



# National Cultural Policy Submission 2026

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Submitted to the Australian Government Office for the Arts

May 2026

*Connecting the world with Australian music*

## Who We Are

The Australian Music Centre (AMC) is a national, service-based not-for-profit institution that exists to support, advocate for, and celebrate the art music community, increasing visibility, viability, and sustainability for independent creators throughout contemporary classical, jazz and improvised, sound art, experimental, media composition (screen and games), and global music spheres.

We hold a culturally significant catalogue of over 40,000 Australian works and resources, accessed by people around the world. We currently represent the works of over 1,000 artists and creators and are supported by Creative Australia, APRA AMCOS, and more than 1,100 members. The AMC is based in New South Wales and has served the Australian art music community for more than 50 years.

Our vision is to ensure that Australian art music is heard, valued, and celebrated. The artists, and the special place of First Nations artists in our creative identity, sits at the centre of everything we do.

The AMC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Revive 2.0, the revised National Cultural Policy. We address all five pillars and are willing to appear before any expert panel or parliamentary inquiry to elaborate on the positions set out here.

## Framing Our Contribution

Australia's creative sector is not a single ecosystem. It is a collection of overlapping communities with different histories, different market dynamics, and different vulnerabilities. Independent art music practitioners and small to medium presenting organisations, encompassing contemporary classical composition, jazz and improvisation, sound art, experimental practice, and media composition, are one of those communities. The sector is vibrant, internationally recognised, and undervalued in the policy frameworks that shape its future.

We want to acknowledge that the current edition of Revive has delivered meaningful progress since 2023. As the Government opens consultation on the next iteration, the AMC urges that this progress be built upon with greater precision: with funding mechanisms calibrated to the communities that need them most, starting with the musicians and organisations that support them; with new frameworks for the technological challenges that have arrived faster than expected; and with a renewed commitment to the structural conditions that allow Australian artists to sustain careers rather than simply survive them.

The AMC also urges that this next policy be understood as a cross-portfolio responsibility.

Art music creators, like all music creators, are micro-business operators, sole traders, exporters, educators, and contributors to community health and social cohesion. Their sustainability is a matter of industry policy, small business policy, trade policy, health policy, and education policy as much as it is an arts policy question. A National Cultural Policy that is read only within the arts portfolio will not deliver the structural change the sector needs. This submission speaks to that broader conversation.

This submission draws on several important bodies of evidence: Creative Australia's 2025 research *Sound Fair? An analysis of art music commissioning in Australia*, the first comprehensive investigation of commissioning practices in a decade; the AMC's own programming data; the Alberts Foundation's music education research; the Tenth Muse Initiative's analysis of orchestral programming; and the AMC's direct experience as a national service organisation working daily with composers, performers, and presenting institutions.

*The evidence is clear. Australian art music creators are paid less than half comparable international commission rates. 55% earn \$5,000 or less annually from commissions. 32% work without a*

*contract. A sector cannot sustain a pipeline of original Australian work if the people creating that work cannot sustain viable careers.*

## Pillar 1: First Nations First

### Our Position

The AMC affirms that First Nations creative practice must be at the heart of any cultural policy. It requires structural commitment: dedicated funding, genuine self-determination in program design, and the sustained resourcing of First Nations-led organisations.

### What We Are Doing

The AMC's First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) Policy was developed with and led by First Nations artists. It provides a practical framework for engaging with First Nations cultural and intellectual property with care, integrity, and respect. We actively share it with presenting organisations, orchestras, and ensembles seeking to engage meaningfully in this space, and it has been referenced by our peer organisations internationally.

We are a partner in the Ngarra-Burria First Nations Composers Initiative, working alongside the ANU School of Music. This program has proven effective in nurturing First Nations creators and building lasting professional networks across the sector. Nearly every First Nations art music practitioner has touched this program and been documented by the AMC.

### What We Are Calling For

- Self-determination must be embedded in all programs and initiatives focused on First Nations peoples, culture, and language. Genuine partnership means First Nations-led organisations have decision-making authority, not just advisory roles.
- Dedicated, quarantined funding streams for First Nations art music practice, not absorbed into broader pools where they are displaced by other genres or more established organisations.
- A nationwide residency program in the arts, music, and creative industries for First Nations practitioners across major creative organisations, designed to enable practical, on-the-job development and deep sector understanding.
- Recognition that First Nations music encompasses a vast spectrum of practice, from deep traditional forms to contemporary experimental work and screen composition, and policy frameworks must accommodate this breadth.
- Broader Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protections, in collaboration with the Attorney-General's portfolio, ensuring that First Nations creators retain sovereignty over their creative work in both domestic and international contexts.
- Formal recognition through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of First Nations music as a central element of Australia's cultural diplomacy, ensuring our international cultural presence genuinely reflects the world's oldest living musical traditions.

## Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

### The Structural Gap in Contemporary Music Frameworks

Contemporary music strategies, at both state and federal level, have historically centred more strongly on popular music, live touring, and venue infrastructure. These are genuinely important. But a policy reflecting the diversity of Australian stories must also account for the communities that fall outside that frame.

In the spirit of inclusion and representation, Australian art music is performed in concert halls, galleries, public spaces, intimate venues, and increasingly across digital and interactive platforms. Its practitioners are among the most culturally diverse in the Australian creative sector: composers from First Nations backgrounds, from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, from regional and remote Australia. Their stories are not peripheral to national cultural conversation. They are part of it and must continue to be elevated alongside all other music creators in the vast spectrum of music making.

### **Music Education: Access, Sustainability and Cultural Identity**

The sustainability of art music in Australia is inseparable from music education. The Alberts Foundation's Music Education: Right from the Start initiative has produced sobering data: in South Australia, one in three primary students has little or no access to quality music education. In New South Wales, 55% of primary teachers received fewer than ten hours of music instruction during their entire training.

This is an education policy failure, at federal and state level, with long-term consequences for cultural identity, community health, and the viability of the creative workforce. The Department of Education has a direct stake in these outcomes. Music education builds cognitive development, social cohesion, and cultural literacy. Investing in it is an investment in the whole child and the whole community.

### **What We Are Calling For**

- A national music curriculum that includes Australian music at primary and secondary school level, connecting students with living creators and building lifelong engagement with Australian art music.
- Residency programs that place composers and musicians in schools, creating direct relationships between creators and communities.
- Support for presenting organisations to program a minimum of 40% Australian content, featuring Australian performers, through orchestras, ensembles, festivals, and more, as a condition of public funding.
- Expanded support for CALD and Deaf and disabled creators in the art music space, including technology upgrades, Auslan interpreters, closed captions, and other accessibility measures that increase participation across all communities.
- Transparent public reporting on funding distribution across music genres, ensuring art music is neither invisible nor absorbed into broader contemporary music funding pools.
- Cross-portfolio recognition, through the Department of Health and Aged Care, of the documented wellbeing benefits of music participation and music education for individuals and communities, with investment in programs that sustain community music practice as a public health resource.

## **Pillar 3: The Centrality of the Artist**

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### **A System Built on Underpaid Labour**

Creative Australia's 2025 research *Sound Fair?* An analysis of art music commissioning in Australia provides the most comprehensive picture of commissioning conditions in a decade. While the research focuses on concert music commissioning, its findings are directly relevant to media

composition practice, where similar patterns of undervaluation, absent contracts, and unpaid additional duties are well documented. The findings are stark and the AMC has been advocating for their implications to be taken seriously.

Australian art music creators are paid less than half comparable international commission rates across almost all work types. Most creators (55%) earn \$5,000 or less annually from commissions, and 32% complete commissions without any contract in place.

Additional duties including parts creation, rehearsal attendance, performance attendance, and unlimited revisions are routinely absorbed into base fees, effectively subsidising organisations through unpaid creative labour. Internationally, parts creation alone typically carries a 10–30% surcharge. In Australia, it is simply expected.

The research also reveals a significant gender dimension. While average commission rates appear similar across genders, women report a 66% gap between their actual and ideal rate, compared to 35% for men. This suggests women are absorbing greater scope creep for the same fee. This is a structural inequity that commissioning practices perpetuate rather than address.

*61% of commissioners and 66% of creators have no standard method for calculating commission rates. In the absence of benchmarks, rates become personal negotiations where power determines outcomes. The 2012 Australia Council guidelines, our last major reference point, are no longer in active use.*

### **Tax Reform, Small Business and the Economics of a Creative Career**

The financial precarity of art music creators is not simply a commissioning problem. It is compounded by a tax system that was not designed with creative careers in mind, and by a small business policy framework that has not yet recognised the composer or independent music creator as the micro-business operator they are.

The vast majority of art music creators operate as sole traders or micro-enterprises. They negotiate contracts, manage intellectual property, develop export markets, and carry the full weight of business risk, without the support structures available to other small business operators. The Department of Industry and Small Business has a direct interest in the sustainability of this cohort. Targeted small business development support, mentorship programs, and access to export assistance through programs administered by Austrade are all applicable to art music creators and need expansion.

Artists and those who work with them experience what is commonly described as “lumpy income”: significant earnings in one year when a commission is paid or a recording is licensed, followed by negligible income in the next. The current income tax system treats these peaks as windfalls, resulting in tax liabilities that bear no relationship to a creator’s actual living standards across their career.

We recognise that income averaging provisions for professional artists already exist under Australian tax law, recognising composers, performing artists, and those that work with them as special professionals. However, the provisions are narrowly scoped, need to be extended and made ongoing, and are poorly understood by many accountants working outside the creative industries. The AMC calls for these provisions to be broadened, better communicated, and strengthened so that they genuinely serve the full range of art music and media composition practitioners, including those with mixed income streams combining creative professional income with teaching, administration, and other arts-adjacent work.

We also call for a serious examination of Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status reform as it applies to music organisations. Current DGR settings favour particular types of cultural organisations and effectively disadvantage the small and medium music sector. Extending and clarifying DGR eligibility for organisations supporting art music creators would unlock philanthropic investment.

Additionally, the AMC proposes the introduction of a cultural infrastructure levy applied to larger organisations, specifically those turning over upwards of \$5 million per year, with funds directed into a pooled, independently administered grant program accessible by artists and small organisations. This would create a sustainable, ongoing revenue stream for the sector that is not subject to budget cycle uncertainty, and would establish a principle of proportionate contribution across the cultural economy.

Finally, the AMC urges the Government to establish an ongoing Technology Transformation Fund accessible by cultural organisations navigating the rapidly changing digital environment. Unlike R&D incentives designed for commercial technology sectors, this fund would support cultural organisations, including the AMC, in upgrading digital infrastructure, digitising collections, and building the technical capacity to remain viable and relevant in a changing landscape.

### What We Are Calling For

- Income averaging provisions for professional artists and those that work with them to be extended, made ongoing, and better communicated to the practitioners who need them.
- DGR status reform to extend eligibility to a broader range of music and arts organisations, unlocking philanthropic investment in the sector.
- A cultural infrastructure levy on large organisations (turnover above \$5 million) to create a pooled fund for artists and small cultural/music organisations.
- A Technology Transformation Fund for cultural organisations to support digitisation, infrastructure upgrades, and digital capacity building.
- Fair commissioning rates as a condition of public funding, including requirements for written contracts and adherence to minimum rate standards. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations has an interest here: commissioning without a contract and payment below sustainable rates are labour market failures, not simply arts sector customs.
- Support for professional development programs including the AMC's Surrounding Sound workshops and professional development program, which provide creators with the networks and skills to build sustainable careers.
- Export pathway support for creators and performers to participate in global showcase events such as ClassicalNEXT, Jazzahead, and WOMEX, and for media composers to access international screen and gaming industry markets, in partnership with Sounds Australia.
- Recognition by the Department of Health and Aged Care of the mental health pressures facing art music creators as sole traders, including income insecurity, professional isolation, and career precarity, with extended access through organisations such as Support Act to targeted wellbeing support.

## Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

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### Infrastructure Beyond Bricks and Mortar

When speaking of cultural infrastructure, it is tempting to think exclusively of concert halls, museums, and broadcast facilities. These matter enormously, but so do the organisations and systems that connect creators to audiences, that hold, document, and maintain Australian works, and that provide the professional scaffolding which supports the growth of individual artists.

The AMC is part of that infrastructure. Our catalogue of over 40,000 works, accumulated over more than 50 years, is a national cultural asset. It is searchable by instrumentation, duration, difficulty, and genre. It is used by orchestras, schools, broadcasters, and music lovers in Australia and internationally.

At the same time, this infrastructure is under pressure. The AMC's platform, which converts physically held, culturally significant collections into digitally accessible resources, is ongoing but requires sustained investment. An investment of \$200,000 would make a transformative difference, completing much of this work and directly benefiting the entire sector, from artists to micro-labels, publishers, schools, teachers, tutors, and community music performers, nationally.

### **Accountability for Public Investment**

All of Australia's major performing organisations, including major orchestras and opera companies, receive substantial public funding to create public value. Data compiled from publicly available programming sources for 2026 shows over 130 Australian works programmed across the major orchestral organisations this year, with the Melbourne Symphony programming over 35, and the CSO, QSO, and SSO all in double figures. This represents a real and ongoing commitment, and we acknowledge this.

At the same time, there is much more work to be achieved in the support of Australian music. The Tenth Muse Initiative found that works by female composers made up 14.6% of orchestral programming in 2025, up from 11% the previous year. That is progress, but it is also much less than what a genuinely representative picture would look like.

The AMC advocates for a principle of proportionate accountability: publicly funded presenting organisations should be required to report transparently on the percentage of Australian works programmed, the percentage by women and First Nations composers, the commissioning rates paid, and the communities their programming is reaching.

### **Australia's Cultural Standing and the Role of Foreign Affairs**

The sustainability of Australian art music is not only a domestic question. Australia has a genuine and recognised international standing in art music, and that standing has value beyond the arts. It is a component of our cultural diplomacy, sitting alongside the work of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in building relationships and projecting Australian values internationally.

The AMC works in partnership with Sounds Australia to place Australian creators and performers in international markets. We call on DFAT to formally recognise art music as part of Australia's international cultural program, and to resource bilateral cultural exchange agreements that include art music alongside the more visible cultural exports.

### **Recordings: A Missed Opportunity for Australian Art Music**

Australian cultural organisations such as orchestras and ensembles produce extraordinary recordings of Australian works. Too often, those recordings are broadcast once and then archived. The AMC, in conjunction with the ABC and these organisations, are developing an audio library that will make these recordings accessible and create new opportunities for creators. We call on the Government, through its levers, to support deeper commercial licensing frameworks that would allow this work to be commercially available at scale, producing ongoing revenue and a wider reach internationally.

### **What We Are Calling For**

- Continued multi-year funding commitments for national service organisations such as the AMC, providing the stability required to plan, build, and maintain essential services.
- A one-off \$200,000 contribution to upgrade the AMC's internationally accessible platform, providing connection, documentation, and commercial infrastructure for art music creators, alongside a training fund for creative industries in newly emerging technologies.
- Mandatory transparent reporting from publicly funded presenting organisations on Australian content, composer diversity, commissioning rates, and community reach.

- Support for the development and commercial licensing of Australian orchestral recordings, creating ongoing income for composers and expanding international reach.
- Increased unity across cultural and creative institutions, with shared advocacy frameworks and training that create stronger outcomes for the entire music community.

## Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

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### Audience Development Is Structural

The sustainability of Australian art music and its creator community is inseparable from a healthy audience ecosystem. That ecosystem is built over a lifetime, beginning in primary school and deepening through consistent, quality engagement with living Australian music across all stages of life.

There is also a strong case to be made to the Department of Tourism. Australia's music culture, including its art music, contributes to the visitor economy and to the sense of place that draws both domestic and international visitors to festivals, concert series, and cultural events. The sustainability of that music culture, and of the creators who produce it, is a tourism and regional development interest as much as an arts one.

Publicly funded orchestras and presenting organisations are funded to create public value. It is worth asking, honestly, whether that value is reaching the full breadth of people it could. Concert hall culture, ticket pricing, and the way programs are written and presented are all signals to people whether a space is for them or not. Some organisations are doing extraordinary work on access and inclusion. The question is whether that work is understood *as part of the core offer*, or as an optional addition.

Australian composers, particularly First Nations composers, composers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and composers from regional Australia, are writing music that speaks to communities the orchestral sector is still finding its way toward. Their work is not a diversity initiative. It is some of the most vital Australian music being written today.

### The International Picture

Australian contemporary music has genuine standing internationally. There is real appetite in Europe, the UK, the Americas, and growing markets in Asia. The AMC works in partnership with Sounds Australia to take Australian creators and performers to global markets through showcase events such as Jazzahead, ClassicalNEXT, and WOMEX.

Reciprocal programming relationships, where engagement with international repertoire comes alongside a commitment to getting Australian works performed internationally, are how we build a sustainable global profile for Australian music, rather than relying on individual champions to make it happen case by case.

### What We Are Calling For

- Sustained investment in music education as the foundational audience development strategy, including a national music curriculum with strong Australian content requirements.
- Support for presenting organisations to develop access and inclusion programs that are embedded in core programming, not added as supplementary activity.
- Ongoing funding for Sounds Australia's export development program, enabling Australian art music creators to access global markets.
- Support for a licensing framework to connect orchestral recordings of Australian works with international audiences, creating new revenue for composers.

- A cross-portfolio approach to music funding drawing on Education, Tourism, Small Business, Health, and the screen and interactive media industries, reducing over-reliance on arts-specific funding and building the case for Australian music, including media composition, as a whole-of-government priority.

## Artificial Intelligence and the Protection of Creative Work

Artificial intelligence presents the most significant structural challenge to Australia's creative industries in a generation. For art music and media composition creators, who predominantly own their own copyrights and rely directly on intellectual property as their primary economic asset, the stakes are high and the policy work is far from complete.

The AMC welcomes the Government's decision not to introduce text and data mining exceptions for AI training. That outcome reflects the weight of evidence and the unified voice of Australia's creative community. But it is a starting point, not a resolution. The deeper questions about how AI interacts with creative copyright, how creators are compensated when their work contributes to AI-generated output, and how the regulatory framework keeps pace with rapidly evolving technology remain open and urgent questions. For media composers working in screen and gaming, the speed of AI adoption in those industries makes this particularly pressing.

*82% of surveyed musicians already expressed concern that AI will prevent them from making a living. APRA AMCOS has modelled significant revenue risks to music creators across the coming years. The legislative question may be resolved for now, but the economic and creative impacts are ongoing.*

Independent art music and media composition creators, unlike major labels, large publishing houses, or well-resourced production studios, have limited capacity to monitor, enforce, or litigate against misuse of their intellectual property. The next National Cultural Policy must establish the frameworks that provide that protection at a systemic level, so individual creators are not left to navigate it alone.

### A Framework for Responsible AI Policy

The AMC does not oppose technological innovation. We recognise that AI tools will become part of the creative landscape and that some uses may ultimately benefit creators. What we insist upon is that this transition is governed by a framework that respects the rights of human creators and ensures they share in the value their work generates.

The Australian Government has an opportunity to lead internationally on this question. The next National Cultural Policy should establish clear principles and mechanisms for the relationship between AI and creative work in Australia. This is fundamentally a cross-portfolio responsibility. The Department of Industry and Science owns the AI regulatory framework. The Department of Infrastructure and Communications owns copyright and digital economy settings. Treasury owns revenue and levy mechanisms. The arts portfolio cannot resolve this alone, and the next National Cultural Policy should explicitly call for a coordinated, whole-of-government response to AI and creative intellectual property.

### What We Are Calling For

- An opt-in licensing framework for AI training on creative works, ensuring Australian creators have the right to decide whether and how their work is used.
- Transparency obligations for AI companies operating in Australia, requiring disclosure of the training data used in models that generate music and other creative content.

- A levy or licensing model for commercial AI-generated works that draw on art music and media composition training data, including music generated for screen, games, and interactive media, with revenue directed to a fund supporting human creators.
- Active consultation with the creative community, not just the technology sector, in the development of AI policy frameworks, with adequate time for meaningful engagement.
- Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the economic impact of AI on Australian music creators, with public reporting and policy adjustment as evidence develops.
- Support for AI literacy and professional development programs that help creators understand and navigate the changing technological landscape, including how to protect their rights and, where appropriate, use AI tools in their own practice.

## Conclusion

The Australian Music Centre has spent more than 50 years working to ensure that Australian art music is created, performed, heard, and valued. This submission reflects that the conditions for a thriving creative sector do not emerge by accident. They are built, deliberately, through policy choices that value human creativity, that resource the organisations which sustain it, and that create the structural conditions for artists to build lasting careers.

The AMC is committed to the ongoing work of this conversation. We represent over 1,000 creators. We hold 50 years of the national catalogue. We have the relationships, the data, and the will to be a constructive partner in building the cultural policy framework Australia's creative communities deserve.

*We are ready to appear before expert panels or the Senate inquiry to elaborate on any aspect of this submission and are happy to provide supporting data, case studies, or additional evidence as required.*

### Catherine Haridy

Chief Executive Officer

Australian Music Centre

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