



Moorambilla Voices

Response to the National Cultural Policy, 2026

1. Provide a short introduction about yourself or the organisation you represent

More than a choir, Moorambilla Voices is one of regional NSW's longest running and most sustained professional arts programs. Each year, more than 300 young people aged 8 to 18 come together to co-create, perform and record multi-disciplinary works that celebrate the rich culture, stories and landscapes of regional and remote NSW.

Through an annual program of skill development workshops, residencies, performances, recording projects, and Artistic and Cultural Immersions held on Country, Moorambilla offers young people the rare opportunity to work alongside artists of the highest calibre – composers, musicians, choreographers and visual artists.

Inspired by the land, spirit and Indigenous cultures of regional NSW, Moorambilla Voices nurtures and empowers young people through song, dance and creativity, while honouring First Nations voices, stories and cultural knowledge. With a deep commitment to excellence, equity and opportunity, we support young people to connect to Country, discover their creative voices, and grow as confident, self-determined individuals who walk together with inclusion, respect and a shared sense of belonging.

2. What are the challenges and opportunities you see in the cultural sector and how to respond to them?

2.1. First Nations First

We believe First Nations culture should remain central to Australia's cultural policy and cultural identity. First Nations languages, spirituality, philosophy and cultural practices should not sit adjacent to Australian culture – they are foundational to it.

Organisations working with First Nations communities require the time and resources to undertake deep consultation, relationship building and culturally safe practice. Authentic engagement cannot be rushed, and it requires long-term trust, continuity and reciprocity, as well as increased financial and human resources to undertake this work respectfully and safely.

One of the challenges we experience is ensuring equitable representation across the many different First Nations communities and language groups we work with across regional NSW. There is also increasing

pressure on a relatively small number of Elders, language holders and cultural practitioners who are regularly called upon by multiple organisations, often leading to fatigue and burnout.

There is a significant opportunity for cultural policy to support longer-term investment in community-led cultural practice, language revitalisation and culturally safe consultation processes, particularly in regional and remote Australia where travel, communication and access costs continue to rise.

2.2. A Place for Every Story

Regional Australia contains extraordinary cultural richness and diversity, yet many regional communities remain underrepresented within the national cultural narrative.

We believe people should be supported to tell their own stories, in their own voice, and in ways that are culturally safe and authentic. This includes First Nations communities, multicultural communities living in regional areas, and young people whose perspectives are often overlooked within public cultural discourse.

Strong artistic outcomes are built through trust, time and meaningful collaboration. This work is relationship-based and cannot be reduced to short-term project delivery.

There is also an opportunity for cultural policy to recognise that a vibrant arts ecology is built through a diversity of organisations, practices and artistic purposes. Not every organisation can, or should, attempt to represent every community, demographic or policy priority (pillar) simultaneously. Organisations are strongest when they are supported to develop deep expertise, sustained relationships and long-term impact within their area of practice, community or artform. A healthy cultural sector requires both breadth across the sector, and depth within individual organisations.

2.3. Centrality of the Artist

Artists are central to Australia's cultural life and should be properly supported, remunerated and valued for the depth of knowledge, labour and creative leadership they provide.

There is a significant opportunity for greater partnership between major organisations, independent artists and regional communities so that high-quality artistic experiences are not limited by geography.

Emerging artists also require stronger support to develop the business and operational skills necessary to sustain long-term careers in the sector. Across many art forms there remains inconsistency and opacity around artist remuneration, commissioning arrangements and employment conditions.

Music Australia's recent *Sound Fair?* research provides an important contribution towards establishing clearer sector benchmarks and shared language around commissioning and artist remuneration. Similar work across additional art forms, including teaching artists, would strengthen sustainability and transparency across the broader cultural sector.

2.4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Arts education and cultural participation in regional Australia are no longer supplementary issues; they are matters of national cultural equity and infrastructure.

Schools are often the starting point for cultural participation, particularly in regional and remote communities where access to arts experiences can otherwise be extremely limited. Yet across Australia we are witnessing a steady erosion of arts education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

There are fewer specialist arts teachers in schools, fewer tertiary pathways in arts education, and reduced confidence among generalist teachers to deliver arts learning. This is creating long-term consequences not only for future artists, but also for future audiences, educators and communities.

We believe all young people should have access to quality arts education regardless of geographic location or socio-economic background. Tertiary qualified educators and teaching artists should be supported to work in partnership with schools, regional communities, arts organisations and local networks to strengthen cultural participation and capability.

Paid internships, mentoring pathways and regional workforce development are also essential. Too often the responsibility for training and supporting the next generation of artists and arts administrators becomes the responsibility of under-resourced arts organisations.

Many not-for-profit organisations outside the arts sector have access to Public Benevolent Institution status and associated benefits that allow them to offer more competitive conditions to attract and retain skilled workers. Consideration should be given to reforms that allow arts organisations greater capacity to compete sustainably for experienced staff and sector leadership.

As philanthropic and corporate funding environments become increasingly competitive, organisations grounded in strong cultural and ethical frameworks may face additional constraints in pursuing certain revenue streams. Public investment therefore remains critical to ensuring cultural organisations can maintain integrity, community trust and long-term sustainability, particularly for organisations working closely with children, First Nations communities and vulnerable regional populations.

2.5. Engaging the Audience

Regional and remote communities deserve access to ambitious, high-quality arts experiences that are culturally relevant, affordable and locally grounded.

Arts participation strengthens social cohesion, confidence, wellbeing and community connection. It also contributes significantly to local economies, regional identity and community vibrancy.

However, the costs associated with delivering arts programs in regional Australia continue to rise substantially. At the same time, ticket prices must often remain capped to ensure accessibility for local communities. Regional venue infrastructure and audience capacity can also limit earned income opportunities.

This creates increasing financial pressure on organisations and reinforces the importance of sustained government investment, philanthropy and long-term cultural partnerships to ensure regional communities are not left behind.

Digital and online engagement models can play an important complementary role in extending access and connection for geographically isolated communities, but they should not replace the vital role of live artistic experiences in building strong, connected communities.

3. What matters to you and your practice?

3.1. First Nations First

At the heart of Moorambilla's work is our commitment to creating with and alongside Australia's First Nations communities.

Indigenous language, culture and worldview are respectfully embedded throughout our programs, performances and recordings. Through long-term relationships with Elders, linguists, artists and communities, Moorambilla creates opportunities for young people to engage with and celebrate First Nations knowledge systems, stories and perspectives.

More than 30% of our participants identify as Indigenous, and many come from communities experiencing significant educational and social disadvantage, with 83% of our partnering schools recording ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) scores below the national median. Across our programs, young people experience cultural pride, intergenerational knowledge sharing, and a deeper connection to Country, identity and belonging, so that we may collectively walk together with inclusion and respect.

3.2. Place for Every Story

For over two decades, Moorambilla has worked with young people across regional and remote NSW to create original works inspired by the landscapes, communities and stories of the region.

Young people are not passive participants in our programs; they are collaborators, co-creators and storytellers. We provide a platform for regional youth to share their voices in an environment that celebrates their capacity, creativity and potential.

This process enables young people to see themselves reflected within Australia's arts and cultural landscape and strengthens their belief that their stories, communities and experiences matter.

3.3. Centrality of the Artist

Since 2006, Moorambilla has partnered artists of the highest calibre with emerging artists across music, dance, visual arts and performance.

A defining aspect of our practice is the annual Artistic and Cultural Immersion program, where collaborating artists spend time on Country with Indigenous Elders, language holders and community

members at culturally significant sites across regional NSW. These experiences profoundly shape the artistic process and foster deeper cultural understanding, cross-artform collaboration and authentic creative exchange.

Moorambilla provides a platform for established, emerging and pre-professional artists to work alongside one another within a mentoring-rich environment. These collaborations support artists to refine their practice, develop cultural competency and build long-term creative relationships.

We are also deeply committed to developing pathways for future arts workers and leaders. Increasingly, alumni are returning to Moorambilla as teaching artists, supervisors, administrators, production staff and creative practitioners, strengthening both the organisation and the broader regional arts ecology.

3.4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Moorambilla believes that everyone lifts on a rising tide. Strong cultural infrastructure is built through collaboration, trust and long-term relationships between schools, communities, artists and organisations.

Our work begins in schools through free Skills Development Workshops delivered across regional and remote NSW. These workshops not only engage young people but also provide teachers with professional development to improve their music literacy skills and greater confidence in arts learning within the classroom.

With philanthropic support, Moorambilla has recently expanded its reach through the KINetic program, delivering Taiko drumming and contemporary dance workshops to more than 1,000 students from some of the most disadvantaged communities in regional NSW. These workshops are co-designed with schools and communities and integrate contemporary arts practice alongside Indigenous cultural frameworks and wellbeing outcomes.

Partnerships are central to our work. We currently collaborate with organisations including the Australian Youth Orchestra, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, NAISDA, Taikoz and Guurrama-Li (led by a Moorambilla Voices alumni). Through these partnerships we are able to deepen artistic outcomes, broaden opportunities for young people and strengthen the wider cultural sector.

There is also significant value in partnerships between regional organisations (and organisations that work regionally) with deep, long-standing community relationships and larger arts organisations with greater infrastructure and resources. Organisations such as Moorambilla Voices, which have spent decades building trust and cultural relationships across regional communities, can provide meaningful pathways for engagement that support more authentic, culturally safe and sustainable artistic outcomes. When these partnerships are approached respectfully and collaboratively, they create opportunities for greater artistic exchange, audience development and regional engagement, while ensuring communities remain at the centre of the work.

3.5. Engaging the Audience

Since 2006, Moorambilla has presented annual Gala performances in regional NSW for thousands of audience members. In recent years, livestreaming has enabled communities across a third of NSW to celebrate and engage with the achievements of their young people regardless of geographic proximity.

Moorambilla has recorded five albums featuring Indigenous languages including Wiradjuri (D10), Gamilaroy (D23), Barkantji (D12), Weilwan (D20), Yuwaalaraay (D27) and Ngemba (D22). These works share the stories, culture and creativity of regional Australia with national and international audiences, with permission, cultural guidance and deep respect for the communities and knowledge holders who have shaped the work.

Digital engagement continues to present important opportunities for regional communities. During COVID-19, Moorambilla developed more than 150 online arts learning modules aligned with school curriculum outcomes. These resources continue to provide valuable access points for young people and educators in geographically isolated areas.

Most recently, with support from Creative Australia, Moorambilla has commenced cultural exchange activity between Australian First Nations artists and Sámi artists from northern Sweden. These exchanges create powerful opportunities for intercultural dialogue, artistic collaboration and shared learning between Indigenous communities from different parts of the world.

3.6. What would you like reflected in the new National Cultural Policy?

We believe long-term, place-based and culturally grounded arts practice should be recognised as essential cultural infrastructure.

The next National Cultural Policy should prioritise equitable access to arts education and cultural participation, particularly for regional and remote communities where opportunities remain significantly limited by geography, workforce shortages and infrastructure gaps.

We would like to see:

- sustained investment in regional arts education and cultural participation;
- increased support for specialist teaching artists and arts educators in regional schools, for example the expansion of the [National Music Teacher Mentoring Program](#) to include every school in Australia and to be expanded across additional art forms;
- greater support for teaching artists to work sustainably in regional and remote communities, both within schools and through community-based cultural programs;
- expansion of mentoring, internship and workforce development pathways for emerging artists and arts workers;
- long-term funding models that recognise relationship-based cultural practice and community trust building;
- stronger support for culturally safe consultation and collaboration with First Nations communities;
- continued investment in regional touring, digital engagement and audience development;
- support for cross-artform and intercultural collaboration;

- stronger support for regional conservatoriums and arts organisations to engage deeply with schools and local communities across a broad range of artistic disciplines; and
- reforms that allow arts organisations to compete more sustainably for skilled workers and sector leadership.

We also believe the cultural sector must be recognised not only for its artistic value, but for its contribution to wellbeing, social cohesion, education, cultural understanding and regional community sustainability.

Existing evidence also tells us about the clear benefits of music and artistic education programs in breaking children free of disadvantage. Many recent studies confirm the significant value of carefully planned and well taught music/arts programs in educational environments and their developmental advantages for young people; a reference list is provided at Annex A.

Teaching artists can also play an important role beyond schools by supporting community choirs, bands, dance groups, drama ensembles and visual arts hubs, helping to strengthen long-term cultural participation and social connection within regional communities.

Arts and cultural education changes lives. It expands aspiration, strengthens identity, builds confidence and creates connection. Young people living in regional and remote Australia should not have their opportunities limited by geographic location.

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4. Annex A: Reference list

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