



SUBMISSION TO THE NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY, MAY 2026

REVIVE CULTURE FOR CLIMATE



The Cultural Gardeners welcome an opportunity to revisit the REVIVE Cultural Policy as conditions in the natural world continue to deteriorate on all fronts, as evidenced in the State of the Environment Report 2021 (updated 2025) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Reports. This includes resource wars that are increasingly harming civilians, defying human rights and contributing to forced migration.

With minimal additional support for arts and culture in the recent 2026 federal budget and a huge leap in defence spending, the message to the public is to prepare for and expect conflict not regenerative solutions. This is a dire message at a time of immeasurable destruction following over 100 years of unsustainable growth that has and continues to drive climate crisis.

This submission is an updated version to the submission made to the Environment and Communications Committees who reviewed the REVIVE cultural policy ahead of this public submissions process.

Country is Culture and must be acknowledged in the Cultural Policy to respect First Nations protocols

As clearly articulated in the State of the Environment Report co-authored by Wuthathi/Meriam woman Dr Terri Janke;

‘Caring for Country’ is a cultural obligation. Indigenous peoples’ connection to their Country is a deep cultural and spiritual bond. Country is the source of life, identity and culture.’

The First Nations First pillar needs developing to continue strengthening First Nations Elders, artists, communities and protocols. This must include ways for non-Indigenous artists and organisations to support and enact this pillar with confidence. It requires education and critical assessment of the values currently underpinning current systems and practices.

Critical thinking needs including in the National Cultural Policy.

To positively change and increase appreciation of arts and culture, we need to understand what we currently value as a Nation.

In principle and in action, the current productivity framework, driving economic growth, only perpetuates harm.

Evidence across all sectors of society show the urgent need for a planned economic transition aligned to the National Climate Risk Assessment. Emergency scale 2030, 2035 and 2050 emissions reduction targets and associated systems change agendas are critical if we are to respond commensurately to the threats faced from climate breakdown.

Prioritising the transformative power of the arts and the need for big imagination for change is fundamental now and in this process.

The National Cultural Policy must contextualise the next phase of work in the climate and ecological crisis and reflect priorities connected to this period of rapid change. Failure to act would demonstrate the depth of the cultural crisis that has brought us to this terrifying crossroad.

The power of the arts is in low carbon creative practice and the elevation of the skills of artists, not as instruments of the current economy. Showcasing the dynamic expressions of who we are and what we value.

Urgent systems change required

There is urgent need for planned economic transition, aligned to the National Climate Risk Assessment, with ambitious 2030, 2035 and 2050 emissions reduction targets and associated systems change agendas. Prioritising the transformative power of the arts and the need for big imagination for change is critical in this process.

The new cultural policy must contextualise the creative sector's next phase of work in the climate and ecological crisis. Failure to act indicates an ongoing cultural crisis.

Past and present generations of Australians have made huge sacrifices to ensure the safety and prosperity of their children and future generations. Coming from all corners of the earth, our multi-cultural settler population contributes stories and practices that create Australia's unique culture. We as a Nation have the strength and capacity to take on instrumental change.

We now know that the reckless consumption of finite resources underpinning mainstream aspirations has caused enormous harm to First Nations People and the precious Country they have managed respectfully for millennia. This is an existential threat to us all.

We call for Emergency measures to focus the Australian Public in a CLIMATE EFFORT akin to the WAR EFFORT of WWII.

Led by First Nations people and protocols of Care – for Country, Kin (all living things), Respect for Elders and Responsibility for Future Generations.

This would enable ambitious creative dreaming for a better future to mitigate further harm, prepare for a predicted increase in disasters, and reconnect people to the living world on which we all rely.

We encourage practical measures such as carbon and resource budgets (rationing), stronger emphasis on land and sea based public transport with slow travel incentives to reduce transport emissions, eradication of unnecessary single use packaging and plastics supporting better waste management. And at the same time our sector must focus on creating regenerative arts centres and creative spaces that provide opportunities for all Australians to learn and practice low carbon creative skills, adapt out of the growing mental health crisis, tackle wicked structural problems, and enrich social cohesion.

Systems change is a relatively new concept for the Arts, yet there is so much to be learnt from engaging with social services, education, health and other sectors that are actively exploring systems change solutions. As all societal indicators are showing, fewer and fewer can thrive in the current so-called productivity driven (extractive, trickle-down) economic framework. Like we are witnessing all around the world, steeply rising inequality is dangerously threatening Australia's fragile democracy.

With this framing, we urge you to deepen your support and provide further investment in the five pillars of REVIVE – First Nations First (with specific learning programs for non-Indigenous people and directives to engage with local treaty processes), a Place for Every Story & Story for Every Place, the Centrality of the Artist (led by their skills, practices and processes), Strong Cultural Infrastructure and Engaging the Audience, **with particular attention to how artists can work across different sectors to weave connection and build imagination for change.**

This cross sectorial approach is vital for the evolution and relevance of the Arts across our Nation. We need to be stepping up with purpose, ensuring the vital role of culture and the arts is recognised and activated in the evolution of effective problem solving, care for all and imagination for fairer futures.

Local creative place-based solutions – a story for every place

Australia leads the world in many devastating impacts of the global climate and ecological emergency. Given the urgency of this crisis for society and our creative sector, and the scale of action required worldwide, we believe that accelerating action hinges on a uniquely Australian, decentralised yet unified, cooperative effort. Increasing sector capacity and support for activation in climate mitigation, emergency planning, and arts-based climate adaptation is vital. Where the artistic work created is achieved more sustainably and artists/ cultural workers are utilising their skills in a societal effort to create a liveable future. We envision a nation where the engagement of arts and cultural skills and capabilities to improve communities' climate adaptation, disaster preparedness and recovery is commonplace and sustainably resourced.

The new vision of REVIVE needs to provide tangible support for Australian artists, creative workers and organisations to develop climate strategies and recovery programs tailored to the unique geographic, social, and cultural context of their communities. Leveraging trust-based, long-term, value-aligned partnerships to co-create relevant, effective, equity-based resources, training, and knowledge sharing opportunities. The sector needs support and commitment to connect and develop training, tools, and support for creatives, festivals, events, and space operators to establish climate strategies and emergency plans. There is a need for new stories, expanding the role of artists in building imagination for better futures, transitioning from an extractive and destructive culture to a regenerative liveable future.

Recognising culture as an indispensable pillar of climate action, the REVIVE policy needs to connect Australia into the world's climate movement, ensuring Australia's creative sector is in the forefront of climate action and adaptation.

The new 2035 carbon reduction emissions targets of 62-70% must be stringently applied across all carbon intensive aspects of the arts (transport, energy use, construction, etc) with further investment to support local engagement in low carbon creative activity that strengthens community and their imagination for change, essential to mitigating further damage and adaptation as our climate continues to evolve and conditions deteriorate.

Leadership is required, utilising creative processes and practices, to experiment and play with new solutions. We cannot continue to apply the same tools and expect different results. Australia is an important middle power on the world stage, with a strong international reputation. We are in a good position to pilot and champion cultural leadership through ambitious climate action that will provide sustainable pathways for culture, our communities and the arts.

With regard to the specific priorities included in the review:

1. Tax reform is needed to address appallingly low wages for artists. This relates to addressing inequity in the arts system with comparatively high salaries for arts managers and administrators while many artists struggle with below poverty line incomes.

The fundamental challenge is to reestablish pathways to develop and maintain the creative skills, processes and practices that are essential to artistic expression, as well as the creation of unique, relevant, excellent place-based artworks. Astronomical HECS fees, inadequate support for artists at every stage of their careers, and unjust money flows in creative systems. This needs urgent attention. The emphasis on economic return must prioritise artists first before all the associated benefits.

Reforms must be considered in the context of converging crises; climate and natural world, housing, cost of living, etcetera.

Regulation prioritising Australian stories and creative processes, specifically addressing 'a place for every story, a story for every place' is needed for Australian artists to REVIVE and to thrive.

To honour the pillars of the REVIVE strategy, regulation must tax foreign creative products, (particularly on screen). While it is important that Australians have access to ideas and cultural expression that reflects multicultural Australia and nurtures intercultural reciprocity, the plethora of relatively cheaply acquired cultural products from the UK, USA, EU and Canada, continues a long tradition of colonisation and perpetuates 'cultural cringe'. Sadly, this means that Australians are more familiar with the stories of New York, London, Toronto, Los Angeles and many foreign places than of Perth, Geelong, Adelaide, Maningrida or other wondrous local places with important stories to tell. There are huge benefits to be gained from rebalancing our national cultural narrative.

Again, there are systemic productivity challenges for all sectors that depend almost exclusively on local labour with strong human centred care values. We urge the committee to consider how to financially separate these sectors from the fiercely competitive, efficiency and productivity focused agendas of corporate Australia.

2. There is no cultural benefit to focusing on technological solutions or enabling AI at this critical moment.

From a nature first perspective, needed in these times of crisis to redress the ongoing harm to the natural world, we assert that the opportunities of emerging technologies for Australia's arts and creative are far outweighed by their risks and challenges.

We already know through various industry led petitions from MEAA, NAVA, highly acclaimed authors and artists, that technology is extractive, driven by profit and AI is a harmful technology for the arts. It does not respond to any need, extracts the incredible work of creative people without consent or compensation, denies the importance of context, relationship to Country, or meaningful in-person connection, promoting deep fakes that challenge human rights and values.

Australians are world renowned 'early adopters' when it comes to new tech with few critical guardrails to predict or monitor impact. The government's world leading initiative to outlaw social media platforms for children under 16, has responded to reports from doctors, psychologists and other experts of the tragic harm and even loss of life that this technology has contributed to. Our learning can now be applied, by disrupting the rampant AI rollout. Instead, we should view AI as a virus requiring health focused guidelines and restrictions.

New technologies and AI require enormous natural resource use, unappreciated by many, including excessive energy and clean water. Our natural systems are already depleted and in crisis. An emphasis on technological 'innovation' and its undue pressure on resources is rarely considered in the industrial scale energy transition plans that will destroy Country and culture.

Aggressive AI marketing campaigns across all media platforms promote corporate greed and offshore interests at the expense of community cohesion and care. The University of Melbourne has raised concerns of diminished mental capacity through excessive AI use that inhibits curiosity and future learning. This has to STOP! We urge the committee to put measures in place to pause the AI rollout, prioritise concern and claims of harm, not just for the arts but for the whole of society.

To conclude

A new cultural policy is welcome. All changes must be contextualised in the Earth Crisis, mass extinctions, ecological damage, with determination to address scientific predictions to ensure a liveable future.

Emergency measures are required.

From Creative Silos to Systems Change in ambition and approach would enable an intersectional holistic framework where arts and cultural activity is enriched and able to better collaborate with other sectors.

Public opinion is moving quickly on these issues and citizens are looking for leadership. Critical thinking is required to combat bad actors focused on hate and division.

We must be courageous, think outside the (productivity) boxes, weave creative practices into solutions-based plans, and act decisively so that the arts can help lead transition and transformation.

This work must be embedded within a National Cultural Policy, across all 5 pillars. We are living through an existential threat with real and present danger. No-one really knows how to do this work. Courage and creativity is required to experiment and play. Artists and cultural workers, people already skilled in collaborative creative processes can help find the way.

We offer an open invitation to support and engage in a collective effort to accelerate, expand and refine the actions needed across Australia at this time of radical change. We look forward to the opportunities of working together toward such a vision and investment in Australia's long-term future.

Who we are

The Cultural Gardeners is convened by CLIMARTE (Vic) and Pippa Bailey (NSW), supported by Arts Front (Qld). We represent over 340 arts and cultural workers in all states and territories deeply concerned with taking action on the converging planetary climate and ecological crises. Humanity faces the combined catastrophes of ecosystem collapse, mass extinction of vital biodiversity and the rapid degradation of critical ecosystems. Australia is at the forefront of these crises.

We champion First Nations principles of Caring for Country and the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Our approach is uniquely Australian to respect and forefront the great diversity of First Nations people across Australia whose 60,000 years+ of continuous culture honours a unique relationship and responsibility for Country.

There are many inspiring cultural workers in Australia and around the world to align with. These allegiances will be stronger if we reconcile with the ongoing impacts of colonisation, follow First Nations people's lead, build trusting relationships and support action in our places, on this unceded land. Australia's identity reflects the unique biodiversity of this continent. Prioritising First Nations cultural knowledge deeply roots all Australians in this place, shaping our sense of pride and need to protect ecosystems here.

We align to a Just Transition, the framework developed by the trade union movement to encompass a range of social interventions needed to secure workers' rights and livelihoods when economies are transitioning to sustainable modes that mitigate climate change and protect biodiversity.

These principles are outlined in the Paris Agreement and are also embedded in the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). We support the ongoing campaign to add culture to the SDG's, and have culture and the Arts recognised in International Climate Agreements and COP meetings.

We recognise that culture, from arts to heritage, has a fundamental role to play in helping people to imagine and realise low carbon, just, climate resilient futures. By

harnessing the power of culture – including diverse ways of knowing, education and storytelling, art and craft, tangible and intangible heritage, and creativity encompassing the full range of voices and perspectives to communicate urgency, mobilise action, and champion sustainable and justice-led ways of living. This vision represents culture's unparalleled capacity for enabling a powerfully inclusive response to create the systemic change needed to holistically tackle the climate crisis.