



**NATIONAL INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL OF AUSTRALIA  
2026**

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**National Cultural Policy Submission**

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*By the National Indian Film Festival of Australia*

*Australia's only national film festival of Indian cinema*

*World's largest national celebration of Indian cinema outside India.*



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## INTRODUCTION

Australia's relationship with India is often discussed through the lenses of trade, education, migration and diplomacy. Yet, culture is where the relationship becomes human.

Cinema is one of the most powerful cultural bridges between nations and communities. It shapes how societies see one another; how diasporas remain connected across generations, and how audiences encounter stories beyond stereotype or simplification.

The National Indian Film Festival of Australia (NIFFA) is Australia's first and only national annual celebration of Indian cinema. In a short time, it has grown from a long-overdue idea into a national platform: Indian stories on Australian screens, in capital cities and regional communities, for Indian Australians and for the wider Australian public.

NIFFA was created because Indian cinema in Australia deserves more than occasional red carpets, nostalgic song-and-dance shorthand, or the assumption that "Indian film" means one language, one region, or one idea of India. Indian cinema is not a singular tradition. It encompasses multilingual work ranging from Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Bengali, Punjabi, Assamese, Manipuri, Kannada, Gujarati, Nepali, Kashmiri, Konkani, Odia, Bhojpuri, English and many more. It involves diverse storytelling practices like documentary, animation, arthouse, mainstream, experimental, devotional, political, diasporic, regional, queer, feminist, commercial and deeply local work. With NIFFA, it is now part of Australia's cultural life.

NIFFA's public program has already demonstrated this ambition: the festival presents regional and independent voices alongside mainstream icons, and it includes industry panels, masterclasses and discussions on co-production, investment, distribution and development. Its 2026 footprint spans major cities and regional centres, including Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Geelong, Adelaide, Dubbo, Broken Hill, Perth, Alice Springs, Darwin, Brisbane, Gold Coast and Hobart. Apart from feature films, shorts, documentaries and animations, the program also includes restored classics, special screenings and a Punjabi package. Presented across 15 Indian languages, all films in the program are International or Australian premieres.

The first and only **National Annual Celebration of Indian Cinema in Australia**





This submission asks that the next National Cultural Policy recognise diaspora-led screen culture not as a decorative add-on to multicultural Australia, but as national cultural infrastructure.

## 1. Diaspora-led cultural platforms are part of the national story

Australia's Indian-born population is now the second-largest migrant community in the country, with 916,300 Indian-born people living in Australia at the end of June 2024. That number alone does not tell the full story. The Indian Australian community is young, multilingual, entrepreneurial, regionally spread, and increasingly central to public life.

Yet the cultural infrastructure available to this community has not kept pace with its presence.

Too often, multicultural arts are treated as community celebration rather than cultural leadership. Food, flags and festivals are welcomed; serious artistic infrastructure is harder to secure. This creates a gap between who Australia is and what Australia funds, archives, tours, markets and exports.

NIFFA sits inside that gap. It is a national screen platform built by people who understand both the Indian cinematic ecosystem and the Australian cultural landscape. It is not simply bringing Indian films to Indian audiences. It is creating a shared public space where Indian Australians can see themselves without translation, where non-Indian Australians can encounter Indian stories beyond stereotype, and where the Australian screen sector can engage with one of the world's most powerful film cultures on practical, artistic and commercial terms.

The next policy should explicitly recognise diaspora-led arts organisations and festivals as part of Australia's cultural infrastructure.

## 2. "A place for every story" must include stories told in many languages

The current consultation paper says the next policy will continue the five pillars of *Revive*, including "A Place for Every Story", "Centrality of the Artist", "Strong Cultural Infrastructure"





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and “Engaging the Audience”. Those pillars are the right architecture. The next step is to make them real for communities whose stories are multilingual and transnational.

For many Indian Australians, language is not only communication. It is memory, region, caste, class, faith, humour, migration, family and belonging. A Tamil film does not speak to the same cultural history as a Punjabi film. A Manipuri film does not carry the same emotional geography as a Hindi blockbuster. A Marathi documentary, a Malayalam drama, an Assamese children’s story or a Telugu short film may each reach a different part of Australia.

NIFFA’s programming recognises this. Its 2026 opening night film, *Boong*, is a Manipuri film set in Manipur. Its wider program includes films in languages such as Malayalam, Assamese, Rongmei, Tai Khamti and Marathi. That matters because it moves Indian cinema in Australia beyond shorthand and into truth.

The next National Cultural Policy should support multilingual screen exhibition and audience development, including subtitling, access services, regional touring and marketing support for films that would otherwise never reach Australian cinemas.

### 3. Festivals are not events; they are pipelines

A festival like NIFFA is visible when the lights go down in a cinema. But the real work happens before and after that moment.

Festivals create audiences. They train volunteers and emerging workers. They build media literacy. They connect distributors, exhibitors, producers, critics, students, diplomats and investors. They create a reason for interstate travel. They give local councils a cultural bridge into communities that may not otherwise feel invited into mainstream arts spaces. They create archives of taste, attendance, response and possibility.

NIFFA also supports industry development. Its 2026 materials identify grants, professional prizes and opportunities across post-production, distribution and film completion. Its FilmFreeway listing describes pitch and fund initiatives, including a post-production completion grant valued up to A\$10,000.

This is cultural infrastructure. It deserves policy settings that match the work.

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NIFFA recommends a dedicated national fund for diaspora-led screen festivals and touring programs, with multi-year support rather than one-off project funding. The fund should prioritise organisations that can demonstrate national reach, regional engagement, industry development, accessibility, youth participation and cultural diplomacy outcomes.

#### **4. Regional Australia must be part of the screen relationship with India**

If Indian cinema only appears in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia has misunderstood both India and itself.

Indian Australians live, work, study and build businesses across the country. Regional cinemas and communities deserve access to curated international screen culture. Regional councils also understand something national policy sometimes forgets: a festival can change the feeling of a place. It can bring people into a town centre, activate local venues, invite new communities into public life, and put a regional location into a much larger cultural conversation.

NIFFA's expansion into places such as Geelong, Dubbo, Broken Hill, Alice Springs and Darwin is not a side project. It is central to the point. The policy should support national touring circuits for culturally diverse screen festivals, particularly where those festivals build partnerships with local cinemas, councils, schools, universities, First Nations advisors, tourism bodies and community organisations.

A regional audience member should not need to travel to a capital city to see contemporary Indian cinema in a cinema. An Indian Australian teenager in regional Australia should not have to rely only on an algorithm to find stories that speak to their family, language or imagination.

#### **5. The Australia-India screen relationship needs cultural policy, not just treaty architecture**

The Australia-India Audiovisual Co-production Agreement is an important foundation. The Office for the Arts has said the agreement will help Australian producers reach new audiences, open new investment avenues and boost distribution in one of the world's largest and growing markets. The Parliamentary committee report also identified cultural exchange,





employment, technical development, new markets, tourism and stronger diplomatic ties as key justifications for the agreement.

But a treaty alone does not create a relationship. People do.

Australia needs more producers who understand India. More programmers who understand Indian cinema beyond Bollywood. More distributors who can handle language diversity. More screen agencies that understand the difference between Indian diaspora audiences and Indian domestic audiences. More Australian creatives of Indian and South Asian heritage with the confidence, networks and support to lead projects, not only consult on them.

NIFFA recommends that the next Cultural Policy establish an Australia–India Screen Culture and Market Development Initiative. This should include support for co-production labs, producer delegations, festival-to-festival partnerships, student and early-career pathways, distribution partnerships, subtitling and market-readiness support, and reciprocal showcases in India and Australia.

This would turn the co-production agreement from a legal mechanism into a living cultural bridge.

## **6. First Nations First must remain central**

NIFFA strongly supports the continuation of First Nations First as the first pillar.

Diaspora-led organisations must not claim space by displacing the oldest continuing cultures on earth. The better model is respect, relationship and place-based practice. NIFFA's own structure includes First Nations advisors, including Jodie Bell and Richard Jameson, who bring deep experience in First Nations production, community media and storytelling sovereignty.

The next policy should support meaningful exchange between First Nations and diaspora-led cultural organisations: not token welcomes, but real advisory relationships, commissioning conversations, regional partnerships, youth programs and protocols that teach migrant communities how to work respectfully in the Country.



Australia's cultural future will be strongest when First Nations sovereignty and multicultural belonging are not treated as competing stories, but as different responsibilities within the same national landscape.

## 7. Artists and arts workers must be paid, protected and visible

The consultation paper rightly notes that digital tools and platforms are changing how creative work is made, distributed and discovered, while also raising questions about authenticity, creative rights and fair remuneration.

This is urgent for screen culture.

Diaspora artists often work across borders, languages and informal networks. Many are expected to donate labour in the name of community. Many translate, subtitle, host, promote, interpret and culturally mediate without that labour being properly recognised. The next policy should treat this work as skilled cultural labour.

NIFFA recommends that funding programs for festivals and screen culture include clear support for fair pay, access costs, culturally competent producing, translation, captioning, community outreach and digital promotion. These are not administrative extras. They are how audiences are reached and artists are respected.

## 8. Discoverability is now a cultural policy issue

The next generation does not discover culture only through institutions. They discover it through feeds, friends, clips, memes, streamers, influencers, parents, subtitles, podcasts, community WhatsApp groups and cinema foyers. If Australian cultural policy is serious about engaging audiences, it must take discoverability seriously.

For Indian cinema in Australia, this is especially important. Mainstream Indian commercial releases can cut through. Smaller regional, independent and documentary films often cannot. Without festivals like NIFFA, many of these works would never be seen in Australian cinemas.

The next policy should fund audience development and discoverability for diverse screen works, including digital campaigns, school and university engagement, critic development,





community ambassadors, creator-led short-form content and partnerships with multicultural media.

This is not marketing fluff. It is the new front door to culture.

## CONCLUSION

NIFFA exists because Australia needed a national Indian film festival worthy of the scale, complexity and promise of the Australia–India relationship.

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise what this moment represents. Indian cinema in Australia is not a niche interest. It is a meeting point for migration, diplomacy, trade, youth identity, language, regional access, artistic ambition and national storytelling.

If the policy is to reflect who Australia is becoming, it must invest in platforms that already live in that future.

NIFFA recommends that the next National Cultural Policy:

1. Recognise diaspora-led festivals as national cultural infrastructure.
2. Create multi-year funding for nationally significant multicultural and diaspora screen festivals.
3. Support regional touring of diverse screen culture.
4. Build an Australia–India Screen Culture and Market Development Initiative.
5. Fund multilingual access, subtitling, captioning and culturally competent audience development.
6. Support youth, second-generation and emerging screen workers from Indian and South Asian backgrounds.
7. Strengthen First Nations–diaspora cultural protocols and partnerships.
8. Treat discoverability, digital rights and fair pay as central cultural policy issues.

Australia’s story is not becoming less complex. It is becoming more honest. NIFFA is proud to help put that honesty on screen.

