



National Cultural Policy Submission 26.08.22

Cultural Gardeners - Australian Cultural Alliance for Climate Action

We are over [200 individuals and organisations from all states and territories](#), working in the cultural sector, deeply committed to taking action on the converging climate and ecological crises.

We believe that we need to look after our culture and country. Artists and the cultural sector must take a leading role in social transitions that mitigate further devastation and help us adapt to a warming climate. Together we can reimagine broken systems at a time when accelerated action is urgently needed.

We align to First Nations principles of Caring for Country and the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#). We align to a [Just Transition](#), the framework developed by the trade union movement to encompass a range of social interventions needed to secure workers' rights and livelihoods when economies are shifting to sustainable modes that combat climate change, protect biodiversity and repair degraded ecosystems. These principles are outlined in the [Paris Agreement](#) and are also embedded in the 17 [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#).

See our [Principles for action](#).

What we advocate for

We advocate for an intersectional and collaborative approach to creating policy; so that arts and culture can be integrated across many sectors. We acknowledge that this is new practice and requires creative approaches.

Importantly, we seek to align climate action with culture in ways that are fair, inclusive, future facing, responsive to community needs, and honour First Nations' perspectives and a Voice to parliament.

A holistic and imaginative approach to transition - with a clear focus on arts and culture - could be aligned to the interconnected goals of reducing carbon emissions, eradicating pollution and

waste, improving health and wellbeing, ensuring resilient communal housing, reimagining social services, place-making with nature at the centre, and involving communities more deeply in civic life. These are key policy areas where arts and culture have an important contribution to make, addressing converging crises and leading the systems change that many are calling for. Let's elevate cultural discourse and advocate for artists and cultural workers to play a key role in co-designing plans for a future that serves all people and the ecosystems that all life depends on.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) the Climate Emergency is deepening at terrifying rates. Australia leads the world in mass extinction of species and increased incidents of extreme weather events. The global pandemic - a predicted symptom of climate disruption - has led to unprecedented global responses and continues to impact people's lives all over the world. Culture has been radically disrupted.

The Australian Arts community has been detrimentally impacted by neglect, systematic defunding, lack of appropriate policy and general lack of care. Australia now needs a future facing cultural policy that leads with an interconnected systems approach, linking policy to practice that serves the wider community.

Investment in culture can rehearse new visions for the future, illustrate many perspectives, connect people to natural environments, shape narratives that are deeply embedded in place, host challenging public conversations between people with different ideas and values to enable greater understanding and stimulate new action. This will prioritise First Nations people and celebrate diverse cultures that include all Australians.

Simplistic, siloed approaches to inherently interconnected, systemic 'wicked' problems do not work. Systemic 'wicked' problems require creative solutions, as well as a cultural response, including respect for critique and analysis.

We call on governments to:

- Invest in Arts and cultural activities that provide place-based and virtual spaces where people connect with each other to reimagine, experiment, play and express. This includes opportunities for creative and cultural work that are integrated within all aspects of society: valuing all forms of culture.
- Ensure access to trustworthy public interest information and make room for other aspects of culture that are harder to articulate and define, and are critical to fostering and safeguarding a healthy democracy.
- Develop policy that acknowledges the tensions between:

1) tangible and intangible values, highly skilled specialists and wider community participants, commercial for-profit businesses and vital not-for-profit services that will always require investment;

2) national, bio-regional and local perspectives; and

3) real place/time and virtual experiences - all developed through diverse cultural lenses that reflect our broader society and will lead to better community outcomes.

1. Are you submitting this submission (tick all that apply):

A self organised group of artists and cultural workers

2. 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:

1. First Nations

1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, unique to Australian identity, includes a holistic worldview where care for the natural world is a vital part of ongoing cultural practice. We must follow this leadership. We endorse the submissions from First Nations led organisations: Bangarra Dance Theatre, Marrugeku, Ilbijerri, Yirra Yaakin, Moogahlin, BlakDance, NAISDA, Tandanya, Australian Dance Theatre, and the many Aboriginal cultural centres in communities across Australia. In particular we endorse key priorities of: a Skills and Workforce capacity building plan; a dedicated First Nations commissioning fund; and funding for the cost of cultural processes particularly cultural maintenance on Country and linking this to Indigenous ranger services. We support their recommended programs and initiatives.

1.2 We call for processes that are led by First Nations people, particularly Traditional Owners, and that centre First Nations values and principles. This includes support for and equitable representation of women, diverse cultural communities, refugees, people with disability and LGBTIQ+. We call for processes that prioritise the climate crisis, with a commitment to brokering and hosting tough conversations as we plan for and implement the Voice to Parliament and transition to a zero emissions culture.

1.3 To honour First Nations cultures as the oldest living cultures in the world, we must intentionally disrupt and dismantle colonial behaviours, get out of the silos and reimagine existing structures. Since invasion in 1788, our cultural history and systems are founded on British and European models that subjugated, abused and annihilated First Nations cultural practices. This devastation has been compounded over recent decades by the industrialisation of culture where economic imperatives in profit driven globalised business models consistently undermine local place based creative and regenerative activities that care for country. This specifically relates to corporate investment and the primacy of national organisations that are not connected to place and assume leadership and Australian identity without respecting First Nations processes or consult and collaborate across different Indigenous nations. The process of change must be First Nations led.

1.4 The recent State of the Environment Report (July 2022) identified the need to harness Indigenous knowledge and this must be integrated with cultural policy. Further, our call for cultural policy that works across different Government departments and sectors is inspired by holistic First Nations cultural principles, in the belief that everything is connected and there is urgent need for arts and cultural workers to help join the dots as part of weaving us out of divisive self-serving silos and into reinvigorated and regenerative civil society.

2. A Place for Every Story

2.1 By centering First Nations artists and honouring their connection to country, we will enhance a respect for bio-regional perspectives as the starting point for understanding the place and local natural resources that all ecosystems and people rely on.

2.2 Following this lead we encourage renewed emphasis on connection to place for the richly diverse stories of our nation and through these local connections reinvigorate civil society. As we deepen local connections, pay more attention to resource use, share scarce resources and shorten supply chains, this offers new opportunities for inquiry and exchange with other people and contexts.

As place based social change and collective impact initiatives (as practised in Social Services and Educational settings across Australia) have shown, these are best delivered in place and help build strong local communities. Strong communities are essential in times of crisis and will speed a rapid transition to a fairer more sustainable future. Urgent action is needed.

By example: The recent [From Risk and Resilience Summit](#) (The National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRRA) Sydney, June 2022) brought together leaders in disaster risk reduction as part of the development of Australia's Second National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction. Several arts and cultural actors (including a Cultural Gardeners representative) were invited to attend. The gathering highlighted the need for developing and integrating new visions for the future, led by scientific modelling, with creative approaches. Cultural actors in this context could bring imaginative processes to balance top down chain-of-command emergency systems with grassroots community informed adaptation solutions, working across stakeholders and services.

2.3 We call for opportunities for artists and communities to swiftly develop new visions for a better future as we embrace ambitious zero emission targets and dynamic values led policy. We have identified a desperate need for new imagination for a fairer and environmentally sustainable future. Effectively engaging communities in drafting visionary plans for a cleaner and fairer future requires the rolling out of locally focussed, inclusive, participatory and accountable initiatives that foster collaborative, creative cultural work across diverse sectors of the economy. This will require mechanisms that can identify and phase out current 'unhealthy' (colonial) practices that are no longer serving Australia while identifying and phasing in marginal new practices that will deliver better outcomes For their unique capacities as listeners, connectors, seeing beyond the 'status quo', we believe that artists and cultural workers are best placed to lead this necessary community building work.

2.4 All new policies must include long term, future facing intergenerational agendas in rapidly changing environmental conditions. Ongoing crises will continue to disrupt 'usual' cultural and social rituals and activities. Whole cultures and communities will need to find new homes as climate change impacts vulnerable places. This is already happening. E.G. Saibai Island in the Torres Strait Archipelago and Lismore, NSW.

2.5 New policy and the stories we tell need to be dynamic and open to change.

2.6 As part of this process, Australian Governments need to invest in Australian stories and the myriad of ways in which artists of different disciplines tell them. To complement this investment we need tighter controls on international cultural influences, particularly through dominant multinational corporations who continue to colonise and diminish the importance of local connection and expression.

2.7 We call for digital and technological strategies to consider carbon footprint and environmental impact. Connecting stories with place in a climate and ecological crisis calls into question the heavy emphasis on digital technologies, disconnected from real place real time experiences or planetary boundaries. Digital footprints already exceed aviation as a major source of carbon emissions. The UK based company erjio studio reports: “ By far the most significant contributor to our individual Internet carbon footprints is our use of online video, which generates 60% of world data flows and over 300 million tonnes of CO2 per year.” (please refer to the carbon neutral group for what 1 tonne of CO2 looks like:
<https://www.climateneutralgroup.com/en/news/what-exactly-is-1-tonne-of-co2/>)

2.8 Putting Government’s 43% emission reductions as a baseline target for all sectors, and specifically the cultural sector, would immediately see creative responses that could help deliver new solutions. To do this we must reimagine resource intensive activities such as Festivals, focus on green tourism, grow slow touring models for cultural work and rethink how we engage internationally.

For example: Travel is a vital consideration for the Australian cultural community. According to The Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics (BITRE), there were 4.84 million passengers carried on Australian domestic commercial aviation (including charter operations) in June 2022. The year ending June 2022 offered 52.38billion available seat kilometres without quantifying environmental impact. Major cultural events have become accustomed to measuring their impact in bed nights and air miles, aligned to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross State Product (GSP) as identified in [*Measuring the economic value of cultural and creative industries—Statistics Working Group of the Meeting of Cultural Ministers*](#) report, 2021. Until these strategies meaningfully measure and seek to reduce environmental impact they are moribund and contributing to deepening crisis. Exploring new economic frameworks and measures, as articulated by various Green New Deals across the world could be rehearsed in the cultural sector. Importantly, according to the United Nations Environmental Program, offsetting emissions will no longer meaningfully avert crisis (<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/carbon-offsets-are-not-our-get-out-jail-free-card>) and the accelerating emergencies will continue to substantially contribute to carbon emissions that are not factored into any national or state calculations. This also indicates a need for cultural change. Mandating triple bottom line accounting principles across the cultural sector is a first step, calculating social and environmental impact with reduction targets as part of a systems wide change agenda.

For example [ARUP](#), who recently collaborated with Arts on Tour to prepare basic [Green Touring Resources](#), have individual employee as well as global travel emission reduction targets to 'walk their talk'. We need to share examples and compete to reduce our environmental impact.

3. The Centrality of the Artist

Artists are vital. They have unique low carbon skills that connect people to their senses, each other and the natural world.

3.1 Imaginative dreaming is what artists and cultural workers do best. They bring complex systems thinking, resourcefulness and exceptional skills in artform practices, collaboration, problem-solving, facilitation and communication, as well as critical frameworks and highly developed 'bullshit detectors'. These skills are desperately needed and must be released from the constraints of onerous bureaucratic funding models.

Participating in creative, artist-led, cultural activities prompts visionary thinking. Adopting imaginative problem-solving approaches, with strong values and principles, improves individual and collective wellbeing. And to be effective contributors to society, artists must be paid a secured living wage. We sincerely hope artists and the cultural sector are represented and considered at the Jobs and Skills Summit (September 2022).

3.2 Artists also need to be employed across all sectors of society. Informed by the best available facts, data and evidence, with respect for intangible cultural heritage and highly skilled practice, we know that artists and cultural workers can play a key role in delivering visionary cross-sector plans for a cleaner and fairer Australia; plans that could transition this country to a regenerative economy that works for all people and all ecosystems here and beyond.

3.3 To centre artists, policy must ensure that artists are salaried and prioritised in cultural organisations as well as identifying opportunities in other government departments to influence the wider culture. This is not the current reality, despite rhetoric to the contrary. Artists from all disciplines, working in different places must be prioritised in governance structures, in decision making and in developing public policy. Placing artists onto other government departments, onto advisory boards and think-tanks could accelerate much needed change.

3.4 Australia's community of artists have been infanticised in funding systems, in part because of an increasingly mechanised understanding of creation and production emphasising. Forced to act as businesses that cannot compete or thrive in the current economy, artists and culture workers have suffered in the same way as people working in other vocations such as teachers, social workers, health care workers, and environmental protectors. Connecting the Australia Council for the Arts with agencies in other sectors would help build a case for revaluing all of these forms of labour.

3.5 Taking a long view ,and following First Nations principles, this new cultural policy must take an intergenerational approach, recognise the importance of mature and Elder artists in the ecosystem and urgently address the educational barriers for young people to study humanities and develop creative skills. This must be applied at all levels of learning from preschool, through primary and secondary education to tertiary and vocational training where fees have been made prohibitively expensive. Lifelong creative learning for artists and the wider community can help replace unsustainable cultural habits. Access to arts must be a society-wide priority.

3.6 Centring the artist must interrogate notions of excellence that generally align to dominant social and cultural power. This includes defending artists rights to free speech and protest. Following the lead of First Nations people, increasing numbers of artists are activists for social and environmental issues. Respecting and protecting artists asserting their right to creatively disrupt and participate in peaceful non-violent protest is essential to a thriving democracy. This includes resisting Government strategies to punish, gag dissent and limit action that will impede the transition process to a sustainable future.

3.7 The deteriorating conditions for artists, particularly in the past decade, has resulted in a weakened sector. If artists are to be centred and play a leading role in cultural transition in the anthropocene there needs to be specific training and support that Government agencies are well placed to support and learn from. As already acknowledged, this is new practice and requires creative approaches and investment.

4. Strong Institutions and Ecosystems of all sizes, creating jobs

4.1 Corrosive impacts from political interference have eroded assumed national principles and values. This has particularly affected cultural institutions and exacerbated the imbalances of power in our sector. The discrepancy of resources between large institutions, small to medium companies and individual artists and arts workers continues to impede the sector. This needs careful consideration when society is demanding change.

4.2 Cultural institutions need to be part of this change, be more conscious of and responsible with their power, privilege and influence, charged to develop transparent processes that communities can access, understand and participate in. At this time they are often perceived to be elite and impenetrable. As people in positions of cultural power are predominantly white, governance and management structures are not diverse and do not naturally reflect or embrace diversity. An obsession with leadership in hierarchical structures undermines collaboration and the need for structures that embed diversity. Following Covid-19 - a predicted symptom of the climate crisis - the 'business as usual' recovery is systematically denying that we live in an ecological emergency and must act now. The impetus for change is coming from edges that need to be noticed and empowered in our system.

For example; the Australia Council for the Arts has refused to engage in environmental auditing or placing environmental considerations on funded artistic projects and programs despite calls from the cultural community, for at least ten years, to do so. We respect that under the previous government many institutions were under threat and operating in a hostile political environment

however the inertia that created in our systems must be radically disrupted so ambitious action can be implemented quickly. The Cultural Gardeners have great hope in the cultural shift that can occur with a new government and generative cultural policy.

4.3 Aligning cultural policy to climate policy enables a reframing of the cultural ecosystem. Our cultural ecosystem is part of a global cultural ecosystem; one that is also deeply rooted in extractive behaviour, reliant on fossil fuels, and elite hierarchical structures. Australian cultural institutions need to help reimagine International engagement so that Australians are confident in our own cultural identity, resilient, future-facing and able to exchange. We must move away from the cultural cringe that continues to diminish home grown activities, take responsibility for our relative wealth and privilege in the world, and be a good neighbour in the Asia Pacific region.

By recognising that many Australian citizens walk in at least two worlds, the dominant white Australian culture and either Indigenous cultural heritage or cultural heritage from another country, we could strengthen intercultural understanding through existing connections in diverse communities. This focus includes strengthening the role of cultural diplomacy, reimagined with reduced environmental impact, to help develop intercultural understanding, advocating for peace and non-violent conflict resolution, and modelling equitable cultural exchange to learn from others as part of creating a fairer sustainable world.

Again, converging crises will continue to see further global disruption with a key role for arts and culture in emergency response, finding ways to protect and support adaptation for refugee cultures as parts of the world become uninhabitable.

4.4 Institutional change is slow. By centring artists, who are nimble, adaptive, better equipped to innovate and imagine sustainable change, institutions will be more able to meet the challenges of our age.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable:

This framework and the 5 pillars are a great starting point for the cultural strategy and aligns to longstanding environmental agendas for change. This contribution has attempted to indicate opportunities for an interconnected systems approach.

Co-convened by [Climarte](#), [Artsfront](#) (Feral Arts) and [REDACTED], the Cultural Gardeners are a relatively new and evolving distributed network. We hope to play a leading role in cultural transition as the planet warms and ecological crisis deepens. We are aligned to and working with [Culture Declares Emergency UK](#)

There is great skill and wisdom in our network and we would welcome the opportunity to develop concrete plans based on the ideas in this submission.