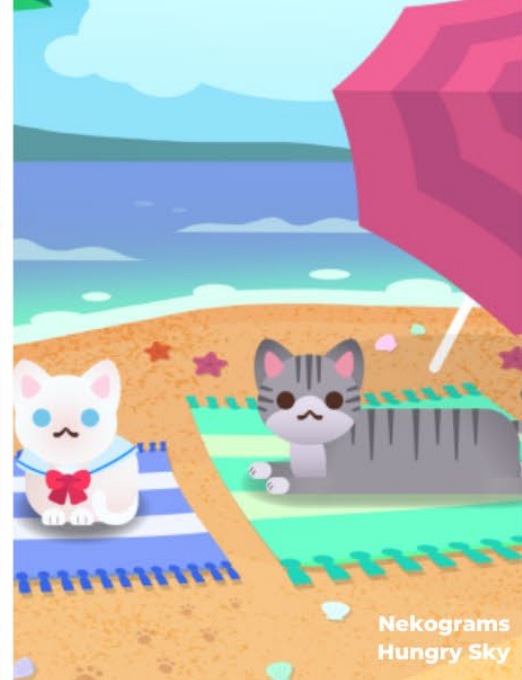




Unpacking
Witch Beam



AO Tennis 2
Big Ant Studios



Nekograms
Hungry Sky

IGEA

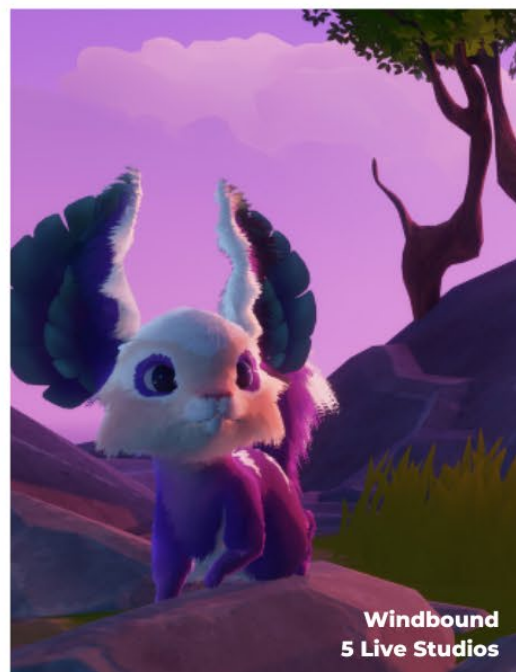
interactive games & entertainment association

Submission to the Office for the Arts

Consultation on a renewed National Cultural Policy

August 2022

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to the land and sea. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their cultures and to their elders past, present and emerging.



Windbound
5 Live Studios



No Way Home
SMG Studios



Submerged: Hidden Depths
Uppercut Games

Introduction

The Interactive Games & Entertainment Association (IGEA) is the industry association representing and advocating for the video games industry in Australia, including the developers, publishers and distributors of video games, as well as the makers of the most popular gaming platforms, consoles and devices. IGEA also organises the annual Games Connect Asia Pacific (GCAP) conference for Australian game developers and the Australian Game Developer Awards (AGDAs) that celebrate the best Australian-made games each year. IGEA has over a hundred members, from emerging independent studios to some of the largest technology companies in the world. A full list of our membership is available on [our website](#).

We thank the new Albanese Labor Government and the Arts Minister the Hon Tony Burke MP for prioritising a renewed National Cultural Policy and for inviting IGEA to the Town Hall events. IGEA is pleased to be able to also contribute a submission to this important and timely review process, which as requested we have kept to three pages. Also as requested, we provide our permission to the Department to both publish our submission and to use our words in the National Cultural Policy Report (both can be publicly attributed to our organisation).

Our submission is divided into two parts. The first part highlights the crucial role that video games, as culturally and artistically-significant interactive media, must play in a renewed National Cultural Policy, while the second part briefly addresses the five pillars around which feedback has specifically been sought. This submission and our participation at the Sydney Town Hall event form our contribution to this important National Cultural Policy consultation.

Video games and a renewed National Cultural Policy

The cultural dominance of video games

In the past, video games have not always been treated by policy-makers as 'culture', and while this view is thankfully fading, our medium is often still not given the same standing in cultural policies as others. Often missing from cultural dialogue is recognition that video games are among the most powerful, impactful and popular of all cultural and artistic expressions, both in Australia and around the world. According to our [Digital Australia 2022](#) research, two-thirds of all Australians play games and 9 out of 10 Australian households have at least one device on which games are played. While the Department and Screen Australia's research continues to show that the engagement of Australians with Australian culture on legacy formats like free-to-air TV and the cinema is declining or under sustained pressure, Australians - and particularly younger Australians - live and love gaming. We see no world of the future where digital storytelling is not the most influential cultural force - and gaming will be a major driver of this.

A generation of Australian digital storytellers emerges

A new generation of Australian storytellers is choosing to express themselves via interactive media. The reason why we should be excited about this is because those stories are and will be among the most rich, compelling and widely-exported cultural products from and about our nation. Modern video games are as visually stunning as film and animation, with individual frames indistinguishable from visual art, incorporate rich music and audio, and can be as narrative-rich as any book. In addition, the interactive and immersive nature of games, as well as their highly social elements, gives our media a cultural impact like nothing else. Game development is also often highly accessible and achievable compared to some other cultural activities too, with many of Australia's most acclaimed games made by small groups of self-

taught artists, creators and programmers. And their stories are told not only to generations of Australians who are increasingly living online, but are digital-exported to a global audience that spends more on video games (at A\$280 billion) than any other cultural product or activity.

Rectifying close to a decade of federal policy inaction

From May 2014, when Federal Labor's barely-commenced Australian Interactive Games Fund (AIGF) was axed by the incoming Abbott Government, until last month, when the first round of Screen Australia's *Games: Expansion Pack* fund recipients were announced, there was zero federal support for Australian game developers. During those eight years, practically every cultural and artistic sector in Australia received varying degrees of federal attention, all while Parliamentary inquiry after Parliamentary inquiry issued bipartisan recommendations for federal investment in Australian video game development. While we applauded the Morrison Government for announcing in March 2021 the Digital Games Tax Offset (DGTO), which is still yet to be implemented, and for announcing a year later the *Games: Expansion Pack* fund, significant damage has already been wrought and many opportunities lost. Countless stories have not been able to be told as a whole generation of Australian talent has left our shores, funding has not been found for projects (despite state and territory support) and foreign investment and new studios have bypassed our borders for other territories. While during this period there have of course also been remarkable success stories of Australian-made games (most of Australia's most successful cultural exports are Australian games), this does not show that support is not needed, but rather what else more could have been achieved with support.

Building on from *Creative Australia*

Federal Labor's previous National Cultural Policy, *Creative Australia*, released in March 2013 by the Gillard Government, was pioneering in its recognition of video games. It spoke about their 2012 announcement of a \$20 million AIGF "to support one of the fastest growing sectors of the world economy" and noted that "Australians now spend approximately \$1.5 billion a year on interactive games". However, in 2022, there is still only the brand new \$6-7 million *Games: Expansion Pack* fund, which is a minute fraction of federal investment in film and TV production and has not even paid out its first round yet, while Australian spending on video games and consoles has reached \$4 billion. From 2012 to 2022, cultural consumption by Australians has heavily moved to digital and online, representing a cultural paradigm shift. Even among museums and other cultural institutions, we are seeing an increasing focus on immersive and interactive media, and it should be no surprise that the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in Melbourne, which has the largest video game collection of any Australian museum, is also one of Australia's most visited museums. So, while video games were mentioned in *Creative Australia* fewer times than film, TV, music, visual arts or even opera, we would expect video games to have far more centrality in a renewed National Cultural Policy.

Enshrining support for Australian game development

In our 2022 Federal Election Policy Platform, [Backing the Game](#), we made three major recommendations for growing the Australian game development industry.

These remain our key recommendation for inclusion in a renewed National Cultural Policy.

Our first recommendation is to supercharge the local industry and draw in boundless foreign investment by **implementing the DGTO**, for which draft legislation has already been written and consulted on by the Treasury and the Office for the Arts. A tax offset for game development is bipartisan policy, recommended by Labor in three Parliamentary inquiries in 2020-21 alone.

Our second recommendation is to launch a **game development fund**. While the *Games: Expansion Pack* was announced as we wrote our platform, at \$6 million and with guaranteed funding only until the end of the present fiscal year, it is insufficient compared to even the 2012 \$20 million AIGF or the \$25 million fund pledged by Labor during the 2019 federal election, a commitment which the then shadow ministers (and now current) Arts Minister Tony Burke MP and Communications Minister Michelle Rowland MP championed hard for our sector to secure.

Our third recommendation is a review of **skilled migration settings** as it applies to information-based workers, including all categories of game developers, to address the severe skills shortage that is one of the most significant constraints on Australian game development.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts
"The Committee recognises the enormous potential of the interactive games sector for Australia and welcomes the implementation of the Digital Games Tax Offset"
- Sculpting a National Cultural Plan: Igniting a post-COVID economy for the arts, 2021

"The committee recommends that the Interactive Games Fund be reinstated"
- Report on the inquiry into the Australian film and television industry, 2017

A games-centric perspective on the five pillars

To conclude, we provide our reflections on the five pillars through the lens of video games:

1. First Nations: Stories that recognise, respect and celebrate First Nations cultures must be told in every medium, including games. While projects like [Virtual Songlines](#) have demonstrated that immersive media is particularly powerful and compelling for telling First Nations stories, a historical lack of federal support for our sector has meant that countless Australian stories have been unable to be told, including First Nations ones.
2. A place for every story: This means all Australians have a right to cultural expression, however and wherever it is best expressed. For many local game developers though, this has been far from reality as interactive screen content has for years been purposefully and cruelly excluded from Screen Australia support and screen tax offsets. A place for every story means a place for digital, interactive and immersive stories too.
3. The centrality of the artist: Despite it being written in code, art is intrinsic to all aspects of video games, including the visuals, moving images, music and writing. Likewise, all game developers are, in one way or another, artists. All investment in game development, whether through Screen Australia funding, the DGTO or supporting games educational institutions, is investment in the artists that underpin our medium.
4. Strong institutions: Strong, modern and relevant cultural institutions are crucial. The public increasingly expect museums and galleries to be interactive and immersive - or in other words, game-like. Educational institutions must also be committed, resourced and ready to equip Australia's next generation of cultural contributors with digital as well as traditional creative skills - skills that will be more relevant to the digital economy.
5. Reaching the audience: Australians are online and they are gamers. Our *Digital Australia 2022* research tells us that gaming has overtaken free-to-air TV to become the second most preferred media in households behind streaming. Games are played by Australians of all backgrounds, young to senior, from the bush to the beaches. We believe no Australian cultural medium will reach as many audiences this decade as ours.

Any questions?

**For more information on any issues raised in this submission, please contact IGEA's
Director of Policy & Government Affairs, Ben Au, [REDACTED]**

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IGEA: [@igea](https://twitter.com/igea)

Game Connect Asia Pacific: [@GCAPConf](https://twitter.com/GCAPConf)

The Australian Game Developer Awards: [@The_AGDA](https://twitter.com/The_AGDA)