



Alice Springs Cinema

11 Todd Mall, Alice Springs NT

www.alicespringscinema.com.au

SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CONSULTATION

May 2026

To whom it may concern,

Alice Springs Cinema is a four-screen, 548-seat independent cinema located at 11 Todd Mall, Alice Springs NT, serving one of Australia's most geographically isolated urban communities. Operating under current management since 2011, the cinema attracts approximately 60,000 admissions per year and holds 825 active members. It is the only cinema within more than 1,000 kilometres in any direction.

Alice Springs Cinema is not simply an entertainment venue. It is cultural and civic infrastructure at the heart of a deeply complex and vital Australian community. Alice Springs has a significant and growing Aboriginal population, and our cinema is one of the few institutions in the town that genuinely brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in a shared public space. Families, elders, young people, students, community groups and visitors attend together. The cinema provides a neutral, welcoming gathering place where cultures meet — at a time when community cohesion in Alice Springs requires every anchor it can find.

Alice Springs is also home to the Araluen Arts Centre, a government-funded performing arts and gallery venue that makes a valued contribution to the town's cultural life. Alice Springs Cinema operates differently and complementarily: it is privately run, commercially self-sustaining, and provides something Araluen does not — a direct connection to popular mainstream culture. Our cinema screens the same films, at the same time, that the rest of Australia is watching and talking about. It is the only venue in the region that gives Alice Springs audiences simultaneous access to the national cultural conversation around screen storytelling. Without it, Alice Springs is not simply underserved — it is culturally disconnected from the shared experience of contemporary Australian life.

The cinema's role extends well beyond commercial film sessions. We host school screenings both local and remote, community events working with local artists, Town Council, fundraisers, corporate functions and cultural screenings that serve the whole town and surrounding region. For many families — particularly those in low-income households and remote community members visiting Alice Springs — cinema attendance is among the most accessible forms of cultural participation available. Our programming supports Australian films, documentaries, LGBTQIA+, special event screenings, regular language films like Indian, Pilipino, Nepalese, Japanese to name a few. Annually we host the Sydney Travelling Film Festival (TFF) and co-host the Maparntwe Alice Springs International Film Festival (MASIFF) and for the first time in 2026 the National Indian Film Festival of Australia (NIFFA). Alice Springs has an incredibly diverse

multicultural community, and we actively seek content that will curate shared experiences celebrating culture.

Our 825 active members reflect a deeply loyal local audience that has chosen cinema as a regular part of their cultural lives. The cinema strives to invest back into the community wherever we can whether it be screening requests or donations to numerous community events & organisations. The cinema is a consistent, trusted presence in a community that faces significant social challenges, and its cultural and civic value far exceeds what attendance figures alone convey.

The infrastructure challenge facing our cinema is immediate. Our projection and digital cinema equipment — installed during the first digital cinema transition between 2009 and 2014 — is fully depreciated and has reached the end of its accounting and operational life. This is the Digital Mark II challenge that Independent Cinemas Australia describes nationally: the replacement or major refurbishment of ageing digital projection systems, servers, sound systems and related equipment. Critically, the distributor-backed mechanisms that funded the first transition no longer exist. The sector is on its own.

The national scale is significant. ICA estimates that approximately 60 per cent of Australia's cinema projection fleet — across approximately 1,380 of the nation's 2,300 screens — will require replacement or major refurbishment within the next four years, representing a national renewal task of approximately \$138 million. Replacement costs for contemporary cinema systems range from approximately \$55,000 to \$250,000 per screen depending on screen size, brightness and sound integration requirements.

For Alice Springs Cinema, this is not an abstraction. With four screens in a remote, high-cost operating environment — where wages, energy and freight all carry a significant remote premium and our electricity costs increased by 14 per cent in the most recent financial year — the cumulative replacement burden is substantial and cannot be funded from operating cashflow alone. We operate without subsidy and are still carrying the long-tail impacts of the pandemic on attendance and revenue. Without targeted support, the choices facing remote cinemas like ours are to defer upgrades, reduce screen capacity, or curtail service to the community. For Alice Springs, where there is no alternative cinema within more than 1,000 kilometres, any reduction in service means the direct loss of cultural access for the entire community.

We ask the Australian Government to:

- Recognise cinema exhibition as essential cultural and civic infrastructure within the next National Cultural Policy.
- Develop a national Digital Mark II framework with targeted support for regional and remote cinemas, where replacement economics are weakest but cultural and social dependence on local cinema is strongest.
- Ensure independent cinemas are eligible for cultural infrastructure, regional development, accessibility and sustainability programs.
- Prioritise communities — like Alice Springs — where the local cinema is the only regular cultural venue of scale and where social cohesion strengthens the case for support beyond the commercial one.

A national cultural policy that values Australian stories must also value the places where Australians experience them together. For the people of Alice Springs — Indigenous and non-Indigenous — that place is our cinema.

Rene Sutton

General Manager

Alice Springs Cinema

11 Todd Mall, Alice Springs NT

18 May 2026