

# From Recognition to Reform: First Nations Cultural Rights and Cultural Governance

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## Submission to the Australian Government Consultation on the Next National Cultural Policy

### Executive Summary and Overview

The release of *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place* marked an important shift in Australian cultural policy. The positioning of “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.

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

At present, 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.

Recent reforms have demonstrated the value of nationally coordinated, First Nations-led partnership structures, shared decision-making arrangements and long-term implementation approaches. The First Nations Languages Policy Partnership provides an important model for broader cultural reform.

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.

***“We stood for our rights to be on Country, to speak our languages, and to be in control of our knowledge and resources.”<sup>1</sup>***

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### **Key Recommendations**

This submission recommends that the Australian Government:

1. Develop a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Action Plan for Australia.
2. Embed the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the Action Plan, particularly as expressed through UNDRIP Articles 8, 11, 12, 15, 33 and 34.
3. Initiate the development of a stand-alone First Nations Cultural Sector Policy that complements and strengthens the broader National Cultural Policy framework.
4. Establish a nationally coordinated process to support the creation of a peak body for the First Nations arts and cultural sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberley Aboriginal Caring for Culture Discussion Report, 2020

5. Embed First Nations cultural authority within national cultural policy design, governance and implementation processes, including through the participation of Elders, language custodians, cultural knowledge holders and community-controlled organisations.
6. Develop a strengths-based national framework for measuring First Nations cultural strength, continuity and cultural outcomes.
7. Align the next National Cultural Policy with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, particularly in relation to shared decision-making, community-controlled sectors and transforming government organisations.
8. Strengthen long-term investment in community-controlled cultural infrastructure, including language centres, arts centres, media organisations, cultural centres, archives and on-Country cultural maintenance initiatives.
9. Establish clear whole-of-government accountability, implementation and reporting mechanisms for First Nations cultural outcomes, aligned with Closing the Gap Priority Reforms and strengths-based cultural indicators.

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## **Introduction**

This submission welcomes the Australian Government's review of the National Cultural Policy and acknowledges the significant contribution **Revive** has made in repositioning arts and culture within national public policy.

The inclusion of "First Nations First" as the opening pillar of **Revive** represented an important national acknowledgment that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are central to Australia's cultural identity and future. The policy recognised that culture encompasses far more than artistic production alone – including language, stories, knowledge systems, spirituality, connection to Country and intergenerational continuity. However, a principle without a policy framework remains a statement of intent rather than a structural commitment.

Importantly, **Revive** also recognised the relationship between culture and wellbeing, and committed to a whole-of-government approach to cultural policy implementation.

**Critically, recent years have demonstrated that the next phase of cultural policy reform must move beyond recognition and toward structural implementation.**

At present, there remains a significant gap between the aspiration of positioning First Nations cultures at the centre of national cultural life, and the policy, governance and institutional arrangements that support this ambition in practice.

Australia continues to lack:

- a stand-alone First Nations Cultural Sector Policy;
- a nationally recognised peak body for the First Nations arts and cultural sector;
- a comprehensive framework for measuring cultural strength and cultural outcomes; and
- an integrated whole-of-government implementation architecture for First Nations cultural development.

This submission proceeds from the understanding that First Nations cultural rights, cultural strength and cultural continuity are matters of national importance connected to identity, wellbeing, prevention, truth-telling, social cohesion and national maturity.

For too long, First Nations culture has been treated within public policy as symbolic rather than structural – acknowledged rhetorically, while inadequately supported institutionally. Yet increasing evidence demonstrates that cultural strength, language continuity and community control are closely connected to improved wellbeing, resilience and social cohesion outcomes.

The challenge for the next National Cultural Policy is whether Australia is prepared to align its institutional settings with what it already claims to recognise: that First Nations culture is foundational to the nation's identity and future.

The submission responds primarily to Pillar 1 – First Nations First – while recognising the ways in which this pillar intersects with the broader objectives of participation, infrastructure, creative workforce development and audience engagement across the National Cultural Policy framework.

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### **Question 1. Challenges and Opportunities**

#### **Structural Challenges**

**The principal challenge facing the next National Cultural Policy is the continuing gap between symbolic recognition and structural reform.**

While *Revive* acknowledges the importance of First Nations cultures, there remains no stand-alone national policy framework dedicated to First Nations cultural rights, cultural governance, cultural maintenance and cultural revitalisation.

This absence has practical consequences.

Responsibility for embedding First Nations culture and language across national policy settings remains fragmented across portfolios, agencies and programs. Cultural maintenance activities are often subsumed within broader arts, health, education or Indigenous affairs frameworks, rather than recognised as a distinct national policy priority requiring coordinated long-term investment and governance.

The absence of a coordinated national framework for cultural maintenance and revitalisation has been compounded by the gradual erosion of earlier cultural support mechanisms and long-term cultural policy infrastructure.

Earlier approaches to cultural maintenance and cultural vibrancy, including work undertaken through the Australia Council's ***Standing Our Ground*** framework and the former ***Indigenous Cultural Support Program***, reflected a broader recognition of culture as a distinct area of long-term national policy investment and community development.<sup>2</sup>

This fragmentation contributes to a broader structural marginalisation of culture within public policy systems.

The contradiction at the centre of current policy settings is this: First Nations culture is routinely invoked as central to national identity, while the systems responsible for funding, governing and measuring culture remain structurally under-developed.

The absence of a national peak body for the First Nations arts and cultural sector further compounds this challenge. The ***National Agreement on Closing the Gap*** is built upon partnership structures and representative peak bodies across multiple sectors.

Yet despite more than 50 years of advocacy for a national Indigenous arts and cultural authority, the First Nations cultural sector remains without equivalent representation in national policy processes.<sup>3</sup>

This absence limits opportunities for coordinated advocacy, shared decision-making and long-term sector development.

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<sup>2</sup> Australia Council for the Arts, *Standing Our Ground: A Draft Policy for Indigenous Cultural Vibrancy* (Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts, 2011); Australian Government, *Indigenous Cultural Support Program*.

<sup>3</sup> Creative Australia, *Bringing It Forward: National Indigenous Arts and Cultural Authority Research Report* (Sydney: Creative Australia, 2022).

A further challenge lies in the absence of robust frameworks for measuring cultural strength and cultural outcomes. While governments increasingly acknowledge the importance of cultural determinants of health and wellbeing, Australia still lacks comprehensive national indicators capable of meaningfully assessing cultural resilience, continuity and revitalisation.

This challenge is compounded by the absence of sufficiently developed policy definitions and frameworks capable of articulating the breadth and complexity of First Nations cultures across areas including kinship, language, governance, spirituality, cultural expression, connection to Country and community authority.

In many policy contexts, the terms “Indigenous” and “cultural” are used interchangeably, limiting the development of more precise frameworks capable of articulating cultural strength, continuity and maintenance as distinct policy domains.

The ways nations measure progress reflect the stories they tell about what matters, what is valued and what futures are being sustained.

**What Australia chooses to measure reflects what Australia chooses to value.**

Despite repeated acknowledgment of the importance of cultural determinants, Australia still lacks a comprehensive national framework for measuring cultural strength, continuity and revitalisation. This is reflected in the Productivity Commission’s Closing the Gap dashboard, which currently identifies limited capacity to assess progress against cultural outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

In-principal recognition without meaningful measurement limits accountability and weakens the capacity for long-term structural reform.

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<sup>4</sup> Productivity Commission, *Closing the Gap Dashboard – Outcome Area 16: Culture and Languages*.

### Recommendations 3, 6 and 9

- Initiate the development of a stand-alone First Nations Cultural Sector Policy that complements and strengthens the broader National Cultural Policy framework.
- Develop a strengths-based national framework for measuring First Nations cultural strength, continuity and cultural outcomes.
- Establish clear whole-of-government accountability, implementation and reporting mechanisms for First Nations cultural outcomes.

## Opportunities for Reform

Despite these challenges, the current review presents a significant opportunity for national leadership. The foundations for reform already exist.

The Productivity Commission's forthcoming review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap also presents an opportunity to examine the absence of coordinated national structures for First Nations cultural governance and representation.

**Revive** itself commits to a whole-of-government approach to cultural policy implementation.<sup>5</sup> The **National Agreement on Closing the Gap** provides a mature framework for shared decision-making, partnership and community-controlled sector development.<sup>6</sup>

The growth and success of First Nations language revitalisation initiatives demonstrate the effectiveness of coordinated policy partnerships and First Nations-led governance structures.

The **First Nations Languages Policy Partnership** provides an important example of what can be achieved when governments commit to sustained collaboration, shared accountability and national coordination.

The next phase of cultural reform can build upon these foundations through stronger partnership structures, coordinated implementation and sustained First Nations-led governance.

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<sup>5</sup> Australian Government, *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Coalition of Peaks and Australian Governments, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, 2020.

Delivering the full scope of a stand-alone First Nations Cultural Sector Policy requires coordinated leadership across Arts, Indigenous Australians, Health, Treasury, Environment and other relevant portfolios.

There is a significant opportunity to:

- align cultural policy more closely with Closing the Gap reform architecture;
- strengthen First Nations-led cultural governance structures;
- establish clearer implementation and accountability mechanisms; and
- recognise culture as foundational national infrastructure connected to health, wellbeing, education, prevention and social cohesion.

International and domestic evidence increasingly demonstrates that where First Nations peoples exercise greater cultural authority, language continuity and community control, outcomes improve across wellbeing, education, justice and social cohesion indicators.<sup>7</sup>

First Nations-led cultural organisations, arts centres, language centres, media organisations and cultural programs are already contributing to community strength, intergenerational knowledge transmission and local economic development.

The next National Cultural Policy can recognise and support this work through stronger investment, partnership and long-term implementation structures.

**Recommendations 4, 7 and 9**

- Establish a nationally coordinated process to support the creation of a peak body for the First Nations arts and cultural sector.
- Align the next National Cultural Policy with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reforms.
- Establish clear whole-of-government accountability, implementation and reporting mechanisms for First Nations cultural outcomes.

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<sup>7</sup> National Close the Gap Alliance Group, *Strong Culture, Strong Youth: Our Legacy, Our Future – Close the Gap Campaign Report 2023* (Melbourne: Karabena Publishing, 2023).

## Question 2. Why the Five Pillars Matter

### **Pillar 1 – First Nations First**

First Nations First is the foundational pillar of the National Cultural Policy framework.

Its recognition that First Nations stories and cultures occupy a central place within Australia's cultural life is both important and necessary. However, the aspirations articulated within Pillar 1 are not yet matched by equivalent structural reform.

The next phase of cultural policy reform involves strengthening the governance, accountability and implementation arrangements that support long-term cultural strength.

This includes recognising that culture is not limited to artistic expression. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culture encompasses language, law, spirituality, knowledge systems, connection to Country, ceremony, kinship and collective identity.

Cultural continuity is also inseparable from the protection of Country, sacred sites and culturally significant places. Recognising the interconnected relationship between cultural maintenance, environmental stewardship and the protection of places of cultural significance, is critical to the makeup of the next National Cultural Policy.

The **2023 *Close the Gap Campaign Report*** highlighted the importance of cultural determinants of health, noting that stronger connections to culture and Country contribute to improved wellbeing, resilience and long-term social outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

The report further 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;

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<sup>8</sup> National Close the Gap Alliance Group, *Strong Culture, Strong Youth: Our Legacy, Our Future – Close the Gap Campaign Report 2023* (Melbourne: Karabena Publishing, 2023).

- improves access to cultural resources and opportunities;
- includes cultural knowledge holders in decision-making; and
- establishes monitoring and evaluation frameworks.<sup>7</sup>

These recommendations are particularly significant because they emerge from a broad coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations, health bodies and community-controlled sectors that increasingly recognise culture as foundational to social outcomes, wellbeing and community strength.

These recommendations form a foundational part of the next phase of national cultural policy reform.

A strong national cultural framework more explicitly recognises Australia's obligations under the ***United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*** (UNDRIP), particularly Articles 8, 11, 12, 15, 33 and 34, which relate to cultural integrity, protection against forced assimilation, cultural revitalisation, spiritual traditions and the right of Indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their institutions and cultural systems.

First Nations First reflects a holistic understanding of culture that extends beyond mainstream institutions and agencies and recognises the central role of community-controlled cultural infrastructure in sustaining living cultures, languages, knowledge systems and intergenerational continuity, including:

- arts centres;
- language centres;
- media organisations;
- cultural centres;
- archives; and
- on-Country cultural maintenance initiatives.

These institutions play a critical role in sustaining cultural continuity, exercising cultural authority and supporting intergenerational knowledge transmission.

The next phase of cultural policy reform also includes stronger recognition of cultural authority, including the role of Elders, cultural knowledge holders, language custodians and community-controlled organisations as holders of authority in relation to cultural maintenance, transmission and protection.

Long-term cultural continuity depends not only on investment in cultural production, alongside strengthening the systems, relationships and governance structures through which cultural authority is exercised and passed between generations.

#### **Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8**

- Develop a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Action Plan for Australia.
- Embed the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the Action Plan.
- Initiate the development of a stand-alone First Nations Cultural Sector Policy.
- Embed First Nations cultural authority within national cultural policy design, governance and implementation processes.
- Strengthen long-term investment in community-controlled cultural infrastructure.

### **Intersections Between First Nations First and the Remaining Pillars**

While this submission focuses primarily on Pillar 1, the structural issues identified above have implications across the broader National Cultural Policy framework.

#### **Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story**

Meaningful inclusion requires more than representation alone. It also requires governance structures that enable First Nations peoples to shape cultural priorities, institutions and decision-making processes.

Truth-telling, cultural authority and self-determination form part of a mature cultural framework grounded in respect, continuity and shared national understanding.

### **Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist**

Sustaining strong First Nations cultural ecosystems requires long-term investment in cultural leadership, workforce development and governance capability.

Sustainable cultural ecosystems require investment not only in artists, but also in producers, curators, language workers, cultural educators, archivists, technicians and community-based cultural practitioners.

The recognised strength of First Nations artistic practice emerges from living cultural systems, intergenerational knowledge transmission and connection to Country.

#### **Recommendations 5 and 6**

- Embed First Nations cultural authority within national cultural policy design, governance and implementation processes.
- Develop a strengths-based national framework for measuring First Nations cultural strength, continuity and cultural outcomes.

### **Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

In addition to galleries, museums and performance venues, Australia’s cultural infrastructure includes community-controlled language centres, arts centres, cultural organisations, archives and media institutions that sustain cultural continuity at local and regional levels.

These institutions form essential national infrastructure, requiring a more strategic and coordinated approach to policy design, implementation and long-term investment.

These community-controlled cultural institutions also contribute to prevention, resilience and long-term wellbeing outcomes through culturally grounded forms of connection, participation, identity and continuity.

#### **Recommendations 7 and 8**

- Align the next National Cultural Policy with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reforms.
- Strengthen long-term investment in community-controlled cultural infrastructure.

## **Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience**

Audience engagement extends beyond consumption and market reach and includes strengthening public understanding, truth-telling, cultural literacy and shared national identity.

First Nations storytelling, language revitalisation and cultural continuity contribute to a deeper and more mature understanding of Australia's history, identity and future.

Strong investment in First Nations cultural expression and community-led storytelling strengthens Australia's democratic, cultural and social fabric as a whole.

### Case Study: Aboriginal Media, Cultural Authority and Community Safety During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the critical role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations as trusted cultural infrastructure capable of supporting community safety, public health communication and rapid localised response.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the pandemic, Aboriginal media organisations including National Indigenous Television (NITV), the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), community radio networks, regional language broadcasters and Indigenous print outlets played a central role in communicating culturally relevant public health information to communities across urban, regional and remote Australia.<sup>10</sup>

Importantly, these responses extended far beyond mainstream information delivery. Aboriginal media organisations translated public health messaging into local languages, addressed misinformation and vaccine hesitancy, amplified community leadership and communicated in culturally grounded ways that reflected local realities, relationships and trust structures.

A critical point of difference was cultural authority.

Campaigns across the country drew upon respected local Elders, artists, language speakers, Aboriginal health workers, broadcasters, sportspeople and community leaders to deliver messaging in ways that were locally trusted and culturally legitimate. In many communities, information was received not simply because it came from government, but because it came through people and institutions with established cultural authority and longstanding relationships within community.

This community-led approach contributed to one of the most successful public health responses globally during the early stages of the pandemic. During the first year of COVID-19, infection rates among non-Indigenous Australians were reported to be almost six times higher than those among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>11</sup>

Evaluations of the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health sector's COVID-19 response later concluded that early community-controlled responses "saved the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" through rapid leadership, trusted communication and culturally informed local action.<sup>12</sup>

At a time when many remote communities faced heightened vulnerability, Aboriginal media organisations acted as essential community infrastructure – supporting social cohesion, cultural continuity and collective wellbeing.

The experience of the pandemic reinforced a broader policy lesson: investment in First Nations cultural and media infrastructure is not solely an arts or communications issue. It forms part of the nation's broader social, cultural and community resilience infrastructure

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *The First Year of COVID-19 in Australia: Direct and Indirect Health Effects* (Canberra: AIHW, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> National Indigenous Television (NITV); Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA); and First Nations Media Australia, examples of community-led COVID-19 communications and language broadcasting initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>11</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations have been central to Australia's successful COVID-19 response," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 11, no. 1309 (2024). [Humanities and Social Sciences Communications article](#)

### **Question 3. What Should Be Reflected in the Next National Cultural Policy**

The next National Cultural Policy provides an opportunity to deepen the transition from symbolic inclusion toward long-term structural and cultural reform.

Long-term cultural continuity requires a strong national cultural framework that recognises culture as foundational to identity, wellbeing, belonging, resilience and national continuity.

The following areas represent key structural and policy priorities for the next phase of national cultural reform.

- **A Rights-Based Framework for First Nations Culture**

A strong national cultural framework recognises and operationalises Australia's obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly in relation to cultural rights, cultural integrity and self-determination.

- **A Commitment to a Stand-Alone First Nations Cultural Sector Policy**

A dedicated First Nations Cultural Sector Policy complements and strengthens the broader National Cultural Policy framework. This should be developed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

- **Support for a Peak Body for the First Nations Arts and Cultural Sector**

A nationally recognised peak body representing the First Nations arts and cultural sector strengthens national coordination, policy participation and sector leadership.

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<sup>12</sup> Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector, *Evaluation of the Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Sector's COVID-19 Response Activities* (Canberra: NACCHO, 2023). [NACCHO COVID-19 Evaluation Report](#)

- **Whole-of-Government Accountability**

The whole-of-government commitments articulated in *Revive* are strengthened through clear implementation mechanisms, accountability structures and cross-portfolio coordination.

Culture intersects with health, education, wellbeing, heritage, climate, tourism, language and justice policy, reflecting the interconnected nature of cultural policy across broader public policy systems.

In the absence of coordinated cultural policy architecture, culture continues to fall between portfolios, funding streams and institutional responsibilities.

- **Recognition of Culture as Foundational Infrastructure**

A strong national cultural framework recognises culture as foundational infrastructure connected to:

- wellbeing;
- identity;
- prevention;
- healing;
- resilience;
- language continuity;
- and social cohesion.

Greater investment in cultural continuity, language revitalisation and community-controlled cultural infrastructure also strengthens preventative and early intervention approaches across broader public policy systems.

- **Strengths-Based Cultural Measurement**

More robust approaches to measuring cultural strength and cultural outcomes strengthen national understanding of cultural continuity, participation, revitalisation and resilience.

Nationally coordinated, strengths-based indicators provide an important mechanism for assessing long-term cultural outcomes.

- **Investment in Community-Controlled Cultural Infrastructure**

Long-term cultural strength is reinforced through sustained investment in community-controlled cultural organisations and infrastructure, including language centres, arts centres, media organisations, archives and cultural institutions.

- **Long-Term Workforce and Leadership Development**

Sustaining cultural continuity requires long-term investment in leadership pathways, governance capability and workforce development across the First Nations cultural sector.

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### **Closing remark**

Cultural policy forms part of the broader national project of truth-telling, self-determination and structural reform. The next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to align Australia's cultural architecture with the values it claims to uphold.

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## **Conclusion**

**Revive** established an important symbolic and narrative foundation. The challenge now is whether Australia is prepared to undertake the unfinished structural reform required to sustain First Nations cultural continuity over the long term.

Over recent years, Australia has increasingly acknowledged the centrality of First Nations cultures to the nation's identity, history and future. However, this recognition has not yet been matched by equivalent governance structures, accountability mechanisms or long-term institutional investment.

The next phase of reform should therefore focus on establishing the structural conditions necessary for First Nations cultures to flourish on their own terms.

This includes supporting self-determination, strengthening cultural governance, investing in community-controlled cultural infrastructure, embedding rights-based approaches and recognising culture as foundational to wellbeing, resilience and national identity.

The case for supporting First Nations cultures does not rest solely on their contribution to broader social outcomes. Culture, language and cultural continuity carry inherent value and form part of the living foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies.

The next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to strengthen institutional, cultural and governance foundations through which the world's oldest continuing cultures remain strong, living and self-determined across generations

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## Appendix

### **About Wes Morris**

Wes Morris is an independent policy advocate and researcher with longstanding experience across First Nations cultural policy, community wellbeing, cultural governance and structural reform.

Between 2006 and 2024, Wes served as Coordinator of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC), working extensively across areas relating to cultural maintenance, community development, language, governance and cultural resilience in the Kimberley region.

His advocacy and policy work has focused particularly on the relationship between culture, identity, governance and social outcomes, including the importance of cultural rights as articulated within the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Wes has also maintained an ongoing engagement with the Australian Centre for Evaluation within Commonwealth Treasury regarding the significant limitations of the *Measuring What Matters* framework in relation to measuring First Nations cultural outcomes.

Over many years, Wes has contributed to public policy discussions relating to:

- First Nations cultural rights and UNDRIP implementation;
- measurement of First Nations cultural outcomes;
- cultural governance and structural reform;
- suicide prevention and cultural resilience;
- multiculturalism and social cohesion;
- community-controlled cultural infrastructure; and
- prevention-focused approaches to wellbeing and social policy.

This work has included:

- submissions to parliamentary inquiries and national policy consultations;
- engagement with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples' Rights;
- advocacy relating to the establishment of a stand-alone First Nations Cultural Policy;
- advocacy for a national peak body for the First Nations arts and cultural sector; and
- contributions to discussions regarding prevention, wellbeing and cultural determinants within broader public policy systems.