ART, CULTURE, COUNTRY, AS ONE

SUBMISSION
TO THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CONSULTATION

BY

THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ART AND CULTURE CENTRE ALLIANCE

Members

Aboriginal Art Centre Hub Western Australia (AACHWA)
Ananguku Arts and Culture Aboriginal Corporation (Ku Arts)
Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists (ANKA)
Desart
Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA)

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1. Introduction

*"Art Centres are our keeping places for culture and art.
They celebrate our country and our storylines. For our people and for the world."*

ANKA/Desart Joint Statement, Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art holds the creation stories of this continent. It comes from an array of living cultures that have survived in this place longer than any other in the history of the planet. The world has much to learn from the complex web of stories embedded in our cultures and it is up to the Australian people and their representative government to ensure that these cultures can thrive as the beating heart of our national identity through well-resourced, community-controlled art and culture centres.

For more than 50 years our art and culture centres have been operating under challenging conditions in some of the most isolated parts of Australia. In that time our art has influenced the nation and the world as it provides glimpses of the oldest living culture on earth. This submission calls for new initiatives that will form the policy foundations needed to allow regional and remote art and culture centres to flourish for the next 50 years helping to keep our culture strong for generations to come.

As a nation, we must ensure that the risks to this industry from mounting pressures faced by remote art and culture centres, including financial pressures, are dealt with through reforms in policy and funding arrangements in consultation with the sector itself. As participants in ANKA's Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit said in 2025, 'A globally recognised Aboriginal arts sector can only thrive when culture is strong because art is an embodiment of culture' (ANKA, 2025, p.2).

We are calling on the Australian Government to take a whole of government approach to address the unique challenges faced by our centres and to consult with the sector through the newly formed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Centre Alliance (The Alliance). Our submission highlights an important thread of key issues that appear consistently throughout published reports, research and policy documents. It aims to fill a gap in the National Cultural Policy that leaves the knowledge holders of our foundational stories, the elders of our tradition-oriented communities across remote Australia, voiceless in the hierarchy of national decision-making.

2. List of recommendations

Recommendation 1: Recognising the Alliance
The National Cultural Policy should recognise the Alliance as an advisory, research and advocacy body engaging with Government on matters related to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture centre sector across portfolios including but not limited to arts, health, housing, infrastructure, education, employment and workplace relations.

Recommendation 2: Funding the Alliance:
The Government should commit to the provision of ongoing operational funding for the Alliance.

Recommendation 3: Stabilisation
Restore core funding to at least the real per-centre level of 10 years ago, as an immediate stabilisation measure.

Recommendation 4: Funding Review
In line with the 2022 recommendation of the Productivity Commission, we call on the Government to instigate a co-designed review of government expenditure directed to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts sector with the aim of ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sector.

Recommendation 5: A National Infrastructure Fund for Art and Culture Centres
We call on the Government to establish a National Infrastructure Fund for regional and remote art and culture centres to finance fit-for-purpose, safe, climate-resilient and digitally capable infrastructure, guided by a national framework developed with the Alliance.

Recommendation 6: Workforce Development
We call on the Government to enter into a co-design process with the Alliance to develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture centre workforce development strategy to compliment Creative Australia's First Nations Creative Workforce Strategy.

Recommendation 7: Sector Mapping
We call on the Government to enter a co-design process with the Alliance to create a sector mapping project that details the full contribution made by remote art and culture centres to service provision in their communities. This project should devise a mechanism to measure, evaluate and fund all services contributed by art and culture centres including intersection with different portfolios, departments and agencies.

Recommendation 8: A co-designed plan to strengthen the sector
We call on the Government to develop a plan to strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture centre sector, co-designed with the Alliance, which builds on the recommendations in this submission with additional priorities to be identified through the co-design process. The plan will establish strategic building blocks for long term sector sustainability with a 50-year horizon and include support for strong governance, cultural maintenance and intergenerational transmission of knowledge and artistic skill.

Recommendation 9: Supporting Culture
We call on the Government to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as a priority domain by establishing a mechanism to measure cultural maintenance and create accountability for investment in cultural maintenance programs across portfolios

3. Who We Are

This submission has been prepared by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Centre Alliance, a coalition of five state and territory peak bodies representing regional and remote art and culture centres. We represent 109 art and culture centres, more than 20,000 artists from approximately 200 language groups.

Art and culture centres are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and governed organisations, operating on a not-for-profit basis, with boards and leaders who speak as the voice for their communities and Country. We seek proper processes for the Australian Government to hear and act on the voices of our cultural leaders, backed by long-term investment that enables our centres to thrive.

The Alliance is the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture centre peak bodies advocating for strong and sustainable community-controlled art and culture centres. Founding members include, AACHWA, ANKA, Desart, IACA and Ku Arts covering regional and remote centres in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. Our core mission is to advocate collectively and on the basis of evidence, Elder knowledge, and community voice for the strength and sustainability of our art and culture centres and the artists, arts workers and communities they support.

Art and culture centres are either incorporated bodies or affiliated with a local organisation or government council. They operate on a not-for-profit basis, service a community of artists and are involved in the production, marketing and sale of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander art as a core activity carried out for the purpose of fulfilling the organisation's primary objectives. Central to the work of art and culture centres is their role linking artists with the art market and promoting and selling works of art to national and international audiences. These commercial activities provide independent income for artists and employment for art and culture centre workers, with profits re-invested into operations. This cooperative model enables art and culture centres to support the long-term work of developing artists' careers and contributing to the cultural and social wellbeing of their communities and to the cultural life of the nation.
The peak bodies that make up the Alliance are Code Signatory or Code Supporter Members of the Indigenous Art Code (IAC) and we acknowledge the IAC is essential for preserving the integrity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts sector by promoting transparent, fair, and ethical trade. By establishing clear guidelines for commercial relationships, the Code guides best practice business behaviour and includes principles of transparency and respect for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, so that artists are supported to make self-determined decisions when selling and licensing their artwork, and buyers are empowered to support the world's oldest living culture fairly and with confidence.

Direct funding to art and culture centres from the Office for the Arts in 2024–25 totalled $21.6 million while, according to Desart's analysis of transaction data from SAM (Stories Art Money), total artwork sales generated $37.4 million for centres, 71% of which was returned to artists. Art and culture centre sales are now in decline since a high point in 2022 of $43.1 million. At the same time, there has been a 25% drop in the real value of IVAIS funding per art centre over the decade to 2026, according to analysis by the Alliance of IVAIS data, leaving the sector financially challenged in an environment of escalating business costs particularly in regional and remote contexts. Compounding this financial challenge is a decline in the number of artists participating and the number of works produced, highlighting a consistent failure to recruit younger artists into the sector (Desart, 2026, p.3).

4. Recognising & Funding the Alliance

> *"Our people have the voice and need to be part of the conversation.*
> *This is a turning point for a lot of us."*
>
> Solomon Booth, Chairperson, IACA

We are an alliance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies advocating for strong and sustainable community driven art and culture centres. Culture is the foundation of our organisations. Self-determination, cultural authority and proper processes should be at the centre of policy design and funding allocation. This can only be achieved by empowering cultural leadership in remote art and culture centres to speak directly to government. The Productivity Commission's 2022 study of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and crafts sector observed;

> Under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, governments committed to build and strengthen the structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with governments. The current approach to determining funding objectives in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts sector does not include shared decision-making between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (p.40)

The Alliance is a First Nations-led national table, with cultural authority grounded in Elders, Country and community, and should be recognised as a core partner and formal advisory body for cultural policy development and implementation. The Alliance enables government to engage with artists, arts workers and cultural leaders on the ground in regional and remote communities. It provides government with a single, representative body for co-design, reducing complexity and ensuring regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices from across the sector are heard in one place.

A recent study of funding policies for the sector by the Aboriginal Art Centre Hub Western Australia found '… that high level political advocacy may also be lacking, and one of the reasons for art centres not being considered as stakeholders by government agencies not traditionally funders of the arts (the Department of Health, Department of Education, Department of Justice amongst others)' (Congreve & Acker, 2024, p.9).

Building on decades of research and policy development carried out by the peak bodies, the Alliance is well placed to initiate research and instigate new policy initiatives across the sector. Establishing the Alliance as a formal partner for whole of government policy development will ensure efficiency and remove obstacles to equitable and timely action across the sector.

Recommendation 1: Recognising the Alliance
The National Cultural Policy should recognise the Alliance as an advisory, research and advocacy body engaging with Government on matters related to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture centre sector across portfolios including but not limited to arts, health, housing, infrastructure, education, employment and workplace relations.

The National Cultural Policy should commit to ongoing, structured engagement with the Alliance and its member peaks. By providing a single, unified body for co-design, the Alliance ensures that voices from regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are heard directly in decision-making processes, rather than through fragmented, or superficial consultations. The Productivity Commission (2022) Study Report concluded that;

> ...the Australian Government (led by the Office for the Arts) should establish a formal, shared decision-making partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and art organisations to help determine what objectives and activities are prioritised in funding decisions. Such a partnership would ... help ensure funding is directed towards the outcomes and objectives that matter most to communities. (p.28)

Government investment to support the operations of the Alliance is an effective and efficient way to address the interests of this culturally significant yet historically marginalised group. It will pave the way for a new era of service delivery where decision making is directly informed by stakeholders on the ground. In its response to the Productivity Commission Study Report, the Australian Government said it is guided by its '...commitment to working in partnership to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (DITRDCA, 2024, p.4).

Recommendation 2: Funding the Alliance:
The Government should commit to the provision of ongoing operational funding for the Alliance.

4. Financial Stability

The rising cost of doing business in remote areas and general increases in the cost of living create ongoing challenges for art and culture centres which can only be met with increased funding. The core objective of art and culture centres is to sustain the livelihoods of artists and their cultural authority over the long term. A crisis is impacting the future sustainability of some centres, with rising financial risks that undermine positive contributions they have made to their communities and the nation.

These economic impacts threaten the achievements made by the sector over many decades and require immediate attention from Government to avert a full-blown crisis across the sector. While current economic conditions require urgent measures to relieve pressure on art and culture centres, a wider review of funding for the sector is overdue. In 2022, the Productivity Commission reported;

> The Australian Government should commission an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of Australian Government expenditure directed to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts sector. The scope of the review should include the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) program, the National Indigenous Visual Arts (NIVA) Action Plan and relevant Australia Council funding. (p.40)

According to recent analysis by the Alliance of IVAIS data, the average art centre has suffered a 25% fall in IVAIS funding in real terms over 10 years. This was calculated using capital cities CPI figures and would notionally be higher based on CPI increases in remote communities.

Facing tough economic times, art and culture centres are aggressively looking for additional funding to maintain their operations. Until now art and culture centres have largely been able to cope with the drop in real funding by allocating sales revenue to cover rising operational costs but with sales revenue now dropping as well, the situation is becoming unsustainable.

This decline in revenue in real terms points to a sector under strain and highlights the argument for an overhaul of funding for the sector.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Stabilisation
Restore core funding to at least the real per-centre level of 10 years ago, as an immediate stabilisation measure.

The risk to the sector of not taking action on the funding arrangements for art and culture centres is significant. The loss of critical services, including the ability of artists to independently generate income for their families, will have a devastating impact on the fragile economies in remote communities and threaten the long-term viability of some centres. Immediate action around funding for the sector will avoid plunging many centres into perpetual crisis management while strategic planning and preventative approaches to funding would bolster their economic performance and their social and cultural benefits.

By comparison, funding for remote art and culture centres lags well behind funding for the Indigenous Rangers Program which received a significant boost of $359 million in 2023. Congreve & Acker (2024) noted that an extra $22.8 million allocated to 14 Ranger groups across Western Australia would support 57 FTE positions with no stated commercial outcomes, while 14 remote art and culture centres in the Kimberley region were supported with only $3.6 million in funding (less than one-sixth of the ranger funding) yet they supported over 50 FTE positions and generated $8.2 million in sales (p.12-13).

Authentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art is too important to the nation, not only in economic terms but to the very nature of our national identity. We cannot risk the financial destabilisation of remote art and culture centres which have achieved so much for their communities and the nation.

Recommendation 4: Funding Review
In line with the 2022 recommendation of the Productivity Commission, we call on the Government to instigate a co-designed review of government expenditure directed to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts sector with the aim of ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sector.

5. Infrastructure

Australia's National Cultural Policy, Revive, prioritises the need for strong cultural infrastructure but a recent AACHWA review of policies impacting remote art and culture centres, found 'Very little targeted support for art centres despite their central role in communities' (Congreve & Acker, 2024, p.31). We seek to prioritise safe, properly resourced workplaces recognising that under-resourcing creates unsafe conditions and that work health and safety (WHS) requirements reflect both workers' rights and equity for the sector.

Art and culture centres are one of the few success stories in remote communities. They have thrived in the harshest and most challenging economic, social and physical environments yet investment in services and infrastructure has been irregular and unreliable. Many of the buildings including staff housing, storage facilities and the art and culture centres themselves are not fit for purpose posing work health and safety risks that are unacceptable. Climate change is exacerbating these risks with increasing flood disruption and damage, and heat related working conditions that are unsafe, particularly for elderly and disabled artists.

These challenges impact the ability of remote art and culture centres to recruit staff, particularly in management and studio roles. This can impact the economic and artistic performance of the centre when staff shortages occur during extended recruitment periods.

The National Indigenous Visual Arts Action Plan acknowledged the need to 'increase investment in core infrastructure that will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to produce new art, generate income, develop professional skills and connect to the commercial art market …' (DITRDC, 2021, p.11). However, investment in infrastructure for remote art and culture centres has remained haphazard and inconsistent, demonstrating a critical need to establish a dedicated fund to support infrastructure development for the sector.

The Northern Territory Government's recent survey of infrastructure needs among remote art and culture centres, a joint project with ANKA and Desart, found 75% of buildings were more than 21 years old and 30% were between 21- 40 years old and either at the end of their useful life or requiring expensive upgrades to be fit for purpose (NT Gov, ANKA & Desart, 2023, p.24).

In Western Australia, a 2024 audit of art and culture centre infrastructure needs recommended infrastructure upgrades to 26 centres costing a total of $51.5 million. It proposed undertaking the work over 4 years where centres with significantly dilapidated infrastructure, truncated design and approvals timeframes and uncertain tenancy would be prioritised (AACHWA, 2024, p.10). In their review of policy impacting art centres, Congreve and Acker (2024) found that empowering remote Aboriginal communities has the potential to realise socio-economic benefits and that, 'This will require investment in cultural infrastructure and tourism experiences that recognise and celebrate the world's oldest continuous culture and develop pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise in domestic and international markets …' (p.36).

The NT Infrastructure Survey reported that 'respondents identified widespread upgrades are required with a total of 124 upgrades needed across 26 identified arts production facilities to be fit for purpose, enhance arts production, meet professional standards and support increased income opportunities for artists and art workers' (NT Gov, ANKA & Desart, 2023, p.14).

A members survey conducted in 2025 by the Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA) in Queensland reported 80% of members had not accessed any infrastructure funding in the previous 4 years and predicted a surge in requests for funding as '… current facilities and equipment nears the end of its safe working life' (p.10). Respondents to the IACA survey identified security upgrades, safe storage facilities, gallery and workshop spaces and infrastructure to accommodate tourism experiences as priorities.

> Climate change is further intensifying these pressures. Extreme heat, humidity and rising sea levels are accelerating deterioration across art centre facilities and staff accommodation. Many centres are experiencing chronic infrastructure failures — including unsafe electrical systems, poor plumbing and sewage, rotting floors and walls, damaged guttering and roofing and inadequate secure storage — that are becoming financially unmanageable and, in some cases, dangerous. (IACA, 2026, p.1)

The 2019 Australian Infrastructure Audit highlighted '… infrastructure safety issues, particularly in remote art centres and in extreme heat …' where 'Inadequate and infrequent maintenance and upgrades to infrastructure and utilities impact the reliability of electricity and air conditioning' (p.22). Extreme weather events leading to extensive flooding across northern Australia in recent years have seen art and culture centres in Daly River in the NT, Hopevale in north Queensland and Fitzroy Crossing in WA, among others, suffering severe water damage. There is no reason to believe that changes in our climate will not continue to impact cultural infrastructure in remote communities.

Australia's workplace laws require safe working conditions for all workers in this country yet the powerhouses of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture across remote Australia are notably high-risk environments with equipment and facilities that are not fit for purpose. The sector is exposed to excessive risk in terms of work health and safety, and governments have a responsibility to invest in remediation.

A key outcome for all the Alliance members is increased investment in resources to address physical safety issues within all our art and culture centres.

Recommendation 5: A National Infrastructure Fund for Art and Culture Centres
We call on the Government to establish a National Infrastructure Fund for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture centres to finance fit-for-purpose, safe, climate-resilient and digitally capable infrastructure, guided by a national framework developed with the alliance.

The infrastructure fund should be underpinned by agreed minimum standards for buildings, housing, vehicles and digital systems. An infrastructure audit should be conducted based on existing data to provide an evidence base for funding commitments across portfolios including infrastructure, housing, transport, employment and workplace relations, climate change and environment. The key outcome should be the establishment of a fund that can provide ongoing investment to meet the infrastructure needs of remote art and culture centres.

6. Workforce

The Australian Government supports the employment of 840 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers in community-controlled art and culture centres through the IVAIS funding program ((DITRDCSA, 2026). Despite this, a 2019 study by Desart found, 'There are no local Aboriginal people employed in a management role in Central Australian Aboriginal art centres or in any of the commercial or public sector galleries' (p.9).

In her foreword to the 2023 Revive policy the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney MP, said;

> It is vital that First Nations peoples lead First Nations arts and cultural organisations. This requires a commitment to training and skills development for First Nations cultural and creative practitioners and more sustainable career pathways for young First Nations peoples ... (p.9)

Senior roles in the art and culture centre sector are predominantly occupied by non-local, non-Indigenous staff. Due to locational disadvantage and failures in education and training programs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers in remote communities face a series of roadblocks to career development. The Productivity Commission Study Report (2022) found;

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under-represented in leadership, management and technical roles within the industry. Most art centres struggle to recruit suitably qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art centre managers and other arts workers from their local community, and training that is suitable to artists' needs can be difficult to access. (p.26)

The Alliance has determined to treat workforce development as a major long-term project creating career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managers, arts workers, board members and cultural leaders (Mokak 2025, p.8).

The Productivity Commission found that 'Gaps and deficiencies in training contribute to under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in some roles and positions in the visual arts industry' (2022, p.41). Desart's 2019 workforce study found, 'There is a complex matrix of barriers faced by Aboriginal people entering the workforce and the solutions require equally complex strategies' (p.9).

In 2022, The Productivity Commission found

> There is no coherent national strategy to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts workforce. Development of the workforce falls in a policy gap between multiple frameworks and without clear objectives and accountabilities. This contributes to ongoing under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in key industry roles. (p.41)

The Commission made the following recommendation:

> The Australian Government should ensure that funding for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts industry supports the development of a sustainable workforce. (p.42)

It also found that 'Any workforce policy objectives should be determined through a co-design process with representatives from the industry' (p.27).

The Alliance recognises that Creative Australia has embarked on the development of an overall First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy and that the Australian Government is 'committed to supporting the development of a sustainable First Nations arts sector workforce (DIRDCA, 2024, p.10). However, the unique needs and training environments of remote art and culture centres demand a tailored response to address the locational disadvantage and specialised skill sets required for remote art and culture workers including artists, arts workers and board members. Desart's 2019 report called for;

> ...culturally appropriate training, delivered locally using local language speakers as trainers, which addresses gender issues and, where appropriate, forms partnerships with local community organisations to facilitate effective and efficient workforce development programs that serve the needs of the whole community. (p.12)

A workforce development strategy for the remote art and culture centre sector should define clear pathways through identified accredited training packages including certificate, diploma and degree courses matched with funding and delivery strategies and partnerships that are unique to the sector such as the ANKA Arts Worker Extension program, an intensive professional development program for Aboriginal arts workers from northern centres, focused on building skills, advancing careers, strengthening connection and providing supported pathways to university qualifications.

Recommendation 6: Workforce Development
We call on the Government to enter into a co-design process with the Alliance to develop a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture centre workforce development strategy to compliment Creative Australia's First Nations Creative Workforce Strategy.

7. Strengthening the Sector

The 2025 Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit held in Darwin, drafted a call to action to all politicians;

> Aboriginal community-controlled Art and Culture Centres bring important social, economic and health outcomes to our communities and give meaningful jobs to our young people. They do this while achieving cultural heritage outcomes for the whole world. We need you to work with us to keep our Art and Culture strong for the next 50 years and beyond (ANKA, 2025, p.10).

(ANKA, 2025, p.4)

The extensive role that art and culture centres play in supporting community life in remote locations is well documented.

> As has often been stated in research literature and confirmed by two Federal inquiries, art centres are not just visual arts studios or galleries. Art centres are increasingly recognised as sustainable, remote community businesses and providers of social services and cultural benefits. Their ability to manage multi-faceted activities that impact on the economic, social and cultural development of their communities, mean that they sit across broader economic development, education and health portfolios. However, they are rarely understood or formally recognised by government agencies as multi-disciplinary service providers and therefore attract very little investment outside of designated arts and cultural programs. Greater interagency acknowledgement and support could lead to multi-level outcomes that benefits not only the artists and arts workers, but also the region and the State. (Congreve & Acker, 2024, p.33)

A pilot study currently being undertaken by Ku Arts, funded by IVAIS and Preventative Health SA, in two remote art centres in South Australia, will '… map social welfare services available in both of these communities through the lens of their Art Centres looking at the services available within their communities, and internally within the Art Centres, and mapping the services they deliver which are beyond their core business of art creation and sales' (Ku Arts, 2025, p.12).

> Art Centres do far more than create and sell art; they sustain education, cultural practice, heritage, and language. They provide strengths-based employment and support health, well-being, and self-determination in remote communities. (Ku Arts, 2025, p12)

The Ku Arts pilot will also trial the placement of a social worker/counselling service within the art centres leading to a peer reviewed report detailing evidence-based findings and recommendations (Ku Arts, 2025, p.15). This work by Ku Arts will provide a strong basis for the formulation of a national arts and culture centre sector mapping project.

The services that the centres contribute to, alongside their central activity of producing and selling art, assist life outcome targets under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and create significant savings to government. In this context the Alliance proposes a project to measure, recognise and fund these contributions.

Recommendation 7: Sector Mapping
We call on the Government to enter a co-design process with the Alliance to create a sector mapping project that details the full contribution made by remote art and culture centres to service provision in their communities. This project should devise a mechanism to measure, evaluate and fund all services contributed by art and culture centres including intersection with different portfolios, departments and agencies.

Recommendation 7 is a key component of a longer-term plan for sector sustainability. The Alliance would welcome working with government to set up the building blocks for the next generation to secure their cultural legacy.

Recommendation 8: A co-designed plan to strengthen the sector
We call on the Government to develop a plan to strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Centre sector, co-designed with the Alliance, which builds on the recommendations in this submission with additional priorities to be identified through the co-design process. The plan will establish strategic building blocks for long term sector sustainability with a 50-year horizon and include support for strong governance, cultural maintenance and intergenerational transmission of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and artistic skill to be completed by 2029.

"The Parties acknowledge that strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are fundamental to improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."

National Agreement on Closing the Gap (p.4)

Government policy across many domains from the Closing the Gap Agreement to health and education policies acknowledge the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as a key building block for the successful delivery of programs. Yet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture centres themselves are rarely funded for anything other than the production and sale of art.

The maintenance of culture is one of many community priorities that have been taken up by the art and culture centres without any specific funding. There is no measurement of intergenerational knowledge transfer, ceremonial practice, or care and connection to Country. In the absence of a policy that names culture as a priority domain, establishes dedicated measurement, and creates accountability for investment across portfolios, structural underfunding of culture will not change.

Recommendation 9: Supporting Culture
We call on the Government to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as a priority domain by establishing a mechanism to measure cultural maintenance and create accountability for investment in cultural maintenance programs across portfolios.

'Culture is the foundation of our art and culture centres.'

(Mokak, 2025, p.6)

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Appendix A:

Financial Snapshot of Art Centres

2004/05 > 2024/25

Data analysed – March 2026

Financial Snapshot of Art Centres

2004/05 > 2024/25

Introduction

Culture first and industry best practice is the foundation of Desart's mission in supporting art centres to continue important cultural practice and to share their art with the world. As part of this support, Desart also advocates for the 'business of art' – the important work art centres do in running a social enterprise and providing culturally appropriate and locally-owned economic opportunities. This report is one expression of this support.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art centres

Central to the work of art centres is their role in linking artists with the art market and promoting and selling works of art to national and international audiences. These commercial activities provide independent income and employment for artists and art centre workers, with any profits re-invested into operations. This cooperative model enables art centres to support the long-term work of developing artists' careers and contributing to the cultural and social wellbeing of their communities. While this report focusses on analysing financial performance, it is acknowledged that cultural practices are critical to the success of art centres.

This snapshot summarises the long-term financial and production trends of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art centres across Australia. The findings are intended for use by art centres, peak bodies and other stakeholders. Desart commissions this financial snapshot of art centres to provide financial transparency of, and accessibility to, the sector, with the aim of enabling informed decision-making.

This update adds two years of new results (2023/24 and 2024/25) to the long-term data, enabling trends and changes to be tracked and contextualised.

Accounting for Inflation

Costs increase over time. To account for this inflation, adjustments can be made to the yearly data reported by art centres; these 'adjusted' figures enable accurate comparisons over time.

As such, all financial data in this report (sales, payments etc) are shown as 'adjusted' amounts. This means that, when looking at historical data, all the information is comparable and recorded in today's money.

Key Findings

Average art centre sales have fallen 25% since 2021/22. Average art centre sales are now back to pre-COVID levels.

Artist payments have fallen 21% between 2023/24 and 2024/25, having been maintained even as sales had begun falling

The proportion of average total art centre income from sales is falling while the proportion coming from funding is increasing.

Around four in five artworks are created by female artists.

Female artists over 50 years old produce nearly four out of 10 artworks.

The number of art centre artists is declining. In 2024/25, there were 5,360 artists across 91 art centres; this is the lowest number of artists for almost ten years.

The number of new artists at art centres in 2024/25 is at its lowest level in almost 15 years.

Core artists – those who sell more than 10 artworks in a year – make up around 20% of artists but generate around 80% sales.

While almost six out of 10 artworks sell for less than $250, this has fallen to its lowest level. Less than 2% of artworks sell for more than $5,000.

In 2024/25, 52,764 artworks were created – similar to levels recorded before COVID and a 29% fall from 2021/22.

Around six in ten artworks were produced in the NT, two in ten in WA, one in ten in SA and the remainder in QLD and other regions.

Product sales have continued to grow and now make up 18% (almost one fifth) of art centre sales, up from less than 5% around ten years earlier.

Sales

Art centre sales have seen sustained falls, dropping 24% since their peak around 2022. In 2024/25, average art centre sales were $569,680, as seen in Figure 1. After 11 years of steady sales growth, peaking at over $760,000 in 2021/22, average art centre sales have returned to pre-COVID levels.

Art centres returned an average of 71% to artists from 2024/25 sales, the second highest proportion of artists income recorded. This translates to average artist payments per art centre of $401,603, a similar fall (17%) as that recorded for sales. It is notable that, despite falling sales over the last three years, the proportion paid to artists remains historically high.

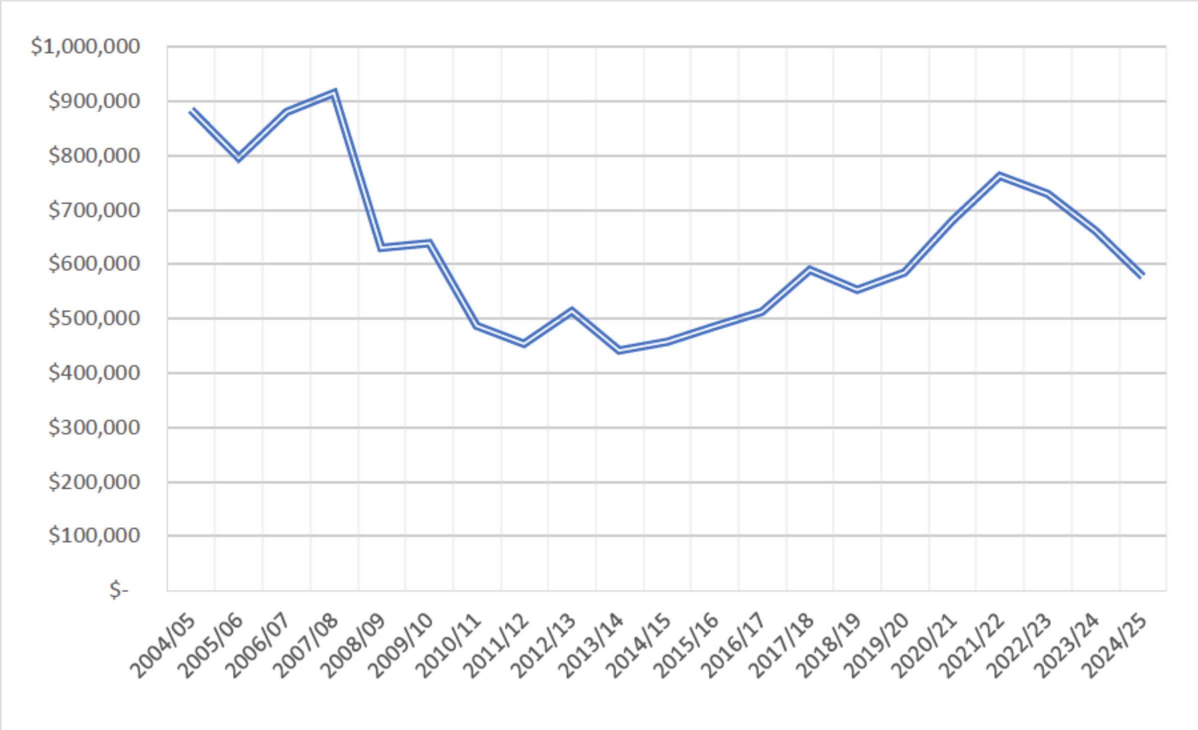

Figure 1: Average annual sales for art centres, 2004/05 to 2024/25 - adjusted.

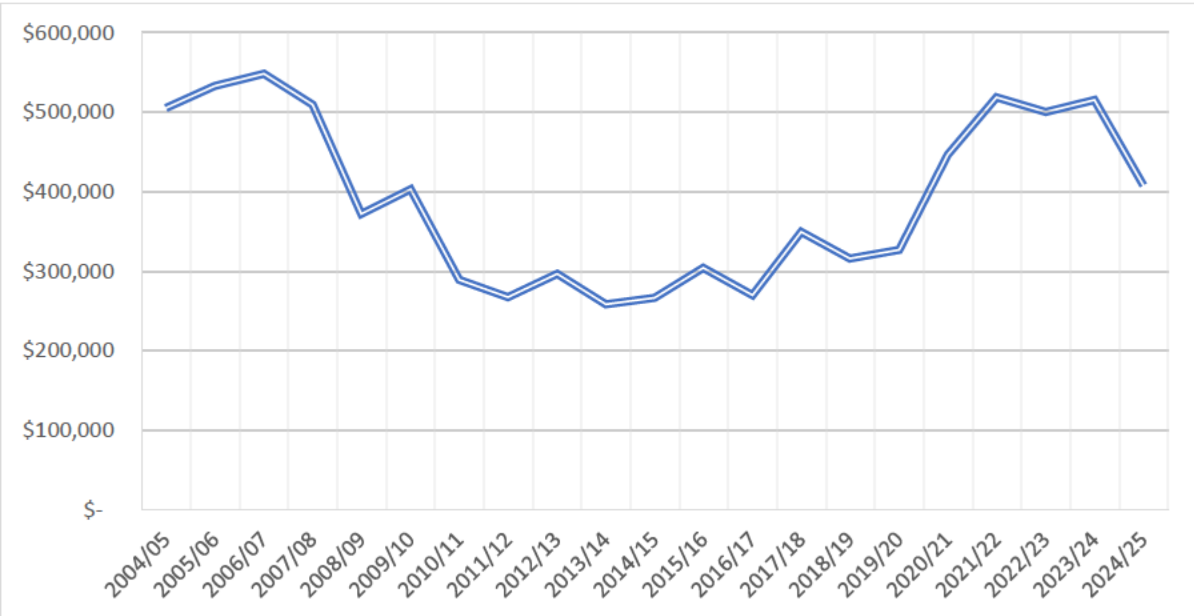

Figure 2: average annual artist payments, 2004/05 > 2024/25 - adjusted.

Average total income (sales, grants and other revenue) for art centres in 2024/25 was $1,251,924. While this is a return to similar levels before the COVID-19 pandemic, the fall since 2022 is less than half of the fall in average sales, at 10%. This indicates that art centres, having become larger enterprises over time, may have some resilience in coping with a shrinking market.

Average sales generated by art centres are different across the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, the states/Territory that are home to nearly all art centres, as seen in Figure 4.

Generally, average sales in each state/Territory peaked around 2021 or 2022 and have been falling since then. Average sales at South Australian art centres have – after around ten years of recording the highest average sales – fallen to be similar to the average sales recorded by NT art centres. Art centres in the NT saw sales peak later than other regions (around 2023/24) but have recorded one of the steepest falls since then. Average sales at Queensland art centres increased during the early COVID years, but the long-term trend shows a sustained decline. Queensland art centres also recorded the largest fall in average sales between 2021/22 and 2024/25, falling 61% from $298,088 to $116,021.

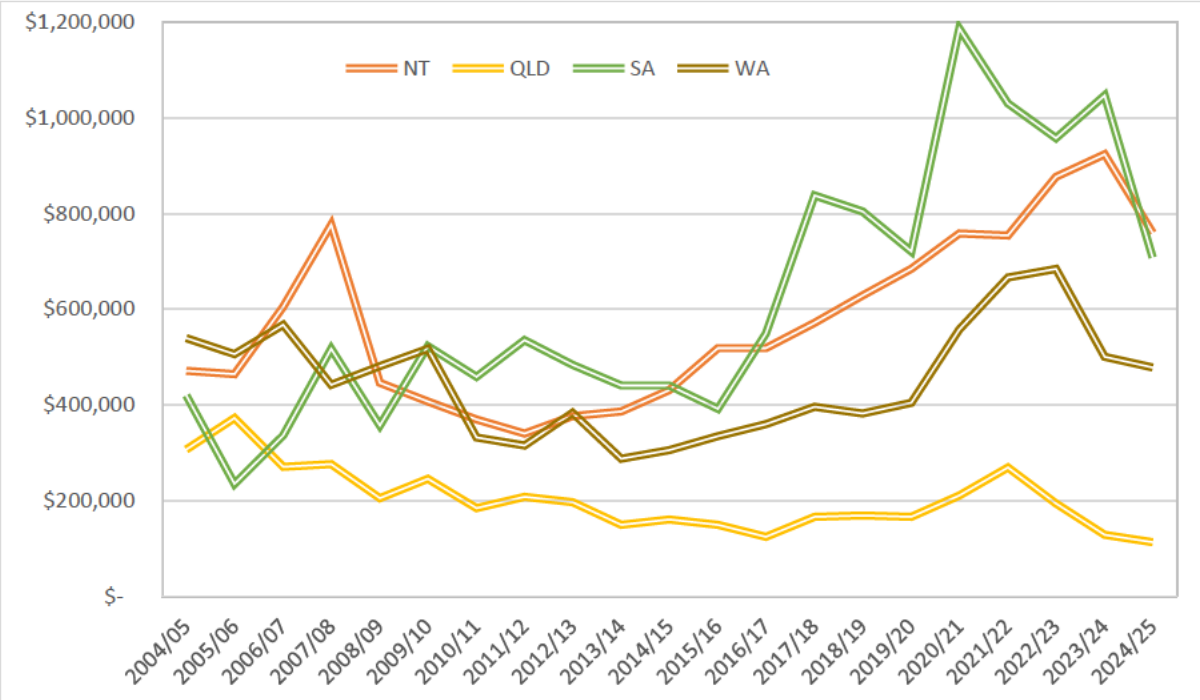

Figure 3: Average annual sales by art centres in each state/Territory, 2004/05 to 2024/25 – adjusted.

Grants

While all art centres receive some grant funding, the levels of this funding have changed over the 21 years of records, as seen in Figure 5. Earlier years are characterized by grants making a relatively small contribution to art centres' total revenue. Around 2010 this situation changed significantly, triggered by new funding priorities (particularly around employment and training of arts workers) and a growing number of new and smaller art centres with a greater reliance on funding.

The proportion of total income generated by sales has changed. While early years saw around 70% of income from sales, this has more recently fallen to between 42% in 2013/14 and a peak of 55% in 2021/22. Recent market conditions have decreased the proportion of total income from sales; in 2024/25 this has returned to pre-COVID levels of around 46%.

Over the last decade, reliance on grants has generally been declining, aside from a short spike during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. A greater proportion of self-generated income means art centres increase their financial autonomy and are less beholden to the requirements of grant funding. However, 2024/25 has seen a significant increase in the share of total income from grants.

Figure 4: Income mix: the proportion of average art centre income that is generated from sales vs grants.

However, as seen in Figure 6, falling levels of grant income may also be linked to the static level of funding available to the sector. For example, in the ten years between 2014/15 and 2024/25, sales grew by 28% and total revenue by 24%, while funding increased by 6%. This finding could benefit from further analysis.

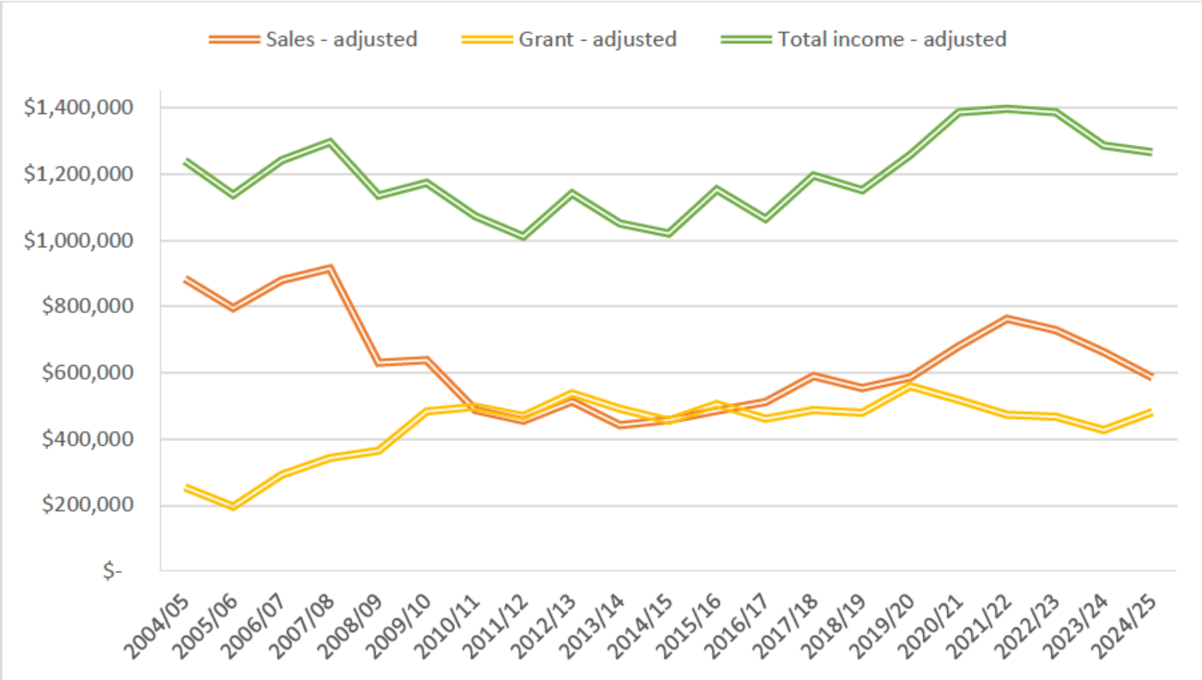

Figure 5: Changes to sales income, grant income and total income, 2004/05 to 2024/25 - adjusted.

The proportion of total revenue coming from grants varies across the three states and the Northern Territory; however, and consistent with the trends shown in Figures 5 and 6, all have seen this increase in recent years. Queensland art centres continue to have the highest proportion of their revenue coming from grants, at 72% in 2024/25. South Australian art centres have the lowest proportion, at 29% in 2024/25.

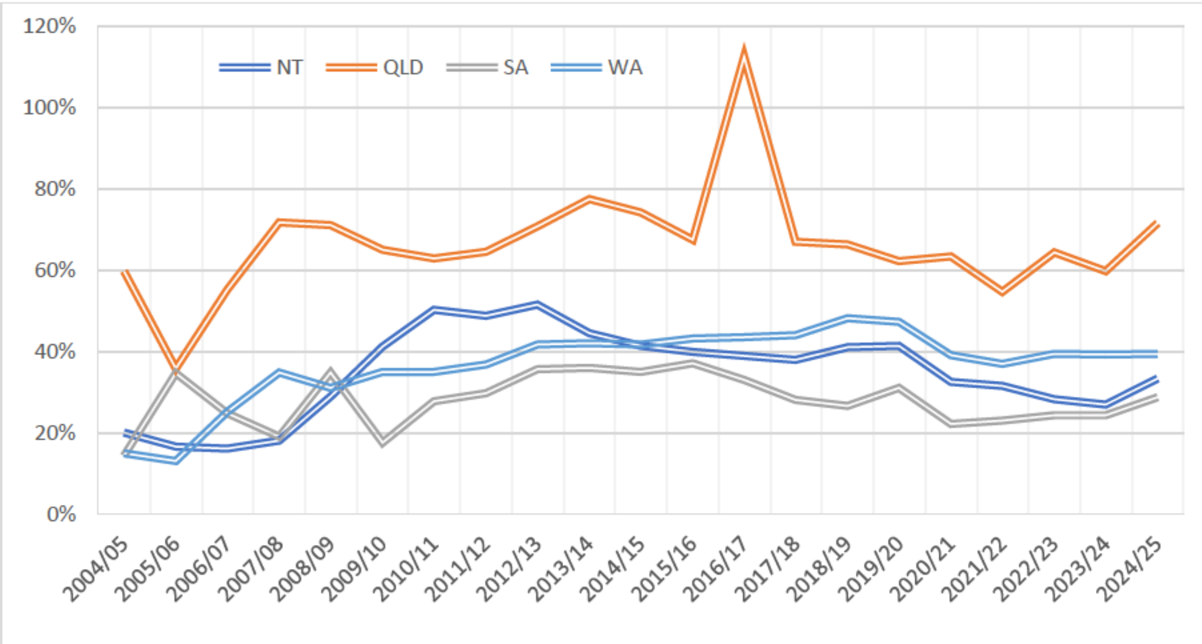

Figure 6: Proportion of an art centre's average total income from grants, by state/Territory, 2004/05 to 2024/25.

Artists

Over the 13 years between 2012/13 and 2024/25[1], female artists produced an average of 76% of all artworks. In 2024/25, 79% of all artworks were produced by female artists, a slight fall from the 2019/20 high of almost 82%.

The proportion of artworks produced by female artists over the last 13 years varies with location, with Queensland have a notably lower proportion of female artists.

State/Territory	% of works produced by female artists
NT	76%
QLD	68%
SA	82%
WA	81%

The proportion of artworks produced by female and male artists also changes with age, as seen in Figure 8. In total, artists aged 60 or more produce 28% of all artworks, while female artists aged 50 or more produce 39% of all artworks.

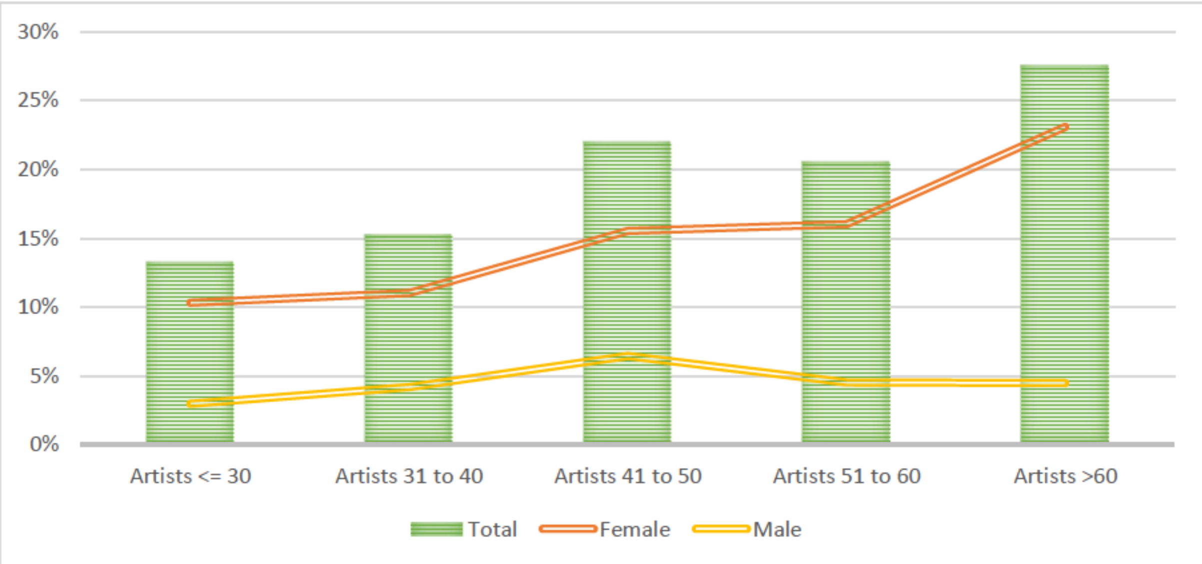

Figure 7: Artwork production by age group and gender, 2004/05 > 2024/25.

The proportion of artworks produced by each age group and gender varies considerably between each state and Territory, as seen in Figures 9 > 12. Western Australian is the most reliant on older artists, with artists over 50 producing 58% of all artworks, considerably higher than other regions. Except for artists over 60, Queensland has the most even gender balance in the production of artworks; around two-thirds of Queensland artists are female, compared to 75-80% or more for WA, SA and the NT.

[1] This is the date range for which reliable gender, age and production data is available. This shorter date range is due to changes in the SAM database made in 2012/13.

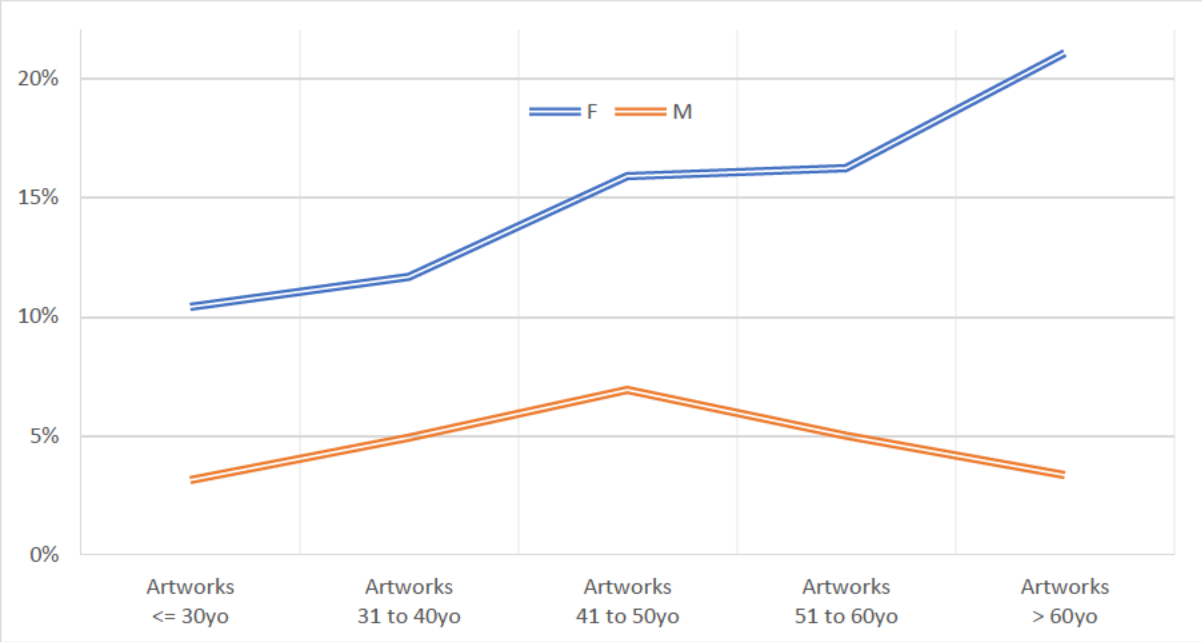

Figure 8: Artwork production by age group and gender in the Northern Territory, 2004/05 > 2024/25.

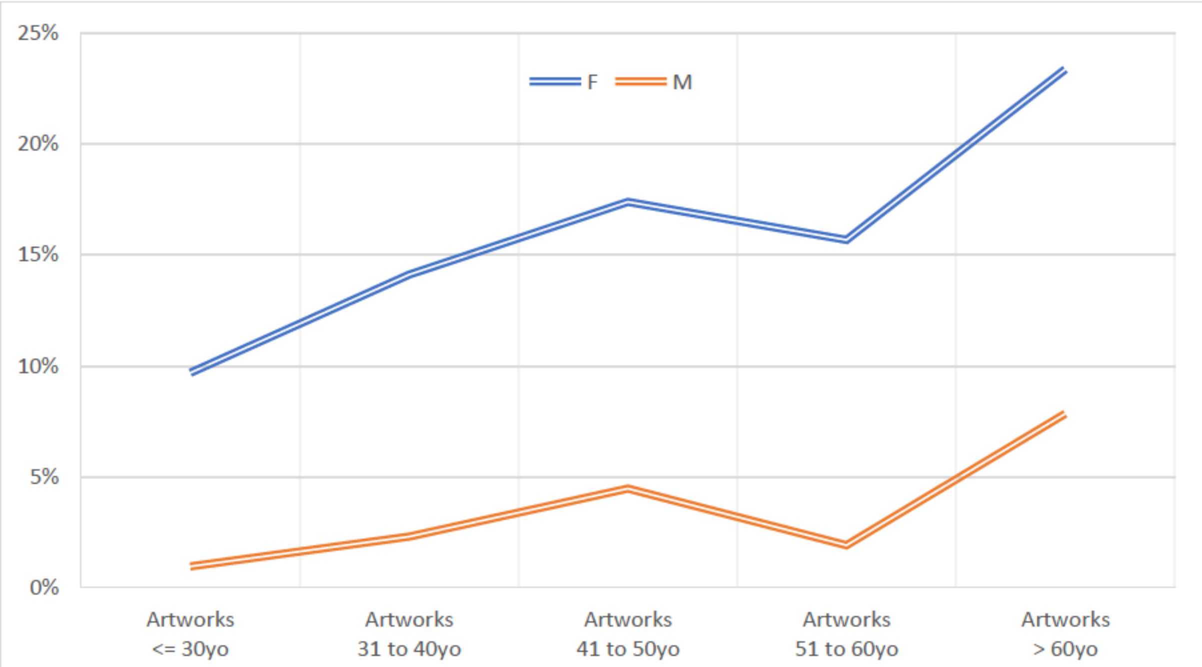

Figure 9: Artwork production by age group and gender in South Australia, 2004/05 > 2024/25.

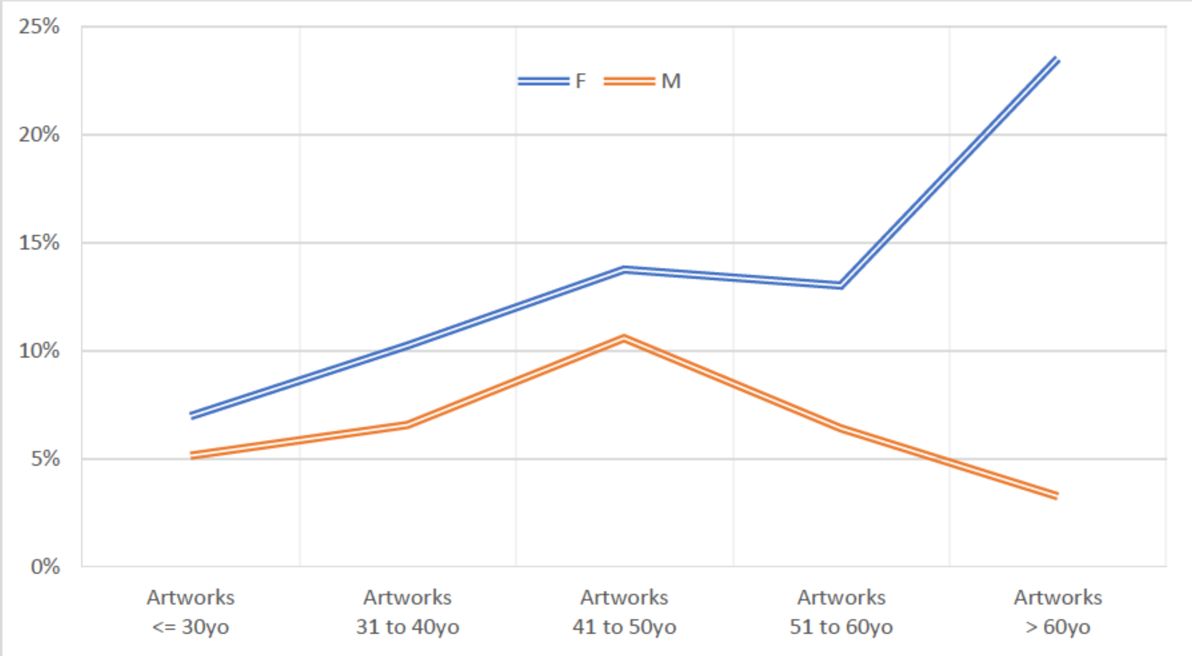

Figure 10: Artwork production by age group and gender in Queensland, 2004/05 > 2024/25.

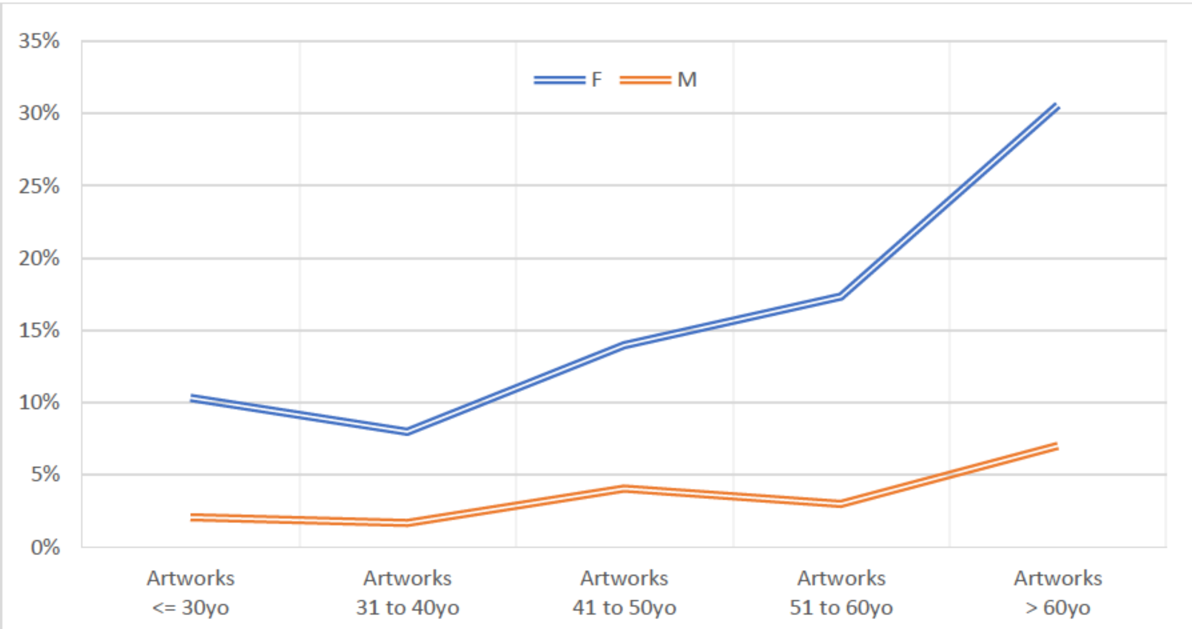

Figure 11: Artwork production by age group and gender Western Australia, 2004/05 > 2024/25.

Artists: Participation and Production

Understanding the participation and production of artists helps to understand the contribution different types of artists make to the art centre. In part, this recognises that all art centres rely on a small group of committed artists, with these core artists generating around 80 % of an art centre's sales. Data on the contribution of all artists is important if art centres (and others) are to respond to changes within art centre demographics and productivity.

For this analysis, five categories of artists are used, all based on the sale of a catalogued artwork:

- Core and new: first year with the art centre and sold more than 10 artworks in a year.
- New: first year with the art centre and sold 10 or fewer artworks in a year.
- Core: sold more than 10 artworks in a year.
- Active: produced artworks but sold 10 or fewer artworks in a year.
- Other: did not produce any artworks but sold 10 or fewer artworks in a year.

As seen in Figure 13, there was significant growth in the total number of artists producing and selling works between 2015 and 2019, peaking pre-pandemic (late 2019), with over 6,000 artists. In line with other findings in this report, a second peak occurred in 2022/23; however, the following two years have seen a 16% decline, with the 5,360 artists in 2024/25, the lowest for nearly ten years.

Within the overall decline since 2022/23, some artist categories have been more significantly affected. In particular, the number of new artists has fallen to the lowest level in almost 15 years, with 2024/25 having less than half the number of new artists recorded in 2022/23.

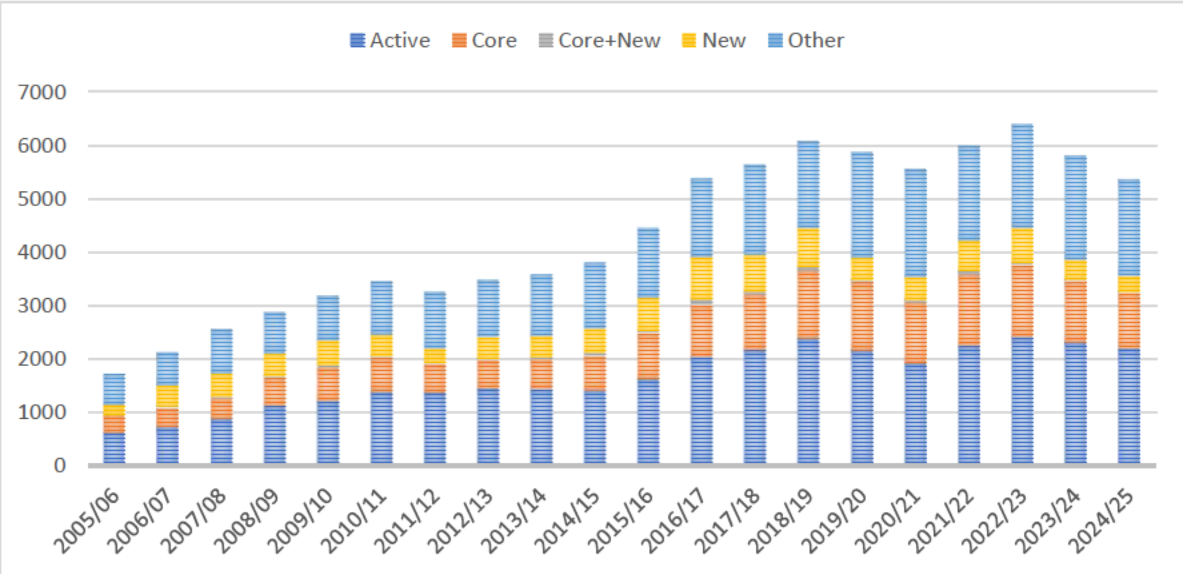

Figure 12: the number of artists in each category, 2005/06 to 2024/25.

The proportion of each artist category has also changed over time, as shown in Figure 14. The disruption caused by the pandemic to normal patterns of participation by artists can be seen, with recent years seeing a reset to pre-pandemic levels. The decline in the proportion of new artists, noted above, is also notable.

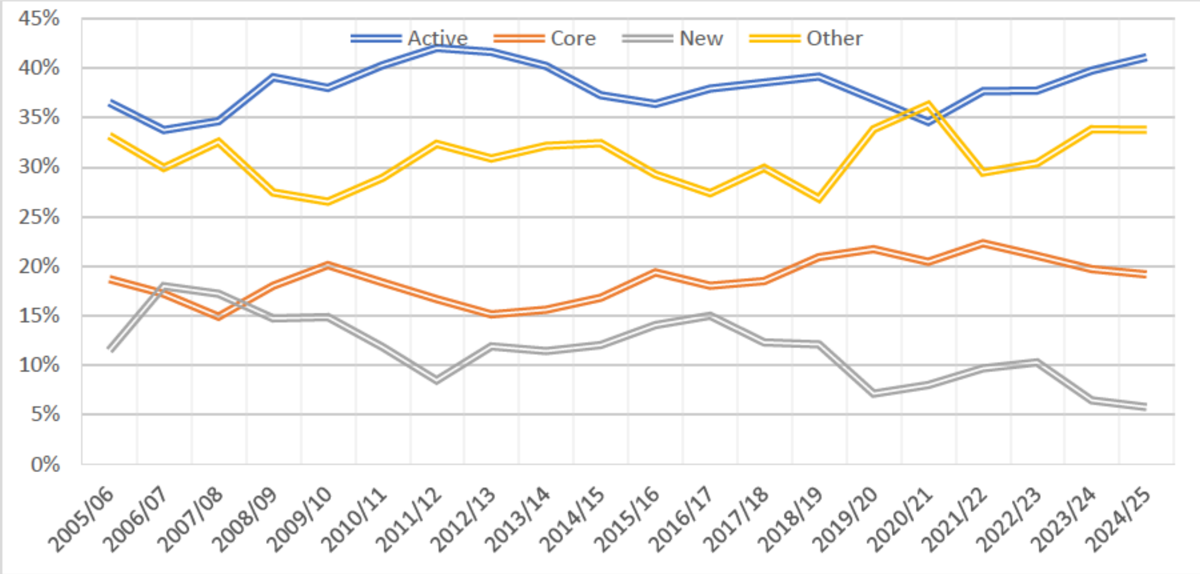

Figure 13: changing mix of artists across art centres, 2005/06 to 2024/25 (excludes core + new artists as it is less than 1%).

Also recorded in SAM is an additional artist category; this tallies all artists that recorded any transaction (sale, catalogued work, payment etc.) other than a consignment – a more general and inclusive way to measure artist participation or activity. The trends, shown in Figure 15 are broadly the same as for the categorised artists above, but the number of artists in this category is significantly higher. Overall, around six in ten artists are from the NT, two in ten from WA and one in ten from SA and the remainder shared between QLD and other regions.

Reflecting other findings in this report, artist numbers have declining over recent years. The 19,678 artists recorded in 2024/25 is 14% lower than in 2022/23 and broadly similar to pre-COVID levels.

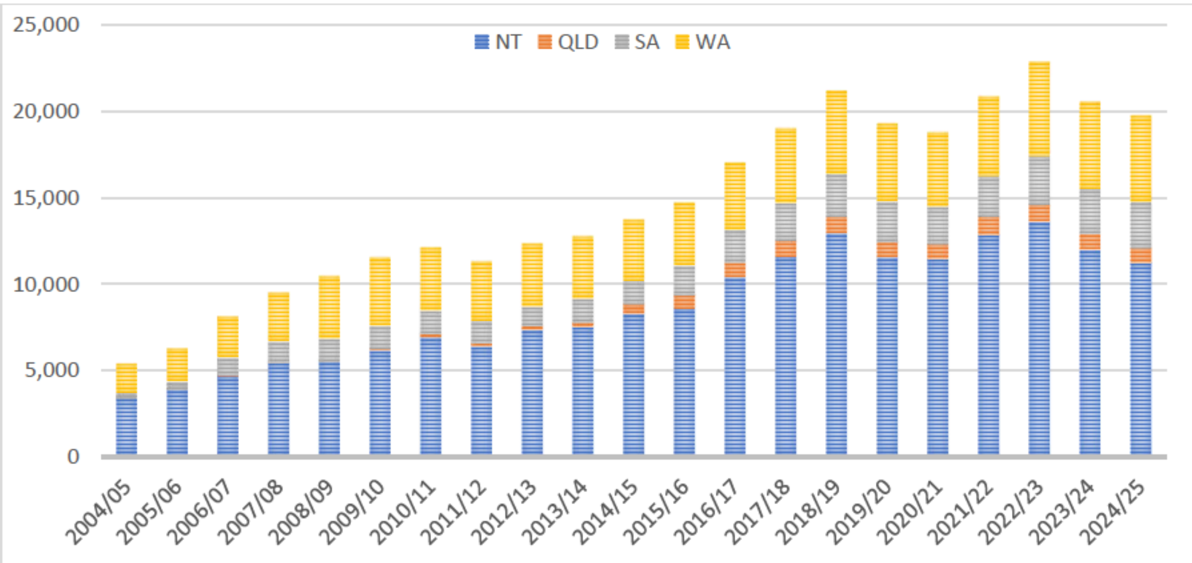

Figure 14: the number of artists with any activity, by state and territory, 2004/05 to 2024/25.

The importance of core artists to economic activity at art centres is shown in Figure 16. Of the $36.0 million in sales generated by 3,552 categorised artists in 2024/25, 83%, or $29.8 million was generated by 1,028 core artists (or 19% of all categorised artists).

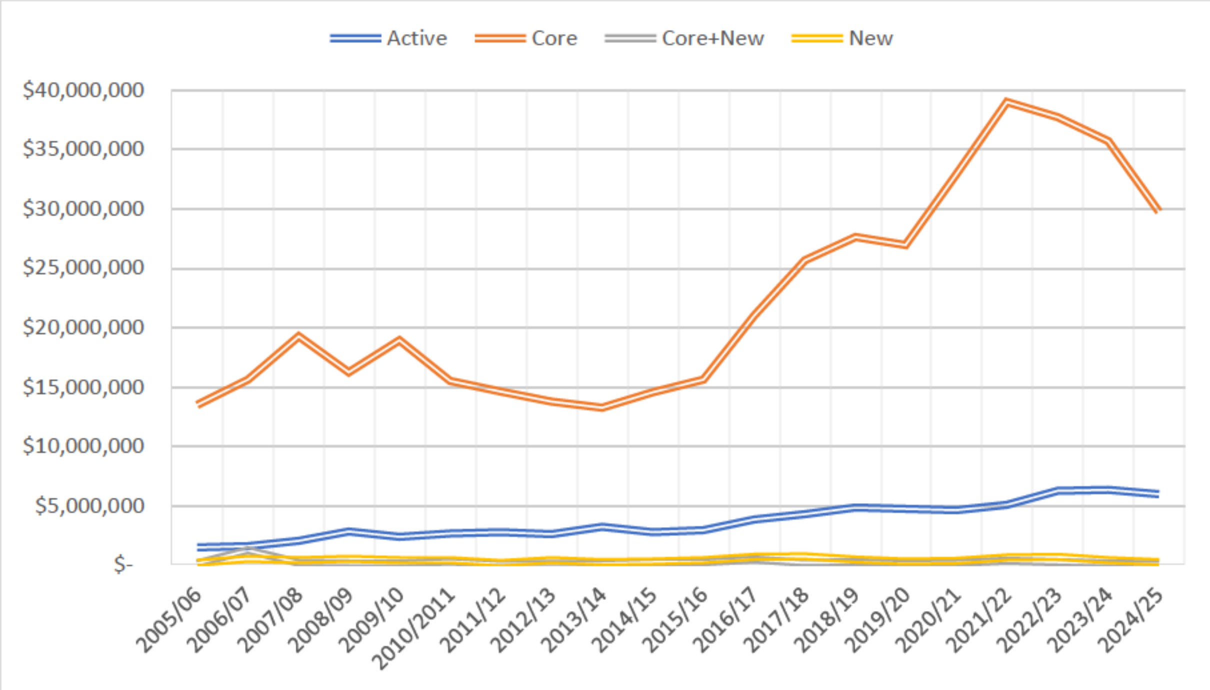

Figure 15: average sales income generated by artists at art centres in each state/Territory, 2005/06 to 2024/25 – adjusted figures.

The distribution of artist categories across the different states and the NT varies, as shown in Figures 17 > 20. Each state/Territory has distinct characteristics for each category of artist.

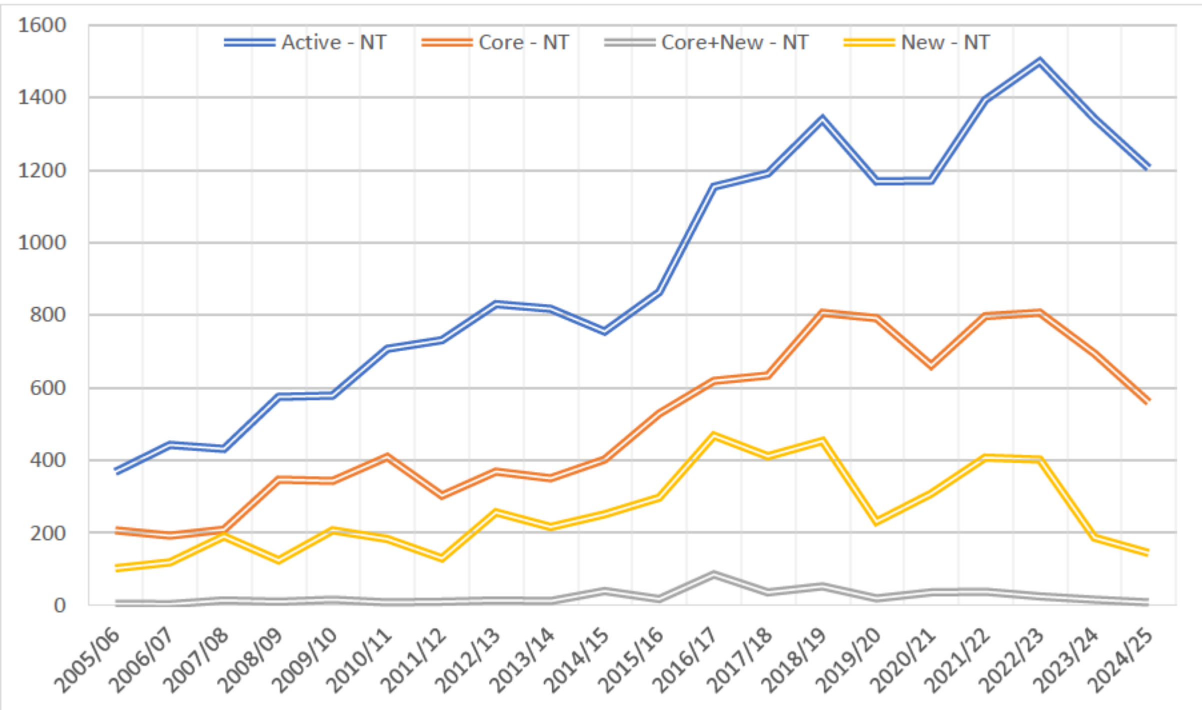

Figure 16: the number of categorised artists in the Northern Territory, 2005/06 to 2024/25.

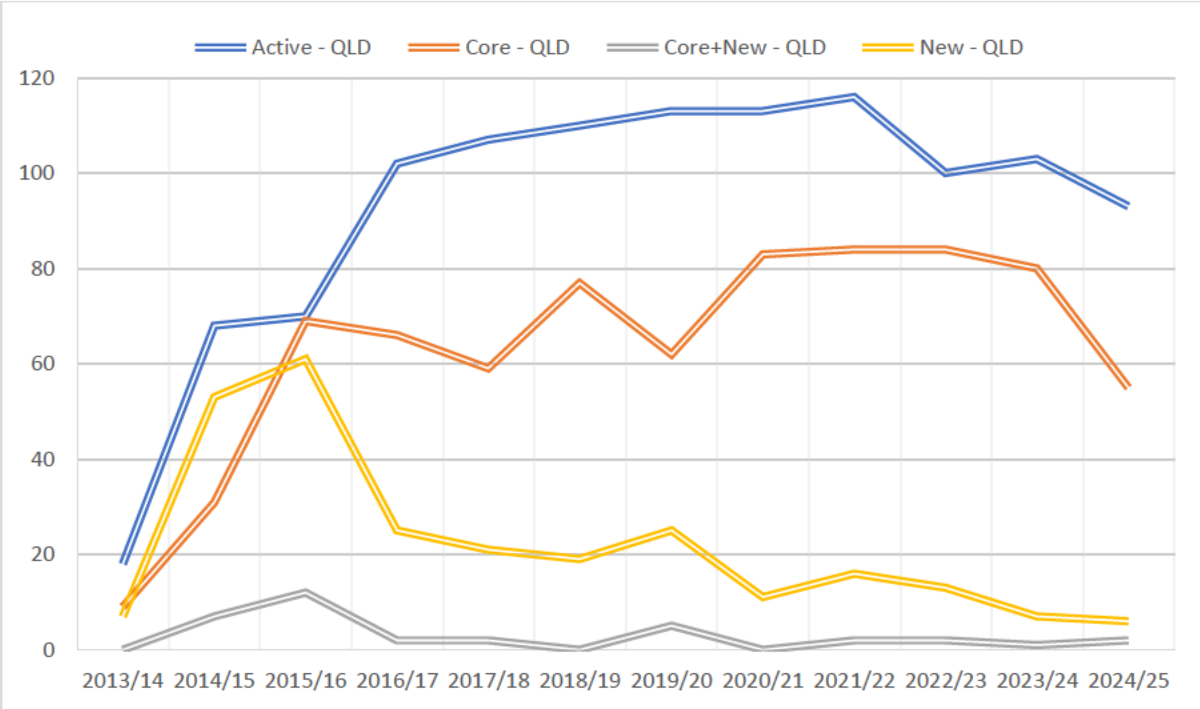

Figure 17: the number of categorised artists in Queensland, 2013/14 to 2024/25.

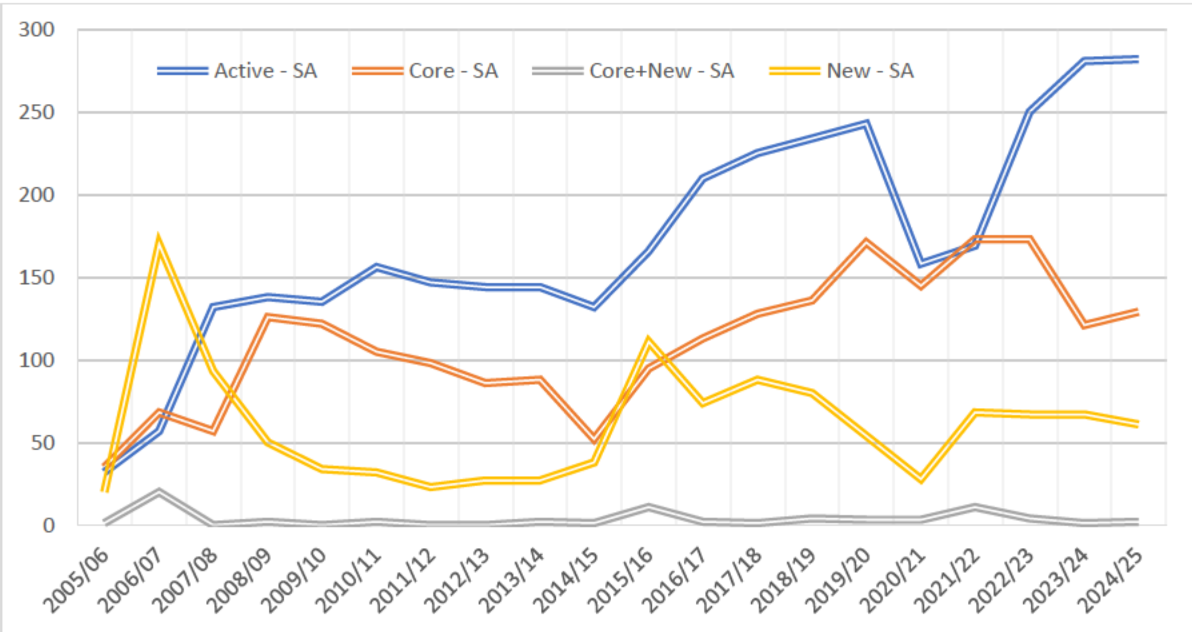

Figure 18: the number of categorised artists in South Australia, 2005/06 to 2024/25.

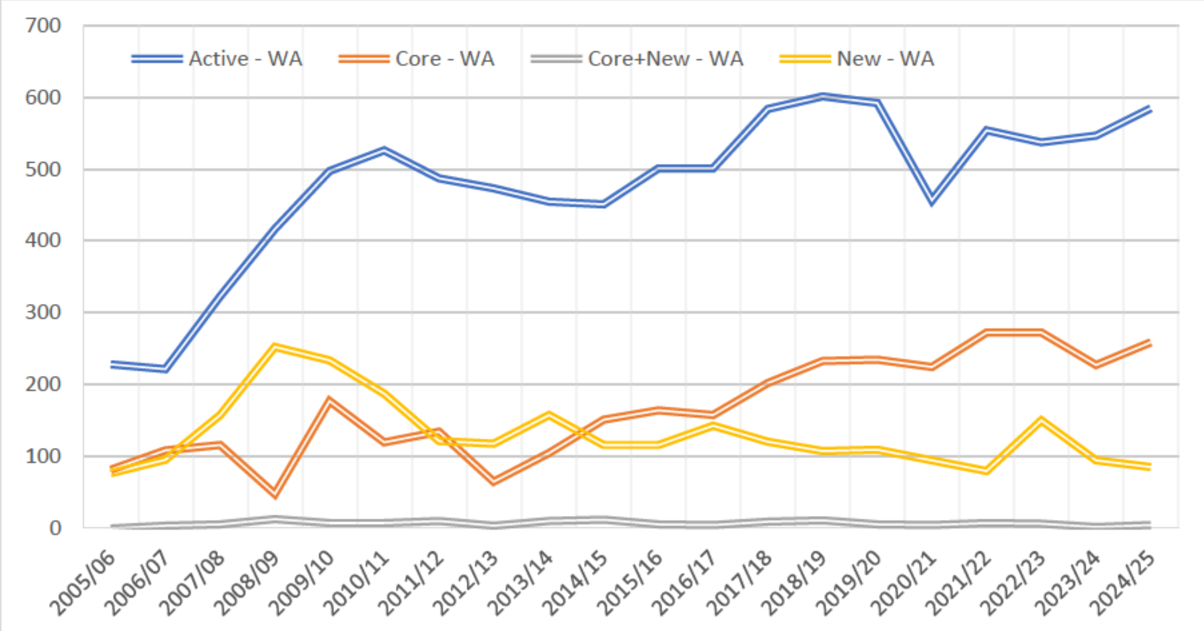

Figure 19: the number of categorised artists in Western Australia, 2005/06 to 2024/25.

Artworks

In 2024/25, 47% of all artworks sold for less than $250 and 2% for $5,000 or more. After more than a decade of relative stability in the proportion of artworks selling for different price points, recent years have seen considerable change. Artworks under $250 is the only category that has fallen, dropping 30% between 2018/19 and 2024/25. All other categories have increased, including a near tripling of artworks selling for over $10,000 – albeit from a small base, that has seen growth from 0.2% to 0.6% of all artworks sold.

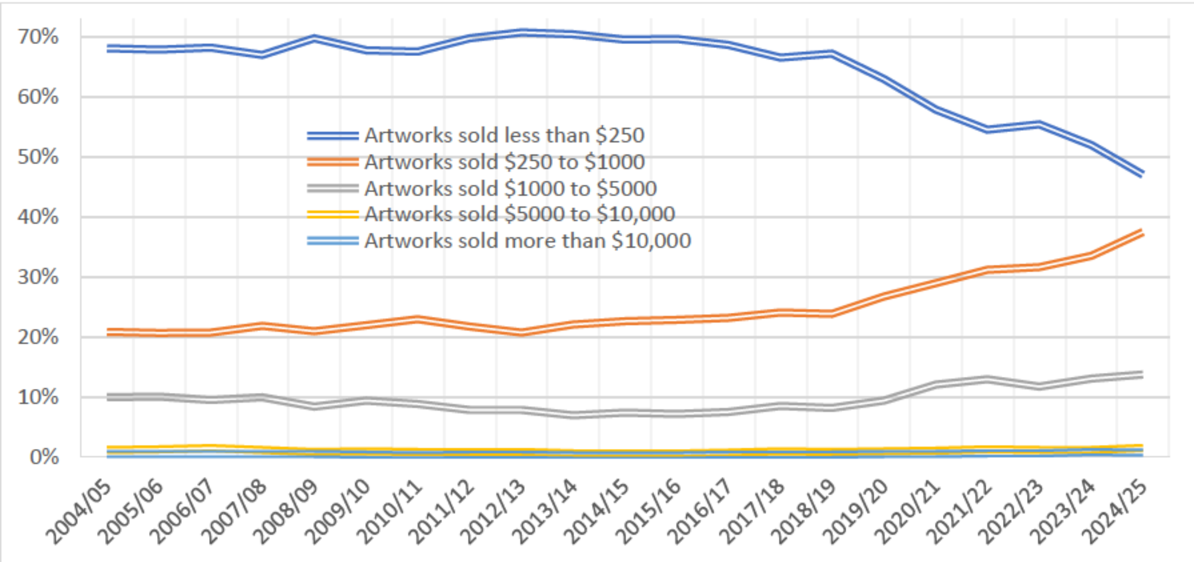

Figure 20: percentage of artworks sold at different price points, 2004/05 to 2024/25.

The changes noted in Figure 21 are also seen in Figure 22, which shows the volume of artworks sold at different price points. Sales of artworks under $250, after falling during the pandemic years (likely

due to the cancellation of art fairs and markets, a key market for this price point) recovered, before the most recent market peak in around 2022. Since then, the volume of artworks sold at all price points has fallen. Artworks under $250 have fallen 41% in the last two years; the mid-range price points have fallen around 18% while the two higher price points declined around 7%.

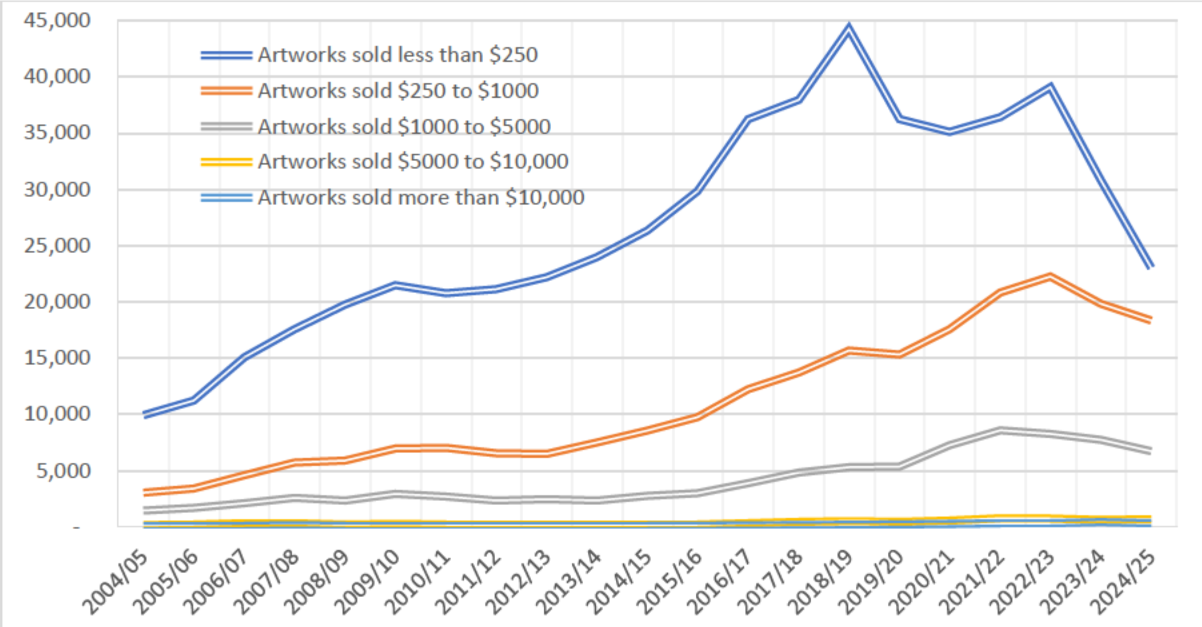

Figure 21: number of artworks sold at different price points, 2004/05 to 2024/25.

Another of the factors influencing artwork price points is the location of the art centres, as shown in Figure 23. More than two-thirds (70%) of all artworks sold by Northern Territory art centres are under $250; at the other end of the spectrum, 45% all artworks sold by SA art centres are under $250. South Australian art centres also have the highest proportion of artwork sales for over $5,000, with around 3% selling at higher price points, compared to WA at 1.6% and the NT and QLD at less than 1%. However, the much higher total number of artworks (produced and) sold in the NT means that more than half of all higher priced artworks are from there.

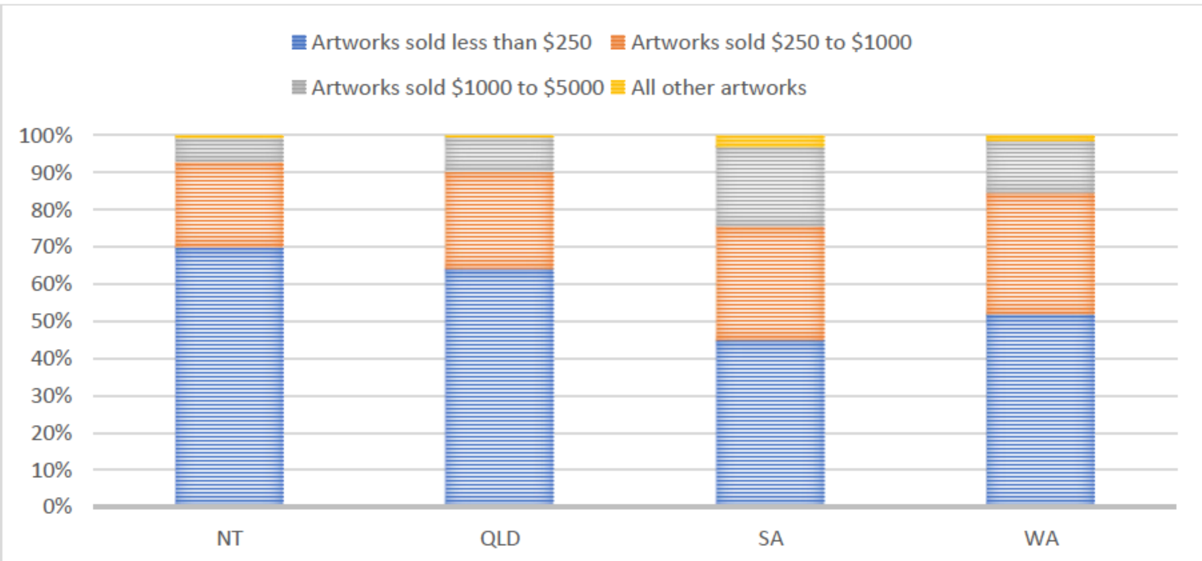

Figure 22: proportion of artworks sold at different price points in each state/NT.

Between 2012/13 and 2024/25 (the date range for which there is comparable data), art centre productivity – the total number of catalogued artworks produced by art centres – has varied, as shown in Figure 24. The COVID-19 pandemic impacts are obvious, as is the fall since around 2022. In 2024/25, 52,764 artworks were catalogued, a return to pre-COVID levels and a 29% drop from 2021 and 2022. With data from 91 art centres in 2024/25, this is an average of 580 artworks catalogued per art centre.

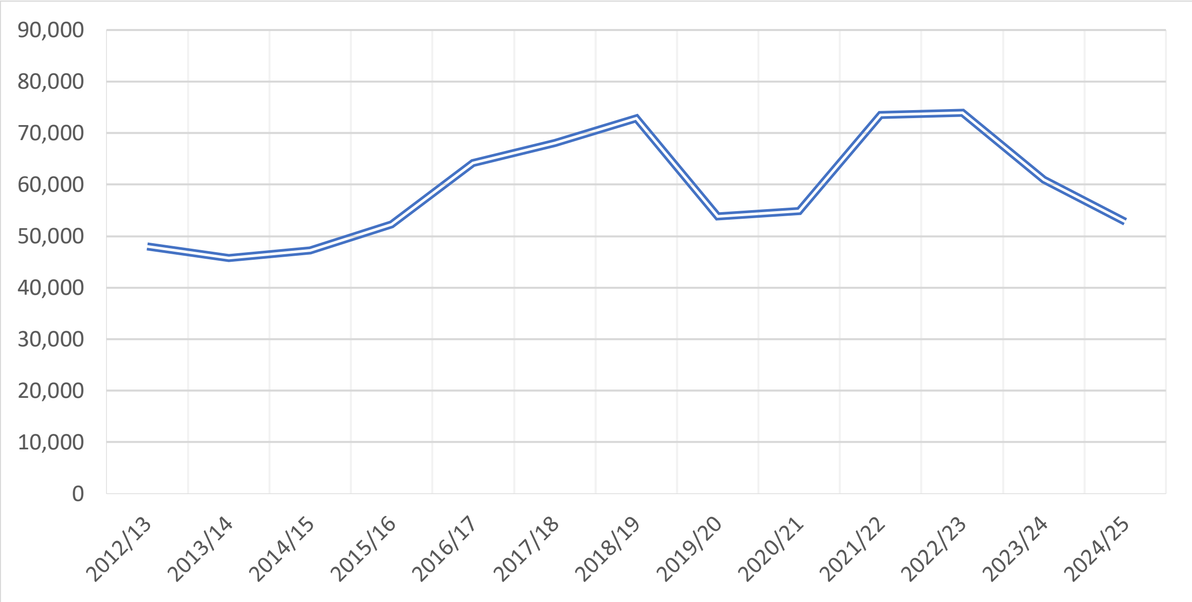

Figure 23: average number of catalogued artworks produced by art centres, 2012/13 > 2024/25.

Artwork production for 2024/25 across the three states and the Northern Territory are shown in the following table:

Location	**Artwork production**	**% of total artwork production**	**% of total artists**
NT	31,504	59%	57%
QLD	3,694	7%	5%
SA	6,188	12%	13%
WA	11,378	21%	25%
Total	**52,764**		

The size of paintings produced by art centres has also undergone change, as seen in Figure 25. While smaller sized artworks (30x30cm, 50x50cm and 75x75cm or less) continue to account for around three quarters of all artworks produced, the decline in production over the last three years is notable. Artworks 50x50cm have had the smallest decline (7% fall between 2021/22 and 2024/25), while all other categories have seen falls of between 23% and 34%. Overall, total artwork production is down 24% - corresponding to the scale of change noted in other areas of this report.

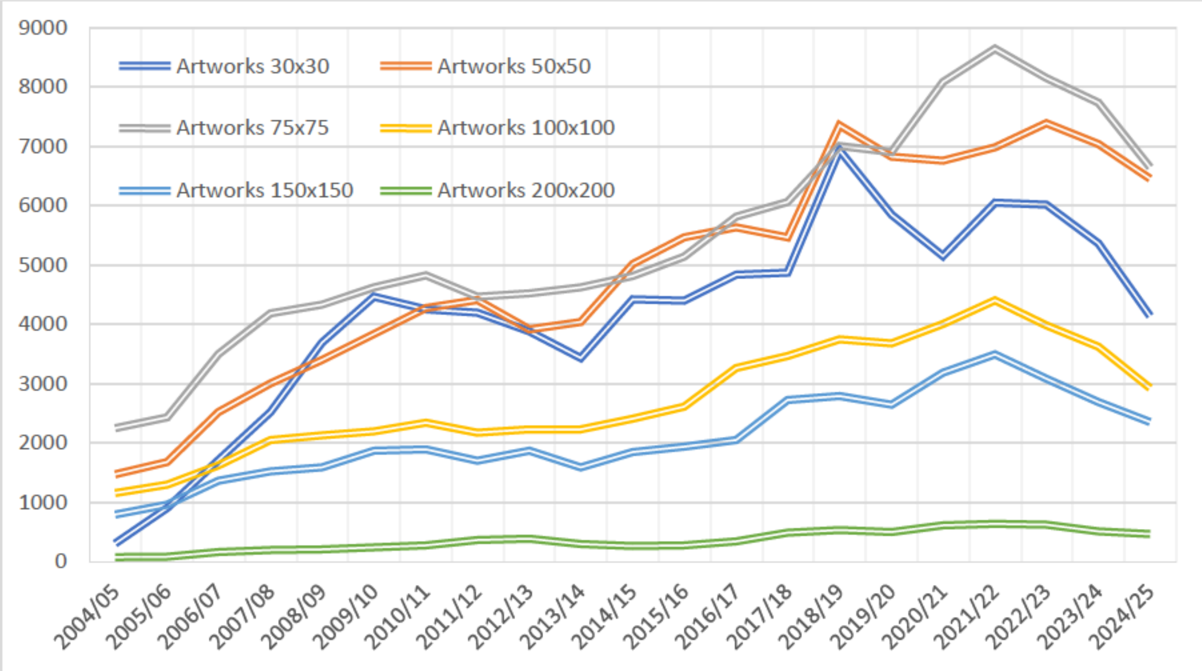

Figure 24: number of artworks produced at different sizes, 2004/05 > 2024/25.

The volume and value of artworks sold in different categories is seen in Figure 26. More than one third of the total value is generated by sales between $1,000 and $4,999, while almost 70% of the works sold are under $500.

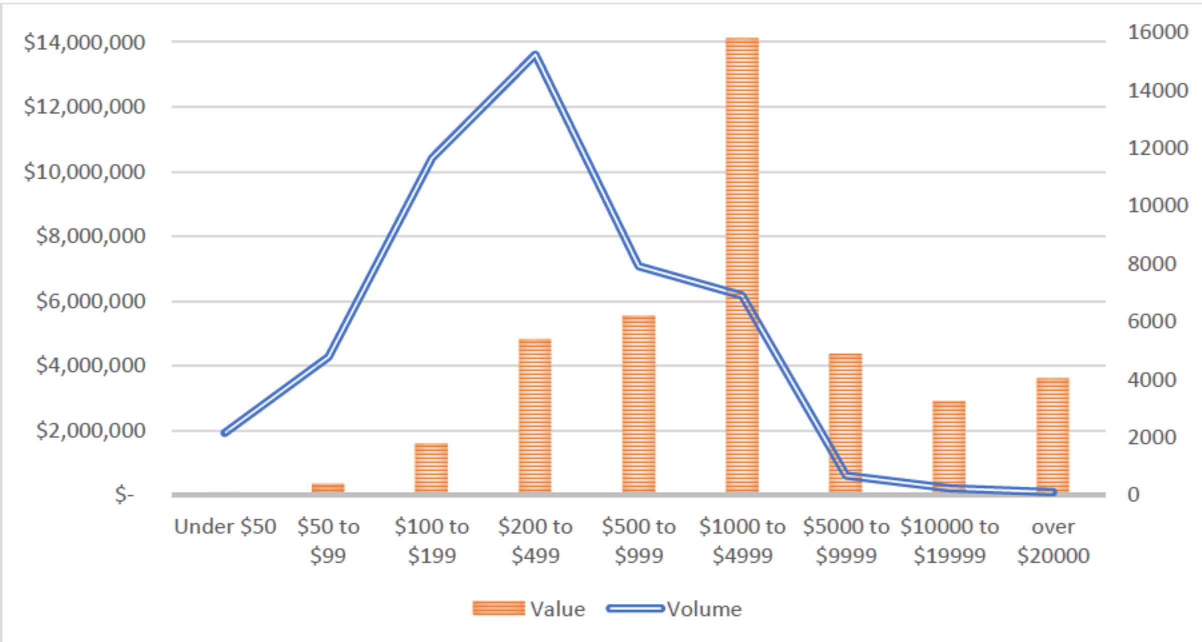

Figure 25: the volume and value of artworks sold at different price points, 2024/25.

Products[2]

Alongside the production and sale of artworks, art centres also make and/or sell products. Products cover an increasingly wide range of items, from merchandise and artefacts, to clothing, homewares and more. Products are a growing part of art centre sales, with product sales increasing at a faster rate than artwork sales and have not seen a decline over recent years – though total product sales are still relatively small, as shown in Figure 27. The proportion of income generated from products has increased from 4% to 18% of total sales, with product generating $8 million in 2024/25, the highest levels recorded.

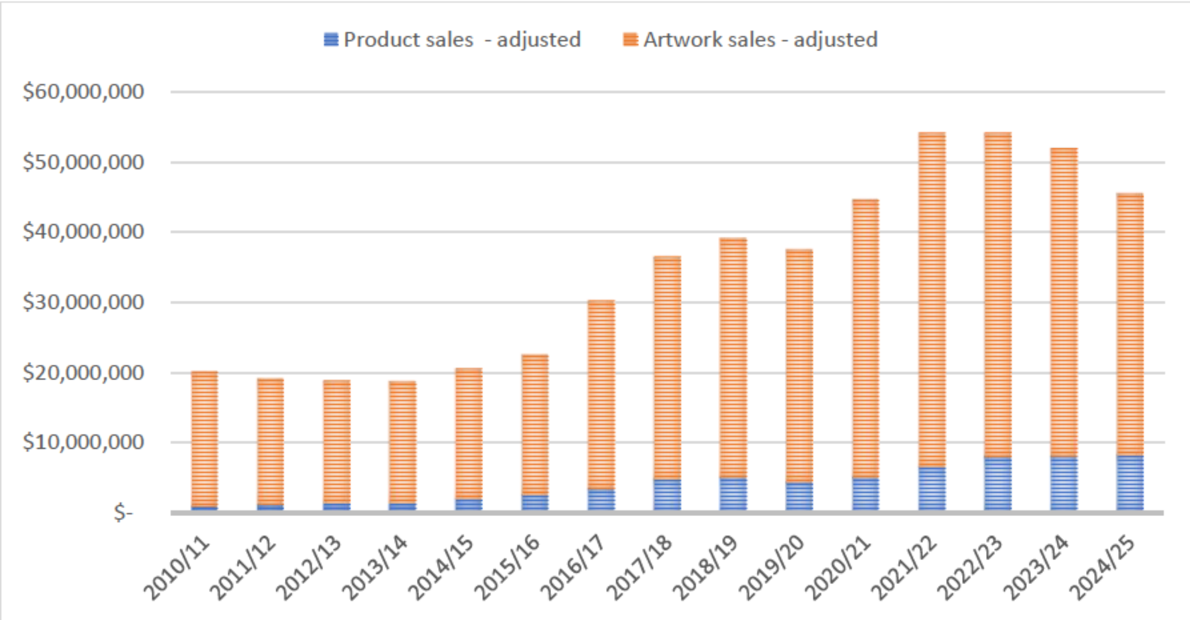

Figure 26: sales of artworks and products,2004/05 to 2024/25 - adjusted.

Figure 28 shows the distribution of price points for product sales. While almost half of all products (22,298) products were sold at the $21 to $50 price point, the income generated was broadly similar (around $800,000) to each of the next three higher price points. However, products for over $500 generate half of total product sales, despite being only 2% of the volume of sales. A total of 51,325 products were sold in 2024/25, generating $5,982,663 in sales income.

[2] Data for the volume and value of product sales has been refined since the 2021/22 report. As such, the product sale amounts listed in Figure 27 are different; however, observations about the increasing proportion of art centre income generated from products are consistent.

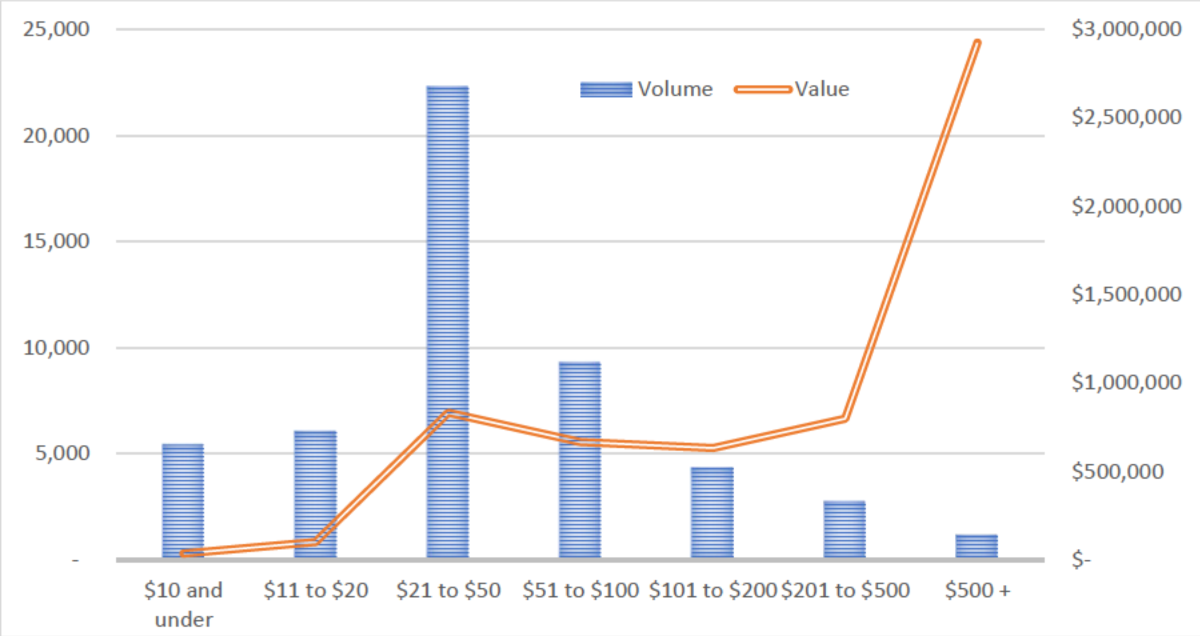

Figure 27: the volume and value of products sold at different price points, 2024/25.

Methodology

This report is based on information from two sources, art centre audits and extracts from their operational database. While this data does not include every art centre, it covers a statistically significant sample and provides a reasonable picture of art centre performance:

1. Art centre financial audits: many art centres complete an annual audit and the majority of these are publicly available. The number of art centres whose audit is publicly available or who provide their audit report varies over time, as shown on the following table. A total of 803 audits were analysed for this report for sales and grant income.

2004/05	19
2005/06	29
2006/07	31
2007/08	31
2008/09	49
2009/10	50
2010/11	56
2011/12	59
2012/13	47
2013/14	56
2014/15	56
2015/16	52
2016/17	55
2017/18	56
2018/19	58
2019/20	52
2020/21	50
2021/22	60
2022/23	51

2023/24	55
2024/25	52

2. Art centre operational data: most art centres use an operational database, SAM (Stories Art Money). SAM provides data on production and participation. The number of art centre datasets analysed each year varies as shown on the following table. A total of 1,456 art centres datasets were analysed.

2004/05	42
2005/06	48
2006/07	52
2007/08	55
2008/09	61
2009/10	66
2010/11	69
2011/12	70
2012/13	77
2013/14	83
2014/15	82
2015/16	87
2016/17	92
2017/18	96
2018/19	100
2019/20	101
2020/21	91
2021/22	91
2024/25	93
2023/24	94
2024/25	91

3. Some data was available for art centres outside of the three states and the Northern Territory; however, this data only provided around 1-2% of results and was thus excluded in the analysis.

4. Some data in this report has updated results from previous years. This is the result of improved and more accurate reports being generated from the SAM database.

5. Rounding is used in this report; as such, some analysis will not add up to 100%.

All data used for this update is fully de-identified.

All adjusted figures are calculated using the Wage Price Index, as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics: WPI series – ABS 6345.0, using the hourly rates of pay reported in the public and private arts and recreation services category (June quarter of each year).

This update draws on, and extends the data and analysis generated by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Economies Project, which concluded in 2015. This data is available at:

https://old.crc-rep.com/research/enterprise-development/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-art-economies/project-outputs

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