



LIVE AT THE VILLAGE SUBMISSION TO THE 2026 NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CONSULTATION

This submission is presented in response to the consultation on the development of a new National Cultural Policy by Live At The Village (LATV).

Live At The Village Inc. is a not-for-profit incorporated association and registered charity located in NSW. LATV have been contributing to the cultural life of the Blue Mountains region and beyond by providing live contemporary and improvised music performances for over 15 years.

This submission outlines the main issues of concern in developing a new National Cultural Policy to LATV. It has also been prepared in consultation with other cultural groups, in particular Modern Art Projects Blue Mountains (MAPBM) whose submission shares several of the same themes and responses. It also draws on the submission made by an alliance of Blue Mountains Cultural Groups in response to the development of the initial National Cultural Policy in 2022.

GENERAL COMMENTS REGARDING THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY AND THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

LATV welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the consultation on the development of a new National Cultural Policy (NCP). In doing so we would like to comment briefly on broader aspects of the current NCP and the consultation process itself.

The NCP was launched in 2023 with the intention of changing “the trajectory of the creative sector”, and “to deliver new momentum”. LATV supports its basic principles and acknowledges that it has had a major and positive impact on Australia’s cultural landscape, in particular through the establishment of Creative Australia. However, there are some aspects which we believe need more consideration in the review beyond a response confined to discussion of the five pillars. These include:

- **Multiculturalism:** While the NCP has achieved much through programs such as the Local Multicultural Projects Initiative, there is a need for a stronger response which celebrates, supports and defends multicultural Australia and which also recognises the unique synergies in performance and art which are being developed between different communities within this environment. This is particularly relevant in Western Sydney where people with backgrounds relating to hundreds of different languages and cultures live and work together, especially at a time when social cohesion is coming under increasing pressure.
- **Peri-urban Australia:** There is a need to recognise the unique cultural environment presented by the peri-urban areas that surround most major Australian cities. These “zones of transition”(which in relation to Greater Sydney include the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Wollondilly council areas) share a range of characteristics which distinguish them from urban and rural regions and which also present particular difficulties in the provision of cultural infrastructure and services. These include

highly dispersed settlement patterns, poor or non-existent public transport, often high population growth, limited local opportunities and inadequate access to infrastructure and services.

- **National and Local:** It is also important that cultural strategies deal more effectively with Australia's federal structure. While it is understandable that the NCP has a national focus (and acknowledging that several local and regional programs have been initiated through the current NCP), most small to medium sized cultural organisations inevitably have far more involvement with state and local government agencies and programs. There is an associated perception that NCP initiatives and programs (including for example Creative Australia) are largely aimed at supporting "the big end of town", ie, national and large statewide cultural organisations. The new NCP needs to overcome this perception of the relative remoteness of national cultural policy from smaller organisations.
- **Small Organisations:** The new NCP needs to acknowledge and respond to the complex environment in which non-profit micro and small cultural organisations and volunteer groups operate and the pressures they face. These organisations, which play a critical role in providing local cultural activities, place making and community building, face the increasing administrative and financial burdens of growing compliance requirements as well as a decline in donations and the availability of volunteers resulting in part from cost-of-living pressures.

Some of these points will be further discussed in the responses to the individual pillars outlined below.

In addition, we are concerned that the consultation process encourages respondents to make short 500-word submissions specifically about the five pillars, which could discourage them from raising broader concerns regarding the NCP. Even within these constraints it is difficult to adequately address even one or two of the pillars, let alone four or five of them, within the notional 500-word limit.

While longer responses to the NCP can be made as separate documents longer than 500 words, this option is not initially obvious in the online material outlining the consultation process. While the intent to establish a "level playing field" and to encourage shorter submissions from organisations with constrained resources is understandable, these arrangements could inadvertently limit the ability of many organisations to fully detail their concerns.

PILLAR 1 — FIRST NATIONS FIRST

LATV supports this important pillar as a critical element of the NCP but does not seek to comment on it at this stage.

PILLAR 2 — A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

As noted in the point above about multiculturalism, there should be a stronger focus in the new NCP on the critical importance of cultural diversity, including multicultural, linguistic, generational and gender diversity, that characterises the Australian population and which enriches cultural experience. This should include developing cultural infrastructure that recognises and supports the contribution that artists and performers from these different groups have made, especially young people and those that have arrived in recent years, not just as tokenistic cultural "representatives" but in their own right.

This contribution should involve substantial investment and commissioning of works involving artists from these communities. In addition, migrant groups have established a range of cultural links with their countries of origin, in particular in the Asia-Pacific region, which should be recognised, supported and celebrated in the NCP.

In association with this there should be much greater recognition of the important contribution made by the “cross-fertilisation” of or “hybridisation” between these different cultures and cultural traditions. LATV provides a significant example of the success of this approach through the many performances it has produced which involve development of new works through intensive processes of collaboration between performers from very different backgrounds. With greater support, the resulting high level of excellence can also aspire emerging performers from a wide range of cultural backgrounds to develop their skills.

As noted earlier, peri-urban Australia (which includes the Blue Mountains where LATV is based) has specific cultural needs which need greater recognition in national cultural planning and development. Currently these needs are not adequately considered in the development of cultural policy and funding priorities at any level of government as these are often arbitrarily divided along “urban” and “regional” lines. The particular needs of these areas should be recognised in the new NCP; some of the specific needs of artists, performers and groups from these areas are considered under Pillar 3.

PILLAR 3 — CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

There should greater recognition in the new NCP of the importance of both achieving and aspiring to excellence in performance and art. There also needs to be greater understanding of the value of broadening the experience and expertise of artists and musicians and of the significance of collaboration for the development of professional practice by artists and performers, both individually and in groups.

Live at the Village reiterates the call made in the submission from Blue Mountains cultural groups to consultations on the first NCP in 2022 that as a matter of principle the National Cultural Policy should commit to the adequate funding of artists and performers, arts workers and community-based cultural organisations. However, the NCP needs to recognise that there is a wide spectrum of cultural endeavour which includes both amateur and professional artists and musicians, all of whom need support.

Artists, musicians and performers in peri-urban Australia face particular challenges. Emerging and younger artists from these areas are often forced to move away to metropolitan centres to access educational and artistic opportunities not available to them at home. However, high living and housing expenses combined with the steep costs of humanities and arts degrees often reduce their ability to develop their skills and can even force them to abandon their studies and artistic careers. As well as the personal cost involved, these outcomes reduce the contributions made by artists and performers from lower socio-economic and diverse backgrounds to the cultural sector.

Conversely, older and more established artists and performers often move to peri-urban areas such as the Blue Mountains, attracted both by the natural beauty of these regions and relatively cheap housing, reflecting the precarity of their income. Consequently, in the case of the Blue Mountains, 7.6% of the total residential population is employed in the creative industries, compared to the NSW state average of 4.7% and a national average of 3.5% (2016 figures)¹. This is a significant contribution to the local economy as well as local culture. However, as noted earlier, there is often limited cultural, social and physical infrastructure in peri-urban areas to support these artists, who also sometimes face the artistic and practical challenges of limited income and aging in place.

Both emerging and established artists and performers would benefit from the increased provision of cultural infrastructure in peri-urban areas. The NCP should consider options such as piloting funding to establish cultural incubators and hubs to support artists and performers in these areas, in addition to the

¹ Blue Mountains City Council, *Creative Strategy 2020-2027*, 2019

other proposals outlined under Pillar 4. These measures would also boost the already significant contribution of the cultural sector in peri-urban areas to the local and national economy.

Like LATV, many cultural organisations across Australia run on a non-profit basis. As such these organisations are registered under relevant state legislation and also nationally under the Australian Charities and Non-profits Commission (ACNC). However, this regulatory framework is not especially well designed to accommodate organisations which support specific target groups and/or the wider community through the development and production of art, music and performance and other aspects of culture rather than through the “traditional” approach of fundraising or the direct provision of social or health services.

The current NCP does not discuss these practical arrangements, nor the resulting implications for cultural groups. For example, in many non-profit cultural organisations the members of the association (including the Committee) are directly involved in developing and providing performances and artworks. The recognition of these artists and performers as workers, a key tenet of the NCP, raises tensions with the strict rules surrounding the remuneration by the organisation of members, especially Committee members, embodied in the relevant legislation. These issues should be addressed in the new NCP especially in light of the fact that, like Creative Australia, the ACNC is a national body established by the federal government.

Similarly, Section 12(8) of the federal *Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act* requires venues and organisations engaging musicians and other artists to present any form of performance (including video or audio works) to pay the superannuation contributions of these musicians and artists directly into their super funds, regardless of whether they hold an ABN or operate as sole traders. This has major and far-reaching implications, especially for small and medium cultural organisations.

While the payment to all artists and performers of adequate remuneration including super is supported, the requirement to make payments directly into super funds can be extremely difficult to implement, especially for organisations hosting festivals or other events which may involve dozens if not hundreds of performers. In addition, some super funds require any organisation making a super contribution payment to register as an employer, which may have other legal implications especially given the contractual nature of the relationship with the performer.

This critical issue is not discussed in the current NCP and should be addressed as a matter of urgency in the new policy, which should seek reconsideration of these measures in consultation with the Australian Tax Office and the cultural sector. The impact of the ACNC and ATO legislative frameworks is also further discussed under Pillar 4 below.

PILLAR 4 — STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

While the current NCP has done much to revive and expand cultural infrastructure at the national level, there is a critical need for much higher levels of practical and financial support by the federal government in conjunction with other levels of government. As noted earlier this is a particular issue for small volunteer non-profit organisations which face increasing compliance requirements as well as a decline in donations and the availability of volunteers, all of which threaten their ongoing viability. Practical measures which could be adopted or recommended in the new NCP include:

- For small to medium non-profit cultural organisations with a proven track record, the ability to apply for a small annual grant (say a maximum of \$20,000) to support their operations and to assist with administrative and compliance costs;

- In addition to the urgent review of the impact of the legislation regarding the payment of superannuation contributions proposed under Pillar 3 above, a comprehensive review of all federal legislation affecting the cultural sector and in particular small non-profit cultural organisations with a view to reducing red tape and compliance costs. The states should be encouraged to participate in this review and to further harmonise all relevant legislation.
- In conjunction with the sector, a review of options to encourage and support volunteer participation in cultural organisations and activities. Options could include media campaigns, greater recognition of the contribution of volunteers and even financial and other incentives provided via the tax system. These should also include measures to encourage participation from Indigenous and immigrant communities.
- A program to ensure that existing community cultural venues such as galleries, theatres, performance spaces etc are upgraded with infrastructure such as hanging systems, adequate projection, audio and lighting systems, streaming facilities, safety equipment, disability access, etc;
- Funding a pilot to establish cultural incubators and hubs to support artists and performers in peri-urban areas;
- Adoption of a process to partly offset the losses incurred by cultural organisations in presenting concerts, performances, and exhibitions (similar to an approach used by DFAT to support Australian performers presenting works overseas);
- Support for a national audit in conjunction with state and local governments of vacant or underutilised government properties that could be utilised permanently or temporarily as cultural facilities for exhibitions and performances. This initiative, which was proposed in the 2023 NSW *Creative Communities* strategy (but does not appear to have been implemented), should be rolled out nationally.
- More broadly, the adoption of an equitable approach to the allocation of cultural funding that is more inclusive and representative of the entire artistic landscape including smaller organisations and emerging artists and performers.

PILLAR 5 — ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE

Similar to the comments regarding the need to adopt practical approaches to the provision of strong cultural infrastructure, the new NCP needs to develop and support innovative ways of broadening and engaging with audiences in the context of new "discovery pathways and modes of engagement".

This could include providing funding support for artists, performers, organisations and venues to develop their capacity to record, distribute and archive live performances, as well as funding and other assistance including the use of quotas to support them to disseminate their work online via online, print and broadcast media. In addition, the new NCP should also provide a range of resources to support publicity and marketing by artists, performers, organisations and venues.

Thank-you for considering our submission. If any further information is required, please contact the undersigned.

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