

As a business developer, marketer, and producer in independent games in Australia for nearly a decade now, I've worked across creative government grants administration, engaged with international partners to bring in millions in international investment, scaled up workforces for local independent teams, and advised internationally and locally on games best practice as a commercial, cultural, and critical endeavour. I now work for an international publisher, investing in and funding teams from all over the world - multiple of which are based in Australia.

It is critical that the new National Cultural Policy appropriately prioritize the games industry, its constituents, and its audiences around the world embracing one of the biggest cultural and commercial levers we have as a country available to us. Video game culture and interactive art of this type is one of the most well known and engaged with art forms in the world - with four out of five Australians of all ages playing digital games regularly. Video games in Australia generate millions of dollars in domestic revenue and are a huge part of our export economy, as well as employing thousands of creative workers across numerous disciplines throughout the arts, tech, and education around the country.

Thanks to the government funding we've established, tireless work from community leaders and advocates in events and cultural conversation spaces, and incredible projects by gamemakers of all scales, Australia is known worldwide as one of the leading creators of video games around the world. We are an award winning, internationally recognised cultural voice, but we are at huge risk of destabilising the careful foundations many have worked so hard to build, during a time of significant global funding challenges, without appropriate consideration in this new policy. This is a huge opportunity to cement the growth of the Australian games sector through dedicated, long-term support at all levels. If strong cultural infrastructure is to continue to be a pillar of national policy, then the national games industry is perfectly positioned to be championed.

Despite being a leading art form economically, socially, technologically and culturally, video games are generally left to the behest of state funding and a minimal allocation of funds and resources. Frequently, games are treated by the government as the less important art form to more established forms like film, and underestimated in terms of their cultural and economic impacts. Many screen agency organizations do not employ game developers in these roles, leading to a misunderstanding of scope, scale and challenge in the industry, and a lack of appropriate, timely activities because of this. This can lead to an inability to capitalise on opportunity and support creatives. **Decision makers must be familiar with the space in order to determine policies, strategies, funding, and opportunities within the sector, and both financial access and team headcount must be resourced appropriately in order to manage the increasing demand on these funds. This requires board level placements, organizational priorities and measurable goals at an executive level, and active industry workers on assessment panels, as well as leading mentorship and upskilling.**

Those that employ individuals from the games sector frequently face minimal capital to problem solve for industry challenges appropriately. They are often hamstrung by strict remit management that strips agencies of the capacity to quickly act and respond to industry trends, funds that remain the same year on year despite a rapidly advancing demand and a huge economic return on investment, and low headcount in teams - leaving them drowning

in the volume of enquiries, work, mentoring, individualised support and governance required to administer such funding programs. None of the industry exists in a vacuum - the tireless, dedicated work of many volunteers across all facets of the industry props up our national conversation around games, but this can lead to burnout and churn of some of our best creative leaders. **We require organisational structural leadership at scale, in varying form factors and engagements, focused on skill building, audience development, education, and data leadership, with appropriate resourcing - to help with communicating challenges to government and industry. This resourcing requires year on year events and infrastructure funding to provide an appropriate runway for planning and execution of major activities.**

Allowing developers access to global markets with travel funding, opportunities to engage with senior creatives locally and around the world, and helping them build long term pathways that allow them to remain in Australia but engage at a global level is vital for their creative development, their potential project and business success, and our position as a technological and creative leader internationally. **Continued support of travel funding and access to market investment, opportunity, collaborations, and partnership requires greater spend and support, and allows us to remain a key player in international markets, while allowing us to bring learnings back to Australia and community.**

Developers with marginalized backgrounds face a far tougher barrier to entry with the industry. They often have less capacity or ability to work for free or in-kind. They frequently have compounding challenges such as caretaking requirements, regional or rural placement hampering access to information, language barriers to complicated grant processes, and many other infringing factors on their access to funding and support. In order to nurture and support diverse creative voices, the structural challenges must be recognised and alternative pathways provided. Diversity and accessibility should continue to be a foundational pillar of arts funding in the country. **First Nations First means establishing long-term dedicated funds both per state and nationally for First Nations led studios, gamemakers, and other orgs to be supported appropriately, and led by First Nations voices. Similarly, these must enforce appropriate ICIP frameworks, protocols, and laws, and be appropriately resourced so that these designated funds match available funding amounts from other production funds across the organisation - and empower applicants to choose which funding pot they wish to access at any given time.**

Without proper support, gamemakers frequently are forced into the gig economy, underpaid, unable to allocate appropriate super, and living on less than minimum wage. Nurturing creative talent takes time and money. **We need industry-driven legislative, regulatory, tax and investment incentives, removal of tax on grants, and changes to superannuation and tax legislation. We need functional fair pay models ingrained into our funding models, and a reduction in the volume of in-kind requirements for creatives, an active barrier to funding access for many marginalised creatives.** We have an incredible cultural voice, and allow audiences to play and experience Australian stories rather than be a passive participant in them. Our ability to engage audiences goes well beyond most other mediums, and we are a truly multidisciplinary space. Games deserves its fair share - we made 600m last year, and an increased financial investment can lead us to 1bn by 2030 - five times theatre and live performance, and $\frac{2}{3}$ of the film and TV sectors. **The rising challenge of AI art requires regulation, clear principles, and policies to better classify**

and protect Australian workers and their creative output, as led by games creative leadership and technologists.

The technological, management, creative, and operational skillsets gamemakers in Australia are learning are at the forefront of global trends. Game development is an iterative process, and the industry faces huge challenges with talent loss and institutional knowledge. Grant funding has deeply supported the interwoven tapestry of creatives in the country, but the first project from teams requires experimentation, technical understanding and growth, and time for gamemakers to find their creative voice. The learnings from this first project are critical to the success of future projects and studios, but are rarely initially profitable. However, numerous Australian studios have sold millions of copies on their second, third or fourth game, generating countless jobs and re-investing huge portions of this money into the local economy. **Gamemakers must be given the opportunity to create more than one project, and pathways that allow for a runway for multi-project, multi-year engagements, making room for creative ambition and progressive growth. This also means lowering the barrier to entry for the DGTO, by reducing the threshold to \$150,000, allowing teams to engage with longer term planning and cashflow on projects of varying sizes.** These games are often made by small studios, but the spend on local businesses like accountants, lawyers, office space, incidentals, insurance, and the multidisciplinary support required from marketers, audio houses, composers, and creatives across numerous spaces cannot be underestimated - easily reaching into the hundreds of thousands on even small projects. Without nurturing the early, nascent phase of game developers' lives with both appropriate financial support *and* structural support, we lose out on the future of creatives for our country. **This means appropriate funding and support for events, festivals, industry development, media outlets, academic researchers, satellite support businesses (like audio and PR), as well as investment in cultural experiences - museums, historical curation and preservation of Australian games culture to sustain this leadership and cultural conversation. We must provide pathways for individuals to be supported with paid mentorship, upskilling, programs, courses, and learning infrastructure as businesses *and* creative endeavours.** Many young creative workers experience unsafe, underpaid, undersupported positions in their early career, due to a lack of available resources, mentorship, and access to community knowledge. Increasing events, festivals, industry development, and the cultural conversation can prevent and reduce harm considerably, but not without support. For junior developers who can't find a job, government funding can be the only path to creating a career. **We need access to appropriate leadership, accounting, business and legal skills, to create safer workplaces that appropriately manage their staff's financial, mental, and emotional wellbeing, providing for longer-term employment and sustainable businesses. We need educational pathways that allow for active engagement with industry to create a well-rounded curriculum and pathways into skills development, placements, and career growth.**

There is a huge risk of brain drain both interstate and internationally. For many mid to senior level developers, without appropriate funding your only options are to start your own business or move overseas if you wish to continue your personal development in the industry. For those in underfunded states, they are often forced to uproot for access to funding in other states or countries if they do wish to start a games business. Structures that support senior developers at both a micro and macro level requires an industry ecosystem

that has opportunities at all scales, studios of varying sizes and requirements, and capacity/opportunity for international engagement and employment. **We need a drastic increase in the amount of funding available, to appropriately support both entry-level creatives, emerging small studios, and enterprise creatives, and create structures that allow for these targeted investments to build greater community infrastructure and opportunity.**