



ATHÉSIA MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

ENTERTAINMENT WITH CONSCIOUSNESS MEANING AND PURPOSE

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Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place

I am a multilingual independent creative professional, singer-songwriter, broadcaster, MC, moderator, actor and writer whose work moves between music, media, storytelling and cultural engagement. I have worked across live performance, broadcasting, cultural events and cross-cultural creative development projects in Australia and internationally, including work with ABC Jazz.

My practice is grounded in storytelling, music and community-focused cultural engagement, with a strong focus on diversity, intercultural understanding, social cohesion and creating spaces where underrepresented voices can be seen, heard and valued.

Because my work moves across multiple creative disciplines and industries, I remain closely engaged with the evolving realities, opportunities and challenges affecting artists, freelancers and cultural practitioners across the broader creative sector. This interdisciplinary experience has given me insight into the interconnected issues affecting many areas of Australia's creative industries and is why I feel greatly concerned with the long-term sustainability, equity and future direction of the arts and cultural industries.

As a migrant artist and member of a culturally and linguistically diverse community, I am deeply grateful for the opportunities Australia has provided me to live, create and contribute culturally. Having worked and performed internationally, I have witnessed the important role arts and storytelling play in building understanding between people, preserving cultural memory and strengthening connection across communities.

It is from this lived and professional experience that I respectfully contribute the following recommendations and reflections.

I welcome the development of a new National Cultural Policy and strongly support the continuation of the five pillars established under *Revive*. However, for the policy to truly reflect contemporary Australia, it must move beyond symbolic inclusion and address the structural barriers affecting artists, particularly Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CaRM), underrepresented Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD), freelance, independent and community-based creatives.

Previous national cultural policy frameworks did not sufficiently and explicitly recognise the realities, contributions and structural barriers experienced by many Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CaRM), underrepresented Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD), migrant, diaspora, refugee-background and multicultural communities. This review presents an important opportunity to ensure these communities are meaningfully visible within national cultural policy, not only symbolically, but through measurable structural inclusion, representation and long-term investment.

I align with and support key recommendations from Diversity Arts Australia (DARTS), which reflect broader sector-wide calls for equity, anti-racism and structural reform in the cultural sector and believe the following priorities should be embedded into the new National Cultural Policy:

1. Strengthen First Nations self-determination, cultural authority and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protections across national cultural policy.
2. Explicitly name Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CaRM) and underrepresented Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) communities and establish measurable actions to address systemic underrepresentation across the arts and cultural sectors.
3. Develop and properly resource a national, industry-led Anti-Racism and Cultural Equity Strategy aligned with the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Anti-Racism Framework.
4. Establish a dedicated CaRM Creator Fund and protected long-term funding streams for CaRM-led organisations, independent artists and community-led cultural projects.
5. Create a national CaRM Leadership, Workforce and Participation Pathways Strategy across the arts, screen and creative sectors.
6. Protect freedom of artistic and creative expression and establish safe and independent reporting mechanisms for censorship, racism and discrimination.
7. Embed compulsory anti-racism, cultural safety and equity training across publicly funded organisations, alongside accountability measures and equity action plans.
8. Measure and publicly report on diversity across leadership, funding allocation, workforce participation, programming, commissioning, collections and audience engagement.
9. Reform funding, tax and regulatory systems to improve equity and access for CaRM creatives, freelancers, community-led practice and small-to-medium organisations.
10. Regulate AI industries and develop ethical AI guidelines specific to the creative sector to protect artists, cultural and intellectual property rights and ensure equitable participation within emerging technologies.
11. Recognise and resource Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) as an essential sector that strengthens social cohesion, participation, resilience and intercultural understanding, inclusion, representation and long-term investment.

In addition, I believe the following issues require urgent attention:

National Youth Storytelling and Creative Mentorship Initiative

One valuable national initiative could be the creation of a nationwide youth storytelling and creative mentorship program involving schools across Australia.

Students would be invited to develop original stories inspired by their lives, communities, cultures, dreams and personal experiences through writing, music, film, podcasting, illustration or other creative forms. Each state and territory could select finalists through a national competition

process, culminating in a national gathering bringing selected young creators together for mentorship, training and collaborative creative development.

Industry professionals from diverse creative sectors, including writers, musicians, filmmakers, broadcasters, actors, neurodivergent creatives, First Nations and multicultural practitioners, could mentor participants and assist them in bringing their stories to life through professional creative production pathways.

The creative process itself could also be documented through television, radio, podcasting and digital platforms in partnership with national broadcasters such as ABC and SBS. This would not only support the participating youth, but also help audiences better understand the creative process and strengthen engagement with Australian storytelling and public broadcasting.

Continued long-term investment in public broadcasters such as ABC and SBS is also essential to ensuring Australian stories, diverse voices and culturally significant content remain visible, accessible and locally produced in an increasingly globalised media environment.

Completed works could then be showcased nationally and submitted to existing creative awards and festivals across multiple categories including short film, podcasting, writing and youth media.

This initiative would strengthen literacy, creativity, confidence, cultural understanding and youth participation while creating a long-term archive of contemporary Australian stories and experiences. Annual themes could encourage exploration of identity, community, environment, resilience, belonging and social connection.

At a time when governments are increasingly responding to concerns around the impacts of excessive social media use on young people, initiatives connected to national broadcasters and school-based creative participation could also help strengthen healthier forms of cultural engagement, creativity, media literacy and community connection for younger generations.

Programs encouraging young people to engage with storytelling, public broadcasting, collaborative creativity and real-world cultural participation may provide meaningful alternatives to algorithm-driven digital environments while strengthening engagement with Australian cultural institutions.

Children and young people are the future custodians of Australia's cultural identity. Investing in their creative voices helps strengthen national unity, intercultural understanding and long-term audience engagement with Australian arts and culture.

Creative development should be valued as an essential part of youth development and nation-building in the same way Australia invests in sporting pathways and talent development. Young people already consume large amounts of cultural content through digital and globalised media environments, yet many lack structured opportunities to develop, share and take ownership of their own stories and creative voices. Embedding storytelling and artistic mentorship within educational and public cultural frameworks would help strengthen creative confidence, cultural literacy and critical thinking while ensuring Australian stories continue to be created locally rather than being shaped primarily by global algorithms and transnational digital platforms.

Creative Hubs and “Café des Artistes” Initiatives

Another valuable initiative could be the creation of permanent “Café des Artistes” creative hubs, affordable cooperative-style cultural cafés and gathering spaces designed to support artists, creative entrepreneurs and community connection.

Rising commercial rents and living costs make it increasingly difficult for artists to gather, collaborate and create informal cultural ecosystems. A cooperative-style artist café model could provide affordable meeting and working spaces while also supporting:

- small performances, readings and exhibitions
- intergenerational exchange
- multicultural dialogue and cultural participation
- creative collaboration and networking
- community-led programming and workshops
- opportunities for local businesses, schools and artists to connect.

Many European cities successfully support artist cafés, cooperative cultural spaces and creative community hubs because they recognise that culture grows through accessible human connection and informal creative exchange.

Such hubs could become nationally recognised gathering places where artists travelling across Australia know they can connect with local creative communities, fostering both national cultural networks and cultural tourism.

Governments could also explore incentive models encouraging the temporary or long-term activation of vacant commercial buildings and underused spaces for artistic and cultural purposes. Rather than allowing properties to remain empty for extended periods, tax incentives could support building owners who provide affordable access to artists, creative organisations and community-led cultural initiatives, while vacancy levies could discourage long-term empty spaces in high-demand urban areas.

This type of cross-sector collaboration between arts, planning, housing and economic development sectors could help strengthen creative infrastructure, revitalise communities and support long-term cultural sustainability.

This approach could also align with emerging conversations around Creative Lands Trust models and the long-term protection of publicly accessible cultural spaces within growing urban developments. As Australian cities continue to evolve, it is important that cultural infrastructure, creative gathering spaces and community-led artistic hubs are recognised as essential components of healthy, socially connected communities rather than optional additions to urban planning.

Australia has an opportunity to become a global leader in developing accessible, community-driven creative hubs that strengthen both social cohesion and cultural participation.

Housing security and recognition of artists as essential cultural workers

Many artists and arts workers face housing insecurity, rising living costs and unstable incomes despite contributing significantly to Australia’s cultural, social and economic life.

Creatives contribute significantly to social wellbeing, community identity and the local economy. During difficult periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic, people relied heavily on music, films, books and the arts for emotional support, connection and hope. Artists are essential contributors to society, yet many live below or close to the poverty line despite dedicating their lives to creating cultural value.

Supporting artists should not only mean funding events and programs, but also protecting the conditions that allow artists to remain part of the communities they enrich. Governments at all levels should expand affordable artist housing initiatives, advocate for long-term affordable housing models, explore artist housing cooperatives and mixed-use creative living spaces, protect existing creative spaces from overdevelopment and invest in affordable shared studios and rehearsal spaces.

This could be supported through the following actions:

- Expanding dedicated affordable housing pathways for artists and cultural workers within existing and new housing developments
- Embedding artist housing and creative live/work spaces into state and local planning policies
- Supporting cooperative housing models and community-led creative housing initiatives
- Protecting existing creative and rehearsal spaces from rezoning, redevelopment or displacement
- Providing long-term affordable leases or subsidised access to studio and performance spaces
- Recognising artists and cultural workers within broader “essential worker” and community wellbeing housing strategies

Governments could also work in partnership with housing authorities, tenancy bodies and Rental Commissioners to explore stronger protections and more sustainable housing frameworks supporting artists, cultural workers and low-to-middle income creatives.

Australia may also draw inspiration from international models where governments play a more active role in regulating affordability, mediating tenancy disputes and supporting long-term housing stability. Countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden and Canada have developed systems that provide clearer rental protections, mediation services and fairer housing oversight mechanisms that help strengthen community stability and reduce housing insecurity.

Exploring similar approaches in Australia, alongside affordable creative housing initiatives, cooperative living models and incentives supporting the use of underutilised spaces for cultural purposes, could help sustain diverse artistic communities while benefiting broader social cohesion, wellbeing and cultural participation across society.

Stronger partnerships between artists, schools, local businesses and community organisations should also be encouraged to strengthen cultural participation and community connection. Supporting grassroots and community-led creative initiatives is equally important to ensuring a diverse and accessible cultural ecosystem.

Retaining artists within communities helps preserve cultural vibrancy, diversity and social cohesion while ensuring creativity remains accessible to people of all generations and income levels.

Without affordable housing and accessible creative spaces, Australia risks losing diverse voices, grassroots cultural activity and future generations of artists.

Funding, taxation reform and economic equity

Current funding and taxation systems do not adequately reflect the financial realities of independent artists and freelancers.

Many artists receiving grants are low-income earners using those funds directly for project creation, community engagement and cultural development. However, grant income is often heavily taxed despite being reinvested into artistic practice and public cultural outcomes. This creates financial hardship and discourages long-term sustainability within the sector.

A more equitable model could include:

- tax exemptions or reduced taxation thresholds for low-income artists and independent creatives receiving grants
- income averaging systems adapted to the irregular nature of artistic income
- simplified reporting obligations for small grants and community-led projects
- increased taxation responsibilities for large commercial entertainment corporations and major record labels benefiting significantly from Australia's cultural economy
- long-term operational funding for small-to-medium organisations and independent artists rather than short-term project-only models.

These reforms would help create a fairer and more sustainable cultural ecosystem.

Freelance systems, superannuation reform and administrative burden

Recent superannuation obligations for freelance contractors are important in principle; however, the current systems create significant administrative burdens for independent creatives and small organisations.

Project leads are often required to manage superannuation payments for multiple artists across short-term projects, resulting in excessive administrative work, repeated invoicing processes, payment tracking issues, compliance complexity and financial strain on already under-resourced creatives.

These administrative demands disproportionately impact freelancers, small arts organisations and community-led projects, diverting time and resources away from creative production, cultural development and community engagement.

The government should invest in a centralised, user-friendly digital platform specifically designed for the creative sector that streamlines payments, invoicing, contracts, taxation and superannuation contributions for freelancers and small creative organisations. This would reduce administrative barriers, improve compliance efficiency and allow artists and producers to focus more fully on creative and community outcomes.

This reform could include the following actions:

- Developing a dedicated national digital platform for creative industry contracting, invoicing and superannuation management
- Simplifying tax, payment and reporting requirements for small-scale arts projects and freelance creative work
- Integrating superannuation and payroll systems into a single streamlined interface for short-term and multi-artist projects
- Reducing duplicated administrative processes across government-funded and publicly supported arts programs
- Providing templates and standardised digital contract systems tailored specifically to creative sector workflows
- Ensuring accessibility for independent artists, small organisations and regional practitioners

In addition, such a platform could represent a significant opportunity for Australian digital innovation. If developed locally, this type of system could become a “Made in Australia” creative industry infrastructure solution, with potential for adaptation and export to international arts sectors facing similar challenges. This would position Australia not only as a cultural leader, but also as a developer of innovative creative industry technologies.

Fair contracting standards and protections for independent creatives

Independent artists, musicians, broadcasters, performers and freelancers frequently operate without adequate contractual protections despite contributing significant cultural and economic value to the creative industries.

Power imbalances between independent creatives and larger organisations, agencies, venues, councils and event producers can result in unfair contract terms, unpaid labour, late payments, last-minute cancellations and financial insecurity.

Many independent creatives are engaged months in advance for performances or creative services, only to experience cancellations with little or no compensation, delayed payments or contracts that disproportionately protect the commissioning organisation without equivalent protections for the artist or creative worker.

The government should work collaboratively with industry bodies, unions and professional organisations such as MEAA to develop clearer minimum standards and fair contracting frameworks for the creative industries. This could include:

- standardised fair contract templates
- clearer cancellation and deposit protections
- maximum payment timeframes
- minimum fee standards
- improved dispute resolution pathways
- stronger protections against unfair contract terms and exploitative practices.

Industry organisations such as MEAA and NAVA have already undertaken important work developing fair contracting frameworks, codes of practice and advocacy resources supporting

independent creatives. Expanding and embedding these standards more broadly across publicly funded and commercial creative sectors could help establish clearer expectations around deposits, cancellations, payment timelines, intellectual property protections and fair working conditions for freelancers and independent artists.

Improving contractual fairness would help create a safer, more sustainable and more professional creative sector while reducing financial instability for independent artists and freelancers.

Sustainable employment standards in the creative industries

Many workers across the music, broadcasting, screen and media industries continue to experience insecure employment conditions, rolling short-term contracts, underpayment and a lack of minimum industry protections despite contributing to sectors generating significant economic and cultural value.

Recent industrial relations reforms addressing insecure fixed-term contracts represent important progress, however many creative workers and freelancers remain vulnerable to unstable employment arrangements, unpaid work, broken contracts and inconsistent income.

Industry surveys and advocacy led by organisations such as MEAA continue to highlight widespread financial precarity within the music and creative sectors, with many artists earning below sustainable income levels despite years of professional experience and ongoing public demand for cultural content.

The rapid transformation of music consumption through digital streaming platforms has also significantly altered income models for musicians and independent artists. While streaming services provide global visibility and accessibility, many artists receive extremely low financial returns despite substantial public engagement with their work.

Greater transparency around streaming royalties, fairer remuneration models and stronger support for Australian music discoverability are needed to ensure artists can build sustainable careers within the digital economy. Consideration should also be given to policies encouraging fairer revenue distribution for independent creators and stronger promotion of Australian content across digital platforms.

Industrial protections such as Same Job, Same Pay and Closing the Loopholes reforms should continue to be extended and adapted to reflect the realities of creative and media sector employment.

The government should continue working with unions, industry representatives and creative organisations to strengthen minimum standards, improve employment protections, support fair remuneration and establish safer and more sustainable career pathways across the creative industries.

Ethical AI regulation and artist protections

The rapid rise of AI technologies presents significant risks for artists, writers, musicians and screen creatives. Strong legislation and sector-specific guidelines are needed to ensure transparency, consent and fair compensation.

Any creative work produced using generative AI should include mandatory disclosure requirements identifying the use of AI in the creation process. AI systems should not be trained on copyrighted artistic works without informed consent, licensing agreements and fair remuneration mechanisms for original creators whose work contributes to datasets.

Australia should establish an ethical AI framework for the arts sector that protects cultural and intellectual property rights, particularly for First Nations and CaRM communities, while supporting artists to participate fairly in emerging technologies rather than being displaced by them.

The emergence of deepfakes, voice cloning, biometric replication and AI-generated identity manipulation also raises serious ethical, legal and psychological concerns extending beyond the creative industries into broader public safety and community wellbeing.

Artists, actors, voice performers and creatives increasingly face risks associated with the unauthorised replication of their voices, likenesses, performances and identities through AI systems without consent, compensation or legal clarity.

Stronger legislation is needed to protect individuals against unauthorised AI replication, deepfake misuse and digital identity exploitation, including clearer consent requirements, legal accountability mechanisms, reporting pathways and meaningful penalties for serious violations.

These protections are particularly important for children, young people and vulnerable communities who may also be harmed through AI-generated harassment, bullying and identity misuse.

Consideration should also be given to protecting audition materials, self-tapes and voice submissions shared through professional casting and creative platforms to ensure creative work submitted for professional opportunities cannot be repurposed, reproduced or exploited without informed consent.

Mental health, burnout and sustainability in the arts

Independent artists and cultural workers often experience financial precarity, unstable employment, unpaid labour expectations and ongoing emotional exhaustion. The cultural sector cannot remain sustainable if artists are expected to continuously create public value while lacking economic and psychological stability themselves. Policies supporting artist wellbeing, sustainable career pathways and fair remuneration are essential to maintaining a healthy and resilient cultural sector.

Regional access and cultural inclusion

Access to arts funding, infrastructure and opportunities should not be concentrated only within major metropolitan or affluent areas. Regional communities, outer-suburban communities and underrepresented cultural groups should have equitable access to creative infrastructure, funding opportunities and long-term cultural investment.

Supporting community-led cultural initiatives across Australia helps strengthen inclusion, belonging and social connection nationally.

Mandating stronger local content obligations for streaming platforms is also essential to ensuring Australian stories, voices and creative workers remain visible within rapidly changing global media ecosystems.

Why cultural representation matters

Arts and storytelling play a critical role in building empathy, reducing division and strengthening social cohesion.

When people see their stories, cultures and experiences reflected in public cultural life, they feel recognised and included within the national identity. Sharing diverse stories helps communities better understand one another, challenges stereotypes and creates meaningful human connection across cultures and generations.

The arts also play an essential role in preserving languages, cultural memory, ancestral knowledge and intergenerational heritage, particularly within First Nations, migrant and culturally diverse communities.

However, representation alone is not enough. Artists and communities must also have equitable access to funding, visibility, infrastructure, leadership opportunities and long-term support in order for these stories to be sustainably created and shared.

Australia's cultural future depends on protecting artists, valuing cultural diversity, supporting community-led creativity and ensuring that all stories, especially those historically excluded, have the opportunity to thrive.

It is also important to recognise that many independent artists, culturally diverse creatives, neurodivergent practitioners and freelance cultural workers may not always have the time, resources, institutional knowledge or language confidence required to participate fully in policy consultations and advocacy processes, particularly when English is not their first language or when they are balancing multiple forms of precarious work.

This is why organisations such as Diversity Arts Australia (DARTS), community-led cultural organisations and advocacy bodies play such an essential role in supporting representation, accessibility, participation and visibility across Australia's creative sectors.

Music, storytelling and the arts are extraordinary vehicles for culture, memory and human connection. People are not only reached through official speeches or institutions, but through songs heard on the radio, stories seen on screen, books carried through generations and creative works that enter both memory and the heart.

Arts and culture have the power to transcend borders, build empathy and create lasting emotional connections between people and communities.

Entertainment with consciousness, meaning and purpose strengthens communities and human connection. It is through the arts that we build empathy, bridge differences, and create a shared sense of belonging across cultures, generations and lived experiences.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the development of the new National Cultural Policy.

Warmest regards,

Athésia

Athésia Music Entertainment

Living and creating on the unceded lands of the Gadigal, Bidiagal and Birrabirragal peoples