



## The Asia Pacific Crafts Alliance (APCA) submission to the National Cultural Policy 22/5/2026

The Asia Pacific Crafts Alliance (APCA) is an international not for profit organisation registered in Australia. We are a global network dedicated to protecting, promoting, and evolving craft traditions through nurturing, collaboration, innovation, and advocacy.

***Against a background growth of international activity and opportunity, Australia has steadily reduced opportunities for craft through education, training, representation, policy acknowledgement and investment.***

### SUMMARY

APCA is charged with safeguarding traditional knowledge; supporting innovation; conducting research; building partnerships that re-capitalise craft resources to ensure relevance and resilience and fostering respectful, compassionate and democratic ways of working rooted in integrity and authenticity.

From 2025 – 2029, Australia holds the Chair of APCA. This unique position within our broader region fosters greater international engagement including stronger advocacy for Australian traditional and contemporary craft. A significant aspect of this work includes identifying and recommending Australian artists to participate in the multitude of international opportunities to exhibit work, participate in craft fairs and festivals, present papers at conferences, conduct workshops and engage in residencies.

There is strong international desire to hear and see the voices of First Nations Australians; but the pathways to foster and support those voices are slim. The importance of carefully supporting First Nations artists to travel internationally should not be under-estimated. The deeply rooted traditions of craft making particularly in wood and shell carving and weaving are sought after, as are the contemporary iterations of fashion creation.

Australia's strong history of balanced migration has enriched our culture, community and economy. The histories, stories, traditions and knowledge brought to this country by new Australians has enriched us enormously. It's vital to a healthy society that space and support is made for all of the stories that are brought here and carried generationally. We are beginning to see through all forms of creativity that first, second and third generation migrant stories are making their way into the public domain enabling our country to gain new perspectives and deeper understanding.

The Hon. Susan Templeman MP, Special Envoy for the Arts noted in her speech at the Asia Pacific Arts Awards 2026, that 'Australia's future lies in Asia'. This was understood to mean economically, culturally, environmentally and socially. While craft is often seen in Australia as a peripheral hobby activity and has been systematically degraded in education, organisational support and investment funding; our regional neighbours understand that craft is inextricably entwined with culture and society.

### **1 – Craft and First Nations Australians**

Over the past decade there has been a strengthening of the organisations that work with First Nations Art Centres and communities. While not wishing to speak for those organisations, some observations can be made. The Art Centres public profiles are often ones of success and innovation. This masks the enormous challenges faced by remote communities, ageing populations, health and wellbeing and the importance of enabling knowledge transfer.

APCA has previously invited members of art centres to participate in events in Vietnam, Indonesia and Central Asia. While the organisers are often prepared to pay airfares and all hospitality for artists, this does not extend to coordinators making participation impossible. It's also critical for Art Centres and communities to be able to effectively filter and assess the value to their communities and artists of invitations.

### **2 – Craft and Australian diaspora**

Australia is a proud country built on successful migration. As our society becomes more complex, layered and interconnected it is more important than ever that we invest in systems of support that enable and present the complex voices that make up our societies.

A lot has been written recently about social cohesion and inclusion. Arts and Culture are fundamental 'tools' that foster better understanding in society. We are at risk of making poorly considered decisions that exclude voices which call our attention to loss, experiences, spiritual meaning and dislocation. If we are unable to properly make spaces for those voices, we risk a long-term loss of understanding and compassion.

The Indian Ocean Craft Triennial (IOTA) based in Perth has been making inroads in this area by bringing contemporary craft makers from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, India, South Africa and Kenya to WA and making connections to local cultural groups and organisations.

### **3 – Craft, the Economy and International Relationships**

Over 300 million people worldwide have the making of craft as their primary source of income. The global handmade and crafts market is substantial, valued in 2024 at USD\$739 billion and is predicted to rise to nearly USD\$983 billion by 2033. Successive government policies through funding and education have failed to notice that there is a significant market for hand crafted objects and that the appetite is growing.

When Australians travel, we typically purchase some small memento of that travel. Most often this comes in the form of a sarong, a wooden carving, a piece of ceramic or a small painting. We cherish these objects of memory without giving a lot of thought to them. By making these purchases we contribute significantly to the incomes of artisans in our region.

APCA has noted the enormous rise in interest and investment in craft engagement across our vast region. Neighbouring countries are investing heavily in market support, education, curated craft exhibitions, craft festivals and fairs as well as seeking international recognition for craft villages and cities through established forms including the UNESCO Creative Cities of Craft program.

Governments are making multi factorial investment decisions. Some, like Uzbekistan seek to ensure their culture is maintained and strengthened and has been making large investments in this area. This has been noticed by neighbours Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan both of whom have been making similar investments. These have included invitations to Australian and New Zealand craft artists and artisans for all expenses paid participation in festivals, fairs and exhibitions. Over the past three years APCA has been instrumental in getting 8 artists and 4 curators, writers and artworkers to participate in these events.

In the first five months of 2026 Australian craft artists and artisans have been invited to participate in craft fairs in Jakarta, Jogjakarta, Hanoi, Bukhara, Almaty, Kyrgyzstan, Istanbul and Portugal. These opportunities have been funnelled by APCA, the Asia Pacific Crafts Alliance and Craft Australia. In addition China, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand hold major craft exhibitions, fairs, conferences and events to which Australians have been invited.

Major specific international Craft Activities relevant to Australian artists, in which Australians participate often due to the advocacy work of APCA and the Indian Ocean Craft Triennale include:

- Cheongju Craft Biennale 2025 and 2027
- Homo Faber Craft Biennale Venice 2024 and 2026
- Homo Faber Guide to Artisans presents over 5,000 artisans from >50 countries
- Inaugural Art Tainan Craft Biennale 2026
- The Asia Pacific Crafts Alliance Craft Masters Awards 2027
- Revelations China - Shanghai Craft Presentation 2026
- Revelations Paris Craft Fair 2027
- Loewe Foundation Prize 2025, 2026

In terms of international presentation and sales:

- Inacraft - Jakarta's premier craft market generated USD\$6.8m over 5 days in February 2026 (Australian artists were invited to participate but could not take up the offer due to cost of airfares and lack of understanding of the opportunity value)
- International Folk Art Market (IFAM) Santa Fe generated USD\$3.88m in artist sales

There is significant crossover to the home decor market with innumerable international opportunities including Milan Design Week, Vietcraft Home Decor Fair etc.

Other countries with similar goals and a wish to expand their cultural knowledge base include China,. Events in these countries have often been filtered through APCA, Craft Australia and the Indian Ocean Craft Triennial to ensure Australian participation. It should be noted that this advocacy and promotion work is voluntary.

*There is currently no timely workable system of support that Australian including First Nations artists and artisans can tap into to support short term international travel to attend many of these events.*

In Australia, domestic and international travellers are drawn to markets, craft fairs, festivals, exhibitions and shops that sell craft products. While the loss of formal craft education at all levels risks our capacity to produce and sell objects of good design and quality, the rise of informal education systems is doing its best to ameliorate those losses.

#### 4 – Craft Education and Health

Human beings are inexorably driven to the hand made. We treasure and value and marvel at what can be made by hand. While it is too early to tell, there are predictions that In the new age of Artificial Intelligence, with all that entails, humans are increasingly drawn to learning and re-learning how to make things with our hands.

Craft in particular has a role to play in cognitive development in early childhood. It is well known and heavily relied on as a key tool in Occupational Therapy. Engagement with craft making involves problem solving, ideas development, predicting how materials will react, fine motor skills, coordination, flexibility and expressions.

Research suggests that In adults, engagement in craft activities may be instrumental in delaying cognitive decline and improvement in problem solving skills and social life.

#### 5 – Craft and its place in the national dialogue

Craft has been slowly disappearing from government policy and action. In 2013, in Creative Australia’s National Cultural Policy, the word ‘craft’ appears alongside visual arts and crafts, and is treated as a subcategory of visual arts. Over time, there has been a loss of discussion of craft practices, craft industries, craft education or craft policy in significant documents.

The 2023 Cultural Policy ‘*Revive*’ has no mention of craft as a standalone category. It has been subsumed into broader sectors like visual arts or cultural industries. Craft is implicit rather than named.

#### 6 – Arts Organisations precarity

We believe in and endorse the importance of transparency, good governance and accountability within all government funded not for profit organisations. However, the increasing reporting requirements unaccompanied by remuneration to cover the costs of this reporting place an additional burden on a sector that is constrained by project funding or 3-4 year investment funding.

Short term-ism does not provide surety of income, employment, nor capacity for long term planning. Given that major events and productions often take 3-4 years to plan and execute, the sector is subject to continual uncertainty.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- That the systems of support for Art Centres and the network organisations that support them be strengthened with long term 10-year funding that is sufficient to enable the crucial work they do.
- Establish Aboriginal led mentorship and leadership programmes to uphold culture and intangible cultural heritage and ensure First Nations leadership is embedded across the cultural landscape.
- That time and funding be invested in supporting the cultural activities of diaspora groups who strive to share their stories with a larger population and that activities supporting integrated experiences and learning be identified and fostered.
- Conduct an urgent 12 month national review and national audit into the decline of practical hand making skills across all levels of education; with commitment to develop a funding recovery plan.
- That a short turnaround, craft specific annual travel fund pool be developed and made available through Creative Australia, DFAT or an auspicing organisation like Craft Australia to enable artists and artisans are able to take timely advantage of international opportunities.
- Establish a Council for the Visual Arts Craft and Design alongside the Councils for Music and Writing.
- Conduct an assessment of other international models for funding of arts and culture. Review how government support is initiated and delivered in other countries with a view to establishing best practice, lateral thinking and long term sustainability.
- Working with States and Territories, the Federal Government conduct a review into a business case supporting ten year funding programs against agreed KPI's.

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