

Cultural Policy Submission

Introduction

I welcome this consultation opportunity for a new National Cultural Policy for Australia. There are many reasons why a new National Cultural Policy should be developed and many are outlined in this submission.

This submission starts with a recognition that Australia's two previous national cultural policies *Creative Nation* (1994) and *Creative Australia* (2013) were written for worlds that no longer exist. Since those times the global cultural, technological, economic, and geopolitical environment has transformed so dramatically that by 2026 the assumptions underpinning both policies are outdated.

Australia's cultural landscape is now shaped by far more complex diasporic networks than in 1994 or 2013 and since the mid-1990s, Australia has become more unequal (now placed in the more unequal half of the OECD).

These are the underlying forces framing any new National Cultural Policy will have to address:

1. Economic precarity
2. Distrust in institutions
3. Techno feudalism
4. Cultural and racial inequity
5. Climate disruption
6. Generational inequality

Not surprisingly, Australia has seen the rise of the racist voice and the threat of social fragmentation. These from Pauline Hanson inciting her resurgent extreme right-wing party.

"Islam cannot have a significant presence in Australia if we are to live in an open, secular and cohesive society."

"Now we are in danger of being swamped by Muslims who bear a culture and ideology that is incompatible with our own."

"Have no doubt that we will be living under sharia law and treated as second class citizens with second class rights if we keep heading down the path with the attitude, 'she'll be right, mate.'"

"You say, 'Well, there's good Muslims out there.' How can you tell me there are good Muslims?"

"Their religion concerns me because of what it says in the Koran. They hate Westerners. That's what it's all about."

(These appear repeatedly including the *ABC*, *The Straits Times*, and *The Jerusalem Post*.)

Given this, an overarching purpose of any new National Cultural Policy for Australia must be to enable conditions which promote and support **Social Cohesion**; to support mechanisms which build ‘shared feeling-worlds’.

How will a National Cultural Policy meet its many aspirations, all the while building the foundational goal of cultural resilience?

This submission proposes that there are three foundational moves to begin this priority task of cultivating ‘shared feeling-worlds’ for Australia. These moves begin a strategic framework to shape cultural participation, equity, and public value with preliminary actionable insights and policy levers, all with cross-sector implications.

A. Outcomes need to be shaped by an *Affect-infused Aesthetics* Policy

This move will address the 200-year bedevilling and abiding muddle between art and aesthetics on the one hand and the ‘shared feeling-worlds’ of a community on the other. In this formulation, affect and aesthetics are of the same matter; and seeks to undo a strangeness from which an ambitious curiosity about the affects, the body, and the senses end up fixated on only one tiny area of sensual life – the fine arts. This requires fresh thinking and a re-articulation of the purposes of culture and of art.

This fresh thinking will support

1. *Affect-infused Aesthetics* is a Public Good

This cultural policy will recognise that shared feeling is a public infrastructure that supports wellbeing, cohesion, and democratic life.

Policy language will compliment the language of the “consumption of culture” with the importance of participation in cultural activities which build shared feeling-worlds.

2. Affective Labour and Artist Wellbeing

Much of the labour of artists and cultural workers is often invisible and seen as marginal to the main business of life. This policy will recognise artistic and cultural effort as skilled work, wages to ensure sustainable careers, support fair pay and bvv safe workplaces, long-term creative development, and treat burnout, precarity, and emotional exhaustion as structural issues, not personal failings driven by ‘lifestyle’ choices.

3. *Affect-infused Aesthetics*, Embodied Participation and Everyday Creativity

Affect-infused Aesthetics expands cultural value beyond the formal arts to include community rituals (such as ANZAC day), craft making, community dance, movement, and embodied play and youth cultural practices (such as skate, cosplay, Minecraft, etc.)

This recognises such cultural practices as legitimate cultural sites, not peripheral hobbies.

4. Relationality and Social Connection will be seen as cultural outcomes requiring new evaluation measures.

This will sit alongside measuring outputs only (seats sold, number of exhibitions and products). Intercultural and intergenerational connections will assess collective agency and youth belonging through affective impact assessments (how did this project make people feel?), atmospheric audits, relational indicators like trust and embodied participation metrics like co-creation opportunities.

This will shift evaluation away from reductive KPIs toward qualitative, relational, and experiential measures which aligns with global shifts toward social impact frameworks and UNESCO's emphasis on culture as a driver of social cohesion.

5. Affect-infused Aesthetics will drive Cultural Safety and 'Fair Play'

Affect-infused aesthetics policy embeds cultural safety as a foundational principle. This is particularly so for first Nations governance over culturally grounded environments, anti-racist, disability-justice approaches and a recognition that harmful atmospheres (such as hostility/exclusion/excessive surveillance) are policy failures.

6. Affect-infused Aesthetics, Technology, and Digital Culture

Cultural policy must address how digital platforms shape feeling. This includes regulations encouraging platforms to foster connection rather than endless extraction and inclusion over polarisation and harassment, while supporting creative uses of AI, VR, and gaming that build shared imaginative worlds

B. Building Cultural Resilience Aligned with Sport

The two public spheres of *Sport and Recreation* and *Arts, Entertainment and Culture* are central in building 'shared feeling-worlds'. From them common values are lived out and shared identities built. National resilience is strengthened.

While the two sectors share these nation-defining and nation-building powers, they do not operate in the same ways. Two differences are worth noting. Firstly, Sport and Recreation always operate within 'a contest'. There are winners, and there are losers: and there is value in that achievement, and that loss. Events from arts and cultural sector are not typically designed as competitions. While eisteddfods are an exception, most events operate on principles of sharing, of inclusion - a demonstration of skills and capabilities without an expectation of reward - only recognition. And there is value in such recognition.

This leads to the second difference. Winners and losers give certainty and unambiguous clarity. "My team lost because...we were robbed!" Culture and the arts do not work that way. They require everyone to accept a degree of ambiguity in every outcome. Just as we cannot

take ‘Blue Poles’ to the High Court because ‘we don't like it’, it would be pointless to rank one year’s folkloric dance celebration to the next! The arts and cultural sector help build a tolerance of ambiguity - that the world is not simply black or white, with winners or losers. In our age of polarisation, it is art and cultural activities which can help communities to ‘disagree better’.

The ***National Sport Strategy 2024–2034 (Sport Horizon)*** is the Australian Government’s 10-year plan for the sport sector, setting national priorities, aligning government and sector efforts, and provides a long-term vision for participation, high performance, safety, inclusion, and international engagement. Sport Horizon also explicitly treats social cohesion as a core national outcome of sport. In it “sport is a social glue”, contributing to community belonging, and as a tool for national unity. Like Arts and Culture, Sport is a strategy specifically addressing the rising fragmentation characteristic of our times.

For the *Arts, Entertainment and Culture* sector to realise its national mission, it is imperative that it is funded at similar levels to the Sport Strategy. It is not.

Sport receives significantly more federal funding than Arts & Culture, especially when elite high-performance sport, infrastructure, and community participation programs are included. The differences are stark. For Sport, funding stands at \$700m–\$800m+ in identifiable programs, plus major capital projects. For the Arts and Cultural sector, funding stands at \$300m–\$350m+ in comparative programs. Of course, these figures move around, depending on how infrastructure and multi-year allocations are counted, but the comparative funding levels are unacceptable. In the 2024-2025 budget the National ***Sport Strategy 2024–2034 (Sport Horizon)*** receives **roughly double** the direct program funding for existing National Cultural Policy work.

C. The Social Dividend of Investing in Arts and Cultural Education.

Australia’s new and next Cultural Policy will benefit massively by adopting an *Affects-infused Aesthetics Policy*, and recognising that Sport and Recreation activities are best understood as complimentary with arts and cultural activities. Both are potent creators of Australia’s ‘shared feeling-worlds’ and play a mobilising role in building social cohesion, identifying national character traits, shared values, and affirming national pride and identity.

This third and final move to refresh a National Cultural Policy for inclusion and balance involves Education, in its broadest sense. In breadth it embraces all matters to do with education; from infants to lifelong learning and from mandatory schooling to community-initiated programs for life transitions and ever-evolving life purposes.

The range of educational practices gathered up as arts and cultural activities is almost inestimable. It is worth being reminded of the following portfolio of benefits available to countries with arts and culture rich policies. We can start with Education itself.

1. EDUCATION

Arts-rich learning environments consistently outperform arts-poor ones across cognition, motivation, memory, and social development. Researched and confirmed benefits are identified as follows:

1. **Strengthened core cognitive processes - building cognitive architecture**

activates and integrates multiple brain systems at once:

- Attention and focus
- Working memory
- Executive function
- Pattern recognition
- Spatial reasoning
- Neural plasticity

2. **Deepened understanding through embodiment:**

- Relational
- Sensory
- Emotional

3. **Grounding abstract concepts in lived experience.**

This is especially important for:

- multilingual learners
- neurodiverse learners
- students who struggle with text-dominant instruction

4. **Increased motivation, curiosity, and engagement**

5. **Improved memory and retention**

6. **Initiating collaboration and social learning**

7. **Improving learning transfer**

8. **Learning through Play**

Neuroscience and neuroaesthetics shows childhood play increases

- curiosity
- experimentation
- pattern-seeking
- risk-safe exploration
- emotional engagement

As a cognitive stance, play remains active throughout adulthood as a way of managing complexity.

2. PROVIDING AN INDUCTION TO THE ARTS

Introducing students and communities to:

- ‘Recognised’ works which make up cultural canons.
- The skills of interpreting, presenting, adapting and curating “the best that has been thought and said” (Matthew Arnold, 1869)

- Affective reasoning is the human capacity to understand, organize, and communicate patterns of feeling through the symbolic forms of art. (Suzanne K Langer)
- Cultural capital and cultural heritage
- Performing Arts and GLAM Sectors (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums)

3. HEALTH EDUCATION

Documented in over 3,000 studies The World Health Organization (WHO) notes the following benefits which flow from arts and cultural activities.

- Mental health (reduced anxiety, depression, stress)
- Physical health (pain management, rehabilitation, chronic illness support)
- Social wellbeing (connection, belonging, community cohesion)
- Prevention and health promotion across the lifespan
- Higher life satisfaction
- Lower loneliness
- Better cognitive health in ageing
- Stronger community trust and participation

Wellbeing

- Activate reward, empathy, and social bonding networks
- Support emotional regulation
- Strengthen neural plasticity
- Improve memory, attention, and executive function

Arts-on-prescription (social prescribing)

In recent research into the effects of art on the brain, Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross made groundbreaking discoveries, including the finding that one or more artistic experiences per month can extend life by up to ten years. These insights radically reshape our understanding of art and culture on health.

1. Doctors are now prescribing 'nature pills', based on studies showing that spending time outdoors has a measurable effect on regulating our physiological systems.
2. Working with your hands using clay, textiles and earth stimulates the skin and nerve endings and activates the body's internal sensory receptors, creating an immediate sense of focus.
3. Just 45 minutes of making art lowers cortisol levels.
4. Singing and humming activate the vagus nerve, which in turn stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting calm and relaxation.
5. Visiting museums is prescribed by doctors to improve sensory engagement and neuroplasticity.

This research has documented reduced GP visits, improved mental health and better chronic illness management plans and saved billions of dollars in quality-of-life gains.

4. LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

1. Emotional Intelligence & Empathy understandings
2. Creative Problem-Solving & Innovation
 - Generate multiple solutions
 - Embrace ambiguity
 - Make unexpected connections
 - Think laterally rather than linearly
3. Imagination & Visioning
 - Scenario thinking
 - The ability to “see” possibilities before they’re real
4. Communication & Presence
 - Embodied confidence
 - Persuasive storytelling
 - Audience awareness
 - Nonverbal communication
5. Collaboration & Collective Intelligence
 - Co-create
 - Listen deeply
 - Share authorship
 - Navigate group dynamics
 - Build ensemble trust
6. Resilience & Adaptability
 - Risk-taking
 - Failure as learning
 - Improvisation
 - Comfort with uncertainty
7. Cultural Intelligence & Equity-Centered
 - Diverse artistic traditions
 - Cultural humility
 - Awareness of power and representation
 - Sensitivity to community narratives
 - Respect for pluralism

5. COMMUNITY & CULTURE

Identity, belonging, and cultural connection

- Express communities’ identity
- Explore multiple perspectives
- Increased social cohesion
- Strengthened cultural identity
- Improved intergenerational connection
- Enhanced community resilience

6. CREATIVITY & IMAGINATION

1. Linking ideas that don’t normally go together.
 - Metaphor
 - Symbolism
 - Analogy

- Cross-modal thinking (sound → image, movement → emotion)
- Divergent thinking
- Tolerance for ambiguity
- Builds neural networks that support innovative thinking.

2. Training the brain to make unexpected connections

3. Integrate emotion with cognition

4. Cultural imagination

Engaging with diverse artistic traditions exposes people to:

- Alternative worldviews
- Different aesthetic logics
- New symbolic systems
- Unfamiliar ways of sensing and knowing

5. Speculative thinking

- Imagine worlds that don't exist
- Identities we haven't lived
- Futures that haven't happened

6. Collaborative creativity

- Ensemble care
- Co-creation
- Shared authorship
- Listening and adapting
- Building on others' ideas

7. INNOVATION

Because innovation creates value faster than competitors, and arts training drives innovation, then the arts serve as a strategic economic asset. The arts build the neural capacity to **pivot**, which is the heart of innovation, alongside:

- Flexibility
- Imagination
- Risk-taking
- Pattern-making
- Embodied problem-solving.

The capacity 'to innovate repeatedly' comes from:

- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Imagination
- Risk tolerance
- Cultural diversity
- Play and experimentation

8. AGENCY

- Adults and children who can express ideas clearly.
- Adults and children who are not afraid to be seen.

- To challenge disinformation.
- Promote democratic engagement.
- Challenge dominant narratives.

Given the portfolio of benefits which flow from arts and cultural education, two matters directly aligned with existing government priorities should be noted.

Firstly: *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place* is the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy, released in 2023. It stands as a five-year plan to rebuild and reshape Australia's arts, entertainment and cultural sector. *Revive* presents the sector with 5 Pillars - all supported. However, given the breadth and diversity of the impact of the arts and culture on education, both compulsory and credentialled, as well as Community-based and self-directed, this submission supports the creation of a sixth pillar called **Arts and Cultural Education** as a strategic lever to shape social cohesion, cultural identity, wellbeing, and democratic life. As a sixth pillar, **Arts and Cultural Education** would serve both Australia's Education and Cultural infrastructure.

Secondly: That the training of elite and high-performance workers in the Arts and Cultural sectors should be equivalent to the those undertaking elite and high-performance training in Sports and Recreation. At present the funding gap is more than \$44m, before considering the \$249.7m allocation for the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) upgrade.

Conclusion:

Thank you for this opportunity to add to the development of this new National Cultural Policy. I trust these inputs will help shape the emerging policy and the three moves outlined adequately contextualise the features of a dynamic and serviceable National Cultural Policy to take us towards 2040.

I look forward to ongoing engagement with this Policy work.

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