



Submission to the Australian Government

National Cultural Policy Consultation:

Revive: A place for every story and a story for every place

Queen Victoria Market as Living National Cultural Infrastructure

Queen Victoria Market is not simply a market precinct or development site. It is one of Australia's most significant living cultural landscapes: a place where First Nations history, migration, trade, working life, civic ritual, food culture, public memory and built heritage remain intertwined in daily operation.

The Market occupies land of profound historical and cultural significance. The site overlays part of the former Old Melbourne Cemetery, established in 1837, including areas associated with Aboriginal burials and early colonial settlement. [OBJ] The City of Melbourne itself acknowledges the enduring cultural connection of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples to this place extending back more than 2000 generations. [OBJ]

Queen Victoria Market is also one of the last major civic marketplaces in Australia that continues to operate substantially in its historic form and function. QVM Pty Ltd describes it as “the longest surviving marketplace of its scale and diversity in Australia.” [OBJ]

The Market is therefore not merely a collection of heritage structures. It is evidence of Australian culture in continuous operation.

This submission supports the continued development of the National Cultural Policy around the five pillars established in Revive and argues that Queen Victoria Market demonstrates why cultural heritage protection should be repositioned nationally as a core arts and culture responsibility, rather than treated principally as a planning or environmental matter.

1. First Nations First

The Queen Victoria Market precinct is inseparable from First Nations history.

The site forms part of Country that sustained Aboriginal communities for tens of thousands of years prior to colonisation. The Old Melbourne Cemetery documentation confirms that an “Aborigines” burial section existed within the cemetery reserve. [OBJ]

The importance of this history extends beyond archaeology. It raises questions of cultural memory, public truth-telling and respectful custodianship.

Redevelopment frameworks that focus primarily on engineering, planning controls and land activation risk reducing First Nations cultural significance to a compliance exercise. Cultural sites of this nature require a national framework grounded in cultural stewardship, storytelling and living public memory.

The Market should be understood as a nationally significant cultural landscape requiring integrated First Nations interpretation, protection and governance.

2. A Place for Every Story

Markets are repositories of public memory.

Queen Victoria Market tells the story of Melbourne’s growth from colonial settlement to multicultural metropolis. Its traders, customers, migrant communities, food traditions and public rituals form part of Australia’s intangible cultural heritage.

The Market’s significance lies not only in its sheds and facades, but in the continuity of social practice:

- * independent traders;
- * affordable fresh food;
- * multilingual exchange;
- * working-class commerce;
- * intergenerational family businesses;
- * civic gathering.

Without the functioning market, much of that living cultural meaning disappears.

The loss of operational authenticity would reduce the site to a themed heritage shell rather than a living civic institution.

3. Centrality of the Artist and Cultural Worker

The Market has historically supported makers, craftspeople, food producers, designers, musicians and small creative enterprises.

It functions as a low-barrier-entry ecosystem for independent enterprise and cultural participation. It enables forms of cultural production that are increasingly displaced by homogenised retail and speculative urban development.

Its role in supporting small-scale creative and entrepreneurial activity should be recognised as part of Australia's broader cultural economy.

4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Queen Victoria Market is cultural infrastructure.

It performs many of the functions traditionally associated with museums, galleries and civic institutions:

- * preservation of collective memory;
- * transmission of social traditions;
- * public gathering;
- * cultural participation;
- * civic identity formation.

Yet unlike many institutions, it remains economically productive and socially accessible.

Current governance settings often treat heritage as subordinate to planning frameworks and commercial redevelopment pressures. This creates a structural imbalance where economic optimisation can progressively erode cultural integrity.

The current policy architecture places much heritage responsibility within planning and environmental frameworks. This submission argues that nationally significant living heritage assets should also fall clearly within

the remit of arts and culture policy because heritage assets are not simply environmental objects. They are evidence of culture itself.

The destruction or dilution of living heritage cannot be understood solely as a planning matter.

5. Engaging the Audience

Queen Victoria Market succeeds because it is participatory culture, not passive culture.

Millions of people engage with it annually not as tourists observing history behind glass, but as participants in an active civic environment.

Its accessibility is one of its greatest strengths:

- * affordable food;
- * open public access;
- * intergenerational use;
- * multicultural participation;
- * everyday civic interaction.

This kind of democratic cultural infrastructure is increasingly rare internationally.

The Market demonstrates that cultural policy should not focus solely on elite institutions or curated experiences. Living civic places are equally important to national identity and social cohesion.

Conclusion

Queen Victoria Market should be recognised as nationally significant living cultural infrastructure.

Its importance arises not only from built heritage, but from the interaction between place, memory, commerce, migration, public life and continuing social practice.

The national cultural policy presents an opportunity to rethink how Australia governs heritage:

- * not simply as a planning constraint;
- * not merely as an environmental issue;

* but as a foundational component of national culture.

Heritage assets are evidence of culture.

Once living cultural systems are fragmented or reduced to commercial abstractions, they cannot easily be reconstructed.

Queen Victoria Market demonstrates why Australia requires stronger national cultural protections for living heritage places whose significance extends far beyond architecture or land use.

Separate attachment: Intangible Values Report

Mary-Lou Howie

President

Friends of Queen Victoria Market Inc

Tel: [REDACTED]

www.facebook.com/friendsofqueenvictoriamarket

