

## National Cultural Policy submission

Country Arts SA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's National Cultural Policy. As South Australia's leading regional arts organisation, every day we see the essential role arts and culture play in strengthening regional, rural and remote communities, creating employment, supporting wellbeing, and ensuring regional Australians are active contributors to the nation's cultural identity.

Since 1993, Country Arts SA has worked across regional South Australia alongside artists, communities, Elders and organisations to ensure that creativity is not limited by geography. Regional communities are not simply audiences for metropolitan culture; they are places where stories are created, shared and sustained.

Our National cultural policy must recognise regional Australia and in particular First Nations peoples and young people, as central to the country's cultural future.

### First Nations First

In South Australia there are over 30 different First Nations language groups. First Nations leadership and self-determination must be central to a future national arts strategy. Self-determined long-term investment is needed to ensure First Nations artists, producers, curators and organisations can lead their own cultural and creative futures on Country. This requires decision-making authority, sustained resourcing, and career pathways to be anchored in regional and remote Australia. The programs delivering these outcomes must be locally led rather than externally imposed. First Nations arts and culture are not an adjunct to the sector; they are foundational to Australia's cultural identity and policies supporting this must be meaningfully imbedded in the regions.

### Place

A National policy needs to address the ongoing loss of regional artists and arts workers to metropolitan centres. Investment is needed in regional artist development, including residencies, mentorships, touring pathways, local commissioning, opportunities to build and sustain networks locally, regionally and nationally. Cross-sector partnerships with local, state and federal governments can embed art within non-arts industries such as health, education, tourism and community development, creating sustainable regional career pathways while strengthening local economies, wellbeing and cultural identity.

### Young people

Young people must also be placed at the centre of the next policy. Access to arts experiences, creative learning and pathways into creative careers should not depend on postcode. In regional communities, the urgency and need for connection, belonging, and creative expression is far more profound. Youth arts investment must value process as much as outcomes, creating spaces where young people feel alive, safe and connected to community. Long-term slow-burn investment in regional youth arts programs, digital connectivity, creative industries training and partnerships between schools and arts organisations is essential to ensuring the next generation can imagine futures for themselves within regional Australia.

### Regional Voices

Regional arts organisations are uniquely positioned as cultural seedbeds for storytelling. They nurture local voices, invest in emerging artists, preserve diverse community histories and create opportunities for stories that would otherwise remain unheard. Long-term operational investment in regional organisations is critical as short-term project funding alone cannot build the relationships, trust and continuity required to support communities over time. Regional people should be

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Far North & West  
Middleback Arts Centre  
Barnarla Country

Mid North & Yorke  
Northern Festival Centre  
Nukunu Country

Riverland & Murraylands  
Chaffey Theatre  
Erawirung Country

Limestone Coast  
Sir Robert Helpmann Theatre  
Boandik Country

Statewide programs  
Arts & Cultural Development  
First Nations Arts and Culture  
Grant Funding  
Performing Arts  
Visual Arts

making decisions about their futures and have a voice on national decisions that affect their lives.

### **Cultural infrastructure**

Regional arts infrastructure requires urgent and sustained investment. Regional arts centres, galleries and community cultural facilities are essential civic infrastructure that support creativity, tourism, employment and social cohesion. Investment in regional arts infrastructure is ultimately an investment in regional people's creativity, connection, wellbeing, cultural identity and sense of belonging. Facilities must be renewed and reimagined to meet contemporary community needs, including accessible spaces, digital capability and environmentally sustainable design. Without equitable investment, regional artists and communities will continue to experience inequality.

### **Now or never**

A strong National Cultural Policy recognises that the future of Australian culture depends on regional voices, First Nations leadership and the creative life of communities across Australia. It is extremely important now as communities face cost-of-living pressures, political division, climate impacts and economic uncertainty. In South Australia, challenges include environmental crises such as the recent agal bloom, the precarity of major manufacturing, agricultural and industrial sectors, a lack of low cost housing and growing social division, impacting regional communities and economies. Arts and culture are critical to building belonging, resilience, connection and local identity during times of change. With the increasing diversity of political power seeking to diminish diverse voices now is the time to rigorously strengthen and prioritise arts and culture.

### **Actions for consideration in the Policy:**

#### **Pillar 1 – First Nations First**

- Invest in First Nations leadership, workforce development and self-determination across the arts and cultural sector, particularly in regional, rural and remote Australia.
- Develop a national framework requiring all publicly funded arts and cultural organisations to commit to measurable First Nations cultural leadership, employment and governance outcomes.
- Establish annual First Nations investment and business development program for the arts, culture and creative sector, including small-to-medium organisations, independent artists and producers, and creative enterprises and small to medium organisations.
- Ensure First Nations Elders, communities and organisations lead decision making around cultural investment, storytelling and the sharing of cultural knowledge on Country.

#### **Pillar 2 – A Place for every story**

- Create long term investment opportunities for regionally based artists and practitioners to develop work that is made in, by, for and about their communities.
- Support new touring and presenting models that enable regionally generated work to reach new audiences and markets.

- Recognise the critical role regional organisations play as cultural seedbeds for storytelling, artistic development and community participation.

### **Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist**

- Invest in sustainable creative pathways that allow regional artists and practitioners to remain in their communities.
- Recognise the additional financial, travel and time burdens experienced by regional artists and practitioners, and resource these inequities appropriately.
- Support residencies, mentorships, local commissioning, touring pathways and network-building opportunities that strengthen regional creative ecosystems.
- Encourage cross-sector partnerships that embed artists and creative practice within health, education, tourism, environmental and community development sectors.

### **Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

- Invest in the renewal, accessibility and sustainability of regional, rural and remote arts centres, galleries and community cultural facilities.
- Support partnerships between local, state and federal governments to maintain and operate existing cultural infrastructure in line with contemporary national standards.
- Recognise that investment in arts infrastructure is an investment in people, community wellbeing, connection and regional resilience.
- Invest in “soft infrastructure” including producers, facilitators, technicians and cultural development workers who enable creative participation and sector growth across regional communities.

### **Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience**

- Ensure equitable access to arts and culture for regional, rural and remote communities regardless of postcode.
- Invest in youth arts participation, digital connectivity and culturally diverse programming that reflects contemporary regional Australia.
- Support community-led arts experiences that strengthen social cohesion, wellbeing and disaster recovery in regional communities.
- Develop audience development and touring initiatives that connect regional communities to locally made, nationally significant work.