

National Cultural Policy review

The Office for the Arts
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications,
Sport and the Arts

May 2026

To the Office for the Arts,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute our views on the shaping of the next National Cultural Policy. This is a collectively-drafted submission from:

- **Professor Dan Golding**, Professor of Media at Monash University
- **Associate Professor Brendan Keogh**, Chief Investigator in the Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology
- **Dr. Helen Stuckey**, Senior Lecturer in Games at RMIT University
- **Associate Professor John Banks**, Chief Investigator in the Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology
- **Dr. Benjamin Nicoll**, Chief Investigator in the Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology

We write as leading researchers of Australia's videogame sector from three Australian universities. As a group, we have been funded by the Australian Research Council for our Discovery Project 'Artistic Practice in Australian Videogame Development' (██████████ 2023-2026), and are pleased to be able to draw upon our research and expertise to offer input into the next National Cultural Policy from the perspective of cutting edge games research. For this project, we have interviewed and collected data from numerous Australian game developers with a view to understanding their creative processes, concerns, and ways of working. Each of us also possesses years of experience researching game making both within Australia and internationally.

Several of our members also have significant experience within the sector.

Professor Golding has contributed music to several Australian videogames as a composer, including the BAFTA-winning *Untitled Goose Game* (House House, 2019), the *Frog Detective* series (Worm Club, 2018-2023), and *Mars First Logistics* (Shape Shop, 2025). Professor Golding's music and collaboration with House House, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), and Orchestra Victoria, was featured as a full-page case study in *Revive* (p86) as an example of bringing "together multiple genres and art forms and new audiences", drawing attention to key *Revive* actions such as the introduction of the Digital Games Tax Offset and increased investment in supporting digital game developers through Screen Australia. Professor Golding has also consulted for Creative Australia. He was the director of the Freeplay Independent Games Festival from 2014-2017.

Associate Professor Keogh is a game developer, the author of the influential *The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist: Why We Should Think Beyond Commercial Game Production* (MIT Press, 2023) and co-founder of Brisbane's Squiggly River Game Collective. Previously, A/Prof. Keogh undertook an ARC-funded DECRA project "Formal, Informal, Embedded: Australian Game Developers and Skill Transfer" for which he interviewed over 200 game developers from around Australia and beyond. A/Prof Keogh has served as the President of the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) Australia and has consulted for cultural agencies and institutions including VicScreen (formerly Film Victoria), Screen Queensland, and Creative Australia.

Dr. Stuckey has extensive experience as a media arts curator working with major arts organisations on the collection, curation, and exhibition of videogames. She has first-hand experience of the challenges institutions face in engaging with artist-gamemaking through her role as Film Victoria's inaugural Interactive Screen Arts Program Manager (2000-2001) and ACMI's inaugural games curator from 2005-2009. Her archival research into Australian Videogame and Media Arts of the 1980s and 1990s has been separately funded by the ARC through the two Linkages "Play It Again: Preserving Australian videogame history of the 1990s" and "Archiving Australian Media Arts: Towards a method and national collection".

Dr. Nicoll is the author of several scholarly books on videogames, including *The Unity Game Engine and the Circuits of Cultural Software* (Palgrave, 2019, co-authored with A/Prof. Keogh), and has consulted for Film Victoria and Intel. **Associate Professor** John Banks has published extensively on the cultural policy challenges associated with supporting Australia's videogame industry, including in his influential book *Co-Creating Videogames* (Bloomsbury, 2013). He also

previously led the ARC Linkage “The Games and the Wider Interactive Entertainment Industry in Australia: An Inquiry into Sources of Innovation”.

We draw this collective experience to bear on this submission.

This submission has been made on the understanding that it will be made public. Finally, we would like to note our objection to and discomfort regarding the stated use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools by the department for administrative processes, processes supporting the efficient handling of submissions, including creating summaries, and the identification of common themes and issues. Scholarly research, media reports, and anecdotal evidence alike suggests the quality of summarisation by AI tools is variable at best, and misleading at worst. More importantly, we feel the use of AI tools for such purposes by the department runs the risk of failing to meet the respect, time, and care shown by the many artists, institutions, scholars, and everyday people who have made submissions. We encourage the department to ensure that every submission is read and considered by a human.

With kind regards and best wishes for the new National Cultural Policy,

Professor Dan Golding

Associate Professor Brendan Keogh

Dr. Helen Stuckey

Dr. Benjamin Nicoll

Associate Professor John Banks

Context: Making Games in Australia

Videogames were the first creative form endemic to computers and the digital age. The story of the history of computers is one that is filled with play and games, first as experiments and cheeky ripostes to all-too-serious computer science programs, then as rebellion and critique from students and artists, and finally as a creative sector and industry.

Today, videogames are an essential component in the story of Australian arts and culture. Very often, Australian videogames achieve global headlines for financial and critical success. Less visibly, but even more essentially, Australian videogames form critical components in the way we understand ourselves in a digital era, how we tell Australian stories, how we articulate local creative identities, how we support the centrality of the artist, and how we engage audiences both large and local. Games are proudly supported financially by most relevant state, territory, and federal funding agencies, and they form part of the web of cultural infrastructure for the articulation and support of creativity, cultural expression, and participation around the nation. This is a story of success, and one that is the envy of many nations around the world.

Despite a series of economic crises almost perpetually engulfing Australia's games sector, and the global games industry at large, Australia's game-making sector is resilient and globally renowned. It was over a decade ago now that Professor Celia Pearce, Professor of Game Design in the College of Arts, Media & Design at Northeastern University in Boston, and the co-founder and Festival Chair for IndieCade, described Australia as "the birthplace of the modern artgame." Australia is undeniably a world leader when it comes to creativity, art, and thought regarding videogames.

For more than a decade, Australia has had a global profile as a hub for thoughtful, creative, and independently-minded game makers. Even in the time since *Revive* was launched in 2023 Australia has produced multiple internationally-recognised hits, either financially, critically, or both, including:

- ***Hollow Knight: Silksong*** (2025): A global smash-hit created by three-person Adelaide studio Team Cherry, *Silksong* was the much anticipated follow-up to the team's 2017 title *Hollow Knight*. The game has been praised for its beautiful art, sophisticated worldbuilding, and gruelling challenge. *Silksong* was so popular that, upon its release,

demand for the game crashed multiple digital storefronts. Critically, too, *Silksong* was praised worldwide, and was nominated for numerous prestigious awards such as the British Academy Game Awards and the Golden Joystick awards.

- ***The Drifter*** (2025): A point-and-click adventure game that evokes the LucasArts games of the 1990s, but set in a fictional Australian city. Created by a small team in Melbourne, the game has received critical attention globally, being called “the best point-and-click game” ever by *Eurogamer*.
- ***Mixtape*** (2026): A nostalgic story inspired by the movies of John Hughes, the game received remarkable international praise on release, including a perfect review score from influential website IGN.com, who described it as setting “a new standard for coming-of-age stories in video games”. *Mixtape* uses music strongly throughout, including from Australian musicians Silverchair, Mondo Rock, and John Paul Young. The main character also wears a Rage t-shirt, with permission from the ABC board.

These games join a track record of international excellence for Australian videogames, including genuine global hits *Untitled Goose Game* (2019), *Armello* (2015), *Antichamber* (2014), *Cult of the Lamb* (2022), *Flight Control* (2009), *Florence* (2018), *Fruit Ninja* (2010), *The Gardens Between* (2018), *Unpacking* (2021), with beginnings as far back as *The Hobbit* (1982). Australian games also tell Australian stories, like the “watercolour shaded landscape” (ABC News) of *Paperbark* (2018), or tenancy horror game *Janet DeMornay is a Slumlord (and a Witch)* (forthcoming).

Such consistent brilliance suggests, quite rightly, that it is not just individual achievement at work here but also a thriving ecosystem and game development culture that supports and cultivates talent. These individual games produced by Australian teams are not discrete phenomena. They emerge from a robust and energetic creative community of videogame creators that consists of a diversity of formalised studios, enthusiast hobbyists, and part-time artists. Just as an entire ecosystem sits behind the most popular bands and musicians, Australia’s global success with videogames draws from and is indebted to a complex ecosystem of creativity and experimentation.

It is hard to overstate how unique this ecosystem is in Australia. For decades, grassroots organisations and state funding - especially but not exclusively in Victoria - has fostered an environment like nowhere else. Here, gamemakers retain the ability to take a culture-first experimental approach to gamemaking, providing resources that have allowed Australian gamemakers to take the risks necessary in any creative sector to produce excellence.

The success of games has also been enabled by, and has in turn, given back to a broader cultural sector in Australia, including tertiary education, museums and the GLAM sector, musical institutions, writers festivals, pop culture conventions, and the media. Once again, even just taking the time period since the launch of *Revive*, we have seen:

- **Orchestra Victoria's 'Indie Symphony II' concert** at Arts Centre Melbourne on 3-4 July 2025, where audiences in their thousands heard a concert of Australian and international videogame music, including new works commissioned by Orchestra Victoria for the event. The concert was broadcast on ABC Classic radio and “proved the appetite for video game concerts is only continuing to enter traditional orchestral repertoire” (scenstr.com.au). The Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra have also programmed concerts of videogame soundtracks, with all three performing Australian works.
- **Honk! Untitled Goose Exhibition** at ACMI, a standalone, originally-commissioned exhibition celebrating Australian global hit *Untitled Goose Game*. Over 155,000 visitors were drawn to ACMI to see a behind-the-scenes exhibition of the making of the game. The exhibition is now touring regionally and internationally, including Wodonga, Central Goldfields, Orange, and Puke Ariki (New Zealand).
- **The Powerhouse Museum in Sydney** acquired the Australian-made videogame *Queer Man Peering Into a Rock Pool.jpg* (2022) for their permanent museum collection. The acquisition took place as part of the game's exhibition as part of Powerhouse's *Absolutely Queer* exhibition which ran as part of Sydney WorldPride from 2023-2024. Game developers Pete Foley and Scott Ford (Fuzzy Ghost) were featured creatives in the exhibition.

Risks facing Australian game makers

Despite a thriving game making community in Australia, there are substantial breaks that limit innovation in the sector and mean sizable risks remain present. We identify these key **risks**:

- **An increasingly concentrated platformisation of the global games industry.** While Australian gamemakers now have a global reputation for creatively experimental works, they remain highly dependent on a small number of (primarily American and Japanese) digital platforms for reaching global audiences. Valve, Apple, Google, and Microsoft (America), and Nintendo and Sony (Japan), strictly control their own platforms and hardware, and have all the power in determining what titles are visible to which audiences. This is complicated further still by the vast number of games now released every year - over 20,000 on PC alone in 2025. A standard cut for an international distribution platform is 30% of the sale price: crucial funds for Australian game developers to feed into their next project, and revenue that remains offshore and untaxed. Platformisation impacts much more than distribution, as well, with oligopolies dominating most stages of game development. For example, popular American game creation software package Unity sent shockwaves through Australian game developer communities when they announced substantial pricing changes in late 2023. These international companies hold the ability to alter the creative and business models of Australian game development at will.
- **A brittle Australian cultural infrastructure for games.** While individual Australian games and the people who make them are, compared to international equivalents, funded relatively soundly by state and federal programs, the cultural infrastructure that nurtures both people and product remain highly volatile. By this we refer to festivals, conferences, events, community institutions, and informal collectives. These have historically been, and remain today, sporadically funded and poorly supported by governments around Australia. The recent announcement from the influential Freeplay Independent Games Festival (likely the world's longest-running independent games event) that they may have to close after missing Creative Victoria funding, is a case-in-point. That Freeplay subsequently announced it would continue in a less professionalised manner is illustrative of the way videogame culture in Australia remains sustained only on the basis of volunteer labour and energy, and not through policy or

support from government. Cultural infrastructure is crucial for a thriving games sector. Passion has buttressed the sector for several decades, but cannot be expected to do so forever.

- **A fickle international funding landscape.** The major financial crises that have confronted Australian game development have been international in nature. It is well established that international investment in Australian game development withdrew following the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-2009, causing the end of Australia's outsourced studio system in the process. More recently, the end of the covid-19 era boom in games has coincided with multiple international credit crunches which has made it harder for Australia's most internationally-engaged game studios to secure funding in the form of publishing or investment. Several of Australia's most significant studios have closed or undertaken substantial layoffs through this international crisis. By now, it should go without saying that international funders of videogame development have no incentive to care about the Australian ecosystem and will always withdraw funds when financial circumstances make it advantageous to do so. Further, Australian developers often rely on foreign investment and funding to fill the gaps left by piecemeal local and public funding. This can lead to risks of Australian-made intellectual property being lost to overseas owners.
- **Limited mechanisms for recognising and expanding the impact of videogames as Australian culture.** Multiple overlapping crises in the media have meant that Australia and much of the international market in 2026 have limited specialist game criticism, journalism, or mainstream coverage. This is not just a problem of discoverability and finding an audience for Australian games, which is also related to the expansion of platforms as noted above. It is also a question of being able to recognise and articulate the relative dominance that Australian videogames have achieved over decades. This makes the recognition of Australian games through industry awards and the identification of success by peak bodies, institutions, and government, all the more essential. Australian videogames possess an extraordinary potential for strengthening a cultural landscape that reflects our diversity, supports our art workers, and strengthens the nation we share. Given the global market for videogames, they are also attractive vectors for Australia's soft power. Yet the stratification of audiences and culture in a platformised, algorithmic age makes the qualities of Australian videogames harder to articulate.

Recommendations

Accordingly, we make the following six recommendations for consideration by the Office for the Arts for the next National Cultural Policy:

- 1. Continue to appropriately support and champion Australian-made games through funding initiatives and investment programs.** Australia's strong investment system federally and at state level remains the envy of the world, and is one of the central reasons why creatively innovative Australian games continue to be made today despite strong headwinds in the global market.
- 2. Strengthen access to Australian videogames and provide alternatives to foreign platforms for game distribution.** An Australian distribution platform like ABC iview would be an exciting mechanism for providing Australians with access to the games taxpayer funds have supported, and would begin to reduce the absolute reliance on foreign oligopolys of distribution. To ensure the ongoing sustainability of the Australian game sector - and to ensure Australian audiences are able to find Australian-made content - will increasingly require dedicated intervention into discoverability.
- 3. Establish dedicated funds and support for grassroots Australian cultural infrastructure for games.** This would include more substantial and recurrent opportunities for financial support for festivals, conferences, and local institutions. It would also mean providing greater opportunity for Australian game makers and those with ties to the game sector to be involved in existing cultural infrastructure such as decision-making boards at relevant government agencies.
- 4. Deepen the ties between Australian videogame creatives and those in other forms and contexts.** This might mean supporting the embedding of game makers in major libraries, galleries, or museums, where crucial on-the-ground connections can be made and developed over the course of months and years. Developing an everyday familiarity with the creative practices and language of game development within the broader arts and GLAM sectors will strengthen creative resilience and innovation across the board.
- 5. Remove barriers for emerging game makers.** The low rate of income support in the form of Jobseeker forces emerging game makers and artists to consider leaving the

creative industries altogether while between game development roles or applying for grants. It also means that, like all creative industries, games are at risk of being the exclusive domain of those who can afford to fail. A more equal community would also mean a more equal, innovative, exciting, and culturally resonant game sector. The government should also prioritise the long-overdue revision of higher education degree funding, and in particular reverse the fee increases from the Jobs Ready Graduate Scheme, which specifically disadvantages students studying game and game-adjacent degrees in the Creative Arts.

- 6. Fund the creation of knowledge about our Australian games, game development, and game audiences.** Currently, Creative Australia and Screen Australia undertake minimal research regarding games when compared with the other areas these agencies champion. The generation of games created under the next National Cultural Policy will be enhanced and their impact multiplied through deeper, more informed, and more resonant research.