality of culture to wellbeing;
- informs investment in cultural governance and revitalisation;
- includes cultural knowledge holders in decision-making; and
- establishes monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

These recommendations provide an important foundation for the next phase of national cultural reform.

This submission further proposes that the next National Cultural Policy:

- adopt a rights-based framework grounded in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP);
- initiate the development of a stand-alone First Nations Cultural Sector Policy
- establish a nationally coordinated process to support the creation of a peak body for the First Nations arts and cultural sector;
- embed clear whole-of-government accountability and implementation mechanisms for First Nations cultural outcomes; and
- strengthen long-term investment in community-controlled cultural infrastructure.

The next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to strengthen the conditions through which First Nations cultures remain living, dynamic and self-determined across generations.

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