

National Cultural Policy Submission

Wantok Musik

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation



Submission to National Cultural Policy

Wantok Musik, a Melbourne-based not for profit arts organisation and music label, represents a diverse and dynamic range of First Nations artists from the Oceania region. Wantok Musik exists to help Pacific First Nations musicians share their unique music and cultural perspectives and, in doing so, transform lives and communities. In a world full of change and challenge, Wantok Musik supports and showcases an Oceania that is ancient, diverse, creative, culturally rich and resilient.

1. First Nations

As a not-for-profit arts organisation that supports First Nations artists, we strongly support this pillar of the proposed platform. It must be the priority for our cultural policy.

Providing appropriate resources for our First Nations artists and cultural leaders is essential to achieving meaningful progress. Self-determined, First Nations-led approaches that support artists, communities, organisations and sustainable practice and ensure that recognition, rights and revenues flow back to the creators of the works is the appropriate way forward.

The proposed National Indigenous Arts and Culture Agency/Authority (NIACA) warrants further development and consideration.

Opportunities which support and facilitate Global First Nations exchange are also a priority, as is cultural diplomacy that engages with our immediate region.

2. Reaching the Audience: Pacific Priority

The Wantok Musik Foundation was established 21 years ago to facilitate numerous arts projects and cultural exchange from First Nations Australian and Oceanic artists.

In addition to delivering projects in the region, Wantok also supports First Nations Australian artists such as Frank Yamma, Kutcha Edwards and Black Rock Band, and this remains a central focus for the organisation. Wantok also acknowledges the significant Pacific diaspora communities now based in Australia and has worked with artists from

these communities such as Charles Maimarosia (Solomon Islands), Tio (Vanuatu) and Maubere Timor (Timor Leste) to support commercial music releases and tours.

Cultural engagement with our region should be a priority of the new cultural policy.

This means prioritisation of cultural diplomacy initiatives in Oceania with a matching budget allocation. The Wantok Musik Foundation already produces regional projects with the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This highlights the potential of a more formal partnership between the Arts and DFAT Ministries to increase our presence in the region through the support of local culture and exchange with Australian artists.

As noted above the potential to support and encourage First Nations exchange within our region is a particular priority. The Wantok Musik Foundation has supported some work in the area with significant cultural impact, and the potential for further First Nations led projects is substantial.

As a long term ambition, using the model of agencies such as the British Council and Goethe Institute, there is a clear opportunity for the creation of an Australian cultural diplomacy agency focused on Oceania.

3. A Place for Every Story

As an organisation that facilitates projects from First Nations artists from Oceania, we consider it crucially important that voices from our immediate region, particularly those that call Australia home, should be uplifted and supported. Wantok Musik aims to improve the awareness and celebration of the performance and cultural connections between the diverse ethnicities and musical ecologies within the Australasian and Pacific regions, providing artists multiple pathways for expression, recognition and remuneration.

We believe that aligning focus on stories from our vibrant Pacific communities should be supported in this new National Cultural Policy. This is an essential opportunity to celebrate the contribution that Australasian and Pacific artists make to the cultural vibrancy and dynamism of Australia. We must celebrate the shared connections, cultural heritage and histories between Australia and our close neighbours in the Pacific. By producing, promoting and presenting the cultural, music and performance connections between the diverse, unique and resilient identities of the Australasian and Pacific region, this provides a powerful opportunity for engagement, not just on economic terms, but also in providing opportunities for reciprocity, understanding and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

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