



WEST AUSTRALIAN  
BALLET

## **NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY SUBMISSION | May 2026**

### **West Australian Ballet**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

West Australian Ballet (WAB) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next National Cultural Policy and urges the Australian Government to take decisive action to secure the sustainability of the performing arts sector.

#### **About West Australian Ballet**

West Australian Ballet is the State Ballet Company of Western Australia and a key contributor to Australia's cultural infrastructure. As one of the nation's leading ballet companies, WAB presents a diverse repertoire spanning classical masterpieces, contemporary works and new Australian commissions, reaching tens of thousands of audience members annually across metropolitan, regional and international contexts.

As a Major Performing Arts organisation, WAB is a significant employer of artists and arts workers, supporting dancers, musicians, creatives, technicians and administrators. The Company also delivers extensive education and community programs, engaging thousands of participants each year and providing vital pathways into professional practice.

Operating in one of the most geographically isolated cities in the world, WAB plays an outsized role in ensuring that Western Australians have access to exceptional performing arts experiences without needing to travel interstate or internationally.

#### **THE OPPORTUNITY IN THE NEXT PHASE OF CULTURAL POLICY**

Dance is a powerful cultural force, one that transcends language and connects individuals and communities through embodied storytelling. It is also a proven contributor to national wellbeing, economic development, and social cohesion.

Research demonstrates that participation in arts and cultural activities:

- Builds community connection, trust and belonging
- Improves mental health and wellbeing outcomes
- Enhances educational attainment and social development
- Contributes directly to economic growth and job creation

However, these benefits are now at risk.



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### A Sector Under Structural Pressure

The performing arts sector, including ballet, is facing a convergence of challenges that threaten its viability:

- **Rising costs:** Production, touring and operational costs have increased significantly, particularly post-pandemic, while funding has not kept pace.
- **Geographic disadvantage:** For WA organisations, freight, travel and accommodation costs can be 30–50% higher than for east coast counterparts.
- **Workforce shortages:** National skills shortages in technical and production roles are limiting capacity and increasing risk.
- **Audience affordability pressures:** With cost-of-living pressures, ticket prices are becoming less accessible, particularly for younger people and families.

At the same time, government investment has declined in real terms. While Australia's population grew by 27% between 2007–08 and 2023–24, public expenditure on culture increased by only 19%, representing a clear reduction per capita.

Australia now ranks 23rd out of 34 OECD countries for cultural investment, with spending at 0.95% of GDP, well below the OECD average of 1.23%.

For organisations like WAB, delivering large-scale, high-cost productions, this environment is unsustainable.

Without immediate intervention, the sector will face:

- Reduced production output
- Fewer employment opportunities
- Declining regional access
- Increased ticket prices and reduced accessibility

This is not a theoretical risk — it is already happening.



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**SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

West Australian Ballet strongly advocates for a National Cultural Policy that delivers structural reform and meaningful investment:

**Pillar One: First Nations First**

1. Substantially increase investment in First Nations-led dance and embed meaningful partnerships within major performing arts organisations.
2. Consistent commissioning of First Nations choreographers
3. Expanding touring and audience reach, especially within WA
4. Developing workforce pathways for First Nations artists and creatives

**Pillar Two: A Place for Every Story**

1. Invest in inclusive participation and professional pathways, particularly for regional and underrepresented communities.
2. Introduce a **40% Live Performance Production Incentive** to unlock new work, jobs and private investment.

**Pillar Three: Centrality of the Artist**

1. Implement tax reforms and income supports to address unsustainably low artist incomes (currently averaging \$23,200 from creative work), recognising arts organisations as **Public Benevolent institutions (PBI)** to unlock tax supports for artists and arts workers.
2. Invest in workforce development to address critical skills shortages.

**Pillar Four: Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

1. **Increase baseline funding** and ensure **indexation** reflects real costs.
2. Deliver **coordinated national policy** across jurisdictions.
3. Address **venue and production cost pressures** for large-scale performing arts.
4. Strengthen **philanthropy incentives** to increase private giving.
5. Build sector-wide fundraising capability.



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**Pillar Five: Engaging the Audience**

1. **Double investment in national touring, particularly to regional Australia**, including recognition that touring costs in Western Australia are disproportionately high in comparison to other jurisdictions.
2. Increase funding for international touring and cultural diplomacy.
3. Deliver a national **Arts Access Program** for schools.
4. Introduce a **Cultural Pass** for young people.
5. Remove barriers for audiences with disability.



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**DETAIL OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Pillar One: First Nations First**

First Nations performing arts are essential cultural, civic and social infrastructure. They contribute significantly to social and emotional wellbeing, cultural identity and community resilience across Australia, including within Western Australia.

**1. Commissioning and Creation**

- Establish consistent commissioning pathways for First Nations choreographers within mainstage and seasonal programming.
- Integrate First Nations works into core artistic output, not as standalone or occasional inclusions.
- Increase investment in development processes, rehearsal time and culturally appropriate production support.

**2. Cultural Governance and Capability**

- Invest in organisational cultural competency and long-term relationship building with First Nations communities in Western Australia.

**3. Touring and Market Development**

- Support the touring of First Nations works across metropolitan, regional and remote Western Australian communities.
- Contribute to national and international visibility of First Nations dance through partnerships and co-presentations.

**4. Workforce and Sector Development**

- Create pathways for First Nations dancers, choreographers, producers and technical practitioners.
- Support leadership development and sustained employment opportunities within organisations.
- Recognise cultural knowledge, governance and community engagement as core professional contributions.



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**Impact**

Strengthening First Nations dance through sustained investment and structural reform will:

- Support cultural continuity and intergenerational knowledge transmission
- Create meaningful, culturally aligned employment pathways
- Increase the visibility and presence of First Nations voices within major performing arts institutions
- Strengthen relationships between organisations and First Nations communities in Western Australia
- Deliver improved social, cultural and wellbeing outcomes across communities

For West Australian Ballet, these actions will enable deeper, more authentic engagement that contributes to both artistic excellence and cultural responsibility.

**Pillar Two: A Place for Every Story**

**1. Inclusive pathways**

Despite strong interest in dance across Australia, access remains inequitable.

- Australians from culturally diverse backgrounds and those living in regional areas face persistent barriers to participation and professional progression.
- Regional WA communities are significantly underserved due to distance and cost.

WAB's education and outreach programs demonstrate strong demand; however, **financial and geographic barriers prevent scale and access to performance opportunities.**

Targeted Federal investment is essential to:

- Expand regional engagement across WA's vast geography
- Support pre-professional and professional training pathways
- Enable genuine inclusion across socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds

Without this investment, Australia risks losing a generation of talent.



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**2. Live Performance Production Incentive**

This is a **critical, high-impact reform**.

For a ballet company, production costs are inherently high, often involving:

- Large ensembles
- Orchestra or recorded scores
- Complex set, costume and technical requirements

A **40% production incentive** would:

- Unlock new Australian works and commissions
- Increase employment across the creative supply chain
- Attract private investment into the arts

Modelling suggests this policy could generate **over \$1.5 billion in economic activity and 4,000 jobs nationally**. For WAB, it would directly translate to more productions, more dancers employed, and more opportunities for audiences.

**Impact**

Targeted investment in equity and access will:

- Expand participation in dance across regional, remote and underrepresented communities
- Strengthen pathways from community engagement to professional careers
- Ensure Australian stories better reflect the diversity of contemporary society
- Increase audiences by reducing structural and financial barriers to participation
- Build a more inclusive, resilient and representative performing arts sector

For Western Australia, this is particularly critical in addressing geographic isolation and unlocking talent across the State.



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### Pillar Three: Centrality of the Artist

#### 1. Sustainable careers

The current economic reality for artists is untenable:

- Average income from creative work: \$23,200
- Only **1 in 5 artists** in secure employment
- Majority rely on secondary income streams

This instability directly impacts organisations like WAB, which rely on a highly skilled and dedicated workforce.

Policy reform must:

- Recognise arts organisations as **Public Benevolent Institutions to Improve take-home income through tax reform and concessions**
- Enable organisations to offer competitive employment conditions
- Retain talent within Australia

Without reform, Australia will continue to lose artists to other sectors and countries.

#### 2. Workforce development

Skills shortages, particularly in technical theatre, staging, and production, are now a **critical constraint on delivery**.

In WA, these challenges are amplified by isolation and a smaller workforce base.

Investment in:

- National training pipelines
- Industry-led traineeships
- Practical, on-the-job learning

is urgently required to ensure **safe, high-quality production standards** and future workforce sustainability.

#### Impact

Supporting sustainable careers for artists and arts workers will:



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- Improve retention of highly skilled dancers, creatives and technical professionals
- Reduce workforce attrition due to financial instability
- Strengthen the quality, safety and ambition of productions
- Enable long-term career pathways within Australia.
- Address critical skills shortages across production and technical roles

For West Australian Ballet, these reforms are essential to maintaining a world-class company and ensuring the continuity of expertise within the sector.

### **Pillar Four: Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

#### **1. Sustainable Investment**

Current funding levels are not aligned with reality. With Federal per capita expenditure at historic lows (\$114 per person), the policy ambition of Revive cannot be achieved without increased investment.

For WAB, **stable, indexed funding** is essential to:

- Maintain world-class artistic standards
- Deliver major productions
- Sustain regional and education programs

Under-indexation is effectively a funding cut in real terms.

### **National Coordination and Cultural Ministers Council**

Arts and culture must be embedded as a **whole-of-government priority** to fully realise the ambitions of Revive. This requires stronger coordination across jurisdictions and policy portfolios.

There is extensive evidence that arts and cultural participation contributes to health, education, social cohesion and economic development. However, current governance frameworks do not adequately support coordinated investment or policy alignment.

### **Recommendations:**

- **Formalise a National Cultural Ministers Council** with representation across Federal, State and Territory governments, supported by clear governance and reporting structures.



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- **Establish a whole-of-government cultural strategy framework** linking arts policy with health, education, regional development, tourism and international relations.
- **Introduce cross-portfolio investment mechanisms** (e.g. arts + health, arts + education) to unlock broader social and economic value.
- **Require annual reporting to National Cabinet** on cultural outcomes, including participation, access and sector sustainability.
- **Align funding systems across jurisdictions** to reduce duplication and improve access for organisations operating nationally.
- **Strengthen integration with international cultural diplomacy**, ensuring alignment with DFAT and export strategies.

#### Impact:

This approach would enable more efficient use of public investment, strengthen policy outcomes across sectors, and elevate arts and culture as a central element of national development.

### 3. Philanthropy and Private Investment

Philanthropy is a critical complement to public investment but is currently under-leveraged in Australia, particularly for not-for-profit organisations and companies operating in geographically isolated states such as Western Australia.

While demand for private support has increased, many organisations lack the structural incentives and capacity to fully access philanthropic income.

#### Recommendations:

- **Introduce a Government-Matched Giving model (Gift Aid equivalent)** where donations to eligible arts organisations are matched by a government contribution, increasing the value and impact of private giving.
- **Enhance tax incentives**, including increasing deductibility of donations (e.g. 150% of gift value) to stimulate broader participation.
- **Expand matched funding initiatives** (e.g. PLUS1-style programs), particularly for small-to-medium organisations and regional contexts.
- **Invest in philanthropic capability building**, including training, mentoring and donor development support for arts organisations.
- **Encourage more flexible funding models**, including operational support, to improve organisational sustainability.
- **Deliver a national campaign promoting giving to the arts**, positioning cultural investment as essential to community wellbeing and national identity.



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### Impact:

Strengthened philanthropy settings would:

- Diversify income streams
- Increase private sector engagement
- Enable artistic innovation and risk-taking
- Build long-term financial sustainability

### 4. Venue and Production Costs

For ballet, venue and production costs are among the largest financial pressures.

Without intervention:

- Ticket prices must rise
- Access becomes restricted
- Risk-taking and innovation decline

### Policy solutions should include:

- Subsidised access to publicly funded venues
- Investment in shared cultural infrastructure
- Reform of venue pricing frameworks to prioritise cultural value over commercial return

## Pillar Five: Engaging the Audience

### 1. Touring

Touring is essential to WAB's role as a state company, yet increasingly difficult.

Key barriers include:

- High travel and freight costs
- Reduced presenting fees from venues
- Limited touring funding

Regional communities deserve access to high-quality performing arts, yet current settings **systematically disadvantage them.**

**Doubling investment** in touring programs such as Playing Australia is both necessary and urgent.



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Additional funding should recognise that the **cost of touring in large states, such as Western Australia, is disproportionate to other jurisdictions.**

### **2. International touring**

International demand for Australian performing arts remains strong, yet rising costs mean opportunities are being declined.

This represents a **missed opportunity for cultural diplomacy and economic return.**

Strategic investment would:

- Amplify Australia's global cultural presence
- Strengthen international partnerships
- Generate export income

### **3. Access and participation**

Cost barriers are now the **primary reason people do not attend live performance**, with 59% of young people citing affordability.

Programs such as:

- A national Arts Access Program
- A Cultural Pass for young people

would directly address this, building the next generation of audiences and ensuring equitable access.

### **Impact**

Increased investment in audience access and engagement will:

- Expand reach to regional, remote and underserved communities
- Build the next generation of audiences through early engagement
- Improve affordability and accessibility for all Australians, particularly young people and families
- Strengthen social connection, cultural participation and community wellbeing
- Increase long-term financial sustainability through audience growth



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For West Australian Ballet, this will enable broader access across Western Australia's vast geography and ensure that high-quality performing arts experiences are available to all communities, not just those in metropolitan centres.

**CONCLUSION**

West Australian Ballet strongly supports the Government's vision for a thriving cultural sector, but vision alone is not enough.

The data is clear:

- Investment is declining in real terms
- Costs are rising rapidly
- Access is becoming more unequal

Without decisive policy intervention, the performing arts sector will contract, reducing its cultural, social and economic contribution.

With targeted reform and investment, however, organisations like WAB can:

- Expand access across one of the largest jurisdictions in the world
- Create jobs and grow the creative economy
- Showcase Australian excellence nationally and internationally
- Deliver profound social impact through the power of dance

This is a critical moment.

A renewed National Cultural Policy must not only sustain the sector, it must enable it to thrive.

West Australian Ballet stands ready to work with Government to realise this ambition.