



[Screen Vixens](#) is a national collective of female identifying, non-binary and intersex screen producers working across all mediums in the Australian screen industry. Founded in 2015 with active chapters operating in all Australian states and territories, the Vixens consider, tackle and provide input into current industry issues and cultural trends whilst providing a supportive and generous network for female producers.

The 2022 policy submission template identifies 5 goals from the 2013 Creative Australia National Cultural Policy. However, when compared to the original document, they are, in fact, an abbreviation of the original goals. We believe the omissions are significant and will have a detrimental effect on the results, skewing the direction of submissions by stakeholders, and will expand below on goals 1-4.

Screen Vixens Leonie Marsh and Sarah Hatherley were recently quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald expressing concern about this matter: [True-blue content call over plan to flip the film script](#) by Andrew Hornery, August 6 2022, SMH

Authors on behalf of Screen Vixens: Felicity Blake, The Dove Media, Documentarian and Social Impact Producer, **Sarah Hatherley**, Producer - La Vérité Films, **Kate Separovich**, Producer - Lake Martin Films, **Annie Parnell**, Producer and **Leonie Marsh**, Producer & Founder of Screen Vixens

We have addressed each pillar by restating the original 2013 goals below, highlighting the areas where they differ from the 2022 template, and where we believe further clarification is vital in order to establish a robust National Cultural Policy for 2022 and beyond.

PILLAR 1: "FIRST NATIONS"

*Goal one: Recognise, respect and celebrate the centrality of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity.*

Recognise, respect and celebrate the centrality of First Nations cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity.

'First Nations' is a Canadian term for which no legal definition exists. It originated in Canada's indigenous civil rights movement in the 1970s to supersede the offensive colonial terms "Indian" and "Autochtone", and broadly refers to Indigenous people who are not Inuits or Metis. This terminology has been broadly adopted internationally to refer to Indigenous Traditional Owners everywhere, including in Australia. As a result of this ambiguity, it is unclear in the 2022 Cultural Policy draft whether "First Nations Cultures" refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, or all Indigenous cultures in general. **We recommend that this language is clarified.**

PILLAR 2: "A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY"

Goal two: Ensure that government support reflects the diversity of Australia and that all citizens, wherever they live, whatever their background or circumstances, have a right to shape our cultural identity and its expression.

Ensure that government support reflects the diversity of Australia.

Screen Vixens is a collective of **female** identifying, non-binary and intersex screen producers. Screen Industry employment data (both statistical and anecdotal) consistently indicates serious inequity and a lack of parity in pay, opportunity, representation and labour conditions. The situation is so dire that [media reports](#) on the most recent study, *A Wider Lens* (Deakin University, commissioned by Diversity advocates from the alarmingly male-dominated Australian Cinematographers' Society), needed to be accompanied by contact information for suicide prevention organisations.

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It's worth noting that film-making in particular is impacted by socio-economics and viewed as an "upper class hobby", as opposed to a commercial and sustainable career. Female filmmakers (who are often more likely to take on caring responsibilities outside of the workplace) are significantly disadvantaged in their ability to earn income from their careers. We need to talk about the pay gap and subsequent gender inequity between female and male producers. These two issues; caring roles and income averages, are why it is so important to include "female" in the diversity.

Screen Vixens members have observed that in recent years, the groups in our sector which specifically advocated for equity for female practitioners have gradually been absorbed into broader committees for "diversity" in general. Diversity groups advocate intersectionality for other marginalised communities (e.g. Indigenous, disabled, CALD, POC, LGBTIQ+ and so forth). While this intersectional advocacy is both necessary and virtuous, it is vital that women - as a cohort - are not overlooked in efforts to address inequity and unequal representation, even if our only claim to "diversity" is our gender. Women who have fought for decades to foster workplace safety and carve out opportunities for themselves *and* for marginalised practitioners at greater disadvantage are increasingly unable to access equity programs and employment opportunities unless they satisfy multiple diversity requirements. **We recommend that gender equity for Creative Sector women is addressed specifically alongside "diversity".**

PILLAR 3: CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

Goal three: Support excellence and the special role of artists and their creative collaborators as the source of original work and ideas, including telling Australian stories.

Support excellence and the special role of artists and their creative collaborators.

AND

PILLAR 4: "STRONG INSTITUTIONS"

Goal four: Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy.

'Cultural value' is a vexed issue for Australia. How can we contribute to it or measure it when Australian "culture" and who is enabled to build it and participate in it is such a fraught concept? Australia has an adolescent cultural identity complex, exacerbated by decades of political white-anting of our cultural sector. If we fail to nurture grassroots creativity and lack an overarching national cultural strategy, Australia's narrative will be dictated to us by others... who may have vested interests. In order to develop a mature, 21st-century 'sense of self' on a national level, immense investment - both financial and emotional - in Australian culture is required.

Artists and creatives produce culture; culture is our shared understanding of who "we" are; it is essential to social cohesion, sense-making, and national progress. As a nation, we have not been able to form a coherent concept of cultural value because we really *aren't* cohesive as a society: slow to embrace diversity and inclusion, no Republic, no truth-telling decolonisation of the mind, no Uluru Statement or Treaty... yet. Screen Vixens heartily welcomes the Albanese government's initiatives in this regard.

Screen Vixens notes that the new focus of this pillar on 'The centrality of the artist' has lost its imperative to create Australian stories, and therefore to articulate Australian identity. **We recommend that original cultural works (intellectual property) which are inherently Australian in character and content are specifically addressed in this goal.**

By way of comparison, in Bhutan's socio-economic policy strategy of Gross National Happiness, the four Pillars include "conservation and promotion of a vibrant culture", which is considered indispensable to the conditions required for Bhutanese citizens to access happiness. Expanding upon these Pillars, [Culture appears again in the nine Domains](#), which clarify and foster aspects of culture that are integral to upholding Bhutan's unique national character and identity.

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Similarly, France's Ministry of Culture is charged with maintaining French identity through the promotion and protection of the arts (visual, plastic, theatrical, musical, dance, architectural, literary, televisual and cinematographic) 'on national soil and abroad'. While this is motivated by France's notable penchant for retaining an "uncorrupted" national identity, it speaks to the fact that our culture is what distinguishes us from every other country, and that cultural policies need to be in the service of that.

If we focus too narrowly on 'art as work' and upholding the right and opportunity for individual artists to work, we run the risk of exacerbating some pandemic-era policy errors of the Morrison government. While creative practitioners need to be able to maintain income security, making money is not the only reason to produce culture. Economic initiatives intended to fuel employment in the creative sector during Covid resulted in the attraction of big-budget American screen productions displaced by runaway outbreak conditions throughout the United States. These devoured local crews, with the result that some below-the-line workers (the blue-collar labourers of the screen industries), mostly in Queensland, obtained several months' employment on US films... but *local* creators of *Australian* stories (producers, writers, directors) remained completely unsupported. Aussie actors boned up on their US accents and erased their Australianness so they could get parts in the US productions. Much of the content produced by the production attraction cash splash was American culture created for the US market, and when Australian productions did ensue, it was almost impossible to crew them because everyone was on US shows.

The implications for children's content are especially dire. **Local content quotas must urgently be introduced for all international platforms providing streamed content accessed through mobile phone signal or the National Broadband Network, and they must include Australian-made children's content which is Australian in character.** For example, Australian comic *The Deep* is a hit cartoon made by an Australian company for the international market but all protagonists have North American accents and attributes. If these types of creative decisions continue, we can all get used to our kids speaking with American or British accents.

As with Bhutan, a vibrant Australian Culture is integral to our nation's success and wellbeing. While the Industrial Relations portfolio can address and defend the value of artists' labour and the profits it creates, the Arts portfolio should also be measured using a different rubric. **We recommend that the intrinsic value of Australian cultural vibrancy (in all its increasing diversity) is measured. This can not be accounted for in financial or monetary terms; Australian Culture should be a key pillar in treasurer Jim Chalmers' [proposed Australian Wellbeing Index](#).**

PILLAR 5: "REACHING THE AUDIENCE"

Goal five: Ensure Australian creativity thrives in the digitally enabled 21st century, by supporting innovation, the development of new creative content, knowledge and creative industries.

Ensure Australian creativity thrives here and abroad in the digitally-enabled 21st century.

By narrowing this goal to "reaching the audience" it doesn't address the creation side - 'ensuring creativity thrives'. We are incredibly risk averse in Australia which stifles creativity. Doing things differently is part of the job, but we also have lots of government involvement. How do we celebrate and foster inventiveness?

Further Recommendations:

- Establish an Australian film promotion fund facilitated and disbursed by Screen Australia. This should encompass both traditional marketing (bums on seats, measured by box office returns) and social impact programs (brains in gear, measured by audience engagement and the cultural impact upon the community).
- Provide more funds to Screen Australia which enable filmmakers to travel to international markets, and enter & attend international film festivals
- Fund ABC News to include greater volume of coverage of arts and culture, at least equal to sport. In particular, fund ABC to produce **written reviews** of Australian arts and culture so that a self-reflexive national record of cultural production is maintained. Without



ample funding for criticism and documentation of ephemeral art productions, we fail to keep a record of the evolution of our national character.

- Create and provide support for women who are emerging in their careers at a more mature age, and those re-emerging into mid-career after leaving the workforce to be a parent or carer.