

National Cultural Policy Submission

Aboriginal Culture, Heritage and Arts Association

Submitted:

On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

On behalf of an arts peak body

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

First Nations

The NSW Aboriginal Culture, Heritage & Arts Association (ACHAA) is a new Peak Body endorsed as per the previous policy goal to recognise, respect and celebrate the centrality of First Nations (as defined as Australian Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander) cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity and the need to develop this goal further. The fundamental reasons for placing this goal front and centre in a National Cultural Policy are not just in the argument of being the World's Oldest Living Continuous Cultures or one of the oldest. It is because these cultures are intrinsically and forever connected to these lands, waters and the skies above. Simultaneously to the development of this Policy, there is the Voice to Federal Parliament and the Treaties being developed in Victoria and Queensland, which acknowledge these lands were never ceded, unlike other Commonwealth countries that have Treaties with their First Nations people. Therefore Aboriginal cultural sovereignty and identity, and its inherent rights to practice and experience culture, is ongoing as it always has been. Government support of these rights, including artistic expression, is enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to which Australia is a signatory.

As the peak body in NSW for Aboriginal arts, culture and heritage, ACHAA would emphasise the need to create a level playing field in the south-east with the rest of mainland Aboriginal Australia, particularly in NSW which has the highest population and concentrations of Aboriginal people. Our unique cultures, languages and artistic expressions in NSW are strong but there is still much to do in maintenance and development before we can claim equality in recognition, respect and celebration with the rest of the country.

Typically in NSW our ACHAA members, as arts, collections and cultural spaces do not fit the Federally-based usage and definition of Art Centres. They were not created as part of a government program and this term not only impedes our sector's development by perpetuating the paradigm that Aboriginal culture exists beyond the south-eastern states. A National Cultural Policy needs to recognise ACHAA's membership of community-controlled Cultural Centres, Knowledge Centres, Languages Centres, Museums, Galleries and Keeping Places typically have cultural object collections and work primarily with visual artists (as well as dance, music, written and spoken word and festivals) and are commonly referred by us as Cultural Centres, not Art Centres. Embracing the term Art and Cultural Centres in reference to Federal policy, resourcing initiatives and funding would be a start towards the

equality Goal 1 speaks to. (See attachment A – photo of map from the most recent Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair)

As a community-controlled sector, only two of ACHAA's core 17 Members in the community-controlled sector have non-Aboriginal staff as managers and they are working to develop Aboriginal staff management.

This speaks to the urgent need for more employment, training and development funding and opportunities for Aboriginal arts workers. In NSW there is dire shortage of suitably experienced Aboriginal arts workers across the community-controlled cultural centres, the regional and urban LGA public galleries and museums and the Sydney Cultural Institutions. We do not have an arts strategy and funded program for this that mirrors the successful Media Ring Group, nor do the range of courses, Leadership Programs and initiatives such as Solid Ground and ArtsReady match our needs. All of these, are developed and managed (with First Nations input) in non-Indigenous Institutions. ACHAA's Board has recently moved to address this gap by taking the lead in the development and implementation with partners on an Aboriginal employment and training program that addresses the urgent need in our community-controlled sector and the broader NSW non-Indigenous arts, culture and heritage sector seeking Aboriginal arts workers. It is a development from our strategic plan to partner with a Registered Training Organisation but we have yet to seek funding and resources for research, modelling, consultation and implementation. ACHAA is also a member of NSW CAPO which through National CAPO is the signatory to the Closing Agreement and its priority reform areas, in conjunction with all levels of Government. ACHAA asserts that because of these priority areas and the rights outlined above, an Aboriginal Peak Body should be supported to lead the development and implementation of a First Nations employment and training program for our arts, culture and heritage sector.

Further to this, as the Peak Body in NSW for Aboriginal arts, culture and heritage ACHAA itself is drastically under-resourced. While we have diversified our programming funding sources during Covid (from primarily Create NSW to include Australia Council, NSW Aboriginal Land Councils and IVAIS for website development), we have not yet applied for nor received organisational or programming funding, having to cross the threshold of successful grants acquitted with any one funding body. Staffing resources since the inception of ACHAA have been provided by Museums & Galleries of NSW Aboriginal staff, equivalent to one full-time position across servicing both organisations. ACHAA's strategic plan seeks the organisation to be an independent peak body by 1 July 2023 but the demands on ACHAA's services as an emergent Peak Body in the past 18 months means resourcing, particularly staffing is urgently required.

Recommendation 1

A National Cultural Policy must recognise the diversity of other First Nations' community-controlled cultural facilities beyond the Art Centre terminology and framework.

Recommendation 2

In pursuing an all of Government response, a National Cultural Policy should

reference the obligations in Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to which Australia is a signatory.

Recommendation 3

Aboriginal artists, arts workers, their cultural centres and their Peak Bodies in the South-East should be equally supported with the rest of the First Nations arts sector.

Recommendation 4

An Aboriginal community-controlled Arts Worker Employment and Training Pilot Program should be supported in the South-East.

A Place for Every Story

Endorsed in its original sense of ensuring Government support at all levels reflects the diversity of Australia. Further as an Aboriginal community-controlled Peak Body, we would emphasise:

- Our artistic expression in all artforms fundamentally tells stories and
- Cultural diversity exists within First Nations storytelling and artistic expression ie it is multicultural. Particularly, in the digital realm, our ACHAA members are concerned and want Digital Sovereignty. That is, in this context, they are the primary sources of knowledge and storytelling. ACHAA's website development will include space for member centres to share this knowledge from securely-stored collection management systems within their own community-controlled facilities. The website is being developed by a First Nations web development and hosting company which, additionally uses an Australian-based only server network. In the true sense of sovereignty, members have made it clear they do not want this information, however secure it may be, passing through overseas located servers. Neither do they want it stored as a primary shared data source on a Cultural Institution or Government Department server within a secure "community section" as had been modelled. Also knowledge sharing between Cultural Institutions and the community-controlled sector needs to be equivalent, tangible and measurable, like our bartering systems, and not one-way ie into the Cultural Institution.

The work on Indigenous Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights (ICIP) needs to give equal weight to this. Digital knowledge and storytelling informed by this need to be protected and controlled through the community-controlled sector first and foremost. A uniformly agreed IP sharing digital labelling system would be a start, similar to the work done on Authenticity Labels for Aboriginal art. Fake Aboriginal art and systemic rip offs of Aboriginal artists (the huge disparities between wholesale and retail prices) needs to be stopped in the physical realms before it can be controlled in the digital realm. Alongside this would be national recommendations on a payment system for heritage knowledge-sharing (particularly from Elders) with Government Departments, Cultural Institutions and LGA public museums and galleries.

Recommendation 5

A National Cultural Policy needs to recognise that Aboriginal storytelling is informed by ancient knowledge of these lands over many thousands of years. This storytelling is geographically diverse and embedded across all artistic expression.

Recommendation 6

First Nations people should be supported to control the sharing of their knowledge and storytelling as the original source within the digital realm.

Recommendation 7

ICIP needs to be recognised, embraced and protected through legislation.

Recommendation 8

A uniform payment system for First Nations knowledge sharing in consultations needs to be implemented.

Recommendation 9

Additional funding for the Indigenous Art Code, Arts Law Centre of Australia, the National Association of Visual Artists and the Copyright Council to support First Nations Artists and raise awareness of the issues including through ICIP labelling systems for the both the physical and digital realms.

The Centrality of the Artist

Endorsed as fundamental but noting the original goal refers to collaborators as well. Should curators (or increasingly creative producers) producing thematic exhibitions be included within artist definitions or are they more usefully designated as Arts Workers? Many gallery curators are themselves artists of course, which can be part of their career path, but in the museum/cultural centre sector this may not be the case, yet First Nations cultural object-based exhibitions (and increasingly others) inevitably include art, which is sometimes commissioned.

IN NSW, recognising there are many awards for Aboriginal artists but none for Aboriginal curators, as far as is known, ACHAA has instigated the annual ACHAA M&G NSW IMAGInE Award for Excellence by an Aboriginal Curator. It is highly competitive and has encouraged engagement of more locally-based curators by regional galleries.

The key issues for government support of artists, especially Aboriginal artists, is simplifying the grant application process, including making application forms as easy to complete as possible. Some funding bodies use a one size fits all application form across individuals and organisations. This is equally true for the Peak Bodies that support them, to ease the time burden, with multiple and almost back-to-back applications to submit. The more successful an organisation is with multiple grant applications in any year means more activity, so subsequent applications can be competing against program delivery and acquittals from previous grants. The NSW State Government has reviewed access to all its grants recently but this evaluation could be broader in scope and across all levels of government.

Recommendation 10

The centrality of artists needs to also elevate and support the role of curators/cultural producers.

Recommendation 11

Grant application forms need to be simplified and consider the different needs and

budget requirements of individuals and the organisations that support that support them.

Recommendation 12

Fund the Australia Council to evaluate the whole ecology of the arts, culture and heritage landscape at all levels of Government.

Strong Institutions

Supported but not endorsed. The terminology used here does not reflect the spirit and intention of the previous policy's goal to support the entire cultural sector to contribute to community well being and the economy, nor National Life, whatever that may be. The previous policy was overwhelming focussed understandably on the Federal Government's most immediate sphere of influence across national Cultural Institutions, the Australia Council, IVAIS, Office of the Arts and bodies directly funded by the Federal Government such as NAISDA and AFTRS. Reducing this consultation to Strong Institutions implies this focus will continue in the new Creative Australia Policy with a focus on Cultural Institutions.

From an Aboriginal perspective in NSW with a diverse and struggling community-controlled sector, the issue here in further focussing on strengthening Cultural Institutions (Federal or State-based) is it also increases their "gravitational pull" for audiences, artists and arts workers. In all three categories, much of this is supplied from regional NSW to our Sydney-based Cultural Institutions. Additionally, considering Sydney as Australia's largest city and international gateway, our own NSW artists and arts workers compete for exhibition space and paid roles with the rest of Australia. This speaks to the lack of Aboriginal employment and training and also the cultural sovereignty mentioned previously. Cultural Institutions should be part of the solution, not part of the problem. In this regard, a solution might be to have parity or near-parity in wages for arts workers in urban and regional areas. This is also mindful of the housing crisis, both rental and purchased, in regional NSW and elsewhere.

The mechanism for a new National Cultural Policy to have influence across First Nations arts, culture and heritage is through the Closing the Gap Agreement between all levels of Government and the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO). In addition to the relevant priority reform areas including Transforming Government Organisations; Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making; and Building the Community-Controlled Sector, the Agreement has an over-arching commitment in 5. (20) " . . . strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures are fundamental for improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people". A National Cultural Policy needs to assert this and follow through with all level of Governments on the arts, culture and heritage impacts of Closing the Gap.

Recommendation 13

Use the Closing the Gap Agreement between all levels of Government and the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) to influence all of government support and outcomes for First Nations arts, culture and heritage.

Recommendation 14

Funding for Parity or near-parity for regional Arts Workers, including the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, with those employed in urban Cultural Institutions.

Recommendation 15

Include funding for Cultural Institutions to encourage and strengthen mutually-obligatory, formal partnerships with their regional and urban networks.

Reaching the Audience

- Strong product is needed to attract audience and buyers. Refer to previous comments, particularly in relation to the community-controlled sector in NSW and its need for equity with the rest of Aboriginal Australia in Pillar 1 to recognise, respect and value First Nations arts, culture and heritage

- NSW, during and post Covid, experiences strong regional visitation. This is evident in feedback from ACHAA's Cultural Centre members. For some these members, demand for tours for large groups of their exhibitions places stress on staff whose primary roles are elsewhere

- NSW has no representation at the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair. ACHAA will apply through IVAIS to co ordinate across its members for a stall next year, following funding via DAAF from IVAIS this year. Such funding needs to consider the vast distances between Sydney and our regional and remote area members for freighting and the competitive nature of a (Darwin-based) fair for return freighting. There was also no NSW finalist, and not for the first time, in the Telstra Nation Indigenous Art Award.

- In other words, reaching audiences must be co ordinated alongside enhancing product and resourcing the community-controlled cultural centre sector.

- Selling Aboriginal art online is a growing market and ACHAA's new website will feature a gallery/shop stocked by member centres themselves from artworks, merchandise, prints, books etc by their local artists, using a vendor marketplace software as used by DAAF. We will begin trialling Australia-wide only, as this is a complex operation requiring digital expertise and we are learning as we go. Further trusted, digital entrepreneurial mentoring – and from a preferred First Nations organisation - as we move into international sales in 2023 is needed and for the training of an additional staff member.

- Finally research and feedback informs audience development (and many other impacts of arts, culture and heritage). I can find no feedback or evaluation of the previous cultural policy, what the ABS displays is limited and dated. Having evaluation on the previous policy, what had been implemented, what hadn't, what worked and what didn't, would have been useful in informing this consultation. Additionally funding bodies collect audience and other data in acquittals but we rarely see an indication of this aggregate.

Recommendation 16

Increase support for regional cultural tourism as part of the "Australian experience"

Recommendation 17

Support Aboriginal Cultural Centres in the South-East so they qualify as "export-ready" products for cultural tourism support and promotion

Recommendation 18

Support Aboriginal visual artists from the South East so they are “export-ready”

Recommendation 19

Ensure the First Nations community-controlled sector is sufficiently resourced to compete in the competitive and growing online Aboriginal visual arts sales market

Recommendation 20

Evaluate the previous National Cultural Policy and publish findings before releasing the new NCP

Recommendation 21

Embed and ensure follow through on annual evaluation of the new National Cultural Policy, co-ordinated with nation-wide statistic gathering from funding and Peak Bodies.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why.

First Nations

NSW Aboriginal Culture, Heritage & Arts Association Inc (ACHAA) is the Peak Body for Aboriginal community-controlled cultural spaces including Cultural Centres, Knowledge Centres, Language Centres, Galleries, Museums and Keeping Places. ACHAA is the only member of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) focussed solely on arts, culture and heritage. ACHAA has 17 core members (Aboriginal community-owned, managed and operated not-for-profit centres). Each has been developed in response to its own community’s arts, culture and heritage aspirations and needs, not in response to a government program. As such, each is unique and does not conform to the conventional and dominant Art Centre model found in most other states and territories. Typically, these cultural centres (used for simplicity as a collective term) hold collections of cultural objects and often more recent records such as family history archives and photographs. These collections and associated knowledge are the basis of their cultural authority, enhanced by Elders and others in their communities.

Most centres work with local Aboriginal visual artists through exhibitions and sales. Some also have workshop spaces and programming for artists. They might also work in other artforms such as dance (dance groups development and presentation), written and spoken word (language and story-telling, including sky stories/astronomy) and even music (at festivals and markets, openings and other community events). Their extended areas as community focussed centres and meeting places might include festivals and markets, sites of significance and environmental work, including bush foods; programs with Elders, youth (including youth at risk) and children (including formal programs both incursions and excursions), early childhood/day care, health (one core member gallery is an extension of the local Aboriginal Medical Service) and education both formal and informal, including life-long learning. At least one core member cultural

centre is a Registered Training Organisation, while two other cultural centres are extension of the local Aboriginal Housing Co-operative. Another has a gallery, Keeping Place and sculpture park and also runs a radio station broadcasting to a large regional footprint in local languages. Much of this exemplifies the holistic approach of Aboriginal culture and intended whole-of-Government approach intended in the previous national policy Creative Australia ie so ACHAA is in a position to speak to this.

ACHAA also has 22 Associate Members (non-voting so it remains an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation). Most of these are non-Aboriginal organisations including most of the Sydney-based State Cultural Institutions, LGA's with public galleries/centres with Aboriginal staff and/or collections and NSW Regional Arts member areas with Aboriginal galleries and staff plus a couple of Aboriginal organisations moving towards establishing their own cultural space. The importance to ACHAA and its members of all other pillars of this national cultural policy consultation are embedded in the above