

## **Victorian Woodworkers Association Submission – National Cultural Policy**

The Victorian Woodworkers Association (VWA) urges the federal government to build on the *Revive* Policy by taking bolder steps to include craft and makers in the next policy.

Established in 1979, the VWA is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization and Victoria's leading woodcraft guild, with over 600 members spanning professional designer-makers, artists, amateurs, students, and industry groups. Its mission is to advance fine woodworking, foster career growth, and build connections within the craft. To achieve this, the VWA operates one of Melbourne's few inner-city workshops, offers subsidised space for emerging woodworkers (Artists in Residence) to develop sustainable businesses, and runs popular hobby classes. The organization also provides a supportive community for craftspeople, many of whom highlight its role in their mental health and wellbeing.

### **Training and Education**

Many professional fine woodworking programs have closed, reduced hours, or are at risk of shutting down. The *Sturt School for Wood* stands as Australia's only remaining full-time fine furniture training program, where many of our Artists in Residence trained before joining our studios. This decline is mirrored in the closure of independent galleries, including the *Bungendore Woodwork Gallery*, once the premier fine woodworking gallery in Australia. A 2023 market analysis commissioned by the VWA and completed by the Melbourne Business School found that while interest in woodworking is growing, few practitioners can thrive financially, making the craft unsustainable for most.

Without intervention, Australia risks losing embedded craft knowledge if the next generation cannot enter the field due to lack of support and the current cost-of-living crisis.

### **Our Recommendations**

1. Actions set out in *Revive* (p. 63) should be expanded to apply to craft training organisations, including wood, ceramics, metal, and textiles. While “craft” is mentioned throughout *Revive*, it is often included as an element of First Nations' Arts and Crafts. Craft must be recognised and supported just as the performing and visual arts are.
2. The actions set out in *Revive*, in relation to pillar 3, should be expanded to meet the clearly documented challenges of artists and craftspeople. Achievable Government levers to encourage downstream demand include:
  - extending and expanding low/no interest loans for the purchase of art and objects of craft;
  - re-introducing tax-deductibility for the purchase of art and objects of craft;
  - supporting the recommendations of the Australian Design Alliance, implementing legal protections for designers of furniture and objects (as

exists in most other western jurisdictions), encouraging home-grown practitioners to invest in product development and local manufacture.

3. The Victorian Woodworkers Association supports the three asks made by the Australian Craft and Design Centres (ACDC) network in their submission to this consultation:
  - a 10-year workforce development plan that addresses skills and training shortages for craftspeople and designers
  - the establishment of a dedicated craft and design structure within Creative Australia, with its own mandate to advocate for the sector, develop funding pathways, and coordinate across government
  - an export and tourism development strategy that positions Australian makers in international markets, including at showcase events like Milan Design Week