



## National Cultural Policy Submission

20 May 2026

We are a nation of makers. Creating opportunities for makers and connecting them with our community is at the core of what we do at Craft + Design Canberra (CDC), the peak body for contemporary craft and design in the ACT and a member of the Australian Craft and Design Centres (ACDC) Network. This submission supports the joint ACDC submission.

As Artificial Intelligence reshapes the world, the value of the handmade is rising. Across the ACDC Network, craft and design returned approximately \$2.16 in direct artist income for every \$1 of public funding in 2025, yet received just 2% of Creative Australia funding over the past decade. CDC's results show what is possible: in 2025 we delivered \$539,898 in direct artist income, with First Nations participation up 188% and public program attendance up 879% on our previous non-Festival year.

### **Pillar 3: The Centrality of the Artist**

Our artists need training pathways they no longer have. The Creative Workplace Scoping Study Report identified an acute shortage of designers and makers. In the ACT, the reduction of craft and design specialisations at the ANU School of Art and Design has hit our workforce directly. CDC steps into the gap through workshops, residencies, Festival commissions, and through profiling artists via exhibitions, retail, open studios, markets, and our Meet the Maker video series. This supports artists' livelihood and wellbeing, but cannot substitute for a national workforce strategy.

The makers we represent are primary producers of Australian-made goods. Investing in skills and training keeps money in Australian communities, builds the market for design-led artisan manufacture, and offers a sustainable alternative to mass-produced, globally shipped goods.

**We propose a ten year workforce plan for craftspeople and designers, building on the Creative Workplaces initiative.**

### **Pillar 4: Strong Institutions**

Craft and design infrastructure in Australia is fragile. The 2026 closure of the Australian Design Centre reminded the sector how quickly capacity can be lost. CDC's own funding fluctuates year to year, making long-term planning and sustainability challenging even as we deliver record results. Strong national infrastructure supports makers to keep making locally,

and that matters economically and environmentally. A dedicated national structure with a whole of sector approach would unlock this potential for all Australians, not just the sector.

**We propose the establishment of a dedicated structure within Creative Australia, working in partnership with the ACDC Network on a whole of sector approach.**

## **Pillar 5: Reaching the Audience**

The Craft + Design Canberra Festival demonstrates how a biennial cultural event can reach audiences at scale and deliver significant economic impact. The 2024 Festival engaged 141,772 people and delivered an estimated \$16 million in economic impact through collaboration with over 30 partners. It is central to Canberra's UNESCO Creative City of Design bid. The 2026 Festival, themed Dissent, builds on this with public art commissions, design markets and international partnerships. This is the model we ask the National Cultural Policy to recognise and replicate.

When audiences engage with craft and design, in festivals, workshops, markets, and open studios, they don't just encounter beautiful handmade objects. Research consistently demonstrates that hands-on creative participation reduces stress, builds social connection, and supports mental health and wellbeing. Reaching wider audiences is therefore not just a market development opportunity, it is an investment in community health and social cohesion. CDC delivers this directly through arts for health programming including our making by hand for wellbeing workshops and the Daily Creative Challenge (370 participants in 2025, up 340%).

The uniqueness of the sector, its roots in First Nations traditions, its multicultural influences, its connection to place and material, is equally a powerful drawcard for inbound tourism and international markets, building Australia's reputation as a creative, design-literate nation. Signature biennial festivals and international representation are how this story reaches the world.

**We propose a ten year market development, cultural tourism and export strategy, including investment in signature biennial festivals like the CDC Festival and representation at events such as Milan Design Week.**

### **Jodie Cunningham**

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Craft + Design Canberra