

Submission to the Public Consultation on Australia's Next National Cultural Policy

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Executive Summary

Australia is designed. The cities we live in, the homes we inhabit, the public spaces we share, the objects we use, the services we rely upon and the systems that structure everyday life all influence how we live, behave and communicate with one another, and all are shaped by designers. Design is the infrastructure through which every Australian lives. It is the form in which culture is most frequently encountered, and the practice through which the nation continues to imagine, make and remake the conditions of everyday life.

The Design Institute of Australia (DIA) is the peak professional body for Australian designers. Founded in 1939 and now in its 88th year, the DIA is Australia's only design institution governed by a constitution, representing practitioners across every discipline of contemporary design, including industrial, interior, fashion, jewellery and textiles, graphic and visual communication, multimedia, UI/UX, web, animation, VFX, service and strategic design, alongside design-led material practitioners spanning the intersection of design and craft. Its work is supported by a national community of members, accredited designers, Fellows and Hall of Fame luminaries, including branch councils in every state and territory and representation on the World Design Organisation, the International Council of Design and the Asia Pacific Space Designers Alliance.

This submission is made in response to the public consultation on Australia's next National Cultural Policy. It welcomes the Government's commitment to consecutive national cultural policies and the continuation of the five-pillar framework first established in *Revive*. It makes a single, structural argument: the recognition of design that already exists within Australia's cultural policy architecture should now be brought into proportion with the scale, significance and contemporary scope of the practice itself. This is not a question of introducing design into cultural policy. It is a question of bringing federal cultural policy into alignment with the country it is written for.

The Evidence Base

The case for design within national cultural policy rests on the Australian Government's own evidence.

In 2020, IP Australia's *Defining Design: Design's role in the Australian economy* established that the contribution to Australia's GDP of design-related industries and workers was approximately \$67.5 billion per annum, representing more than 3.5 per cent of GDP.¹

In December 2024, following sustained advocacy by the DIA through its *Define Design* campaign, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) elevated Design to a standalone Minor Group 242 Design Professionals within the new Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA), with all design occupations recognised at Skill Level 1. The ABS estimates an Australian design workforce of 50,000 to 150,000 professionals; industry

¹IP Australia, *Defining Design: Design's role in the Australian economy*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2020.

estimates place the total population of practising designers across the economy at more than 300,000.²

The Government's own consultation paper acknowledges that cultural and creative activity contributed \$67.4 billion to the economy in 2023–24 and employed 591,000 people, and that culture “fosters creativity, design thinking and problem-solving capabilities” central to innovation and productivity.³

These figures establish the scale of design's contribution. The Australian Government's own investment record tells a different story. In 2025, Australia's network of craft and design organisations alone reached more than 4.1 million people, returning approximately \$2.16 in direct practitioner and sector-worker income for every \$1 of government investment. Yet from 2015 to 2025, Craft and Design combined received just 2% of total Creative Australia funding, and only 0.095% of estimated Australian Government cultural expenditure over the decade.⁴

Design is not absent from the existing policy architecture. *Revive* explicitly named design thinking as central to innovation and national economic growth. Creative Australia's renamed Visual Arts, Craft and Design Partnership Framework (VACDPF, 2025) formally inserted design into the national framework title. This is a significant and welcome step, but its full promise will only be realised when design is recognised within the framework as a cultural practice that encompasses the diverse outputs Australian designers deliver across the full contemporary scope of practice.

Over recent decades, Australia's design culture has been progressively built through the collective efforts of designers, state and regional galleries, museums, universities, private galleries, industry bodies, design platforms, Design Weeks, festivals and the national network of craft and design centres. Together, these organisations and practitioners have organically established a substantial cultural infrastructure for Australian design, often through sustained sector-led investment supported by modest state and local government funding, supporting design production, exhibition-making, collection building, publishing, critical discourse, professional development, commissioning, retail, public programming and international exchange.

Importantly, this infrastructure has not emerged from a singular national strategy, but through sustained investment, advocacy, experimentation and collaboration across the sector itself. In turn, it has significantly expanded public engagement with contemporary Australian design and materially shaped the nation's cultural landscape. **What remains missing is policy parity.**

Not parity through a separate vertical body that would peel design out of the cultural framework. Not parity through aggregation within a “visual art, craft and design” paradigm

²Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA)*, December 2024 release, Minor Group 242 Design Professionals.

³Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, *Public Consultation Paper — National Cultural Policy*, Commonwealth of Australia, March 2026.

⁴Australian Craft and Design Centres (ACDC) Network, *Submission to the National Cultural Policy, 2026*; sector data 2015–2025.

that positions design as a narrow form of production. Parity through three complementary structural moves: the explicit recognition of design's full contemporary scope, in all forms, within Creative Australia's existing architecture; the insertion of design as a thread woven across all five pillars of the National Cultural Policy, not contained within any single sub-category; and a paired National Design Policy that holds design's cultural, economic, civic and environmental contribution in a single national instrument. The cultural recognition exists in name. What it currently lacks is the structural form, scale and policy parity that the contemporary scope of the practice warrants.

National Consultation and Occupational Review

To inform this submission, the DIA draws on evidence gathered through the national *Make Design Count* consultation process (February–March 2026)⁵ undertaken as part of DIA's submission to the ABS for the OSCA 2027 Update.⁶

Through a national survey and subsequent Expert Professional Review Panels, design practitioners, educators and industry representatives across all ten occupations within Minor Group 242 Design Professionals contributed evidence regarding the contemporary nature of Australian design practice. The submission represented one of the most significant advocacy initiatives undertaken for the design profession in recent years.

The consultation demonstrated that contemporary design practice is fundamentally underpinned by strategic and systems thinking, research, communication, problem-solving, aesthetic and material intelligence, production knowledge, and interdisciplinary collaboration. It further revealed the significant prevalence of independent practice, consultancy and small-to-medium studio models across the Australian design sector, reflecting broader shifts in the structure of creative and professional design work.

These findings reinforce the importance of ensuring that OSCA accurately reflects the contemporary realities of design practice, including emerging strategic and service-led design capabilities now operating across government, industry, technology, health, education and social innovation contexts.

The Structural Argument

Design's place in Australian cultural life is not a question for the future. It is the present condition the policy must describe.

Australia's design culture lives across a diverse and expanding ecology of organisations, marketplaces, venues, events, forums, public programs, platforms, publishing, media, and digital and international exchanges, connecting audiences and practitioners through shared engagement with design ideas, practice and production.

⁵ Make Design Count DIA campaign 2026 www.design.org.au/make-design-count

⁶ DIA OSCA Update 2027 submission
www.design.org.au/dianews/dia-leads-one-of-australias-largest-design-advocacy-campaigns

Within Australia's leading state, regional and local galleries and museums, design has become a visible and valued cultural experience. Ambitious exhibitions and collection building initiatives present works by Australian designers that explore material culture, technology, sustainability, identity, innovation and the futures we might inhabit. Alongside these public institutions, Australia's national network of craft and design centres, private galleries, design fairs and independent practitioner-led initiatives champion designer-makers and expand public engagement with contemporary craft, collectible design, design-led manufacturing and experimental practice.

Across the country, a growing constellation of place-based Design Weeks activates cities and regions through talks, open studios, workshops, installations and public conversations spanning interiors and product to health and communication design. In 2025 Melbourne Design Week alone attracted more than 100,000 attendees across 350+ events and over 1,300 participating designers, confirming its position as one of the most significant design platforms in the Asia-Pacific region.⁷ Fashion and jewellery festivals, typography and graphic design conferences, digital and games culture showcases, and placemaking forums further contribute to a public design culture that is visible, participatory and interdisciplinary.

Audiences encounter design across civic, private, commercial and digital contexts, where it shapes how people gather, communicate, navigate and participate in cultural life.

This expanding ecology reflects the breadth of Australian design practice itself, a field that moves fluidly across typologies, experiences and contexts, spanning artistic and cultural expression, studio and independent practice, industry and manufacturing, digital and emerging technologies, communication and service design, spatial and urban environments, material innovation, sustainability, storytelling and markets. Recognising this diversity is essential if national cultural policy is to accurately reflect the scale, complexity and contemporary relevance of Australian design culture, and the audiences who already engage with it.

The cultural infrastructure for design already exists on the ground. The opportunity for the next National Cultural Policy is to bring its own architecture into alignment with this momentum: recognising design in its full contemporary scope within Creative Australia's existing framework, inserting it as a thread woven across all five pillars of cultural policy, and committing to a paired National Design Policy that holds design's cultural, economic, civic and environmental contribution in a single national instrument.

⁷Melbourne Design Week, *About*, National Gallery of Victoria, designweek.melbourne/about/ (2025 audience and program data).

The Submission's Approach

This submission engages all five pillars of the policy framework.

Pillar 1 — First Nations First. The Design Institute of Australia acknowledges First Nations design as one of the world's oldest continuing design cultures, carrying deep knowledge systems, cultural authority and enduring relationships to Country across objects, communication, environments, materials and contemporary practice. In 2017, the DIA supported the establishment of the Australian Indigenous Design Charter⁸, developed to support the respectful and accurate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in design and associated media, and to guide Indigenous and non-Indigenous designers, clients, commissioners and institutions.

The charter acknowledges First Nations design as both a physical and relational practice, one that extends beyond conventional western design disciplines to include belonging, relationality, storying, reciprocity, cultural continuity and connection to Country. Alongside spatial, communication, environmental, wearable, object, interaction and service design practices, it recognises Indigenous knowledge systems, community exchange and lived cultural experience as integral to contemporary design thinking.

Building on this foundation, this submission supports the explicit inclusion of First Nations design within the First Nations First pillar of the National Cultural Policy, recognition of First Nations designers and design leaders, and continued support for the evolution of the Australian Indigenous Design Charter as an important national framework for ethical and culturally informed design practice.

Consistent with the ongoing advocacy of the DIA's Continuing Indigenous Ambassador, Nicole Monks,⁹ this submission calls for a coordinated national approach to supporting First Nations design practice, leadership and cultural authority across Australia's contemporary design ecology.

Pillar 2 — A Place for Every Story. Design is one of the primary ways cultural stories of place, people and contemporary Australian life take material form, across objects, interiors, buildings, public spaces, communication, services, systems and digital environments. Australian design carries the distinct social, civic, environmental, technological and economic conditions through which contemporary culture is experienced and understood. This submission proposes that "diverse forms of cultural expression" be explicitly defined to include design practice across its full contemporary scope.

It further calls for federal recognition and support of the Design Institute of Australia's *Designed in Australia* initiative as a national design provenance framework, developed in partnership with Creative Australia, IP Australia and relevant government agencies, to strengthen public recognition of Australian design, support local designers and design-led manufacturing, and promote Australian design culture nationally and internationally.

⁸ Australian Indigenous Design Charter www.design.org.au/dianews/how-designers-can-contribute-to-greater-visibility-of-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-culture

⁹ Nicole Monks Continuing Indigenous Ambassador www.design.org.au/dia

As a call to action, this submission proposes the development of an Australian Design Provenance Framework to support the visibility, attribution and cultural value of Australian design practice.

Pillar 3 — Centrality of the Artist. National Design Workforce Plan. Designers are professional creative workers. The ABS OSCA 2024 milestone formally recognises this within Australia’s national workforce framework. This submission proposes that cultural policy now aligns with that recognition by extending **Creative Workplaces** protections, fair pay frameworks, creative rights and AI protections to designers. It further proposes that the Government’s Creative Workplaces initiative be expanded through a long-term **National Design Workforce and Career Development Strategy** that supports designers at every stage of practice, recognising the distinct conditions, contexts and career trajectories that shape design practice, strengthening pathways for Australian design and design-led manufacturing, and fostering partnerships through which both designers and corporate Australia can prosper through local design innovation.

Pillar 4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure. This submission proposes a series of structural reforms to achieve greater policy parity for Australian design within the national cultural framework. These include the explicit recognition of design’s full contemporary scope within Creative Australia’s existing structures, dedicated internal representation for design within Creative Australia, and the development of a National Design Policy as a companion instrument to the National Cultural Policy.

This submission does not propose a separate standalone body for design, but rather sustained internal capacity within Creative Australia with a clear mandate to advocate for the sector, develop meaningful and relevant funding pathways, strengthen research and data capability, and coordinate design policy across cultural, industry, education, manufacturing and innovation portfolios. Such a framework should be supported by long-term investment designed to secure the future of Australian designers, design culture and design-led innovation.

As a call to action, this submission proposes the establishment of a **National Design Policy and Cultural Infrastructure Framework** to guide the coordinated development, recognition and support of Australian design practice, institutions, audiences and cultural infrastructure over the coming decade.

Pillar 5 — Engaging the Audience. Design is among the most publicly engaged forms of culture in everyday Australian life, encountered through ideas for places, use, interaction, communication and speculation. This submission proposes federal recognition of, and co-investment in, Australia’s national network of Design Weeks, design festivals and design-led cultural programming as significant cultural infrastructure with public audiences at scale. It further calls for stronger support for the international presentation and promotion of Australian design across the distinctive global platforms through which design culture is exchanged, exhibited and advanced.

Recognising the breadth, visibility and international relevance of Australian design practice is essential if cultural policy is to accurately reflect the contemporary design ecology and the

audiences it engages. As a call to action, this submission proposes the development of a **National Design Audience and International Engagement Strategy** to support public participation, cultural exchange and the global visibility of Australian design.

Recommendations

The DIA calls on the Australian Government to:

1. Recognise **Design in its full contemporary scope** and insert it as a thread woven across all five pillars of the next National Cultural Policy.
2. Include First Nations design within the First Nations First pillar, support the evolution of the **First Nations-led Australian Indigenous Design Charter**, and commit to a coordinated national approach to First Nations design.
3. Recognise and support the DIA's *Designed in Australia* initiative as a national design provenance framework, and develop an **Australian Design Provenance Framework** with Creative Australia and IP Australia.
4. Extend Creative Workplaces protections to designers as professional creative workers, and develop a long-term **National Design Workforce and Career Development Strategy** supporting designers at every stage of practice.
5. Establish dedicated internal representation for **Design** inside Creative Australia with a clear mandate to advocate, develop funding pathways, strengthen research, and coordinate design policy across portfolios.
6. Commit to a National Design Policy as a companion instrument to the National Cultural Policy, and establish a **National Design Policy and Cultural Infrastructure Framework**.
7. Co-invest in Australia's national network of Design Weeks and design festivals, and develop a **National Design Audience and International Engagement Strategy** to support public participation and global visibility.
8. Embed design within national policy narratives including Future Made in Australia, digital transformation of government services, the circular economy and climate transition, and accessibility and inclusion.

Context and Framing

The DIA submits these recommendations not in pursuit of inclusion at the margins of cultural policy, but in service of a national cultural policy that accurately describes the country it is written for. *Revive* placed culture back at the centre of national life. The next chapter of cultural policy can recognise design as one of the principal practices through which that culture is made, encountered, and continually renewed.

The Design Institute of Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute these recommendations to the National Cultural Policy Review and acknowledges the Australian

Government's continued commitment to strengthening Australia's cultural future. The DIA looks forward to ongoing dialogue regarding the role of Australian design within the nation's cultural, social and economic life.