

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY –Submission

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✓	On behalf of an arts peak body	Can be made public
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Pillar 1. First Nations.

In 2018 the Australian Museums & Galleries Association published *The First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries* developed by Terri Janke. This significant document identified the importance of decolonising and indigenising our cultural institutions and ensuring First Nations self-determination in both the stories that are told and the collection material that is held. This involves ensuring the active participation of Indigenous custodians in the preservation, care and interpretation of collection material.

Libraries, archives, museums and galleries around the country hold significant collections of First Nations cultural material which range from photographs to paintings to ceremonial objects. Years of cataloguing practices under a colonial paradigm mean that in many institutions there is a huge amount of work required to decolonise and make collections culturally safe. While the larger institutions are undertaking this work and are able to appoint First Nations staff, there are hundreds of community and smaller institutions around the country that need help to resource this type of work. Even larger institutions would benefit from programs that enable them to employ more First Nations staff to work through collection material that can number in the tens of thousands. Photographic collections alone are frequently catalogued with racist terminology in the metadata and incorrect attribution that will take decades to work through. An increased workforce of First Nations practitioners that can work with institutions to address this material will ensure that institutions become more inclusive and culturally safe for First Nations people.

Fundamental to the *Roadmap* is the recognition that cultural institutions need to carry out meaningful collaborations with First Nations people. Collaborations are based on relationships which take time to build. Many smaller organisations, particularly volunteer run organisations, do not have the resources to do this and often don't know how to go about making contact. There can be fears around not consulting in appropriate ways or with the wrong people and there is often a general lack of knowledge around the protocols and processes required for consultation. Furthermore, the distances in Australia between cultural institutions and First Nations custodians is often vast and difficult for smaller organisations to overcome. A regional program that helps support smaller organisations build meaningful and ongoing relationships with First Nations people will help facilitate collaboration. This could be done through training or a roving advisor program where trained professionals can act as a go-between bringing institutions and First Nations people together.

It is also critical to increase the numbers of First Nations staff working in cultural organisations across the country and to create more programs to ensure they are supported and empowered in their roles. First Nations staff can burn out through cultural load or feel alienated in institutions that do not embrace or value the perspectives they bring. Career pathways and development programs for middle level First Nations staff would be valuable to ensure they are empowered to rise up to senior and executive levels in organisations.

Pillar 2. A place for every story.

Exhibitions play important roles in bringing to light untold stories, amplifying the voice of minority perspectives and encouraging people to think differently about the world we live in. Research

published by A New Approach in *Report Two: Transformative: Impacts of Culture and Creativity*, 2019, demonstrates that arts and culture inspire and enable meaningful change both within individual lives and across diverse communities, including in the area of some of Australia's biggest public policy challenges. Galleries and museums provide safe places to tell difficult stories and play a fundamental role in truth-telling. *The First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries* by Terri Janke, published in 2018 by the Australian Museums & Galleries Association, identified the importance of truth-telling in our institutions and the vital role of collaboration with First Nations communities to ensure exhibitions are meaningful and inclusive of First Nations' perspectives. However many institutions, particularly smaller organisations and community run museums, feel unable to address this past and don't know how to include First Nation stories in their exhibitions and displays. A support program that institutions could apply to, that was specifically focused on small and regional institutions, could provide pathways to enable greater engagement with First Nations stories.

There is also reluctance in some institutions to address difficult stories for fear of political fallout. In part, this is a response to the previous federal government's criticisms of what it described as 'black armband history'. The new federal government can play an important role in establishing a culture that embraces truth-telling in institutions and encourages galleries and museums to tell uncomfortable stories about the nation's past.

Pillar 3. The centrality of the artist.

Artists are trained workers and it is important to acknowledge their right to upskill through tertiary education courses. It is also important to ensure artists of the future have access to equitable higher education to enable them to pursue a career pathway in the arts. Universities and art schools play a fundamental role in making job-ready the artists and arts professionals of the future. Yet the role of university education in the cultural industry is often omitted which has made university education vulnerable to government decisions made in the mistaken belief that an arts education doesn't contribute to job-ready graduates of the future.

The increase in university fees for humanities degrees in 2020, discourages school graduates from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds from taking up university education to pursue a career in the arts. This is already playing out in reduced enrolments in humanities degrees in universities around the country this year.

The arts is already a significantly underpaid and insecure sector and burdening graduates with increased debt through fee hikes has the potential to create even more social disadvantage which does not support a healthy economy or a fair society. Increased fees disproportionately impact artists from under-privileged backgrounds, particularly first-in-family students, First Nations students and those from migrant backgrounds. It also unfairly disadvantages women who account for two-thirds of students enrolled in humanities degrees. This will contribute to more long-term financial insecurity for women and a further widening of the gender gap. This form of discrimination compounds and will impact the cultural sector in years to come.

Pillar 4. Strong institutions.

Today the gallery sector is thriving, making substantial contributions to the vitality of cities and regional hubs. Galleries play a fundamental role in the economic prosperity of cities and regional towns and help build resilient communities with direct links to health and wellbeing.' (VicHealth, "Audience access standards", 2006, p. 4.)

Human capital is core to the achievements of institutions and the current success of public galleries and museums across Australia is directly related to the tertiary education of directors, curators, artists and other gallery professionals. This education was affordable and accessible and enabled students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds to participate, thereby ensuring a wide and diverse pool of talented and capable professionals who have subsequently built the prosperity of the sector. The rise in university fees for humanities degrees in 2020 threatens the success of the

sector because it directly impacts on the diversity of voices represented in institutions by discouraging artists and arts workers from lower socio-economic backgrounds, first-in-family, migrant and First Nations backgrounds from undertaking this career path. Universities are already reducing faculties and closing arts departments around the country and the effects will be felt in weaker arts institutions in the future.

Some galleries are also undermined by a trend amongst some local governments to devalue the role of the director. This has resulted in instances where directors who are qualified in the field, with years of gallery experience, are replaced by generalist coordinators, who in many instances have no experience in the visual arts. Perhaps this trend has been enabled by the apathy of the previous federal government and the devaluation of the arts sector over the past 9 years. But it demonstrates a lack of understanding of the skill set required to lead arts institutions, particularly art galleries. Furthermore, municipal galleries are particularly vulnerable to the priorities of local government and can languish with slashed budgets if senior executive are not supportive. The arts are often in portfolios where they have to compete with essential services including health and housing or with recreation where they consistently miss out because sporting clubs are better at lobbying councillors and mobilising support. Research and the coordinated collection of data is urgently needed to help individual arts institutions demonstrate value. Without the coordinated collection of qualitative and quantitative data institutions struggle to demonstrate their worth. The Australia Council for the Arts could be financially resourced to undertake this research.

Another issue for institutions is the lack of financial support at the federal level. At present the Australian Government injects less than 1% of Australia Council for the Arts funding into the public gallery sector. (Refer *Australian Public Galleries Snapshot*, 2020 Museums & Galleries Queensland and Public Galleries Association Victoria, p. 19). Multi-year funding for galleries has been precarious in the past with many grassroots institutions losing funding during the cuts of 2016 and efficiency targets in recent years further stymieing exhibition programming and care of collections. A funding model that increases and safeguards financial support for cultural institutions into the future, while ensuring support for smaller, innovative organisations, is needed.

There is also need to help institutions, particularly smaller institutions decolonise collections. Years of cataloguing practices under a colonial paradigm mean that in many institutions there is a huge amount of work required to make collections culturally safe. While the larger institutions are undertaking this work and are able to appoint First Nations staff, there are hundreds of community and smaller museums and galleries around the country that need help to resource this type of work. Even larger institutions would benefit from programs that enable them to employ more First Nations staff to work through collection material that can number in the tens of thousands.

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

While university education is generally not included in discussions of the creative and culture industry, universities and art schools play a fundamental role in the ecology of the sector, not only by making job ready the arts professionals of the future, but also through being at the forefront of discussion and thinking about the sector's issues. At present there is a major disconnect between understandings of the output of the creative and culture industries and the requirements that give rise to these outputs. This is also witnessed in discussions of the success of Indigenous art. There is a symbiotic relationship between public galleries, universities and the art market that has been identified as a key element in the success of the Indigenous visual arts industry. (David Dolan, 'The academy, the market and the art museum in the repositioning of Australian Aboriginal Art', *Canadian Art Review*, vol 28, 2001-03, p. 61.) Yet it is seldom acknowledged in broader industry conversations. For instance the federal government discussion paper *Consultation Paper on Growing the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry*, September 2020, does not even mention the role public galleries, let alone universities, have played in contributing to the success of this industry. This type of omission enables government and policy decision makers to make adverse decisions that have far-reaching and long term implications for our sector, weakening institutions in the future. A National Cultural Policy that acknowledges the contribution of the education sector would provide recognition of the important role both schools and universities play in the vibrancy and diversity of the arts.