

# National Cultural Policy Submission 2026

I'm Jon Cartwright, and I've been making games for the last 40 years. I started out back in the UK as a teenager programming my own games on home computer, and I've since worked my way up through a succession of roles to run teams, studios, companies, and now work as a consultant for Screen Agencies, game developers, and game publishers worldwide from Brisbane.

Like many countries, Australia has classed games as a screen industry broadly analogous to Film and Television. Whilst this approach is understandable to those working outside the games industry, in reality it is as if there was a single agency to oversee NRL, Rugby Union, and Soccer on the basis that they are all played on rectangular grass pitches. Certainly, there are many common terms and phrases that are used across all three, but the meaning in each is very different.

Having worked in the Australian games industry since 2005 I have seen many changes, and I am keen for action that would help create a sustainable industry with on-going career opportunities in Australia.

I do not believe that any Film or TV executives working in screen agencies are doing anything to deliberately harm the games industry. However, I do not believe that they have the expertise to manage the games industry if they have not worked in it. I have no doubt that if I was appointed CEO of a screen agency without any experience in Film or TV there would be outrage (and quite rightly so).

I believe that the best route is to establish a screen agency specifically for the games industry with its own budget, and its own remit, staffed by appropriately experienced games industry veterans. This is a model that has seen much success in New Zealand, with the establishment of NZ CODE. They are a major client of mine, and the outcomes they have achieved from a modest government investment are very impressive and far outclass anything in Australia. My professional opinion is that NZ CODE is the best games screen agency in the world and should be treated as the gold standard to emulate.

Pre-GFC there were numerous foreign owned game development studios operating in Australia that arguably employed the majority of staff. This was driven both by the talent available in Australia, but more because the AU\$ was weak and so the value proposition of developing games in Australia looked good in a spreadsheet. For example, [REDACTED] was set up with the specific business case of developing licensed games at low cost.

At that time, game publishing was much harder than it is today (before the advent of mobile app stores, and indeed before the PC Steam platform was open to all), and broadly the Australian owned studios did "work for hire" making games for game

publishers outside of Australia. Often the IP created in Australia would not be retained in Australia, either because the studios were owned by foreign game publishers, or the Australian developers contract terms required them to give it up. Clearly this is not ideal.

When the GFC hit, and the AU\$ became stronger the majority of the foreign-owned publishers closed their studios in Australia. This left hundreds of talented game developers without jobs, and with the mobile app stores in their infancy many left Australia for game development jobs in the US, Canada, and Europe. This was a literal brain drain. We cannot allow this to happen again.

In recent years the industry has evolved greatly, and it is now possible for small teams to create and publish games on many different platforms, from mobile, to Steam for PC, and consoles including PlayStation, Xbox, and Nintendo. This can be done entirely within Australia, although many game developers partner with overseas publishers to access funding, and specialist PR/marketing etc. In the vast majority of cases the IP is retained, and the revenue from the games comes into Australia. Here in Brisbane our prime example would be [REDACTED] which has generated millions of dollars of revenue. Even after the overseas publisher taking a cut this revenue has come into the local industry and provided stability for employees. There is a net positive for the entire Australian industry when there are large successes like this.

At the same time there has been a resurgence in foreign investment in studios in Australia, with Electronic Arts, Gameloft, Riot, and Sledgehammer establishing or purchasing studios in the country. Whilst these absolutely provide well-paying jobs for hundreds of staff, these are effectively outsourcing studios for the parent company, and none of the Australian entities publish games or collect revenue on them. As with the pre-GFC studios they are cost centres and not profit centres. There is no doubt that there is key talent working in these studios, but their continued existence is undoubtedly tied to the value of the AU\$.

I previously ran [REDACTED], which was a 100% owned subsidiary of a (then) USA owned company. The local studio was closed in 2023, and all game development was transferred to a cheaper studio in Vietnam. There was no issue with the talent in the studio, it was purely a cost-based decision.

I do believe that foreign-owned studios have a place as part of the Australian games industry. However, the higher the percentage of the Australian industry that works for foreign-owned studios, the greater the dependence on the value of the AU\$ which is not something under industry control.

To help create and foster a more sustainable Australian games industry I feel it would be prudent to encourage locally owned studios to establish and grow profitable businesses as part of the local games ecosystem. The NZ CODE model is the gold standard here.

Not only do they provide (competitive) grants, but critically they provide training, education, and mentorship from the industry experts in their field worldwide to help set the NZ game developers up for success. NZ CODE regularly attends industry events and is now a trusted brand for global publishers and investors. The NZ industry punches well above its weight, with successful titles including multi-million sellers DREDGE and Abiotic Factor with more in the wings. Critically, the number of staff working for foreign owned studios in NZ is far lower than in Australia. As a result, a much higher proportion of revenue from NZ developed games goes back into NZ. At the New Zealand Game Developers Conference in October 2025, it was announced that the NZ CODE budget was to be doubled due to the success and return on investment. The NZ games industry is a bigger value export than NZ wool. Read that again.

I urge you to look at the games industry outside of the lens of Film and TV and help us create a thriving, resilient, frictionless export economy.