

25 May 2026

To whom it may concern,

Submission to the Australian Government

National Cultural Policy (Revive) – Sunshine Coast Council & Regional Arts Sector

The Sunshine Coast is one of Australia's fastest-growing regional areas, with a rapidly expanding and increasingly diverse population, a globally recognised natural environment Biosphere, and a strong visitor economy. Within this context, arts, culture and creative industries are critical to the region's identity, liveability and economic future.

This submission highlights the Sunshine Coast as a maturing regional cultural economy with a dynamic creative ecosystem and strong community participation. However, it also outlines persistent structural challenges including limited access to markets, workforce sustainability pressures, infrastructure gaps, and inequitable access to long-term funding.

Key priorities for federal action include:

- Strengthening regional access to national and international markets
- Supporting sustainable creative careers and workforce development
- Investing in transformational cultural infrastructure
- Embedding First Nations leadership in policy and funding frameworks
- Recognising the creative industries as a key regional economic driver

Sunshine Coast Council demonstrates a strong and ongoing commitment to the arts through strategic planning, direct investment, and partnerships with the regional sector. Council recognises arts and culture as both a cultural cornerstone and an economic driver, and is committed to working with all levels of government to deliver the ambitions of Revive.

Regional Context

The Sunshine Coast is projected to grow to approximately 550,000 people by 2041, with increasing demographic diversity.

This growth is accompanied by major urban development, including the emergence of new centres such as Maroochydore, reshaping the region's economic and social fabric. The growing population and visitor base are driving increased demand for high-quality cultural experiences and arts participation opportunities.

The region's strong tourism economy and internationally recognised natural environment provide a unique opportunity to leverage arts and culture as a driver of place-making, visitor engagement and economic diversification.

However, the Sunshine Coast's diverse and dispersed geography—spanning coastal, hinterland and rural communities—requires a distributed approach to cultural infrastructure and service delivery.

Local Creative Ecosystem

The Sunshine Coast has a dynamic and evolving creative ecosystem, characterised by strong local talent, growing professionalisation, and an expanding network of organisations and programs.

The sector includes:

- Independent artists and creative practitioners across all disciplines
- Peak and support organisations such as Sunshine Coast Creative Alliance and Arts Connect
- Cultural institutions including Caloundra Regional Gallery and The Events Centre
- Artist-run and experimental spaces such as The Old Ambulance Station and The Old Lock Up

Festivals and events are a cornerstone of the ecosystem. Horizon Festival, the region's flagship contemporary arts event, attracts more than 25,000 attendees and delivers measurable economic impact.

Council investment directly supports more than 800 programs and events annually, engaging over 200,000 participants and employing hundreds of local artists.

Key Challenges and Recommendations

1. Regional Isolation and Access to Markets

Revive Alignment: Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story | Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience

The Sunshine Coast's geographic dispersion and distance from major cities limit access to national and international markets. Artists face reduced visibility, fewer touring opportunities, and barriers to scaling creative work.

Recommendations

- Expand federal touring and presenting programs to include regional hubs
- Establish national pathways for regional creative export and market development
- Invest in digital infrastructure and hybrid delivery models to broaden audience reach

2. Workforce Sustainability and Career Pathways

Revive Alignment: Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist | Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story

Creative work remains fragmented and reliant on short-term funding. Regional artists face lower income stability and fewer career progression opportunities.

Recommendations

- Increase multi-year funding for artist development and residencies
- Implement regional workforce reforms supporting fair pay and secure employment
- Invest in professional development, entrepreneurship and business capability
- Introduce targeted initiatives to attract and retain creative talent in regional areas

3. Infrastructure Gaps and Funding Limitations

Revive Alignment: Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Despite growth in smaller-scale spaces, the region lacks major, drawcard cultural infrastructure capable of attracting national and international programming.

Funding remains fragmented, with strong local investment but insufficient long-term federal support.

Recommendations

- Establish a federal co-investment program for regional cultural infrastructure
- Provide sustained operational funding for regional arts organisations
- Expand affordable creative workspace initiatives
- Align investments with major opportunities such as the Brisbane 2032 Cultural Olympiad

Measurable Outcomes

National policy should include clear regional metrics, as libraries do, including:

- Participation rates in regional areas
- Employment in creative industries
- Access to cultural infrastructure
- First Nations cultural outcomes
- Contribution to the visitor economy

Conclusion

The Sunshine Coast is a high-growth regional area with a vibrant and increasingly sophisticated creative ecosystem.

With targeted, long-term federal investment aligned to the pillars of Revive, regional centres such as the Sunshine Coast can play a central role in delivering a more equitable, sustainable and nationally connected cultural sector.

This submission reinforces:

- The importance of regional voices in national cultural policy
- The readiness of the Sunshine Coast to partner with government
- The need for place-based, long-term investment

Regional communities are not peripheral to Australia's cultural future - they are essential to it.

Provided by Sunshine Coast Council