

ABC submission on renewing the National Cultural Policy

May 2026

1. Introduction

The ABC welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of a refreshed National Cultural Policy. As Australia's national public broadcaster, the Corporation is a significant cultural institution and plays a central role in sustaining and contributing to the cultural life of Australia.

The ABC's functions, set out in its Charter, require it to contribute to a sense of national identity and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community.¹ This includes promoting and participating in the arts in their broadest sense as an essential part of Australia cultural life. The Corporation is specifically charged with encouraging and promoting the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia.

The ABC is at the heart of Australia's creative and cultural industries, which deliver significant economic and social benefits for Australian society. As an engine of creative development, employment and innovation, the ABC helps to support and promote these industries in line with its Charter obligations. It offers a long-standing, effective mechanism that can contribute to the achievement of policy outcomes by ensuring the production and availability of Australian content.

The Government's extension of stable, five-year funding for the national broadcasters recognises this role, as does the recent and welcome decision to provide the Corporation with an additional \$50 million over three years with which to commission premium original drama and children's programs from Australia's independent screen production sector.

2. The ABC and the cultural sector

As the national public broadcaster, the ABC serves as a bridge between the creative sector and Australian audiences, providing visibility, and opportunities for

¹ *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* (Cth), s 6.

engagement and participation. Its content caters to a broad array of audience tastes and reflects a range of artists and performers — from programs of wide appeal, like *The Piano*, to those serving more specialised interests, such as the ABC Young Performers Awards.

The Corporation supports, promotes, records and transmits live music performance around the country on ABC Classic, triple j and a range of digital channels, and on programs such as *Rage*, *Front Row*, *Live at the Wireless* and the annual New Year's Eve concert. The ABC covers local arts and music festivals, and hosts events that brings Australia together to celebrate contemporary music, such as the triple j Hottest 100 and regional One Night Stand events. In doing this, the ABC works with a wide range of creative talent and partners with key cultural institutions.

The ABC sets and regularly exceeds Australian music targets on its radio services. In 2025, Australian music levels were:

Network	Australian music actual	Australian music target
triple j	55%	40% *
triple Unearthed	100%	100%
Double J	40%	35% *
ABC Country	51%	40%
ABC Classic	51%	35%
ABC Jazz	35%	30%
ABC Local	33%	30%

* In 2026, triple j increased its target to 50% and Double J increased to 40%.

These targets ensure the ABC contributes to the Australian music ecosystem, as airplay fosters discoverability and allows artists to reach audiences and build followings. In contrast, commercial music radio services are required to meet quotas of between 5% and 25% Australian music.

The ABC commissions original Australian drama, comedy and other screen programming, working with independent producers and a range of talented Australian writers, directors and actors. Deloitte Access Economics reports that between 2022–23 and 2024–25, ABC-commissioned screen productions generated \$772 million in value for the Australian economy from commissioned titles across drama, children's, entertainment and documentaries and supported more than 7,700 full-time equivalent cultural-sector jobs.²

The Corporation provides a range of dedicated screen and audio programs that explore the arts and culture, including *Portrait Artist of the Year*, *Creative Types* and *Tonight at the Museum*, as well as documentaries that celebrate Australian artists, such as *Midnight Oil: The Hardest Line*, *Songs Inside* and *But Also John Clarke*. Between 2024–25 and 2025–26, the ABC increased its investment in screen arts

² Deloitte Access Economics. *Lights, camera, action: The economic and social contribution of ABC-commissioned screen productions, 2026*, <https://live-production.wcms.abc-cdn.net.au/50114ce55d432b8f227d20651c6828ee>.

content commissioning by 18%, including successful continuing programs, such as *Portrait Artist of the Year* and *The Piano* series.

The Corporation invests in short-form digital-exclusive arts content from creators like Mary McGillivray (██████████) and Celeste Mountjoy (██████████) to reach younger audiences through its Creator Program. It delivers specialised educational resources developed alongside cultural partners to support teachers and foster creativity in the classroom.

The ABC's unique national broadcast footprint and online services allow it to make these programs and services freely available to all Australians on the platforms that they use.

The impact of the Corporation's services can be seen in audience responses. In 2025–26, the ABC's Corporate Tracker, a nationally representative panel of Australians, found that 78% of Australians believe the ABC does a good job of “encouraging and promoting Australian performing arts such as music and drama”, while 75% said it does a good job of “supporting Australian music”.

3. Reflections on the National Cultural Policy

The current National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, introduced a new framework and structures for supporting creative work and organisations. As the ABC has previously noted, the Policy recognises the often-precarious nature of working within the cultural sector, of the challenges to be heard as a First Nations, diverse or emerging artist, of access to arts education, and of the real possibility for artists to be exploited or treated unfairly.

Many of these challenges remain, particularly in light of the growing dominance of algorithmic content distribution platforms and their capacity to affect the visibility of Australian artists and content.

The five pillars that underpin the Policy remain relevant, as they reflect key sites of intervention to encourage a thriving cultural sector and to enable the surfacing of questions about the pressure points affecting cultural production and discoverability.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

The ABC has a proud history of giving a voice to First Nations Australians. It delivers three dedicated Indigenous radio programs: *Speaking Out* on ABC Radio, Indigenous arts and culture program *Awaye!* on Radio National, and *Blak Out* on triple j. On screen, the ABC seeks to be the place where First Nations storytelling breaks new ground, whether through landmark drama series like *Mystery Road Origin* and *Goolagong*, documentaries such as *End Game with Tony Armstrong* and *The Kimberley*, or entertainment and comedy shows, such as *Always Was Tonight* and *That Blackfella Show*.

In October 2026, ABC News launched *Deep Time*, an interactive history of the Australian continent and its first peoples that draws upon thousands of years of oral

histories.³ Through ABC Archives' Kin-nect program, the Corporation offers First Nations people and communities access to content in its extensive Indigenous collection about their kin and culture while building relationships that can improve its understanding of that collection.

The ABC's Elevate Reconciliation Action Plan is built around a commitment to embedding First Nations names, languages and voices within the Corporation's vocabulary and style so that they, in turn, become part of the language of the nation. Consistent with the principle that the telling of Indigenous stories should be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content-makers, ABC content divisions have First Nations creative leaders on their executives and senior First Nations cultural advisors to assist content-makers.

The ABC Indigenous unit provides space for First Nations writers, directors and producers to tell screen stories that impact all audiences. It has supported the careers of award-winning creative leaders like Warwick Thornton, Rachel Perkins and Wayne Blair. Today, it continues to back the next generation.

Additionally, ABC Indigenous supports screen skills development initiatives that form pathways for mid-career and emerging First Nations creative leaders. It also makes space for growing skills, training, and career development into its projects to support a sustainable pipeline of First Nations creatives. Most recently, the ABC partnered with Screen Australia and NITV to commission five short romantic comedy films which will premiere at the 2026 Sydney Film Festival. Each year, the ABC also provides a mid-career First Nations documentary practitioner a four-month ABC, enabling them to build networks, experiences and skills to support their career.

The ABC considers collaborations and partnerships with First Nations peak bodies and screen organisations to be vitally important. The Corporation has strategic partnerships with First Nations Media Australia (FNMA), First Languages Australia (FLA) and NITV. The ABC recently participated in an industry-wide summit involving First Nations representatives from stakeholders including NIDA, AFTRS, state and federal screen agencies, and First Nations-led community broadcasters to identify ways of supporting the work of Indigenous screen practitioners.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

As the nation's leading public broadcaster, the ABC has a responsibility to reach and remain relevant to all Australians and to look and sound like contemporary Australia. This is a challenge that the Corporation has embraced across its platforms and services.

The ABC's Commissioning for Diversity and Inclusion Guidelines⁴ ensure that the content it commissions from screen producers contributes to increasing the participation of diverse talent, both on and off screen. This is immediately visible in inclusive programming such as *The Assembly*, *The Piano*, coverage of the annual Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, *Australian Story* and *Backroads*. Through industry

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/deeptime/>

⁴ <https://live-production.wcms.abc-cdn.net.au/a7526a437ca226e158eddf277069c15>

collaborations and partnerships, the Corporation works across a range of initiatives, such as talent programs, scholarships and Indigenous placements, to provide opportunities for diverse stories to be told.

The ABC acknowledges that geography can sometimes be a barrier to participation in cultural life, as access to cultural infrastructure and institutions diminishes with distance from capital cities. The ABC has a substantial network of Local services across the country serving inner-city, suburban, regional and rural audiences, which play a vital role in documenting and reflecting regional artists and cultural festivals and community story-telling. The ABC's annual *Heywire* initiative gives a voice to young regional, rural and remote students to tell stories of their communities and place.

The Corporation contributes to an evolving national identity by discovering and supporting young and new artists through broadcasting their songs and supporting their work across its music networks and platforms.

For Australians young and old, seeing representative stories on screen contributes to individual identity and collective culture-building. The ABC's free and universally accessible services play an important role in ensuring this representation occurs and offer opportunities for participation and engagement.

Acknowledging the critical importance of Australian children having access to quality local stories and voices, the ABC commissions children's programs like *Bluey*, *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, *Knee High Spies*, as well as provided dedicated audio content for children through ABC Kids listen. The ABC is applying a proportion of the additional \$50 million over three years in content funding it recently received to strengthen its pipeline of local children's and family programs. In 2026–27, it will bring the iconic shows *Bananas in Pyjamas* and *Little Lunch* back to Australian screens, and is developing an adaptation of Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton's much-loved *Treehouse* book series. Based on early planning, the ABC anticipates a 15% increase in expenditure on children's and family content in 2026–27 and further increases in 2028–29 and 2029–30.

In 2025-26, 79% of a nationally representative panel of Australians agreed that “the ABC did a good job of “producing and sharing programs that reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community”. In the same survey, 82% of respondents felt the ABC is doing a good job at “being distinctively Australian and contributing to Australia's national identity”.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

The ABC works with a wide range of talented Australian creators, providing an environment in which they can thrive. It provides a national platform through which local artists and content-makers can be discovered and celebrated, and which serves as a primary way for audiences to discover and enjoy Australian creative and cultural content.

Ausmusic Month is an annual ABC event in November, which celebrates Australia's rich musical landscape across all genres, and the incredible contribution musicians and their work have made to the cultural life of this country.

In June 2026, the ABC TV and the triple j Live Music Team will record a special ARIA Hall of Fame Anniversary event to mark the 40th anniversary of the ARIA awards and honour some of Australia's most influential artists of the past 40 years.

triple j Unearthed is an award-winning initiative for surfacing and championing new Australian music. Built around an online platform where independent Australian artists can share their music directly, it currently offers 198,000 tracks from more than 100,000 different artists, the best of which are also played on Unearthed Radio. The initiative has launched the careers of numerous artists, including Missy Higgins, Genesis Owusu, Confidence Man, Tones & I, The Kid Laroi and G Flip. In 2025–26, Unearthed introduced 10 new specialist and curated programs designed to spotlight a wider range of genres and voices from across the country. The annual Unearthed High and Unearthed High Indigenous competitions provide opportunities for school-age musicians. In 2026, Unearthed High, has partnered with The Push youth music charity.

In addition, the Corporation supports a broader ecosystem of producers, editors, journalists and content-makers who shape, interpret and disseminate cultural work — roles that are increasingly precarious, but essential to a functioning cultural sector. Programs like Radio National's *The Book Show*, *The Bookshelf*, *The Screen Show*, *The Music Show*, *Critics Corner* and *By Design* offer reviews and interviews with artists, writers and designers.

The Corporation supports Australian storytelling through the screen, music, the written word and other creative outlets. Its investment in commissioning drama plays an important role in ensuring Australian stories continue to grace our screens. In 2024–25, the ABC was the largest commissioner of first-release Australian drama and comedy programming with seven titles.⁵ Against a backdrop of local industry-wide declines in drama production, the Corporation increased its expenditure in 2025–26, commissioning 10 titles. In 2026–27, it will air screen adaptations of premium Australian literature, including Chris Hammer's *Treasure & Dirt* and *Dustfall*, based on Vikki Petraitis' book *The Unbelieved*.

The ABC contributes economic benefits as a significant employer of artists, creatives, and content-makers, as well as through partnerships with other organisations in the screen, music, arts sectors and through regional production and events.

By sourcing Australian stories, ABC-commissioned productions help to build the capability, capacity, and support current and future talent across the creative industries. In 2025–26, the Corporation increased its screen content expenditure with the independent production sector by around \$20 million or 70% of its local commissioning budget, up from 66% in 2024–25. It anticipates maintaining this higher level in coming years.

The role of the ABC is important in providing a relatively steady stream of production funding that directly employs and indirectly supports roles for workers in the Australian production sector. A recent report by Deloitte Access Economics found

⁵ Screen Australia. *Drama Report 2024–25*, <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/insights-and-trends/industry-reports/drama-report/>.

that for every ABC employee working on screen productions, three additional FTE roles were supported, on average, across the 2022–23 to 2024–25 period.⁶

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

As a national public broadcaster, the ABC contributes directly to the nation's cultural infrastructure by commissioning, contextualising and amplifying Australian arts and culture collaborating with Australia's cultural institutions and the next generation of thinkers and creatives, particularly in areas that are under-commercialised, emerging, or critically engaged. The Corporation is committed to providing platforms upon which artists and content can be discovered and celebrated by Australian audiences wherever they are — across audio, screen, online, digital and social, both within Australia and through the ABC's international services.

To better perform this role, the ABC pursues partnerships with creative industries and cultural institutions to deliver outcomes that showcase works and ideas to wide audiences. Bodies with which the Corporation has, or is actively pursuing, relationships include Creative Australia, the Powerhouse Museum, the Ethics Centre, the Festival of Dangerous Ideas, First Nations Media Australia and First Languages Australia.

ABC Education, in particular, has partnered to create cultural education projects, including *Let's Sing* with Music In Me (Australian Youth Orchestras);⁷ *Journeys of Hope* with the Melbourne Holocaust Museum;⁸ *Yarrabil*,⁹ *Yarrabil Bula*¹⁰ and *Garul Jagun* (releasing July 2026) with First Languages Australia; and *Modern Australia* with the National Museum of Australia (releasing July 2026).

Further, through regular programming dedicated to arts and culture across all of its platforms, the ABC provides multiple opportunities to connect with cultural institutions and organisations, artists, festivals, and the issues that specifically affect the arts sector. As many of these institutions invest in the creation of digital content, partnerships with the ABC provide an opportunity to allow these concerts, plays, artist and exhibition profiles to be seen by a far broader audience on ABC broadcast and digital platforms.

The Corporation helps carry Australian voices to the world through its international services — spanning radio, television and online platforms — and through co-productions and content exchanges with counterpart public media organisations around the world. ABC-originated programs like *Bluey* and *Muster Dogs* that have resonated with local audiences have carried Australian stories, voices and values to international audiences.

The ABC acknowledges that audiences, creators and content commissioners all benefit from a thriving screen production industry that can deliver social and cultural

⁶ Deloitte Access Economics. *Lights, camera, action: The economic and social contribution of ABC-commissioned screen productions*, 2026, <https://live-production.wcms.abc-cdn.net.au/50114ce55d432b8f227d20651c6828ee>.

⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/education/collections/lets-sing>

⁸ <https://www.abc.net.au/education/digibooks/journeys-of-hope/104544800>

⁹ <https://www.abc.net.au/education/digibooks/yarrabil-first-nations-songs/104025800>

¹⁰ <https://www.abc.net.au/education/digibooks/yarrabil-bula-first-nations-songs/104810588>

benefits, as well as employment opportunities for creative personnel. As Australia's largest content commissioner, the ABC has a strong interest in maintaining a vibrant, independent production sector and ensuring that Australians can easily access high-quality local content.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

The ways in which Australians are using media services is continually evolving as a result of changing technologies, global platforms and global competitors. In a contemporary attention economy that is increasingly dominated by short-form content, infinite scrolling and algorithmic platforms, ensuring discoverability and audience reach are critical challenges for media organisations. Australian cultural content, including video, radio and podcasts, is competing in global, algorithm-driven environments that do not prioritise local work or artists.

Public broadcasters, like the ABC, remain one of the few places where Australian stories and artists are curated, contextualised, and surfaced to audiences at scale. To perform this role, the Corporation continues to adapt its services and modes of engagement with audiences and industry.

For example, the arrival of international subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) services with large budgets and extensive program catalogues has significantly changed the conditions under which broadcasters compete for audiences' attention. Over the past decade, scheduled viewing of broadcast television has been in decline as Australians have increasingly embraced on-demand viewing. Between 2015 and 2025, total television viewing in the five major metropolitan markets declined 31.8%.¹¹ All broadcasters now operate video-on-demand (VOD) services, such as ABC iview.

In this changing and crowded market, the ABC has found there is value in making content available to audiences for longer and on third-party platforms in Australia. As a result, it is increasingly working with producers to construct bespoke deals that are suitable for the changing market for screen content so it can offer Australian content in the ways that audiences consume it and in the places they find it.

The Corporation encourages the Government to pursue ways of improving the prominence and discoverability of Australian audio, video and other content on third-party platforms. This may involve legislating to ensure that algorithms not only serve the advertising needs of the companies that operate them but also discharge a social obligation by surfacing and giving prominence to local content for Australian audiences.

The ABC is also actively pursuing opportunities to create audience engagement events that bring Australians together around the creative works to create a bigger impact and visibility for artists and performers. In 2026, the annual triple j Hottest 100 countdown attracted 2.1 million votes, 3.44 million streaming starts and 45 million social views. These events often involve partnerships with other cultural institutions. For example, the Classic 100 countdown on ABC Classic not only attracts listeners

¹¹ OzTAM combined Five-City Metro, spill included, Consolidated 28, w/c 4/01/2015 – w/c 21/12/2025, broadcast reach counts five minutes consecutive viewing.

but has led to live music concerts as part of a three-year partnership with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

In this environment, the ABC faces challenges around digital licensing and industry agreements. Music licence agreements are still broadcast-focused, with supplementary digital rights, which limits the Corporation's ability to deliver services via digital platforms to Australian audiences. Global digital service providers have no regulation around their support of Australian music and record label industry restrictions in the local market make it harder for the ABC to provide music content to audiences for free.

4. Addressing AI in the next National Cultural Policy

The National Cultural Policy does not make any mention of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. This is not surprising, as the Policy launched two months after ChatGPT, the chatbot service that brought generative AI into popular consciousness, and it was unclear at that time how much of an impact generative AI might have on arts and culture in Australia.

In the intervening years, however, it has become clear that the potential effects of AI tools are significant. While they have the potential to augment creative activity, AI-based technologies raise significant questions in relation to intellectual property and the possible displacement of creative and cultural workers.

The development of a new National Cultural Policy provides an opportunity to directly address these and other questions relating to AI and Australia's creative industries.

In recent years, companies training large generative AI models have ingested an enormous number of works — images, sound and video recordings and texts — into their systems without the permission or compensation of Australian creators or rightsholders. They have claimed that this industrial-scale copyright infringement is enabled by different laws in other jurisdictions. The companies generally refuse to provide information about the works they have ingested or to discuss licensing content under Australia copyright law.

The ABC, like other media organisations, does not agree to giving its output for free to AI companies. The Corporation believes a range of regulatory changes are required in order to protect Australian rightsholders, including reforming the copyright enforcement provisions to permit jurisdiction over AI organisations who import their AI products into Australia and ensuring transparency around material ingested into AI systems under the pretence of fair-use licences.

The ABC notes also that Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP) of First Nations peoples is vulnerable to misappropriation in AI systems, and there is a gap in the regulatory framework to protect these cultural materials adequately. AI technologies have the capacity to exacerbate the commercialisation of inauthentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistry in the absence of express intellectual property protection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge and expression.

The ABC acknowledges that the Government is examining the impact of AI on the creative sector through the Copyright and AI Reference Group (CAIRG). It has welcomed past announcements by the Attorney General and the Minister for the Arts that Australia will not legislate a fair dealing exception for text and data mining (TDM) under the *Copyright Act 1968*.

The Corporation encourages the Government to take up the opportunity to address these questions that will be afforded by a new National Cultural Policy.