

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous

Individual

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

As a professional practicing visual artist, I am writing from the perspective of someone who has spent years navigating the realities of sustaining a creative practice within Australia's cultural sector. While the arts are regularly recognised for their social, cultural and economic value, the day-to-day conditions under which artists work remain financially precarious, administratively burdensome and structurally undervalued.

One of the greatest challenges facing artists today is the instability of income. Most artists work across multiple roles simultaneously to sustain their practice, balancing art making with administration, grant writing, marketing, social media, installation, freight coordination, budgeting, advocacy and community engagement. Much of this labour is unpaid, despite being essential to maintaining a professional practice. In regional contexts especially, artists are also expected to remain constantly available: travelling long distances, maintaining networks, advocating for the sector and contributing to community life without additional support or compensation.

There is also increasing pressure to accept unpaid or underpaid work simply to remain visible and connected within the industry. Volunteering and goodwill are too often filling the gaps left by underfunded arts infrastructure. Consultation, relationship-building, mentoring and cultural labour are routinely expected but rarely recognised financially, despite being critical to the success of projects and organisations.

Taxation and welfare systems are poorly suited to the realities of artistic income. Grants, prizes and project payments can create disproportionate tax burdens or affect welfare and HECS/HELP obligations, even when artists experience long periods of low or inconsistent earnings. Many artists also find taxation and compliance systems intimidating and inaccessible, relying on informal peer advice rather than clear public guidance.

I would like to see the new National Cultural Policy recognise that artists are workers and that creative labour deserves the same protections as other professions. This includes mandatory minimum artist fees aligned with the NAVA Code of Practice, superannuation paid on top of artist fees, and stronger enforcement of workplace rights and entitlements across publicly funded activity. Consultation, administration and cultural engagement should also be formally recognised as labour within funding and contracting structures.

Finally, I believe the policy must strongly protect freedom of expression. Artists are increasingly navigating online harassment, reputational attacks and pressure to self-censor politically or socially challenging work. This disproportionately affects artists from marginalised communities. A healthy cultural sector depends on artists being able to contribute to public debate, critique and cultural dialogue without fear. Stronger protections for artistic freedom, clearer institutional support and access to legal, communications and wellbeing resources are essential.

A sustainable cultural sector requires more than celebration of the arts in principle. It requires structural reform that properly values artistic labour, protects creative freedom and enables artists to build viable, long-term practices.