

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Organisation

New England Regional Art Museum

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Regional Australia must be recognised as a central pillar of the nation’s cultural life, not as a secondary or peripheral concern. While the current consultation acknowledges diversity and access, there remains insufficient emphasis on the unique value, challenges and critical importance of regional arts practice and infrastructure. Without explicit and sustained recognition within the National Cultural Policy, regional arts risks continuing to be siloed, under-supported and structurally disadvantaged in comparison to metropolitan centres.

Arts and culture are not optional extras in regional Australia; they are essential social, cultural and economic infrastructure. Regional galleries, museums, performing arts organisations, festivals and community arts programs provide much more than entertainment. They foster social cohesion, strengthen community identity, support mental health and wellbeing, contribute to tourism and local economies, and create opportunities for education and lifelong learning. In many communities, arts organisations are among the few spaces where people gather across generations, backgrounds and experiences.

Yet despite this enormous contribution, regional arts organisations operate under significantly greater pressures than metropolitan institutions. The cost of delivering high-quality cultural programming in regional areas is substantially higher due to freight, travel, staffing shortages, ageing infrastructure and geographic isolation. At the same time, regional organisations often have far less access to philanthropy, sponsorship, corporate partnerships and private wealth. Audiences are dispersed across large geographic areas, making participation and engagement more resource intensive.

Despite these realities, regional arts continues to receive disproportionately low levels of investment. Too often, funding structures privilege scale, density and visibility associated with metropolitan centres, rather than recognising impact, access and community value. This creates an uneven playing field where regional organisations are expected to deliver ambitious cultural outcomes with significantly fewer resources.

The next National Cultural Policy must directly address this imbalance. It should include a dedicated regional arts framework that recognises the distinct role regional cultural organisations play in Australia’s creative ecology. This framework should commit to long-term, indexed operational funding; investment in regional cultural infrastructure; workforce development and housing strategies for regional arts workers; touring and freight support; and greater equity in federal funding distribution.

Importantly, regional arts should not be treated solely through the lens of access or outreach from metropolitan institutions. Regional Australia is not simply an audience for culture produced elsewhere. Regional communities are places of cultural production, innovation and leadership in their own right. Some of Australia’s most ambitious and socially engaged creative work is happening in regional areas, often with fewer resources and under far more challenging conditions.

If the National Cultural Policy is genuinely committed to ensuring “a place for every story,” then regional Australia must be embedded at its centre, not positioned at its margins. A strong national cultural future depends on strong regional cultural ecosystems.