

Cultural Vibrancy Rests on Cultural Authority

KALACC Submission Regarding the Development of a National Cultural Policy

Current Context and Realities

1. There is no Peak Body to Speak for First Nations Arts and Culture.

The Coalition of Peaks is made up of over 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak and member organisations across Australia. None of those organisations has a primary mission or remit around promoting First Nations Arts and Culture

2. There is no *First Nations Arts and Cultural Plan*.

In 2017 the then Dept of Prime Minister and Cabinet prepared a Briefing Note on the development of a National Indigenous Cultural Policy, for consideration by the then Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council. This work was not progressed by the then Government and none of this work was made public.

3. The Australia Council for the Arts Currently Does Not Have an Endorsed Cultural Vibrancy Policy

In July 2013 the Australia Council published the *DRAFT Standing Our Ground, Cultural vibrancy: a discussion paper for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts sector*. This body of work was not progressed past the drafting stage.

4. There Are Currently No Commissioning Pathways for Projects That Operate in the Social and Cultural Determinants of Health Domain.

In December 2017 the Commonwealth Health Department published *My Life My Lead, Opportunities for Strengthening Approaches to the Social and Cultural Determinants of Health*. In August 2022 there remain no commissioning pathways for projects that operate in the Social and Cultural Determinants of Health Domain.

5. Creative Australia Set Out to Link the National Cultural Policy and Closing the Gap

“Submissions also noted the need for a whole-of-government agenda which would harness the power of arts and culture in achieving other objectives across government, including in education, innovation, digital communication, closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage, social inclusion, diplomacy and health. In particular, submissions noted the need to recognise the multicultural makeup of Australia in the ways and means by which the government supports the arts into the future.”

P. 129, *Creative Australia*

Recommendations For the Development of a *National Cultural Plan*.

1. Develop A Peak Body to Speak for First Nations Arts and Culture

KALACC wholeheartedly endorses Purrumpa, First Nations Arts and Cultural Gathering 2022. It is sincerely hoped that Purrumpa is able to advance development of a peak body to speak for First Nations Arts and Culture. A first order of priority action for a National Cultural Plan should be to develop a National Indigenous Arts and Cultural Authority, being a peak body to speak for First Nations Arts and Culture.

<https://australiacouncil.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/events/purrumpa/>

2. Develop a *First Nations Arts and Cultural Plan*.

Alongside the emerging new *National Cultural Plan*, there is a need to develop an accompanying *First Nations Arts and Cultural Plan*. The intended outcome of a *First Nations Arts and Cultural Plan* is to drive cross-sector strategies to place arts and culture at the centre of Government policy and planning in regards to all matters relating to First Nations peoples.

3. The Australia Council for the Arts Should Finalise an Endorsed *Cultural Vibrancy Policy*.

The draft *Cultural Vibrancy Discussion Paper* that the Australia Council developed in 2013 is an excellent document. It was shelved and canned for the same reasons that *Creative Australia* was shelved and canned. The all too real political impediments that existed in mid- 2013 are no longer present. Now is absolutely the right time for the Australia Council to complete and finalise the *Cultural Vibrancy Policy*, to sit alongside the existing *Artistic Vibrancy Policy*.

4. The Department of Health Needs to Develop and to Resource Clear Commissioning Pathways for Projects That Operate in the Social and Cultural Determinants of Health Domain.

The *First Implementation Plan* for the *2021 – 2031 Aboriginal Health Plan* needs to specifically contain commissioning pathways for projects that operate in the social and cultural determinants of health domain.

5. The Forthcoming *National Cultural Policy* Needs to Harness Whole of Government Approaches to Indigenous Advancement and Wellbeing.

This is somewhat similar to #4 above ie whilst First Nations Arts and Culture remains pigeon – holed in to the arts funding policy silos, we will never see real progress and advancement in Indigenous wellbeing in this nation. *Creative Australia* in 2013 was absolutely on the right track ie a whole-of-government agenda which would harness the power of arts and culture in achieving other objectives across government, including closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage, is absolutely needed. The objectives and outcomes of the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap should be woven within and across the *National*

Cultural Policy. It is essential that as a nation we take a whole-of-government approach to address the inequality faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People across Australia and that we build First Nations Culture in to the centre of all programs and policies relating to Indigenous Australians.

Appendix: Abstract for a Proposed KALACC Keynote Address and Presentation at Purrumpa

Purrumpa, First Nations Arts and Culture National Gathering 2022

<https://australiacouncil.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/events/purrumpa/>

As the proposed Keynote Address at Purrumpa, KALACC will present the view that the foundation and bedrock of First Nations culture and art practices must be seen 'as Australia's first high culture.... our opera as well as our law.' We will promote Indigenous Elders' voices calling for self-determination and for policies to support the protective forces of language, culture and arts for our next generations of cultural custodians. Through discussions at Purrumpa we will map out a pathway towards building a cultural authority which will provide the bedrock for a national voice for Australia's First Nations Arts and Cultural practitioners.

Elders have long advocated for self-determination to exercise the full expression of our cultural practices. A united voice – a cultural authority, would ensure provisions to protect the cultural vibrancy of Indigenous peoples' cultural practices and art forms such as song, dance, story, music, symbols, iconography, ceremony and creation narratives, whilst providing mechanisms for the safety of all arts and culture workers.

Celebrating First Nations Artistic Vibrancy in the modern world, whilst important, is not enough. In this presentation, notions of cultural leadership and cultural governance are explored as alternatives to 'Western' governance: the foundation remains in the legacy of knowledge systems held by Elders.

We will showcase how evolving Indigeneity and the continuous thread of traditional cultural practices and First Nations artforms tether the present moment to 70,000 years of living heritage. Elders are our cultural custodians – living libraries who have legal obligations to maintain connection for the national and global wellbeing of all species.

KALACC is a partner in The Trade Routes Cultural Governance Project which aims to share vibrant and complex traditional trade routes spread across our current day states and territories. This is an urgent and critical project that provides now elderly knowledge holders, along with emerging custodians, dynamic platforms to hold up these interconnected systems, fill knowledge gaps and revive cultural governance systems to underpin the wellbeing of future generations.

The Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre is the Kimberley region's peak Indigenous Law and Culture centre. KALACC was established in 1985 by Kimberley Aboriginal leaders and our mission is the cultural protection and maintenance of 30 Aboriginal language groups. Through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations such as KALACC, Aboriginal people seek stronger self-determination of their law, culture and cultural practices. KALACC facilitates engagement of elders across diverse cultural blocks within the Kimberley for Aboriginal-led protection of ancestral laws and increased respect and understanding that 'the old people are our government'.

With the 2022 Purrumpa Gathering we wish to contribute to the realization of a vision held by First Nations arts and cultural leaders over the last 50 years, that of a 'cultural authority'. Recent political changes present real opportunities to re-create pathways to a future imagined by Elders where they enjoy a platform and voice to safeguard the world's oldest continuing living culture, supported by a National Indigenous Arts and Cultural Authority.