

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

Stephen Schwer



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I support the submission made by Alice Springs Cinema because it speaks to something that is difficult to quantify but immediately felt once you live in a remote town: some places become part of the emotional scaffolding of a community.

The cinema in Alice Springs is one of those places.

In policy discussions, cinemas are often framed as commercial entertainment businesses, somewhere between popcorn and streaming competition. But that definition collapses completely in remote Australia. In Alice Springs, the cinema behaves less like a business category and more like civic glue. It is one of the last remaining indoor public spaces where the whole town still gathers without needing to agree on politics, background, religion, income or identity first. The lights dim, the screen flickers alive, and for a few hours a sometimes fractured town breathes in rhythm.

In our town, the cinema is a long standing beacon of hope. Services have disappeared. Opportunities have narrowed. Cultural life has been quietly eroded in ways that statistics have never properly captured. A cinema may seem small from Canberra. In Alice Springs it is a cultural necessity that keeps people connected to the wider country and to each other.

There is also something profoundly equalising about cinema itself. A blockbuster, a documentary, an Australian film, a Bollywood screening, a kids' movie during school holidays, a local festival event, these all place different parts of the community into the same shared orbit.

What strikes me most about the submission is that it identifies a blind spot in Australian cultural policy. Governments readily fund the creation of culture, but often overlook the spaces where culture is collectively experienced. Stories do not live only at the point of production. They live in audiences, conversations, rituals and shared memory. A cinema in a remote town is not just a delivery mechanism for films. It is a way of sharing culture and allowing our cultures to be shared.

The Digital Mark II proposal therefore should not be dismissed as a technical industry upgrade. If independent regional cinemas cannot afford to replace ageing systems, communities like Alice Springs risk cultural dimming. Not an abrupt blackout, but a gradual fading: fewer screenings, fewer events, less diversity, less access, less gathering. In remote Australia, decline sneaks in quietly, until everyone laments what used to be.

I believe there is a strong public interest in ensuring that does not happen. Supporting independent regional cinemas is not simply support for entertainment businesses. It is investment in social infrastructure, regional equity and cultural participation.

A national cultural policy should recognise that Australians do not experience culture only in capital-city institutions. Sometimes culture lives in a four-screen cinema in the middle of the desert, where people still come together on a Friday night to laugh, cry, escape, argue and feel part of something larger than themselves.