



# Submission to the next National Cultural Policy

## From the Australia India Film Council

The Australia India Film Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

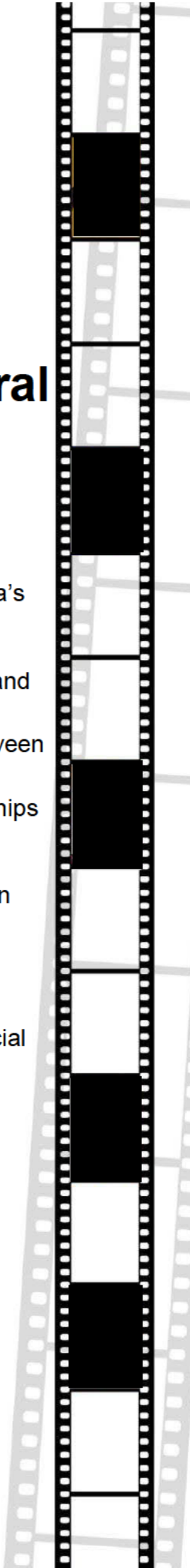
The Council exists for a simple reason: the screen relationship between Australia and India is too important to be left to chance. India is one of the world's great screen cultures. Australia is a sophisticated, diverse and highly skilled screen nation. Between the two countries there are powerful people-to-people links, growing strategic ties, major diaspora communities, shared democratic values, expanding trade relationships and a deep public love of cinema.

Yet, for too long, the screen relationship has been treated as occasional rather than structural.

The next National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to change that.

AIFC's mission is to provide a platform that promotes Australian cultural and financial links with the Indian film industry for the benefit of Australia and Australian screen practitioners. It supports collaboration, policy advocacy, professional development, education, filming resources, festivals, masterclasses and practical industry connection.

This submission argues that Australia should recognise the Australia–India screen relationship as a serious cultural, economic and diplomatic priority within the next National Cultural Policy.





## 1. India should not be treated as a one-off opportunity

Australia's screen sector has often engaged with India in bursts: a film shoot here, a festival there, a delegation, a treaty, a headline, a red carpet. These moments are valuable, but they are not enough.

India is not simply a market. It is a continent-sized screen ecosystem with many languages, regions, genres, platforms, production cultures and audiences. It cannot be understood only through the word "Bollywood". Hindi cinema is significant, but so are Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Assamese, Odia, Manipuri, documentary, animation, streaming, advertising, music and digital content.

Australia needs policy settings that understand this complexity.

The Australia–India Audiovisual Co-production Agreement is a major step forward. The Parliamentary committee examining the agreement noted its potential to encourage employment, technical development, cultural exchange, investment sharing, market access, professional interchange, tourism and diplomatic ties. It also recorded AIFC's view that the agreement is an excellent instrument to formalise greater collaboration between the two industries.

But a treaty is not a strategy. A treaty creates a door. Policy must help people walk through it.

## 2. Screen culture is cultural diplomacy

Screen stories are among the most powerful ways nations understand each other.

When an Indian production films in Australia, it does more than spend money. It creates images of Australia in the minds of millions. When an Australian story reaches Indian audiences, it carries our landscapes, our humour, our diversity, our conflicts and





our imagination into one of the world's largest cultural conversations. When Indian and Australian artists work together, diplomacy becomes human, practical and creative.

The Australian Government has already recognised that the co-production agreement can help Australian producers reach new audiences, open investment avenues and boost distribution in one of the world's largest and growing markets. It also noted that projects in both countries can access government funding, grants, loans and tax offsets under the agreement.

The next National Cultural Policy should go further and treat screen collaboration with India as part of Australia's cultural diplomacy infrastructure.

This means connecting arts policy with foreign affairs, trade, tourism, education, migration and regional engagement. At present, these areas too often operate separately. A film project can support all of them at once.

### **3. Australia needs an India-specific screen strategy**

The Australia India Film Council recommends that the next National Cultural Policy include an India-specific screen and cultural engagement strategy.

This should not be a symbolic statement. It should be a practical framework with funding, accountability and industry participation.

The strategy should include:

1. A dedicated Australia–India Screen and Cultural Exchange Fund.
2. Development support for Australian stories with Indian and South Asian connections.
3. Support for official and unofficial co-production pathways.
4. Producer exchanges, writer rooms, labs and market delegations.
5. Legal, treaty, finance and distribution guidance for producers.
6. Support for subtitling, translation, cultural consultancy and accessibility.
7. Reciprocal showcases of Australian screen work in India and Indian screen work in Australia.



8. Stronger collaboration between Screen Australia, state screen agencies, Austrade, DFAT, Creative Australia, festivals, guilds, universities and industry councils.

This would help move Australia from reactive engagement to long-term capability.

#### **4. Diaspora expertise must be recognised as cultural infrastructure**

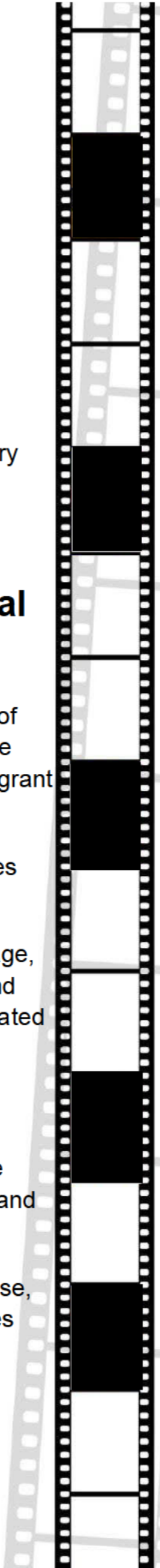
Australia's Indian diaspora is one of the country's great cultural assets. At the end of June 2024, 916,300 Indian-born people were living in Australia, more than twice the number a decade earlier, making the Indian-born population the second-largest migrant community in Australia at that time.

But demographic scale does not automatically become cultural power. That requires institutions, policy, funding and leadership pathways.

Diaspora screen professionals often carry knowledge that institutions need: language, trust, cultural nuance, market awareness, community access, informal networks and the ability to translate expectations between industries. Too often, this labour is treated as informal help rather than recognised expertise.

The next National Cultural Policy should treat diaspora-led councils, companies, festivals and practitioners as part of Australia's cultural infrastructure. These organisations do not simply "represent communities". They build audiences, advise government, reduce risk, develop talent, bring international partners into Australia and help Australian stories travel.

AIFC's own aims include providing screen bodies with a point of contact for expertise, acting as a representative and strategic advisor, liaising with government authorities





and supporting the next generation of filmmakers. These functions are exactly the kind of connective tissue that cultural policy should strengthen.

## **5. Education and industry literacy are urgent**

Many Australian producers are interested in India but do not know where to begin. Many Indian producers are interested in Australia but do not understand our funding systems, locations, unions, offsets, legal requirements, cultural protocols or state-by-state screen agencies.

This gap creates lost opportunities.

AIFC recommends investment in Australia–India screen literacy: seminars, short courses, producer toolkits, student programs, school and university partnerships, case studies, location and incentive guides, cultural protocols and plain-English treaty guidance.

The Council’s services already include seminars for Indian and Australian practitioners and students, learning and upskilling programs, filming resources and events designed to enrich Australian screen culture. These activities should be scaled nationally and linked to screen agencies, guilds and education providers.

A serious Australia–India screen relationship requires more than goodwill. It requires people who understand how the other industry actually works.

## **6. First Nations First must remain foundational**

AIFC strongly supports the continued priority of First Nations First in the National Cultural Policy.

Australia’s relationship with India must not be built on a shallow export pitch. It must be built from an honest understanding of this continent, its First Nations sovereignty, its oldest continuing cultures, its migration history and its contemporary diversity.



Any Australia–India screen strategy should include clear First Nations cultural protocols. International producers working in Australia should be supported to understand Country, consultation, permissions, representation and respect. Likewise,

Australian delegations to India should be able to present Australia as more than landscapes and incentives: a country with ancient cultures, living communities and complex stories.

This is not a compliance issue. It is cultural truth.

## **7. Audience development and distribution need policy attention**

Australia often talks about production, but not enough about audience.

If Australian stories are to reach India, and Indian stories are to reach broader Australian audiences, we need serious investment in distribution, marketing, subtitling, community engagement, critics, schools, regional touring, digital discoverability and festival platforms.

The public consultation paper for the next National Cultural Policy specifically identifies changing audience behaviours, discovery pathways, marketing and distribution as matters for the “Engaging the Audience” pillar. It also notes global demand for cultural content and the importance of connecting Australian stories to audiences beyond our borders.

For the Australia–India relationship, this is crucial. The challenge is not only to make work. It is to make sure the right audiences can find it, understand it, value it and support it.

## **Recommendations**

The Australia India Film Council recommends that the next National Cultural Policy:



1. Recognise Australia–India screen collaboration as a cultural, economic and diplomatic priority.
2. Establish a dedicated Australia–India Screen and Cultural Exchange Fund.
3. Support an India-specific screen strategy involving federal and state agencies, industry councils, guilds, festivals, universities and cultural diplomacy bodies.
4. Fund producer labs, writer exchanges, market delegations and co-production development pathways.
5. Recognise diaspora-led screen organisations as cultural infrastructure.
6. Invest in education, upskilling and practical resources for Australian and Indian screen practitioners.
7. Support subtitling, translation, cultural consultancy, accessibility and legal/treaty guidance as essential creative labour.
8. Embed First Nations cultural protocols in all international screen engagement.
9. Strengthen distribution, festival, regional touring and audience-development pathways between Australia and India.
10. Connect screen culture more effectively with tourism, trade, education and foreign affairs.

## Conclusion

The Australia–India screen relationship has moved beyond possibility. The foundations now exist: diaspora, demand, talent, policy interest, a co-production agreement, festivals, companies, educational links and growing industry curiosity.

What is needed now is structure.

The next National Cultural Policy should not treat India as a footnote, a market visit or a red-carpet opportunity. It should recognise India as one of Australia’s most important cultural screen relationships.

The Australia India Film Council stands ready to work with government, agencies, industry and communities to help build that future — not as a one-off initiative, but as a long-term national cultural priority.