

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

My name's Josh Hallaran and I'm an independent game developer in NSW with 15 years experience and 10 commercial games under my belt - all self-funded and Australian-owned IP. My 8-Bit Adventures series has sold over 50k copies and achieved global critical praise. I also help run a local game development group, and advocate for NSW developers via the State of Play board.

Games are one of the artforms that Australians (of all ages) engage with the most – 4 out of 5 people play digital games regularly. Furthermore, Australian games generated \$600 million in domestic sales last year. That's 65% of film and television's sales, yet games receive only 3% of the government funding that film and video production get.

The federal government funds the majority of other screen content but leaves the bulk of games funding to be handled by the states. This has been disastrous in NSW, where a lack of support has required 90% of independent games to be self-funded (like mine).

Consequently, 73% of developers have considered leaving NSW for better opportunities – as found by State of Play NSW's survey. The Digital Tax Offset was also found to be used by less than 1% of respondents - many developers weren't even eligible.

That's because the majority of games are made by very small studios with minimal funds. And because these games are so expensive to create, many developers (contractors in particular) often accept minimal payments or work pro bono to get these projects made.

I've only achieved what I have by living with my parents and pouring all the money I've earned into game development – working tens of thousands of unpaid hours to find success. My work is highly rated, and I've found a dedicated commercial audience, but I could've achieved this much faster with proper funding (and with much less struggle).

Decision-makers from other sectors don't understand the game development landscape, which usually leads to games programmes being underfunded or misallocated. Funding, strategy, and policy decisions should be made in part *by* game developers, not for them.

Indie games are a small investment which can create huge returns. There is unrealised potential for paid hours through grants and funds, which in turn would lead to healthier production and much higher potential for studio growth. Government funding can help small developers get off the ground, find self-sufficiency, and create more jobs.

Games are also culturally significant. They let audiences interactively experience Australian-made stories, while uniting multiple artistic disciplines. As a writer, games let me bring stories and characters with my uniquely Australian voice to a global audience.

Recommendations:

- The federal government should increase games funding to at least 10% of what film and television production receives nationally – or at least \$20 million per year. Game developers will do great things with the proper support.
- Boards responsible for games funding and policy must appoint at least some members with industry experience.
- Establish a dedicated national games agency led by people with industry experience to manage games programmes and funding, champion Australian games globally, and act as a bridge between creators and state bodies.

- Expand local content requirements for broadcasters/streamers to also cover game storefronts, to boost investment in Australian game development.