

Design Tasmania

Submission to the National Cultural Policy

Date: May 2026
To: National Cultural Policy Consultation, Office for the Arts
From: Design Tasmania

Design Tasmania has operated from our historic and architecturally celebrated galleries in Launceston for fifty years. We are a public institution – a gallery, a design store, a collection, and a programming body working across exhibition, residency, professional development, and retail to develop the careers of designers and makers in Lutruwita/Tasmania and connect their work with audiences, buyers, and national peers.

Our galleries are a working part of northern Tasmania's visitor economy. Our Design Store sells exclusively Tasmanian-designed and made objects, representing sixty-five designers – a commercial platform for Tasmanian making practice with no equivalent in the state. Our permanent collection of contemporary furniture and crafted objects, the Design Tasmania Wood Collection, documents design in Tasmanian timber across five decades: a record of practice built on some of the world's rarest materials, and on the complex relationship between Tasmanian communities, industries and our forests.

We are the peak body for design and craft in Lutruwita/Tasmania. This submission is made with that responsibility in mind and in active support of the joint submission of the Australian Craft and Design Centres network (ACDC), of which we are a founding member.

The Tasmanian context

The formal pathways through which designers and makers enter this sector in Lutruwita/Tasmania are disappearing.

In October 2025, TasTAFE announced the elimination of nine Arts and Design courses by the end of the year, affecting approximately five hundred enrolled students. The courses cut include visual arts, design, fashion, and textiles – disciplines that have historically supplied the sector we represent. The state government described these courses as not "necessarily delivering great student outcomes and they're not delivering great outcomes for our economy"¹ – but the overwhelming evidence runs the other way, with the fashion and textiles industry alone employing 7,000 people in Tasmania and bringing in \$400m each year.²

Critical industry partners such as Waverley Mills, Australia's last fully vertical woollen mill operating in Launceston since 1874, require a pipeline of skilled designers and textile practitioners to remain viable, and removing fashion and textiles education severs the connection between local design talent and Tasmanian manufacturing capability.

At University of Tasmania, the School of Fine Furniture – the first purpose-built specialist furniture education facility in Australia – no longer operates in the form that produced the previous generation of renowned practitioners such as Brodie Neill and Kevin Perkins who were instrumental in cementing Tasmania's signature reputation for fine furniture. Design Tasmania's celebrated *Tasmania Makes* program, which focuses upon linking contemporary object designers and craftspeople with senior mentoring support to develop and test new design work and explore expanded market opportunities, emerged as a direct consequence of the vacuum left by the withdrawal of formal training but is not a replacement for institutional learning.

Tasmania has a global reputation for the quality of its timber designers and makers. That reputation was built on access to some of the world's rarest materials and a culture of craft with deep roots in this island. But it is not self-sustaining. Without formal pathways, without investment in the programs that fill the gap they leave, and without infrastructure connecting emerging practitioners with experienced mentors and industry, the well runs critically dry.

¹ <https://pulsetasmania.com.au/news/tastafe-arts-courses-face-5000-fee-hike-as-subsidies-axed/>

² <https://aeutas.org.au/tastafe-to-axe-12-courses-26-staff-following-5400-fee-hike/>

This is not Tasmania just reflecting a national trend. The island's geographic isolation compounds the impact of every withdrawn pathway. A designer in Tasmania who loses access to vocational training does not have an equivalent institution a commute away.

We support the ACDC network's call for a ten-year workforce plan for craft and design. In Tasmania's case, that plan must account for the specific acceleration of pathway loss: TasTAFE cutting the disciplines that feed this sector at the same time as specialist higher education provision contracts.

Recognising craft and design as distinct

Design and craft in Tasmania is not a subcategory of visual art. It is practice rooted in material expression, in intergenerational knowledge transmission, in the resourceful and DIY culture of a small island community, and in the living traditions of the Palawa people, who are this country's first makers.

Our 2023 program *Silk Stockings at the Babel Island Store* – a collaboration between First Nations designers Michelle Maynard, Lillian Wheatley, and Takira Simon-Brown, mentored by Gunditjmarra and Torres Strait Islander artist Lisa Waup, Melbourne-based fashion designer Ingrid Verner, and Design Tasmania Artistic Director Michelle Boyde – was the first dedicated exhibition of Tasmanian First Nations fashion and textile design. It was also a demonstration of what craft means here: the weaving together of cultural memory and healing, material practice, and contemporary design into work that cannot be classified as visual art without losing what it is.

The distinctiveness of design and craft – including connection to manufacturing, intergenerational and First Nations traditions, and role in the visitor economy – is not reflected in funding structures or policy settings. This limits capability, limits strategic response to market opportunities, and leaves the sector without adequate political advocacy at either state or federal level.

For this sector to receive the investment it warrants, it needs to be properly defined and separately recognised within funding structures. Design Tasmania endorses the ACDC network's call for dedicated craft and design capacity within Creative Australia, in a similar vein to the distinct structural representation of Music Australia within that entity.

Getting work off-island

For designers and makers in Tasmania, reaching national and international audiences carries costs not shared equally with mainland practitioners. Bass Strait sits between every Tasmanian maker and trade and design fairs, residencies, curatorial connections and national markets. The overhead of touring Tasmanian work interstate and internationally is substantially higher than from any mainland city.

Curatorial relationships through which opportunities are initiated and sustained require physical presence. Bringing mentors and curators to Tasmania, as Design Tasmania does through our programs, is one way to bridge that gap, and it requires resourcing. A national export and tourism development strategy that does not account for the logistical reality of geographic isolation will not serve Tasmanian practitioners equally. We ask that the National Cultural Policy explicitly recognise the island state context and include resourcing mechanisms that address the compounding disadvantage of distance for equal access to national opportunity.

We support the full submission of the ACDC network and add to it here the perspective of an island institution that has spent fifty years developing what we believe is one of Australia's most distinctively voiced design and making cultures. The opportunity in this policy process is to recognise that culture for what it is, fund it accordingly, and build the structures that allow it to thrive.

Yours sincerely,

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