

# INDIAN OCEAN CRAFT TRIENNIAL | AUSTRALIA

Submission by the

**INDIAN OCEAN CRAFT TRIENNIAL INC.**

to the

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

24 May 2026

## **SUMMARY**

Craft deserves explicit recognition in Australia's National Cultural Policy for its cultural, social, health and economic value. The Indian Ocean Craft Triennial (IOTA) is the only organisation operating at the intersection of craft, Australian-Indian Ocean diplomacy and First Nations knowledge exchange, from the only Australian city situated to do that work. This work – cultural diplomacy across the Indian Ocean Rim through contemporary craft – directly responds to all five policy pillars.

## **FIRST NATIONS FIRST**

First Nations cultural knowledge is foundational, not supplementary, to Australia's cultural identity and craft practice. IOTA embeds this through First Nations artist exchange residencies, representation in IOTA's international Curatorium, and programs connecting First Nations makers internationally.

## **A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY**

Hand-making is an essential human activity — for utility, beauty, worship, adornment — sustaining cultural continuity, identity and creative expression. Rapid technological change and AI dependency risk losing hand-making skills critical to cognitive development, fine motor ability and creative thinking. Craft is fundamental to social inclusion, community cohesion and regional participation – 74% arts and cultural participation among Western Australians, against 44% for sport and recreation.

## **THE CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST**

Craft practitioners contribute across creative, cultural and small business sectors yet remain under-recognised in policy and funding. Australia's craft economy employs 116,538 people generating \$19.2 billion in gross value added — 1.0% of GDP. IOTA supports artists through international exchange, exhibitions and professional development, building sustainable careers, global networks and Australia's cultural presence.

## **STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Australia ranked 25th out of 31 OECD countries for arts investment in 2023. The loss of Craft Australia in 2011 left an unfilled void. Australia needs a new, agile national craft platform — a contemporary, digitally-enabled, First Nations -led, internationally dextrous structure. Short-term project funding, disproportionate reporting burdens and lead-time mismatches, lose diplomatic and commercial opportunities in a region where craft is economically and politically significant.

## **ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE**

IOTA24 attracted over 125,000 visitors across 65 venues throughout Western Australia. Its international conference drew 421 delegates, presentations from 9 countries across disciplines –

health, environment, technology, social science, trade. Craft reached beyond the arts sector demonstrating public thirst for craft.

**IOTA calls for:**

- A properly resourced national craft platform with operational funding, First Nations leadership and cross-portfolio mandate
- Adoption of a Basic Income for the Arts model following Ireland's evidence-based precedent returning €1.39 per €1 invested
- A rapid-response cultural diplomacy fund for craft with short decision timelines matching international opportunity cycles
- Ten-year investment models with streamlined reporting and proportionate accountability
- Coordinated investment across arts, education, tourism, trade and DFAT portfolios
- Establishment of a Council for Visual Arts, Craft and Design alongside existing councils for Music and Writing
- Government-led consolidation of craft sector data — drawn from existing funding, reporting and compliance mechanisms — to accurately measure the sector's cultural and economic contribution

Australia's cultural and economic relationships with Asia and Indian Ocean Rim depend on sustained, strategic investment in the sector. Craft — the ancient problem-solver — is a universal language with measurable contemporary impact. It warrants policy commitment to match.

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**1. The Indian Ocean Craft Triennial Inc. (IOTA)**

The Indian Ocean Craft Triennial (IOTA) presents contemporary craft through a mission to connect cultures, makers and ideas across the Indian Ocean Region. Anchored by a strong curatorial model with institutional partners, it delivers major international exhibitions, symposia, exchanges and regional engagement across WA and the IOR, championing innovation, skill and cultural exchange.

Perth is Australia's gateway to the Indian Ocean Region — geographically closer to Singapore, Jakarta and Colombo than to Sydney. From this position, IOTA operates as an established platform for cultural diplomacy, connecting with a growing network of makers, curators, organisations and audiences of a region encompassing 2.7 billion people across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania — a highly dynamic and diverse region representing one-third of humanity.

IOTA is a micro-organisation — 1.4FTE staff, charitable not-for-profit status, substantially volunteer-supported — delivering macro impact. Two triennial editions (2021, 2024) have built a track record and an international curatorial network and we are now developing a third edition for 2027. Core programming spans major institutional exhibitions, a statewide community festival, international conference and exchanges and residencies for curators and craft artists in WA and with IOR countries.

IOTA24 in numbers:

- 125,000 audience
- 540 makers participating
- 65 exhibition venues across WA
- 28 craft disciplines represented
- 70+ artists and groups from 9 IOR countries
- 421 conference attendees from 9 countries

[\[https://indianoceancrafttriennial.com/product/iota24-impact-summary/\]](https://indianoceancrafttriennial.com/product/iota24-impact-summary/)

### **Partnership model**

Arising from a volunteer-run partnership in 2019 to a not-for-profit organisation with charitable status in 2022, IOTA now operates with multi-year funding partners Creative Australia, Curtin University, and most recently the Minderoo Foundation. These partnerships are supported by creative project funds provided by the WA Department of Creative Industries Tourism & Sport, Lotterywest, the Centre for Australia-India Relations and the ASEAN-Australia Centre.

The creative program is delivered with major institutional exhibition partners; for IOTA27 these have expanded to include John Curtin Gallery, Walyalup Fremantle Arts Centre, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art and Bunbury Regional Art Gallery. The community festival program is delivered by art spaces, galleries and groups statewide.

IOTA has become an informal but consequential advocacy network for Australian craft internationally – a function that warrants formal policy recognition and long-term investment.

## **2. IOTA – Cultural Diplomacy in Action**

Since 2021, IOTA has functioned as an active platform for Australian cultural diplomacy across the Indian Ocean Rim – not by design initially, but as a direct consequence of the international relationships built through two triennial editions. That informal but consequential diplomatic function now warrants policy recognition and long-term investment.

### **What IOTA has built**

Through targeted funding from DFAT Cultural Diplomacy grants, the Centre for Australia-India Relations (MAITRI program), the ASEAN-Australia Centre and Creative Australia, augmented by our donor program – the IOTA Ambassadors – and building relations with IOR consulates in WA and Australian diplomats in the IOR, IOTA has:

- Presented the work of over 60 IOR-based artists alongside over 40 Australian artists & groups in major curated exhibitions in Western Australia
- Facilitated curatorial and artist exchange residencies (inbound & outbound) – eight curators in 2025-26 and 24 artists including two First Nations Australian practitioners across IOTA24 and development towards IOTA27.

- Facilitated selection of Australian artists and their contemporary craft at exhibitions in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, and major international events including the Cheongju Craft Biennale (South Korea), Homo Faber Biennale (Venice), Revelations (Shanghai and Paris).

These outcomes were achieved by a micro-organisation operating mainly on project-based funding, largely through the dedication of a small staff and volunteers. They represent the floor of what is achievable with appropriate structural investment – not the ceiling.

### **The International Curatorium**

A defining development for IOTA27 is the establishment of an international Curatorium of eight curators drawn from Kenya, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Australia — including those of diverse and First Nations cultural heritage. This structure fundamentally shifts IOTA from an Australian organisation presenting IOR craft, to a genuinely regional platform with embedded curatorial perspectives from around the Indian Ocean Region.

This is cultural diplomacy architecture – relationships of trust, reciprocity and genuine creativity are built over years. It is not replicable at short notice and it is not funded as the strategic asset it represents.

### **The opportunity pipeline — and the funding gap**

The international craft calendar now generates a growing stream of invitations for Australian makers to participate in major events across the IOR and beyond. Through IOTA, the Asia Pacific Crafts Alliance (APCA) and the World Crafts Council Australia, opportunities are being actively identified and communicated to Australian practitioners – including events in Jakarta, Jogjakarta, Hanoi, Bukhara, Almaty, Istanbul and Portugal in 2026 alone.

The funding infrastructure to support that participation does not match the pace or scale of opportunity. Three structural barriers consistently obstruct engagement:

- Lead time mismatch – international invitations frequently arrive on timelines incompatible with existing grant cycles, making formal funding applications impossible regardless of the opportunity's significance
- Cocktail funding burden – small organisations like IOTA must assemble case-by-case funding from multiple sources for each initiative, a model that is administratively disproportionate to the scale of individual projects and unsustainable at volume
- Protracted funding outcomes – delayed decisions on applications routinely cause Australian practitioners to miss confirmation windows for international events.

These are not minor administrative inconveniences. They are structural failures that cost Australia cultural diplomacy outcomes and commercial opportunities in a region where craft is economically and politically significant.

### **Practical measures**

- Establish a dedicated rapid-response cultural diplomacy / economic development fund for craft – with streamlined assessment criteria and short decision timelines – to capture time-sensitive international participation opportunities
- Recognise IOTA's international Curatorium approach as a cultural diplomacy asset and fund its ongoing development and convening accordingly
- Create a standing inbound artist mobility mechanism to bring internationally significant IOR craft practitioners to Australia for residencies, workshops and exchange – removing the current case-by-case funding burden

- Ensure DFAT's people-to-people engagement frameworks explicitly include craft as a named diplomatic instrument alongside music and screen, which currently receive disproportionate support.

### 3. IOTA – Cross-Portfolio Proof of Concept

IOTA's experience demonstrates that craft operates across policy portfolios – not as a peripheral cultural activity but as a substantive contributor to health, environment, technology, social cohesion, education, agriculture, innovation, trade and diplomacy. This is not an assertion; it is evidenced directly by the breadth of the IOTA24 Futuring Craft International Conference, held at Curtin University's School of Design and the Built Environment in September 2024.

Across 39 peer-reviewed papers from 9 countries, the conference addressed craft's intersection with:

- **Health and wellbeing** — craft as therapeutic practice, resilience building in young people, and inclusive making for people with disability (*The Magic of Making or Crafting as Cure: Supporting Resilience in Middle-Grade Girls; Inclusive Craft: Tactile Sensory Approach to Empower Persons with Blindness through Ceramic Making Skills*)
- **Environment and climate** — ecological practice, sustainable materials, circular economy design and nature-based making (*Our Veins/Swallow: Exploring Ecological Fragility through Corrosion Casting; Crafting Waste Toward a Future Creative Circular Economy; In Our Hands: Nepali Nature Inspired Climate Solutions in the Anthropocene*)
- **Technology and AI** — handloom weaving in dialogue with digital technologies, data visualisation as craft, AI's challenge to human making (*Futuring Handloom Weaving in the Indo-Pacific: Balancing Digital Technologies with Artisan Practice; Crafting Knowledge: The Art of Mapping and the New Craft of Data Visualization for Cultural and Creative Industries*)
- **Social science and policy** — craft policy network formation, decolonisation in curatorial practice, postcolonial perspectives on craft value (*Crafting Communities, Crafting Policy: The Formation of Craft Policy Networks in Australia; Unweaving the Fabric of Hierarchy: Decolonisation in Curatorial Practices for Indonesian Art and Craft*)
- **Trade and economics** — slow fashion, handcrafted textiles, global south craft development, urban-rural maker collaboration (*Slow Fashion in Action: Creating Value in Handcrafted Textiles; Does Tradition Have a Timeline? A Dialogue on Collaboration between Urban Designers and Rural Weavers*)
- **Cultural diplomacy and community** — First Nations intergenerational knowledge sharing, IOR craft village traditions, non-western craft perspectives (*Hearing the Message Sticks: Sharing and Making in Communal, Cultural and Intergenerational Settings with Nhanda Artists; Craft Villages along the Red River Delta in Vietnam*)

This breadth is not incidental – it reflects craft's genuine cross-sectoral reach. A conference ostensibly about making objects attracted environmental scientists, industrial designers, public health researchers, technology scholars, policy analysts and First Nations knowledge holders to the same table. No single government portfolio owns that conversation.

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## The cross-portfolio gap

Despite this demonstrated reach, IOTA – and the craft sector broadly – remains funded and administered exclusively through the arts portfolio. This structural misalignment means that craft's contributions to health outcomes, environmental practice, manufacturing capacity, digital innovation and trade are invisible to the portfolios that would benefit most from recognising them.

The cultural think-tank A New Approach (ANA) has proposed that cross-government arts collaboration could be modelled on Australia's existing 2030 strategic plans for agriculture, sport, innovation and tourism – embedding arts and cultural activity across all relevant portfolios rather than siloing it within a single ministry. IOTA supports this framework and argues for craft's explicit inclusion within it.

[<https://newapproach.org.au/>]

- Craft and manual skills training contributes to manufacturing workforce development – relevant to the Industry and Science portfolio
- Craft practitioners operate as micro-enterprise owners and cultural exporters, generating income, employment and export value – relevant to Treasury, Small Business and Trade portfolios
- Investment in craft livelihoods reduces artist precarity and dependence on welfare support, delivering measurable fiscal return – as Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts model demonstrated at €1.39 return per €1 invested
- Regional craft practice sustains local economies, supports tourism infrastructure and anchors creative industries in communities outside metropolitan centres – relevant to Regional Development and Tourism portfolios
- Craft-based health programs deliver measurable wellbeing outcomes – relevant to Health and Aged Care
- Craft and manual skills training in schools and VET builds cognitive and fine motor development alongside career pathways – relevant to Education portfolio
- Sustainable materials practice and circular design in craft align directly with environmental policy priorities – relevant to Climate Change and Environment portfolio
- Craft diplomacy and artisan exchange generate trade, tourism and people-to-people engagement outcomes – relevant to Trade, Tourism and DFAT

## Practical measures

- Establish a formal cross-portfolio coordination mechanism for craft, with nominated responsibility across Arts, Health, Industry, Environment, Trade and Education portfolios
- Commission a cross-portfolio audit of existing programs where craft skills and practice intersect with non-arts policy outcomes – making the invisible contribution visible
- Fund IOTA's international conference as a designated national platform for cross-sectoral craft research, with operational support that reflects its function as a convener of disciplines, not merely an arts event
- Adopt ANA's cross-government collaboration framework with craft explicitly named as a priority sector alongside music, dance, screen and writing.

#### **4. Craft in Australia – a policy gap with economic consequences**

Australia's craft economy employs 116,538 people and generates \$19.2 billion in gross value added – 1.0% of GDP. Yet craft has been systematically removed from Australia's cultural policy frameworks over the past decade.

In 2013, Creative Australia's National Cultural Policy named craft explicitly alongside visual arts. By 2023, the *Revive* National Cultural Policy contains no standalone reference to craft – subsumed into broader categories, implicit rather than named. This is a policy retreat from a sector with a proven, measurable economic footprint.

Meanwhile the global handmade and craft market was valued at USD\$739 billion in 2024, projected to reach USD\$983 billion by 2033, driven by consumer demand for unique handmade objects, e-commerce growth and a documented cultural counter-response to AI and automation.

The UK demonstrates what integrated measurement reveals: when artisan skills embedded across design verticals — bespoke fashion, architectural metalwork, premium jewellery — are factored in, craft's cross-sector contribution reaches £3.4 billion, feeding directly into creative industries that generated a record £148.87 billion GVA in the UK economy. Narrow craft-only measurement systematically understates the sector's true economic footprint. *Createch*, where creativity meets advanced technology, is one of the UK's most exciting high-growth investment frontiers.

Australia is positioned to capture a growing share of this market – but not without policy settings that recognise the sector exists.

##### **Cultural participation and education**

In Western Australia, 74% of residents participate in arts and culture – compared with 44% in sport and recreation. [<https://cits.wa.gov.au/>]

Craft commands strong public demand: IOTA's participation and audience numbers across WA, and international recognition; the IOTA24 conference drew 421 delegates to hear 39 papers from 9 countries, with ongoing regular access to the proceedings, downloadable online. Local craft groups' workshops sell out consistently and community class providers routinely cannot meet demand. Noting that much of these activities are organised by volunteers.

The large 'hobby' demand exists against a background of systematic reduction in formal craft education. Manual skills training has contracted across school curricula, VET and university programs nationally. The consequences are twofold: loss of skills critical to cognitive and fine motor development, and erosion of a workforce pipeline for both the cultural and manufacturing sectors.

A 2023 report by Susan Luckman – *The Value of Craft Skills to the Future of Making in Australia* – identified that renewed support for at-risk manual craft skills, embedded in collaboration with industry and alongside digital technologies, is essential to both innovation and workforce capacity.

##### **Specific policy mechanisms required:**

- Reinstatement of dedicated craft and manual skills training within the Australian Curriculum and VET frameworks, with craft recognised as a viable career pathway – not a hobby elective
- A national review of tertiary and vocational craft education provision, benchmarked against industry demand and informed by regional access constraints

- Targeted workforce development support for emerging craft practitioners, including mentoring structures and pathway funding
- Recognition of craft's contribution to domestic manufacturing capacity, particularly in the context of government priorities around sovereign capability and advanced manufacturing
- Coordinated data collection and analysis to measure the economic impact of the craft sector.

Arts tourism data reinforces the economic case: in 2018, 30% of international visitors to Australia were classified as arts tourists, generating \$3.5 billion.

Craft purchases – from regional and metropolitan galleries and studios – represent a significant and undercounted component of that figure. Better data collection is itself a policy need.

<https://www.creative.gov.au/news-events/news/arts-bigger-drawcard-international-tourists-wineries-casinos-or-sport>

### **The policy ask is straightforward**

**Name CRAFT explicitly in the revised National Cultural Policy, establish a dedicated funding stream, and align education, VET, tourism and trade portfolios around a sector that already contributes \$19.2 billion to the Australian economy and is growing globally.**

- References:  
 Luckman, S & Tower, A 2023, *The value of craft skills to the future of making in Australia*, CP3, UniSA, Adelaide, APO, viewed 23 May 2026, <<https://apo.org.au/node/324171>>  
<https://knowledgehouseforcraft.org/Weft/Claims/Claim+-+Craft+makes+an+important+contribution+to+the+economy>  
<https://www.wearecreative.uk/>

## **5. A National Craft Platform: Restoring What Was Lost, Building What Is Needed**

Australia currently has no national craft platform. The sector's representational infrastructure has been fractured progressively over more than a decade – a policy failure with direct, measurable consequences for professional development, international representation, sector cohesion and economic potential.

The loss of Craft Australia in 2011 was a defining blow, occurring alongside the contraction of tertiary craft teaching programs nationally. Individual state-based craft organisations continue to operate and form their own network – the Australian Craft and Design Centres – but without national coordination, representation remains uneven, metropolitan-weighted and structurally disconnected from the breadth of contemporary craft practice, particularly in regional areas and among First Nations artists.

It was in this structural void that IOTA was formed. The Australia Pacific Crafts Alliance (APCA) similarly emerged from the absence of national leadership. Both organisations exist because the infrastructure that should exist does not – and both are operating beyond their resource capacity as a direct consequence.

### **The Canadian precedent**

Australia is not the first country to make this mistake or to correct it. The Canadian Crafts Council, established in 1974, was defunded in 1996 in a decision that closely mirrors Australia's own

trajectory. It survived through the dedication of volunteers and, following government review in 1999, was reconstituted as the Canadian Crafts Federation with renewed public investment. Canada recognised that defunding a national craft platform was a false economy and corrected course. The reconstituted organisation went on to strengthen Canada's international craft presence, professional development infrastructure and sector cohesion in ways that the intervening gap had visibly eroded.

Australia now has the same opportunity – but with the advantage of hindsight, a changed landscape and a far stronger evidence base for investment than existed in 1999.

### **Not restoration – reinvention**

A future national craft platform should not simply resurrect what existed before. Craft Australia operated in a pre-digital, pre-social media, pre-AI environment where the challenges and opportunities facing the sector were fundamentally different. Reinstating that model would be a missed opportunity.

What is needed is a contemporary, agile national platform architected for the current moment:

- Digitally enabled – leveraging connectivity to reach and support makers in remote, regional and metropolitan areas equitably, not defaulting to capital city infrastructure
- First Nations led – embedding First Nations craft leadership structurally and substantively, not as a programming add-on, with genuine authority over relevant program design and international representation
- Culturally inclusive – actively engaging Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse communities, with particular focus on IOR diaspora whose craft traditions, material knowledge and cultural networks represent an underutilised bridge between Australia and the region. These communities are not peripheral to IOTA's mission — they are central to it.
- Commercially and culturally fluent – operating across both registers, recognising that craft practitioners are simultaneously cultural contributors and micro-enterprise operators who need support in both domains
- Internationally agile – able to move at the pace of international opportunity, facilitating participation in global craft events, exchanges and diplomatic initiatives without the current funding lag that costs Australia presence and credibility
- Cross-portfolio connected – positioned explicitly at the intersection of arts, education, trade, tourism and health portfolios, reflecting craft's demonstrated reach across sectors
- Regionally representative – with governance and programming that reflects the geographic diversity of Australian craft practice, including the Territories and remote communities

The question for this policy review is not whether Australia can afford to build this. The Canadian precedent, the Irish Basic Income model and Australia's own \$19.2 billion craft GVA figure collectively answer that.

<https://knowledgehouseforcraft.org/Warp/The+value+of+craft+skills+to+the+future+of+making+in+Australia>

**The question is whether Australia can afford another decade without it.**

IOTA calls for the establishment of a properly resourced national craft platform – with a dedicated operational funding stream, a governance structure that reflects the sector's full diversity, and a mandate that extends across cultural, commercial and diplomatic domains.

This is not a niche arts infrastructure request. It is a national economic and cultural strategy with a proven international precedent and a measurable domestic evidence base.

## **6. International Context: A Growing Sector, an Underperforming Policy Response**

### **The global opportunity**

The global handmade and craft market was valued at USD\$739 billion in 2024, projected to reach USD\$983 billion by 2033. The Asia-Pacific region – encompassing India, China and Southeast Asia – is the dominant driver, with some analyses placing the global figure closer to USD\$1 trillion. When artisan skills embedded across design verticals are factored in – as the UK has demonstrated with a measured £3.4 billion cross-sector craft contribution – narrow craft-only measurement systematically understates the sector's true economic footprint.

Australia ranked 25th out of 31 OECD countries for government investment in recreation, culture and religion in 2023. This is not a peripheral underperformance – it is a strategic miscalculation in a region where governments actively invest in craft as cultural and economic infrastructure.

### **UNESCO Creative Cities: a missed opportunity**

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network for Craft and Folk Art grew by 58 newly recognised cities in 2026, bringing the global network to 408 cities across 58 countries. Ballarat is Australia's only recognised UNESCO Creative City for Craft. Since designation in 2019, Ballarat's creative sector has contributed \$658.4 million to the local economy, with cultural tourism growing 25% year-on-year. [<https://www.indesignlive.com/happenings/ballarats-unesco-creative-city> ]

Only one Australian city. One data point demonstrating what recognition and investment unlocks. The question for this policy review is how many more Australian cities – including Perth, uniquely positioned on the Indian Ocean – could achieve comparable outcomes with comparable support.

The World Crafts Council Craft Cities program lists 83 cities worldwide noted for specific craft traditions, 13 awarded in 2025-26. [<https://www.instagram.com/worldcraftscouncil/>]

Australia has no representation. These are not honorary designations – they are platforms for cultural tourism, international trade and diplomatic exchange.

### **Australia's UNESCO Convention obligations**

Australia is a signatory to the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the 'Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions', which recognises craft traditions as vital to cultural diversity, sustainable development and international cultural cooperation. The Convention's monitoring framework requires reporting against four goals:

1. sustainable governance for culture
2. balanced flow of cultural goods and services and artist mobility
3. integration of culture in sustainable development
4. promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

[<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000142919> ]

From specialist observation within the sector, Australia's reporting against these goals has been minimal, reflecting a lack of integrated policy and knowledge linkages rather than a lack of activity. This is a governance gap – and a reputational one.

A revised National Cultural Policy should establish clear interdepartmental responsibility for UNESCO Convention reporting, with craft explicitly included in that framework.

### **The Vietnamese precedent and WA's strategic position**

Creative industries are among the 10 priority sectors in *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040* [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2023].

Vietnam – specifically the government of Hanoi – has embarked on a deliberate program to develop the city as a global craft centre. This is not incidental cultural activity; it is strategic economic positioning.

Perth sits at the intersection of this opportunity. Closer to Hanoi than to Sydney, WA is Australia's natural point of engagement with the craft economies of Southeast Asia and the broader Indian Ocean Rim. A National Cultural Policy that fails to leverage this geography is leaving a strategic asset untapped.

### **The Irish model: a recommended framework for artist sustainability**

The 2023 UNESCO report 'Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity' highlights Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot scheme as a landmark international model. Launched in 2022, the scheme provided 2,000 artists and creative workers with €325 per week for three years. In October 2025, the Irish Government made the scheme permanent following a positive assessment: artists devoted more time to creative practice, reported improved economic situation and reduced anxiety and depression.

Critically, a cost-benefit analysis found society received €1.39 for every €1 of public money invested.

[<https://www.unesco.org/creativity/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/01/380474eng.pdf>]

IOTA recommends Australia adopt an equivalent Basic Income for the Arts model, developed through sector-wide consultation and structured to:

- Provide income stability that enables craft practitioners to sustain professional practice
- Reduce reliance on project-based funding cycles that currently fragment careers and organisations
- Recognise craft as a skilled profession with workforce development needs equivalent to other priority sectors
- Generate measurable social return – as the Irish model has demonstrated – on public investment

This is not a radical proposal. It is an evidence-based, internationally validated policy mechanism with a documented positive cost-benefit ratio. The question is not whether Australia can afford it – the Irish data suggests it cannot afford not to.

### **Practical measures**

- Include craft sector specialist knowledge in all Expert Panels and Policy Advisory Group
- Substantially increase Australia's investment in arts and culture toward OECD median, with craft explicitly included in revised funding frameworks
- Pursue additional UNESCO Creative Cities for Craft designations, prioritising cities with existing craft infrastructure and IOR engagement potential

- Establish clear interdepartmental responsibility for UNESCO 2005 Convention reporting, with craft included
- Adopt a Basic Income for the Arts model, developed through sector consultation, as a mechanism for workforce sustainability
- Align the Southeast Asia Economic Strategy's creative industries priority with dedicated craft diplomacy funding, recognising WA's geographic position as a national strategic asset.