

**SBS SUBMISSION TO THE OFFICE FOR THE ARTS
CONSULTATION ON A NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY
MAY 2026**

1. Introduction

The Special Broadcasting Service (**SBS**) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the development of a new National Cultural Policy. SBS is one of the world's most linguistically diverse media networks, with broadcast television and audio, and multiplatform online services in more than 60 languages as well as uniquely close relationships with the communities it serves.

In its submissions to the development and review of the National Cultural Policy '*Revive*', SBS noted its role as a key cultural institution providing services that are vital to Australia's cultural life and identity, as well as being a key arts provider and supporter.

On this basis, SBS called for a central role in *Revive*, suggesting that with appropriate resourcing, there were significant opportunities for SBS to play an impactful role in the achievement of the NCP's objectives.

There now exists a similar opportunity to leverage the existing public investment in SBS and NITV and unlock unrealised potential benefits through greater utilisation of their unique capabilities, storytelling and community connection. SBS and NITV are essential public services, available for free to all Australians, delivering diverse cultural output with both a broad and specific reach.

The new National Cultural Policy should specifically acknowledge the unique role SBS and NITV play in ensuring Australia's cultural output reflects contemporary Australia and is accessible to all Australians. This submission outlines how, with appropriate recognition and resourcing, the new National Cultural Policy can make greater utilisation of SBS and NITV's ability to deliver cultural and social objectives for the benefit of all Australians.

About SBS

For over 50 years, SBS has played a crucial and unique role in Australia as a key cultural institution providing services that are vital to Australia's cultural life and identity. The history of SBS began in 1975 when the Australian Government established radio stations 2EA in Sydney and 3EA in Melbourne to inform Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds about Medibank.

Since then, SBS has evolved to deliver services across multiple platforms, broadcast and online, producing Australian content in more than 60 languages, so that all audiences have free access to trusted news and high-quality entertainment. Today SBS News is one of the most trusted news sources in Australia, and SBS was awarded Australian podcast publisher of the year for



three consecutive years. National Indigenous Television (NITV) is Australia's leading platform for First Nations storytelling and home to the only national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander television news service.

The SBS network delivers exceptional programming by and for Australia's diverse communities and in doing so, supports civic, social, and economic participation, and social cohesion in contemporary Australia.

2. SBS is the cultural institution that best represents Australia

SBS is the cultural institution that best reflects contemporary Australia. Its role should be recognised and supported through the new National Cultural Policy.

SBS has specific Charter obligations to serve all Australians including First Nations peoples, and the more than 5.6 million users of languages other than English at home. The most recent Australian census indicates significant growth in both these cohorts. Those speaking a language other than English at home grew approximately 16% since the last Census - almost double the growth rate of the general Australian population. Also in the 2021 Census, 812,728 people identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander – up from 649,171 in 2016, representing a 25.2% increase.

SBS and its specific remit to serve these communities is therefore more relevant than ever, as is its purpose to inspire all Australians to explore, respect and celebrate our diverse world, and in doing so, contribute to a cohesive society.

SBS's unparalleled connections with diverse communities are a national asset. The Policy should strengthen and make full use of these connections to ensure Australians from all backgrounds can access cultural content and experiences that genuinely reflect their lives, languages and communities.

3. SBS as national cultural infrastructure

There is an opportunity for the new National Cultural Policy to recognise and support a broader range of institutions which connect Australians with cultural life and identity. That is, the National Cultural Policy should expand its strategy for ensuring access beyond traditional collections, galleries and Government agencies, and consider recognition and support for institutions which unlock broader participation and access.

The ability of diverse and under-served audiences to participate in Australian culture increasingly depends on accessibility, discoverability and platform design. SBS's unique reach, services, content, and community connections means it is a key tool to connect diverse and under-served audiences with relevant and impactful cultural content.

SBS's platforms and services offer powerful ways to reduce structural barriers to equitable access to cultural participation. Those barriers include:

- Assumed fluency in English;
- Assumed familiarity with cultural tenets;
- Limited opportunities in the sector for new and emerging creatives from diverse backgrounds; and
- Assumed capacity to pay for access (unlimited fast internet connections, mobile data and/or content subscriptions).



SBS's services, content and accessibility means it is well placed to play an expanded role in Australia's national cultural infrastructure. SBS's cultural infrastructure already serves multilingual Australians, First Nations peoples, newly arrived communities, culturally specific audiences, audiences with additional accessibility needs, and audiences needing free access to cultural participation:

- SBS and NITV's terrestrial transmission network, digital audio services and SBS On Demand are key pieces of cultural distribution infrastructure. SBS's terrestrial network reaches 98.5% of the population and provides access without charges, limits or subscription fees.
- Audiences can access cultural content on SBS and NITV's digital platforms for free.
- Through its multilingual content and deep community connections, SBS provides access to cultural content in ways other platforms cannot, helping more Australians see, hear and engage with stories that reflect their lives and communities.
- SBS and NITV's platforms can be accessed without significant technical complexity. In a crowded content and cultural landscape, ease of discoverability is as important as the production of content, and cultural institutions must adapt to meet audiences where they are.
- SBS provides very high levels of captioning for deaf and hard of hearing audiences on its television and on-demand services and provides increasing levels of audio-description for blind and low-vision audiences.
- SBS and NITV's content and services are governed by a Code of Practice (including classification frameworks) and Commercial, Funding and External Relationships Guidelines. This framework ensures SBS's services and content are provided in ways which align with community expectations regarding the safety standards for media content.

SBS also has initiatives in place to lower barriers to the creation of cultural content. For example, SBS, NITV and Screen Australia recently announced the return of Digital Originals, a leading initiative for emerging creatives in Australia. It is designed to uncover original and compelling stories for SBS and NITV, and to provide a structured pathway to the screen industry, equipping emerging creators with skills, industry connections and resources to develop bold ideas into audience-ready, short-form scripted series.¹

From SBS and NITV's perspective, culture is not only about the creation of content, but about who can access it, participate in it, and see themselves reflected within it. Cultural policy should not only focus on the creation of cultural works, but also on their discoverability and capacity to connect communities. Institutions such as SBS and NITV that lower barriers to cultural participation and connect Australians across language, geography and lived experience should be recognised within the new National Cultural Policy.

4. The cultural content created and distributed by SBS and NITV is unique in the Australian media landscape

The cultural content created and distributed by SBS and NITV occupies a distinctive place in Australia's media and cultural landscape.

¹ <https://www.sbs.com.au/aboutus/2026/05/14/transforming-bold-ideas-into-market-ready-productions-digital-originals-returns/>



Everything that SBS does is driven by its Charter. In a media environment where commercial imperatives can favour content with mass audience appeal, SBS and NITV audiences are served with stories, languages and cultural perspectives which may otherwise have limited visibility.

This includes multilingual content, culturally specific storytelling, First Nations storytelling and programming that helps diverse communities see themselves reflected in Australian cultural life. This distinct role means that SBS and NITV are an important part of how a contemporary, diverse Australia sees itself reflected in its cultural output.

Amongst the full slate of Australian content across platforms and industry sectors, SBS's Australian content is truly unique. Recent examples of these series include dramas such as *Four Years Later*, *Moonbird*, *True Colours*, *New Gold Mountain*, *Safe Harbour*, *Sunshine*, *Dead Lucky*, *On the Ropes*, *The Hunting*, and *Hungry Ghosts*.² These unique productions, made by diverse creatives, feature diverse stories, languages, settings and storytellers in ways not found on other platforms.

SBS's drama and documentary output is scalable. Further recognition and resourcing support through the new National Cultural Policy will have the potential to deepen Australia's cultural expression by enabling more stories that reflect the complexity and diversity of modern Australia. Additional investment would also have flow-on benefits for Australian creatives, supporting more commissions, more creative jobs and greater investment in Australian cultural storytelling.

SBS is also leading in the development of a more inclusive screen sector which is more representative of the diversity within the community. SBS's market-leading Commissioning Inclusion Guidelines³ outline SBS's commitment to reflecting the diversity of Australia through on-screen and off-screen roles across its commissioned content slate. In the most recent reporting period, SBS achieved an uplift in inclusion and representation across its commissioned content slate benchmarks, reflecting the diversity of contemporary Australia.

5. First Nations cultural infrastructure

NITV is a channel made by, for and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It connects with communities, elevating stories and perspectives to a nationwide audience. In 2024-25, NITV delivered over 220 hours of original First Nations content and grew prime-time audiences by 10%. NITV's commitment to high-quality, culturally relevant programming brings diverse First Nations voices and experiences directly into the homes of all Australians, often in partnership with diverse First Nations production companies. Noting *Revive's* commitment to "First Nations First", there is scope to expand NITV's role in enhancing the nation's cultural outputs.

As an example of the cultural impact of NITV initiatives, NITV's quiz show, *Big Backyard Quiz*, first premiered in NAIDOC Week 2024, offering a fresh 'Blak lens' on entertainment. The production broke new ground through an innovative partnership with Screenwest, and landmark investment in supporting opportunities for First Nations creatives and practitioners. Thirty-six First Nations people were employed in behind-the-scenes and on-camera roles and received screen credits, reflecting a pioneering new model for First Nations talent development in the Australian film and television industry. It stands as a powerful example of NITV's

² Available on SBS On Demand [sbs.com.au/ondemand](https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand)

³ <https://www.sbs.com.au/aboutus/commissioning-inclusion-guidelines/>



commitment to self-determination in storytelling, and with appropriate resourcing support, this approach can be replicated into additional storytelling projects.

NITV's commitment to highlighting the importance of culture and connection also extends to connecting the newest Australians with the oldest living continuous culture. For example, NITV coverage of the Garma Festival each year features unique multilingual coverage with representatives from SBS language programs at the festival and reporting across the SBS Audio network in more than 60 languages.

This unique integration of First Nations storytelling, multicultural engagement and multilingual distribution is unlike anything else in Australia's cultural landscape, demonstrating the distinct value of SBS and NITV as national cultural infrastructure. It highlights the importance of ensuring the National Cultural Policy recognises and sustains institutions like SBS and NITV, whose public value lies precisely in this ability to connect cultures, communities and audiences in ways others cannot.

In particular, there is scope for NITV to expand its children's content with additional funding support. While many broadcasters are vacating this space, NITV has produced series that enable both First Nations children and children from all backgrounds to see positive, constructive representation on screen. Such content can support to a number of Closing the Gap targets, including early childhood education, and culture and language. The award winning *Little J and Big Cuz* is one example, with episodes available both in English and in First Nations languages including Arrernte, Yawuru, Noongar and Warlpiri. Policy settings that improves access to free, Australian, culturally relevant kid's content for Australian children should be considered a priority for the new national cultural policy.

Recognition of the role and impact of NITV in the new National Cultural Policy would be appropriate, and should be supported by enhanced funding opportunities to take advantage of NITV's unique cultural impact and potential.

6. Efficiency and impact

SBS's strong record of efficiency, multilingual output and growing reach makes it a powerful case for further cultural investment. SBS produces cultural content that has impact, reflects Australia's diversity and remains accessible to more people, while maintaining a relatively small cost base.

This efficiency is especially significant given the added complexity of creating content for both broad national reach and specific multicultural and multilingual communities.

SBS is industry-leading in efficiency. Broadcast cost per transmitted hour, broadcast salary costs per transmitted hour, and radio cost per transmitted hour are extremely low when compared to the already competitive set in Australia.⁴

SBS has also effectively grown audience consumption significantly, and at levels greater than its funding growth. Over the last ten years, SBS has found, and reinvested significant efficiencies, totalling \$77 million (to financial year 2024–25), to significantly grow digital video and audio consumption and television share, and make more first run Australian content than ever before.⁵

⁴ Internal analysis – FY23/FY25

⁵ SBS Annual Report 2025 – p 84



This efficiency and effectiveness, together with its established infrastructure, means that additional investment in SBS and NITV aligned to the new National Cultural Policy would deliver superior marginal utility, with benefits flowing directly back to Australian audiences and the Australian screen production sector.

7. Expanding the understanding of cultural participation

SBS encourages the Office of the Arts to use the opportunity of a New Cultural Policy to help broaden the understanding of 'culture' and cultural consumption.

Cultural storytelling has for some time increasingly occurred outside of galleries, theatres, museums and literature. Culture is not only encountered in formal arts settings, but also through the stories people consume in their everyday life. Australians are increasingly looking for cultural content in other settings, including those which can be consumed in the home or on the move.

Cultural participation now includes forms of storytelling such as documentary, digital storytelling, multilingual journalism, audio storytelling and community-linked media. Screen, audio and digital media play a central role in shaping cultural identity, building understanding and fostering social cohesion, particularly for younger audiences. Broadening the understanding of cultural participation can also assist in equity of access, as digital, broadcast and multilingual storytelling can reduce geographic, cost and language barriers to participation.

For many Australians, cultural connection is experienced through multilingual news and information, documentaries and storytelling that reflects the experiences of diverse communities. These areas of strength for SBS and NITV.

In light of these broader forms of participation, SBS's role as key cultural infrastructure is clear, and should be recognised through the National Cultural Policy.

8. Social cohesion, belonging and inclusion

There is also an opportunity to reconsider the policy aims associated with the National Cultural Policy, or to adjust their weighting. For instance, cultural policy is traditionally conceived of in economic and creative terms. However, reference can also be made to other Government policy priorities, such as belonging, cultural understanding, national identity, civic participation and social cohesion.

At a time when social cohesion is under pressure and trust in institutions is declining, SBS provides a vital cultural safeguard through the amplification of under-represented voices, and through diversity, plurality, and enhanced mutual understanding.

The media environment is increasingly fragmented and audiences are dispersed across platforms. This is resulting in audiences and communities consuming content from a range of very different content ecosystems. Institutions like SBS and NITV, which can create shared points of cultural connection, are increasingly important.

SBS's Charter requires it to reflect Australian society, increase awareness of diversity and make use of Australia's diverse creative resources. In line with its Charter, and with appropriate resourcing, SBS can produce even more content that builds on cultural expression as a mechanism for connection, inclusion and civic participation

A National Cultural Policy that advances social cohesion, belonging and cultural understanding, should recognise SBS and NITV as core cultural infrastructure. SBS's ability to operate across



languages, platforms and communities is unique and warrants explicit inclusion in the new National Cultural Policy.

9. An investment in SBS is an investment in the diversification of the nation's cultural outputs

Inclusion of SBS and NITV in the new National Cultural Policy should go beyond a reference or recognition in the text of the policy and should include additional resourcing support for the creation and dissemination of additional cultural content.

Such an outcome would diversify Australia's cultural output by expanding the range of stories that are commissioned, produced and distributed. This is due to SBS's unique editorial remit, commitment to Charter and audience focus, which create space for stories that are otherwise underrepresented. Culturally valuable storytelling does not always align with commercial incentives and SBS plays an important role in addressing this gap, ensuring a broader and more authentic cultural output.

SBS's Commissioning Inclusion Guidelines also ensure that investment in SBS supports diversity in behind-the-camera roles. The Guidelines, and a range of other industry development programs, help develop the careers of writers, producers, journalists, directors and creative practitioners from a broader range of cultural backgrounds.

Diversification of cultural outputs can occur not just in thematic terms, but also in linguistic terms. Multilingual storytelling that reflects the experiences of a multicultural Australia creates content and enables access in ways that would be unlikely to emerge through mainstream commissioning models alone.

In this way, SBS and NITV's role as cultural infrastructure can be understood not only in terms of cultural production, but also in the creation of a richer, more representative expression of national identity.

10. Conclusion

SBS and NITV support the creation of a new National Cultural Policy which reflects modern cultural participation, the diversity of contemporary Australia, and the potential to draw on existing national cultural infrastructure.

SBS and NITV already have a unique and defined role in producing and disseminating cultural content through distinctive storytelling, multilingual content, First Nations cultural output and equitable access. As a trusted national institution with deep community connection and a proven capacity to deliver cultural output efficiently, SBS and NITV should be recognised and further supported through the new National Cultural Policy.

Leveraging existing public investment in SBS and NITV to enable new and extended content initiatives offers an efficient and high-impact opportunity to strengthen Australia's cultural infrastructure, diversify national cultural output, and to help ensure cultural participation is accessible to all Australians.