

Gondwana Choirs

National Cultural Policy Submission



1. Are you submitting this submission (tick all that apply):

On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

Gondwana Choirs is the voice of Australia's youth.

We are Australia's leading choral organisation for young people. Our choirs shape the Australian sound through the creation and presentation of innovative new work and provide opportunities to young Australians through world-class training by leading artists. Our choirs are in demand through high-profile engagements with the country's leading festivals, orchestras and events. Founded 33 years ago by Artistic Director Lyn Williams AM, we welcome singers from all backgrounds to join us in an inclusive, holistic choral training and performance experience.

Our organisation encompasses:

- Sydney Children's Choir - one of the world's leading treble vocal ensembles, having forged a reputation for artistic innovation and spell-binding performance. Over 400 children per week take part in a training program unsurpassed in Australia.
- Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir - a contemporary expression of the world's oldest living culture. Based in Cairns, the Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir is a place where young singers train, perform and collaborate with Elders and composers while forging connections with music, language, land, and stories.
- Marliya – a celebrated choir of young female First Nations singers based in Cairns. They are the performers in the iconic Spinifex Gum stage show and recordings, which was born out of a collaboration between Gondwana Choirs and Felix Riebl.
- Gondwana National Choirs - the country's best young performers from all backgrounds who come together at National Choral School and for tours and special projects to create extraordinarily rich musical ensembles.

As a recognised leader in the field of youth arts in Australia, Gondwana Choirs strongly supports a National Cultural Policy.

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

2.1 First Nations

As home to the Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir and the choir Marliya, the performers in the celebrated stage show and recording collective Spinifex Gum, Gondwana Choirs has long recognised the vital importance of recognising and respecting First Nations stories at the centre of our arts and culture. We endorse this as a key pillar of a National Cultural Policy, whilst also stressing the centrality of this pillar across all areas of the Policy.

2.2 A Place for Every Story

Youth arts organisations play a vital role in giving children the opportunity to engage with their creativity, with positive impacts on their social, academic, and civic capacity development and importantly their wellbeing. Investment in the arts needs to better reflect the importance to the sector and the wider Australian community of the youth arts organisations that open the doors to a child's engagement with their creativity.

As a not-for-profit organisation, Gondwana Choirs operates in a fiscally constrained environment. Even so, we strive to reduce or eliminate structural and financial barriers to participation that can preclude access to our programs by a never-ending search for philanthropic support towards our bursary program. Every child who wants to engage with their creativity should have equitable access to a training program. To fully enable 'A Place for Every Story' as a pillar in a National Cultural Policy, Gondwana Choirs calls for greater support and dedicated funding for youth arts organisations within the Australia Council's funding framework.

2.4 Strong Institutions

Gondwana Choirs strongly supports greater federal government investment into the small to medium arts organisations that sustain our nation's arts and culture ecology. We call for an increase in the number of organisations supported through the Australia Council's multi-year investment program, rather than the reduction that the sector has seen in the last two funding cycles.

In recognising the training institutions that support the development of our future artists, arts workers, philanthropists, and audiences, Gondwana Choirs urges the government to have a broader outlook on the number of institutions that are currently funded. We encourage greater targeted support of a wider range of training organisations and institutions as the pathway to creative workers' development.