

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Public Consultation March 2026

I am an independent maker with over ten years of practice, writing as someone whose work sits squarely within Australia's craft sector. A sector that is largely absent in any policy discussions, supported funding or planning frameworks.

That absence reflects a systemic failure to recognise craft as a distinct and legitimate pillar of Australia's cultural life. While I write in broad support of the submission made by the Australian Craft and Design Centres (ACDC) Network, I want to add the perspective of someone working in this area that is consistently overlooked, misclassified, and under-resourced.

On 'Craft'

The findings that "Australia's craft economy is slightly larger in size and impact than the sports economy" (Luckman and Tower, 2023)¹ seem at odds with the government's neglect of craft. This reflects a long-standing tendency within Australian cultural policy to subsume craft under the visual arts umbrella in ways that effectively erase it.

I have raised this directly with Creative Australia when I asked about craft representation on Creative Australia Peer Assessment panels. I was told that craft fits under visual arts and that despite 5–9 panel members representing each discipline, there was no room for anyone to specifically represent craft. This is the flawed logic that keeps our sector invisible. Craft has its own traditions, its own skill pathways, and its own audiences.

Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story

There is currently no place in Australia's cultural policy for my practice. While that seems wrong to me, it is understandable in our current ecosystem.

Australia's training pathways for craft push practitioners in one of two directions: towards (barely existent) industry via TAFE, or towards fine arts via university. The result is that those who end up showing in craft galleries have predominantly come through fine arts programs, so those galleries have built their expectations, infrastructure and exhibition programs around that kind of work. Makers who came through other pathways don't fit. There is no alternative infrastructure to catch them.

This is the loop I find myself outside of. My work is recognised internationally – I am invited to exhibit overseas and am juried into international shows – and yet here I cannot get a quilt on the wall of my local craft gallery. This reflects a structural problem where the ecosystem that should support my practice doesn't exist.

The UK offers a useful reference point, not as a model to be copied, but as evidence that a broader craft ecosystem is possible. Britain's Crafts Council, alongside Arts Council England and a network of trusts and foundations, supports a rich infrastructure for makers that spans training, exhibition, market development and public engagement. Much of that is built on centuries of institutional history Australia doesn't have and can't replicate overnight. But it does demonstrate that when the ecosystem is better, craft is taken seriously – as a cultural form worthy of institutional support, public funding and genuine career pathways. Australia needs to build its own version of that ecosystem. This is something a national cultural policy should be laying the groundwork for.

Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist

On rights protection

The consultation paper asks how cultural policy can respond to the protection of creative rights in the digital environment. I can tell you what that looks like for me: my work has been stolen multiple times. When it happens, it is other artists and arts workers, not any government body, who help me get it taken down, and there is no meaningful recourse to prevent it happening again or be compensated for the theft.

The craft community needs a stronger Copyright Act that keeps pace with the changing digital environment; legislation that requires platforms operating in Australia to have accessible takedown

mechanisms; and practical, funded support infrastructure to assist creative practitioners when their work is stolen.

On skills and education

The consultation paper also speaks of "the role of arts education, creative skills and lifelong learning". This is laughable in the context of craft.

My experience has included studying a Certificate IV in Textile Design and Development at RMIT. The course was oriented entirely towards working in industry, despite there being next to no textile industry left in Australia. This begs the question 'which industry was being consulted?' The practical classes were inspiring, some of the teachers were exceptional and the peer networks we formed have been genuinely valuable, but the curriculum left us unprepared for the reality that if we chose to work in textiles, we would work independently. There were no units on running a small business, nothing on applying for grants, nothing on building a practice through social media.

We need a 10-year workforce plan, as ACDC proposes, but one built on a true assessment of what independent practice requires given that's the path most practitioners take.

Pillar 4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure

If an aim is for cultural infrastructure to remain resilient and fit-for-purpose, I would ask the government to reflect on the fact that one of the country's most important institutions for craft, the Australian Design Centre, has just been closed on its watch.

Craft and design infrastructure in Australia was already fragile. The closure of the ADC is a signal about what this government considers expendable. A strong cultural policy would acknowledge that signal and commit to reversing it.

Pillar 5 — Engaging the Audience

While international engagement and export might be an aim, it is not where my most urgent need lies.

My work travels internationally more easily than it circulates locally. The audiences and institutions that have most enthusiastically engaged with my practice are overseas. At home, I work in a medium that is actively excluded from exhibition spaces, even those run by bodies whose explicit purpose is to support craft.

What I am looking for is not an export strategy. I am looking for policy that would make it possible for my work to hang in a craft gallery in my own city. That is the baseline.

More broadly, craft participation – making, learning and sharing skills – is deeply connected to community wellbeing and social cohesion. A cultural policy that takes seriously the link between making with your own hands and mental health should recognise craft practice as a public good, not merely a market to be developed.

Craft could also have a central role in building resilience. At its core, craft is practical. We often hear talk of food or fuel insecurity, but Australians would be hard-pressed to clothe themselves if global supply chains were really disrupted. Learning to make and mend gives people agency and practical skills that build resilience.

A final word

In this moment, the handmade matters more than ever. As AI spits out derivative design work, making by hand is something it cannot do. The time and attention used to create a physical object, the knowledge and skills shared between makers, the ability to produce something that is not reliant on a global supply chain. This is the moment for Australian cultural policy to take craft seriously.

I urge the government to provide dedicated craft representation inside Creative Australia, to invest in genuine education and career pathways for makers, and to build the institutional infrastructure required to support it.

1. Luckman, S., and Tower, A., (2023). The value of craft skills to the future of making in Australia, <https://apo.org.au/node/324171>