

# Submission to the National Cultural Plan, August 2022 on behalf of the Scaffolding Cultural Co-Creativity Project

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## Introduction

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to help inform the creation of a new National Cultural Plan for Australia. I write as a cultural producer and researcher with a strong interest in the role of cultural and creative practice, and as the Lead of the ***Scaffolding Cultural Co-Creativity Project (SCCCP)***, a research and cultural project exploring the dynamics of creative collaboration across the three overlapping domains of Culture, Arts and Education.

Through collaborative action research case studies with [partner projects and organisations](#) in Australia and internationally, and mixed-method qualitative research with cultural practitioners, SCCCPC is identifying and testing new frameworks for mapping cultural co-creativity. We are developing and disseminating tools and resources for practitioners and organisations to facilitate, sustain, embed and scale co-creative practices into diverse organisational and cultural contexts. Based at the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies, Research School of Humanities and the Arts at the Australian National University, the project commenced in 2019 working in collaboration with partners in Australia, the Pacific and Latin America.

The SCCCPC aims and approach are to:

1. **Undertake co-creative cultural projects with partner organisations and practitioners.** We undertake action research on collaborative cultural projects with practitioners and organisations from across arts, culture and education sectors. We research, map and share collaborative cultural work and methodologies within and between projects.
2. **Develop and test frameworks and resources for facilitating, teaching and enhancing cultural co-creativity.** We map the dynamics of how co-creativity happens across diverse case studies and research. We develop and test resources to enhance, sustain and scale cultural co-creativity as a core skill and capacity for practitioners and organisations.
3. **Translate cultural sector knowledge of co-creativity into different organisational and disciplinary settings.** Through our cultural work and research, we explore effective ways to share and translate the knowledge and practice of co-creation across sectors, scales, geographies and cultural contexts.
4. **Develop a community of practice and network of practitioner co-researchers.** We work with local and international practitioners and organisations as collaborative partners and co-researchers. We seek to foster emerging practitioners, and support organisational development to enhance and scale co-creativity.

You can find more information about the project at the website <https://scccpc.net>

## **First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.**

### ***Importance of support for First Nations Cultural Practitioners, knowledge custodians and the organisational ecologies which support them***

Policies and actions to recognise, support and sustain the critical importance of First Nations cultural knowledge and practice to Australia, and to Australians of all kinds, are essential elements of a National Cultural plan. **It is important however that First Nations cultural knowledge and practice is not only valued through its public outputs**, whether these be art expressions, cultural products, or public storytelling. Whilst these cultural products are of great value to Australia and to the region, and to elevating and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories in our arts and cultural sectors, a National Cultural Plan for Australia must feed and sustain the roots, country and people from which these cultural expressions grow. **The roots of First Nations stories are strong, healthy and sustained First Nations cultural knowledge custodians, elders, current and future cultural practitioners.** Without sustained, meaningful support for these knowledge holders, and the processes of cultural practice and intergenerational teaching and learning which they are responsible for, First Nations cultural knowledge cannot be translated, accessed and experienced by others.

Our national cultural plan must also recognise the social and organisational infrastructure which support and sustain First Nations cultural knowledge and practice - in the form of cultural governance, ceremony, law, language, country and cultural learning. **This requires ongoing investment and capacity-building of the First Nations cultural organisations which form a critical part of the cultural ecology in which current and future cultural practitioners practice, learn and teach.** This includes the range of small to medium and regional organisations which focus on First Nations culture, law, arts, heritage, and country. These are organisations such as the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre in WA, the many arts and culture centres in regional and remote parts of Australia, as well as language centres, youth and women's organisations, ranger groups and First Nations cultural education programs, all of which often operate with minimal core or recurrent funding, but are the front line support infrastructure for the living libraries of First Nations elders as well as the training grounds and incubators of our current and future cultural practitioners from Canberra to Kununurra and everywhere in between.

**As the recognition of centrality and importance First Nations people and culture in Australia grows, the burden on these grassroots cultural organisations also grows.** They are relied on to train, support, enable and collaborate with the many people, organisations and institutions who increasingly call upon First Nations knowledges and practices – be they in arts and culture, education, research, health, or public policy. They are usually underfunded, housed in and using inadequate physical and digital infrastructure, and reliant on volunteer labour. So, whilst recognition and respect are important, increased and sustained resourcing for these organisations will provide cultural value to the nation well beyond those resulting from investment in specific arts projects or development of large-scale cultural products.

### ***Recommendations***

- Policy and funding investment in, and capacity-building of, the First Nations cultural organisations which form a critical part of the cultural ecology in which current and future cultural and creative practitioners practice, learn and teach. This funding should be distinct from project funding or development of specific cultural products or activities.

## **A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.**

### ***Cultural and Arts practice as a key pillar to wellbeing, health and resilience across scales in Australia***

Cultural practice and its flow on value are not always public, visible to a wider or general audience, large scale, or able to be funded or valued under the banner of Arts. **It is critical that our Cultural Plan recognise the centrality of creative and cultural practice** - be it of First Nations people and the many other cultural groups and communities in Australia - **as a key pillar to our individual, community and national health, wellbeing and resilience.** Research around the world has drawn direct links to participation in and access to creativity, cultural expression and the arts in making important contributions to the wellbeing of individuals, groups and the social fabric of communities. Further, it gives contexts for exploring and sharing knowledges, stories and ways of being that contribute to connection, new insights across difference and creative response to challenges large and small – be these political, social or environmental. Our arts and cultural practitioners and organisations have a central role in not only in shaping the identity and self-understanding of the nation, and our engagement with our region, but in fostering wellbeing across scales. They do this through supporting contexts for creative dialogue and collaboration across difference, experiences that grow and foster the skills of creativity, collaboration, communication and cultural understanding, and the translation of knowledge and experiences into forms that can transcend the limitations of language, geography and time.

### ***The importance of Arts and Humanities education and practice to an adaptive, collaborative and innovative Australia***

**The ecology of arts and humanities in Australia has been corroded by policy over a sustained period of time.** This has occurred through a variety of policy means, including repeated ‘efficiency dividends’ across our national cultural institutions; consistent cuts to funding for arts and culture organisations and industries of all sizes; watering down of protections for Australian content in broadcast and other platforms; neglect of artists and universities in Covid-19 policy responses; and, the funnelling of funding and support away from Humanities and Arts education.

This corrosive policy attitude toward humanities and the arts has not diminished the appetite for the products of the arts and humanities, or the market for education in these areas. In fact, these artistic and cultural products have sustained us and brought us together during recent global crises, as we consumed more creative stories, relied more on the innovations of digital platforms, sought out opportunities to connect, relax, reflect, rebuild ourselves through cultural and creative means. Students still want to study humanities and arts courses, despite the increased costs. Artists are still making, and innovating in ways to share their creativity with others, although to keep going many have had to move to cheaper housing, or supplement their incomes with other forms of work.

**The National Skills Commission has identified that jobs requiring a high proficiency of core skills such as initiative and innovation, oral communication, problem solving, capacity for learning, are less likely to be automated in the future. These are the very skills fostered by arts and humanities education and practice.** The industry demand is also clear - numerous sectors are crying out for the skills fostered in Arts and Humanities education and practice. Engineering departments and firms, for example, are seeking to grow the skills of creative collaboration, cultural translation and team work as core competencies for their graduates, and are looking to the those in Arts and Humanities to assist.

**But the networks** of education programs, institutions, cultural practitioners, artists, producers, teachers and educators **that have previously enabled high quality arts and humanities education and practice have been stretched to near breaking point** over the past decade. Our artists were often also casual teachers in university programs but have lost these jobs as universities have lost funding and support for humanities and arts programs. We struggle to place students from our Arts and Humanities programs into practical placements and internships in cultural organisations, because those institutions have no capacity to supervise them due to lack of funding and over work. Our students are working more casual jobs than ever before whilst studying their arts and humanities degrees, in order to pay the increased fees and despairing at the perceived undervaluing of the skills and knowledges they are gaining in employment policies and priorities across the country. **We must urgently rebuild the recognition, valuing and practical support and funding for arts and humanities across the education system in Australia, to ensure that the clear demand for an adaptive, creative and innovative workforce is met in the future.**

### ***Recommendations***

Our national cultural plan should include:

- Funding pathways specifically targeting cultural practice in support of wellbeing.
- Strategies to grow national understanding of the links between cultural and creative practices, wellbeing and innovation. These could include support for research, evaluation and program development in these areas.
- Increased policy and funding support for humanities and arts education across Australia to ensure an adaptive, collaborative and innovative workforce into the future.

### **The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.**

**Culture is more than its visible, consumable or tradeable expressions.** All of us, our families, communities, our organisations and institutions, our businesses and governing systems are expressions of culture, and shaped by cultural understandings and practices. **So many aspects of our society rely for their good functioning on skills such as effective collaboration, creative problem solving & adaptation, communication & translation across forms, disciplines and differences, and the capacity for real time learning and application of knowledge.** As outlined above many of these have been identified as core competencies by the Australian Skills Commission, and they are skills which Arts and Cultural practitioners are recognised for and are well practiced in both applying in their work, and fostering within creative teams and other learning environments. Whilst there is no doubt of the value of art and cultural expressions and products in their own right, the important contributions of artists and cultural practitioners in fostering skills and ways of working - beyond the specific cultural forms and expressions they create- need greater recognition and support.

**If we better recognise the *processes* of cultural making as contributing to our society beyond the value of the outputs that result, then we must put artists and cultural producers at the centre, rather than the periphery of our society.** We must ensure their rights as workers are protected, through directly addressing the needs for protection and basic support for those whose skills and practice are best used through freelance models of employment. We must create more contexts where the unique skills of creative cultural practitioners are valued as expert knowledge about innovation, creativity and collaboration. This could include policies and programs to provide opportunities for artists and cultural producers to be remunerated for contributions to education and skill development of the broader population in core skills needed for the future.

#### ***Recommendations***

Our national cultural plan should include:

- Support for initiatives that recognise and support culture and arts practice & practitioners as critical to fostering wider development of essential skills for Australia's future, skills such as creativity, collaboration, communication and facilitation across difference.
- Strategies to provide for the security and basic wage of those whose skills require freelance models of employment. This could include investigating cooperative models of income and practitioner insurance, provision of special income gap support for freelance practitioners, and policy mandates to address the needs of artists and freelancers in emergency income support in the face of disasters.

### **Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.**

There is no doubt that we need to rebuild and radically strengthen the cultural ecology of Australia, through investments across all levels of cultural organisational infrastructure. This is outlined in more detail above.

#### ***Recommendations***

Our national cultural plan should include:



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- Significant investment in humanities and arts education in Australia to ensure an innovative, creative, culturally engaged and collaborative workforce in the future.
- Significant investment of core support to the network of First Nations cultural organisations which support cultural custodians and emerging cultural practitioners across the nation.
- Policies to rebuild arts, cultural and educational institution funding, which will in turn support pathways for employment and training opportunities for cultural practitioners, and to contribute to potential reach and engagement with diverse sectors of the Australian and international communities.

## Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

There is great potential value in sharing cultural and artistic expressions and engagements across different regions and communities in Australia as well as across the Asia Pacific region to foster peace, understanding and appreciation of difference, and diplomacy. **A renewed focus on sharing Australian stories and cultural expressions, through increasing Australian content across all platforms and cultural forms in Australia is important, as is fostering audiences internationally. However, so too is seeking out and supporting artists and cultural practitioners from the Asia Pacific and inviting them and their cultural perspectives into our storytelling and cultural practice in Australia.** To understand ourselves, we must foster better appreciation of diversity and Australia's connections - geographically, historically and culturally - to those in our region. **We have much work to do, not only to grow appreciation for Australian culture, but to grow confidence in our cultural capacity to listen, appreciate and respect the cultures of our neighbours.** There is much to share and much to learn, and the opening of opportunities for exchange and collaboration of practice, as much as the sharing of stories and cultural products, will lay foundations of regional cultural understanding and relationship that will resonate for generations to come.

### *Recommendations*

Our national cultural plan should include:

- Increased support for strategies and programs that foster grass roots cultural exchanges and collaborative engagements between Australia and Asia Pacific artists and cultural producers. These programs should support long term, deepened connection and shared learning, rather than focus on production of specific cultural outputs in the short term.
- Increased support for cultural infrastructure, activities and programs in our regional neighbours through our aid and diplomatic programs. These should be co-designed, with a focus on growing and strengthening cultural organisations, cultural practitioners and opportunities for cultural and artistic development, rather than focus on high profile practitioners or cultural products only. These could also include opportunities for scholarships and training for cultural and arts practitioners from Asia Pacific region in Australian educational, art and cultural institutions, as well as support for student and practitioner exchanges to similar organisations within our region.