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Ipswich City Council Submission on the Federal Arts and Cultural Policy
Australian Government Office for the Arts - Australia's National Cultural Policy
Claire Sougnes, Director Ipswich Art Gallery
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Ipswich City Council



ipswich.qld.gov.au

Australian Government Office for the Arts - Australia's
National Cultural Policy
Online submission portal: [REDACTED]

26 May 2026

Re: Submission on the Federal Arts and Cultural Policy

The opportunity to shape the future direction of Australia's arts and cultural sector presents challenges and possibilities. While the current arts and cultural policy *Revive* aims to strengthen Australia's arts and cultural sector, its funding and implementation settings risk reinforcing existing inequities by favouring metropolitan institutions and overlooking outer growth areas.

In Ipswich, Queensland, arts and culture play a vital civic role – supporting social cohesion, education, economic participation, and community identity – yet local organisations face mounting pressures from population growth, limited resources, and complex community needs. Despite functioning as a major regional centre, Ipswich's metropolitan classification excludes it from key regional funding, creating a disconnect between policy frameworks and lived reality. As a result, local government bears a disproportionate share of sustained cultural investment despite limited revenue, while federal support remains fragmented and inequitable.

The following submission calls for a more balanced, place-based approach to ensure cities like Ipswich are recognised as central to Australia's cultural future.

Yours sincerely



Sonia Cooper
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Submission

A Regional and Outer Metropolitan Perspective from Ipswich, Queensland

Introduction

This submission responds to the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy *Revive* from the perspective of regional and outer-metropolitan Australia, with a specific focus on Ipswich, Queensland. Ipswich is one of Australia's fastest-growing cities, characterised by cultural diversity, deep histories of First Nations custodianship, strong creative communities, and significant socio-economic variation. While the policy's intent to renew, sustain and grow Australia's arts and cultural sector is welcome, its implementation risks reinforcing long-standing disparities between metropolitan and regional communities and continuing to overlook the growing outer areas unless funding structures, access mechanisms and place-based investment models are recalibrated.

The Role of Arts and Culture in Cities like Ipswich

In Ipswich, arts and culture play a critical civic role that extends well beyond creative production. Cultural organisations and facilities function as engines of social cohesion, lifelong learning, economic participation, youth engagement, and community identity. As a regional city less than 40 kms from Brisbane within a major growth corridor, Ipswich experiences metropolitan pressures without essential metropolitan-scale resourcing. Local cultural infrastructure - galleries, libraries, museums, performance spaces, festivals and community arts programs - are often the most visible and accessible expressions of culture for residents. They are also tasked with responding to complex community needs including population growth, intergenerational disadvantage, cultural diversity, and reconciliation. These responsibilities increasingly sit at the local government level.


Federal Funding: Competitive, Centralised, and Uneven

While *Revive* articulates national goals around sustainability, access and fairness, federal arts funding continues to be structured in ways that disadvantage regional organisations:

- **Competitive, project-based funding models** favour large, metropolitan organisations with dedicated grant-writing capacity and institutional scale.
- **Short-term funding cycles** undermine long-term workforce development and organisational sustainability in regional contexts.
- **National program settings** often fail to reflect regional operating realities, including smaller audiences, higher touring costs, and limited access to philanthropy and corporate sponsorship.
- **Inequitable classification** of outer-metropolitan cities resulting in exclusion from regional status.

As a result, federal investment in arts and culture is disproportionately absorbed by capital cities, despite strong participation, demand and demonstrated impact in regional-scaled growth communities like Ipswich

One of Ipswich's challenges within the current funding framework is its position as a rapidly growing outer-metropolitan regional city. Ipswich is classified as metropolitan because of its proximity to



Brisbane but in reality, it functions as one of Australia's fastest-growing standalone cities, with infrastructure and service pressures equivalent to major regional centres. **Federal policy needs to recognise outer metropolitan growth cities like Ipswich, so they are not locked out of the funding designed to support exactly these challenges.** Ipswich is classified by proximity and connectivity- not by growth pressure, disadvantage, or governance independence and this needs to change.

Local Government: Carrying a Disproportionate Share

By contrast, Ipswich City Council- and regional local governments more broadly -provide significant, sustained and structural investment in arts and culture. This includes:

- Ownership, operation and maintenance of major cultural infrastructure;
- Direct funding of visual and performing arts programs;
- Delivery of community arts, education, heritage and First Nations initiatives;
- Workforce development and creative sector support;
- Free and low-cost access programs that ensure equity of participation.

This funding is delivered despite local governments having the narrowest revenue base of all three tiers of government. In effect, councils are underwriting core cultural services for their communities while federal funding largely remains episodic and supplementary.

The imbalance is particularly pronounced in growth regions like Ipswich, where demand for cultural services increases year on year, but federal funding is not indexed to population growth, place-based need, or infrastructure responsibility.

Missed Opportunities in the Current Policy Framework

While *Revive* contains important principles - such as creative workforce sustainability, First Nations leadership, and increased access - it does not yet sufficiently address:


- **Place-based funding models** that recognise the central role of regional anchor institutions, reclassifying outer-metropolitan cities to enable access to Federal funding;
- **Direct operational funding** for regional cultural organisations delivering ongoing public benefit;
- **Equitable infrastructure investment**, particularly where local government has already demonstrated long-term commitment;
- **True partnership approaches** between federal and local government.

Without these mechanisms, federal policy risks amplifying rather than alleviating geographic inequity.

What Regional Australia Needs

From an Ipswich perspective, a more equitable national cultural policy would include:

1. **Dedicated, quarantined regional arts funding streams**, assessed with regionally appropriate criteria that acknowledges outer-metropolitan cities in growth corridors as regional centres;
2. **Multi-year co-investment models** that genuinely match or leverage local government funding;
3. **Recognition of local government as a primary cultural funder**, not merely a delivery partner;

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4. **Decentralised decision-making**, including regional representation in assessment processes;
 5. **Support for creative workforce retention** in regional communities, not just touring or outreach activity.

Conclusion

Ipswich demonstrates that when local governments invest in arts and culture, communities benefit socially, culturally and economically. However, local government cannot and should not continue to shoulder this responsibility alone.

If the Australian Government is committed to fairness, access and sustainability - as articulated in *Revive* - then federal funding must more accurately reflect where cultural participation actually occurs and who is funding it day to day. Regional Australia does not lack ambition or capability; it lacks equitable access to national investment.

Revive provides a strong conceptual framework for Australia's cultural future. To deliver on its promise, the policy must be implemented in ways that genuinely recognise regional realities and the pivotal role of local government. A rebalancing of federal arts funding, in genuine partnership with local government, is essential to ensure that regional cities like Ipswich are not peripheral to Australia's cultural future - but central to it.

Ipswich demonstrates that regional cities are not peripheral to Australia's cultural life - they are central. A more equitable partnership between federal and local government, aligned to *Revive's* five pillars, is essential to ensuring that cultural opportunity, participation and sustainability are not determined by postcode.