

Minister for Home Affairs,
Immigration and Citizenship,
the Arts, Multicultural Affairs and
Cyber Security
Parliament House
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To improve our cultural policy we need to rethink the Review Process, so we can build cultural inclusion, and improve our social cohesion and our democracy.

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To improve current policy outcomes, a rethink of this review process is needed.

'Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

Preamble

Attributed, without evidence, to Albert Einstein. Described, for our purposes, it is interpreted as meaning that the policy outcomes from this review, need to improve the ways we define, express and project our Australian Culture.

Arguably, a shared culture is the *glue* that binds us all as Australian, and which is revealed in our social cohesion and a strong democracy. So we need to do better.

This review provides the opportunity for our leadership to strike a new stamp for Australia's culture.

I commend Minister Burke on the Review and the progress made on the current National Cultural Policy, 2023.

Minister Burke has reaffirmed his commitment to continue to improve the policy and encouraged the public to have their say. Minister Burke said that he believed the present 5 pillars are correct. Similarly, it seems, Minister Burke believes the 4 expert industry panels and the policy group, are correct. With greatest respect for Minister Burke, I believe that the pillars, the panels and advisory group can be improved; and consequently, the policy results will be improved.

What and *how* might improvements be made? And how might policy improvements contribute to improvements in the lives of everyone in our diverse society?

Indeed a **cultural policy for all Australians**, could be the aspiration for this new Policy.

Recommendations for policy improvements.

1. Define *Cultural* Policy so it is clear and complete.

What is the policy? Is it a *cultural* policy or *art and culture* policy, or *art, culture and heritage* (included in pillar 4) policy?

- Is it for *creatives* or inclusive for *all Australians*?
- Is it for those in *creative industries* or for *all Australians* to identify with and in?
- Is it aimed at funding the arts or improving social cohesion through our diverse population?

With greatest respect, if the answer is *yes* to all the above, intentions are ambiguous.

2. Expand topics, expertise and representation on Panels and Policy Group to include environmental, population diversity and built and recorded cultural heritage.

2.1 Expand topics and expertise.

Minister Burke has multiple portfolio responsibilities that include cultural functions; Home Affairs, Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Arts and Cyber Security. However, other Ministers have responsibilities that include Culture. Is it that, implied or explicit, the terms of reference for the panels and policy group are restricted by Minister Burke's portfolio responsibilities?

Surely, though, our Australian culture policy review and decision-making, should include all Ministers with responsibility for culture?

First Peoples are rightly recognised in the policy and pillars and panels for their foundation cultural place and continuing cultural evolution to the present. But Senator Malarndirri McCarthy, Minister for Indigenous Affairs is omitted.

Minister Murray Watt, Minister for Environment and Water, has considerable cultural responsibilities within the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*. Our Australian Environment, Surroundings, Places, Built Heritage and our Recorded Histories, fuel and inspire our artists. Our Australian history and heritage are primary sources for the content for the arts, that make our art recognisably Australian.

It is as if, Australia's post European heritage is *hiding in plain sight*. In the same way, first people's art has continuously evolved, Australia's collective contemporary culture evolves, through migration and expansion in the diversity of our Australia population.

2.2 Expand representation and expertise by including communities

Membership of panels and policy group are identified as *industry leaders*.

What of other cultural, arts and heritage leaders not identified and therefore not contributing?

This speaks loudly about the shortcomings in the policy to date and the review in train. It is a failure to value the expertise in the community. It is disrespectful not to include community organisational representatives paid or volunteers, whose knowledge and resources sustain our cultural assets throughout the country.

The policy and strategies' implementation will be the poorer for not *bringing these leaders into the decision-making room*.

2.3 Include Australia's Built and historic cultural heritage

Our **Built Cultural Heritage** is included in policy definitions, and legislation at all levels; at state, federal and UNESCO. Built Heritage is an accepted truth as being **Cultural Heritage**.

So too are the community-based organisations that together, have the largest repositories, expertise and embedded advocacy for Australian culture. Australia's Royal Historical Societies (RHS), National Trusts (NT) and Heritage Councils (HC) are national organisations currently omitted from the review structure.

Why? The political portfolio divide between Minister Burke's responsibilities and those of Minister Watt for the Environment, that include Culture Heritage, surely is not reason enough for this omission?

Note: Submissions have been made by National Trust, Victoria and the Heritage Council, Victoria.

3. Australian Culture in context of Australian Values.

Shared Values matter. Sense of *Shared Culture* matter. Respect for differing ethnicity, language, religions within our society that blend into an Australian culture, matter. Both Values and Culture help bind a diverse, multicultural nation together and build social cohesion. And they can divide.

3.1 Culture building not dividing

Australian visa applicants must sign *Australian Values Statement* that contain principles most Australians would support; respect, tolerance, compassion, and equality of opportunity – the essence of what we often call a “fair go”. But with our increasingly fractured society, and growing sense of unfairness among groups, and scepticism of words belying true meaning, is a *fair go* a reality in the experience of many people?

On one hand government wants recognition of the *values* that define and shape our country and culture. On the other hand experiences for many, are different.

It behoves Minister Burke, also responsible for immigration, to reflect on the pitfalls of overreach in promises. As with values, culture is a broad and often imprecise concept.

That said, an *Australian Culture Statement* should be considered. This may be our best opportunity to find a better way to bind our people's diversity.

Similarly, a tangible, distinctive action that represents our Australian National Culture might be considered.

<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/social-cohesion/australian-values>

3.2 A place for Australia's Culture

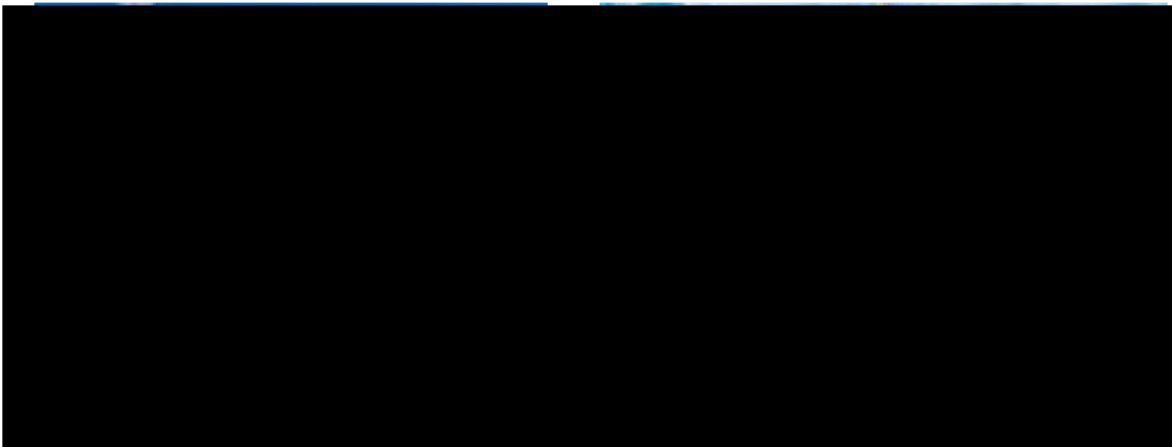
In much the same way, that buildings and places and artifacts, speak of the history and art and invite curiosity, inform, and give identify; so too can a special place, be a symbol and can inspire. At the top of our national recognition list, would be our parliament, as the symbol of our democracy.

Why not have a place, perhaps known as, **Australia's Institute for Culture?**

It would be an independent, publicly accountable, custodian and repository for the best of Australia's culture. It would be a place for decision making and happenings that continually review, reinforce and refine our culture.

For guidance on how such a place could work, I recommend the Institute de France. The French Institute, founded in 1795, is pivotal operator for the ministry of Culture And Ministry of Europe and foreign Affairs. The Institute is France's prestigious society and umbrella organisation that is guardian of French culture arts and sciences.

<https://parisjetaime.com/eng/culture/institut-de-france-p1120>



Australia's Federal Parliament

France's Institut de France, Paris

4. Build a stronger Australian Culture with UNESCO's guidance.

Australia is a member of the United Nations. The UN has *culture* as being essential for sustainable development, human rights and global peace. The UNESCO drives UN's cultural policy and nations' implementation.

Why would not Australia take guidance from the UN for Australia's Cultural policy?

UNESCO refers to Culture as *collective beliefs, value, customs, and practices that characterise a particular group or society. It encompasses language, art, religion, and social norms, shaping how individuals interact with one another and perceive the world.*

UNESCO adds *that no development can be sustainable without a strong culture component. Indeed, only a human-centred approach based on mutual respect and open dialogue among cultures can lead to lasting peace.*

<https://www.unesco.org/en/query-list/c/culture>

Minister Burke knows from first-hand experience, the intensive scrutiny by nations' political leaders, their representatives and experts, it takes to draft and publish UNESCO's statements and policies.

It behoves Australia to apply these policies agreed; as guidance for our cultural statement and as a direct link to our international partnerships. For example, as a signatory to UN's Sustainable Development goals, 2030.

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

Note: Ministers Watt, Bowen and McCarthy, currently have cultural components in their portfolios, that require their involvement in the cultural policy review.

4.1 UNESCO's World Heritage Convention and Communities as key partners

UNESCO's World Heritage Committee endorsed 5 strategic objectives for implementation of the convention. These are

World Heritage Committee endorsed 5 strategic objectives for implementation of the convention. These are **Credibility, Conservation, Capacity Building, Communication and Communities.**

Inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities at all stages in the world heritage process, reflects recognition that communities are best placed to value, protect, conserve and sustain cultural places.

<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/about/world/management-australias-world-heritage-listed/managing-world-heritage-australia/life-community>

5. A suggested key result for our Australian Cultural policy

All Australians can identify with the policy and can see themselves as contributing in the implementation of the policy goals.

Terminology matters. Agreed definitions and shared understanding are essential in the foundation of the policy. Recommendations in these submissions might be a trigger for some improvements in the review process that in turn lead to policy improvements.

Margaret R O'Brien, for

Friends of Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens

(Friends are representatives from community associations. who advocate for our WHI site and Buffer zone)