



## National Cultural Policy Submission

Australasian Consortium of Humanities Researchers & Centres

This submission to the National Cultural Policy is made on behalf of the Australasian Consortium of Humanities Researchers and Centres (ACHRC). The ACHRC strongly supports the development and investment in a National Cultural Policy. We thank the government for the opportunity to make a submission.

### Who we are

ACHRC is a network of humanities scholars and groups engaged in humanities-based research in universities. Our aim is to connect researchers, centres and cultural institutions, both within Australia and internationally. We are an advocacy, research and professional development and training representative body. We comprise regional and national networks of professional expertise with the aim of building research capacity, collaboration and institutional knowledge. In 2015, we established a portfolio dedicated to promoting humanities-based research in regional areas of Australia. One of our flagship membership programs, *Humanities in the Regions*, has run successful annual conferences based in regional universities.

One of our key aims is to promote and strengthen relationships in the wider community, particularly within regional Australia. ACHRC offers a platform for networking and connection between institutions. We work collaboratively with other Australia arts and humanities organisations and bodies through a consortium. We believe we can play a useful role in helping the government develop and implement the national cultural policy and can provide a network for feedback and communication between the government and universities and centres of expertise, particularly in regional Australia.

This submission draws on the experience and expertise of the ACHRC Advisory Board, which comprises academics working in the humanities sector across metropolitan and regional universities. It is made on behalf of the Board under the directorship of Professor Kylie Message (Australian National University).

Our submission is organised around the suggested 'pillars' approach, but we note that it is not always helpful to think of the identified issues as being separate. In some instances, a holistic and unified approach embedded will better suit a new National Cultural Policy, and integration across all pillars of practice is required to support a vibrant, equitable and sustainable culture.

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

Understanding and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage and knowledge must be central to a healthy and thriving national culture. ACHRC supports First Nations as the first pillar of the National Cultural Policy and recognises it as an important connection to the government's commitment to the full interpretation of the *Uluru Statement of the Heart*.

We argue that the National Cultural Policy must invest in First Nations-led skills development, education and training and support further representation and employment of First Nation people across the full gamut of arts education and arts roles. Investment, capacity building and infrastructure must be built in regional areas as well as in metropolitan centres. To do so effectively, policy on issues relevant to First Nations people cannot be the product of a single university or organisation. The recognition, integration and celebration of First Nations cultural knowledge, with appropriate local input, must become standard practice. The preferred model involves the development of a healthy ecology of initiatives, communities and institutions that are First Nations controlled and led.

In our collaborations with various universities, peak bodies and cultural institutions, we see the development of further employment and training opportunities at middle management levels as an imperative. The lack of mid-career upskilling for First Nations people was identified in a recent National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) workshop and we support their recommendation for the creation of further mid-career development opportunities. ACHRC is in a position, particularly through its relationships with regional, state and Commonwealth cultural institutions to support increased opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, networking and development in academic and curatorial research, as well as the requirement for cultural competency training in small to medium organisations.

ACHRC recommends

- a boost in funding across state and territory, urban and regional and remote communities for indigenous art organisations, cultural and knowledge centres and targeted financial support for First Nations artists and practitioners.
- that the national policy includes a program of development of mid-career professional development for First Nations people.

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

ACHRC's annual forum *The Humanities in the Regions* is an initiative that addresses the idea of a place for every story and the contribution of diverse stories and research to culture. That is a central concern of the ACHRC, and we support its inclusion in the National Cultural Policy. We are an important advocate for the humanities in Australasia, and our focus on humanities research scholarship and teaching in Australian regional centres gives the organisation a unique perspective. Expanding and strengthening those networks, platforms and forums for the sharing of stories is essential to capturing storytelling diversity and providing a place, either physically or digitally, in which those stories can be heard.

Creating the opportunity to tell stories also provides the opportunity to build audiences and create new connections, and there are several strategies to achieve this. The ACHRC supports Diversity Arts Australia's call for an anti-racism strategy to work towards an equitable Australian arts and culture sector. The promotion of diversity should not be a separate pillar; it should be embedded within all our practices.

The pillar also includes ‘place’. You cannot understand place without detailed attention to history. Communicating, knowing and understanding our history is essential to building a robust cultural policy.

The National Cultural Policy must acknowledge the different health outcomes, and educational and employment opportunities for different groups around Australia. Workplaces and conditions must be made culturally safe for First Nations people. A place for every story also requires equity and understanding of whom is not given opportunities.

ACHRC recommends

- diversity and inclusivity be embedded across the National Cultural Policy.

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

The ACHRC advocates for programs and funding that support long-term artistic practice to improve the training, working and living conditions of artists.

Education and training are important in supporting the centrality of the artist as worker and creator of culture. Cultural policy development needs to capture the views of the education and university sectors, and to be cognizant of the work carried out by artists, art workers and art research across both. The ACHRC supports the shift in perception towards art as ongoing work and the artist as worker. Professional development and upskilling opportunities for artists are important in achieving that.

One of the issues raised during a recent ACHRC online seminar was the need for more information sharing, transparency and consistency in how creative research is reported within universities, and in how that research is articulated and made publicly available by both institutions and government. The contextual challenges for creative art research in the university sector involve navigating between industry and academia, which have different needs. Regional artists have less access to professional opportunities than their metropolitan counterparts, which can create negative perceptions about the impact of location or place on creative practices (this also ties into the issue of ‘place’ addressed in the previous pillar).

ACHRC recommends

- increased investment in regional arts and cultural infrastructure and a review of models of reporting within universities to better accommodate creative practice outputs and support the role of the centrality of artist’s work to culture.
- greater investment in existing peak bodies, agencies and services to increase professional development programs for artists and art workers.

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

More public funding is needed to provide the necessary infrastructure to Australia’s creative, cultural and research institutions (particularly considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic)

to develop the strong institutions envisaged for the National Cultural Policy. One of the biggest issues facing the arts, humanities and social science sector was the substantial fee increases for HASS subjects introduced by the previous federal government. We think it would be positive if those increases were reversed.

The 'efficiency dividend' that has been imposed on the budgets of national cultural institutions has resulted in a crisis in the capacity to deliver core functions, as well as concerning trends in the mental health and well-being of staff. These effective budget cuts cannot be sustained in perpetuity without a significant reduction of amenity to the public.

The ACHRC notes the increasing use by the previous government of ministerial discretion in approving ARC grants. Our position is that the ARC is better suited to assess applications, and that the outcome of delegating approvals to the Council is likely to be a more vibrant and diverse cultural sector.

The ACHRC also advocates the abolition of unpaid internships. Internship programs are often jointly managed between the university and cultural institution sectors and additional funding to develop a program of paid internships would bring them into line with international benchmarks.

ACHRC recommends

- The Department of Infrastructure, Transport Regional Development, Communication and the Arts work collaboratively with the GLAM sector, universities and peak bodies, such as the ACHRC to develop a program of paid internships which would see students and new professionals get work in metropolitan and regional libraries, archives and museums, and to develop a pilot program.
- A percentage of public funding to be assigned to a dedicated coordination and strategy development across the different layers of government.
- The abolition of the efficiency dividend imposed on national cultural institutions.

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

The ACHRC has been rethinking the nature and needs of its audiences recently. That became particularly pertinent during the COVID-19 lockdowns when we moved to the delivery of key programs in an online format.

Digital networking and presentation have been important in the last two years as a means of reaching researchers in the university and other sectors. In some respects, digital delivery has created increased access, with a recent online seminar attracting over 200 registrations, including from attendees who would have found it much harder to attend in-person. Digital outreach has significant potential for growth and for increasing the diversity of participation in the humanities and arts and should be developed further as part of a national co-ordinated approach.

Another initiative from the ACHRC in 2022 has created a community of practice discussion network among regional humanities academics that has been able to create a trusted space to

share stories and data regarding the impact of COVID-19, sector cuts and the rising costs of humanities courses at different regional institutions. Building audiences through these digital delivery platforms has created connections and community and share stories of professional practice.

In its outreach work with the cultural institutions, ACHRC has seen the issue of a reduction of grant funding for regional exhibition touring programs, as well as international touring raised and discussed at multiple forums. Another issue frequently raised is a need for new funding to present Australian collections, creatives and artists in digital media while ensuring the protection of artist's intellectual property and moral rights and fees.

Through its reach with different tiers of humanities and art organisations and workers, we also see the need to re-establish the National Arts and Culture Accord as a strategy to facilitate cooperation between the different levels of government.

ACHRC recommends

- A strategic balance of both digital and in-person initiatives articulated in the new National Cultural Policy.
- extending grants such as Visions Australia and review the National Collection Touring Program (NCITO) to include touring programs for international audiences. Post Covid-19 there is an urgent need to encourage audiences directly back in front of arts and cultural programs.
- a greater emphasis be placed on digital outreach as a means of connecting with a wider and more geographically dispersed audience for cultural programs. For example, funding to be made routine rather than 'special or 'emergency' funding for preservation and digitisation of significant collections in in cultural institutions.
- re-establishing the *National Arts and Culture Accord* a Creative Australia initiative providing a framework for increased collaboration across government jurisdictions to increase support for cultural heritage, arts and creative industries.

### **What other things would you like to see in a National Cultural Policy?**

ACHRC has expressed its concern about the impact of efficiency dividends placed on major public institutions, including Commonwealth cultural institutions and cuts to humanities funding within the university sector. A review of the impact of these cuts with a view to reinstating targeted funding is urgently required.

We also recommend a closer link to arts and humanities research and education be embedded into the Five Pillars framework. A robust National Cultural Policy should support the implementation of these curriculums across both the secondary and tertiary education sectors and provide professional training and programs to support teachers and students



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**ACHRC Research Manager**

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