

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Review

by Museums & Galleries Queensland

Museums & Galleries Queensland (M&G QLD) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Cultural Policy Review. As Queensland's peak industry body for public museums, galleries and keeping places, we advocate for a strong, sustainable and connected sector that reflects the diversity, creativity and stories of Queensland artists and communities.

Based on the lands of the Yuggera and Turrbal people in Hendra, Queensland, M&G QLD exists to:

- **Inspire and support excellence** across Queensland museums, galleries and keeping places.
- **Foster innovation, connection and cultural leadership.**
- Champion a future where *museums, galleries and keeping places* are **vibrant cultural hubs, enriching communities and deeply valued by all.**

M&G QLD plays a national leadership role as:

- Queensland agency and Co-chair of National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Australia.
- Co-convenor of the National Public Galleries Alliance.
- Founding member of the National Standards Taskforce.

The Importance of Museums, Galleries and Keeping Places

Australia's museums, galleries and First Nations keeping places are foundational cultural infrastructure, uniquely positioned to deliver on each pillar of *Revive*. They:

- **Preserve and safeguard collections** that interpret and share Australia's natural, social, scientific, artistic and movable cultural heritage.
- **Support artists, curators, historians and cultural workers** through exhibitions, acquisitions, research and commissioning.
- Reflect lived experience and belonging through **place-based storytelling.**
- **Deliver lifelong, intergenerational learning** through objects, storytelling, archives, exhibitions, and formal and informal education programs.
- **Strengthen communities** by reflecting local identity, fostering social cohesion, and amplifying Australia's diverse voices.
- **Contribute to economic outcomes**, particularly in rural, regional and remote areas, through cultural tourism, employment and volunteer engagement.

More than **400 public museums and galleries** are embedded in communities across Queensland, with **81.5% located outside of the greater Brisbane area**. Around three-quarters of these organisations are volunteer-led, deeply connected to place, and trusted custodians of collections of local, state, national, and in some instances, international significance.

Local government is the primary investor in arts and cultural infrastructure across our communities, but its resources are increasingly under pressure. Despite these constraints, local governments recognise the vital role of the arts and cultural heritage in enhancing liveability, fostering community wellbeing, and attracting and retaining skilled and creative professionals within their regions.

A National Cultural Policy that overlooks this sector risks undervaluing one of Australia's most accessible and socially impactful cultural assets.

While screen, music and performing arts are often clearly articulated within policy frameworks, museums, galleries and movable cultural heritage are frequently overlooked, referenced indirectly or grouped broadly under arts, built heritage or infrastructure.

This lack of recognition creates several challenges:

- **Policy misalignment:** Collections care, digitisation, storage and conservation do not sit neatly within existing creative funding frameworks yet are core to cultural sustainability.
- **Underinvestment:** Without clear policy recognition, cultural heritage and collections-focused initiatives struggle to compete for funding against more visible creative outputs.
- **Missing data and advocacy:** The impact of collections (social, educational, environmental and economic) is often poorly captured in national cultural metrics.
- **Strategic gaps:** Long-term issues such as climate resilience, disaster recovery, digital access and workforce succession in museums and galleries remain under-addressed. This is particularly true for small-to medium and volunteer-run organisations.

This visibility gap is particularly acute in rural, regional, and remote areas, especially for small-to-medium, volunteer-run museums and galleries, which:

- operate with limited staffing and infrastructure.
- manage large and significant collections.
- face increasing risks from weather events and ageing facilities.

This lack of visibility:

- limits the sector's capacity to plan and innovate.
- constrains opportunities to attract investment.
- undermines the sector's ability to contribute fully to national cultural objectives.

This submission underscores the **importance of museums, galleries and keeping places** and calls for stronger recognition of **movable cultural heritage** within the National Cultural Policy. M&G QLD urges the Australian Government to take a **clear leadership role** in this area. While Creative Australia has supported artistic excellence at arm's length since 1973, and

the Community Heritage Grants program supports collections care, **no equivalent national mechanism exists** to support the operations of small-to-medium cultural heritage organisations that safeguard Australia's collections and shared stories. We call on the Australian Government not to distribute existing funding, but to increase investment to support a **thriving arts ecology**.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Museums, galleries and keeping places are key partners in delivering **First Nations storytelling, truth-telling and reconciliation**. Collections held in these organisations, both historic and contemporary, are not static assets; they are **living cultural resources**. They embody ongoing relationships to Country, community and sovereignty, and carry profound cultural, spiritual and political significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

M&G QLD strongly supports *Revive's* commitment to placing First Nations cultures first, and to advancing **First Nations self-determination, cultural rights and sovereignty**. However, many organisations across our sector require additional support to realise these ambitions. This includes access to training and guidance in culturally safe practices, investment in First Nations-led programming, and the recruitment and retention of qualified First Nations staff.

The collections sector sits at the intersection of cultural policy, reconciliation and truth-telling. Its role in caring for, returning and reactivating cultural material must be clearly articulated and properly resourced within the National Cultural Policy. Without this recognition, there is a risk that these commitments remain aspirational rather than operational.

Recommendations

1. Establish **dedicated, ongoing funding streams** to support **First Nations leadership and decision-making** in the governance, interpretation, repatriation, care and activation of collections.
2. **Recognise museums, galleries and keeping places** as key delivery partners for Pillar 1 within the National Cultural Policy.
3. Invest in **First Nations keeping places and culturally appropriate collection infrastructure**, particularly in regional and remote areas, to house repatriated cultural material.
4. Fund education and workforce development to grow and sustain **First Nations cultural leadership and career pathways into the collections and visual arts sectors**. This includes funding First Nations positions within service organisations and peak bodies to build capacity, capability, cultural safety and awareness across the sector.
5. Support collecting organisations, especially small, regional and volunteer-run museums, to work **ethically, respectfully and in genuine partnership** with Traditional Custodians.

Pillar 2. A Place for Every Story

Our sector is a vital platform through which our country's diverse stories are interpreted, collected, preserved and shared. Regional museums and galleries, in particular, play a vital role in this space, ensuring that Australia's cultural narratives do not become homogenised or city-centric.

Museums, galleries and keeping places support and share:

- **Local and community stories**, including First Nations, migrant, refugee, youth, families, older persons, LGBTQIA+, disability, neurodiverse, and regional narratives.
- **Place-based storytelling** that reflects lived experience and belonging.
- **Intergenerational knowledge transfer** through objects, storytelling, education programs, archives and exhibitions.

Museums and galleries are central to delivering *Revive's* ambitions, yet the sector remains **largely invisible** within the policy framework. This is particularly acute for **small-to-medium organisations**, which are the primary vehicle for place-based storytelling yet continue to face **systemic underinvestment** and limited access to Federal Government support.

This under-recognition is reflected in current funding patterns. Investment across areas of practice in 2024–25 (*Creative Australia Annual Report*) demonstrates a persistent imbalance:

- Orchestras: 26%
- Theatre: 13%
- Opera: 10%
- Dance: 9%
- Music: 9%
- **Visual Arts: 6%**

Regional inequity is also pronounced. While 36% of Australia's population lives in regional areas, regionally based organisations across all artforms received just 13% of Creative Australia funding. In 2025, local government galleries received only 0.25% of Creative Australia funding. Queensland received 12% of Creative Australia funding, with only 0.98% of that investment benefiting the visual arts sector in our state. **Museums and movable cultural heritage organisations received no funding** through Creative Australia.

Sustaining "a place for every story" requires sustained investment in the infrastructure that **collects, documents, preserves and makes stories accessible over time**.

This includes:

- An appropriately skilled, capable workforce.
- Fit-for-purpose facilities and collections storage.
- Digitisation and digital access.
- Conservation and risk management, particularly in regional and climate-vulnerable locations.

Without this foundational investment, many collections, especially those housed by small, volunteer-run organisations, are at risk.

Recommendations

1. **Recognise museums, galleries and cultural heritage organisations within *Revive***, alongside the visual arts, as essential cultural infrastructure.

2. Ensure *Revive* supports the **full lifecycle of cultural storytelling**, including collecting, documentation/registration, interpretation, preservation, digitisation, presentation, access and learning.
3. **Establish a modest national operational support** or stipend program for **volunteer-run museums and heritage organisations**, administered through state-based peak bodies/service organisations to strengthen these under-resourced organisations.
4. Invest in **workforce development and professional skills** across the museum, gallery and movable cultural heritage sector to support ethical collecting, interpretation and inclusive storytelling.
5. Embed policy mechanisms that value **place-based and community-led narratives**, ensuring that cultural diversity and inclusion are sustained over generations.

Pillar 3. Centrality of the Artist

Museums and galleries support artists across all stages of their careers as employers, mentors, commissioners, exhibitors, collaborators and collectors. They provide opportunities for artists to produce new work, engage with collections, contribute to research and education, and participate in public programs.

Importantly, museums and galleries also engage a broad cultural workforce beyond artists, including curators, conservators, registrars, preparators, educators and technicians. These specialist roles are essential to maintaining professional standards, supporting artists' practice, and ensuring that cultural material remains accessible, interpreted and preserved for future generations.

While *Revive* rightly focuses on improving conditions for artists, M&G QLD notes that:

- The role of museums and galleries as employers, commissioners, mentors and industry partners for artists is under-recognised.
- The sector's specialist paid staff and volunteers are largely absent from policy discussions around creative workforces.
- Artists, particularly those regionally based, benefit significantly from local museums, galleries and small-to-medium arts organisations through employment, visibility and career development.
- Strengthening support for museums, galleries and small-to-medium arts organisations directly supports the creative ecosystems in which artists work.

Recommendations

1. Expand the definitions of creative labour to include the **specialist museums, galleries and collections workforce**, who are essential to safeguarding and sharing our shared stories and supporting artists and their work.
2. Invest in museums and galleries, particularly those in regional areas, as **foundational infrastructure that supports creative employment, professional development, cultural tourism, presentation and the growth of artists' audiences and retail markets**.
3. Establish **Visual Arts and Craft Australia** within Creative Australia to provide direct support to the visual arts, craft and design sector, including the ecosystem of small-to-medium arts organisations, galleries and museums that support it.
4. Align artist support initiatives with funding for museums, galleries and small-to-medium arts organisations, recognising that supporting these organisations directly supports

artists. This includes programs beyond the *Cultural Gifts Program* that support museums and galleries to acquire artists' works and grow their collections.

Placing artists at the centre of cultural policy requires sustained investment not only in individuals, but in the organisations and workforces (the ecosystem) that support them.

Pillar 4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Museums, galleries and keeping places are **foundational cultural infrastructure**. They house collections, provide public access to culture, support creative practice, inspire and challenge audiences, and serve as community hubs. Many regional museums and galleries operate with **limited resources** despite caring for significant collections and managing aging facilities.

M&G QLD is concerned that *Revive* does not adequately address the **infrastructure needs** of the museum, gallery and movable cultural heritage sector, including:

- Collections storage, environmental controls, and building maintenance.
- Conservation and preservation.
- Accessibility upgrades to meet contemporary standards.
- Digitisation and collections management systems.
- Climate resilience, disaster preparedness and recovery.
- Sustainable staffing models, particularly in small-to-medium, regional and volunteer-run organisations.

Additionally, initiatives like the Australian Government's *Sharing the National Collection* program are placing additional strain on Queensland's small-to-medium public gallery sector. While the program is welcomed and valued, it introduces increased operational and financial responsibilities for local governments, the majority of which own and manage regional galleries. These organisations must ensure they have the necessary resourcing, infrastructure and capacity to appropriately support and care for longer-term loans. Without targeted support for infrastructure uplift, there is a risk that the program's benefits may be offset by unintended pressures on already constrained regional systems.

By not recognising the importance of cultural infrastructure, funding frameworks risk prioritising **short-term outputs over long-term cultural sustainability**.

Priority: Climate change and natural disasters

Museums, galleries and keeping places are not just the caretakers of our stories and cultural heritage; they are essential hubs that play an important role in the long-term well-being and recovery of communities following natural disasters and other impactful events.

The sector faces **growing risks from climate change and the high frequency of natural disasters**. In Queensland alone, for the period 1 January 2025 to 30 April 2026, our state has experienced **more than 20 major weather events**, affecting 73 of the 77 local government areas, including:

- Wide-spread flooding
- Tropical Cyclone Alfred
- Severe storms
- Bushfires

- Tropical Cyclone Koji
- Tropical Cyclone Narelle

In 2024-2025, M&G QLD delivered 28 workshops to 395 participants across six local government areas impacted by fires, funded by the Australian Government's Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Program. This initiative contributed to building skills capacity and strengthening disaster resistance across Queensland's arts and cultural heritage sector.

While M&G QLD actively works with our sector to deliver training and skills development in areas including disaster preparedness, salvaging and recovery, and to ensure that organisations have solid disaster plans in place, the frequency and severity of recent natural disasters have had significant impacts on our sector, particularly our smaller, volunteer-run, community organisations.

To further support the sector in times of natural disasters:

- M&G QLD has partnered with the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM) for five consecutive years to develop and deliver the *Disaster Preparedness Calendar*. This practical resource supports cultural organisations to plan and respond in a timely and coordinated manner to natural disasters. See <https://aiccm.org.au/disaster/disaster-preparedness-calendar/>.
- Since 2010, M&G QLD has partnered with AICCM's Queensland representative to administer Q-Dis, an online forum to share information, resources and updates during times of natural disasters, strengthening communication. See [Q-Dis: Queensland Culture and Heritage Disaster Forum - Home | Facebook](#).
- M&G QLD Staff also work with AICCM Queensland representatives and the Queensland Museum's Museum Development Officer program to provide on-the-ground and remote support following natural disasters. This includes assessing damage, salvaging collections and providing longer-term conservation, advice and resources following natural disasters.

This work is time sensitive, often relies on volunteer efforts, and requires increased and sustained levels of support and resourcing to ensure effective and timely responses.

The impacts of climate change and natural disasters not only **affect organisational viability**, but they also place our collective **cultural heritage at greater risk**.

Priority: Workforce, education and career pathways

Strong cultural infrastructure requires a skilled and supported workforce, including curators, conservators, registrars, educators, technicians and volunteers. Queensland's museums and galleries are part of Australia's broader arts and cultural ecosystem, a \$111.7bn industry contributing 6.5% of GDP. Yet the sector faces acute workforce shortages, particularly in regional, rural and remote centres, across essential areas, including collection management, conservation, exhibition design and installation, technicians, public programming, administration and First Nations expertise.

Declining education pathways compound these shortages. *The Polycrisis for Arts and Creative Education in Australia*¹ identifies a consistent national decline in senior secondary arts

¹ <https://asme.edu.au/the-polycrisis-for-arts-and-creative-education-in-australia/>

participation and tertiary creative arts enrolments since 2018, alongside widespread course closures and reductions in regional institutions. National data shows:

- A **21.8% decline** in domestic creative arts university students between 2015 and 2024.
- A **20%+ decline** in Year 12 arts subject participation over the past decade, with greater declines in regional areas.
- Almost **50 creative arts degrees were cut nationally** between 2018 and 2025.²

This decline undermines our sector's future workforce and is misaligned with the ambitions of *Revive*.

In response, **M&G QLD is working towards becoming a sector-led Registered Training Organisation (RTO)** to deliver targeted vocational education training for the broader museums, galleries and the cultural heritage sector: CUA30625 Certificate III and CUA40825 Certificate IV in Arts and Cultural Administration (museums and galleries), and associated traineeships. **Developed by industry, for industry**, these programs will strengthen workforce capability across priority skill areas and build sector resilience, particularly in regional communities.

Recommendations

1. **Recognise movable cultural heritage, museums and galleries** as essential cultural infrastructure within *Revive*.
2. Invest in **collections storage, conservation, accessibility, digitisation and climate resilience**, with priority for rural, regional and remote organisations.
3. Address workforce shortages by supporting **education pipelines, professional development and clear career pathways** for museum and gallery professionals and volunteers.
4. Recognise and support the **volunteers** who underpin much of regional Australia's cultural infrastructure.
5. Respond to the arts education "polycrisis" by reversing course closures and supporting **tertiary and vocational training aligned to collections practice**.
6. Support sector-led training initiatives, including **M&G QLD's progression toward RTO status**, to build sustainable skills capacity nationwide.
7. **Establish a National Cultural Recovery Fund** managed by state-based peak bodies to facilitate responsive action in times of natural disasters.

A strong national cultural policy must ensure that the arts and cultural organisations entrusted with Australia's collections and movable cultural heritage are properly resourced, staffed and future-ready.

Pillar 5. Engaging the Audience

Museums and galleries are among the most accessible cultural spaces in Australia. In Queensland alone, they actively engage more than 6 million visitors annually through exhibitions, public programs, education, outreach and community partnerships.

² *Australia Risks Becoming an 'Artless Country' as University Creative Course Enrolments Collapse*, Dr Sophia Langford, 9 February 2026. <https://www.academicjobs.com/higher-education-news/decline-australian-creative-arts-enrollments-artless-country-3898>

The sector plays a critical role in:

- Reaching regional, remote and underserved communities.
- Supporting cultural tourism and local economies.
- Expanding digital access to collections and stories nationally and internationally.
- Providing trusted, non-commercial spaces for dialogue, learning and reflection.

However, audience engagement through collections and movable cultural heritage, particularly ongoing, place-based engagement, is rarely foregrounded in national policy. Investment in digitisation, interpretation and programming within museums and galleries would significantly advance *Revive's* objectives to engage audiences.

Touring programs also significantly expand engagement and access to contemporary visual culture, but are increasingly constrained by rising costs and would benefit from enhanced funding mechanisms.

In 2025, M&G QLD toured nine exhibitions to 29 venues nationally, engaging 106,219 visitors. These exhibitions profiled the work of seven curators and 100 artists, including 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, and were supported by over 140 education and public program activities. This outcome would not have been possible without the support of the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program, however, while touring costs have risen dramatically, the Government's investment in this program has remained relatively static.

Recommendations

1. Recognise museums, galleries, keeping places and the collections and movable cultural heritage sector as **a core pillar of Australia's cultural ecosystem**.
2. Clearly **articulate the role of museums, galleries, keeping places, collections and movable cultural heritage** in cultural sustainability, education, research and community wellbeing.
3. **Embed greater support for regional and community-based museums and galleries**, including those led by volunteers.
4. **Align funding frameworks** to recognise collections care, conservation, interpretation, digitisation and storage as essential cultural activities.
5. Increase **Visions of Australia** funding to **three rounds per year**, incorporating contingency funding as an eligible expense to accommodate unforeseen circumstances such as increases to expenditure due to the fuel crisis and impacts of natural disasters.
6. **Develop national data and metrics** that capture the social, cultural and economic value of the collections sector.

Note:

This submission aligns with and supports the submissions and recommendations advanced by the following national industry bodies, and that of our sister organisation, Museums & Galleries of New South Wales:

- National Exhibition Touring Support (NETS) Australia
- National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA)
- National Advocates for Arts Education's (NAAE)
- National Public Galleries Alliance (NPGA)