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Central Coast Council National Cultural Policy Response

The Central Coast NSW is a large and geographically dispersed region spanning approximately 1,681 km², located between Sydney and Newcastle within a key growth corridor. Its coastal, hinterland and semi-rural landscape create physically separated communities, impacting connectivity, access to services, and participation in cultural life. With a population of 346,596 in 2021, the region is the third-largest urban area in New South Wales and continues to grow (5.8% from 2016–2021), driven by migration, housing development, and families relocating from metropolitan areas.

The First Nations population has grown by approximately 37% since 2016 and now represents 4.9% of residents—above state and national averages. Cultural diversity is also increasing, with 7.1% of residents speaking a language other than English at home.

The region has a network of council-owned and council-supported facilities, including galleries, performing arts venues, libraries, and other alternative community spaces. The facilities are central to cultural participation, creative production, and community wellbeing. Additionally, the region has a substantial proportion of independent creatives, including the delivery of programs which are imbedded in deep community-based cultural practice. While the region benefits from committed artists, cultural workers and community organisations, it faces structural challenges including limited infrastructure, fragmented sector coordination, geographic dispersion and the absence of a dedicated advocacy body – regional arts representation.

Council see's *Revive* as an opportunity to create a place-based and inclusive cultural ecosystem, specifically where contemporary, historical, and emerging viewpoints can be shared. In a region such as the Central Coast cultural activities play a vital role in wellbeing, social cohesion, equitable access, while also defining its own, though diverse identity. The significant demographic diversity requires a stronger focus across state and federal government levels to support equitable investment across all pillars, inclusive of First Nations leadership, sustainable and standardised employment pathways for creatives, relevant advocacy and opportunities to address cross-sectoral policies and frameworks, including representation of community cultural expression, which focuses beyond major institutions.

Cultural Participation and Wellbeing

In urban and regional communities, such as the Central Coast, cultural participation is foundational to community wellbeing.

This form of engagement and participation:

- Supports mental health and social connection, particularly in areas experiencing disadvantage or isolation
- Creates shared spaces for storytelling, belonging and intergenerational exchange



- Improves access to creative expression for people who may not engage with metropolitan cultural institutions

Council-led and supported cultural spaces – such as art galleries, theatres, libraries, community centres, heritage sites and public programs are often primary access point to arts and culture for residents.

In order of being recognised we recommend local governments in regional areas to be acknowledged and supported through dedicated state funding streams to be acknowledged as frontline cultural delivery partners, not merely an infrastructure provider.

Role of Cultural Facilities

Council operates and supports a range of cultural facilities that serve as accessible and essential civic infrastructure. These facilities:

- Provide inclusive low-barrier access to culture, learning and engagement
- Enable multidisciplinary community storytelling and cultural exchange
- Support and host a range of grassroots and professional activities.
- Provide an essential platform towards building one's professional practice and pathways in a risk-free environment.

However, demand for space and programs exceed capacity needs, creating operational constraints. Without increased financial investment in activation, staffing and programming, facilities risk being underutilised as presentation venues rather than places for creation, learning, experimentation, professional development and community connection.

First Nations First: Local Leadership and Storytelling

Culturally and place-based storytelling is fundamental to First Nations identity. The Central Coast is located on Darkinjung Country with deep First Nations cultural knowledge, yet First Nations cultural practice remains under-resourced and under-represented in formal funding structures. Local First Nations creative practitioners support cultural connectedness, community wellbeing and shared understanding.

First Nations communities' recommendations include:

Prioritise long-term investment

- Allocate sustained, long-term funding commitments to enable continuity of engagement to support programming and identified arts and culture roles.

Embed robust governance frameworks

- Prioritise and strengthen governance structures that support transparent, consistent and accountable engagement with First Nations communities, which



Enable self-determination

- Empower community-led decision-making processes that prioritise First Nations voices, leadership and cultural authority to support creation, transmission and presentation outcomes.

Strengthen Cultural Protections

- Provide national guidance and resourcing to ensure consistent application of cultural protocols and IP protections within local government departments and facilities

Creative Industries and Regional Coordination

The Central Coast has a strong base of independent artists across diverse disciplines and levels of experience; however, the region lacks a dedicated regional arts body. This structural gap limits coordination, advocacy, and professional development. Improved regional coordination would strengthen creative career pathways, peer networks and cross-sector collaboration, assisting with arts and culture advocacy, alongside sustainable and local employment. Instead, this gap creates fragmentation across Council, small arts and culture organisations (who receive minimal state and/or federal funding) and individual practitioners, reducing the region's capacity to deliver consistent and long-term programming.

Access, Inclusion and Equity

Geographically spread, transport barriers and economic diversity create inconsistencies in access to cultural opportunities. Local government is often the most direct avenue when delivering inclusive cultural programs. *Revive* implementation should prioritise place-based delivery, enabling councils to support grassroots and site-specific cultural activities across multiple locations and communities. Additionally, from an equity perspective, issues with limited and unsustainable income streams across the sector, including a focus on fair working conditions (industrial recognition) for artists must be a priority, otherwise income insecurity, high cost of living, underpayment, inconsistent levels of employment will continue.

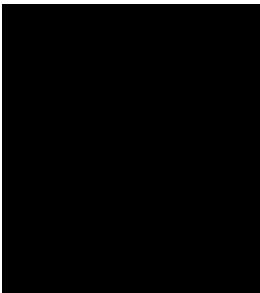
Conclusion

The Central Coast is rich in creativity and cultural knowledge, yet constrained by gaps in coordination, infrastructure and sustainable funding. For *Revive* to succeed in regional Australia, it must recognise the essential role of local governments in the arts and culture sector in fostering wellbeing, connectedness, professional access and storytelling. Additionally, the pressures and expectations placed on regional local governments to support the growing and unique needs of its communities must be viewed and supported where sustainability is paramount. The recommendations provided in relation to the gaps outlined include:

- Long-term and ongoing funding streams dedicate to regional local government areas across cultural and programming infrastructure
- Establish a dedicated state funded regional arts body to underpin equitable access, sector sustainability and regional and localised arts advocacy
- Prioritise and allocate long term investment to support First Nations governance, cultural protections and self-determination in programming and cultural infrastructure

- Dedicate funding streams to support regional cultural workforce pathways
- Adjustments to national funding and cross-sectoral policy frameworks to enhance and reflect regional delivery

Yours faithfully



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Arts and Culture