

National Cultural Policy: Submission

CAST welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

The Consortium of Australian Non-Profit Theatre Companies (CAST) brings together Australia's leading not-for-profit theatre companies, including state theatre companies and major producing organisations across the country. Collectively, CAST members are the largest commissioners and producers of Australian theatre, employing thousands of artists and arts workers, reaching hundreds of thousands of audience members annually, and anchoring cultural infrastructure in metropolitan and regional centres. CAST companies play a critical leadership role within the broader performing arts ecology—developing new Australian work, telling Australian stories, sustaining artistic careers, and enabling pathways across the sector from independent practice through to large-scale production and national touring. The trajectory of a work from the page to the stage engages with a significant number of freelance artists, including writers, directors, producers, designers, set builders, costume makers, actors, technicians, electricians, riggers, ushers, hospitality workers and the list goes on. Their work is supported by a range of industry professionals including marketers, administrators, fundraisers, finance and HR professionals.

More Australians see a live performance than all of our major sporting codes combined. The cultural and creative sector employs almost 600,000 workers, about 4% of Australia's total workforce (comparable to the employment share of transport, postal and warehousing, and wholesale trade).

Live performance makes a significant contribution to this activity. In 2024, it generated over \$3 billion in ticket revenue through more than 31 million ticketed attendances at a live performance event. Live theatre generated almost \$914 million in turnover and supported more than 16,000 jobs. (Live Performance Australia)

Research, including most recently from A New Approach (ANA), demonstrates that cultural and creative activities help build community cohesion, belonging and trust while enhancing empathy and inclusion. These activities also help combat loneliness and isolation, support individuals and communities in recovering from disasters and trauma, and make cities, suburbs and regions more liveable. Live performance provides space to connect with others, sharing stories and developing an understanding about different lived experiences, as well as supporting peaceful, active citizenship.

The power of engagement with creativity and live performance at a young age is also well understood. Significant individual learning and behavioural benefits, as well as broader societal benefits, have been proven through long-standing national and international research. Access to arts education and performance sets students up for a lifetime enriched by cultural experiences, and to be future audiences across the cultural sector.

However, the theatre sector and the performing arts sector at large continues to be negatively impacted by a combination of forces— including significantly higher costs, particularly in travel and production; critical skill shortages; changes to audience and consumer behaviour including reduced frequency and/or predictability of attendance; the impacts of high costs of living; climate change; and the sustainability of careers in the sector.

As a consequence of this operating environment, theatre companies are increasingly needing to be more risk averse, often focusing on smaller-scale productions; reducing their range of offerings; and employing fewer

CAST
National Cultural Policy: Submission

artists and arts workers. Technical skill shortages risk best-practice show delivery and safety, and high-quality audience experience. Fewer new works can be commissioned, and there is less ability to invest in vital sector development and training.

These impacts are amplified by, in real terms, flat or decreasing Government investment at all levels – Federal, State and Local. Recent research indicates that although Australia's population increased by 27% between 2007–08 and 2023–24, cultural expenditure over that time only increased by 19%. This represents a significant decrease in the investment in this vital societal lever. And, despite Australia being a culturally active country, it is currently ranked 23 out of 34 OECD countries for expenditure on culture, recreation and religion, with the average expenditure 1.23% of total GDP while the Australian figure is only 0.95%.

These combined factors are having a significant negative impact on the sector as well as weakening the foundations of Australia's cultural life for generations to come.

The CAST companies are committed to supporting the Government to build on its landmark [*National Cultural Policy – Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*](#) (Revive).

However, to realise its ambitions, additional targeted initiatives are required. The recommendations outlined in this submission address this need. These will also support the delivery of other cross-Governmental policies, including in portfolios such as Foreign Affairs and Trade, Employment and Workplace Relations, Education, Health, Disability, Ageing and Regional Development, as well as supporting other key areas such as *Closing the Gap* and *Cost of Living*.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

First Nations performing arts are essential cultural and social infrastructure, contributing to wellbeing, cultural identity, employment, knowledge transmission and community connection across Australia.

Evidence consistently demonstrates that connection to culture contributes to improved social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and is recognised as a national priority under *Closing the Gap*.

The CAST companies are committed to walking alongside First Nations colleagues, creatives, artists and arts workers, recognising the shared responsibility to increase the presence and impact of First Nations people in theatre, including in decision-making roles, commissioning and representation at all levels.

We support the specific opportunities outlined in the statements and submissions of the Blak Futures Collective and First Nations Performing Arts Companies Network – acknowledging their cultural authority and expertise in articulating the First Nations performing arts priorities in Australia.

To fully realise *Revive* and *Closing the Gap* commitments, the new National Cultural policy should:

1. Sustainably support, develop and recognise the entire First Nations performing arts workforce system. Including workforce development across producing, technical, touring and leadership roles; the recognition of cultural labour within workforce frameworks and long-term workforce sustainability

CAST
National Cultural Policy: Submission

pathways. We call for funding for a national First Nations performing arts workforce feasibility study and data framework.

2. Provide dedicated investment and support for a dedicated First Nations performing arts commissioning system.

Enable dedicated commissioning pathways for works of audience scale and cultural scale; investment in long term creation and development processes. Provide support for independent artists and emerging companies, as well as support for writers, dramaturgs, directors, designers and producers.

3. Ensure appropriate resourcing and recognition of requirements to fully support cultural governance and ICIP Infrastructure.
 1. First Nations performing arts organisations carry significant responsibility in maintaining and transmitting cultural knowledge connected to Country, community and environmental stewardship. Culture must be recognised as part of Australia’s resilience infrastructure. To fully support cultural governance, we call for full resourcing of cultural governance and protocol processes, embedded ICIP frameworks across all funding systems and recognition of governance and cultural labour as core infrastructure.
 2. Support national touring and international exchange systems which reflect First Nations cultural practice and systems.
 3. First Nations national and international touring and exchange operates differently to standard arts models. First Nations performing arts are increasingly operating within global cultural networks through touring, Indigenous-to-Indigenous exchange, commissioning, co creation and cultural diplomacy. This includes reciprocal exchange, international relationship development and Indigenous diplomacy. To support touring and exchange we call for equitable and culturally grounded touring systems, investment in touring feasibility and audience development and producer and cultural brokerage capacity.
 4. This requires dedicated First Nations-led market development infrastructure and can be actioned via implementation support for the Tri-Nations Indigenous-to-Indigenous transnational exchange, an export and commissioning strategy as well as support for Indigenous diplomacy and reciprocal exchange.
 5. Ensure culturally informed pathways to long term Sustainability for First Nations artists, arts workers and organisations.
 6. Current policy settings continue to frame culture primarily as an industry. While economic contribution is important, this framing is insufficient. First Nations performing arts operate as civic, social and cultural infrastructure. To support long term sustainability for First Nations performing arts companies we call for pathways from project funding to multiyear operational support, support for organisational stability and institutional growth, leadership sustainability and succession planning and infrastructure investment focused on people and practice, not solely buildings.
 7. Embed First Nations led cross-Government alignment.

First Nations performing arts sustain wellbeing, language, identity, intergenerational knowledge transmission, community cohesion and cultural continuity. To properly support organisations we require stronger coordination between arts, education, foreign affairs, tourism and employment systems.

Greater coherence can be achieved by embedding First Nations leadership across international cultural policy and export structures and aligning cultural policy implementation with Closing the Gap and UNDRIP commitments.

As identified in the Blak Futures Collective and First Nations Performing Arts Companies Network submission, First Nations cultural governance, workforce development international exchange and cultural continuity must operate as cross-cutting principles across all pillars of the next National Cultural policy, rather than as isolated initiatives.

This includes across all recommendations highlighted below.

Pillar 2 – A place for every story

The new National Cultural policy should:

4. Endorse and commit to the introduction of a 40% Live Performance Production Incentive (LPPI) for commercial and not-for-profit producers to attract investment in a globally competitive market, supporting the development of new works in Australia across theatre, dance, ballet, opera, music and other live performance, and including First Nations works.

This critical investment in Australian live performance across the commercial and not-for-profit sectors offers a 40 per cent offset on qualifying production costs. It would be applied as a tax offset for taxpaying entities, or as a rebate for non-taxpayers. Rebates or offsets would only be realised on eligible production-related spend, ensuring the benefits flow directly to the industry and are tied to tangible creative output.

International case studies, including from the UK, and financial modelling conducted by Live Performance Australia, highlight the significant benefit of this proposal for the nation's performing arts sector, its artists and its arts workers. Following the Creative Industries Tax Summit in September 2025, this high impact initiative is understood to be supported by all State Governments.

Enshrining the Live Performance Production Incentive (LPPI) in the new National Cultural Policy would be the single most transformative structural intervention available to government. Amplifying the crucial foundational investment from all layers of Government, the LPPI will stimulate private investment, and delivering systemic rather than incremental change to the economics of performing arts production. CAST endorse Live Performance Australia's advocacy position on the LPPI, and add our voices to the sector's coordinated call for its introduction knowing that the implementation of such a policy will help create more Australian Stories and allow more Australian Artists to tell them to more Australian audiences.

Pillar 3- centrality of the Artist

The new National Cultural policy should:

5. Support sustainable careers for artists and arts workers, including in not-for-profit organisations.

CAST

National Cultural Policy: Submission

Australia's theatre workforce is a vital, expansive ecology defined by a high reliance on freelance work, interconnected subsectors, and systemic precarity. The sector faces critical skills shortages, long-standing wage issues, and an ongoing need for sustainable operations.

The sector operates as an integrated system rather than a single industry. It spans everything from independent sole-operators, small to medium companies, larger not-for-profit organisational employers, such as the CAST companies, festivals, venues, major state institutions and commercial producers. Touring programs share performing arts work regionally, interstate and internationally. Individuals – artists, creatives, technical crew, producers, front of house staff, and a broad suite of other arts workers – move between elements of the connected ecosystem.

Only about 9% of artists work full-time solely on their creative practice. Much of the workforce balances multiple jobs, relying on a mix of freelance work, arts-related employment, and non-arts jobs to make ends meet. While creative output is highly valued culturally, economic conditions remain tough. Average incomes for artists fall well below the national workforce average, with professional artists averaging just \$23,200 annually from creative work, and the sector routinely suffers from higher-than-average job mobility and underemployment.

Without arts and arts workers, the goals of *Revive* will not be able to be met, and the benefits to the community will be severely impacted. Conditions to retain a healthy and sustainable creative workforce must be addressed, including addressing sector-wide recruitment and retention. Approaches to address this challenge could include:

- Extending Public Benevolent Institutions (PBI) status to include arts and cultural institutions. This critically enables the attraction and retention of skilled staff, with an ability to compete for talent against other industries and address current skills shortages.
 - Piloting dedicated Artists as Workers Schemes to embed salaried artists as hybrid artistic/administrative workers inside companies across multiple NPAP organisations. As one model, this could be a multi-year training and employment initiative that combines artistic practice with arts administration and organisational operations. It tests a new model of hybrid artistic and administrative employment, supporting artists to build sustainable careers while strengthening the creative and operational resilience of participating organisations and the wider sector.
 - Explore portable benefits and entitlements for freelance workers which can be carried from one job or project to another, regardless of the employer or contract type. For example, access to paid leave or income support for freelancers between contracts or gigs, as implemented in the Republic of Ireland's Basis Income for the Arts (BIA) initiative.
6. Support nation-wide industry-led training initiatives to address identified critical workforce and skills shortages across the arts and cultural sector.

The recent [Creative Workforce Scoping Study](#) conducted by Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA) articulates that Australia's creative industries are facing critical workforce and skills shortages, exasperated by precarious work conditions, a disconnect between formal education and industry needs, low wages and overwork. Workforce shortages are most acute in production/technical roles, off-stage creative roles (lighting designers in particular) and marketing and communications.

CAST National Cultural Policy: Submission

It highlighted the need for new or re-invigorated initiatives in the performing arts to strengthen support for industry-led on-the-job mentoring and traineeships to address identified skills gaps and ongoing workforce resilience. Once off pilot programs could be used as models for longer-term sustained initiatives, such as the recent Creative Australia Producer and Production workforce development programs in which multiple CAST organisations participated.

The ANZCO classifications also should be reviewed to sufficiently capture performing arts producing roles (such as Executive Producers, Producers and Assistant Producers), bringing this into alignment with screen producers and ensuring that the Occupation Shortage List (OSL) accurately captures all workforce supply gaps.

The SaCSA study also identified slow progress on delivering diversity and inclusion due to structural barriers, and a consistent need across performing arts for business skills for creatives, alongside management and leadership skills. Structurally, this could be enhanced by initiatives to actively encourage specialists with expertise in law, finance, human resources, psychology, coaching and/or mediation to make pro bono support available to arts companies (rather than frequently relying on these skills to be covered by volunteer board directors, particularly in smaller organisations).

These findings confirm and validate the CAST companies' experience and provide evidence that the new policy must act on. The CAST companies are well positioned to assist in skills pipeline development initiatives, and we stand ready to work closely with Government on this issue.

Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

The new National Cultural policy should:

7. Enhance the overall level of investment in the sector, structured for long term sustainability. This would allow for rebuilding of capability within the sector, organisational stability and vitality, and the crucial scaffold to support the ongoing development of artists and artform.

With federal per capita expenditure in 2023 being the lowest on record at \$114, there is a clear and urgent need for increased investment to achieve the ambitions of the National Cultural Policy.

This increase should include a step change in the level of overall investment that:

- reflects the current increased cost base impacting all arts organisations and individual artists;
- acknowledges the recent broadening of criteria applied to many funding schemes to a wider range of entities and increases funding pools to ensure ongoing equity to all types of organisations.
- enables individuals and organisations, including multi-year funded organisations, to seek specific strategic project funding which specifically supports the new Cultural Policy.

In addition, to be sustainable, structurally

- Government funding must keep pace ongoing with rising expenses, rather than being indexed at less than CPI. The sector cannot meet the objectives of *Revive* or a new Cultural Policy with partially indexed funding from government, which is a decline in real terms. This damages the ability to maintain standards, employ artists and arts workers, maintain infrastructure, invest in new work, and keep ticket prices affordable and audiences representative of the whole community.

CAST
National Cultural Policy: Submission

- Funding arrangements must enable long-term strategic and operational planning, with multi-year horizons and adequate timelines for decision making.

Stable multi-year public investment in Australia's major theatre producing companies remains vital and should be continued and strengthened in the new policy. Government should consider an increased investment quantum relative to the actual cost of researching, developing and producing theatre at a world-class standard, and reflective of the sector leadership role these companies play in commissioning Australian work, developing artists and connecting with audiences nationwide. Funding levels to theatre companies falls well below funding levels provided to other performing arts forms and this fact alone increases the precarity of work and income for the performers of this genre. Unlike ballet or orchestral companies that have large workforces of full-time artists, theatre companies rely heavily on freelance actors employed on short term contracts and declining funding and rising costs puts downward pressure on the volume of work available for these artists.

We applaud the investment made in the Creative Futures Fund through *Revive*, and the focus on telling Australian stories in impactful ways and we advocate for the continuation of this initiative. The specificity of the fund's requirements and the highly competitive nature of the fund means that it largely picks up works which have already received investment in the commissioning phase of a new work life cycle.

New work is expensive, risky and takes time to make. CAST companies invest extensively in new work, but constrained financial operating environments have meant that many companies have had to reduce investment in this important but highly speculative area of our business models. We therefore propose a dedicated commissioning fund available to the theatre sector specifically tied to the generation of new work. This could take the form of an Australian commissioning fund to extend the number of scripts under commission by the CAST companies. Such a fund would be a natural precursor to works suitable for support through the Creative Futures fund for development/ presentation and ensure the pipeline of new Australian works for both the stage and often then moving onto the screen

In addition to a new commissioning fund CAST advocates for increased investment levels to support core funding on a broader, ongoing basis, to allow companies to deliver ambitious and engaging works for the Australian community, and which showcase the breadth of talents of Australian artists and creatives.

8. Empower a coordinated national approach to policy development and funding across federal, state and local jurisdictions, and across portfolios (e.g. Health, Education, Trade, Investment).

International and Australian research confirms that arts and culture have direct, positive impacts on cohesion, health, sustainability, security and prosperity. Providing access to arts and culture for all Australians, whoever they are and wherever they live, is not simply a matter for the arts portfolio. This is a critical whole-of-government responsibility.

Unlocking this power of the performing arts to support other policy areas will require creating real mechanisms designed to broker cross-portfolio connections – with structured opportunities to unleash additional investment.

This could include elevating the existing meeting of Cultural Ministers to a formalised Ministerial Council, reporting annually to National Cabinet, as suggested by A New Approach. This would provide a functional and transformative step to give higher priority to the nation's cultural needs and ambitions. Crucially, this

CAST
National Cultural Policy: Submission

new Ministerial Council should be tasked with developing an intergovernmental non-partisan plan for long-term collaboration.

9. Support affordable and efficient access to rehearsal venues and touring accommodation.

The development and rehearsal of work within the live performing arts is inherently linked to the physical co-location of the artists, creatives, technical staff and broader arts workers involved. However, rising property costs and limited access to affordable, safe and productive creative space continue to place significant pressure on the sustainability of Australia's arts sector, impeding the ability for artists and organisations to develop, create and rehearse new work.

This impacts all parts of the sector including those who rent or lease physical ongoing premises, as well as availability and affordability of rehearsal spaces for independent artists and organisations on a project basis.

Opportunities could include:

- providing tax incentives or a rental subsidy scheme to new and existing property developers and owners to provide sustainable access to unused space to artists and arts companies. A national scheme could incentivise property developers and owners to make vacant or underutilised spaces available for rehearsals, studios, creative development, and residency programs. This initiative would increase access to affordable creative infrastructure while also activating unused buildings, supporting urban renewal, and strengthening connections between artists and local communities. It would create practical pathways for developers and the arts sector to partner in ways that deliver both cultural and civic value.
- better leveraging Government-owned assets, solving, in part, the need for space far more efficiently than building more physical infrastructure. For example, this could include a program which coordinates between local and state government to identify unused government-owned spaces that could be donated to arts organisations and freelance artists. Additionally, the leasing model between existing arts organisations who are resident in Government-owned arts assets could be remodelled to shift the focus from commercial return to an investment in artists developing work and creating audience connection. This strategy also develops partnerships between the independent sector, cultural institutions and/or larger organisations.

The benefits of improving access to rehearsal spaces could be amplified by creating a national Guest Artist Rebate initiative, such as tax incentives for accommodation providers that offer discounted lodging to visiting artists, touring productions, and creative practitioners. This would address the rising accommodation costs that are placing significant pressure on existing creation and touring models, limiting the scale, reach and diversity of work able to be developed and travel across Australia.

10. Reform the operation of the GST-free concession under section 38-250 to better reflect contemporary operating models, including allowing eligible ticket sales by charity-endorsed and DGR live performance organisations to be treated as GST-free.

CAST
National Cultural Policy: Submission

Not for Profit Live Theatre Companies (and other NFP producers) ticket pricing often mixes GST-free and GST-inclusive ticket classes, particularly for larger companies and producers. This creates compliance complexity, retrospective tax risk, and reduces revenue available to reinvest in Australian work.

Eligible charity-endorsed and DGR organisations should be able to treat all ticket sales as GST-free under clear conditions.

The New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999 (s38-250(2)) allows endorsed charities/DGR entities to sell tickets GST-free only where the ticket price is less than 75% of the cost of supply. Tickets above the threshold incur GST. The 75% threshold has not changed since July 2000, but the economics of these for purpose companies has changed in that time with many companies demonstrating an increasing reliance on ticket income and thus amplifying the impact of GST complexity. This

- Creates uncertainty and administrative burden when setting prices and substantiating the threshold.
- Introduces retrospective tax risk where ticketing systems or cost estimates do not align to GST treatment.
- Discourages small price increases because GST can reduce net revenue unless prices rise materially.

A 100% GST-free setting would remove a structural barrier to incremental revenue growth, reduce retrospective tax risk, and support reinvestment in Australian performing arts, including tours and community access initiatives. In addition, this would provide greater pricing flexibility to keep tickets affordable and equitable; and enable simpler pricing and compliance through one GST treatment across tickets sold by for purpose arts organisations.

11. Commit to a more ambitious arts philanthropy framework, incentivising increased private support for arts and culture, specifically to
 - Increase tax deductible donations to 1.5x amount of gift
 - Expand matched funding programs to increase donations
 - Lead a nationwide campaign that inspires and encourages Australians to donate to the arts.

Revive identified the need to promote philanthropic giving. However, more work is needed to meet the Australian Government's commitment to double giving by 2030. The Productivity Commission noted that, while the total value of donations has increased over recent decades, fewer people are claiming a tax deduction for giving. Australia's giving also compares unfavourably with our global counterparts- Australian giving equates to 0.81% of GDP, in comparison to New Zealand (1.84%) and the United States (2.1%).

Individuals are less likely to give if the financial incentive they receive is too weak. Currently, donors can claim back the exact amount that they gift to a DGR entity. Allowing them to claim a deduction of 1.5x the donation amount would incentivise donations. This model has been successfully implemented in Singapore, where individuals receive \$2.5 deductions from their taxable income for every \$1 donated (2.5x the donation amount).

Matched funding schemes amplify individual contributions to create a more substantial collective impact. It adds legitimacy to the fundraising campaign, and gives donors a compelling reason to give, knowing their contribution will be matched and maximised. Proven benefits of matched schemes include

CAST
National Cultural Policy: Submission

increasing donation amounts; building stronger relationships with major donors; expanding the donor base, particularly smaller donors; making the 'ask' easier; and boosting visibility and attracting media coverage. Existing programs like Plus1, MATCH Lab, and ACF Boost (all administered by Creative Australia) could be used as models on which to expand further and specific gifting towards endowments or company reserves would assist in building long term capacity for many arts companies, allowing them to plan more effectively, take greater risks and employ more Artists

12. Support arts and cultural organisations, many of which already hold DGR status, to more efficiently harness philanthropic opportunities.

Philanthropic and private sector giving is growing as a required proportion of overall income for performing arts companies, necessitated by stagnant Government funding, cost-of-living increases dampening box office returns and presenter fees, and the need to offset major inflationary cost increases. However, skilled staff are in high demand across multiple not-for-profit sectors, with the administrative and system burden high to acquire and steward required donors and partners.

Specific initiatives to strengthen the sector's capacity, capability and effectiveness could include:

- Enhancing and extending Creative Australia initiatives to grow the arts sector's philanthropic aptitude. This would build on the integration of Creative Partnerships Australia into Creative Australia and ensure the ongoing delivery of initiatives such as mentoring, workshops and training.
- Adopting an international model such as the UK's Gift Aid program for arts and cultural organisations with DGR status. Under this model, for every donation made to a registered DGR status arts and cultural organisation, the Australian Government would directly contribute an additional percentage to the organisation. Gift Aid has successfully increased giving in the UK, with half of donors utilising it and cultural charities gaining substantial benefit. In Australia, a similar rebate could assist arts organisations who struggle to attract large volumes of donations, encourage donors at all levels through immediately boosting the impact of every donation and create a compelling message to galvanise more giving. Required administration could leverage Australia's existing tax infrastructure, with donation details submitted to the ATO via an online portal.

Pillar 5- engaging the audience

The new National Cultural policy should:

13. Endorse and commit to providing a federal Government-funded Cultural Pass for 13–25-year-olds.

Attendance at live performances in Australia is heavily constrained by cost-of-living pressures- 59% of young people (16-25) and over half of the general population identifying expense as the primary barrier.

The pass would support significantly discounted or free access to arts and cultural live performances and participatory workshop experiences, without impacting financial sustainability for organisations. Successful overseas examples of a Culture Pass have been rolled out in Italy, Germany and France, providing between €100 to €500 to young people to use across cultural events and products; in France, 41% of these funds have been to live performances.

14. Develop a cross Government dedicated Arts Access Program for schools.

The CAST companies make a significant contribution to the range of learning programs available to Australian students and young people, including through curriculum-aligned productions, workshops and artist engagement. However, pressure on both school budgets and theatre company budgets means these programs are increasingly being reduced, cut altogether, or available only to communities able to afford fee-for-service models.

An Arts Access Program, could, for example, be used to support opportunities such as artist-in-residence programs; workshops with teaching artists; additional subsidies for incursions for remote, small and disadvantaged schools; and access requirements for schools to attend performances (including transport). The Cultural School Bag (Norway) could provide an international benchmark to emulate – with this program giving all students the opportunity to experience, become familiar with and develop an understanding of high quality professional artistic and cultural expressions.

The impact of this initiative would be amplified by direct support for organisations with existing high-quality programs- maintaining and expanding reach in areas of identified disadvantage and providing more access for students to curriculum-aligned performing arts education.

15. Expand investment that supports live performance touring across Australia, reflecting real growth in costs and ensuring funding models continue to be fit-for-purpose for evolving and unique community needs, sustainable touring models, and audience and artistic development requirements.

The current regional and national touring model is under intense pressure, substantially reducing the ability for companies, to connect with audiences across all parts of Australia. These challenges are mirrored for companies who proudly represent Australia and Australian creative talent internationally.

- Producing companies have faced, and continue to experience, significant increases in the costs of touring. These are no longer able to be covered by stagnant Government touring funding envelopes;
- Fees payable by regional, metropolitan, and international presenting venues have been reduced due to their own increased costs of operating and revenue pressures, adding to the gap between touring and broader operating costs for producing companies and available funding.

Specific initiatives include:

- Doubling investment in Playing Australia for touring focused in regional and remote Australia, including funding timelines that support effective planning and resourcing;
- Amplifying this investment with complementary touring funds for companies and artists to showcase their work nationally in larger metropolitan centres;
- Developing targeted support for new ways of engagement between producing companies, presenting venues, and local communities. These could include: green-touring initiatives; skills sharing initiatives; new audience development strategies; new programming models which combine workshops, engagement with local artists, and performances over longer periods; expanding funding program remits to support touring of performances into regional schools; a “go see” fund to enable presenters to see new work created regionally and nationally; collaborative engagements which support the development of new work outside of metropolitan centres; and/or use of non-traditional venues and spaces.

16. Significantly increase support for Australian live performance companies to tour internationally.

This investment in the export of Australian performance and artist exchange into international markets has both cultural and economic relevance. It expands the power of valuable soft diplomacy across multiple jurisdictions, as well as meeting demonstrable market demand, particularly in Europe and the Americas. Ongoing feedback from international posts also highlights the value of the performing arts in cultural diplomacy.

However, because of increasing travel costs from Australia, and our cost-competitiveness compared to international peers, many CAST companies are currently unable to accept invitations to some of the world's most prestigious festivals and venues.

Whilst there has been a welcome shift in Creative Australia programs which support international touring for live performance, greater investment is required to keep up with escalating international travel costs and evolving global touring opportunities and challenges.

Foundational DFAT programs such as the Australian Cultural Diplomacy Grants Program (ACDGP) are significantly over-subscribed and individual grants are still limited to pre-pandemic levels. This severely impacts performing arts international touring viability, particularly for works with a larger cast or requiring freight, such as those often delivered by many of the NPAP framework organisations.

Where available, funding parameters and timelines are often asynchronous with confirmation of presentation arrangements, leading to lost opportunities or significant risk being borne by touring artists and organisations. Unpredictable geopolitical, climate and other disruptions can also add significant costs at short notice, beyond secured investment envelopes. New initiatives could address these structural barriers, including

- A presenter-fee matched funding model to help convert confirmed demand into viable touring.
- A quick-response international disruption and resilience fund alongside realistic contingency requirements in publicly supported touring budgets.

This would bring enhanced economic benefits and job creation, together with the opportunity for greater Australian cultural exchange, the showcasing of Australian talent on the world-stage and the initiation of new international collaborations.

In addition to increased direct touring investment, the establishment of a single fit-for-purpose organisation would support cross-government International Cultural Relations. A New Approach identified that of the top 15 economies in the world, Australia is the only nation to not have a single institution to lead its international cultural relations. This compares to organisations such as the Japan Foundation, The Korea Foundation, Germany's Goethe Institut or the Alliance Française. Strengthened pathways to DFAT and the international diplomacy network would ensure cultural diplomacy is able to continue to play a key part in the National Foreign Policy agenda as relevant to the world today.

17. Embed and support climate policy across all five pillars of the National Cultural Policy.

CAST National Cultural Policy: Submission

The CAST companies recognise climate change as one of the defining challenges facing the Australian community. Within the theatre sector, the climate crisis is increasingly affecting audiences, artists, infrastructure and the capacity to create and share work. Climate mitigation and adaptation must become central to arts policy, infrastructure planning, touring models and sector development.

Australia's arts sector has both a responsibility and a leadership opportunity to respond to climate change, particularly given the country's ecological vulnerability and the knowledge systems offered by First Nations communities. Traditional touring models are highly carbon intensive and increasingly challenging due to climate-related disruptions such as floods and fires, particularly in regional Australia.

Climate action is necessary not only for environmental responsibility, but also to ensure Australia remains aligned with the global arts community. The new Cultural Policy should engage in dedicated investment in "green" or low-carbon touring models. There should be a formal recognition of live performance as essential to community resilience and recovery in disaster-affected areas. In addition, there should be climate-related cancellation funding, sustainable arts infrastructure upgrades, and support for artists and organisations adopting climate-conscious practices, as formalised within the Theatre Green Book Australia (TGBA).

The CAST companies believe these recommendations would help the Government deliver a new Cultural Policy that strengthens Australian theatre, centres First Nations stories and leadership, supports artists and arts workers, builds stronger cultural infrastructure, engages audiences, and improves access to theatre for communities across the country

These recommendations would strengthen Australia's theatre ecology, ensuring that the benefits of live storytelling, social connection, education and civic participation through theatre are available to more Australians, and that future generations continue to have access to ambitious Australian work.

CAST also acknowledges related submissions from Live Performance Australia and other performing arts bodies where they address structural issues affecting theatre producers and presenting companies.

