



22 May 2026

Jim Betts
Secretary
Office of the Arts
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

Via submission form at www.arts.gov.au/have-your-say/new-national-cultural-policy

Dear Mr Betts

Submission on the development of a new National Cultural Policy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the development of a new National Cultural Policy. The Bega Valley Shire has a rich tradition of supporting our community's cultural and creative endeavours. Bega Valley Shire Council (Council) recognises the importance of arts and culture to social, economic and health-related benefits for individuals and communities alike. The shire is proud of its cultural strength, with arts playing a crucial role in rebuilding community life in the aftermath of the Black Summer fires and COVID-19. A new cultural policy should approach regional and rural arts investment as an opportunity rather than a cost burden.

We are looking to contribute to a stronger cultural life for our regional and rural communities here in the South East of New South Wales. Councils recently adopted Arts and Culture Plan outlines our commitment to support arts and cultural development in the shire. While the plan is modest and realistic, 25 of the 64 actions outlined will require external funding support for implementation.

Council is uniquely positioned to help shape arts and cultural in our community. However, we require state and federal government funding support to deliver ongoing vibrancy and social connection through access to creative and cultural opportunities, just as cities and urban areas do. Increasing financial pressure on local government has led to a reduction in our ability support local volunteer arts organisations that produce and present major festivals, exhibitions and shows in local venues. Our cultural spending priorities have narrowed to sustaining our four libraries and civic centre venue, maintaining our community halls, establishing and operating our new regional gallery, and maintaining support for the South East Arts regional arts development organisation.

Support for volunteer and artist capacity building is essential to regional cultural vibrancy

Our region relies on skilled volunteers to sustain festivals and events that connect community arts with professional artists, musicians, writers, and filmmakers, helping to grow audiences and provide a base for national and international artists to tour and develop new work. To address the challenge of volunteer burnout and ensure long-term success, this submission calls for a dedicated investment fund focused on building capability. Such a fund would provide longer-term support to enable events, festivals, and galleries to expand and invest in volunteer and career development. Currently, a key barrier is the lack of transitional funding for event managers, technical support, and marketing, as identified by local groups behind major

events like Sculpture Bermagui, the Cobargo Folk Festival, local galleries, and the Headland Writers Festival. Targeted funding could support part-time positions, new equipment, youth arts programs, and further collaboration with local government cultural officers, ensuring investment has maximum impact.

The Revive national cultural policy renewed the highly effective Regional Arts Fund and Festivals Australia that give project funding for new and innovative work and focus on direct investment in artists. The new fund would complement these funds by build the support network for local and national artists based in regions and serve to deepen community reach.

The NSW regional arts development organisations (RADOs) provide a proven model to build on. With support from NSW Government and three rural councils, South East Arts offers technical and producer expertise to help events and festivals get off the ground. Funding agencies (including Festival Australia) have confidence in supporting new events where RADOs are involved. RADOs have a strong focus on where local artists can reach more people, and expertise in small grants to artists to travel, invest in new technology, or finish a project. Expanding this collaborative model across Australia could bring both efficiency and positive results. We encourage the policy advisory committee to consider how the RADO network has contributed to the growth of professional artist careers and turned cultural tourism into a regional success.

Arts and culture as essential to community resilience

Arts and cultural investment is a critical component of national climate resilience and adaptation. Creative practice enables communities to interpret, process and respond to change in ways that extend beyond conventional policy or technical solutions. Through storytelling, performance and visual expression, artists help communities make sense of environmental shifts, strengthen shared identity, and foster psychological resilience. There is growing evidence that the integration of arts and science enhances community understanding of climate risks and supports behavioural and cultural adaptation. This is not a new phenomenon; First Nations storytelling traditions have long encoded and transmitted environmental knowledge across generations, including records of historical sea level change. Recognising arts funding as an enabler of community resilience, knowledge transfer and long-term cultural adaptation will ensure the National Cultural Policy supports not only creative industries, but also Australia's capacity to respond to ongoing environmental change.

Local government as the enabling partner for regional arts participation

Local government plays a crucial role in enabling participation in arts and culture, particularly in regional, remote and rural areas. Bega Valley Shire Council (Council) and our community clearly recognise the importance of planning for and investing in these sectors.

Local government in regional areas is the delivery partner for much of the Australian Government's cultural programs. Local government manages 25 percent of national arts spending.¹

Council's recently adopted Arts and Culture Plan outlines Council's commitment to support arts and cultural development in the shire. While the plan is modest and realistic, of the 64 actions in the plan, 25 will only be delivered with external funding support.

Council is uniquely positioned to help shape arts and cultural in our community. However, we require state and federal government investment to deliver ongoing vibrancy and social connection through access to creative and cultural opportunities.

Government investment in arts and culture

Government investment in arts and culture is not keeping pace with population growth. Australia's population increased by 27% between 2007–08 and 2023–24 to 27 million, while expenditure on arts and culture increased by 19%. Per capita government expenditure on arts and culture was \$316 in 2023–24. For

¹ A New Approach (ANA) report, 2026, *The Big Picture: Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity by governments in Australia in 2007–08 to 2023–24*, <https://thebigpicture.newapproach.org.au/>

comparison, the figure in 2007–08 was \$339 per person when adjusted for inflation, which represents the highest expenditure in the last 17 years.²

Local governments contributed \$2.2 billion to arts and culture investment. Local government share increased from 24% in 2021–22 to 25% in 2023–24, reversing a trend of steady decline since peaking at over 27% in 2016–17.³

Financial sustainability of councils: cost shifting puts arts at risk

Regional local councils are in a financial vice, squeezed between capped income below rising costs and ongoing cost-shifting from state and federal government. Local government support for the arts is vulnerable. Arts and culture programs are frequently regarded as a non-essential service within local government operations. Local government is key to providing regional arts infrastructure – galleries and performance spaces – which are rarely financially viable without ongoing subsidy. Council-managed arts infrastructure and services are at risk when local governments are required to make choices between maintaining core essential services (roads, water, sewer) and cultural services and facilities.

Cost-shifting onto NSW local government – which bears the primary operational burden for regional cultural infrastructure – rose 78% in just over five years, from \$820 million to more than \$1.36 billion per year.⁴ These figures represent a structural problem that Council recommends that the next National Cultural Policy address. The National Cultural Policy should recognise vital role of local government in the arts and culture sector and outline a pathway for adequate federal investment to bolster local government arts and culture programming.

Regional cultural infrastructure needs operational certainty (not just capital)

State and federal grant programs tend to focus on new capital projects rather than supporting ongoing operational costs of infrastructure. This is a challenge across all local government services, including the arts. We have experienced many examples of well-meaning community-led projects attracting investment in infrastructure, with local government left to sustain operations and maintain infrastructure in a very constrained funding environment. It is imperative that the National Cultural Policy prioritises an investment framework for operational support for regional arts and culture facilities to ensure their long-term sustainability. With 33% of artists living outside capital cities – compared to 28% of Australians overall in regional or remote areas – there is a clear need for increased investment to support regional artists, organisations, and the sustainability of creative practice and presentation beyond metropolitan centres.⁵

Specific national actions supported by Council

Bega Valley Shire Council fully supports recommendations from Museums & Galleries of NSW, Regional & Public Galleries of NSW, the National Association for the Visual Arts and others, that the Australian Government:

- Acknowledge the critical role of galleries, libraries, archives, and museums in shaping our national story
- Establish a National Cultural Infrastructure Fund to support cultural heritage preservation in small to medium museums, galleries, and Aboriginal Cultural Centres
- Establish Visual Arts and Craft Australia within Creative Australia

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Local Government NSW (LGNSW) report 2023, *Cost shifting: how state costs eat council rates*, https://lgnsw.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/QR/Cost_Shifting_flyer.pdf

⁵ Creative Australia report 2025, *Towards equity 2: Creative Australia diversity data report*, <https://creative.gov.au/research/towards-equity-2-creative-australia-diversity-data-report>

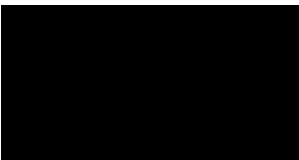
- Provide more investment in Visions of Australia to support more touring, and assess National Collecting Institutions and other applicants separately (noting there is also a separate National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach fund)
- Provide greater focus on the impacts of the small to medium scale arts sector in supporting career pathways and community wellbeing, while also highlighting the lack of funding to this sector
- Recognise the vital role of local government in the provision of arts and culture, despite bearing the burden of increased cost shifting (In 2024-25, only 0.18% of Creative Australia's investment went to local government galleries, and only 6% went to Visual Arts – the lowest out of the six artforms⁶)
- Prioritise focus on regional practice
- Consider the impacts of climate change and natural disasters on the cultural sector, particularly with regard to collections.

Events and venues underpin the visitor economy, social cohesion and local identity

The Bega Valley Shire is home to an array of significant high quality unique cultural events and venues that underpin our visitor economy, creative expression and social cohesion, celebrating local identity and culture. These include Giiyong Festival, Wanderer Festival, Cobargo Folk Festival, Four Winds, the South East Centre for Contemporary Art (SECCA), Theatre Twyford and Headland Theatre. These all facilitate a melding of community and professional artists in the development of groundbreaking innovative works. Examples include Bioluminescence (youth-led synth and light projection works) and Barragga Yangga (a collaboration between a Djiringanj language choir and other local musicians presenting original First Nations' songs). The future success of these organisations, events and venues and their unique and vibrant outputs is dependent upon ongoing state and federal support. The National Cultural Policy needs to prioritise ongoing multi-year investment in operational and program support for regional arts programming, events and venues, whether they are driven by community, local government, business, or professional artists.

In conclusion, Council calls for a National Cultural Policy that recognises the essential role of local government, provides sustained operational and programming funding (including to established arts and cultural organisations), and ensures regional communities can continue to deliver vibrant, accessible and high-quality cultural experiences. With the right policy settings, arts and culture will continue to strengthen Australia's economy, social cohesion and national identity.

Yours sincerely



Anthony McMahon
Chief Executive Officer

⁶ Creative Australia, *2024–25 Annual Report* and *2024-25 awarded grants list*, <http://creative.gov.au>