

SUBMISSION — NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY 2026

First Nations First · Strong Cultural Infrastructure · Centrality of the Artist

A Homeland-Based Future for the Next Fifty Years

Goŋ Wanhurr Indigenous Corporation — InDigiMatha Homeland Studio immersive Lab (IDMHSiL)

Classification: this submission may be published, but without Appendix A, which is intended for NCP committee internal review only.

8 June 2026

The Hon Tony Burke MP

Minister for the Arts

Office for the Arts

Dear Minister Burke,

Introduction

We write on behalf of the board of **Goŋ Wanhurr Indigenous Corporation** (GWIC), an ORIC-registered Aboriginal corporation governed by a majority-Yolŋu board and based at Dhälinybuy Homeland in the Laynhapuy Indigenous Protected Area, East Arnhem Land. For over a decade, GWIC has developed and delivered the **InDigiMatha Homeland Studio immersive Lab (IDMHSiL)** — a Yolŋu-led cultural-technology program that supports remote Homeland communities to produce and transmit immersive cultural works on Country.

Our submission supports **Pillar 1 — First Nations First**, and speaks directly to **Pillar 4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure** and **Pillar 3 — Centrality of the Artist**. It makes one argument: the next National Cultural Policy should recognise and fund **Homeland-based cultural enterprise as a distinct delivery model**, sitting alongside — not inside — the established art-centre system, so that cultural and economic activity can be sustained *on the Homelands* rather than drawn into regional hub towns.

We make this argument with respect for the remote art-centre movement and the fifty years of significant achievement it represents. Our own Deputy Chair, **Dr Djambawa Marawili AM** — recipient of the 2026 Red Ochre Award for Lifetime Achievement in Cultural Advocacy and Leadership, and a key organiser of the 2008 Blue Mud Bay sea-rights case — is among the architects of that achievement. It is from inside the movement, not outside it, that we say the model which built the sector was designed for a different purpose from the one Homeland leaders now hold for the next fifty years.

1. What IDMHSiL is, and why it exists

InDigiMatha — *the Indigenous digital tongue* — grew out of the Nambara Arts and Cultural Heritage Centre at Dhälinybuy and more than a decade of collaborative cultural work in Yolŋu Homelands. It was founded by internationally recognised Yolŋu artists Djakapurra and Janet Guypunura Munyarryun, both founding cultural consultants of Bangarra Dance Theatre, and is now led by Elder-Artist-Curators **Tommy Riyakurray Munyarryun OAM** and **Dr Djambawa Marawili AM**.

The program uses immersive technologies — XR, AR and VR, projection-mapping, photogrammetry, motion capture and environmental sensing apparatus — to let communities curate and transmit cultural knowledge **direct from Homeland to exhibition**, an approach we call **Metaverse Mala**. It is designed to run through three integrated streams: **Elder-in-Residence**

(knowledge authority and governance), **Artist-in-Residence** (production), and **Curator-in-Residence** (digital preservation, metadata and controlled-access protocols, trained from within the community).

It exists because Homeland communities asked a clear question, and have kept asking it: *what should our Homelands look like in another fifty years, and what has to change to get there?* IDMHSiL is the cultural leadership's own answer — a way to keep Elders, artists and young people living, working and earning on Country, transmitting living knowledge under Yolŋu law (Mala, Madayin and Galtha Rom).

IDMHSiL is, at the same time, an arts program *and* a cultural-heritage program, because in Yolŋu rom the two are inseparable. The work is shaped by the five interrelated dimensions of rom — **wāŋa** (Ancestral Homelands), **manikay/bungul** (song and ceremonial dance), **miny'tji** (clan designs), **bāpurru/gurruŋu** (clans/kinship) and **dhāwu** (ancestral story) — through which a single body of knowledge is held in place, sung and danced, painted, carried in ceremony and kinship, and told. A clan design is not decoration: it is law, story, song and Country at once, centred on sacred sites and held under senior Elder authority (**Djambatj ŋalapa**).

This is why GWIC's historical funding base has necessarily drawn on both the visual-arts stream (**IVAIS**) and the languages-and-cultural-heritage stream (**ILA**): not because the program is two things, but because the funding system divides what rom holds together. A policy that recognised Homeland cultural production as the integrated whole it is would not require communities to split one body of knowledge across programs that each see only part of it.

2. The difference: Homeland business, not hub-town business

The established art-centre system is, by design, a **hub-town model**. The ANKA Homelands Mapping Project records 38 art centres serving more than 700 homelands across northern Australia; in the Arnhem region, 17 centres — 44.7% of the national total — serve extensive homeland networks from regional service towns such as Yirrkala, Maningrida and Galiwin'ku. Art centres are correctly described in that mapping as frequently the only Aboriginal-owned business and source of independent income in their communities.

But the geometry is centripetal. Artists travel *in* to the town centre; works travel *out* to southern markets; and the enterprise, the employment and the infrastructure accrue to the hub. In that arrangement the Homeland is a **catchment**, not the business.

IDMHSiL is built the other way round. The studio sits **on the Homeland**. The Elder, artist and curator work on their own estates. The immersive work is produced on Country and transmitted to the world, and the enterprise structure is designed so that income returns to the Homeland. In calendar 2025, 51 Yolŋu artists and artworkers were engaged across our partner Homeland sites. The difference is not technological novelty; it is **where the value is meant to live** — on the Homeland, under the authority of the people whose knowledge it carries.

“This story is about dan'parr (Stringybark Larrakitj). The manikay is about ŋalindi (the moon) and djurrpun (the evening star)... the people and animals gathering at the sacred place of Warrawurr. This manikay comes from Wangurri clan wāŋa.”

— Tommy Riyakurray Munyarryun OAM, Chair

3. Who is asking — and why that matters

The standard answer to a Homeland-based model is that it is too new, too small, without a track record. But consider who is asking. **Dr Djambawa Marawili AM** chairs the sector's peak body and

has just received the nation's lifetime award for cultural leadership. **Tommy Riyakurray Munyarryun OAM** is a senior Wangurri clan leader, a NORFORCE Senior Elder, an artist and ANKA board member. The program was established by founding cultural consultants of Bangarra Dance Theatre.

These are not newcomers at the gate. They are among the people who built the cultural foundation on which the entire Indigenous art economy stands — and they are now saying, **from the centre of the movement**, that the model must evolve to serve the Homelands directly. A policy framework that cannot hear that is measuring the wrong thing.

When a major philanthropic foundation declined our Expression of Interest on the ground that GWIC lacked an established financial track record, it exposed the conceptual error at the heart of the current frame: it **equated legitimacy with corporate scale**, and so could not see fifty years of cultural authority standing in front of it. The track record it asked for is precisely the one that stable funding would have built.

4. Built by their own hands — then, and now

Our senior leaders share a common history. As young men in the Homeland movement of the 1970s and 1980s, they worked beside their fathers to build the Homelands **with their own hands** — clearing ground, raising the first houses and airstrips, securing water and re-establishing daily life on clan estates after the mission era. That work was never only construction. It was how they came to know Country, law and responsibility, and it is how they became the leaders they are today. **Building the Homeland was the education.**

IDMHSiL adapts that same method to new tools. Today the young people of these Homelands learn by working beside the same Elders — not raising houses now, but building the **digital Homeland**: capturing Country, modelling clan designs under instruction, curating the community's own archive, producing immersive works. The pedagogy is unchanged — intergenerational, hands-on, on Country, learning by doing under Elder authority, which Yolŋu call **Galtha Rom**. Only the materials are new. This is why the leadership backs the model so firmly: they recognise in it the very thing that formed them — and they intend it to form the next generation the same way, over the next fifty years.

5. An integrated, decentralised model — a network of Homeland nodes

Where the art-centre system concentrates activity in a single town, IDMHSiL is designed as a **decentralised network**. Each Homeland Studio is a **node** — owned and governed by the clan whose estate it sits on, producing and holding its own cultural content under its own authority. The nodes are not isolated: they are connected into shared infrastructure and a shared route to market. It is a **distributed network, not a hub and spoke**.

Across that network, four functions operate together and reinforce one another:

- **Production.** Each node makes cultural and heritage content on Country — immersive works, digital keeping places, language and Country mapping — with ICIP held locally.
- **Sales and commissioning.** Nodes share a collective commercial and exhibition channel — through NorthernGate Immersive, GLAM commissions and cultural tourism — so a small remote node can reach markets it could never access alone, without surrendering ownership of its knowledge.
- **Engagement.** Audiences, exhibitions and GLAM, university and school partnerships connect to every node, not only to a central gallery.

- **Training.** Digital capture, curation and production skills move across the network — anchored by the Garrthalala Bush University model and the Curator-in-Residence pathway — so capacity built at one node is shared by all.

Because all three residency streams operate at once, a single node delivers cultural, economic and educational outcomes **simultaneously and across three generations**: Elders hold and transmit knowledge; adults produce work and earn income; young people train as digital curators, producers, program managers and coordinators. The network multiplies that layered impact — each new Homeland that joins adds capacity to the whole rather than competing with it.

Capacity-building is being formalised through university partnerships. **Charles Darwin University** and **Macquarie University** collaborate with GWIC on research, production and accredited training pathways, so that learning on Country can carry recognised qualifications rather than remaining informal. The **Garrthalala Bush University** is the model for this — a place where university learning outcomes are integrated with Yolŋu on-Country pedagogy (Galtha Rom) and delivered on the Homeland, rather than requiring people to leave Country to study. A Memorandum of Understanding being finalised with the **Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation (LHAC)**, Board-endorsed in February 2026, will define this capacity-building partnership — covering IDMHSiL infrastructure support and, potentially, program delivery across an extended network of Laynhapuy Homelands.

This is what **remote Homelands working together** looks like in practice, and it is a more resilient foundation than a single centre. There is no single point of extraction; value and ICIP stay on each Homeland; and only what genuinely benefits from sharing — market access, infrastructure and training — is pooled. The model is built to scale: Stage 1 runs transportable prototype installations at two distinct sites (Dhālinybuy and Baniyala), validating the node under different clan and moiety conditions, with Starlink connectivity and edge computing making production viable off-grid. New Homelands join as nodes **without rebuilding any centre**.

The community-benefit engine is built into the network from the start. GWIC has embedded the mechanism in the constitution of its partner enterprise, NorthernGate Immersive Pty Ltd (a majority Indigenous-owned company registered in April 2026): the structure commits 50% of net profit to a **Community Reinvestment Fund** under cultural-authority oversight, so that when the enterprise trades, benefit flows back to the Homelands by rule rather than by director discretion.

This integrated approach is consistent with peer-reviewed scholarship on decolonising entrepreneurship — including the case study *Kimberley Strongbala Woomin* (Mitchell, Short, Eversole & Evans, 2025, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Decolonising Entrepreneurship*), co-authored by Dr Cindy Reese Mitchell (Charles Darwin University), a research collaborator with GWIC. That work shows Indigenous enterprise is motivated by more than money, organised around family and Country, seasonal rather than growth-maximising, and a vehicle for social and economic justice — and argues that the standard tools of capital and managerialism cannot, unaltered, deliver self-determination. A decentralised network of Homeland nodes is the on-Country, digital expression of that finding.

6. The roadblocks — and where they come from

The roadblocks are structural, not incidental.

The funding architecture is keyed to a single delivery model. Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) is the only stable operating-funding source in the sector, and it is built around the art-centre unit. In parallel, Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) directs stable resource to Language Centres. There is no permanent equivalent funding category for a Homeland-based

digital cultural enterprise that manages both outcomes. A new, Homeland-led model cannot access core funding designed for a shape it does not take, and so is forced to survive on short, competitive project grants — with the consequences our own accounts show: less than one month's cash reserves, roughly 70% dependence on government grants, and a single part-time staff member carrying all operations. And whilst recent competitive grant support for the IDMHSiL model is encouraging, it is not on the same basis as the invitation-only funding available to established art and language centres.

Philanthropy reproduces the same gate. As above, capital is withheld from new Homeland models for want of a track record that only stable funding could create — a self-closing loop.

Remoteness is treated as a deficit rather than designed for. Connectivity is so marginal that our own 2025 Annual General Meeting could not hold a single phone or video link across the Homelands. Until digital infrastructure on Homelands is treated as core cultural infrastructure, the playing field stays tilted toward the town.

Two economies, one statistic. Beneath all of this lies a structural feature of the East Arnhem economy that policy rarely names: there are **two Indigenous economies**, not one. One is a royalty and rent economy tied to mining and land-use agreements; the other is the Homeland economy, which lives on grants, art, ranger work and community programs. The royalty-supported entities are a numerical minority, but they carry disproportionate economic — and therefore representational — weight, able to resource the staff, travel and advocacy that shape regional voice and funding settings. This is no different from how wealth concentrates influence in any society. Its damage is to **measurement**: Closing the Gap and impact evaluation aggregate both economies into a single regional statistic that flatters the better-resourced, town-based organisations and renders the Homeland economy invisible — or, judged against economic-rationalist metrics built for scale, makes it appear unviable. Policy cannot fund what it cannot see, and it cannot see what it does not disaggregate. The Homelands GWIC serves sit largely *outside* the royalty economy. That is precisely why they need a model — and a policy — designed for them.

7. SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established 14-year track record of continuous Homeland delivery (since 2012) with ILA, IVAIS, ArtsNT and Creative Australia support • Senior cultural authority — a Red Ochre laureate Deputy Chair, an OAM Chair, and a GWIC inaugural Chair and Bangarra founding cultural consultant • Elder-led, ICIP-grounded governance; clean acquittal record across all grants • Working prototypes and exhibitions developed (Listening with Elders, Walking with Ancestors immersive LEWA exhibition; Wangurri Virtual Museum, Miny'tji immersive Mapping) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under-capitalised — less than one month's cash reserves • ~70% dependence on government grants • A single part-time staff member carrying all operations; no payroll history • Thin governance bandwidth; key-person dependency • Everyday friction of remoteness and connectivity • Competitive funding models erode enduring and sustainable outcomes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep GLAM, university and Homeland-corporation partnerships; scholarly validation 	
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activation of CDU and LHAC partnerships from July 2026, building on the established DAC partnership • Pending transformational funding to seed the first paid Homeland roles and the enterprise vehicle • GLAM-sector and cultural-tourism demand; Indigenous data-services markets • A national policy moment open to digital sovereignty and First Nations-led Homeland Studio models supporting increased and stable Arts & Cultural Heritage outcomes directly • Intergenerational succession through Legacy mentorship 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited incumbent-keyed federal funding channels with no category for this model • The philanthropic track-record catch-22 • Aggregated measurement that renders the Homeland economy invisible • The gravitational pull of hub towns drawing talent and activity off the Homelands • Climate and connectivity exposure

8. What our cultural leadership and members say

Direction is set by cultural authority, not by management. Our Chair, **Tommy Riyakurray Munyarryun OAM**, holds that every activity must remain Elder-led and community-defined and aligned to Mala, Madayin and Galtha Rom, delivering tangible benefit to Yolŋu artists and Elders while building toward financial independence. Our Deputy Chair, **Dr Djambawa Marawili AM**, has placed Legacy mentorship — intergenerational transfer and succession — and the Homeland Art Studio at the centre, and backs the enterprise vehicle as the means to channel future profit into training, employment and a reserve for the next generation. Homeland leaders including David Banul Munyarryun, Mary Galtharra Munyarryun, Yinimala Gumana, Waka Mununggurr and Jeffrey Doŋu Ganambarr guide delivery on their own estates.

Their collective instruction is unambiguous: **ownership of infrastructure and enterprise must sit in Yolŋu hands, with benefit mechanisms that cannot be reversed by future directors.** That is the principle the model is built to honour.

9. Recommendations

1. **Recognise Homeland-based cultural enterprise as a distinct, fundable delivery model** under Pillar 1 — defined by on-Country production, Yolŋu ownership, and durable community-benefit mechanisms — rather than treating the art centre as the sole investable unit.
2. **Fund networks of Homeland Studio nodes, not only single organisations.** Recognise a decentralised network of Homeland studios — sharing production, market access, commissioning and training — as a distinct multi-program fundable unit, and invest in the shared connectivity, exhibition and commissioning infrastructure that lets small remote nodes reach markets without surrendering ownership.

3. **Establish a second core-funding channel** for Homeland-based cultural organisations, so that stable infrastructure and operating support is not available only through the art-centre and language-centre system.
4. **Decouple legitimacy from corporate scale.** Weight cultural authority and community mandate in eligibility, so that recognised Elders and senior cultural leaders are not locked out for want of a corporate-style track record.
5. **Disaggregate measurement.** Report Homeland-economy outcomes separately within Closing the Gap and arts impact evaluation, so the Homeland economy becomes visible and fundable on its own terms.
6. **Treat Homeland digital infrastructure and Yolŋu digital sovereignty as core cultural infrastructure** under Pillar 4 — connectivity, edge computing, digital keeping places, immersive production capacity, and ICIP control retained by custodians.
7. **Support the artist where they live.** Under Pillar 3, recognise Elder knowledge-holders and community digital curators as cultural workers, supported on the Homeland and not only at the hub — including accredited training delivered on Country through university partnerships such as the Garrthlala Bush University.

Closing

Fifty years ago, Yolŋu families returned to live on their own Country. The question our leaders now ask is what those Homelands should look like in another fifty years. That is not a grievance; it is a planning horizon. The question for this policy is therefore a design question — what settings are required so that what Homeland leaders are striving for becomes a realistic, fundable and progressively measured target? Three things: measurement that disaggregates the Homeland economy so it can be seen; legitimacy decoupled from corporate scale so cultural authority counts; and a funding channel built for the Homeland economy rather than the hub. The art-centre movement gave the sector its foundation. The next era needs a model that keeps culture, work and income on the Homeland. The land has grown a tongue. A strong National Cultural Policy should make sure it can speak from where it stands.

Kind regards

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Chair

Submission contributors:

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East Arnhem Homeland consultancy workshops

Dhālīnybuy, Baniyala and Gängan

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