

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

Towards a New National Cultural Policy

As a cultural producer, photographer, writer and independent practitioner working across heritage, cultural tourism, festivals, public engagement and community-led cultural initiatives, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

My feedback primarily relates to **Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure** and **Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience**.

Over the past two decades I have worked across a broad range of cultural and civic programs, including Brisbane Open House, Gold Coast Open House and Sunshine Coast Open House, alongside major public festivals and events including Oktoberfest Brisbane, Bluewater Festival and Long Table Shorncliffe Pier. I am also Chair of Brisbane Living Heritage, a role focused on strengthening awareness and appreciation of Brisbane's heritage places, stories and cultural identity through public engagement and advocacy.

Alongside this work, I created *Heritage Hands*, an ongoing documentation project exploring endangered crafts, traditional trades and artisan practices across Australia. What began as a photography, storytelling and publishing project has evolved into a broader public engagement platform incorporating exhibitions, talks, community conversations and the future development of festival-style programming centred around living heritage, participation and intergenerational knowledge sharing, informed by international models such as the UK's Heritage Crafts initiative, including approaches to endangered craft recognition, succession pathways and skills preservation.

Through this work, I have seen firsthand that Australia's cultural infrastructure extends far beyond our major institutions. It exists in regional workshops, suburban halls, maker spaces, local museums, libraries, historical societies, festivals, community organisations and in the hands of practitioners carrying knowledge across generations.

Living Heritage as Cultural Infrastructure

Australia's cultural policy framework has historically focused heavily on traditional arts institutions and contemporary creative sectors. While these are essential, there remains an under-recognition of living heritage practices, traditional trades, artisanship and intergenerational knowledge transfer as important components of Australia's broader cultural ecosystem.

Across the country, highly skilled makers, craftspeople and heritage practitioners continue to preserve specialised knowledge systems that are culturally significant, economically valuable and deeply connected to identity and place. Yet much of this work exists outside formal support structures and often relies on unpaid labour, ageing practitioners and informal community networks to survive.

These practices are not simply nostalgic pursuits. They preserve material literacy, technical expertise, cultural memory and human-centred creative practices that contribute meaningfully to education, tourism, sustainability and community participation.

Importantly, they also offer increasingly rare opportunities for direct human connection in a rapidly digitised world.

There is significant opportunity for the next National Cultural Policy to more explicitly recognise living heritage and traditional knowledge practices as part of Australia's cultural infrastructure. This could include stronger support for:

- intergenerational skills transfer and apprenticeship-style learning
- community-led heritage and maker festivals
- regional cultural tourism initiatives
- public demonstrations and participatory programming
- and partnerships connecting culture, tourism, education and local economic development.

Some of the strongest opportunities for future cultural resilience may come from supporting localised and regional cultural ecosystems that enable communities to actively participate in knowledge sharing, creative practice and cultural stewardship within their own places and contexts.

Australia has the opportunity to position living heritage not as a niche interest, but as an active and evolving part of contemporary cultural life.

Place-Based Cultural Participation Matters

One of the greatest strengths of Australia's cultural landscape is that culture happens everywhere - not only within major metropolitan institutions.

Some of the most meaningful cultural engagement occurs at a local level through neighbourhood festivals, heritage walks, open buildings programs, workshops, artist-led experiences, community archives, public talks and place-based storytelling initiatives. These activities help communities understand their histories, connect across generations and develop stronger senses of belonging and civic identity.

Programs such as Open House initiatives across Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast demonstrate the enormous public appetite for accessible, place-based cultural participation. Likewise, projects such as the recent National Trust Queensland Heritage Award-winning Monto Open Doors program highlight the cultural and social value of locally driven heritage activation in regional communities.

Much of this work is also sustained by volunteers and community advocates who contribute extraordinary amounts of time, knowledge and care to preserving local stories, collections, traditions and cultural experiences. These individuals represent an essential but often under-recognised part of Australia's cultural infrastructure. Supporting volunteer sustainability, succession and capability development will be increasingly important to the long-term resilience of the sector.

These experiences are often highly successful because they are participatory, accessible and deeply connected to place. They encourage people to actively engage with culture rather than passively consume it.

The next National Cultural Policy should continue to recognise and invest in locally embedded cultural ecosystems, particularly in suburban and regional communities where cultural participation is often highly active but structurally under-supported.

Audiences Are Seeking Participation and Connection

Audience behaviours are continuing to evolve. Increasingly, people are seeking cultural experiences that are immersive, authentic, educational and participatory.

This shift presents enormous opportunity for Australia's cultural sector.

Across my work, I have consistently observed strong audience demand for experiences that involve direct engagement with artists, makers, storytellers and communities. Workshops, demonstrations, talks, open studios, live making, heritage festivals and behind-the-scenes experiences all create deeper forms of participation and connection.

These forms of engagement are particularly important in attracting audiences who may not traditionally engage with formal arts institutions.

They also create stronger intersections between culture, tourism, education and community wellbeing. At a time of increasing social isolation and digital saturation, participatory cultural experiences also provide important opportunities for human connection, intergenerational exchange, wellbeing and community resilience - benefiting both creative practitioners and audiences alike.

Australia's future cultural infrastructure should support not only the presentation of culture, but also participation in culture. This requires continued investment in accessible programming, community partnerships, public activation and innovative approaches to audience engagement.

Sustainability for Independent Cultural Producers

Much of Australia's cultural innovation is driven by small independent practitioners and producers working across disciplines, communities and sectors. These individuals often operate without stable infrastructure, long-term funding or sustainable employment pathways, despite delivering significant public cultural value.

Independent cultural producers frequently sit at the intersection of arts, heritage, tourism, education and community development, yet existing funding and policy frameworks do not always reflect the interdisciplinary nature of this work.

There remains significant reliance across the sector on short-term project funding, unpaid labour and personal financial risk. While passion and commitment continue to drive many initiatives forward, these models are difficult to sustain long term.

If Australia wishes to build a resilient and future-focused cultural sector, greater attention must be given to supporting the sustainability of independent and community-led cultural practice, including long-term partnership models, operational support and pathways for cross-sector collaboration.

Looking Forward

Australia has an opportunity to broaden how it defines cultural infrastructure and cultural participation.

The future of Australian culture will not be sustained by major institutions alone. It will also be shaped by local makers, independent producers, community organisations, regional initiatives and the everyday cultural participation occurring across the country.

As Australia looks toward 2032, the Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games, and beyond, there is an important opportunity to consider the long-term cultural and heritage legacy we wish to create alongside major infrastructure and global events. Lasting cultural impact will not come solely from large-scale venues or temporary programming, but from sustained investment in local cultural ecosystems, community participation, creative skills, storytelling and place-based identity.

Major national moments present an opportunity to strengthen enduring cultural capacity across suburban, regional and grassroots communities - ensuring the legacy of 2032 includes stronger cultural connection, participation and visibility long after the events themselves conclude. This includes opportunities to elevate Australia's living heritage traditions, regional creative identities and community-led cultural participation as part of the nation's broader cultural story.

There is enormous untapped potential in cultural experiences that connect heritage, creativity, tourism, education and community participation. I am currently developing future-facing cultural initiatives that build on these intersections, including the evolution of *Heritage Hands* into broader public programming and festival experiences, as well as the development of a major new legacy cultural event for South East Queensland focused on creativity, place and community connection.

These types of initiatives demonstrate the growing public appetite for cultural experiences that are participatory, locally grounded and deeply human.

The next National Cultural Policy has an important opportunity to recognise, support and strengthen these interconnected ecosystems - ensuring Australian culture remains diverse, participatory, resilient, locally grounded and internationally distinctive for generations to come

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