



Submission: National Cultural Policy Consultation 2026

Comedy Industry Perspective

Submitted by:	Business of Comedy Conference Australia (www.businessofcomedy.com) produced by Hard Knock Knocks (www.hardknockknocks.com).
Authored by:	Future Ready Now (www.futurereadynow.com.au).
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Contact:	[REDACTED]

INTRODUCTION

This submission is made on behalf of the findings from the **Business of Comedy Conference** hosted in Melbourne on April 16, 17 and 18.

The comedy industry is a vibrant, economically significant, and culturally vital sector that currently operates as a fragmented ecosystem without dedicated policy recognition or coordinated support.

It encompasses stand-up performers, sketch artists, improvisers, podcasters, writers, animators, producers, educators, venue operators, and technology innovators across all Australian states and territories. We represent a sector that generates substantial economic value, employs thousands of creative professionals, drives visitor economy activity, and serves critical social functions including free speech, mental health support, and community connection.

Our core message: Comedy deserves explicit recognition as a distinct industry sector within Australia's National Cultural Policy, with dedicated infrastructure, targeted funding mechanisms, and coordinated governance support.

HOW THIS SUBMISSION CAME ABOUT

The Business of Comedy Conference

This submission is grounded in the findings and strategic vision developed through the **Business of Comedy Conference**, a landmark industry gathering that brought together government representatives, industry professionals, festival operators, educators, media professionals, and comedians to examine the state of Australian comedy and chart a path forward.



The conference was the first event of its kind in Australia—a dedicated forum for the comedy industry to collectively assess its economic contribution, identify structural challenges, and develop a coordinated strategic vision.

Topics Covered

The conference addressed the full breadth of the comedy ecosystem through structured panel discussions, interviews, and stakeholder engagement sessions. Key topics included:

- **The Laughter Economy** — comedy’s economic contribution and the case for industry recognition
- **Ticketing System Reform** — systemic issues including venue-exclusive ticketing and artists losing customer data
- **Satire and Democratic Discourse** — comedy’s role in free speech, holding power to account, and cultural commentary
- **A Home for Comedy** — the case for a dedicated Comedy Hub in the South Melbourne/Arts Precinct
- **Regional Comedy Festivals** — strategies for launching and sustaining comedy festivals in regional cities
- **Technology and Innovation** — emerging platforms for payment, booking, and industry empowerment
- **Comedy in Brand Marketing** — the “humour gap” in advertising and untapped commercial opportunity
- **Comedy Film Production** — the economics of short films, funding challenges, and AI integration
- **Podcasting** — the booming Australian podcast landscape and comedy’s leading role
- **Animation** — opportunities for Australian comedy animation following Bluey’s global success

Conference Participants and Contributors

The conference drew a diverse cross-section of the comedy industry, government, academia, and technology sectors. The following individuals participated as panellists, speakers, interviewees, and moderators:

Government and Academia:

- **Nina Taylor MP** — Victorian Government
- **Dr. Mark Gibson** — RMIT University (Comedy as an Agent of Change research project)
- **Dr. Louise Mahler** — Moderator
- **Till Knowles** — Academic

Comedians and Performers:

- **Wilbur Wilde** — Musician / Comedic Performer
- **Jack Levi** (Elliot Goblet) — Comedian



- **Trevor Marmalade** — Comedian
- **Stephen Hall** — Actor/Writer
- **Beti Jay** — Comedian/Industry Advocate
- **Matt O'Neill** — Comedian/Animator

Festival and Venue Operators:

- **Cassandra Tombs** — Buxstock and the Garden of Unearthly Delights, Adelaide Fringe
- **PJ White** — Geelong Comedy Festival
- **Michelle Buxton** — Garden of Unearthly Delights

Technology and Innovation:

- **Marc Goldenfein** — ArtsPay (Social Enterprise Payment Platform)
- **Morry Morgan** — Gigme (Performer Booking Platform) and Hard Knock Knocks
- **Adam McCurdie** — Humanitix (Ethical Ticketing)
- **Linda Scott** — Eventbrite
- **Andrew J. Nash** — HBO's Silicon Valley Technical Advisor

Media, Satire and Content:

- **Scott Dikkers** — Founder, The Onion
- **John Delmenico** — The Chaser
- **Dan Ilic** — Moderator/Satirist
- **Christina Canters** — Podcast Services Australia
- **Richard Palmer** — Triton Digital
- **Brad Shean** — Comedian & Moderator

Production, Film and Animation:

- **Stig Wemyss** — Producer
- **Anthony Littlechild** — Cinematographer
- **Nick Kozakis** — Director/Editor
- **Sarah Barton** — Film Director & Moderator
- **Amanda Spagnolo** — Princess Bento (Animation)
- **Ken Cantrill** — Xentrix (Animation)



Branding, Advertising and Business:

- **Jim Ingram** — Thinkerbell (Advertising)
- **Julian O'Shea** — Monash University/Creator
- **John Hallford** — Producer
- **Chamu Sriram** — Moderator
- **Nick Abrahams** — Comedian, Lawyer & Moderator

Architecture and Infrastructure:

- **Chris Godsell** — Architect
- **Charles Kovess** — Australian Institute of Comedy

Industry Strategy:

- **Greg Curcio** — Future Ready Now (and Comedy Industry Strategist)
- **Tammy Fitzgerald** — Moderator

What Was Produced

The conference proceedings, panel discussions, and individual interviews were synthesised into a comprehensive strategic document: the **Business of Comedy Conference — Public Summary & Strategic Vision** (Version 1.0, May 2026). This whitepaper established a five-year implementation plan for the comedy industry, mapped the comedy value chain across eight interconnected verticals, identified critical gaps in measurement, infrastructure, governance, funding, and policy, and outlined a strategic vision for positioning Australia as a global comedy destination by 2031.

This submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation draws directly from that strategic whitepaper. The findings, challenges, recommendations, and economic data presented here are grounded in the collective insights of the industry professionals, government representatives, academics, and creative practitioners who participated in the Business of Comedy Conference. This is not a theoretical exercise—it reflects the lived experience and professional expertise of the Australian comedy industry.

PART 1: WHY COMEDY MATTERS

1.1 Economic Contribution

Comedy is a significant economic force, yet remains largely invisible in policy frameworks:



- **Melbourne International Comedy Festival** generates **\$43.2 million in annual economic contribution** to Victoria (from \$22.9M box office revenue)—a multiplier of approximately 1.9x
- **16 million Australians** listen to comedy podcasts monthly; comedy ranks as the **4th most popular podcast genre** in Australia
- **Garden of Unearthly Delights** (Adelaide) generates approximately **\$65 million in annual economic impact**
- The broader **live performance industry** generates \$3.4 billion in annual ticket revenue with 31.4 million attendances
- Comedy creates employment across **eight interconnected verticals**: live performance, film & television, animation, podcasting, advertising, digital media, writing & production, and training & education

The Measurement Problem: Comedy's economic contribution is currently "swallowed up" in broader categories (festivals, screen, podcasts, creative industries) making it invisible to policymakers and funders. This invisibility directly impacts funding eligibility and policy recognition.

1.2 Cultural and Social Value

Beyond economics, comedy serves essential cultural functions:

- **Free Speech & Democratic Discourse:** Satire and comedy provide a critical space for examining power, challenging authority, and enabling public dialogue on sensitive social and political issues
- **Mental Health & Wellbeing:** Comedy and laughter are scientifically linked to improved mental health, stress reduction, and community resilience
- **Community Connection:** Comedy festivals and events create gathering spaces that strengthen social bonds and build community identity
- **Experimental Zone for Culture:** Comedy serves as a testing ground for new ideas, cultural narratives, and forms of expression before they reach mainstream audiences
- **Talent Pipeline:** Comedy festivals (particularly MICF) serve as primary talent identification mechanisms, feeding performers into television, streaming, international markets, and other creative verticals

1.3 Horizontal Value Chain Integration

What makes comedy unique is its **horizontal integration across multiple creative verticals**. A single comedian may:

- Perform live stand-up (live performance)
- Create podcast content (audio/digital)
- Voice animated characters (animation)
- Write for television (screen)



- Develop brand partnerships (advertising)
- Create social media content (digital)
- Teach workshops (education)

This creates a **multiplier effect** that traditional industry models fail to capture. Investment in one vertical (e.g., live performance infrastructure) generates value across all eight verticals.

PART 2: CURRENT CHALLENGES

2.1 The Measurement Gap

Challenge: Comedy is not measured as a distinct industry sector in national economic data.

Impact:

- Policymakers cannot see comedy's true economic contribution
- Funding bodies cannot justify targeted investment without clear data
- Industry lacks evidence base for advocacy
- International comparisons are impossible

What's Needed:

- Systematic economic research establishing comedy's GDP contribution
- Employment data tracking across all verticals
- Visitor economy impact assessment
- Export revenue measurement

2.2 The Infrastructure Gap

Challenge: There is no dedicated, year-round comedy venue or central hub in Australia.

Impact:

- Talent development is disrupted outside festival seasons
- Content creation opportunities are limited
- Collaboration between verticals is fragmented
- Regional touring is economically unviable due to venue scarcity

What's Needed:



- Dedicated comedy performance and production spaces
- Regional venue partnerships and touring infrastructure
- Technology platforms supporting ticketing, data, and distribution
- Production facilities (studios, editing suites, recording spaces)

2.3 The Governance Gap

Challenge: There is no peak body, industry association, or coordinated advocacy mechanism for comedy.

Impact:

- Comedians lack collective bargaining power
- No unified voice in government relations
- Industry data is fragmented and uncollected
- Emerging talent has no clear career pathways

What's Needed:

- Peak body establishment (Comedy Industry Association)
- Industry advisory structures with cross-sector representation
- Coordinated advocacy and government relations
- Professional development and career pathway support

2.4 The Funding Gap

Challenge: Comedy is not recognized as a distinct funding category in government grants or philanthropic programs.

Impact:

- Comedians compete for funding in generic “arts” categories
- Infrastructure projects (like a Comedy Hub) lack dedicated funding streams
- Regional festivals struggle with grant accessibility
- Technology innovation is underfunded

What's Needed:

- Dedicated comedy funding streams within Creative Australia
- Infrastructure funding for venue development
- Regional festival support programs



- Technology and innovation grants

2.5 The Policy Gap

Challenge: Comedy remains largely invisible within existing policy frameworks, spanning multiple government portfolios (arts, screen, tourism, digital, education, wellbeing) but owned by none.

Impact:

- No coordinated policy approach
- Inconsistent support across jurisdictions
- Missed opportunities for cross-portfolio collaboration
- Industry development is reactive rather than strategic

What's Needed:

- Explicit recognition of comedy as a distinct sector in national cultural policy
- Cross-portfolio coordination mechanisms
- Regional development strategies
- International market development support

2.6 The Regional Circuit Breakdown

Challenge: Touring costs have increased materially post-COVID, and regional venues are declining.

Impact:

- Talent pipeline is concentrated in metropolitan areas
- Regional audiences have limited access to live comedy
- National reach is constrained
- Regional economies miss visitor economy benefits

What's Needed:

- Regional venue partnership programs
 - Touring subsidy mechanisms
 - Regional festival development support
 - Infrastructure investment in regional cities
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PART 3: HOW COMEDY ALIGNS WITH THE FIVE PILLARS

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Comedy's Contribution:

- First Nations comedians and storytellers are leading voices in contemporary Australian culture
- Comedy provides a platform for First Nations narratives, perspectives, and cultural expression
- Satire and comedy are traditional tools for cultural commentary and knowledge transmission

What's Needed:

- Dedicated support for First Nations comedy creators and festivals
- Recognition of comedy as a vehicle for First Nations cultural leadership
- Funding pathways for First Nations comedy projects and infrastructure

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Comedy's Contribution:

- Comedy is inherently diverse, reflecting the full spectrum of Australian voices and experiences
- Comedy festivals celebrate diverse perspectives, identities, and cultural backgrounds
- Digital platforms enable emerging voices to reach audiences without gatekeepers

What's Needed:

- Support for diverse comedy creators across all backgrounds
- Funding for comedy festivals celebrating diverse voices
- Technology investment enabling direct artist-audience relationships
- Accessibility initiatives for comedy venues and events

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Comedy's Contribution:

- Comedy creates employment across multiple verticals for creative professionals
- Comedians are workers deserving fair wages, safe workplaces, and professional development
- Comedy education and training are critical career pathways

What's Needed:

- Fair remuneration standards for comedy creators



- Workplace safety and wellbeing support
- Professional development and skills training programs
- Career pathway clarity across all eight verticals
- Protection of creative rights in digital environments
- Support for comedy education and training institutions

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Comedy's Contribution:

- Comedy festivals are major cultural institutions driving visitor economy activity
- Comedy venues are gathering spaces strengthening community connection
- Comedy production facilities support content creation across multiple platforms

What's Needed:

- Dedicated comedy venue and hub infrastructure
- Regional venue partnership and development programs
- Technology platform investment (ticketing, distribution, data)
- Production facility support (studios, editing, recording)
- Festival infrastructure and support programs

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Comedy's Contribution:

- Comedy is one of the most accessible and engaging cultural forms
- 16 million Australians engage with comedy content monthly
- Comedy drives audience participation across live, digital, and hybrid experiences
- Comedy builds parasocial relationships driving sustained audience engagement

What's Needed:

- Support for diverse distribution platforms (live, digital, hybrid)
- Technology investment enabling audience discovery and engagement
- International marketing and export support
- Audience development and accessibility initiatives



PART 4: STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Immediate Actions (0-12 Months)

1. Establish Comedy as a Distinct Sector

- Formally recognize comedy as a distinct industry sector in national cultural policy
- Commission baseline economic research quantifying comedy's GDP contribution and employment
- Create dedicated comedy funding streams within Creative Australia

2. Create Governance Structures

- Support establishment of Comedy Industry Association as peak body
- Establish industry advisory group with cross-sector representation
- Develop government-industry coordination mechanisms

3. Develop Infrastructure Strategy

- Commission Comedy Hub business case and feasibility study
- Identify regional venue partnership opportunities
- Develop technology platform strategy (ticketing, distribution, data)

4.2 Medium-Term Actions (1-3 Years)

1. Infrastructure Investment

- Secure funding for Comedy Hub development (South Melbourne/Arts Precinct location identified)
- Establish regional venue partnerships across all states
- Implement industry-wide ticketing and data platform

2. Economic Measurement

- Publish baseline economic research establishing comedy's GDP contribution
- Implement ongoing economic tracking mechanisms
- Develop industry-wide data collection systems

3. Talent Development

- Launch professional development program for comedy creators
- Establish career pathway support across all eight verticals



- Create mentoring and skills development initiatives

4.3 Long-Term Actions (3-5 Years)

1. Industry Maturity

- Open Comedy Hub as dedicated industry infrastructure
- Achieve formal policy recognition of comedy as distinct sector
- Establish sustainable funding model for long-term viability

2. Global Leadership

- Position Australia as global comedy destination
- Develop international market development program
- Support Australian comedy exports (content, talent, technology)

3. Systemic Integration

- Integrate comedy across all five policy pillars
- Establish cross-portfolio coordination mechanisms
- Demonstrate economic and social impact through published research

PART 5: FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

The comedy industry requires investment across three key areas:

5.1 Governance & Coordination (Year 1)

- Peak body establishment and operation
- Industry advisory group support
- Economic research commissioning
- Government relations and advocacy

Estimated requirement: \$500K–\$750K

5.2 Infrastructure Development (Years 1-3)

- Comedy Hub business case and design
- Regional venue partnership program
- Technology platform development



- Production facility investment

Estimated requirement: \$2M–\$5M (depending on scope and delivery model)

5.3 Industry Development (Years 1-5)

- Professional development programs
- Talent development initiatives
- Regional festival support
- Content production funding
- International market development

Estimated requirement: \$1M–\$2M annually

Total 5-Year Investment: \$10M–\$20M

Return on Investment: Based on MICF economic multiplier (1.9x), this investment would generate \$19M–\$38M in economic contribution, plus significant cultural and social benefits.

PART 6: SUCCESS METRICS

The comedy industry's progress should be measured against:

Economic Indicators

- GDP contribution (measured and reported annually)
- Employment (full-time equivalent jobs created)
- Ticket revenue and attendance
- Export revenue
- Visitor economy impact

Infrastructure Indicators

- Comedy Hub operational status
- Regional venue partnerships established
- Technology platform adoption
- Production facility utilization



Industry Development Indicators

- Peak body membership and engagement
- Professional development program participation
- Career pathway clarity and adoption
- Talent pipeline development

Cultural & Social Indicators

- Audience reach and engagement
 - Community connection and wellbeing outcomes
 - Free speech and democratic discourse contribution
 - First Nations representation and leadership
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PART 7: CONCLUSION

The Australian comedy industry is at a critical juncture. With coordinated governance, dedicated infrastructure, and explicit policy recognition, comedy can transition from a fragmented ecosystem to a measured, sustainable industry contributing significantly to Australia's economy, cultural identity, and social wellbeing.

The five pillars of the National Cultural Policy provide an ideal framework for this transformation:

- **First Nations First:** Comedy as a platform for First Nations voices and cultural leadership
- **A Place for Every Story:** Comedy celebrating diverse Australian perspectives
- **Centrality of the Artist:** Comedy creators as workers deserving fair wages and professional development
- **Strong Cultural Infrastructure:** Dedicated comedy venues and production facilities
- **Engaging the Audience:** Comedy as one of Australia's most accessible and engaging cultural forms

We respectfully request that the next National Cultural Policy:

1. **Explicitly recognize comedy as a distinct industry sector** in national economic data, policy frameworks, and funding mechanisms
2. **Establish dedicated funding streams for comedy creators and infrastructure** within Creative Australia and other government funding bodies
3. **Support the establishment of governance structures and peak body representation** through the Comedy Industry Association



4. **Commission economic research quantifying comedy's contribution** to GDP, employment, and the visitor economy
5. **Invest in dedicated comedy infrastructure** including the Comedy Hub and regional venue partnerships
6. **Develop regional comedy development and touring support programs** to strengthen national reach and regional economies
7. **Integrate comedy across all five policy pillars** with explicit recognition in policy documents and cross-portfolio coordination mechanisms

The Australian comedy industry is ready to contribute to Australia's cultural and economic future. We welcome the opportunity to partner with government in realizing this vision.



APPENDIX: KEY ECONOMIC DATA

Metric	Value	Source
MICF Annual Economic Contribution	\$43.2M	MICF 2025 Data
MICF Box Office Revenue	\$22.9M	MICF 2025 Data
Economic Multiplier (MICF)	1.9x	Calculated
Australian Comedy Podcast Listeners	16M monthly	Industry Data
Comedy Podcast Ranking	4th most popular genre	Industry Data
Garden of Unearthly Delights Economic Impact	\$65M annually	Industry Data
Live Performance Industry Revenue	\$3.4B annually	Industry Data
Live Performance Attendances	31.4M annually	Industry Data
Creative Industries GDP Contribution (Victoria)	\$41.2B annually	Industry Data
Creative Industries Employment (Victoria)	331,000 people (9% of workforce)	Industry Data
National Creative Industries GDP Contribution	\$67.4B (2023-24)	National Data
National Creative Industries Employment	591,000 people	National Data



APPENDIX: COMEDY VALUE CHAIN VERTICALS

1. **Live Performance** – Stand-up, improv, sketch, theatre shows, festivals, touring
 2. **Film & Television** – Features, series, streaming content, variety shows
 3. **Animation & Voiceovers** – Animated series, voice acting, character development
 4. **Podcasting & Radio** – Comedy podcasts, radio shows, audio content
 5. **Advertising & Branding** – Comedy in ads, brand partnerships, campaigns
 6. **Digital & Social Media** – Social content, YouTube, TikTok, online distribution
 7. **Writing & Production** – Script writing, content development, editing
 8. **Training & Education** – Comedy schools, workshops, mentoring, academic programs
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End of Submission