

National Cultural Policy submission

22nd May 2026

Terrapin welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and to highlight the urgent need for settings that better support equitable access to the arts and the sustainability of new Australian work.

Our key recommendations are:

1. Strengthen support for First Nations storytelling.
2. Introduce a producer tax offset to support the development of new Australian performance work.
3. Increase the Creative Australia funding pool for fellowships, projects and organisations.
4. Strengthen soft infrastructure as well as hard infrastructure to reach regional and remote Australia.
5. Reform Playing Australia and other national touring funding to better enable access-driven touring.
6. Make access to Theatre for Young Audiences a universal right for every Australian child as advocated by the National Children's Theatre Alliance.
7. Increase funding for international activity to tell our stories to the world.

Terrapin exists to make lives better, shift realities and create connection. We are Australia's premier contemporary puppetry company, creating world-class performances and public space works for children, families and intergenerational audiences from our home in Hobart. We are touring experts, specialising in reaching regional, non-traditional and isolated audiences. Our schools tour has delivered new Australian work to up to 20,000 Tasmanian students a year since 1981. More broadly, Terrapin reaches up to 134,000 people per year in theatres, festivals, galleries and public spaces in Australia and around the world. In 2025-26, touring locations include Japan, Singapore, USA, Taiwan, UK, Germany and the Eastern states of Australia.

We have addressed each pillar below

- **First Nations First:** Recognises and respects the crucial place of First Nations stories at the very centre of Australian arts and culture, empowering Indigenous communities in truth-telling and self-determination.

Strengthen support for First Nations storytelling.

First Nations storytelling continues to be the single most important pillar of the cultural policy from which all Australian storytelling can gain inspiration from. Terrapin endorses the FNPAC submission on this pillar.

- **A place for every story:** Reflects the breadth of Australia's diversity by ensuring all cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences are represented as contributors to the country's culture.

Introduce a producer offset for the creation of new Australian work.

Terrapin sees an urgent need for a policy that strengthens the creation pipeline for new Australian work. We support the introduction of a producer tax offset for new Australian works of all scales. There is a clear successful model for this in screen industries, and an equivalent mechanism for live performance would stimulate investment and support more sustainable revenue for organisations.

A producer tax offset would encourage risk-taking, unlock private and philanthropic investment, and provide producers with greater capacity to develop ambitious new work. Importantly, it should be accessible across scales – from small independent productions to larger works ensuring that innovation is supported at every level of the sector. This is particularly critical for work created for children and young people, which often faces additional market limitations despite its profound cultural and developmental value.

Such an offset would strengthen the sustainability of the sector while ensuring distinctly Australian stories are being created and shared across the country. When paired with a reformed Playing Australia program, this would create a more cohesive ecosystem where new work can be both developed and meaningfully accessed by diverse audiences.

- **Centrality of the Artist:** Focuses on the artist as a worker, supporting fair wages, safe workplaces, and creative rights while celebrating them as the core creators of culture.

Increase the Creative Australia funding pool for individual artists and organisations.

The trajectory of artists careers is varied and filled with uncertainty. Most of the artistic directors of leading Australian theatre companies began their careers as independent artists seeking funding from national and state funding bodies to develop their unique artistic voice. The freedom to create work unbound by the established practices and output of an existing organisation is essential in creating the leading artistic voices of the future. Therefore, increasing the funding available to individual artists through both fellowships and project funding available through Creative Australia is essential.

Once these artists have an established voice and body of work, a move to a leadership role within an existing organisation may be the next important step, leading to some stability as a mid-career artist. Another path may be formally incorporating a collective into an organisation so they become eligible for organisational funding. However, this latter path is rarely taken and the majority of currently multi-year funded organisations are decades old. A Creative Australia program that supports the formation of new organisations into emerging multi-year funded organisations would fill an important gap in artists careers when more financial stability is needed and increase the artistic vibrancy of the sector.

Increasing the funding available to multi-year organisations to fund multi-year programs that support both the incubation of emerging talent and succession planning would further contribute to the sustainability of artistic careers and the vibrancy of the sector.

- **Strong cultural infrastructure:** Provides robust support across the spectrum of galleries, libraries, museums, and commercial entities that sustain the arts, culture, and heritage.

Strengthen soft infrastructure as well as hard infrastructure to arts in regional and remote Australia.

Investing in hard cultural infrastructure will remain an important pillar of The National Cultural Policy. However, it is important to recognise that many of the galleries, libraries, museums, and commercial entities that attract the lion's share of funding are institutions located in major population centres that Australians in regional and remote Australia do not have regular access to. And while these institutions are 'good for a visit', to truly expand the reach of arts and culture into regional and remote Australia, we must be open broadening the definition of cultural infrastructure to better include soft infrastructure; systems and programs that reach out into the community where they already gather. This would involve utilising existing hard infrastructure like schools, aged and childcare centres and other sites like migrant resource centres. Investing further in soft infrastructure will be the best way to reach Australians of all ages and demographics in regional and remote Australia and will also contribute to a more environmentally sustainable sector through reduced travel.

- **Engaging the audience:** Ensures that these stories and creative works reach and connect with people across the country and around the world.

Reform support for regional touring to increase reach.

As a company with deep experience in creating and touring work for young audiences, we see firsthand the transformative impact of live performance in regional and remote communities. However, current funding structures, particularly within Playing Australia, do not adequately reflect the realities of reaching audiences where they are today. The existing model – which excludes funding for performances in schools and aged care centres is no longer viable, with sharply declining audiences in performing arts centres combined with rising touring costs. Terrapin has experienced this firsthand. Our 2025 National tour of *The Paper Escaper* was critically well received, booking numbers were low and three presenters dropped out. We reached just 35% of the weekly audience numbers we reach with our Tasmanian schools tour.

We strongly advocate for reform to Playing Australia to better enable access-driven touring. This includes expanding eligibility and assessment criteria to recognise non-traditional venues such as schools, community centres, and aged care facilities as vital cultural sites. Touring models should be flexible enough to support smaller scale, mobile, and embedded engagements that meet communities on their own terms, rather than relying solely on established presenting circuits. This does not exclude or reduce the importance of regional performing arts centres, rather it would encourage new approaches to working in partnership with producing organisations and audience development for those venues.

In addition, increased investment is required to ensure that touring to remote and regional Australia is financially viable. This could include multi-year touring support, load-in and load-out allowances, targeted funding streams for hard-to-reach communities. Without such reforms, the gap in cultural access between metropolitan and regional Australians will continue to widen.

Make access to Theatre for Young Audiences a universal right for every Australian child.

As a founding member of the National Children's Theatre Alliance, Terrapin endorses its submission to the consultation process. In particular, we support its call for the next National Cultural Policy to strengthen the children's theatre sector through targeted investment, including through the Children's Theatre Investment Fund; to adopt cross-portfolio collaboration; and to remove barriers to access.

Children and young people have fundamental human rights to play, to access culture, and to engage with complex art. This benefits their holistic wellbeing and contributes significantly to our cultural fabric, community cohesion, and national identity.

Terrapin remains committed to ensuring that all Australians regardless of geography or circumstance can experience high-quality, relevant artistic work. We urge the Government to consider these reforms as part of a broader strategy to build a more inclusive, resilient, and future-focused arts sector.

Increase funding for international activity

Australian arts practice occupies a unique position internationally, framed by being the site of the longest continual arts practice in the world. Further, our proximity to Asia, rich cultural diaspora and relative geographic isolation means that the work that comes from here is like no-other. However the tyranny of distance means that high quality work that is of interest to international presenters is not competitive due to the fees required to cover freight and travel. There is funding available through the International Engagement Fund, however it is so competitive that many artists are missing out on opportunities to tell Australian stories to communities around the world. This is a missed opportunity for career development, employment and the use of soft power in promoting Australia as a cultural powerhouse. Terrapin endorses the Australian Live Performance Export Alliance's submission on international touring and exchange.