

National Cultural Policy Submission

Arts Upper Hunter

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

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

The greatest opportunities here will be with First-Nations-led programs. This means that more skill-raising and experience for Aboriginal people in leadership and arts support roles is needed. And the best way to ensure those skills are not only taken up but used and retained will be for there to be jobs in the field. At Arts Upper Hunter, we believe that Aboriginal Arts Officers or Cultural Development Officers should be funded so they can make a long-term difference to building cultural activity in their communities.

A Place for Every Story

Please see our response below about the low-carbon future.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

The arts must be integrated into the move into a low-carbon future, especially in industrial, coal-producing areas in danger of great loss of livelihood.

As the peak arts body in the Upper Hunter region, representing the LGAs of Dungog, Singleton, Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter, we are witnessing first-hand the beginnings of change into renewables and low-carbon outcomes.

This is a crucial area for consideration. The Hunter Valley produces 85% of the coal and a significant part of the electricity in NSW. The current economies are not yet truly in transition but that will begin happening very very soon. To avoid sharp economic decline and give people the chance to find new pathways forward - especially for the younger members of those communities - creative thinking, skills, opportunities and infrastructure need to be funded, in consultation with the people themselves.

The larger towns and Councils in the region are already moving into infrastructure and attempting to make the move into a "post carbon" future as smooth as possible. They are also investing in new industry and sites for new economic activity. Some of these should include creative industries.

But there is a disconnect between the infrastructure and the opportunities. For example, there are few or no TAFE courses offered locally in arts, artisanal production and digital creativity. As Arts Upper Hunter sees it, **managing this transition may be the most important aspect of any cultural policy.** Large employers such as electricity generators in the Hunter Valley are already looking at their own approach to renewables and "what happens from here", through their own inevitably narrow lens.

During any transformation, an engaged workforce, consulted, with new opportunities for themselves and their families, working in collaboration with artists and educators, with social services providers,

unions and employers, and offered economic outcomes, given the chance to try new skills and be part of the other vast changes affecting our society (from the digital world to First Nations reinvigoration) will help build new possibilities for fine living townships that could otherwise struggle and become moribund.

If the arts is part of the story of that transformation, it could even happen with a vibrancy and poignancy that might otherwise be lost. Creative industries could and should be considered part of the way to a low-carbon future and continuing active economy. This is an obvious home for STEAM (STEM + Arts) training and industry – indeed Councils are already piloting programs or considering doing so.

Telling the story of the place of coal and electricity will help “bring the workforce along” on the journey. The NSW economy is built on electricity generation. Coal is a serious export and money-earner. That story must be told sensitively, that legacy honoured, and its winding down and passing must be seen clearly. Artists and engagement will help tell the story. New industry, including in the creative industries, with the tourism and liveability that go with creative communities, can then be built with optimism and hope.

We might also add that the mines in our region are key funders of art prizes, small institutions, events and perhaps most importantly First Nations activity – and the local Aboriginal institutions are currently using this and government funding to launch a resurgence of their Nations.