



BALYA PRODUCTIONS

Submission to Australia's National Cultural Policy Review 2026

**First Nations Governance, Workforce Development
and Cultural Infrastructure Reform**

MAY 2026

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Proud Kokatha, Wirangu and Mirning Woman
Resides on Kurna Yerta, South Australia

ACKNOWLEDGMENT TO COUNTRY

I acknowledge and pay my respect to the Traditional Owners of the land on which I live, work and play, the Kurna people of Kurna Yerta, Elders past, present and emerging. I recognise and honour their enduring cultural, spiritual and historical connection that Kurna people have maintained to their Country for generations.

I extend this respect to all First Nations peoples and communities across Australia and acknowledge the important role that culture, storytelling, and self-determination play in strengthening our shared future.

Submission responding to:

Towards a New National Cultural Policy – Public Consultation Paper 2026
Australian Government – Office for the Arts

Building pathways, visibility and long-term structural change for First Nations peoples across Australia's live music and cultural sectors

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission aligns with the Australian Government's *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place* National Cultural Policy and supports the principles of self-determination outlined in the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*.

Balya Productions welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy. As a First Nations-governed organisation working across live music production, touring, festivals, workforce development and community engagement, Balya Productions supports a policy framework that delivers meaningful and lasting structural reform across the arts, cultural and live music sectors.

While the Australian Government's *Revive* National Cultural Policy has established an important foundation for strengthening Australia's cultural future, significant gaps remain in workforce development, culturally safe leadership pathways, regional and remote participation, First Nations governance, industry representation and long-term operational sustainability for First Nations-governed organisations.

First Nations peoples continue to be underrepresented across many areas of the contemporary music and live production ecosystem, particularly within technical production, touring, stage management, festival operations, producing, programming and other behind-the-scenes leadership and operational roles. Current funding and policy settings often focus on participation outcomes rather than addressing the structural barriers that limit long-term career progression, workforce retention and industry leadership opportunities for First Nations peoples.

This submission draws upon lived experience, professional practice and sector leadership developed through Balya Productions and nearly two decades of work within the Australian live music industry. It highlights the need for coordinated national investment that supports First Nations self-determination, culturally safe workplaces, workforce development, First Nations languages as cultural infrastructure, regional and remote participation, and sustainable First Nations governance across the sector.

The submission further recognises the significant cultural load carried by First Nations practitioners, particularly First Nations women, whose contributions often extend beyond formal employment responsibilities to include cultural leadership, mentoring, community accountability, advocacy and the maintenance of culturally safe environments. These responsibilities remain largely invisible within existing funding, workforce and policy frameworks despite being critical to sector sustainability.

Balya Productions recommends a policy approach that recognises First Nations peoples not only as artists and cultural contributors, but as producers, technicians, programmers, tour managers, mentors, decision-makers, business leaders and cultural authorities whose leadership is essential to the future growth of Australia's creative industries.

Strong cultural infrastructure extends beyond venues and buildings. It includes First Nations languages, cultural knowledge systems, governance structures, mentorship networks, workforce pathways and community-led organisations that sustain cultural continuity, economic participation and industry development.

To achieve the ambitions of the National Cultural Policy, government investment must support long-term operational sustainability, strengthen First Nations leadership across all levels of the sector, improve workforce data collection and establish dedicated investment pathways that create lasting cultural, social and economic outcomes for First Nations peoples and communities.

ABOUT BALYA PRODUCTIONS

Balya Productions is a First Nations-governed, 100% owned, production and cultural consultancy organisation working nationally across live music production, touring, festivals, workforce development, cultural engagement and industry capacity building (see appendix A)

The organisation was established in 2019 by Letisha Ackland, a proud Kokatha, Wirangu and Mirning woman from Ceduna in the Far West Coast of South Australia to address longstanding gaps in representation and participation for First Nations peoples within the live music and touring sectors, particularly across technical, operational and behind-the-scenes roles that have historically remained inaccessible to many First Nations and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Balya means "Good" in Kokatha (Goo-ga-dja) for representing the far west coast language which is important to Letisha's identity and connection. Balya's Logo three C's - Community, Culture, Connection.

Through practical workforce development initiatives, mentoring programs, festival production opportunities and industry partnerships, Balya Productions creates pathways for emerging and established First Nations crew, creatives and industry workers to gain hands-on experience, build professional networks and access sustainable employment opportunities across the contemporary music ecosystem.

The organisation's work is guided by principles of self-determination, cultural integrity, community accountability and long-term sector development, recognising that meaningful change requires investment in people, leadership, governance and workforce participation alongside artistic outcomes.

Balya Productions believes that visibility creates opportunity. The principle that "we cannot be what we cannot see" underpins the organisation's commitment to ensuring First Nations peoples are represented not only on stage as artists, but throughout every level of the industry, including production, touring, technical operations, festival delivery, programming, governance and leadership.

NATIONAL INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE AND SECTOR LEADERSHIP

Balya Productions brings extensive experience across Australia's live music, festival and events sectors, delivering cultural leadership, production expertise and workforce development opportunities across national touring festivals, major cultural events and grassroots community initiatives.

Director Letisha Ackland has worked across a broad range of nationally recognised festivals and events spanning more than two decades, including major national touring festivals, First Nations-governed cultural events, regional festivals and community-based programs.

This experience includes leadership, production and cultural advisory contributions to events including the National Indigenous Music Awards, Barunga Festival, WOMADelaide, Adelaide Festival, Adelaide Fringe, Harvest Rock, St Jerome's Laneway Festival, Groovin the Moo, Spilt Milk Festival, NAIDOC South Australia events, Treaty SA, Yabaardu Festival, Survival Day, Mourning in the Morning and numerous community-led First Nations cultural events.

This breadth of experience provides Balya Productions with a unique understanding of the opportunities and systemic barriers that continue to impact First Nations participation across the contemporary music, touring and live production sectors.

INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP AND SECTOR REPRESENTATION

Letisha Ackland, founder and Director of Balya Productions is recognised as a trailblazer within Australia's live music and touring sector, bringing extensive experience across national touring festivals, major cultural events, regional programs and grassroots community initiatives.

Her leadership is grounded in a commitment to creating opportunities for others, strengthening First Nations workforce participation and ensuring emerging First Nations practitioners can access pathways into an industry where representation has historically been limited.

Through mentoring, workforce development and cultural leadership, Letisha continues to lead by example, creating opportunities for the next generation of First Nations artists, crew, producers and industry leaders.

Further information regarding industry leadership, governance appointments and sector contributions is provided in Appendix B.

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

As a First Nations woman working nationally in live music production, touring and festival delivery, I have experienced both the opportunities and the barriers that continue to exist within Australia's contemporary music industry. While there has been important progress through Revive, significant gaps remain in workforce development, culturally safe leadership pathways, sustainable infrastructure, and long-term investment for First Nations-governed organisations.

Throughout my career, I often found myself standing in front of festival stages looking towards production crews and technical teams where women were rarely visible and First Nations representation was almost non-existent. When I received my first opportunity as a stagehand, it quickly became apparent how few First Nations peoples were working within the broader touring and production workforce.

First Nations participation in the arts is still treated as a program outcome rather than embedded within decision-making, leadership, production, touring and infrastructure systems. Representation alone is not enough. We need investment that supports self-determination, career longevity and sustainable business growth.

Through Balya Productions, I have spent years creating practical pathways ranging from emerging to established First Nations crew, artists and industry workers to gain hands-on experience within major touring and festival environments. These opportunities create real employment outcomes, professional networks and long-term career confidence. Programs like these are essential because visibility matters.

I now stand on the stage of festival stages and look at the production crews working behind the scenes and don't see women visible within those spaces. The live production and touring environment often felt heavily male-dominated, particularly across technical and operational roles.

As the years went on and I continued working across national festivals, touring and live events, I realised I was not only often the only visible First Nations representative within those environments. I was, and still am, the only known First Nations and only female working nationally within live production touring at that level over nearly **2 decades**.

That reality shaped my understanding of what **"we cannot be what we cannot see"** truly means.

My experience has been developed through work across national touring festivals, major cultural events, regional festivals and grassroots community initiatives throughout Australia.

Working across environments ranging from nationally recognised festivals such as WOMADelaide, Adelaide Festival, Adelaide Fringe, Harvest Rock, Laneway Festival, Groovin the Moo and Spilt Milk, through to community-led First Nations events including Barunga Festival, Survival Day, Treaty SA, Yabaardu Festival, NAIDOC celebrations and the National Indigenous Music Awards, has provided direct insight into the workforce, leadership and representation challenges that continue to exist for First Nations peoples within the live music sector.

This experience has reinforced the importance of creating visible pathways for First Nations people across all areas of the industry ecosystem.

It is difficult for young First Nations people, particularly women and those from regional or remote communities, to imagine themselves within these careers if they never see anyone who reflects their identity, culture or lived experience occupying those roles. Visibility creates possibility. It tells the next generation that these spaces are not out of reach and that they belong there too.

This understanding became one of the primary reasons Balya Productions was established. Not simply to produce events, but to create pathways, representation and long-term structural change within the live music and touring industry. Through mentoring, workforce development and hands-on opportunities within real touring and festival environments, Balya Productions is helping ensure emerging First Nations crew and creatives can physically see themselves within these spaces, not only on stage as artists, but behind the scenes as crew, producers, technicians, tour managers, stage managers and leaders shaping the future of the industry.

KEY FACTORS

OPERATIONAL INVESTMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Long-term operational investment and governance for First Nations-governed organisations, including cultural governance and knowledge systems, not just short-term project funding.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS

Workforce development pathways across technical production, touring, staging and behind-the-scenes roles, including opportunities that support the use, visibility and integration of First Nations languages within live production, cultural delivery and industry practice.

CULTURAL LOAD

Greater recognition of cultural load, mentorship labour and community leadership responsibilities carried by First Nations practitioners.

DECISION - MAKING POWER

Decision-making power for First Nations people at all levels of the sector, including programming, governance, producing and policy development.

CULTURAL SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Investment in culturally safe industry environments that retain First Nations workers beyond entry-level opportunities, including environments that respect First Nations languages, cultural protocols and knowledge systems as part of everyday practice.

FIRST NATIONS FIRST

First Nations people must be embedded across all levels of the arts and cultural sector, not only as performers or cultural contributors, but as decision-makers, producers, programmers, crew, mentors and business leaders. Investment must support long-term self-determination, First Nations language revitalisation and use, culturally safe leadership pathways, and sustainable First Nations governance within organisations that create real employment, career pathways and lasting outcomes for our communities.

A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

Australia's cultural landscape should reflect the diversity of lived experiences, communities and voices across the country, including regional, remote and grassroots stories that are often overlooked. Storytelling should not be limited to what is considered commercially safe or institutionally familiar. Communities deserve access to platforms that allow authentic expressions including First Nations language-based storytelling, ensuring language is recognised as a living cultural system central to identity, voice and cultural continuity.

THE LIVE SECTOR CAN DO BETTER

The live music sector has a greater responsibility to elevate and showcase regional and remote Indigenous culture specifically, including First Nations languages, recognising that First Nations communities are not one voice, one story or one experience.

Investment and programming should create space for distinct cultural identities, languages, stories and creative practices to be represented authentically, with communities leading how their culture and languages are shared, presented and protected.

CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

Artists and creative workers are essential to Australia's cultural identity and economy, yet many continue to work within unsustainable conditions. Greater investment is needed to support fair pay, career longevity, touring pathways, mentorship opportunities and wellbeing across all areas of the industry, including technical production and behind-the-scenes roles that are often undervalued despite being critical to live events and touring ecosystems.

This must also include support for First Nations language-informed creative practice, ensuring artists and cultural workers are able to express, maintain and embed language within contemporary performance, production and touring environments.

CULTURAL LOAD AND WORKFORCE SUSTAINABILITY

Greater recognition of cultural load acknowledges the additional emotional, cultural, community and professional responsibilities often carried by First Nations practitioners working within the live music and community sectors. Responsibilities that frequently sit outside formal job descriptions, funding structures or paid labour.

For many First Nations workers, particularly those in leadership positions, the role extends far beyond operational delivery. It can include mentoring emerging community members, providing cultural guidance, navigating community expectations, advocating for culturally safe practices, responding to trauma or community issues, representing community within institutional spaces, and carrying the emotional labour of educating others while continuing to deliver professional outcomes.

This labour is often invisible, unpaid and ongoing.

Within live music environments, cultural load can also include the pressure of being the only First Nations person within a workplace or touring environment, carrying expectations to speak on behalf of community, managing cultural accountability alongside operational responsibilities, and constantly navigating spaces that may not yet fully understand cultural safety or lived experience.

WELLBEING AND LATERAL VIOLENCE

Wellbeing support for First Nations practitioners must therefore extend beyond standard workplace approaches and recognise the unique pressures attached to cultural leadership and representation.

This could look like:

- Dedicated funding and resourcing for mentorship, cultural advisory and community engagement labour.
- Access to culturally safe wellbeing and mental health support services.
- Flexible workplace structures that recognise community, Sorry Business and cultural obligations.
- Shared leadership models that reduce burnout and isolation for First Nations staff.
- Long-term employment pathways that provide stability rather than short-term project insecurity.
- Investment in additional staffing and operational support for First Nations-governed and employed organisations carrying significant community responsibilities.
- Creating culturally safe touring and workplace environments where First Nations practitioners do not feel isolated or tokenised.
- Recognising lived experience, cultural knowledge and community leadership as professional expertise equal to institutional qualifications.
- Providing opportunities for peer connection, leadership development and professional support networks for First Nations workers across the sector.

For Balya Productions, recognising cultural load also means understanding that much of the work happening behind the scenes is deeply relational and community-driven. The responsibility is not only to deliver events or productions, but to create pathways, protect cultural integrity, support emerging people and maintain accountability to community while operating within fast-paced national industry environments.

Without genuine recognition and support, the sector risks continuing to rely on the unpaid emotional and cultural labour of First Nations practitioners while expecting them to simultaneously lead change, mentor others and sustain community relationships on limited resources.

THE MATRIARCHS - First Nations WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

First Nations women have always been the backbone of community, culture and survival. Across generations, they have carried the responsibility of holding families together, protecting culture, advocating for community and creating pathways where none previously existed. Many continue to do this while navigating workplaces, industries and systems that were not designed with them in mind.

Alongside professional expectations, First Nations women often carry deep responsibilities to family, community, culture, mentoring, advocacy and caring for others. For many, survival mode becomes normalised, constantly balancing the needs of everyone around them while continuing to show up, lead and deliver outcomes regardless of exhaustion, burnout or personal capacity.

Within many organisational and sector settings, First Nations women are frequently positioned as key cultural contributors, educators, nurturers, advocates, organisers, who create culturally safe environments. This often includes significant emotional and relational labour, particularly while being one of the only First Nations visible voices in the room. This form of labour is frequently unrecognised within formal role descriptions, workforce frameworks and funding models, despite being essential to the functioning of culturally safe environments.

This cumulative burden is not solely occupational; it is cultural, emotional and intergenerational in nature, shaped by historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation and systemic inequity.

Many First Nations women are carrying entire ecosystems behind the scenes. Not only delivering work, but holding communities together, creating opportunities for others and ensuring culture remains visible, respected and protected within industries that have historically excluded them.

The role of the matriarch is often invisible to those outside the community, yet it is foundational to the strength, resilience and continuity of First Nations communities across the country.

Despite these pressures, First Nations women continue to lead with strength, knowledge, resilience and deep cultural responsibility, creating pathways not only for themselves, but for future generations. The labour of First Nations women has long sustained communities, movements and industries, even when that labour has gone unseen, unsupported or unrecognised.

Recognising this reality means the sector must move beyond relying on the unpaid labour, goodwill and emotional capacity of First Nations women to sustain culturally safe spaces and industry change. Real investment, culturally safe wellbeing support, leadership opportunities and long-term structural support are necessary to ensure First Nations women are not only surviving within these industries, but are able to lead sustainably, be supported holistically and thrive without carrying the burden alone.

Strong cultural infrastructure extends beyond venues, buildings and programs. It includes people, relationships, First Nations languages, knowledge systems, governance structures, mentorship networks, workforce systems and cultural transmission pathways that enable sustainable sector development and culturally safe practice.

Future investment should prioritise regional access, workforce development and long-term capacity building, particularly for First Nations-governed organisations and independent creative businesses working directly within community and live music eco-systems.

Supporting organisations such as Balya Productions represents investment not only in creative and industry outcomes, but in the cultural leadership, lived experience and community-connected governance systems. Sustained investment in First Nations-governed organisations strengthens employment pathways, supports cultural continuity and contributes to long-term structural industry change led and driven by the people doing the work on the ground.

FIRST NATIONS GOVERNANCE ORGANISATIONS AND SELF - DETERMINATION

First Nations governance is not symbolic representation or consultation after decisions have already been made. It is about First Nations people holding real authority, leadership and decision-making power across the planning, delivery and future direction of projects, organisations and the broader live music sector.

It looks like:

- Decision-making led by First Nations-governed and employed organisations embedded across programming, producing, touring, production and workforce development.
- Community relationships and cultural responsibility being valued equally alongside operational and financial outcomes.
- Employing and mentoring First Nations crew, producers, artists and emerging workers into long-term industry pathways not one-off opportunities.
- Creating culturally safe work environments where Mob can work, lead and grow without needing to compromise identity or cultural integrity.
- Building governance structures that reflect accountability to community, culture and long-term impact, not only institutional expectations.
- Ensuring regional and remote voices are represented within national conversations and industry leadership spaces.
- Supporting self-determination by allowing communities and First Nations-governed and employed organisations to guide how stories, events and cultural experiences are developed and presented.
- Investing in sustainable operational capacity for First Nations-governed and employed organisations already doing the work on the ground, rather than relying solely on short-term project funding.

For Balya Productions, First Nations governance is also about visibility and leadership within spaces where First Nations women, particularly in live production touring and behind-the-scenes operational roles, have historically been underrepresented. It is about creating pathways so the next generation can see themselves not only on stage, but leading festivals, touring nationally, managing productions and shaping the future of the industry itself.

ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE - BLAK MUSIC FOR BLAK AUDIENCES - MOB FAMOUS

On Country Programming - Audience engagement should focus on accessibility, inclusion and meaningful connection rather than simply attendance numbers. Communities engage more deeply when they see themselves reflected authentically across programming, leadership and creative delivery. Supporting culturally safe events, regional touring, grassroots initiatives and emerging creatives helps build stronger relationships between audiences, artists and the broader cultural sector.

Australia's cultural future should reflect the full diversity, strength and leadership of First Nations creatives not only on stage, but across every layer of the industry ecosystem.

The next National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to create lasting structural change that supports a more equitable, sustainable and culturally connected live music sector for the future.

RAISING THEIR VOICES REVIEW (2022)

As identified in the *Raising Their Voices Review (2022)*, "systemic change is needed" across the Australian contemporary music industry, particularly in relation to cultural safety, representation, equity and leadership for First Nations peoples. Balya Productions supports a National Cultural Policy framework that ensures First Nations music workers are not simply consulted, but are actively positioned within decision-making, governance, workforce development and long-term industry leadership roles through principles of self-determination, culturally safe practice and equitable investment.

The barriers experienced by First Nations practitioners working across live production, touring and technical roles are consistent with findings identified in the *Raising Their Voices Review (2022)*, which highlighted the need for greater First Nations representation, cultural safety and leadership across the contemporary music industry.

Through Balya Productions, this work is already being addressed in practice through the delivery of culturally safe workforce development initiatives, touring mentorship, festival and live production pathways, and leadership opportunities for emerging First Nations crew, creatives and industry practitioners. This work demonstrates the importance of sustained, community-led investment models that move beyond short-term engagement toward long-term workforce participation and leadership outcomes.

The priorities outlined within the Australian Government's *Revive National Cultural Policy* strongly align with the work currently being undertaken through Balya Productions.

Through First Nations mentoring, workforce participation initiatives and culturally informed leadership development, Balya Productions contributes directly to the *First Nations First* pillar by creating practical employment, training and career development opportunities for emerging First Nations creatives and industry workers.

Through regional, grassroots and community-led events, Balya Productions also contributes to *A Place for Every Story* by supporting authentic cultural expression, community connection and increased access to culturally connected creative experiences outside metropolitan areas, including regional and remote communities.

The principle of *Centrality of the Artist* is further reflected through support for touring, live production delivery and sustainable artist ecosystems, recognising that artists require strong operational, technical and production infrastructure around them to maintain long-term careers and creative practice.

Balya Productions also reflects the principle of *Strong Cultural Infrastructure* by recognising that cultural infrastructure extends beyond physical venues and buildings to include workforce capability, First Nations languages, mentorship systems, operational capacity, cultural governance and community-led knowledge sharing that collectively strengthen the broader live music ecosystem.

Through culturally safe festivals, community events and accessible participation opportunities, Balya Productions further supports *Engaging the Audience* by strengthening meaningful relationships between communities, creatives, audiences and the broader cultural sector.

However, without sustained investment in workforce pathways, culturally safe leadership development and First Nations-governed and employed organisations infrastructure, representation outcomes across the sector will remain limited, inconsistent and unsustainable.

The consultation paper consistently references resilience, inclusion, participation, innovation, sustainability and long-term sector growth. These objectives cannot be fully realised without coordinated national investment in First Nations workforce development, culturally safe governance structures and long-term industry participation pathways across the broader contemporary live music ecosystem.

There remains limited national workforce data capturing the participation of First Nations peoples across the contemporary music industry beyond performing artist roles. This includes areas such as live production, touring, stage management, technical operations, festival delivery, programming, producing, artist services, logistics and other critical behind-the-scenes leadership and operational positions that underpin the sustainability of the sector.

Without accurate workforce mapping and sector-wide data collection, the contributions of First Nations peoples across the broader music ecosystem remain structurally under-recognised within policy development, funding frameworks, workforce planning and long-term industry investment strategies.

Future National Cultural Policy and music industry research frameworks must therefore include dedicated First Nations workforce data collection, sector mapping and longitudinal research across all areas of the music and live production ecosystem to better understand participation, barriers, workforce retention, leadership pathways and long-term sector sustainability for First Nations peoples working across both creative and operational industry roles.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRY DATA

The following recommendations are informed by the Revive National Cultural Policy, the Raising Their Voices Review (2022), the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, UNDRIP and First Nations language policy frameworks.

Balya Productions calls for a coordinated national response that recognises First Nations peoples not only as contributors to Australia's creative industries, but as cultural leaders, knowledge holders, producers, technical specialists, and drivers of long-term sector sustainability.

Without sustained and targeted investment, First Nations participation across the contemporary music and live production sectors will continue to be constrained by short-term funding cycles, limited workforce pathways, under-resourced infrastructure, and systemic inequities in decision-making and governance.

To address these ongoing barriers, Balya Productions recommends the following actions be embedded within the National Cultural Policy framework:

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT AND SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY

- Commit to long-term operational funding and governance support for First Nations-governed and employed organisations, music and live production organisations, moving beyond short-term project-based funding models that limit sustainability, workforce retention and sector growth.
- Recognise cultural infrastructure as extending beyond venues and physical assets to include First Nations language, workforce development, operational capacity, mentorship systems, cultural governance and community-led knowledge sharing.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION

- Develop and invest in clear workforce pathways across technical production, live touring, staging, festival operations, event management and other behind-the-scenes industry roles that remain significantly underrepresented by First Nations peoples.
- Establish dedicated national workforce data collection and research to measure and strengthen First Nations participation across the broader contemporary music industry ecosystem, including operational, technical and production-based careers.
- Support First Nations-governed and employed organisations mentorship, training and industry development initiatives that create direct employment outcomes, leadership opportunities and long-term professional networks.

REGIONAL ACCESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE EQUITY

- Increase national touring investment and regional infrastructure support to improve equitable and sustainable participation opportunities for First Nations artists, crew and industry workers living in regional and remote communities.
- Prioritise investment in On-Country creative, cultural and language-based programs that strengthen community connection, intergenerational knowledge transfer, cultural continuity and local economic participation.

CULTURAL SAFETY, LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- Increase First Nations representation across decision-making, governance, programming, producing and cultural policy development roles throughout the arts and music sectors.
- Invest in culturally safe workplaces, leadership pathways and retention strategies that support long-term career sustainability for First Nations practitioners and workers.
- Recognise and appropriately resource the significant cultural load, mentorship responsibilities and community leadership obligations carried by First Nations practitioners across the sector.
- Ensure all future national cultural policy frameworks embed First Nations self-determination, leadership, accountability and shared decision-making mechanisms across all levels of the creative industries.
- Support the strengthening, visibility and integration of First Nations languages across music, live production, festivals, touring and cultural programming as an essential component of cultural safety, identity and self-determination.

- Effective First Nations governance reflects the principles of self-determination articulated through UNDRIP (2007), the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and the First Nations First pillar of the Revive National Cultural Policy(2023).

NATIONAL FIRST NATIONS MUSIC WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

Balya Productions recommends the establishment of a dedicated First Nations Music Skills and Workforce Capacity Building Program, with an investment of \$2 million over four years to strengthen long-term workforce participation across the contemporary music industry ecosystem.

The program should support:

- culturally safe training and professional development,
- paid mentorships and industry placements,
- touring and technical production pathways,
- leadership and governance development,
- and sustainable employment opportunities across live music, festivals, touring and behind-the-scenes industry roles.

NATIONAL FIRST NATIONS MUSIC COMMISSION AND INVESTMENT FUND

Balya Productions further recommends the establishment of a dedicated First Nations Music Commission and Investment Fund, with an investment of \$4 million over four years to support First Nations artists, producers, presenters and First Nations-governed and employed organisations.

This investment should prioritise:

- On-Country creative and cultural development,
- touring and presentation opportunities,
- professional development and showcasing initiatives,
- producer and presenter development,
- and long-term operational sustainability for First Nations-governed and employed organisations.

Funding models must prioritise First Nations self-determination, culturally safe delivery, equitable governance and sustainable sector development, rather than relying solely on short-term project outcomes and fragmented investment approaches.

The Fund should also support initiatives that strengthen the use, preservation and revitalisation of First Nations languages through music, performance, live production and contemporary cultural practice, recognising language as a critical component of Australia's cultural identity and creative future.

INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP AND SECTOR REPRESENTATION

Balya Productions Director, Letisha Ackland, provides strategic leadership and sector expertise through participation in national advisory committees, governance forums, and industry-led initiatives that contribute to policy development, cultural reform, and strengthened outcomes for First Nations peoples within Australia's arts and music sectors. These appointments and contributions include:

- Advisory member, [Australian Live Music Business Council](#)
- Member, [Support Act - First Nations Leadership group](#)
- Member, [First Nations Steering Committee - '2022 - Raising our Voices Music Review'](#) contributing to national discussions addressing systemic discrimination, cultural safety, and equity within the contemporary Australian music industry
- Advisory Committee Member, [Regional and Remote Music Summit 2026 - Advisory & Speaker at the 2025 Summit in Byron Bay, NSW](#)
- Speaker, Regional and Remote Music Summit 2025 held in Byron Bay

These leadership and advisory contributions reflect Balya Productions' ongoing commitment to advancing First Nations self-determination, strengthening culturally informed governance frameworks, and advocating for culturally safe, equitable, and sustainable long-term structural reform across Australia's creative, cultural, and music sectors.

RECOGNITION AND INDUSTRY ACHIEVEMENT

Balya Productions acknowledges the national leadership and industry contribution of Director, Letisha Ackland, whose work across First Nations music, cultural advocacy, and community leadership has been recognised through significant sector awards, including:

- Recipient of the [NAIDOC SA Awards 2024 Person of the Year Award](#) [Recipient of the Women in Music Awards 2025 Live Production Touring Award](#) [2025 Recipients and Finalists IAWMA](#)

These acknowledgements reflect the strength of First Nations leadership within the contemporary music and cultural sectors and demonstrate the importance of investing in First Nations-led production, touring, and cultural development initiatives across Australia.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations outlined in this submission support the objectives of Revive, align with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, uphold the principles of UNDRIP (2007), and contribute to a stronger, more equitable and culturally sustainable future for Australia's arts and cultural sectors.

Australia's next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to move beyond symbolic inclusion and deliver meaningful, long-term structural reform across the arts, cultural and live music sectors.

While *Revive* has established an important foundation, significant gaps remain in workforce development, culturally safe leadership pathways, regional access, First Nations-governed organisations, and long-term investment in the infrastructure required to support sustainable participation and career progression for First Nations peoples.

As a First Nations woman working nationally across live music production, touring and festival delivery, I have experienced both the opportunities and barriers that continue to exist within the industry. Through Balya Productions, I have worked to create practical pathways for emerging First Nations crew, creatives and industry workers to gain hands-on experience, employment opportunities and long-term career development within touring, festival and live production environments. This work is grounded in a simple principle: **we cannot be what we cannot see**

This submission calls for sustained investment in First Nations self-determination, governance, workforce development, culturally safe workplaces, First Nations languages as cultural infrastructure, regional and remote participation, and leadership pathways that extend beyond representation alone. It also recognises the significant cultural load carried by First Nations practitioners, particularly First Nations women, whose leadership, mentoring, advocacy and community responsibilities often remain invisible and under-resourced.

Strong cultural infrastructure extends beyond venues and buildings. It includes First Nations languages, cultural knowledge systems, governance structures, workforce pathways, mentorship networks and community-led organisations that sustain cultural continuity and industry growth.

To achieve the ambitions of the National Cultural Policy, government investment must support long-term operational sustainability, strengthen First Nations leadership across all levels of the sector, improve workforce data collection, and resource First Nations-governed initiatives that create lasting employment, cultural and economic outcomes.

The future of Australia's arts and cultural sector must be built not only on inclusion, but on genuine partnership, shared decision-making and First Nations leadership. By investing in the people, organisations and communities already driving change, the government can help create a more equitable, culturally strong and sustainable creative future for generations to come.

Warm Regards,

Letisha Ackland



Director & Founder of Balya Productions

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www.balyaproductions.com

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APPENDIX A – SELECTED INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE AND EVENT DELIVERY

NATIONAL TOURING FESTIVALS

- St Jerome's Laneway Festival (2014–2026)
- Groovin the Moo (2016–2023)
- Spilt Milk Festival (2023, 2025–2026)
- Wildlands Festival (2024 / 2025)
- Strummingbird Festival (2025)

MAJOR ARTS AND CULTURAL FESTIVALS

- WOMADelaide
- Adelaide Festival
- Adelaide Fringe Festival
- Harvest Rock Festival
- Gluttony Food & Wine 2019 - 2025
- Darwin Festival 2017 - 2019

FIRST NATIONS FESTIVALS AND CULTURAL EVENTS

- Spirit Festival (2010, 2013)
- Survival Day SA
- Treaty - SA First Nations Showcase (2020)
- Barunga Festival (2018, 2019, 2021, 2025)
- Yabaardu Festival (2022–2024)
- National Indigenous Music Awards (2022–2026)
- NAIDOC SA March and Family Festival (2022–2026)
- Mourning in the Morning (2026)
- Blakyard Picnic (2024)
- Blak Nite (2026)

APPENDIX B – INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE CONTRIBUTIONS

- Australian Live Music Business Council
- Support Act First Nations Leadership Group
- First Nations Steering Committee – Raising Their Voices Review
- Regional and Remote Music Summit Advisory Committee
- Speaking engagements
- Awards and recognition