

Christian Media and Arts Australia (CMAA) is pleased to make this submission relating to a National Cultural Policy on behalf of its 86 member organisations.

CMAA is a Sector Representative Organisation (SRO) member of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia's (CBA) Sector Roundtable. CMAA endorses and welcomes CBA's submission to the National Cultural Policy. Our submission adds detail of particular interest to the Christian media sector.

CMAA has represented the interests of Christian media organisations for over 40 years. In doing so, it amplifies the interests of over 3,000 Christians in media and the arts by undertaking advocacy, empowering content creation, fostering unity and promoting excellence.

CMAA members reach culturally and geographically diverse audiences through:

- eight (8) Community Broadcast Licence (CBL) holders in state and territory capitals;
- twenty-seven (27) CBL holders in major regional and rural centres,
- a nationally networked service, broadcast on more than 700 Open Narrowcast Licences (ONL) serving parts of capital cities; major regional centres and over 600 regional and remote towns and communities;
- subscription Television Services on all major platforms, including Foxtel and Video on Demand streaming services (VOD), and
- associated digital media.

CMAA radio and television broadcast members employ more than 300 people have a significant supporter and volunteer base and are very engaged with the communities they serve.

CMAA's broadcast media members are not only significant cultural institutions in themselves, collectively they serve thousands of other community-based organisations and groups enabling them to engage with a specialised audience in targeted ways.

They support local creative and cultural organisations (including those doing charitable work locally and globally) by:

- raising awareness of need and garnering support to meet need through community participation, advocacy and fund raising;
- promotion on air, in print and through digital media;
- community service announcements;
- support for community events;
- programme interviews;
- news and journalistic coverage;
- the production of tv series and specials

Christian media promotes local musicians and artists and serves as a launch pad for Australian creatives to expand their audiences around the country and the world.

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

First Nations – Through our sector policy and advocacy work CMAA is supporting initiatives that advance reconciliation and voice (including the recent redrafting of the Community Broadcasting Codes of Practice).

CMAA members are in discussion with Indigenous elders about ways to more closely work with local communities and we are investigating the development of an instrument such as a Reconciliation Actions Plan suitable for the Christian Media and Arts Sector.

CMAA sees the potential to work collaboratively with other SROs, particularly First Nations Media Australia, for mutually beneficial outcomes that enhance relationship, cultural understanding and expand the availability of content for indigenous and non-indigenous Australian Christians. CMAA has started a conversation with the Bible Society Australia about ways to incorporate their substantial resources of Bible material in First Nations languages.

We believe a high priority of a National Cultural Policy should be to fund solutions that support such collaboration and promote the creation of new content, particularly with the foreshadowed Referendum on Voice.

A Place for Every Story – CMAA members create and curate unique content to serve the Christian community interest across a myriad of platforms. Ninety one percent (91%) of Christian radio listeners strongly or somewhat agree that it provides an outlet for views not expressed elsewhere¹.

Christian radio alone reaches over 1.89 million Australians per week². While primarily designed to serve a Christian audience, one third of weekly listeners to Christian radio either hold no religious belief (21%) or follow a different religion (12%)².

Ninety five percent (95%) of Christian radio listeners find their station has a positive impact in their lives and helps them grow spiritually (88%) and relationally (74%)¹. The creation of safe and responsible places for matters of faith and values to be discussed is a significant contribution to the common good. It serves diversity and celebrates the value of free speech.

Christian subscription television is no exception. There are an estimated 800,000 to 1 million monthly viewers to ACCTV/Good through the Foxtel, Fetch TV and D2 platforms. Christian television viewers enjoy similar social benefits and report similar outcomes to radio listeners.

A National Cultural Policy should recognise the importance of such diversity. It should be framed to promote and uphold the rights and obligations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the related Siracusa Principles³. The absence in Commonwealth law and lack of commonality across jurisdictions about such matters as the right to manifest religion, including the right to provide and discuss religious teaching in our media, must be addressed. Whether actively or passively, cultural policy must not serve to stifle or censor the freedom of speech or belief.

Such a Policy should fund, promote and enable story telling for all sections of the Australian community. Targeted investments into the diverse Community radio sector, narrowcast sector and into other forms of community-owned not for profit media outlets is an effective way to achieve this goal.

Centrality of the Artist – CMAA members celebrate local and international artists and content creators who have emerged from the Australian Christian community in many genres. These artists developed their voice, built their skills and honed their craft in Australian Christian media. The significant role of churches in this regard also needs to be emphasised

A National Cultural Policy should recognise the vital role that churches, Christian media and associated platforms play, not just for Christian artists but for thousands of developing artists and content producers across all genres.

Strong Institutions – Most CMAA members are not-for-profit organisations that rely on donor funds, limited sponsorship (advertising) income and grants.

The legislative and regulatory regimes for community broadcasting are antiquated were devised before the significant developments in digital media and are based on assumptions out-of-step with current needs and practice.

Moreover, this regime has not kept pace with decades of reform in not-for-profit and charitable governance including the establishment of the ACNC. This is a significant issue for CMAA's radio members in particular, all of which are charities registered with and regulated by the ACNC. Members face the burden of overlapping and even conflicting regulation. Sensible regulatory reform that help not-for-profit and charitable media organisations to embrace the opportunities of digital media and reduce the unnecessary and overly onerous compliance burdens is long overdue.

A National Cultural Policy should recognise that government regulatory reform has a powerful role to play in amplifying artistic expression though community broadcasters, narrowcasters and other not for profit community media enterprises.

Reaching the Audience – CMAA members recognise the challenges and opportunities to reach and engage existing and new audiences in today's digital media landscape.

¹ The Social Impact of Christian Radio in Australia Report (in conjunction with McCrindle Research)

² The Community Radio Listener Survey; Christian Community and Vision Radio, 2021, Wave 2

³ United Nations Economic and Social Council, Siracusa Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, available <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/E/CN.4/1985/4>

Whilst consumers have virtually unlimited global media choices, many people still choose to engage with free to air media. For example, listeners currently tune in to Christian radio for a little over nine hours per week².

A National Cultural Policy should recognise the many ways in which Australians engage with media and enable ways to creatively share content across all media platforms, including traditional media.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why?

First Nations – Reconciliation with First Nations people remains a critical concern for all Australians, including Christians. Media in all of its forms will play a key amplification role in shaping our nation's response to many of the issues we must confront. CMAA and its member organisations stand ready to play their part in achieving these goals.

A Place for Every Story – Story telling is a powerful tool for cultural engagement. The narrative style has been a tradition long associated with the building of faith and spirituality in all cultures and traditions. Research shows that audiences are motivated into service by what they see and hear in Christian media. Seventy five percent (75%) volunteer in at least one community, political, charity or church group. Forty one percent (41%) have helped someone in their local community because of what they have heard or seen on their radio or Television station.⁴ Christian media make a positive contribution to community building and engagement.

Centrality of the Artist – Christian churches, artists and media continue to make a significant contribution to the health, wellbeing and growth of Australia's cultural industries. Their contribution to the growth of audiences for Australian cultural product is economically substantial.

Strong Institutions – CMAA helps ensure good compliance and best practice among its members. CMAA itself is accredited the CMA Standards Council ensuring it is well-governed, accountable and transparent. CMAA member organisations are encouraged to also seek this high level of accreditation.

Reaching the Audience – CMAA's CBL and ONL members have a legislative mandate to serve their communities of interest. Any ways in which a National Cultural Policy can assist licence holders to achieve this mandate are welcomed.

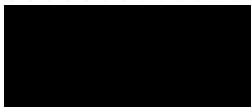
Are there any other things you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

CMAA members contribute to and reflect an Australia that is an open society and a strong democracy that embraces pluralism. They affirm the values, beliefs and cultural heritage of the Christian faith and contribute to Australia's rightly-deserved reputation as the most successful multi-cultural, pluralist nation on Earth.

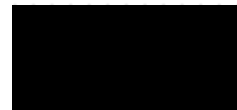
Media that serves the specific needs of different communities of faith and spiritual practice are essential in maintaining personal and national well-being. That these voices can be heard in free-to-air media available to all is particularly important.

As social media on all platforms become increasingly siloed and tribal, and localism in broadcasting comes under greater pressure, community-focused broadcast, digital and narrowcast media provides the opportunity for a shared voice of positive counterbalance, responsible discussion, social inclusion and community building. Deeply-rooted live and local not for profit, and community-owned media will remain a critical enabler of a National Cultural Policy.

Sincerely



Penny Mulvey
CMAA Chair



Nathan Brown
CMAA CEO



⁴ The Social Impact of Christian Radio in Australia Report (in conjunction with McCrindle Research)