

Miriki's submission for the National Cultural Policy

The next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to address a significant gap in Australia's cultural infrastructure: the lack of dedicated investment in First Nations youth performing arts development.

The principles outlined in First Nations audience development strategies emphasise self-determination, community leadership, intergenerational knowledge transfer, authentic engagement, and long-term audience building. For more than a decade, First Nations-led organisations such as Miriki Performing Arts have delivered these outcomes in regional Australia, yet investment has not matched impact.

Through community-led arts programs, school partnerships, cultural workshops, and major productions, we have introduced the performing arts to thousands of First Nations young people and their families across regional and remote Queensland. These programs align directly with the National Cultural Policy pillars of First Nations First, Engaging the Audience, and Centrality of the Artist. However, organisations delivering measurable outcomes continue to operate without sustained arts investment.

Regional organisations also face a visibility challenge. Since 2014, we have produced major annual works and community programs from a Category 3 regional location. One recent production attracted more than 3,000 audience members across a three-night season. For a regional First Nations youth company, these are significant audience outcomes, yet regional success is rarely recognised in national conversations about arts excellence and audience development.

The greatest gap remains First Nations youth arts development. While many non-Indigenous young people can access specialist performing arts training, qualifications, and industry pathways during secondary school, equivalent opportunities for First Nations youth are extremely limited. As a result, many Indigenous artists enter professional training and accreditation almost a decade later than their mainstream counterparts.

For more than a decade, we have delivered accredited-aligned arts training to First Nations young people. Our alumni have progressed into sustainable careers across the arts and other industries. One example is Troy Schrieber, who entered a traineeship with The Australian Ballet Education Unit and has since secured long-term employment. In 2025 alone, we delivered arts programs to more than 900 First Nations students across Far North Queensland, despite receiving no ongoing federal arts investment for this work.

We are now establishing Australia's first fully Indigenous regional Registered Training Organisation delivering Performing Arts Certificates to Indigenous high school students. This initiative responds directly to the need for early career pathways, workforce development, and cultural leadership.

The Australian Government currently invests in national First Nations arts initiatives that primarily support adult artists. We encourage the Government to establish a comparable, dedicated investment stream for First Nations youth arts development. Sustained support for proven regional organisations would strengthen cultural infrastructure, increase participation, create employment pathways, build future audiences, and ensure the next generation of First Nations artists can thrive.