

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

As a former Director-General, National Library of Australia (retired April 2026), I write with experience of implementing Revive, the first iteration of the National Cultural Policy, in a national cultural institution which itself works with hundreds of cultural institutions across Australia.

Revive provides clear policy direction for cultural institutions which otherwise find themselves trying to convince ‘from the margins’ of adjacent policy arenas.

Revive’s five pillars remain sound as a policy framework.

First Nations First

Advance development of stand-alone legislation recognising Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP). While many institutions are developing and implementing ICIP protocols, these efforts do not yet have the force of law, leaving recognition of ICIP vulnerable to the views of governments, governing bodies and managers of the day.

The legislation must look beyond the immediate issue of preventing copying, mimicry and other exploitation of First Nations visual arts practice to the immense bodies of ICIP held by libraries, archives and museums. Provide specific funding to accelerate the work required to identify and manage this ICIP in respectful partnership with First Nations communities.

A Place for Every Story

Increase funding for the Community Heritage Grants program, a proven program now in its fourth decade.

Australia has a wealth of stories collected by and cared for by local community organisations. Many are in rural and regional areas; most operate on extraordinarily modest budgets.

Add specific streams for First Nations organisations and for well-planned and sustainable digitisation of these local stories to ensure Australia’s local stories are maintained for future generations.

Centrality of the Artist

Australia’s current stance in relation to copyright and AI must be maintained. Copyright, moral rights and Intellectual Cultural and Intellectual Property rights must not be suborned to the demands of AI and other tech companies seeking to use this property without permission or recompense.

Australia has existing models and organisations that could support a permissions and licensing regime. The fact that Australian artists have already had their intellectual property stolen by international AI companies should not deter Australia from upholding artists’ rights.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Reverse the Job-Ready Graduates Program in relation to the costs of arts and humanities degrees. Australia’s cultural institutions depend on skilled workforces with arts and humanities subject matter expertise, and the modes of thinking developed through arts and humanities enquiry.

Explicitly recognise the role that Australia’s vibrant public library system plays in Australia’s social, community and democratic life. The Department of Home Affairs’ Office for Social Cohesion has already recognised the role that this social infrastructure plays in a society at risk of division and fracture.

Engaging the Audience

Invest in a National Reading Strategy. Australia already has good data around who is and is not reading, and strong evidence around the value of reading in building creativity, empathy, knowledge, the skills required to identify, use and share trustworthy information, and for participating fully as citizens. This data can now be leveraged for an active strategy.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.