

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I am a screen and cultural researcher, public commentator and Senior Lecturer in Creative Industries at QUT, where my work focuses on cinema, audiences, public culture and the community value of screen experiences. I am also a Chief Investigator in QUT's Tier 1 Digital Media Research Centre. My submission asks that the new National Cultural Policy recognise cinema exhibition as cultural infrastructure, particularly under the pillars of Strong Cultural Infrastructure and Engaging the Audience.

The problem is that cinema is still too often treated as discretionary entertainment or a commercial retail business. That framing misses its social, cultural and civic value. When local cinemas disappear, communities do not simply lose an entertainment venue. They lose accessible gathering places, low-barrier cultural participation, shared storytelling, intergenerational connection and local cultural identity.

Cinema has a distinctive role because it is scalable, accessible and place-based. Film remains one of, if not the most, popular cultural forms in Australia. It is affordable, familiar and does not require high cultural capital to participate. Local cinemas, independent cinemas and outdoor cinemas bring people together across age, class, cultural and political differences. They create shared experiences that can lead to conversation, empathy and belonging. Cinema should not be overclaimed as a cure for loneliness, mental ill-health or social division. But it clearly undergirds the social conditions in which connection, curiosity and participation become possible more regularly and more effectively for Australians than any other shared cultural activity.

I recommend that the National Cultural Policy:

Recognise cinema exhibition, including independent, regional, local and outdoor cinema, as cultural infrastructure rather than solely as commercial sites.

Include cinemas in audience development, cultural participation and community wellbeing settings, especially where they support young people, older Australians, multicultural communities and regional communities.

Fund pilot programs linking cinemas with councils, schools, community organisations and social-prescribing and wellbeing initiatives, with appropriate evaluation so that cultural, social and public value can be measured.

My recent public research has argued that Australian cinemagoing is not only about content consumption, but about reprieve, reward, memory, place and collective experience, including in Australia's remarkable outdoor cinema culture. This submission also reflects the significant conceptualising and industry leadership of Independent Cinema Australia CEO Nick Hayes, and Kate Separovich's important Australian Film in Cinema work. A future-facing cultural policy should treat cinemas as part of the civic and cultural fabric of Australian life: places where Australians not only watch stories, but encounter one another through them.