



**MANINGRIDA  
ARTS AND  
CULTURE**

PMB 102 Winnellie  
Northern Territory 0822

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ABN: 58 572 395 053

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09 June 2026

Minister Tony Burke  
Federal Minister for the Arts  
Office for the Arts  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts



Dear Minister Burke,

We are writing on behalf of Maningrida Arts & Culture (MAC), an operational area of Bawinanga Homelands Aboriginal Corporation (BHAC).

Maningrida Arts & Culture is one of Australia's oldest Aboriginal community-controlled art centres, supporting artists from Maningrida and surrounding Homelands since 1963. Based on Kunibidji country in Arnhem Land, MAC supports artists, arts workers and cultural leaders living across more than 32 Homelands, over 100 clan estates and more than 12 language groups.

For more than 50 years, MAC has played a vital role in supporting artists to maintain cultural practice, generate income from their work, and share the rich cultural traditions of the Maningrida region with audiences nationally and internationally.

While our primary role is supporting the production, promotion and sale of contemporary Aboriginal art, our work extends far beyond the arts market. Through our day-to-day activities we contribute to employment, cultural maintenance, intergenerational knowledge transfer, tourism, community wellbeing and the ongoing viability of homelands.

#### **ABOUT MANINGRIDA ARTS & CULTURE**

The Maningrida region is internationally recognised for the strength, diversity and cultural integrity of its artistic traditions. Artists from the region work across bark painting, weaving, fibre sculpture, carvings, printmaking and other contemporary cultural practices grounded in deep connections to Country, language and cultural authority.

MAC currently supports almost 300 artists across the region, who continue to achieve national and international recognition through major exhibitions, commissions, art fairs and institutional partnerships. Recent highlights include participation in the Telstra NATSIAA Awards, NGV Triennial, major touring exhibitions, national art fairs and significant public commissions.

At the same time, the art centre remains deeply embedded in community life. Through supporting artists to access Country and their homelands, harvest natural materials, and share knowledge with younger generations, the art centre plays an important role in maintaining cultural practice.



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MAC also works alongside other important cultural organisations and initiatives in the region, including Bábbarra Women's Centre, Djómi Museum and the Cultural Research Office. Together these organisations contribute to the cultural strength of the region, however this submission focuses specifically on the role and experiences of Maningrida Arts & Culture.

### CORE FUNDING

MAC is experiencing significant increases in operating costs which impact our viability and long-term sustainability. As a remote organisation supporting artists across a vast geographic region, our operational costs are substantially higher than those experienced by metropolitan arts organisations. Freight, fuel, vehicle maintenance, staff travel, insurance and utilities have risen sharply since 2020 due to the pandemic and global economic pressures.

There is a current shortfall of \$470,000 in wages alone for employees of MAC and Bábbarra for FY 26/27. This additional funding has come from BHAC reserves for the entirety of the grant funding term and this trend is continuing and unsustainable. Current funding settings do not adequately reflect the true cost of supporting artists in remote Australia or the broader cultural, social and economic role art centres play within their communities. Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) is the only stable operating funding source for centres and it has not kept pace with rising costs. As a result, MAC requires a significant increase to support its core operations. IVAIS core funding has not generally been sufficient to cover key operational costs, including the manager, assistant manager, and indigenous arts worker salaries – this gap is now widening further. As of 1 July 2027, wages at BHAC in these areas will increase by 4.75% in line with the recent Fair Work Commission decision, the grants do NOT reflect this increase. BHAC is chronically underfunded as regards essential staff required to continue running our art centre, putting increasing pressure on our operations.

Recommendation:

- Increase IVAIS funding to stabilise the sector and to reflect the true operational costs of remote Aboriginal art and culture centres.
- Develop long-term operational funding models that recognise the broader cultural, social and economic functions of community-controlled art and culture centres.
- Provide dedicated strategic development funding to support governance, organisational planning and long-term sustainability.

### STAFFING AND CAREER PATHWAYS

MAC faces ongoing workforce challenges associated with operating in a remote context. Recruitment and retention of skilled staff remains difficult due to limited housing availability; high living costs;



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workforce shortages in remote regions; increasing workloads and administrative pressures; and competition for skilled workers across sectors.

At the same time, MAC remains committed to creating meaningful employment and leadership opportunities for Aboriginal staff. The organisation currently employs a predominantly Aboriginal workforce and provides important pathways for local arts workers, tourism workers, cultural workers and emerging leaders. However, there remains a significant gap in long-term investment in Aboriginal arts leadership pathways across the sector.

There is also growing demand for specialised skills in: digital cataloguing & archiving; curatorial practice; cultural tourism; language documentation; research; arts administration; and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property management. These are long-term workforce development needs that require sustained investment.

### Recommendations:

- Invest in a Remote Art and Culture Centre Workforce Development Plan that focuses on pathways for managers, arts workers, board directors and cultural leaders
- Develop a National Art and Culture Centre Infrastructure Fund, with minimum standards for climate appropriate, safe, fit-for-purpose buildings, housing, vehicles and digital systems

### ARTISTS' LIVELIHOODS

MAC relies on the leadership, knowledge and availability of senior artists and cultural practitioners to ensure the organisation operates with cultural integrity. Through their artistic practice, mentoring and participation in the Arts & Culture Subcommittee, senior artists provide cultural guidance on strategic direction, artist development, exhibitions, materials, projects and partnerships, while supporting emerging artists and collaborating with national and international institutions.

Senior artists play a vital role in keeping knowledge alive through teaching future generations. Our art and culture centre is not funded to pay for this work, except through occasional projects. Many artists who have taught multiple generations of young artists, largely without pay, live below the poverty line. Without superannuation or accumulated wealth, they face ongoing economic hardship, food insecurity and associated chronic health impacts.

Ensuring a stable income for senior artists would recognise their role as community leaders, educators and cultural authorities. It would acknowledge their ongoing cultural, social and economic contributions beyond traditional retirement age.



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#### Recommendations:

- Establish a Basic Income for Artists (BIA) program to provide an unconditional fortnightly stipend for recognised senior remote and regional Aboriginal artists and cultural practitioners
- Create a stipend fund for senior artists and cultural practitioners

#### INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Fit-for-purpose infrastructure is essential to the sustainability of remote Aboriginal art centres. In addition to gallery and studio spaces, organisations require adequate climate-controlled storage, staff housing, vehicles, digital systems and visitor infrastructure to operate effectively.

Climate change presents an immediate and ongoing risk to MAC. The art centre has already been significantly affected by rising temperatures, severe weather events and prolonged wet seasons resulting in large amounts of artwork needing to be written off due to major mould issues throughout the art centre, and increased operating costs to mitigate the impact. These impacts have placed additional financial and administrative pressure on our organization, highlighting the need for long-term investment in resilient cultural infrastructure.

Adaptation and investment in appropriate infrastructure are essential to ensure the centre can continue operating into the future.

#### Recommendations:

- Develop a National Art and Culture Centre Infrastructure Fund, with minimum standards for climate appropriate, safe, fit-for-purpose buildings, housing, vehicles and digital systems
- Establish a government-backed insurance program to protect remote art and culture centres from climate-related risks

MAC supports ANKA, the peak body representing Aboriginal art and culture centres across Arnhem Land, the Kimberley, Darwin–Katherine and the Tiwi Islands and the national alliance of art and culture centre peak bodies' (AACHWA, ANKA, Desert, IACA and Ku Arts) call for a long-term, coordinated approach to strengthening the sector.

Every day, our centre sees how culture, employment, community wellbeing and education are interconnected through our work. Art and culture centres are uniquely placed to bring all these things together. This work must be properly recognised and supported through Australian Government policy.

Regional and remote Aboriginal artists and art and culture centres must have a central place in a strong National Cultural Policy. They are essential to Pillar 1 – First Nations First, the foundational pillar



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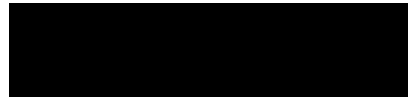
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of the Australian Government's current [Revive National Cultural Policy](#). Remote art practice delivers significant cultural, social and economic benefits for communities and contributes far beyond its scale to Australia's cultural standing internationally.

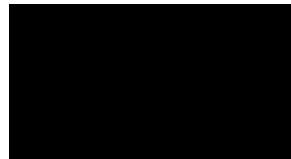
Kind regards,



Kelly Butler  
Art Centre Manager  
Maningrida Arts & Culture



Kira Bourke  
Chief Executive Officer  
Bawinanga Homelands Aboriginal Corporation



Cynthia Brown  
BHAC Chairperson  
Bawinanga Homelands Aboriginal Corporation