

National Cultural Policy Submission 2026

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As an independent visual artist who has also independently contributed to the arts in my City, in initiating and producing projects(exhibitors with performance art, arts writing) that always pay contributors, curation, and a creator and director of studio spaces there are a range of concerns that must be addressed as to our place within the arts, this would also apply to a range of artists such as musicians, dancers, writers but I know most clearly my artform and some disparity we may have in cases such as royalties, some standard rates even if just casually understood, much larger accepted project budgets. But there is a lot to be addressed for ALL artists in all areas. We are continually asked to contribute submissions for state and federal cultural policies while funding continues to decline, spaces are defunded or closed and basic conditions such as artists being paid for their creative work are still extremely lacking.

True Centrality of the Artist: Sector Equality, Value and Reverence

(Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist, Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

• BASIC INCOME FOR ARTISTS.

- **Absolute Value of the Artist:** Artists create the art/content/output that is the value the industry requires to exist; to fill galleries, to show in festivals, to sell to collectors, to curate into exhibitions, to require for opportunities, commissions, proposals etc. Yet Artists have no conditions as 'worker' or unique creators, we are paid in token fee's per project / artwork/exhibition. There are no rates of pay-award rates-minimum wage, no consistency of fee's, we may not be paid at all or in exposure coin which is still rife. On top of this, in many cases we still pay a fee or a commission and frequently both, not in a gallery covering costs and presenting buyers, but in non-manned public galleries where you are also required to be selected via rigorous proposals and also cover transport, install, documentation, sitting, promo, etc in both labour and cost.
- **Government Disproportion:** There is disproportion even in government who must example best practice, it is accepted to pay less or token fee's. For example, as peer assessors we may receive a fee for final meeting hours, yet much more reading and preparation is required, we are well aware the arts workers we are working with are being paid for every hour they work or a much higher percentage, same as reading our applications we write unpaid. Councils often charge to exhibit and take commission with very little assistance for install etc and do not see the issue in this, "we get plenty of applications wiling to show with these conditions" It must start and be exemplified on local, state and national government levels.
- **Unacceptable Expectations:** Yet we must demonstrate, prove, or reason our case on the basis of 'professional practice' 'career trajectory' 'professionalism' in a career where we do not have the basic entitlements, conditions, unacceptable notions such as working for free or having to pay to work as any other 'worker'. The fair work commission does not apply to us, and we have no known or tangible career ladder or trajectory, our career stages: emerging, mid or established are vaguely and conflictingly marked often by years practicing or since graduating and little else. Working in a career when you are generally not paid is not a professional career.
- **The Competitive Loop:** A large percentage of our work is preparing applications for competitive opportunities; this is unpaid and are becoming less and are often given to those who make better PR opps but don't always fit the brief. Some of these opportunities require unpaid or minimally paid workshops to compete for one place, or letters of reference. Orgs and Institutions appear to want a larger number of applicants for one 'winner.' How many artists need to be rejected? 20, 50, 100? We are tired of the competition, the rejections, the feedback if given at all that is arbitrary, and the amount of work just to compete, over and over and over. That we need to be fostered, pushed, grouped or workshoped to make a good commission or application or good work. Instead give us skills, ask us questions, let us talk, have faith in what we do in our medium.

- **Distinct Appropriate Rights and focus for Artists vs. Arts Workers:** Artists and arts workers are not in the same position and need to stop being lumped together. Arts workers are rightly fighting for better, fairer, more even, and transparent rights, more job security, and overtime—which are all really important. However, while artists keep everyone in jobs to some degree, we have not come close to this level of basic worker rights, income security, or value. Lumping the two distinct roles together actively harms both sides, as it masks the unique structural vulnerability of independent creators who work entirely without institutional safety nets.
- **Centrality of ARI and independents:** True creative centrality requires that the National Cultural Policy actively prioritize, recognise, and nurture the independent practitioners, curators, producers, and ARI's who sustain the grassroots ecosystem. The value of these initiatives extends far beyond basic funding metrics; independent creators regularly initiate highly inclusive, supportive, and impactful opportunities for the wider sector. However, the current framework causes severe burnout and systemic marginalisation by forcing grassroots platforms to compete directly with major organisations for baseline validation and structural recognition. Furthermore, peak bodies and government consultations routinely treat major institutions as the default voice of the arts, leaving independent creators excluded. The policy must establish structural mechanisms that guarantee direct independent representation in national discourse, ensuring that strategic support, public investment, and recognition flow past institutional gatekeepers and supports those who make immense contributions to the arts not as their paid job but as a commitment to their peers and ecology.

Decolonisation, Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination

(Pillar 1: First Nations First, Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story, Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist, Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

- **Structural Frameworks:** The National Cultural Policy must take a decolonial, anti-racist and anti-discrimination approach. It should respect and take leadership from those in the sector who are already working from a strong decolonial, anti-racist and anti-discrimination framework.
- **Universal Values over Political Definitions:** The IHRA definition of antisemitism must be removed from all arts, cultural and educational institutions and be replaced with the UN Core Stance of Values: “The UN asserts that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, without distinction of any kind, including race or ethnic origin. It maintains that no state, institution, group, or individual should make any discrimination in human rights and fundamental freedoms.”
- **Resisting Instrumentalization:** Arts and cultural institutions must respect cultural diversity, and support, champion and care for the diverse conversations that artists bring to their programs, particularly those who have been targeted in the media for speaking out against injustices. Artists must not be instrumentalised by institutions, lobbyists, the media and politicians.
- **Ethical Sector Leadership:** The National Cultural Policy must support artists to continue to be ethical and values-driven leaders of the sector and broader community. Artists must be able to speak freely, sign letters and participate in boycott actions without harming their reputation and livelihoods.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure and Freedom of Expression

(Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story, Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist, Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure, Pillar 5: Our People, Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience)

- **Infrastructure Reform:** Stronger institutions on all levels, and in all states with artists from ALL states. Small, med, and large. ARI (artist run), state, private, commercial, and experimental. And everything in between. All consulting with artists, artists on boards, taking feedback and really listening to their arts community without fear or repercussion. If artists are afraid to speak out in the arts, we have a big problem. Gallery models like 4 exhibitions a year are stagnant and diminish opportunities. Larger group exhibitions are needed more often, invitation not just application. Many invitations to varied career levels, not the same artists over and over, new combinations, fresh ideas, swap's and indoor, outdoor, residencies, touring varied exhibitions, also putting the artist as central. Free studios, studio visits, sharing visitors, sharing resources, curators looking further, deeper, wider, what was seen last month, what hasn't been seen, what needs to be seen again.

- **Artistic Freedom of Speech:** Strong cultural infrastructure must be based on artistic freedom of speech. This is already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act (11.e “to uphold and promote freedom of expression in the arts”) and needs to be upheld in the National Cultural Policy.
- **Accessibility and Disability Equity:** The policy must embed disability justice and accessibility at its core. Funding models must ensure fair pay, leadership roles, and direct consultation for artists and arts workers with disability. Publicly funded spaces and programs must be fully accessible for both creators and audiences, ensuring deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent practitioners are fully included, beyond token or virtue signally efforts. Disability only opportunities would be important to see, in regular programming and institutions not as separate “disability inclusion of the year”.
- **Protecting Critical Discourse:** In order to create strong infrastructure, art must be able to facilitate critical discourse, address political issues, and critique power and class structures. There must be an end to the culture of intimidation that prevents artists from expressing and creating art freely. The policy must actively address the prevalence of censorship, targeting, and cancellation of artists who speak out against injustices, particularly in relation to nations condemned by the UN for acts of apartheid, genocide, and war crimes.
- **Ending Political Interference:** The arts must remain independent and free from political interference through independent and ‘arms-length’ funding processes across federal, state and local government. Politicians at all levels must not influence or give advice that results in the provision or removal of funding support of a particular project or artist (enshrined in Article 14.2 of the Creative Australia Act).
- **Fair Representation:** The policy must guarantee that federal arts funding is shared fairly across all states, including South Australia. To make this work, all government and all other advisory bodies and consultation groups must include a balanced mix of members from every state. These positions must be paid, and they must be also inclusive beyond token of independent artists and grassroots contributors, rather than only letting major institutions, or regions represent the entire country.
- **Systemic Inquiry:** A key action must be to implement an inquiry into political interference in the arts, including through donations, board membership, and lobbying. Donors must not influence arts organisations and institutions. Board members with connections to political parties or lobbyists must be removed and boards must start containing many more artists and practicing creatives.
- **Institutional Outreach:** Institutions that reach out and are not closed off and insular. Where the donors don’t only get special treatment, the artists do. That nurture careers, that open their doors, that look to new audiences, that promote artists, that use their resources like documentation on their websites so past exhibitions can still be seen in their real in space glory, not just to give to the artists or go into storage. That give real tangible feedback, not just on failed proposals, that see those in the community working tirelessly with minimal resources to also support artists and make opportunities and band together, this includes publications. looking to regional, ARI’s not just major institutions.
- **Reclaiming Art Focus:** Education is absolutely crucial from primary school to year 12 to university/art school and here again the business/career focus of universities loses the creative and critical skills. Bring art focus back!

Protection from Generative AI and Exploitation of Creative Labor

(Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist, Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

- **Retain Copyright Control:** Artists must keep complete copyright ownership over their original work, imagery, text, and styles. AI companies cannot be allowed to bypass copyright law to feed our creative labour into their systems.
- **Right to Fair Payment:** If any artist's work, writing, or intellectual property is used to train or run AI models, tech companies must be legally required to negotiate licensing and pay fair royalties to the creator.

- **Explicit Consent Required:** No tech platform should be allowed to scrape or use an artist's digital output without their explicit, upfront permission. The law must prevent opt-out traps that force independent practitioners to police the internet themselves.
- **Preserving Funding for Human Labor:** Public grants, institutional recognition, and full copyright protections must be strictly reserved for work created by human intellectual and physical effort, protecting the livelihoods of real creators from automated market dilution.

This is not conclusive and is mainly focused on visual arts, I am painfully aware there are many, many, many more areas needed to address. I really hope to finally see culture and the arts finally recognised in Australia with the major impact they bring to all society, especially in its peak bodies and gov't organisations. Artists must be moved to the front, and all arts must be treated with the importance and immense value they add to our collective wellbeing, economy, voice and experience.