

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous

Individual



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

As a visual artist working in Australia, I welcome this consultation as a meaningful opportunity to shape policy that serves not just the idea of art, but the people who make it. My submission focuses on Pillar 3 — the Centrality of the Artist — because I believe it is where the gap between aspiration and reality is most stark, and where the next policy can make the most tangible difference to working lives.

Most visual artists in Australia earn well below minimum wage from their practice. This is not a niche problem — it is a structural one. We ask artists to generate cultural value, represent Australia at home and abroad, anchor communities, and contribute to a creative economy, while simultaneously accepting that their labour is routinely unpaid or underpaid. The next National Cultural Policy must name this contradiction directly and commit to minimising it.

A nationally consistent minimum wage standard for artists — particularly those engaged through publicly funded bodies — is long overdue. Payment standards should be embedded into grant conditions, commissioning frameworks, and exhibition agreements across all tiers of government funding. Symbolic recognition of artists as workers is no longer sufficient. The policy needs enforceable, funded commitments.

Wages are only part of the picture. Visual artists also navigate unsafe working environments, unclear contracts, lack of superannuation, and no access to standard workplace protections. The arts sector has historically normalised poor conditions because passion is treated as compensation. This must change.

The establishment of Creative Workplaces has been a significant and welcome step — providing the sector with dedicated advice, resources and advocacy on pay, safety and welfare. The next policy should build on this foundation by substantially expanding Creative Workplaces' remit, reach and resourcing. A small team cannot meet the scale of need across a sector this large and this diverse. Growing this function — and giving it real authority — would signal that the government is serious about treating artists as the workers

Artists also carry a disproportionate administrative burden — grant writing, reporting, self-promotion — that competes directly with time spent making work. The next policy should invest in reducing this friction: simpler applications, multi-year funding options, and peer-assessed processes that respect artists' time and expertise.

A cultural policy that champions the artist in principle but fails to protect them in practice will not produce the flourishing creative sector Australia deserves. The stories we tell as a nation are only as strong as the conditions we create for the people telling them.

I urge the next National Cultural Policy to treat artist welfare not as a footnote, but as a foundation — and to resource it accordingly.