

Submission to Australia's National Cultural Policy

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Hard infrastructure considerations in Northern Australia

The provision of cultural infrastructure and the strategic urban planning and landscaping can transform a regional city.

Regional sector stakeholders continue to acknowledge the benefit of high level strategic planning that leads to the successful provision of arts and culture infrastructure and beautiful public art and appropriately landscaped civic spaces.

Indigenous landmarks are critical in regional cities and particularly important in Northern Australia. The lack of Indigenous keeping places is a critical gap for regional Australian cities.

Urban street upgrades are welcome in regional cities, but more could be done to enhance our streets. Better walkability and appropriate public art more generally would enhance the accessibility and legibility of arts infrastructure.

There is potential for regional multifunctional art centres, catering for day and night activation, which is not captured in the current tradition of separating art from infrastructure. Alternative multi-arts venues have the potential to bring communities of practice together with general audiences and people.

In regional centres there is a need for smaller arts spaces that allow different parts of the ecology to grow, including experimental, underground, and youth arts programming.

There is often an uneven provision of arts and culture infrastructure across regional cities.

Soft Infrastructure

There are limited mechanisms that draw together the broader sector, however capacity sharing can occur effectively in sub-sector clusters.

There is potential to strategically enhance the capacity of the regional arts sector leading into the roll out of the cultural events associated with the 2032 Brisbane Olympics.

There is demand for broad regional programs that rely on dedicated programs of influence, infrastructure, and resources to be valued over a larger geographical region than a local government area demarcation. All tiers of government need to work together to ensure efficient pipelines for arts and cultural development.

Governments need to understand the impact and significance of arts, cultural and creative activity to ensure a sustained period of growth. Benefits to regional economies result from the demand for development, production and presentation of culture and the arts. The demand and use of arts facilities remains high.

The organisation of arts leaders into a cohesive voice will provide an avenue to develop greater support and appreciation of the efforts of the sector in the wider political and cultural context of northern Australia. Support for arts leadership in regional clusters can form a conduit for sector growth.

Regions need to connect national arts programs while remaining unique expressions of place and identity.

Collections

Indigenous keeping places are a critical piece of infrastructure to maintain historical material culture. Currently, significant artefacts are scattered around the region and international collections seek to repatriate to appropriate facilities for conservation and protection. Cities in Northern Australia are uniquely positioned with higher populations of First Nations people.

Significant AAA grade storage facilities for both Indigenous and non-indigenous collections is an ongoing and immediate concern for the sector in Northern Australia's regional cities. The sector's interpretation of collections includes oral and social history recordings, precincts, public art, murals along with art, archives and artefacts.

Indigenous arts

There is a clear argument for arts and cultural development, resources and infrastructure representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, to be centred in Cairns and other cities in Northern Australia.

A key step to achieving equity in the sector is growing Indigenous leadership in broader arts, cultural and creative management, projects and programming scenarios.

Arts and cultural capital or destination?

There is a sense that Cairns is an important hub for northern Queensland and should aim be part of a strong network across Northern Australia with links to the Pacific and Southeast Asia.

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of local and grassroots arts and culture to any status that represents Cairns as a capital; touring product should only be part of a wider ecology.

Tourism organisations and operators could do more to shape Cairns into an arts and culture destination, although reef and rainforest tourism remain the drawcard for the region.

Arts and tourism

Participation in the tourism market is out of range of many small organisations. The cost of participation and meeting minimum expectations is beyond the means of many in the sector.

The sector is largely disengaged from tourism activity, preferring to cater at a level for immediate local audiences or traditional arts touring markets.

Having arts company boards, directors and managers integrate tourism outcomes as strategic indicators has the potential to focus the sector efforts on integration with the tourism economic cluster.

Public art

There are many success stories of public art placement, reflecting a region's connections to place. In Northern Australia where remote communities have unique perspectives, such as Cape York and the Torres Strait, regional cities become cultural and artistic hubs providing connections to networks and markets beyond sea and Country.

It is important for regional council's to have in place procedures for consultation on public art, however there is a perception/sentiment in the sector that there could be better processes to commission, procure and place public art.

Arts and disability

Accessibility associated with infrastructure should be balanced with an increased level of engagement involving inclusive programming.

Inclusion should be a central strength of programs rather than a segregation or add-on.

Young creatives

A Young Creatives Strategy is a critical need. There remains a sense of losing a young generation, with limited youth-oriented organisations, few young people on boards or committees and diminishing pathways at tertiary education institutions.

The young generation needs to be engaged through new models and methods that include new technologies.

Internships and mentorships are key to young people's knowledge and skill sets so they reach their full potential.

Art, culture, environment

The natural environment is the central inspiration for all artforms in Northern Australia; the environment itself is a backdrop and sustenance to art making.

Foregrounding the connection between environment, culture and the arts is desirable and part of the regional city and region's cutting edge.