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Office For the Arts

A New Cultural Policy

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Dear Office for the Arts,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to A New National Policy.

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) is the state's largest community-based heritage advocacy organisation, representing more than 40,000 members and supporters. We are Victoria's leading heritage and conservation organisation and are committed to safeguarding and activating natural, cultural, social, and Indigenous heritage values, in turn fostering strong, vibrant, and prosperous communities today and for future generations.

Our organisation manages a diverse portfolio of heritage places and brings significant expertise in portfolio management through a heritage lens with the aim of activating these places through history and creativity. Our advocacy is delivered through policy engagement, education, custodianship, and public programming of our places. We strive to lead best practice in heritage conservation, management, and public programming and are Australia's storytellers, essential to passing on the histories, traditions, myths and narratives that shape our individual and national identity.

Summary of Position

The Cultural Policy considers the place of arts and culture in Australia, and the consultation paper states that it is about Australian stories and Australian creativity in all its forms. Arts and culture is the responsibility of the Minister for the Arts with the Office for the Arts, as well as several bodies, such as Creative Australia, who oversee artistic and cultural production. Within this context, the important role of heritage within the remit of the department, and across the federal government, is very limited. Currently, heritage features in:

- The Office for the Arts through the Cultural Heritage Program, focused on acquisition as well as repatriation of Indigenous ancestral remains.
- The Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), through legislation for Commonwealth and National heritage-listed places and Australian Heritage Grants (only for National Heritage-listed places) and the First Nations Heritage Grants (only for world and National Heritage-listed places).
- The National Library of Australia who manage the Community Heritage Grants, capped at \$20,000 grants, for heritage interpretation, conservation, and collection management activities.

This glaring absence of cultural heritage in the remit across federal government is symptomatic of the lack of acknowledgment, integration and visibility of cultural heritage in federal policy, including the current Cultural Policy.

Not having a clear culture and heritage program that provides a unified approach to valuing, and celebrating culture and heritage in Australia is a significant gap and a missed opportunity. It is essential that the renewed Cultural Policy address this gap and provide the focus and leadership required of whole of government, to embrace and champion cultural heritage, enabling the arts and creative and cultural practice to thrive in Australia.

Many places outside of Australia, including, as good examples, France, Canada and the United Kingdom, include heritage as a core component of arts and culture, often referred together as the "arts, culture, and heritage" sector. It encompasses the tangible (monuments and artifacts) and intangible (traditions and languages) legacies inherited from past generations, which shape and enrich contemporary cultural identity, practices, creativity, and values.

More specifically, within the new Cultural policy, the inclusion of Heritage more intentionally within arts and culture is essential because it:

- Provides identity, continuity, and meaning for people.
- Fosters social cohesion by connecting past generations with present creativity for communities.
- Ensures, the preservation of traditions, knowledge, and skills— such as design and performance—which act as a foundation for future artistic innovation and cultural diversity.
- Supports positive education and tourism outcomes by sharing stories and experiences about our history, ingenuity, and past innovations and mistakes as sources of inspiration for our today and tomorrow.
- Retains places of connection, meaning and value - providing spaces for arts, cultural and creative practice.

As a leader in developing policy settings that enhance the creative impact and cultural health of Australia, the Federal Government has a responsibility to expand its view of culture to position the heritage sector as a key asset presenting significant benefits for the public.

Key Recommendations

The NTAV recommends that the Office for the Arts:

- 1. Establish a dedicated heritage unit, funded and staffed by qualified heritage professionals, in the Office for the Arts team, to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the best way to enhance creative impact through the intentional inclusion of heritage as part of the arts and cultural sector.**
- 2. Embed heritage within and across the new National Cultural Policy** to significantly improve the creative impact and cultural health of Australia through the inclusion of heritage engagement as a key creative asset for our nation.
- 3. Appreciate that heritage places are places for making and sharing arts and culture** and build this into the policy and the activities of Creative Australia ensuring heritage engagement is a core asset for all Australians.

4. **Provide leadership in valuing, utilising and caring for heritage** by demonstrating and fostering good custodianship and supporting custodians of heritage places and collections to undertake impactful storytelling initiatives that benefit the public.
5. **Integrate heritage across and within each of the 5 pillars of the policy**, positioning heritage places and practices as key to sharing historical and contemporary Australian stories and Australian creativity across all arts, creative and cultural forms.

Conclusion

The opportunities of heritage identified through this response to the public consultation are significant and more needs to be done to ensure that the lack of a systematic, focused and integrated approach to heritage, arts and culture is addressed efficaciously. Policy adjustment and inclusion alone, while significant, will not resolve these issues.

A fundamental shift towards supporting integrated, well-resourced, and expert-led heritage and asset management and activation practices is required to ensure a sustainable and richly creative Australia. Without this shift, Australia's significant heritage values and creative practices will not be fully realised for the benefit of the Australian community.

The National Trust stands ready to work with the Office for the Arts to improve heritage outcomes for all Australians.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further. Please contact our office on (03) 9656 9844 or at collette.brennan@nattrust.com.au.

Yours sincerely,



Collette Brennan

CEO