

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

For over twenty years I have worked professionally as a playwright, director, actor and producer in theatre, while also working across screen and media, and arts and cultural development. Alongside my arts practice, I have spent two decades in vocational education teaching and mentoring emerging practitioners across performing arts, writing, directing, screen production and arts administration. This combination of industry and education experience has given me direct insight into the realities facing artists, students, educators and communities across regional Australia.

Regional communities are active sites of cultural production, truth-telling, storytelling and creative innovation. Some of the most socially engaged and community-responsive arts practice in Australia occurs in regional areas because artists are often working in direct relationship with local histories, local struggles and local people producing First Nations-led cultural work, multicultural community projects, disability-led practice, youth arts, community theatre, regional festivals and intergenerational arts programs.

The new cultural policy needs to recognise regional culture not as a secondary extension of city-based arts industries, but as a critical part of the national cultural ecology. This requires structural support, long-term investment in regional arts organisations, independent regional artists, regional touring infrastructure, regional training pathways and community-led cultural development.

Vocational arts education should be given greater acknowledgement within the national policy framework. TAFE and vocational training providers play a significant role in regional cultural sustainability. They provide practical pathways into the creative industries for students who may not be able to access higher education or metropolitan networks. In many regional areas, vocational arts training is directly connected to local festivals, venues, productions, community projects and cultural organisations. These connections build both workforce capability and community identity and should be supported into the future.

The policy needs to strengthen mechanisms for consultation and co-design between regional practitioners and communities. Currently, regional engagement is improvising connections and partnerships after policy directions have been established. Cultural policy needs to provide the framework for artists, educators and communities who are already undertaking this work on the ground, First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, artists with disability, young people and local cultural workers whose experiences provide valuable knowledge about participation, access and sustainability.

The policy needs to acknowledge the heavy-lifting regional arts and culture performs post-traumatic events, for communities to start healing as well as managing and maintaining wellbeing, education and community resilience. In regional communities, arts practice functions beyond entertainment or tourism outcomes, it supports social connection, mental health, local identity, intergenerational exchange and recovery from social and economic disruption.

Regional artists and communities need to be recognised as central to the future cultural life of the country. National cultural policy must recognise regional cultural practice as core infrastructure through long-term investment, vocational training pathways and sustained community-led support.