

Photography Organisations Network Australia:

Ballarat International Foto Biennale (VIC)
Centre for Contemporary Photography (VIC)
Head On Foundation (NSW)
Museum of Australian Photography (VIC)
Perth Centre for Photography (WA)
photo access (ACT)

National Cultural Policy joint submission

Recognising Australian Photography Organisations as Essential Cultural Infrastructure

Australia's network of photographic organisations play an important role in the ecology of the cultural sector and provide the critical pathways for our national artists to develop their careers, experiment and tell their stories. Photography has played a significant role in how the nation understands its history, in how colonial legacies are being understood, and also in how we as a contemporary society define ourselves and our communities through creativity and visual storytelling.

We represent a national network of photographic organisations that are best placed to deliver impactful, quality experiences for audiences and communities around Australia due to our established national reach. Our activities extend beyond presentation to include educational programs and courses which develop our community's skills and knowledge in creative and critical thinking. The nation has seen a decline in students enrolling in university courses in the humanities, and this is none more so evident than in the arts. This does not reflect a lack of public interest, but rather the financial barriers that now shape access to study. Investment in the specific educational programs that our organisations deliver have a lasting and significant positive impact on developing skills and knowledge for young people in particular.

Further investment in visual literacy is important for the development of the nation, as young audiences navigate the omnipresence of photography in digital environments. It is through participation in photographic activities and classes that we are able to develop visual literacy, so the workshops and educational programs that we deliver are of vital importance to society that delivers benefits that extend beyond the cultural sector.

Photography is an ever-evolving medium that now more-so than ever has significance in our daily lives, our habits, and how we form attitudes and opinions. It is also a medium of aesthetic pleasure and empowers people to express themselves in ways which disseminate images in high circulation within the dynamic fluidity of digital platforms. It is a unique medium with multiple applications and uses that is at the intersection of industry and art. It is because of the discursive nature of photography that its understanding and significance within the cultural sector is often overlooked and is sometimes misunderstood by government bodies.

Australia's photography sector is split. While its commercial sector is established, our unique stories through artistic photography are under-supported relative to global peers. This gap weakens our national narrative and cultural presence. With rising interest from younger

audiences, proactive government investment is essential to elevate Australia's diverse voices, government recognition and targeted funding are urgently needed to prevent Australia from falling further behind and to elevate the sector's social and cultural potential.

What this network hopes to achieve is to advocate for the ongoing viability of artists working with photography and support the critical infrastructure which empowers Australian photographers to create work and tell their stories.

Over the past two decades we have observed a decline in the funding for medium-specific organisations, and this has had a significant impact on photographic organisations in particular who are historically under-funded and currently operate in a precarious situation. Both the Australian Centre of Photography in Sydney and the Queensland Centre of Photography in Brisbane are no longer in existence, and the Perth Centre for Photography and Melbourne's Centre for Contemporary Photography are currently without a permanent home, which illustrates that the ecosystem is currently at a crisis point, operating in a fragile and vulnerable position.

It is only through government investment, from all levels of government, that stability and sustainability will be achieved. Through the new National Cultural Policy we have the opportunity to redress the lack of government investment in the organisations who provide employment and pathways for artists and creatives. Investing in established organisations that are already delivering impactful experiences for communities provides the greatest return on investment, as the networks and audiences are already established and are fundamental to the ongoing sustainability and viability of the cultural sector.

We congratulate the Office for the Arts on the delivery of *Revive* and look forward to working with the entire sector to deliver an updated cultural policy that will deliver a prosperous and culturally aware nation that engages with all artforms in meaningful and unique ways.

Recommendations

Establish a Dedicated National Investment in Photography

Establish a dedicated national funding stream with multi-year operational investment to address the long-term structural underinvestment in Australia's photographic sector and support the sustainability of photographic organisations as essential cultural infrastructure.

This core funding would support:

- artist commissions
- exhibitions and touring
- publishing and digital projects
- public programs and education
- emerging photographers
- First Nations photographic practice
- regional and community engagement
- sector development and national coordination

Support National Coordination and Sector Development

Invest in national coordination that will uplift our capacity to strengthen collaborations, support advocacy and knowledge sharing, expand access and participation, and increase visibility of photography within the cultural sector.

Recognise Medium-Specific Organisations as Essential Cultural Infrastructure

Recognise the role of our organisations within the cultural sector's ecology. 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. Australia's cultural future depends on sustaining the organisations, artists and communities that make, present and encounter art.

Recognise the important role photography plays in strengthening social cohesion, community participation and cultural inclusion

Photography is one of the most inclusive cultural mediums, accessible in digital and analogue forms. It lowers barriers to participation, documents lived experiences, highlights social and environmental issues, and through shared images and dialogue, strengthens empathy, civic engagement, and communities.

Why This Investment Matters

Investment in photographic organisations will lead to:

- job creation and workforce development
- increased cultural tourism
- skills development
- education outcomes
- international cultural reputation
- community participation and social cohesion
- creative industry growth
- preservation and development of Australia's cultural capital

Australia's leading photography organisations collectively demonstrate extraordinary national reach, cultural impact and economic value. Together, the sector engages audiences in excess of 1 million annually, supports more than 1,600 artists and creative workers, and delivers hundreds of exhibitions, education initiatives and public programs across metropolitan and regional Australia.

In 2024–25 alone, the sector delivered:

- More than 335 exhibitions and related events nationally
- Over 1 million audience engagements and exhibition visits
- More than 1,660 exhibiting artists and cultural workers
- Over 430 education programs, workshops and public events
- More than 460,000 website visitors and substantial digital engagement
- An average of more than 55% of organisational expenditure directly supporting artists and creative practitioners

Our national photography network operates in alignment with *Revive's* five pillars:

- **First Nations First:** Photography elevates Indigenous voices and storytelling within national programs through respectful collaboration and representation;
- **A Place for Every Story:** We enable broad, diverse storytelling across regions and communities;

- **Centrality of the Artist:** We support photographers to strengthen artistic practice, nurture careers, and foster innovative visual culture;
- **Strong Cultural Infrastructure:** education, archives, and accessible platforms to sustain photography as a vital medium;
- **Engaging the Audience:** We facilitate exhibitions, digital platforms, and international partnerships to broaden audience reach and social participation.

We are an essential resource ensuring that Australians can participate in culture and engage critically with media and technology. Through participation in activities, our community will develop vital visual literacy skills and awareness of digital technologies. As our network is national and our activities are both in-person and online, we also break down barriers to participation and provide access to contemporary photography regardless of geography.

Investing in a stable and viable photographic sector in Australia, would benefit audiences by increasing access to contemporary photographic practice, driving up cultural tourism and the flow-on economic benefits to other sectors. Now is the time to invest in contemporary Australian photography to strengthen creative careers and provide pathways for early and mid-career artists to tell their stories.

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