

National Cultural Policy Submission

1473502

Public

Individual

Natalie Woods



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

My name is Natalie Woods. I live in Maryborough, a small historic town in regional Victoria, and I also spend significant time working in Alice Springs / in Central Australia. I am not a filmmaker, a cinema operator, or a film industry professional. I am a community member who loves going to the cinema — and who has become increasingly conscious of what it means to actually show up for it. This submission is written from that everyday perspective: as someone who understands, at a personal level, what small and regional cinemas contribute to the cultural life of the communities they serve, and what would be lost if they disappeared.

Like many people, I do not get to the cinema as often as I would like. Life gets in the way. Streaming is convenient. A big screen at home with decent sound can feel like a reasonable substitute. But every single time I walk into a cinema, I am reminded that it is not. The experience — the scale of the image, the quality of the sound, the darkness, the shared attention of an audience — is something that cannot be replicated at home, regardless of the technology available to us. It is genuinely better, and it is genuinely different.

I have made a deliberate effort recently to go more often, and that decision is not just personal. When I buy a ticket at the Paramount Cinema in Maryborough, I am supporting a small business that has chosen to stay in a regional town and keep that experience alive for the people around it. When I travel to Alice Springs for work, I make a point of visiting the Alice Springs Cinema for exactly the same reasons. Two different towns, two different contexts — but the same instinct: that turning up is an act of support, and that these places are worth fighting for.

Small and regional cinemas operate on tight margins in a market that has been dramatically disrupted by streaming platforms, rising operational costs, and the long shadow of post-pandemic audience habits. Unlike metropolitan multiplexes, regional cinemas cannot rely on volume. A single screen serving a town like Maryborough or a remote city like Alice Springs is not a luxury — it is often the only access point residents have to the cinematic experience, to Australian stories told on film, and to the sense of occasion that comes with going out to see something together as a community.

These cinemas also play an outsized social role. They are gathering places. They mark occasions. They give young people in regional and remote towns access to culture and storytelling that broadens their world. And in a place like Alice Springs, where community cohesion carries particular weight and cultural life is deeply meaningful, a local cinema is not peripheral — it is central. When a regional cinema closes, it is rarely replaced. The gap it leaves is permanent.

I would like to see the government explicitly recognise small and regional cinemas as cultural assets, not simply as private businesses operating in the entertainment sector. This should translate into practical support: targeted grants for infrastructure upgrades, relief from the licensing and regulatory costs that disproportionately burden small operators, and programs that help regional cinemas expand their programming to include Australian films, community screenings, and culturally significant works that streaming platforms do not prioritise.