

South East Arts Submission: National Cultural Policy Review

Introduction

South East Arts is the Regional Arts Development Organisation for the Snowy Monaro, Bega Valley and Eurobodalla. This submission reflects consultation with artists, cultural workers and communities across the South East region of New South Wales, undertaken in April–May 2026 through a structured five-day social media campaign.

This submission presents a regional, rural and remote perspective on the future of arts and culture in Australia.

Engagement with arts and culture is strong across regional, rural and remote communities. People attend events, participate in creative activity, and engage with Australian content through music, radio and digital platforms. There is a clear desire to see regional stories, places and people represented across national cultural platforms.

“Arts and cultural events create space for community to come together — to learn, create and see things from different perspectives.”

Creative sector funding extends beyond individual projects; it strengthens social cohesion and inclusion, generates economic benefits, and sustains pathways for expression and employment.

A significant risk for regional, rural and remote communities is the decline in per capita recurrent expenditure, particularly funding that supports the ongoing operation of established organisations, events and programs. While investment in new initiatives is important, policy must also sustain proven cultural activity that already delivers social, cultural and economic impact.

This submission highlights both the strengths and structural challenges facing arts and culture in **regional, rural and remote communities**. It also responds to emerging national and global shifts — including digital transformation, workforce precarity and climate impacts — which are felt acutely in **regional, rural and remote Australia**.

1. First Nations First

Community feedback strongly emphasised the central role of First Nations arts and cultural practice in regional communities.

“Art and culture are not separate—they are who I am and where I come from... It is how we pass knowledge to the next generation. It creates pride, healing, and belonging.”

Respondents also identified barriers to accessing funding, including limited access to digital infrastructure and application systems. Current processes can exclude people with disability, English as a second language, or limited formal education. These barriers are often amplified in **regional, rural and remote contexts**, where access to infrastructure, support and culturally appropriate systems is more limited.

Recommendation:

Embed First Nations leadership and decision-making authority, ensure accessible and flexible funding systems, and support long-term, community-led cultural practice in regional, rural and remote communities.

2. A Place for Every Story

Regional communities have strong and diverse stories to tell, yet these are not always visible within national cultural narratives.

“There’s a typical attitude that if someone is local, they can’t be as good — so we look elsewhere.”

This perception is reinforced by national systems that continue to privilege metropolitan production over **regional, rural and remote cultural voices**.

Funding models often prioritise metropolitan production companies working in regional locations rather than supporting regional storytellers. Regional, rural and remote communities must not only be treated as locations for cultural production, but as owners and generators of cultural stories, intellectual property and creative leadership.

Recommendation:

Invest in **regional, rural and remote storytelling** by prioritising locally generated content, regional production capability, and regional ownership of cultural narratives across screen, media and cultural platforms.

3. Centrality of the Artist

Artists face structural challenges including limited funding, administrative burden, and unpaid mentoring work.

These pressures are intensified in regional, rural and remote communities, where artists often carry multiple roles as creators, educators, organisers, mentors and community connectors.

“I’d take on work experience again, but it’s a big drain on time and money.”

Funding systems can exclude artists due to inaccessible application processes. These challenges reflect a broader national issue, but are intensified in **regional, rural and remote communities**, where fewer opportunities and higher costs increase precarity.

Recommendation:

Increase direct investment in artists, reduce administrative burden, and establish a **National Creative Workforce Framework** that recognises artists as workers and supports fair pay, portable entitlements and sustainable careers.

4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Key issues include lack of studio space, high venue costs, and misdirected “activation” funding.

“Venue and insurance costs make hosting any kind of public event often out of reach.”

Current funding settings risk privileging short-term activation and new initiatives over the recurrent operational funding needed to sustain proven programs, events and organisations. In regional, rural and remote communities, successful cultural activity may still be financially fragile because ticket sales, sponsorship and local commercial returns rarely cover true costs.

Continuity matters. Established cultural programs build trust, participation, partnerships and social impact over time. These outcomes cannot be recreated through short-term project funding alone.

Recommendation:

Invest in **affordable creative infrastructure**, separate infrastructure activation from artist development funding, introduce **subsidised insurance mechanisms**, and **increase recurrent operational funding** for established regional, rural and remote arts organisations, events and programs.

5. Engaging the Audience

Participation is strong but shaped by perception and accessibility.

“Not everyone feels comfortable with ‘art’ — but everyone has a story to tell.”

Participation is strong in **regional, rural and remote communities**, but is shaped by accessibility, perception and opportunity. In regional, rural and remote communities, cultural participation is often central to wellbeing, belonging, identity and social cohesion.

Recommendation:

Support inclusive participation and strengthen pathways through schools, youth programs, community partnerships and wellbeing initiatives, recognising cultural participation as a public good in regional, rural and remote Australia.

6. The Digital Future in Regional, Rural and Remote Australia

Digital engagement is increasingly central to how arts and culture are created, shared and experienced. However, access to digital infrastructure, tools and opportunities remains uneven across **regional, rural and remote Australia**.

Artists and cultural workers in **regional, rural and remote communities** face barriers to participating fully in the digital cultural economy, including limited connectivity, fewer resources for digital production, and reduced access to distribution networks. At the same time, rapid technological change — including the rise of artificial intelligence — is reshaping how creative work is produced, circulated and valued.

Without targeted investment, there is a risk that **regional, rural and remote voices** will be further excluded from national and global cultural platforms.

Recommendation:

Invest in digital infrastructure, capability and access for artists and cultural organisations in **regional, rural and remote communities**, ensuring equitable participation in the digital cultural economy. This includes support for digital production, skills development and access to distribution platforms.

Recommendation:

Establish fair remuneration and regulatory frameworks to ensure artists are appropriately recognised and compensated for the digital and AI use of their work, with consideration of impacts on **regional, rural and remote practitioners**.

7. Culture in a Climate-Impacted Regional, Rural and Remote Australia

Regional, rural and remote communities are at the frontline of climate impacts, including bushfires, floods and increasing environmental and economic instability. These events have significant and ongoing effects on cultural life, infrastructure and community wellbeing.

Arts and culture play a critical role in recovery and resilience in **regional, rural and remote Australia**. Creative practice supports community connection, helps process collective experience, and contributes to place-based responses to change.

Despite this, cultural recovery is often under-recognised in disaster response and long-term resilience planning.

Recommendation:

Recognise arts and culture as a key component of disaster recovery and resilience in **regional, rural and remote communities**, and fund arts-led recovery programs as part of national and state response frameworks.

Recommendation:

Support climate-responsive cultural practice and invest in adaptive, flexible and resilient cultural infrastructure that reflects the realities of **regional, rural and remote Australia**.

Conclusion

Regional arts are vibrant and essential but require policy that reflects regional realities.

“We’re not short on ideas — we’re short on support.”

National cultural policy must embed a **regional, rural and remote lens across all areas**, recognising these communities as central to Australia’s cultural future.

Without structural reform to funding systems, workforce conditions and infrastructure, the sustainability of arts and culture in **regional, rural and remote Australia** will remain at risk.

National cultural policy must embed a **regional, rural and remote lens** across all policy settings. This includes not only investment in new initiatives, but **recurrent operational funding** for proven organisations, events and programs that sustain cultural life, social cohesion and local economies over time.

With the right policy settings, regional, rural and remote communities can lead Australia’s cultural future.