


Ballarat International Foto Biennale

20 May 2026

12 Lydiard Street North
Ballarat 3350 VIC Australia
ABN 70 496 228 247


ballaratfoto.org

Ambassadors:

The Hon. Stephen Bracks AC
Nici Cumpston OAM
Warren Ellis
Mayor Cr Tracey Hargreaves
Her Honour Judge Sara Hinchey
Peter Jopling AM KC
Julie Kantor AO
Jeff Moorfoot OAM
Kate Torney OAM
Andrew Walsh AM



National Centre for Photography


nationalcentreforphotography.org

BIFB Inc. Submission Australia's Next National Cultural Policy

As the operator of the Ballarat International Foto Biennale, Australia's longest-running regional photography festival and the National Centre for Photography on Wadawurrung Country, we offer a perspective from the frontline of regional cultural infrastructure and contemporary visual culture.

Photography is the medium of our time. It is how Australians communicate, document, participate in culture and understand one another in increasingly image-driven digital environments. Yet despite its centrality to everyday public life and contemporary communication, photography remains structurally under-recognised in national arts policy — treated as a subset of the visual arts rather than a distinct discipline with its own histories, technologies, professional pathways and infrastructure requirements.

Australia has a vibrant photographic ecology. It is also a fragile one. The organisations that develop artists, build visual literacy, foster community participation and connect Australian photography to the world operate without the sustained support their ambitions demand.

BIFB Inc. typically operates on project-to-project funding. In 2025, the Ballarat International Foto Biennale attracted more than 66,000 visitors — 78% from outside Ballarat — generating \$45.6 million in economic impact, supporting 429 artists and 60 event facilitators, and contributing to 85.2 FTE jobs. The National Centre for Photography will deliver \$75.7 million in economic benefit over 10 years and draw 140,000 visitors annually. While these are nationally significant cultural, social and economic outcomes, the organisation still lacks the stable operational investment required to sustain this work long-term.

We make four calls to policymakers:

- 1. Recognise photography as a nationally significant art form.**
Photography must be recognised and resourced within the next National Cultural Policy as a distinct art form and essential cultural infrastructure, rather than absorbed into frameworks designed for other disciplines. This means dedicated support for institutions that commission, exhibit, educate, archive and promote photographic practice while developing visual literacy and public engagement.

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2. **Fund regional cultural infrastructure to sustain, not just deliver.** BIFB Inc. is routinely funded for outcomes without the operational capacity to embed them. Multi-year operational funding (not project grants alone) is essential to build adequate staffing, governance, education, touring, partnerships and digital infrastructure that nationally significant work requires. Regional organisations should not have to rebuild workforce and cultural capacity from scratch each funding cycle.
3. **Move beyond acknowledgement of First Nations leadership.** The National Centre for Photography will feature a dedicated First Nations Gallery and programs shaped by Elders and Cultural Leaders. National policy must match this ambition with genuine investment: in First Nations cultural authority, curatorial pathways, artist development and long-term governance structures. Acknowledgement is not a strategy.
4. **Resource artists as workers in an international community.** Without dedicated support, international pathways remain ad hoc and inequitable. National policy should resource regional organisations to promote Australian artists globally, while ensuring fair pay, professional development, accessible cultural participation and community connection at home.

Australia's cultural future depends on who is supported to make, present and encounter art — and where. A policy that recognises photography, strengthens regional infrastructure, invests in First Nations leadership and supports artists and audiences will shape a cultural life that is genuinely diverse, sustainable and world-class. BIFB Inc. would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further.

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