

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

As an arts supporter and audience member, I write to urge the Australian Government to ensure the next iteration of the National Cultural Policy (NCP) takes decisive action against censorship, political interference, and racism in the arts. The health of Australia's cultural life depends on it.

The arts have always been a space where difficult truths are told, where marginalised voices find expression, and where communities make sense of the world. Over the past several years, that space has been shrinking. Artists have faced public targeting, loss of funding, and institutional abandonment for speaking out on issues of justice, particularly in relation to countries condemned by the United Nations for acts of apartheid, genocide, and war crimes. This is not a fringe concern. It is a crisis at the heart of Australian cultural life, and the NCP must respond to it directly.

On racism and decolonisation: The next NCP must adopt a genuine decolonial, anti-racist, and anti-discrimination framework. not as a symbolic gesture, but as a structural commitment. This means taking leadership from First Nations peoples and from communities already doing this work. It also means removing definitions of discrimination that have been selectively applied to silence artists from particular backgrounds. I strongly support replacing such frameworks with the UN's core stance that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, without distinction of any kind. No artist should face a higher barrier to expression based on their ethnicity, religion, or national origin.

On censorship and freedom of artistic expression: Freedom of expression in the arts is already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act. The next NCP must honour that commitment in practice, not just in principle. Artists must be free to sign open letters, participate in boycotts, create politically challenging work, and speak out against injustice, without fear of reputational damage, funding withdrawal, or institutional abandonment. The current culture of intimidation is real, well-documented, and deeply corrosive to creative life. Strong cultural infrastructure cannot be built on silence and self-censorship.

On political interference: Arts funding must be genuinely arms-length. The principle that politicians should not influence or direct funding decisions is already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act under article 14.2, yet breaches of this principle have occurred and gone unaddressed. The next NCP must not only reaffirm this principle but enforce it. I call for a formal inquiry into political interference in the arts, including interference via donations, board appointments, and lobbying. Donors must not direct institutional programming. Board members with active ties to political parties or lobby groups must be removed.

As an audience member, I attend the arts because I believe in their power to challenge, illuminate, and connect us. That power is only possible when artists are free. I urge the government to ensure the next National Cultural Policy protects that freedom, for artists, for audiences, and for the future of Australian cultural life.