



OFFICE OF THE GENERAL MANAGER

Goulburn Mulwaree Council
Locked Bag 22
Goulburn NSW 2580
[REDACTED]
www.goulburn.nsw.gov.au

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The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Arts
PO Box 6022
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister Bourke

Subject: Submission to the next National Cultural Policy (Revive)

Goulburn Mulwaree Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to consultation on the next national cultural policy.

As a regional local government authority in NSW, Council plays a significant role in supporting visual arts, performing arts, culture, heritage, events and tourism outcomes for our local community and visitors to the region. Through direct investment, facility management, programming, partnerships and advocacy, local government is often the most visible and accessible level of cultural support in regional communities.

Our experience demonstrates that arts and culture are not secondary or discretionary pursuits. They are essential to community identity, wellbeing, economic development, tourism, social cohesion and regional liveability.

While the first iteration of Revive has provided an important national framework and renewed visibility for arts and culture, there remains a significant need to strengthen long-term investment, regional equity and practical support mechanisms that recognise the realities of delivering cultural outcomes outside metropolitan centres.

The Role of Regional Local Government

Regional local government plays a vital role in sustaining Australia's cultural life, particularly in communities where councils are the primary providers of cultural infrastructure, heritage conservation, creative programming and community events. At the same time, councils are increasingly bearing the impacts of cost shifting, with growing expectations to maintain and expand cultural services without corresponding increases in operational funding support.

The next national cultural policy should more clearly recognise the contribution of local government and the financial pressures associated with delivering cultural outcomes at a local level.

Regional councils are increasingly expected to deliver professional cultural infrastructure, contemporary programming, public art, performing arts, festivals, heritage conservation, community engagement and visitor experiences with limited resources and growing community expectations.

In many regional communities, including Goulburn Mulwaree, councils operate:

- Regional galleries and museums, including collections
- Performing arts and exhibition spaces
- Heritage buildings
- Festivals and major events
- Visitor Information Centres, Libraries and more.

Public libraries remain one of the most accessible and heavily utilised forms of cultural infrastructure in regional Australia, playing an important role in literacy, lifelong learning, digital inclusion, community connection and cultural participation.

Local government frequently acts as the connector between artists, community organisations, volunteers, tourism operators, schools, state agencies and funding bodies. Despite this, local government is often overlooked in national cultural policy discussions and funding structures. The next national cultural policy should formally recognise local government as a critical delivery partner in Australia's cultural ecosystem.

Regional Equity and Funding

We note ongoing concerns regarding the distribution of national arts funding and the comparatively limited investment directed toward regional organisations, local government galleries, museums and heritage organisations.

Creative Australia's 2024/25 investment highlights significant disparities across artforms and sectors. While orchestras received 26% of investment, theatre 13%, opera 10%, dance 9% and music 9%, visual arts received 6%, local government galleries received only 0.18%, and museums and heritage organisations reportedly received no direct allocation.

In the Local Government NSW report, Cost Shifting 2023: How State Costs Eat Council Rates, it was found that in just over 5 years cost shifting on to NSW local government rose 78% from \$820 million per year to more than \$1.36 billion per year.

We also note the distribution of National Cultural Policy additional investment in 2024–25, including approximately 31% directed to Music Australia, compared with 2% allocated to the Visual Art, Craft and Design Framework. These figures reinforce the need for greater balance and equity across artforms in future national cultural investment.

Regional communities contribute significantly to Australia's cultural identity, yet funding outcomes often disproportionately favour metropolitan institutions and peri-urban areas with greater population density and infrastructure advantages.

This imbalance creates ongoing challenges including:

- Difficulty attracting and retaining arts professionals
- Limited touring opportunities
- Reduced access to contemporary cultural experiences
- Increased operational pressure on regional organisations
- Reliance on short-term project funding
- Difficulty maintaining aging cultural infrastructure

National policy settings should better recognise the additional costs, workforce challenges and logistical barriers associated with regional delivery.

We strongly support:

- Increased regional arts funding
- Multi-year operational funding opportunities for regional cultural institutions
- Dedicated support streams for local government owned and operated cultural facilities
- Improved support for regional touring and partnerships
- Simplified grant processes for small and medium regional organisations

Regional Council-owned Visual Art Galleries

We support the establishment of a dedicated Visual Arts Board within Creative Australia to ensure stronger advocacy, sector visibility and strategic leadership for the visual arts sector nationally.

There is also a need for greater recognition of the small to medium arts sector, which plays a critical role in supporting career pathways, experimentation, local cultural participation and community wellbeing. Despite its importance, this sector continues to operate with limited operational security and constrained funding opportunities.

As noted in the statistics above, funding of visual arts projects and organisations has been disproportionately underfunded and under-recognised in the federal government framework. This is despite the large impact that the visual arts make on an international, national, state and local level. Regional galleries in particular serve as sites that support artists, create communities, foster education and promote wellbeing in communities. Many regional galleries are long-running institutions that are hubs of cultural life but that require greater funding commitments and certainty from state and federal levels of government.

Regionally-based organisations (across all artforms) received 13% of Creative Australia funding while 36% of Australia's population is regionally-based. Further, in 2025 0.18% of Creative Australia funding went to local government galleries through Creative Australia. This low percentage of funding to regionally-based local government galleries demonstrates a perspective that ongoing funding in the current system is expected to come from local and state government. However, we know from recent outcomes from NSW Government via Create NSW that the amount of organisations that have received multi-year funding has reduced, and of those that have been successful their annual funding has stayed the same or been reduced, falling short of rising operational and program costs.

We strongly support:

- Development of Visual Arts Board in Creative Australia
- Multi-year operational funding for regional visual art galleries from federal level
- Greater recognition of the small to medium arts sector via opportunities for individuals as well as organisational funding
- Simplified grant processes for small and medium regional organisations

Regional Council-owned Museums and Heritage

Regional museums and heritage organisations should also have greater visibility within national cultural policy settings. Museums, collections, memorials and heritage places are essential contributors to cultural identity, education, tourism and intergenerational storytelling, yet often sit outside mainstream arts funding frameworks.

We strongly support the introduction of dedicated funding opportunities for small to medium museums and heritage organisations and projects.

Heritage should continue to form part of Australia's broader cultural policy framework. Regional communities are custodians of significant stories, collections and historic places that contribute to Australia's identity and collective memory.

Federal funding support for heritage conservation is critical to assist local government and regional communities in maintaining and activating significant heritage places and collections. Without sustained investment, many heritage assets face increasing risks associated with aging infrastructure, rising conservation costs and limited local resources. Investment in heritage not only protects important places and stories, but also enables interpretation, storytelling, placemaking, tourism activation and stronger community identity and connection.

The conservation, interpretation and activation of heritage places create social, educational and tourism benefits while strengthening community pride and connection.

Regional Council-owned and operated Performing Arts Centre

We acknowledge the support within the policy framework targeted to support the delivery of regional touring productions and first nations stories. For a regional Council-owned and operated Performing Arts Centre, there are gaps between the policy vision and operational reality.

The Policy outlines improved access to information and resources for creative workers through the establishment of Creative Workplaces which is a benefit to the industry, however the broadness of this initiative fails to address the need for qualified technical professionals to be employed in regional towns by Local Government in order to adequately meet the needs of touring productions. Performing Arts Centres are currently experiencing shortages in:

- Lighting technicians
- Audio operators
- Riggers and Fly operators
- Stage managers
- Venue technicians

The policy does currently recognise skill shortages, however to date there has been little direct implementation that assists regional venues with staffing retention, or operational financial support.

Arguably, arts venues owned and operated by Local Government are Australia's largest regional cultural infrastructure network and the primary access points for live performance outside metropolitan areas. These venues are essential in the introduction of youth to the arts, and education within different art forms and in technical areas, yet the policy supports most favourably flagship institutions, national companies and the artists themselves.

The policy has missed identifying and addressing the needs for a technical workforce strategy for Regional Performing Arts Centres and arts venues. Without adequate staff resources regional centres will be unable to accommodate the needs for touring performances and therefore a large population of regional people will miss the opportunity to experience these works despite the funding being allocated to the artists.

Council-owned and operated Performing Arts Centres often miss out on funding opportunities because they sit in a place between infrastructure and arts delivery. There is now a need, following significant capital investment being made to create these venues, that dedicated operational funding streams for Regional Council-owned and operated Performing Arts Centres are required so that rates payers of regional towns are not being burdened with the responsibility to keep these venues operational.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure and Audience Participation

In regional communities, cultural infrastructure often serves multiple purposes beyond arts presentation alone. Facilities become tourism drawcards, education spaces, community gathering places and key contributors to civic identity.

Our experience in managing and conserving significant heritage and cultural assets has highlighted the importance of long-term investment rather than reactive or ad hoc approaches.

Funding programs should better support:

- Conservation and adaptive reuse of heritage buildings
- Upgrades to regional galleries, museums and performance spaces
- Accessibility improvements
- Collection management and preservation
- Cultural infrastructure planning and asset renewal

Importantly, infrastructure funding should recognise operational sustainability. Capital investment without ongoing operational support can place unsustainable pressure on local government and regional organisations.

Regional audiences are highly engaged when opportunities are accessible, affordable and locally relevant. However, distance, transport limitations and cost-of-living pressures can impact participation.

National policy settings should continue to support:

- Affordable regional touring
- Community-based programming
- Place-based storytelling
- Festivals and events that strengthen local identity
- Cultural participation across all ages and backgrounds
- Partnerships between schools, councils and cultural organisations

Conclusion

Regional communities make a substantial contribution to Australia's cultural life.

Local government remains one of the largest investors in cultural infrastructure, heritage conservation, community events and creative activation across regional Australia, yet often does so with constrained resources and increasing expectations.

The next national cultural policy presents an important opportunity to strengthen regional cultural capacity, improve equity and recognise the essential role local government plays in delivering cultural outcomes. The next national cultural policy should also better recognise the operational realities of regional cultural venues owned and operated by local government. While significant investment has been made in infrastructure and touring outcomes, greater attention is needed to support the workforce capacity and operational sustainability required to deliver these experiences in regional communities.

Goulburn Mulwaree Council strongly supports a future national cultural policy that:

- Recognises local government as a key cultural delivery partner
- Improves regional equity in funding and policy outcomes
- Supports sustainable cultural infrastructure and operations
- Supports the operational sustainability and workforce capacity of regional cultural venues and facilities owned and operated by local government
- Strengthens pathways for regional artists and creatives
- Integrates heritage within broader cultural policy settings
- Invests in audience development and cultural participation across regional Australia

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to consultation, and look forward to a continued national leadership that values arts, performing arts, culture and heritage as essential components of Australia's prosperous future.

Yours faithfully



Scott Gallacher
General Manager



cc The Hon Kristy McBain MP
Minister for Emergency Management, Regional Development, Local Government &
Territories
Member for Eden-Monaro
