



CAAMA is a media organisation. We have uploaded a short film about our work as a separate attachment. The document that follows stands on its own; the film provides a visual introduction to CAAMA, its people, its place and its work.

CAAMA submission: towards a new National Cultural Policy

Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association

Mparntwe / Alice Springs, June 2026

The limits of existing frameworks

For almost fifty years CAAMA has operated at the intersection of culture, language, media, education and community life in Central Australia. We maintain nationally significant archival collections, support Aboriginal language broadcasting, train broadcasters and content creators, and provide trusted information services across one of the largest Indigenous media footprints in Australia. Yet organisations like CAAMA sit awkwardly within existing policy frameworks. Cultural policy, communications policy and Indigenous affairs policy each recognise part of the work. None recognises it whole. This submission argues that the existing frameworks have not been designed to see and support the full range of what First Nations media institutions do — institutions that perform many of the functions already associated with recognised cultural infrastructure, while also undertaking responsibilities unique to community-controlled media organisations operating on Country.

The government's own department of infrastructure, transport, regional development, communications, sport and the arts defines the cultural and creative sector as encompassing not only traditional arts activities and cultural services but also media activities, including radio broadcasting and internet publishing and broadcasting.¹ The definition is already there yet recognition has not followed.

Galleries, museums, libraries, archives and collecting institutions are recognised as cultural infrastructure because of the functions they perform: they preserve cultural knowledge, provide public access, support participation, develop capability and maintain cultural memory across generations. We perform every one of those functions. We preserve cultural knowledge. We maintain archives of international significance. We support language continuation across generations. We create and present contemporary cultural expression. We develop creative and technical careers. We provide public access to culture in communities where no other institution does. We maintain cultural memory on Country, in language, in the institution itself.

We also do things no gallery, library or theatre is asked to do. We provide emergency communications in remote areas where no other trusted information source exists. We build and maintain technical infrastructure across vast distances. We deliver in-language content to

¹Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts. Submission to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee, October 2025, p. 1.

communities where English is a second, third or fourth language. In many of the communities we serve, we are the only institution performing these functions.

Despite this, Aboriginal community-controlled broadcasting organisations are funded and assessed primarily as communications services. The result is a persistent mismatch between the breadth of what these organisations do and the policy frameworks through which they are supported. Cultural infrastructure policy, communications policy and Indigenous affairs policy each see a portion of the work so organisations sit across all three frameworks and are fully housed in none.

This is a structural problem, and it has a specific consequence. The frameworks available to government were designed to fund outputs: programs, projects, assets, equipment and connectivity. They were not designed to recognise that institutional capability is also a component of infrastructure; that assets require accumulated human knowledge, relationships and cultural authority to function as intended. As a result, capability development can be difficult to recognise, measure and sustain through existing funding categories. The cycle repeats.

The argument here is not that Indigenous media has been invisible to policy. CAAMA is funded. Archives receive digitisation support. Training programs exist. The argument is that the frameworks through which these investments are assessed and delivered were designed for different kinds of institutions, and that this mismatch consistently produces underinvestment in the component of these organisations that generates their most distinctive value. More resources within existing frameworks would help. But without frameworks that can see and measure institutional capability — the accumulated relationships, cultural knowledge and organisational memory that make assets and projects effective — investment will continue to flow to the visible and measurable at the expense of the enduring.

The significance of First Nations media institutions increasingly extends beyond the communities they serve. In 2026, CAAMA combined traditional community radio with TikTok Live across sixteen broadcasts. More than 50,000 people tuned in from across Australia and around the world, including other First Nations communities internationally, to watch elders, broadcasters, musicians and families share stories, language and music in real time.

These audiences were not seeking (and did not find) polished commercial content. They were seeking authentic access to contemporary Aboriginal life, culture and perspectives that are rarely visible through mainstream media. The broadcasts created moments of cultural exchange between remote Central Australian communities and audiences far beyond them, demonstrating the growing role First Nations media institutions can play as cultural ambassadors in a connected world.

Australia has long recognised the strategic value of sustained broadcasting capability in the Indo-Pacific. Trusted, place-based media institutions build relationships and cultural influence that project-based funding cannot replicate. CAAMA understands this from direct experience. We recently hosted an exchange with ABC International and Pacific media workers as part of a First Nations media exchange, alongside Ngaarda Media from the Kimberley. A gathering of this kind is made possible because these organisations have the institutional standing, the relationships and the on-Country presence to convene it. The reach and trust that make such exchanges meaningful are not created by programs. They are the product of decades of sustained

institutional investment. The same logic that justifies Australia's international broadcasting strategy applies domestically. First Nations media institutions are already part of that network. Cultural policy should recognise them as such.

The audience was reached through digital platforms, but the trust that sustained their engagement was built over decades. As cultural participation increasingly occurs across both physical and digital spaces, First Nations media institutions represent an important bridge between communities, cultures and audiences. This submission makes the case for CAAMA specifically as Australia's oldest Aboriginal-owned media organisation which has played a foundational role in the development of First Nations broadcasting in Central Australia. It does not make this argument on behalf of a sector but on the basis of forty-five years of its own experience: evidence of what the current framework has not been structured to see.

The institution as archive

An archive is usually understood as a collection. A catalogue. A repository. The value lies in the the recordings, the documents, the images. Access to those objects is what archives are for, and preservation is how that access is sustained over time.

CAAMA's collection holds up to 50,000 hours of radio, television, film and music across more than thirty Central Australian languages. It contains footage of the 1985 handback of Uluru, firsthand accounts of the Coniston massacre, some of which may be the only surviving record. It has been formally assessed as internationally significant.² Copies of some material exist at AIATSIS and the National Film and Sound Archive. Those copies serve researchers and national heritage purposes.

But a copy is not the same as the collection. And the collection is not only the recordings.

The value in the CAAMA archive is also in knowing who is in it and who made it. Which family they belong to. What cultural protocols govern their use. What language is being spoken and by whom. What the circumstances of recording were. What can be shared and what cannot, and with whom, and under what conditions. That knowledge may be documented in the catalogue and the metadata but it also lives in the institution, in the people who work there, in the relationships with communities that have been built across decades.

As filmmaker and CAAMA alumna Trisha Morton-Thomas has observed, the archive is 'like an elder of our community, not just for one, but for all central Australian communities.'³ That observation identifies something important. An elder's value is in what they know, who they know, and the trust that has been built across a lifetime. The same is true of CAAMA.

The organisation itself is an archive. Capability is part of the collection.

²Sassoon, J. (2018). Statement of Significance of the Archives of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA). Commissioned by CAAMA under the National Library of Australia Community Heritage Grant Scheme, January 2018. See also: Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting (2017). More than Radio: a Community Asset. Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, November 2017, p. 10.

³Morton-Thomas, T. Cited in Sassoon, J. (2018). Statement of Significance of the Archives of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), p. 4.

CAAMA was the first institution to show Aboriginal people on Australian television in their own languages, made by Aboriginal people. Generations of broadcasters, musicians, technicians and journalists have passed through 101 Todd Street. The relationships built with dozens of communities across nearly five decades live in the institution. The knowledge of how to do this work, on Country, in language, with community trust, is held by the organisation and the people who have made it their home.

For many people, CAAMA was literally home. *Apmere*. On Country, in their place. The communities whose languages fill the archive, whose families appear in its footage, whose musicians recorded in its studio, came because CAAMA was theirs. That is the foundation of everything else.

If the institution disperses, that knowledge does not transfer to another organisation or relocate to a national collection in another city. The original relationship between the collection and the communities it documents is not a transitional arrangement pending something better. It is the permanent and appropriate arrangement, and it depends entirely on the institution continuing to exist and to hold capability.

Trust

The consultation framework asks about audience engagement, access and participation. In remote Central Australia, those questions have a specific answer. Engagement is a function of trust, and trust of this kind is the slow accumulation of showing up, in the right place, in the right language, for the right reasons, across generations.

CAAMA broadcasts to communities from Kaltukatjara to Alpururulam, from Rum Jungle to Ceduna and Coober Pedy. It does so in language, through voices communities recognise. A health facility reaches the people who walk through its door. A trusted community broadcaster, operating on Country, in language, reaches the people who may not, and delivers information in a form they can act on.

That trust was built because CAAMA was here first, and has remained. It cannot easily be created by a new program or transferred to a newly funded organisation. It is not solely a communications asset. It is a cultural one, accumulated across nearly fifty years of relationships, participation and the steady transfer of knowledge, skills and stories between generations.

Summary

This submission responds to the public consultation on a new National Cultural Policy and addresses all five pillars of the Revive framework, with particular attention to Pillar 1 First Nations First, Pillar 3 Centrality of the Artist, Pillar 4 Strong Cultural Infrastructure, and Pillar 5 Engaging the Audience. CAAMA is Australia's oldest Aboriginal-owned media organisation and a foundational institution in the history of First Nations broadcasting in Central Australia.

The case for investment rests on four interconnected arguments. Aboriginal-controlled media organisations perform functions extending well beyond broadcasting, including emergency communications, language preservation, digital mentoring, workforce development and

community representation: the institutional capability to do this work is itself a component of the cultural infrastructure these communities depend on. Research consistently shows that trusted, place-based, community-controlled capability is the missing component in digital inclusion which cannot be achieved through connectivity alone. The sector is at a critical juncture as rapid digital transition, audience fragmentation and a decade of flat real funding have placed Indigenous broadcasters under structural pressure at precisely the moment their functions are expanding. And the opportunity exists now for continuity, coordination and scale. CAAMA already holds the infrastructure, relationships, archival collections and community legitimacy required to anchor a regional capability hub.

The primary Commonwealth funding mechanism, the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program, has not been indexed to inflation and will be more than \$11.7 million below its real 2014-15 value by 2027-28.⁴ At the same time, remote First Nations communities remain among the most digitally excluded people in Australia, with a digital inclusion gap nearly four times the national average in very remote communities.⁵

Forty-five years of doing the work

CAAMA emerged in the early 1980s driven by a clear principle: that Aboriginal people should be able to communicate in our own languages, represent ourselves in the media, and participate actively in the cultural and civic life of the nation. Over time, CAAMA became Australia's first Aboriginal-owned radio station, the country's first Indigenous organisation to hold a commercial broadcasting licence, and one of the most significant Indigenous media institutions in Australia.

Since emerging from special administration in 2021, CAAMA has undergone substantial institutional renewal, restoring financial stability, rebuilding governance systems and re-establishing compliance foundations. This experience reinforced a lesson relevant to cultural policy: institutions do not fail because culture loses value. They fail when the capability required to steward cultural infrastructure is allowed to erode.

In March 2020, CAAMA was placed under special administration by the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations following the accumulation of debts totalling \$2.7 million and a \$1 million annual operating deficit.⁶

The administration concluded in August 2021. CAAMA subsequently sold a building it had long leased and been renovated to accommodate a major Aboriginal health organisation, using the proceeds to extinguish its commercial loan and repay its debt to NIAA. The pattern is worth noting: public investment is often directed towards individual projects, assets or organisations without mechanisms to consider how those investments interact across a broader cultural and media ecosystem. The result can be duplication in some areas, capability gaps in others, and

⁴First Nations Media Australia, 'Strengthening Our Media, Connecting Our People', FNMA Sector Funding Pitch 2026/27 (2026). The IBMP has not been indexed to inflation; FNMA projects a cumulative real shortfall of \$11.7 million by 2027-28.

⁵Featherstone, D., Thomas, J., Holcombe-James, I. and Ormond-Parker, L. (2023). Mapping the Digital Gap: 2023 Outcomes Report. RMIT University / Australian Digital Inclusion Index.

⁶Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC). CAAMA debt rearranged and manageable. ORIC media release, August 2021. Available at oric.gov.au.

missed opportunities to strengthen institutions already positioned to sustain long-term outcomes.

At CAAMA, annual audits now produce clean financial statements. The organisation is acquitted across all funded programmes. AIATSIS is conducting priority digitisation of the archive, and CAAMA has raised \$200,000 toward the ongoing management of the collection through a Creative Australia dollar-match grant and generous gifts. The first Aboriginal apprentice Broadcast Technician in many years is employed, and two further staff are engaged in remotely delivered vocational training.

This recovery has been achieved without additional resourcing for the administrative functions that make it sustainable. Institutional renewal, governance compliance, financial system development and grant acquittal are not funded activities. They are absorbed within an operational budget already stretched across broadcasting, archive management, music, training and community service.

What the evidence shows

The evidence base for investing in Indigenous broadcasting is substantial, consistent and largely unacted upon.

The 2017 Social Return on Investment analysis commissioned by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet found that every dollar invested in Indigenous Broadcasting Services generates an average return of \$2.87 in social, cultural and economic value.⁷

The same research documented that Indigenous broadcasters were contributing to a far wider range of government priorities than their funding frameworks recognised, including technical support, training, emergency communication, cultural archiving, youth engagement and community services delivered alongside and through content production.⁸

The 2021 NIAA review reinforced these findings and made sixteen recommendations spanning infrastructure, workforce development, training, funding reform and legislative recognition.⁹ Most remain unimplemented five years later. The 2024 Griffith University research, commissioned by NIAA, found the sector operating in a rapidly evolving hybrid media environment with the same unmet needs identified in previous reviews: funding, technology, skills and communications infrastructure have not kept pace, particularly in remote areas.¹⁰

The gap between policy diagnosis and policy action is now more than a decade old. It is not a knowledge problem. It is a resourcing and prioritisation problem.

⁷Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting (2017). More than Radio: a Community Asset. Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, November 2017. SROI ratio of \$2.87:1 across three IBSs studied.

⁸SVA Consulting (2017), op. cit., Key Insight 1.

⁹National Indigenous Australians Agency (2021). Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset: The Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Sector. Report commissioned by NIAA, February 2021.

¹⁰Forde, S., Van Issum, H., Bargallie, D., Meston, T., Anderson, H., de Groot Heupner, S. and Barnett, L. (2024). Radio, Television and Digital Media in 21st Century Indigenous Broadcasting: A Place of Old and New Ways. Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University. Commissioned by NIAA.

Cultural participation requires capability

Research through the Mapping the Digital Gap project has documented the scale of digital exclusion facing remote First Nations communities with precision¹¹. Under Australian Digital Inclusion Index modelling, 45.9 per cent of remote First Nations research participants are highly excluded, compared to 9.4 per cent of the general population.¹² The gap is 7.5 points nationally but widens to 25.4 points for people in very remote communities.¹³

For First Nations media institutions, the significance of this gap extends beyond access to technology. Increasingly, cultural participation occurs through digital platforms. Language content, storytelling, music, community information and creative expression are now produced, shared and experienced across both physical and digital environments.

Connectivity alone does not guarantee participation. Communities also require the capability to create content, tell their own stories and engage with digital cultural life on their own terms. Without workforce development embedded within community-controlled institutions, infrastructure investment risks expanding access to platforms without strengthening the local capability needed to contribute to them. The challenge is therefore not only one of digital inclusion but also one of cultural participation, representation and self-determination in an increasingly digital world.

A significant region, a fragmented system

Central Australia holds a position in Australia's media landscape that its resourcing has never matched. The region has been home to Imparja Television, ICTV, PAW Media, and a wide network of remote broadcasting services extending across the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. Their alumni are present at the highest levels of Australian public broadcasting, independent production and the arts.

The region also functions as one of the country's most contested media landscapes. Public deficit narratives about crime, alcohol, youth disengagement and remote communities circulate nationally with extraordinary speed and intensity, most of them generated by institutions that are physically and culturally distant from the communities they describe. Aboriginal-controlled media organisations are the mechanism through which those communities are able to represent themselves, respond to external narratives in real time, and maintain language and cultural continuity across generations.

Yet these organisations have largely evolved within separate funding systems, technologies and governance structures. The result, over time, has been duplication in some areas, gaps in others, and a persistent failure to build the kind of coordinated regional framework that would allow existing capability to be strengthened and sustained.

¹¹Featherstone, D. et al. (2023), op. cit.

¹²Featherstone et al. (2023), op. cit.: 45.9% of remote First Nations research participants classified as highly excluded under ADII modelling, versus 9.4% of the general Australian population.

¹³Featherstone et al. (2023), op. cit.: national gap of 7.5 ADII points; widens to 25.4 points for very remote communities.

Investment without capability

Consider a set of observations from CAAMA's operating environment. A youth centre redevelopment funded at \$20 million includes a podcast and radio studio built two kilometres from CAAMA's existing broadcast infrastructure. An organisation working across the same communities receives a multimedia bus, then invites to CAAMA to deliver the training to use it. CAAMA asks to borrow that bus for outside broadcasts in town camps because CAAMA does not have one. A talented technician or producer or broadcaster, trained over years, is recruited to Darwin or Sydney. Digitisation funding arrives for the archive, but stewardship funding does not. Connectivity improves in communities, but the local capability to use it meaningfully does not grow at the same rate. Workforce training programs produce trainees; they do not produce a workforce.

These look like separate problems but they are not. They are manifestations of the same phenomenon.

Capability is cumulative. Trust takes decades. Workforce takes decades. Archives take decades. Community relationships take decades. None of these things fit neatly into annual reporting cycles or project acquittals, yet they are often the reason projects succeed or fail.

The challenge is not an absence of investment. Organisations such as CAAMA receive substantial public funding and that investment remains essential. The challenge is that capability development in remote and regional First Nations contexts is often more resource-intensive than policy settings assume. In major cities, workforce capability can be drawn from established education providers, professional networks and large labour markets. In Central Australia, capability must frequently be developed locally through workplace learning, mentoring and sustained employment pathways. The institutions undertaking that work are not consuming capability; they are creating it.

As a result, the effort required to build and retain skilled broadcasters, journalists, technicians, producers and cultural workers is often underestimated. Infrastructure, connectivity and equipment remain important, but their value ultimately depends on the people and institutions capable of activating them. The result is investment that disperses rather than compounds. In remote Central Australia, where there is no labour market to draw from, no local training infrastructure, no critical mass of practitioners, and no institutional history to build on outside the organisations that have been here for decades, this pattern is not merely inefficient. It is self-defeating.

Community-controlled institutions are where cultural capability accumulates. That is what CAAMA represents: forty-five years of relationships, knowledge and trust built in one place, on Country, in language. A studio without someone who knows how to run it is furniture. A digitised archive without someone who knows who is on the tapes, which family they belong to, which protocols govern access, is a hard drive. Connectivity without local expertise serves someone else. The assets are necessary. They are not sufficient. The capability that activates them is what matters, and capability of this kind takes decades to build and very little time to lose.

This is not a criticism of the organisations that received those investments, or of the people who made the funding decisions. It is a description of what happens when the frameworks available

to government are not designed to recognise institutional capability as a component of infrastructure. They were designed to fund outputs. The new National Cultural Policy has an opportunity to change that.

What CAAMA has held together

CAAMA's role as a training ground for Aboriginal media workers remains one of the most significant and least formally recognised things the organisation does.

Cultural participation and creative careers begin with exposure. In most of Australia, young people encounter media, storytelling and creative practice through school, through local arts organisations, through the informal infrastructure of communities where these things are simply present and normal. In remote Central Australia, that infrastructure is largely absent. There is no accredited on Country pathway in media or communications available from secondary school. VET in Schools programs that elsewhere provide the first step toward creative industries careers do not reach these communities in any sustained form. Without that foundation, the conversation about participation, about performance, about who gets to tell the story, starts too late and for too few people. By the time cultural policy begins talking about workforce development and creative pathways, it is often already describing outcomes available only to those who left Country to access them. Many do not leave. So the starting line that students elsewhere take for granted does not exist here.

In a 1993 analysis co-authored by CAAMA co-founder Philip Batty, the persistent challenge was named plainly: training does not always lead to employment.¹⁴ More than thirty years later, that observation remains accurate. Aboriginal broadcast technicians, producers and journalists are not available for hire in Central Australia. They have to be grown, and the training infrastructure to grow them has never been sustained.

Broadcasting staff are employed under the Broadcasting, Recorded Entertainment and Cinemas Award 2020.¹⁵ There are no volunteers. Nor should there be. Free labour does not close the gap.

This point was made plainly at a recent national sector forum convened by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia. When CAAMA's Aboriginal Radio Coordinator noted that recruiting volunteers in Central Australia was the organisation's most significant challenge, the responses from major urban stations were instructive. One Sydney station suggested CAAMA needed to help people fall in love with the station first. Another suggested building profile at community sporting events. It was left to a manager from a remote Western Australian Indigenous broadcaster to state what should have been obvious: in the remote Indigenous radio sector, broadcasters expect to be paid. Only non-Indigenous people volunteer at major town stations.¹⁶

¹⁴O'Regan, T. with Batty, P. (1993). An Aboriginal Television Culture: Issues, strategies, politics. In T. O'Regan, Australian Television Culture. St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, pp. 169-192.

¹⁵Broadcasting, Recorded Entertainment and Cinemas Award 2020 (MA000091). Current rates from 1 July 2025. See Fair Work Ombudsman, Pay and Conditions Tool, accessed May 2026.

¹⁶Community Broadcasting Association of Australia. Sector deep-dive forum, May 2026. Response from Neil Turner, PAKAM (remote Western Australia).

The workforce problem is not only about pay. It is about whether there is anywhere local to learn the work in the first place.

Rachel Perkins arrived at CAAMA in 1988 seeking a return to Arrernte Country, her grandmother's traditional land.¹⁷ She was given a traineeship. When she started, people in the industry told her that no one would ever watch First Nations films, that no one was interested, that it would never rate.¹⁸ She went on to become one of Australia's most significant filmmakers and screen industry leaders. That trajectory began at 101 Todd Street.

Radio and community media are genuine apprenticeships for visual storytelling. Learning to structure a story for audio, to edit for pace and rhythm, to find the telling detail in an interview: these are transferable craft skills. They are how creative industries pipelines actually work in places where film schools do not exist and internships in Melbourne are not an option.

Warwick Thornton has described his ambition plainly: he wants issues to come from within community and answers to come from within community.¹⁹ That capacity to define the questions and generate the answers from within is what CAAMA was built to develop. The pipeline that produced Rachel Perkins, Warwick Thornton, Erica Glynn and Trisha Morton-Thomas was not an accident. It was an institution.

CAAMA is not funded for film production and does not propose to be. However, the success of First Nations screen investment in Central Australia depends on more than individual projects. It relies on a broader ecosystem of institutions, relationships, training opportunities and cultural infrastructure that help people develop skills, confidence and pathways into creative careers.

For nearly five decades, CAAMA has been one part of that ecosystem. Many of Central Australia's First Nations filmmakers, broadcasters, musicians and storytellers have passed through its studios, training programs and productions at different stages of their careers. Investment in screen production is most effective when it is complemented by sustained investment in the institutions that support participation, capability development and cultural expression over time.

Recommendations for the National Cultural Policy

CAAMA offers the following specific recommendations for consideration in the development of the new National Cultural Policy, organised by pillar.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

1. Formally recognise Aboriginal community-controlled broadcasting organisations as cultural institutions, not service providers. The next National Cultural Policy should make explicit that Aboriginal-controlled media organisations perform essential cultural infrastructure functions:

¹⁷Perkins, R. Filmmaker interview. Australian Screen Online, National Film and Sound Archive. Available at aso.gov.au/people/Rachel_Perkins/interview.

¹⁸Perkins, R., interviewed by triple j Breakfast, ABC Radio, 2021. Available at abc.net.au.

¹⁹Thornton, W. Interviewed in *Making Whites Obsolete*. Meanjin, 2006.

language preservation, archival stewardship, emergency communications, digital mentoring, workforce development and community representation. These functions are not peripheral to broadcasting and should be recognised and resourced accordingly.

2. Index the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program to inflation and commit to real funding adequacy. The IBMP has not been indexed to inflation since at least 2014-15. A projected cumulative real shortfall of more than \$11.7 million by 2027-28 is not a funding gap, it is a policy choice. The new National Cultural Policy should commit to indexation as a minimum condition for sector viability.

3. Establish a formal co-governance model for Indigenous broadcasting between NIAA and DITRDCSA. The 2024 Community Broadcasting Sector Sustainability Review acknowledged the overlap between the two agencies' responsibilities.²⁰ The logical and long-overdue conclusion is a formal, ongoing role for DITRDCSA in the oversight and funding of Indigenous broadcasting: bringing communications and technical expertise to an inherently technical and editorial function currently administered entirely within a social policy framework.

4. Implement the unimplemented recommendations from the 2021 NIAA review. Sixteen recommendations were made and most remain unimplemented five years later. The new National Cultural Policy should nominate the 2021 review as a baseline and establish a mechanism for tracking implementation progress, particularly Recommendations 10-12 on workforce development, training pathways and recognition of non-broadcasting functions.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

5. Invest in existing Aboriginal media institutions as creative industries gateways and capability hubs. CAAMA's ground-floor radio studios, CAAMA Music Studio and production facilities represent substantial prior Commonwealth investment. All are operating below their potential because operating budgets have never matched the assets. A professional-class recording facility that cannot run sustained artist programs or train Aboriginal producers is capital investment without its return. CAAMA is also the institution through which film, television, music production and digital media careers in Central Australia begin. A formal partnership between CAAMA and screen funding agencies, including Screen Territory, Screen Australia and AFTRS, would recognise this gateway function and allow screen investment in Central Australia to compound rather than disperse.

The same is true of the CAAMA Collection: 50,000 hours of archive material that communities actively use for genealogical, cultural and linguistic memory, assessed as internationally significant, and deteriorating without the archival staffing to manage it. Cultural policy should address the gap between capital investment and operational funding as a structural issue, not an organisational one.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

²⁰Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, and Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Anika Wells MP. Next steps toward a sustainable community broadcasting sector. Joint media release, 2024.

6. Invest in on-Country accredited training, workforce development and creative career pathways. There is no sustained, accredited pathway in media, communications or digital production that can be accessed locally in Central Australia. The informal, low-paid or voluntary labour model that sustained community broadcasting in its early decades no longer functions. Award rates apply. Volunteers do not exist in remote communities in the same way. The workforce pipeline that produced Rachel Perkins, Warwick Thornton, Erica Glynn and Trisha Morton-Thomas operated through informal mentorship and organisational goodwill without formal support. A structured workforce development model, grounded on Country and aligned to accredited VET pathways from secondary school, is the mechanism through which those outcomes become systematic rather than exceptional.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

7. Invest in the physical infrastructure of Aboriginal media institutions as cultural infrastructure. The buildings occupied by community-controlled media organisations are more than workplaces. They are places where archives are held, stories are created, skills are developed and culture is shared. At CAAMA's headquarters in Mparntwe/Alice Springs, visitors regularly seek to learn about Aboriginal broadcasting, media history and contemporary Aboriginal culture, yet substantial parts of the building are unusable due to longstanding infrastructure issues. If Aboriginal media institutions are recognised as cultural infrastructure, their physical premises should be recognised and supported as such.

8. Invest in the long-term stewardship and activation of the CAAMA Collection. The CAAMA Collection contains up to 50,000 hours of radio, television, film and music in more than thirty Central Australian languages, including recordings of national historical significance. Some material has already been lost and more remains at risk. Preservation alone is not enough. Collections of this scale require ongoing cataloguing, cultural governance, rights management, community access and creative activation if they are to remain living cultural resources. Funding should support not only digitisation, but the long-term stewardship of the Collection by CAAMA as its creator and custodian.

9. Strengthen coordination of First Nations media and cultural capability investments. Investment in community broadcasting, digital inclusion, workforce development, cultural preservation and creative industries is often delivered through separate policy frameworks and funding programs. Governments should establish mechanisms that consider how these investments interact at a regional level, with the aim of strengthening existing capability, reducing duplication and maximising long-term cultural and community benefit.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Digital transformation in Indigenous media extends the reach of community broadcasting rather than replacing it. In 2026, CAAMA combined linear radio broadcast with TikTok Live across 16 broadcasts, reaching more than 50,000 viewers from across Australia and around the world, including other First Nations communities internationally. Residents across remote Central Australia connected alongside people from around the world to watch elders, broadcasters, musicians and families share stories, language and music in real time. The future for Indigenous

community media is not radio or digital. It is radio and digital. Cultural policy and funding frameworks should reflect this reality.

Audience policy for remote First Nations communities must be designed around how people actually receive information. In remote and very remote communities across Central Australia, power card systems create intermittent home electricity. Devices are shared. Mobile coverage is patchy. Many community members listen to CAAMA in their cars or through shared spaces. Cultural policy that measures audience engagement through platform metrics and digital reach has already misunderstood the audience it is trying to reach.

The long-term sustainability of Aboriginal media institutions will depend not only on public funding but also on their ability to activate existing skills, infrastructure and creative capability in new ways. Cultural policy should support community-controlled organisations to develop enterprise activities, creative services and industry partnerships that complement their cultural and community missions. These opportunities are already emerging at CAAMA through CAAMA Digital and related social enterprise activity.

Conclusion

Central Australia has been making the case for sustained investment in First Nations media capability for more than three decades. The 2017 Social Return on Investment analysis documented a return of \$2.87 for every dollar invested. The 2021 NIAA review made sixteen recommendations, most of which remain unimplemented. The Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program has lost ground to inflation every year since 2014. The 2024 Griffith University research identified many of the same unmet needs documented in previous reviews. The pattern is familiar: review, recommend, under-resource, repeat. The consequence is not simply underinvestment in media services, but underinvestment in the institutions through which cultural capability is developed, transferred and sustained.

For almost fifty years CAAMA has maintained one of Australia's longest-running Aboriginal media institutions. It has trained broadcasters, preserved language, maintained transmission networks, stewarded nationally significant archives and created pathways into creative and cultural industries for generations of First Nations storytellers.

The Revive policy committed to First Nations First as its foundational pillar and recognised the importance of investing in the institutions, places and practices through which culture is sustained and shared. First Nations media institutions belong within that conversation. They are places where language is spoken, stories are recorded, creative careers begin, archives are maintained, trusted information is shared and cultural knowledge is carried forward across generations.

Strong institutions are not inevitable. They require sustained investment in workforce capability, governance, cultural stewardship and leadership over time. Recognising First Nations media institutions as cultural infrastructure is not just about preserving what exists, it is about ensuring these institutions can continue evolving as places where language, storytelling, journalism, digital participation and cultural capability are developed and transferred to future generations.

Community-controlled institutions are where cultural capability accumulates. That is the proposition this submission seeks to demonstrate, through evidence and through example. The new National Cultural Policy has an opportunity to recognise not only the outputs these organisations produce, but the capability they embody: the relationships, knowledge, trust and institutional memory that accumulate over time and enable cultural participation, preservation and creation.

That is what CAAMA has been, from the beginning. Still making, still here.