

22 May 2026

To the Office of the Arts,
Re. A new National Cultural Policy



My name is Mitchell Jones, and I am an independent artist, technical arts worker, and cultural leader working predominantly in the circus and physical theatre sector through my company Oozing Future. Based in Melbourne, I have worked across the arts and cultural sector for more than 20 years in a variety of roles. My submission to this policy review is informed by the multidisciplinary nature of my portfolio career, through which I have pursued artistic innovation, professional sustainability, technical proficiency, and community leadership.

These interwoven strands of practice speak to both the complexity of the arts sector and the nuance required to support workers within it. I hope the new National Cultural Policy continues to engage in an open-ended spirit of support that resists the impulse to prescribe simplistic solutions or seek easy answers, and instead allows us to continue exploring what Australian arts and culture can be, and what it can do.

Before making recommendations, I would like to acknowledge the significance of this moment. For the first time, Australia will have had two continuous National Cultural Policies guiding the development of the sector. I strongly endorse the continuation of a National Cultural Policy as an essential part of Australia's creative ecosystem.

One practical example of the importance of Revive is the way it positively contributed to my own arts advocacy within my local community. In conversations with government representatives across all three levels, I was able to use the pillars of Revive to frame discussions about how national cultural priorities could be realised locally. This is not an abstract side effect. A coherent federal policy position on culture sends a strong signal across the sector that there is a shared value system guiding investment and activity. Equally important is that this value system remains open to review and shaped by the people working within the sector.

The following are the areas I would like to see addressed in a renewed NCP, organised around the existing pillars of the Revive policy.

Pillar Three – The Centrality of the Artist

In 2026, artistic careers continue to involve an unacceptable level of precarity. The government's own research shows that artists are the lowest-paid workers in a sector built upon the value of their labour (Throsby, D. and Petetskaya, K. 2024. *Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*. Creative Australia). An equitable arts and culture sector must urgently address the disparity between the value artists create and the conditions under which many artists work.

Important progress has been made under Revive through initiatives such as Creative Workplaces, including increased awareness around superannuation for contractors and greater recognition of psychosocial hazards in the workplace. However, until the underlying economic imbalances of a sector reliant on unpaid artistic labour are addressed (Throsby, D. and Petetskaya, K. 2024. *"Australian artists only earn \$23,200 a year from their art – and are key financial investors in keeping the industry afloat"* The Conversation) we cannot claim that the arts is a safe or equitable sector for future generations to aspire to join.

There are several key initiatives I would like a future NCP to pursue:

- A national system of wage support for practicing artists and arts workers between contracted engagements. Australia's welfare system is poorly designed for the realities of highly skilled freelance cultural work. Many arts workers do not require long-term welfare support, yet the administrative burden of accessing assistance can outweigh the immediate benefit, leading workers to sacrifice stability simply to remain employed within the sector. The nature of arts work, including short-term contracts, seasonal activity, and widespread sole trading, makes financial sustainability uniquely difficult. Providing artists with an indexed wage supplement between contracts would have a transformative effect on workforce sustainability and would help create a sector that is more accessible to people without private financial support.
- Greater support for parents in the arts. Ensuring that parental leave systems and application processes are accessible and relevant to freelance workers is another essential step towards a more equitable sector that genuinely respects artists as workers.
- A stronger commitment to articulating the social value of the arts. A renewed NCP could do more to elevate and promote the perspectives of Australian artists as vital forms of inquiry, reflection, and public understanding.
- Adjustments to tax settings for artists to make receiving grants simpler and more financially viable for individuals.

Pillar Four – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

- Set a national benchmark for arts funding as a share of GDP, with the expectation that states and territories work towards matching it. The real value of arts funding has declined significantly in the face of inflation, and this erosion must be addressed if the sector is to remain viable. An ambitious federal target could help drive national change if clearly endorsed through a new NCP.
- Reinforce the principle of arms-length, peer-reviewed arts funding. After a series of damaging controversies in recent years, there is widespread scepticism about the independence of arts funding bodies from political influence. A renewed NCP should make a clear and unequivocal statement in support of robust arms-length decision-making.
- Continue supporting peak bodies as vital sources of sector advocacy, professional support, and pathways for artists to participate in cultural leadership. Theatre Network Australia, for example, has recently experienced funding cuts from the Victorian government. A new NCP should recognise the national value of these organisations and help safeguard them from short-sighted funding decisions.
- Reverse the Jobs Ready Graduate fee increases for arts and humanities education. Building sustainable arts careers requires addressing barriers to participation. The targeted fee increases introduced under the Morrison government significantly increased the cost of arts education and risk turning higher education into a privilege accessible primarily to the wealthy. A diverse cultural sector depends upon accessible pathways into creative practice.

Pillar Five – Engaging the Audience

- Ambitious quotas for Australian content across all areas of cultural production and distribution should be a major priority of any policy seeking to strengthen the sector. Australian artists and producers are competing against heavily subsidised cultural industries from larger international

markets such as the United States and South Korea. Mandatory Australian content quotas are essential to ensuring local work can reach audiences and continue building sustainable cultural participation.

- Support for arts journalism through Writers Australia would recognise that a healthy cultural ecosystem depends upon locally produced criticism, journalism, and public discourse. The decline of support for journals and magazines has weakened the visibility and public appreciation of Australian arts and culture.

Finally, I would like to comment on the controversy surrounding the withdrawal of Khaled Sabsabi's Venice Biennale commission following the intervention of Adrian Collette and the Creative Australia board. In my view, no recent event has caused greater division within the sector than this unprecedented and reactive decision.

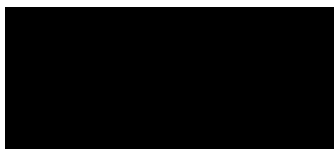
The independence of artistic support systems from political pressure, conservative media campaigns, and external lobby groups must be protected within future cultural policy. After reading the Blackhall and Pearl report (Blackhall and Pearl, 2025, *Creative Australia: Venice Biennale 2025 Governance Review*) and following the events closely, it is clear that the treatment of Sabsabi had an underlying racial bias. This is unacceptable. It is difficult to imagine an artist of Anglo heritage being subjected to the same level of parliamentary and media scrutiny over past work before being declared unsuitable to represent Australia internationally.

Trust in the independence of Creative Australia and confidence in its decision-making processes now need to be rebuilt. A renewed NCP should make a clear statement supporting artistic independence and cultural pluralism.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope this second continuous National Cultural Policy sets out a vision for Australian arts and culture that is matched by meaningful investment and policy reform that reflects the unique conditions of the cultural workforce. Australian artists are a national asset - not only because of the role cultural production plays in social cohesion at home, but also because of the contribution artists make to Australia's cultural diplomacy abroad.

As we enter a period of increasing geopolitical uncertainty, it is more important than ever that Australian culture is treated as a public good and a national investment priority. I look forward to reading the new NCP, and I thank you for your time in considering my submission.

Kind regards,



Mitchell Jones

