

Helen Britton
Living Treasure: Master of Australian Craft

24.05.2026

I have written twice now to the Australian government expressing my sadness and consternation at the closure of Australian Design Centre. The letters are below as part of this document.

A recent report tabled by NSW parliament on April 29 recommends the following::

Recommendation 12: "That the NSW Government urgently restore baseline funding to the Australian Design Centre from \$150,000 to \$500,000 per annum for 2026 and 2027 to enable the state's only government-supported institution dedicated to craft and design to continue operations beyond 30 June 2026."

The challenge is to get current government to understand and acknowledge excellent institutions such as ADC and ensure their longevity, giving them core funding so that their human resources are funneled into projects rather than a constant battle to secure finances for their basic operations.

ADC through the Living Treasure Aware has provided me with opportunities nationally and internationally. This award sparks the imagination of so many and has been a source of increased interest and understanding not only of my practice, but also of all the practitioners who have received this award. I have heard so often from international institutions how forward thinking Australian Cultural Policy makers must be to implement such an award. The destruction of ADC will bring an end to the unique and remarkable The Living Treasure Award.

What needs to be reflected in any New Cultural Policy is the recognition and support of valuable, highly functional, existing and irreplaceable institutions like ADC. What is important is to recognize that culture is built over long periods of time. Destroying institutions such as ADC with the idea to bring in something new is not only irresponsible, but also a massive waste of resources and shows a lack of comprehension of the value of existing cultural networks. ADC should be refunded immediately and its significance as a vibrant and well-functioning institution celebrated.

Written 20.02.2026

To the Hon Anthony Albanese PM
Prime Minister



To The Hon Tony Burke MP



Dear Hon. Mr Albanese PM, Dear Hon. Mr Burke MP,

I am writing to you to once again express my consternation and now distress at the impending closure of Australian Design Centre due to the removal of core funding at both a federal and state level. I am reattaching my original correspondence to The Prime Minister for reference.

Since writing in November last year the world has darkened further with the horrible trauma of Bondi and new levels of grotesque behaviour in international politics. I am sure you have both experienced moments of despair while facing the challenges of leading a country through these trying times. I wish you both strength, courage and clarity.

For many months now [REDACTED] Australian Design Centre have been challenged at a professional and emotional level as they try to avert the destruction of this unique cultural ecosystem dear to thousands of artists and tens of thousands of visitors, developed over 62 years of dedicated work. Many of us who have worked with ADC have reached out to government and yet it would seem our words will not be read, our voices not heard. It is heartbreaking.

It defies all logic not to find the piddling (!) amount of money to preserve this valuable cultural institution. This is an institution that is vibrant, inclusive and loved, providing a quality service that brings communities together and helps create a healthy social fabric through showcasing beauty, creativity and skill. This is an institution that encourages people to put down their phones and make things with their hands.

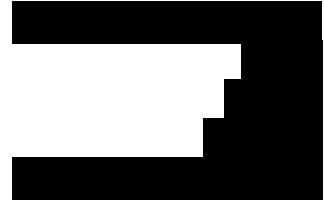
I am currently in Newcastle, accompanying the Australian Design Centres 9 venue regional tour of my exhibition "The Story So Far" as Living Treasure : Master of Australian Craft. When talking to people in the arts community here in Newcastle the level of disdain and frustration towards government due to what is seen as the wanton destruction of the arts particularly in NSW is alarming. These are such fractious times, with critical shifts in the political landscape of this country. I honestly believe it is perilous to underestimate the division and disenfranchisement that the destruction of these kinds of institutions causes.

I can only ask you once again to please consider finding a way to reinstate and permanently secure core funding for Australian Design Centre. So many good people will be so thankful as will future generations.

With my sincere and kindest regards,

Helen Britton
Living Treasure: Master of Australian Craft

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05.11.2025

To the Hon. Anthony Albanese PM
Prime Minister



Dear Honourable Mr Albanese PM,

I am writing to you to express my consternation at the impending closure of Australian Design Centre due to the withdrawal of both state and federal core funding.

For months now [REDACTED] Australian Design Centre [REDACTED] along with a significant number of arts professionals in Australia and internationally, have fought to bring attention to the impending demise of this 61-year-old institution due to decisions made by government bodies that clearly have little idea of, or interest in, the calamity they have created through their ill-judged decisions.

We are all facing significant challenges with the monumental shifts in politics, the economy, and the environment. The stress of these shifts adds to declining social cohesion, an erosion of trust in government institutions, a spreading feeling of dispossession, disaffection, disenfranchisement. We watch massive amounts of funding being poured into war machinery, this fact alone causing anxiety and social tension. In these trying times it is culture that provides society with a respite from anguish, and cultural institutions that give us hope as they showcase the beauty of what it means to be human. Australian Design Centre is exactly such an organisation, representing in the course of its operations, thousands of artists and providing a diverse community and cultural hub with tens of thousands of visitors each year. The value of the sense of stability provided by this and similar institutions in Australia at a grass roots level should not be underestimated. It is their unique ability to bring together a range of people and create a sense of community and cohesion, a sense of belonging that contributes to society, diffusing polarisation, and discontentment.

I do not need to lecture you, Prime Minister, on the value of micro economies. Nor on the economic value of the arts. The data is readily available. What is important to mention is that Australian Design Centre represents artists whose practice focuses on making things with their hands. Craftspeople and designers who create things also for everyday use. The closure of Australian Design Centre will leave N.S.W. as the only state without a dedicated centre for these practices. Designers and Craftspeople tend to be a little humbler than capital A Artists, often coming from working class backgrounds, often being women. Perhaps that is why it has been so easy for the government institutions to feel no qualms about withdrawing funding?

Environmental issues have always interested me. I am including with this letter a copy of the response from the office of the Prime Minister written to me in 1979, regarding the protection of whales. I had written to the Hon Malcom Frazer expressing my consternation at the killing of whales in Australian waters. Whaling stopped that very year, and as a child of 12 I felt as if I could indeed contribute to the good and that the powers that be would listen. I see Australian Design Centre not only as an institution but a unique and valuable ecosystem. We should never forget that as human animals we too can create treasured ecosystems through our activities. It would be irresponsible beyond words to destroy this ecosystem, just as it would have been irresponsible to hunt whales to extinction.

Australian Design Centre initiated Living Treasures: Masters of Australia Craft over twenty years ago and I am the 10th recipient of that award. Having grown up with a single Mum just like you Prime Minister, from a working-class background of strong Labour supporters, it is a marvellous feeling, and both my Mum and I are very proud. My international profile has drawn a great deal of attention to the award and my success has been celebrated not only at home but across Europe and America with expressions of admiration at the foresight of Australia and Australian Design Centre in creating such an award. With the pending demise of Australian Design Centre this award too will vanish. Rather than celebrating future generations of living treasures, I will be the last. Now I am bombarded with questions from such venerable institutions as The Chamber of Crafts of Bavaria and the Museum of Art and Design in New York, with both of whom I have exhibited my work, asking me: Why this is happening? What was the government thinking? What is being done to resolve this errant decision? So, what should I tell them Prime Minister? What argument can justify this wanton destruction?

Dear Prime Minister Albanese, I can only implore you as your Living Treasure: Master of Australian Craft to reinstate core funding permanently to Australian Design Centre without further delay. Future generations will look back and thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Helen Britton
Living treasure. Master of Australian Craft.



THE DEPARTMENT OF
THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET

27 FEB 1979

[REDACTED]
I am writing to thank you for your recent message to the Prime Minister concerning the protection of whales.

It is expected that the Government will soon be in a position to make final decisions on the Report of the Inquiry into Whales and Whaling.

In the meantime, you will be pleased to learn that at its recent meeting in Tokyo, the International Whaling Commission placed a zero quota for 1979 on sperm whales in the waters off the Western Australian coast between the longitudes 90° and 130° East (Division 5) i.e. approximately between the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Barrow Island, stretching between the equator and the Antarctic coast.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
(G.C. Gourlay)
Senior Adviser
Operations Branch