

## THE NATIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT CULTURAL FORUM, AUSTRALIA



leadership network  
culture governance development  
local policies national of exchange  
experiences

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### 1. A unique blend of established traditions and new influences

The Commonwealth of Australia is the world's sixth-largest country by total area, with around 7,700,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The population in 2013 was estimated in 23,316,122 inhabitants. The country's original inhabitants are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who have been living in Australia for at least 40.000 years and possibly up to 60.000. There used to be as many as 250 indigenous language groups. Nowadays the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent 3 per cent of Australia's population.

The rest of Australia's people are migrants or descendants of migrants who have arrived in Australia from more than 200 countries after the first British settlement, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In order to gain a more accurate picture, it is remarkable that more than 6.5 million migrants have settled in Australia since 1945.

Australia has six states (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia) and two major mainland territories (the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory). The five largest cities of Australia are: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide. There are three levels of government: national, state and local. There are 565 councils across the seven states and territories in Australia, representing significant diversity in local governance.

Australia has maintained a stable liberal democratic political system that functions as a federal parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy, headed by Queen Elizabeth II of England. According to international standards, Australia is considered one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

## 2. A vision for Australia's culture

Cultural diversity is definitely a characteristic feature of Australia. Also, there is a common core of diverse cultural factors in the Australian identity that co-exist and unify the Australian way of life. For example, having a secular government, and consequently having freedom of religion; having English as the national language, while valuing at the same time other languages, like for example, the most common spoken Greek; or locating heritage and tradition as a firm base of the culture and at the same time, integrating new music, food and cultural expressions, of all the confluent cultures. The Australian Council for the Arts, the arts funding agency of the national Government, was established in 1974.

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## 3. Creative Australia, the national cultural policy

The first Australian cultural policy, *Creative Nation*, was launched two decades ago. The second, and current, Australian national cultural policy, was launched in 2012 Entitled *Creative Australia*, this policy "aims to ensure that the cultural sector –incorporating all aspects of arts, cultural heritage and the creative industries– has the skills, resources, and resilience to play an active role in Australia's future". As the policy says, "a creative nation is a productive nation".

*Creative Australia* has five equally important and linked goals:

- a) Recognise, respect and celebrate the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity.
- b) 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.
- c) Support excellence and the special role of artist and their creative collaborators as the source of original work and ideas, including telling Australian stories.
- d) Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy.
- e) Ensure Australian creativity thrives in the digitally enabled 21<sup>st</sup> century, by supporting innovation, the development of new creative content, knowledge and creative industries.

In order to achieve these five goals, *Creative Australia* emphasizes three key themes:

- a) modernise funding and support,
- b) creative expression and the role of the artist,

connect to national life for a social and economic dividend. This policy, which is divided in concrete actions, provides a landscape to support activities across all levels of government.

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#### **4. The National Local Government Cultural Forum: origin and purpose**

The National Local Government Cultural Forum was instigated by the Cultural Development Network, an independent non-profit agency based in Melbourne that promotes cultural vitality of communities in Australia, by linking local government, communities, artists, researchers and related agencies.



The Forum was acknowledged in the National Cultural Policy in March 2013, under the first theme: modernize funding support. The Cultural Forum is funded by the Australia Council for an initial three-year term (2013 - 2015).

The Cultural Forum consists of a twice-yearly meeting for stakeholders from local government to develop and articulate a national perspective for local government cultural development and to strengthen the capacity of local government in relation to community arts and cultural development. The Forum's activities are: to study the role of community arts and cultural development artists and the role of local government in growing arts participation; and to coordinate local government cultural activities to provide a firm base for the National Arts and Culture Accord (an instrument describing how each level of government will support arts and culture, and set out principles for ongoing cooperation). Ultimately, the National Local Government Cultural Forum intends to test new ways of strengthening local arts and cultural development, create greater connectivity between artists and local government and improve community health and wellbeing through the arts.

#### **5. Members and activities**

The members of the Cultural Forum are representatives from:

- the local government associations from each of the eight states and territories who have responsibility for cultural development,
- the eight Australian capital cities (Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney),
- the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), the national voice of local government.

- the Commonwealth Ministry for the Arts, the peak arts policy office for the national government
- the Australia Council for the Arts, the arts funding agency of the Commonwealth.
- the Global Cities Research Institute at RMIT University, Melbourne, provides research expertise and assistance in evaluating the Forum.

The Cultural Development Network (CDN) and ALGA form a joint executive of the Cultural Forum, managing the meeting agendas and the business of the forum. The Hon. Fred Chaney, AO, former Senator, acts as Chair.

## *The National Local Government Cultural Forum recognises the principles of the United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) Policy Statement on “Culture as the Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development”.*

### a) First meeting: June 2013, Canberra

The first meeting explored the role of local government in arts and culture across the nation and set the medium long-term objectives for the Cultural Forum. These were agreed to be:

- Response to the National Arts and Culture Accord
- Extending of use of local government cultural data and indicators
- Development of models for infrastructure development and cultural ‘spaces’
- Building of a stronger relationship between local government and national peak arts organisations
- Collection and utilisation of case-studies of exemplar practice

### b) Second meeting: October 2013, Perth

A key outcome of this meeting was the decision to collect additional data that demonstrates the scope of local government’s contribution to the national arts and cultural agenda. The Cultural Forum will develop a system for gathering data to help to define the impact of local government cultural development activity. Drawing from case-studies of arts projects, this initiative will establish the range of measures, indicators and the dynamics that feature in local community-based arts projects for use in informing future practice.

## **6. The Cultural Forum: principles and evaluation**

The National Local Government Cultural Forum recognises the principles of the United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) Policy Statement on “Culture as the Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development” (approved in Mexico City in 2010), that (i) aims to strengthen heritage, creativity, cultural industries, drafts and cultural tourism and (ii) that culture has its rightful place in all public policies.

Global Cities Research Institute at RMIT University, Melbourne, a leading centre on the integration of policies that impact on sustainability in cities and local governments, will evaluate outcomes of the Forum. Intermediate outcomes achieved within the first year include positive engagement of all invited parties and consequently the first ever national collaboration between stakeholders in local government cultural development.

## **7. Other information**

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