

National Cultural Policy Submission August 2022

The Aboriginal Art Association of Australia

Question 1. The Aboriginal Art Association of Australia (“the Association”) serves and represents artists, individuals and organisations that produce, promote, protect, and support Indigenous art, and the cultures that nurture First Nations art. Our Board of 10 includes five Indigenous members and five non-Indigenous members and is led by me, an Aboriginal man of the Warring-Illum-Balluck people from Taungurung Country. The Association has an Aboriginal Cultural Council on which it relies for advice on matters of First Nations culture. Membership includes over 250 First Nations artists, comprised of artists practising independently of art centres, artists working exclusively with art centres and artists working across both sectors. About 50% of Artist members are from remote areas. Our 50 trade and associate members are commercial galleries, dealers, art centres, licensors and mixed retail outlets marketing fine art and souvenirs, including First Nations participants both within and outside the art centre model. The Association is the only body that speaks for all parts of the sector and is uniquely equipped to provide insights across the full range of issues affecting the whole sector.

Question 2. This 2022 consultation has taken the 5 goals of the 2013 National Cultural Policy and distilled them into 5 pillars. Submissions to this consultation are asked - ‘what challenges and opportunities do you see in the relevant pillar(s)?’. Our submission focusses on Pillar 1 but touches on Pillars 3, 4 and 5.

Pillar 1 First Nations Challenges and Opportunities

At the direction of the Commonwealth Government, The Productivity Commission has just spent 12 months “examining the value, nature, and structure of the markets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts” to “consider problems” and to “make recommendations for governments to address them”. (Productivity Commission Issues Paper, September 2021, p.1)

There cannot be a more authoritative source of “challenges” and “opportunities” in the Indigenous visual art and craft sectors. We strongly endorse the Productivity Commission’s recommendations.

The Productivity Commission’s *Summary of draft recommendations* includes recommendations that are specifically relevant to: “support thriving and self-determined First Nations creative ecosystems” (Pillar 1); “support skilled, diverse ecologies of artists” (Pillar 3); “strengthen the capacity of the creative sector” (Pillar 4); and to “build sustainable, networked and globally recognised creative industries” (Pillar 5). (Australia Council for the Arts *National Culture Plan Consultation Framing Submission*, p.1).

The challenge – funding priorities and workforce needs

“Decisions on funding priorities – including responding to current and future workforce needs – do not adequately take into account the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities”. (Productivity Commission draft recommendation, p.29) (our emphasis)

The opportunity - funding and workforce needs – what to do, why, and how

What to do - *“Governments – in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – should evaluate the effectiveness of expenditure directed to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts sector”.* (Productivity Commission draft recommendation p. 29) (our emphasis)

Why do it - “*An independent evaluation would establish appropriate funding for the sector, including art centres and independent artists, and enable governments to deliver funding that aligns with community priorities*”. (Productivity Commission p. 29)

How to do it - “*The Australian Government should establish a formal shared decision-making partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and organisations*”. (Productivity Commission p. 29).

“*Shared decision making would help communities and governments to direct funding toward pressing priorities and to identify strategic initiatives to support the sustainability of the sector*”. (Productivity Commission p. 29)

The Productivity Commission’s recommendation about establishing a decision-making partnership to address the funding and workforce needs challenge is in our opinion the most important opportunity for supporting ‘thriving and self-determined First Nations visual arts and crafts ecosystems’ (Australia Council for the Arts, Framing Submission, p.1)

The Association asks the National Cultural Policy to support the Productivity Commission recommendation to establish a formal shared decision-making partnership between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and organisations. That decision-making partnership will:

- Help all First Nations’ workforce and capacity building in a way that enables self-determination in governance and leadership. (Australia Council Framing Submission - First Nations – Focus area 1)
- Help governments understand how best to design legislation to clarify and balance the rights and responsibilities of Traditional Owners with those who use Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property in visual arts and crafts. Getting this balance right is needed for Australia to enable both collaboration and artistic innovation. In our view, there is nothing more important than finding ways to grow the sector such that there is balance of communal needs and interests, and individual needs and interests. This is a way to future-proof arts practice.
- Help Government to better understand how growth of the Indigenous Visual Art sector will support achieving outcomes across the Closing the Gap framework. As the Productivity Commission has recently recognised, art generates income for artists and creates economic opportunities for communities, as well as maintaining, strengthening, and sharing culture and knowledge. (Productivity Commission Issues Paper, p. 1)
- Help Government build on its longstanding and successful support of the Indigenous Visual Arts sector. The Government’s recent *National Indigenous Visual Arts Action Plan 2021 - 2025* is an important document and strategy, especially when the funding and workforce challenges and opportunities discussed above have been resolved.

We want to highlight one issue where a shared formal decision-making partnership will particularly help to ensure that potential growth in the sector is achieved. The Productivity Commission Study finds:

- There are no comprehensive data on training and development support available to independent artists in the visual arts and crafts sector. (p.324)
- It is clear that accessing grants through a competitive process can be challenging. (p.324)

- Appropriate training and professional development opportunities appear limited and, in particular, it is not clear how adequate or accessible professional development opportunities are for independent artists.(p.324)

A whole of industry approach

The Association contends that the shared formal decision-making partnership will also help governments realise that achieving the full potential growth of the Indigenous Visual Arts industry depends on understanding the interconnectedness of *the whole* of the sector.

The Minister for the Arts raised this in his interview with *Limelight* on 30 June 2022:

“So that’s why in redoing cultural policy I want to make sure we are fully focussing on the commercial significance of the sector and the role of the artist as a worker.”

In our opinion, one way for the National Cultural Policy to achieve that focus would be to adopt the description of the Indigenous Visual Art Industry set out in the 2020 *Consultation Paper on Growing the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry* (p.5):

“Today, the industry is made up of a strong framework of art centres, commercial galleries, auction houses, wholesalers, dealers and independent artists working in a range of ways, including being represented by agents or commercial galleries, contracted as designers or operating as sole traders”.

“The (Action) plan will also assist the Government to identify ways it can support the Indigenous Visual Arts industry as a whole”.

As part of the ‘whole of industry’ approach, the language and narratives on how independent artists are seen and viewed within arts markets need to demonstrate the full scope of the marketplace more clearly. This pan-industry approach will improve access to market, supply chains, and with developing new and innovative market channels.

Question 4. Are there other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy.

Goal One from the 2013 *Creative Australia* was - “recognise, respect, and celebrate the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity”.

In our view, that Goal could today be expressed as – ‘celebrate the recognition and respect now given by Australians to the expression of Indigenous cultures through visual arts and crafts’.

The Association would like to see the National Cultural Policy recognise and celebrate the success of the Commonwealth Government’s policy support for the Indigenous Visual Art Industry, at the same time as recognising the potential for significantly more growth.

If so, a matter for inclusion in National Cultural Policy might be expressed as – ‘How best does Australia build on that Australian policy success story?’

Name: The Aboriginal Art Association of Australia

Contact: Matthew Everett [REDACTED]