

New National Cultural Policy – Individual Submission

May 2026

I am an early career researcher and a member of the *Safekeeping of Remote Indigenous Community Collections* ARC Industry Laureate Fellowship with [REDACTED], at the Robert Cripps Institute for Cultural Conservation (University of Melbourne). My doctoral research about Yolŋu language and art brought me to live on Country and gave me the opportunity to work with remote Indigenous communities in North Arnhem Land. Through the past six years, I have had the privilege to learn firsthand about Yolŋu knowledge systems and languages, how Yolŋu understand and talk about art, and the importance of passing on traditional cultural knowledge to new generations.¹ This submission draws on my experiences in remote Indigenous communities not only as a researcher, but also as an employee of an art centre (2022-2025), a women's ranger support officer (2021), a bush university teacher (2025), and the adopted kin of Yolŋu who I continue to work with and learn from every day.

My submission responds to two National Cultural Policy (NCP) principles, with relevance to **Pillars 1 and 4**:

- 'First Nations arts and culture are First Nations led.'
- 'Arts and culture are generative (creating new works and supporting emerging artists) and preservative (protecting heritage and conserving cultural memory).'

To better achieve these aims, government action should focus on two areas:

- (1) promoting **philanthropic programs** and incentives for remote Indigenous art centres;
- (2) implementing appropriate **cultural conservation** methods beyond digitisation.

1. *Challenges/Opportunities for philanthropic programs*: While the government has continued to invest in the ILA and IVAIS programs to support Indigenous languages, arts and culture programs, grant amounts are usually insufficient and limited in scope for remote Indigenous art centres (i.e not able to be used for infrastructure). Applications for these open-competitive grants are also often burdensome for art centre managers, many of whom are running small art centres alone or with little help. IVAIS grants play a crucial role in supporting the daily operations of art centres but more funding is needed. Philanthropy and private sector support offer potential for more financial support to remote Indigenous art, providing more flexible and varied sources beyond limited, competitive government funding. However, philanthropic support has historically been scarce in the contemporary visual arts and crafts sector, and from this pool, an even smaller percentage supports Indigenous art.²

Currently only around half of Indigenous art centres in the country are endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) and even less are endorsed as Cultural Organisations,

¹ Haoyi Li, "How Yolŋu talk about art: Aspects of narratives, metaphors and colour terms from the Ganalbiŋu (Western Yolŋu) perspective" (PhD, Australian National University, 2026), <https://doi.org/10.25911/1083-CD23>.

² Rupert Myer, *Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002), 41, <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2002-06/apo-nid140716.pdf>.

thus making a great number of art centres unable to receive monetary donations or cultural artefacts.³

2. *Challenges/Opportunities for cultural conservation:* The current NCP prioritises digitisation as the primary method of preserving at-risk First Peoples' cultural material, mainly through the work done by AIATSIS. However, the reach of AIATSIS is limited and there is urgent need for the preservation of cultural material in remote communities around the country.

Indigenous art centres play a unique role in remote communities, often acting as cultural hubs where a language centre is not present. In communities like Ramingining and Gapuwiyak where the local school is no longer offering a bilingual program and where there is no language centre, it is the art centre which acts as a cultural hub. The art centres in these communities house a local collection of artworks that provide a generative and preservative function for the artists and community members, where young artists can see the artworks created by their old people and the collection acts as a tangible cultural reference for the whole community. The preservation of these remotely-held art collections require multimodal and specialised conservation techniques, where digitisation alone would not suffice. Old people's stories need to be recorded, as a first priority, and with the threat of climate related risks, lack of appropriate infrastructure, the conservation of community collections needs to be treated as an urgent priority.⁴

Recommendations:

1. Independent evaluation of IVAIS and other relevant government funding for remote Indigenous art centres, as outlined in Recommendation 9.1 of the Government's response to the Productivity Commission's report.⁵
2. Standalone legislation for ICIP and coordinated policy development, as outlined in Recommendations 5.1 and 6.1 of the Government's response to the Productivity Commission's report.⁶

Reference: Australian Government response to the Productivity Commission's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts and Crafts Study Report (November 2024).

³ "Deductible gift recipients," Australian Government Australian Business Register, <https://abr.business.gov.au/Tools/DgrListing>.

⁴ Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation (ANKA), *Safe Keeping. A Report on the Care and Management of Art Centre-based Community Collections* (ANKA, August 2017), <https://anka.org.au/assets/Archive/Project-Publications/Cultural-Legacy-Safe-Keeping-Report-reduced.pdf>.

⁵ Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, *Australian Government response to the Productivity Commission's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts and Crafts Study Report* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024), 9, <https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/australian-government-response-to-the-productivity-commissions-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-visual-arts-and-crafts-study-report-november-2024.pdf>.

⁶ Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, *Australian Government response*, 5.

3. Targeted promotion of the Cultural Gifts Program for philanthropists to support First People's art, specifically for remote Indigenous art centres.
4. Simplification and promotion of the application process for remote art centres to be endorsed as Cultural Organisations.

Reference: Future foundations for giving. Inquiry report (May 2024).⁷

5. Ratification of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which the current NCP has 'considered' but not yet actioned by the government.

Reference: Ratification of 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (September 2008).⁸

My recommendations in this submission provide immediate and long-term solutions to gaps in the current NCP, allowing for more sustainable development of Indigenous arts workers and leaders, and for the strengthening of art centres as important cultural hubs for remote communities. Only through easing pressure on the daily operations of art centres can Indigenous arts workers and artists get the much-needed support and training to be able to lead, be autonomous and self-sustaining for future generations. Preservation of remotely-held Indigenous art collections require more fit-for-purpose conservation beyond digitisation, to be able to achieve generative and preservative outcomes for communities.

Please consider this submission alongside the *Safekeeping of Remote Indigenous Community Collections* group submission and the submission by ANKA; as well as the individual submissions by Ameliah-Rose Tioriori, Brigid Stapleton, Caleb Triscari, Cheralyn Lim, and Robyn Sloggett.

⁷ The Productivity Commission, *Future foundations for giving. Inquiry report* (Commonwealth of Australia, May 2024), <https://assets.pc.gov.au/2025-07/philanthropy/overview.pdf?VersionId=i.cJyzGwaqoVgdOYW1JxhUsMwiYfqA28>.

⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Ratification of 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, September 2008), <https://humanrights.gov.au/resource-hub/by-resource-type/submissions-uncategorised/submission-ratification-2003-unesco-convention-safeguarding-intangible-cultural>.