

2022 National Cultural Policy submission: Bundanon (NSW)

Overview

Bundanon is the only National Collecting Institution (NCI) in regional Australia, and as such, has a significant role to play in shaping the nation's cultural identity. Situated on the Shoalhaven River on south-coast New South Wales, it works collaboratively with diverse communities and local First Nations custodians; and foregrounds the work of artists across disciplines (visual and performing arts, music, literature and dance) through onsite residencies, live events, learning programs and exhibitions.

Bundanon completed a major infrastructure project in December 2021, opening its new Art Museum and Bridge for Creative Learning in February–March 2022 in the aftermath of COVID-19 lockdowns and extensive flooding across NSW, which saw its launch events cancelled. Located within a high-risk fire and flood zone, and deeply impacted by the January 2020 bushfires, it comprises a 10,000-hectare wildlife refuge with multiple biodiverse habitats – the combined challenge and dramatic beauty of its location necessitating a strong position on climate change, and the careful balance of cultural, educational and environmental activity.

Bundanon's regional bush location and national remit, ecological stewardship, and diverse creative and educational programming position it uniquely in Australia and abroad; and offer a timely case study for cultural organisations into the future. Bundanon offers an 'end-to-end' experience for artists across disciplines, from the creation of new works through onsite residencies, through to their delivery and display in the Art Museum, wider buildings and natural landscape. It further offers learning experiences for young people that are site-responsive, immersive, and environmentally driven that build on, and extend well beyond standard curriculum; and wider multi-generational learning experiences.

Sustainability and a low carbon footprint are central to Bundanon's mission and respond to the challenging climatic conditions of its location; to increased extreme weather events nationally and internationally; and the urgent need for 'best practice' benchmarks by cultural organisations going forward. Designed in response to fire and flood mitigation, the Art Museum sits within the protective envelope of a hillside and the Bridge straddles a flood gully adjacent. The new infrastructure utilises solar power and harvests rainwater onsite. Bundanon maintains two carbon forests, undertakes annual cultural burns with First Nations



custodians, and collaborates with custodians and environmental scientists on land care and bush regeneration strategies.

Response

Bundanon stands with the Australian cultural sector in applauding the new federal government for seeking to formulate a National Cultural Policy; and for consulting widely and seeking feedback across the sector to this end.

This process of inclusion is crucial for a sector that has suffered extensively through lack of visibility, of policy-based advocacy and reduced funding for nine years, the last two critically impacted by COVID-19, which will have ramifications for years to come. The opportunity to implement a national policy will, we hope, foreground the intrinsic value and vast contribution of the cultural sector to the nation's multiple and diverse stories; contribute powerfully to the resilience and wellbeing of communities across the nation; and enhance the intellectual growth and prosperity of Australians today.

The five pillars outlined by government provide important entry points to a wider policy framework; and they invite further reflection and detail in the present, building on the 2013 *Creative Australia* framework put forward by the Gillard government.

Below we respond to the five Pillars and advocate for the following outcomes, with a particular focus on (and beyond) the NCI and non-profit community.

Pillars

First Nations first

We believe recognition, visibility and support for the work of First Nations artists and cultural workers is essential to the new National Cultural Policy and commend government for placing this at the forefront of the five pillars.

Build on and fund partnerships between the NCIs and Traditional Custodians ensuring local voices and cultural practices are strengthened, supported and amplified by the NCIs

Support and recognise the particular circumstances and challenges of First Nations communities and artists living in regional (as well as remote) locations

Promote the visibility and agency of First Nations people through policy, including identified positions in leadership and on Boards; consultation with community leaders as a standard

practice and protocol; and ongoing cultural immersion training as a standard for NCI staff and other cultural workers

A Place for Every Story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture

Recognise and support the additional expenses of regional and non-urban organisations to collaborate with communities; and support and commission the work of regional artists in the creation of culture

Develop and implement a 'regional and remote' policy strand that recognises the true diversity of the creative sector, from artists to the organisations that support them; and acknowledging that many live, work or operate beyond the major city centres and have important stories to tell. Visibility, access, infrastructure support and heightened expenses represent key challenges for artists and organisations operating within regional and remote locations and should be reflected in this policy strand

Centrality of the Artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture

Invest through policy in the importance of supported opportunities for artists to have time for reflection, renewal, and sustained focus on practice development; as well as opportunities for exchange across state, national and international borders

Support opportunities for artists with a disability to develop their practice, and to be represented in all NCI programming; invest in support for NCIs to deliver focussed programs and train staff

Recognise through policy the importance of a living wage and industry standards for the cultural sector – including regulated standards for exhibition/writing/performance fees and new work commissions; consideration of wider salary/remuneration (as opposed to 'gig economy'), and continuous Superannuation and insurance schemes; consideration of regulated standards for secondary market sales

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

Invest in ongoing operational and program support to enable non-profit institutions and the NCIs to deliver best practice in the creation and delivery of content, and wider operational context; and reducing time-consuming reliance on multiple small grants and donations that do not provide continuity or an ability to program for the long-term – and thus, to support artists in the creation and delivery of new work, major projects or extended research.

Appropriate, sustained levels of funding are critical for the survival and growth of organisations including the NCIs and the many artists they support – without this funding, they cannot plan in the medium to long-term and cannot thus support adequately the artists who create our diverse national stories

Reaching the Audience: ensuring our stories reach the right audience at home and abroad

Prioritise roll-out of high performing internet capability/NBN across the nation, especially in regional and remote locations, where access is frequently limited or unreliable

Recognise through policy the digital transformation post COVID-19, and support storytelling across real and virtual platforms

Invest in the international value of Australian stories, providing funding for artists and cultural organisations to collaborate and disseminate projects abroad

Building on the above pillars, we advocate for a **sixth column** addressing the imminence of climate change, and promoting values of sustainability, resources conservation and futureproofing for the next generation.

The cultural sector can (and does) play a leading role in building awareness and advocacy around climate change, shaping stories and educating future generations, and setting standards in relation to sustainability and environmental stewardship. Our world has changed greatly since the 2013 *Creative Australia* framework, from increasingly extreme weather patterns to COVID-19 and its aftermath. We advocate for a policy that reflects this threat matrix and enshrines values of sustainability and a net zero approach through policy, including benchmarks for cultural organisations to reduce production of waste, maximise recycling, employ sustainable materials, considered environmental practices and sustainable, climate-responsive architecture that aims for minimal environmental impact.