

Indigenous Art Centre Alliance
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To whom it may concern,

Towards a new National Cultural Policy: submission by the Indigenous Art Centre Alliance to the review of Revive, the National Cultural Policy

The Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review of *Revive*, Australia's National Cultural Policy.

This submission draws on the experiences, priorities and aspirations of our member art centres and artists. It highlights the vital cultural, creative, social and economic role of First Nations art centres and outlines the ongoing support and resourcing needed to strengthen and sustain the sector into the future.

Art Centres: The Heart of Culture, Community and Creativity

One of the main reasons art centres are so important is that they are places where our stories are recorded, cultural, historical and contemporary. We work closely with our Gamba Gamba (old women), our Elders, who share their cultural knowledge and stories with us.

The art centre is a special place for our community, especially for young people, to learn about and celebrate culture. It helps keep our language and culture strong by connecting generations through creative expression. Our art centre is the heart of our community, a learning hub that brings people together.

I am learning from my Elders, and at the same time, I am sharing our culture with the wider world through our gallery, art fairs and exhibitions.

We bring our children into the art centre so they can see the artworks and learn the stories behind them.

Our community has been impacted by removal and government policies during Mission Times and beyond. The art centre plays an important role in preserving, revitalising and celebrating culture through creative practice. Our Elders are at the heart of this work, helping us stay connected to Culture.

The art centre provides employment for local Guugu Yimithirr people. It is a place of belonging, connection, wellbeing and joy. As a community-controlled and managed organisation, it allows us to protect our ICIP and ensure everything is done the right way.

*Personally, I love being at the art centre because I am surrounded by my Elders, who continue to teach and guide me. They are my mentors. As a worker at the art centre, I understand my responsibility and cultural obligation to help record our stories and support the incredible work of our artists. [REDACTED], **Gallery Assistant, Hopevale Art & Culture Centre***

About IACA

The Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA) is a network of First Nations art centres, representing more than 400 Indigenous artists from Cardwell in the south through to the Torres Strait Islands in the north. We are Australia's only peak body dedicated to supporting two distinct cultural groups, serving both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

*IACA staff have expertise and resources. They are always available, whether it's on the end of the phone or at an art fair or industry event or at conferences and training. They always listen to us and are a strong voice for First Nations art centres across Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait. [REDACTED], **Manager, Badu Arts***

IACA unites self-determined, community-based art centres across the region, fostering collaboration and a strong network that amplifies members' voices and responds to their priorities and aspirations. IACA members lead the way in having a high proportion of First Nations Art Centre Managers; currently, around half of all Managers are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, a unique outcome.

IACA and member art centres are also proud supporters of the Indigenous Art Code. Upholding the Code is essential to protecting the integrity of our sector and ensuring artists receive a fair go.

Since 2011, IACA has built a reputation for effective programs and services, driving advocacy, capacity-building, and training and mentoring to strengthen the resilience and visibility of Indigenous art centres, particularly in the face of professional isolation and remoteness.

We are very grateful for IACA always advocating for us and always listening to our needs. IACA is very good at sharing with us opportunities for professional development and business growth. IACA opens doors for us. If we weren't part of IACA I don't know where we'd be. It's very good that we regularly come together to discuss the challenges we face. It's good to know we are not alone, even though we are spread out across Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait. [REDACTED], **Manager, Erub Arts**

As the representative body for Far North Queensland's network of First Nations art centres, IACA is pleased to contribute to this review of the National Cultural Policy.

As a founding member of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Centre Alliance, IACA supports the priorities identified by, and argued for, by this collective. The seven priorities are detailed in the Alliance's submission, but in summary are:

1. Recognising the Alliance
2. Funding the Alliance
3. Stabilisation package
4. Review of IVAIS funding
5. Sector mapping
6. A national infrastructure fund for art and culture centres
7. Workforce development

While IACA fully endorses these priorities the Alliance are asking the review to consider, there are additional details and local context that we believe are important. This additional material adds both detail to the situation for Far North Queensland artists and responds to exciting possibilities and opportunities for the sector. In particular, IACA asks the Revive review to consider:

1. Creating safe art centre infrastructure.
2. Adapting expectations to climate change.
3. First Nations workforce development.
4. First Nations leadership and governance development.
5. Intergenerational artist development.
6. Building a First Nations art and Pacific arts collaboration.
7. Leveraging ethical commercial opportunities from the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Brisbane 2032.

In detail, IACA is proposing:

1. Prioritise better infrastructure and facilities for First Nations art centres

Working closely with its members, IACA has identified and mapped the infrastructure needs of Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait art centres. Infrastructure is an urgent priority, requiring targeted investment to ensure these centres remain viable, safe and sustainable workplaces. In many remote and island communities, access to builders, tradespeople and repair services is limited and prohibitively expensive, leaving essential maintenance and infrastructure issues unresolved and escalating.

The inability to fund ongoing maintenance has serious consequences. Poorly maintained air conditioning systems, combined with rising electricity costs, compromise the preservation and marketability of artworks while also creating significant workplace health and safety risks for staff and artists. Further, many centres are experiencing chronic infrastructure failures – including unsafe electrical systems, poor plumbing and sewage, rotting floors, damaged guttering and inadequate secure storage – that are becoming financially unmanageable and, in some cases, dangerous.

Without dedicated funding for repairs, upgrades and futureproofing, some facilities risk becoming unviable, threatening the sustainability of IACA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art centres as critical cultural, social and economic hubs within their communities.

A severe shortage of safe and appropriate staff housing is also limiting the ability of art centres to recruit and retain skilled staff, undermining operational capacity and long-term sustainability.

Digital infrastructure remains another significant challenge. Many remote art centres rely on costly satellite services that provide unreliable connectivity and insufficient data for contemporary business operations. As centres increasingly depend on digital platforms for sales, communications and cloud-based systems, inadequate internet access is limiting efficiency, growth and market reach.

→ **Recommendation**

Undertake an infrastructure audit into current facilities and the risks they pose. In response, a strategically designed funding package across State and Federal departments needs to be put in place to address this critical area.

2. Climate change

Climate change is further intensifying pressures on art centres, their facilities and personnel. Extreme heat, humidity and rising sea levels are accelerating deterioration across art centre facilities and staff accommodation, particularly in the Torres Strait Islands.

One of IACA's founding members, Bana Yirriji Art in Wujal Wujal community, was severely affected by Tropical Cyclone Jasper in December 2023. The entire art centre facility was destroyed, and rebuilding is not expected before 2027. This is one example of the effects of extreme weather that is anticipated to increase over coming years, with growing risks to the fragile and highly exposed art centre infrastructure across northern Queensland. Compounding the climate change risks are the increased insurance costs

that accompany them. For many art centres, these insurance costs have risen so far, so quickly, that they will soon be uninsurable.

It is clear that the sector, art centres and artists will need to adapt to climate change; however, we are concerned that the expectations and funding is not commensurate with the scale of this challenge.

→ **Recommendation**

Climate adaptation should be included as a key risk in the infrastructure audit, proposed above.

3. Workforce development: arts workers and staff

Workforce development is critical to the long-term sustainability of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture centre sector. We now have a crisis due to shortage of suitably trained and skilled people to work within the remote First Nations art centres.

Currently, there is no dedicated national or tertiary framework that equips the workforce with the specialised skills required for art centre operations, governance and leadership.

Addressing this gap requires a structured and centralised workforce development model. These challenges are particularly acute in remote communities, where access to training is limited.

IACA proposes a coordinated national approach to skills development, supported by accessible training pathways, anchored in the realities of art centre work. IACA has taken early steps toward this goal through a relationship with the Country Universities Centre and the University of Western Australia to begin scoping a pilot training package for art centre staff. While this initiative demonstrated the value of a place-based, sector-specific tertiary pathway, it also highlighted the need for sustained investment and resourcing to deliver such models at scale.

Workforce pressures extend beyond art centres to the peak bodies that support them, with sector-wide shortages of skilled and experienced staff. There is a strong opportunity to support experienced art centre managers to transition into training and mentoring roles, strengthening sector capability from within.

IACA also recognises the importance of practical, on-the-ground onboarding for new art centre managers, supported by ongoing mentoring as they develop their skills and experience. IACA's experience shows that on-the-ground training combined with ongoing mentoring and support delivers strong and lasting outcomes. Since 2012, this approach has contributed to a significant increase in First Nations leadership, with approximately half of IACA member art centre managers now First Nations people.

IACA is committed to building a more coordinated and sustainable workforce development framework. This will require a national response that invests in culturally appropriate training, establishes clear and accessible career pathways, supports governance and leadership development, and embeds ongoing mentoring and professional support across the sector.

→ **Recommendation**

A combined approach of hands-on training, Tertiary level training, career mentoring and outreach to remote student placements and secondments needs to be established and supported nationally.

4. First Nations leadership and governance

We recognise the strength, authority and leadership of First Nations peoples as the foundation of the art centre sector. This leadership is reflected through organisations such as Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA) and the work of art centre Boards, whose governance is grounded in cultural authority, accountability and enduring knowledge systems.

The vision, expertise and advocacy of First Nations leaders, past and present, have been central to the success of art centres across Australia. Their leadership ensures art centres remain community-controlled, culturally strong and responsive to local priorities.

To sustain a strong future for the sector, continued focus on First Nations leadership and governance is essential. This includes supporting emerging leaders to step into leadership roles and strengthening governance capability.

Strengthening First Nations governance underpins self-determination, ensuring communities continue to lead decisions about their cultural, social and economic futures, while art centres remain places where culture, creativity and community aspirations thrive.

→ **Recommendation**

Art centre funding to recognise the central place of First Nation governance and sector development to create pathways for upskilling Boards and Directors.

5. Artists

Recent industry data points to long-term challenges for the sector regarding the number of artists and the pipeline of new and younger artists producing artwork at art centres. Since around 2022, the number of artists working in art centres nationally has declined almost 20%, while IACA members have seen these falling participation rates at closer to 30%.

All IACA art centres are aware of this situation and are responding in ways that reflect individual community circumstances.

However, to address this long-term, existential challenge for art centres, IACA is advocating for a recalibration of the language and philosophy surrounding art centres and their funding by, and recognition within, government policy. While IACA acknowledges that the remarkable success that art centres have forged over nearly four decades, much of this success uses a commercial lens. Without the long, slow work of artistic apprenticeships, and the sustained support of culture and creativity, it is likely the art centre model will struggle to maintain its standing, becoming more focussed on smaller and smaller groups of artists.

IACA believes art centres are well-positioned to balance the commercial and creative/cultural forces that define the sector. However, what is needed is additional support and recognition for the creative and

cultural development work that is largely invisible, but also essential to artistic life in First Nations communities. It is this continuity, this 'supply chain' that IVAIS should be grounded in.

→ **Recommendation**

Increased emphasis within art centre (and other) funding on arts development and the enabling environment to support younger and emerging artists into the sector.

6. Pacific opportunities

Communities and art centres across Far North Queensland have long and enduring connections throughout Melanesia. To capitalise on these, IACA has begun work on a long-term, multi-disciplinary arts and cultural project. This project will design and deliver a dynamic, innovative program of artistic exchanges, knowledge sharing and inter-cultural learning that will seed the making of new works of art and creative collaboration that work towards a major institutional exhibition. In tandem, the project will build capacity, confidence and creativity in each community it works.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art centres are among the most sustained and successful creative industries in Australia. This national network of art centres, featuring the 12 centres from Far North Queensland, has delivered creative excellence for decades; however, much of this is based on commercial arrangements, consigning works to a gallery to sell; the cultural drivers that make this globally unique art possible are far less commonly acknowledged.

This project however, focuses on the cultural practices and stories that underpin the best of First Nations art and the ability of these works to build enduring links into Melanesia, to foster a new generation of artists in both Australia and in Melanesia and create new ways of working together; the artist-to-artist connection at the core of this project will create outcomes that directly benefit the region and Australia.

There are two broad aims for IACA's Pacific project - to create and present innovative works of art and to share learning. In particular, IACA believes there are significant opportunities for the art centre model that has been so successful for First Nations people across Australia to be adapted to support artists and creative enterprises in Melanesia (PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caledonia). Early relationships and connections have been established, and IACA is in close communication with the team at the Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival (MACFest 2026), with the intention of sending a formal delegation from Far North Queensland art centres to Fiji in November this year.

→ **Forward planning**

Further project planning will occur throughout 2026, working with stakeholders, artists and others throughout Melanesia and Australia, setting the foundation for a multi-year, multi-agency project that redefines collaborative, cross-cultural art making.

7. The Olympic and Paralympic Games Brisbane 2032

The 2032 Brisbane Games represent a generational opportunity for First Nations artists and art centres—culturally, creatively, and financially. IACA will play a leadership role in ensuring the sector is positioned to fully realise these opportunities, not only for its members but nationally. In doing so, IACA will work in

collaboration with other First Nations Art Centre peak bodies to deliver a coordinated, sector-wide approach that elevates capability, improves equity, and maximises collective impact across the country.

In capitalising on these opportunities, IACA also recognises the current capacity and capability constraints faced across the sector, including limited commercial experience, unequal negotiating power, and the structural challenges of operating from remote locations.

As a first intervention, IACA is leading the design and delivery of a national gathering for the art centre sector in late 2026. This initiative will focus on the value of content and intellectual property generated by First Nations artists and art centres, and how this can be leveraged to contribute to the success of Brisbane 2032. This gathering will build sector capability, establish clearer commercial and organisational pathways, and lay the foundations for a more equitable framework that ensures First Nations art centres are active partners in, and beneficiaries of, the opportunities ahead.

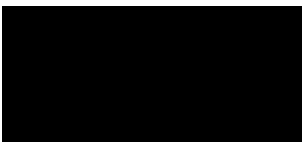
→ **Forward planning**

IACA sees this initiative as a first, crucial step to ensure the benefit sharing possible from Brisbane 2032 reaches the remote communities of Far North Queensland. This first workshop will propose next steps on the way to 2026, and IACA encourages the review to acknowledge and support this initiative.

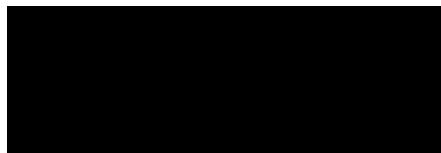
IACA acknowledges the Australian Government's leadership in reviewing the National Cultural Policy and appreciates the opportunity to contribute insights drawn from our ongoing engagement with First Nations art centres across Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait. Through this work, we have seen the profound and enduring impact that sustained investment in art centres has on artists, communities and the continuation of culture.

As the policy evolves, we encourage the Australian Government to further strengthen its support for First Nations artists and communities, while recognising and celebrating the vital role art centres play within Australia's cultural landscape.

Yours faithfully,



Solomon Booth
Chair



Edwina Circuit
CEO

Indigenous Art Centre Alliance
www.iaca.com.au
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