

**National Cultural Policy Submission**

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Public and anonymous



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

The forthcoming National Cultural Policy must respond clearly to the conditions currently affecting artists, arts workers and cultural organisations. Across the sector, there is growing concern about censorship, political interference, racism and the narrowing of public debate. A strong cultural policy should protect the independence of the arts, uphold freedom of expression, and ensure that all communities are treated through a consistent anti-racist and anti-discrimination framework.

The policy should be grounded in decolonisation, First Nations leadership, anti-racism and anti-discrimination. These principles must not be symbolic. They should shape funding, governance, institutional practice, public programming and sector accountability. Cultural policy should support institutions to engage with difficult histories and contemporary injustices, while ensuring that no artist or community is treated as more or less deserving of protection than another.

It is important that anti-racism is approached through universal human rights principles, not through exceptional frameworks that privilege one cultural, religious or ethnic group over others. The National Cultural Policy should affirm that all people are entitled to dignity, safety, freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination.

Artists are central to the cultural life of Australia. They often carry the ethical, imaginative and critical work of the sector, including by speaking to social injustice, colonial histories, war, racism, class, gender, power and displacement. Artists must be able to sign open letters, participate in advocacy, engage in boycott actions, and contribute to public debate without fear that their livelihoods, reputations or future opportunities will be damaged. Cultural institutions should support artists through complex public conversations rather than distancing themselves when controversy arises. Valuing creativity and artistic production opposed to outcomes through institutions, would be a significant evolution in the arts.

Freedom of artistic expression is essential to strong cultural infrastructure. Art must be able to challenge power, question dominant narratives, and create space for public dialogue. A cultural sector shaped by fear, cancellation or reputational risk cannot be genuinely innovative or democratic. The National Cultural Policy should therefore include clear protections against censorship and intimidation, particularly where artists are targeted for speaking about human rights, conflict, colonialism or state violence.

The arts must also remain independent from political interference. Funding decisions should be made through transparent, arms-length processes, guided by artistic merit, cultural value, community impact and peer assessment, not political pressure or lobbying. Politicians, donors, lobbyists and board members should not be able to influence the approval, withdrawal or suppression of funding, programs or artists.

A key action of the National Cultural Policy should be an independent inquiry into censorship and political interference in the arts, including the influence of donations, lobbying, board appointments and government pressure. The policy must protect artistic freedom, strengthen institutional courage, and ensure that Australia's cultural sector remains open, independent, critical and genuinely inclusive.