ANKA
ARNHEM, NORTHERN AND KIMBERLEY ARTISTS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
Working together to keep art, country and culture strong

Before It Is Too Late

Securing the Remote Indigenous Community-Controlled Art and Culture Sector for the Next Generations

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation
May 2026

ANKA (Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation) acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. The ANKA board pays its respect to them and their cultures; and to Elders both past & present.

ANKA's preferred terminology when referring to peoples, artists and art is Aboriginal (for the ANKA region specifically) or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Indigenous is used in specific national contexts, such as when referring to the sector and the market. First Nations is used when referring to the direct language used in the National Cultural Policy documentation.

ANKA recognises that individuals, communities and organisations hold different preferences, and we acknowledge and respect their right to self-identify.

National Cultural Policy Consultation Submission: ANKA (Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation)
May 2026

This submission was written by Christina Davidson and Marie Falcinella on behalf of the ANKA Board of Directors and membership, whose ideas and leadership are at its centre. Thank you to the ANKA staff team, including Bala Starr, Mandi King, Rosita Holmes, Honey Abbott, Claudia Prendergast and Emma Cameron, and to Robyn McKenzie and the many ANKA collaborators whose knowledge and goodwill have contributed.

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INDIGENOUS ART CODE SUPPORTER MEMBER

Cover image: Warlayirti Artists, Balgo. Photo by Peter Eve, 2005

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PART A

Executive Summary

> ‘Our cultures, languages, patterns and designs were given to us by our ancestors. It is our responsibility to keep our culture going. Our culture goes back to the beginning of time. Remote community-controlled art and culture centres help us keep our culture strong. We need you to work with us to keep our art and culture centres strong for the next 50 years and beyond.’

Call for Urgent Action, Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit, Darwin, November 2024 – addressed to the Ministers and Shadow Minister for the Arts and Indigenous Australians and endorsed by ANKA members and supporters from across the sector. See Appendix 1.

ANKA (Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation) is Australia’s first peak body for Aboriginal art and culture, founded in 1987. Governed by an all-Aboriginal board, ANKA represents nearly 50 Aboriginal art and culture centres and artist groups and over 6,000 artists across four regions of northern Australia: Arnhem Land, the Kimberley, Darwin/Katherine and the Tiwi Islands.

Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture centres are fundamentally hybrid institutions, both cultural and commercial, but government funding has never adequately recognised or resourced their cultural role. Operational funding from the federal government, through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) program, funds centres only for the production, marketing and sale of visual art – not the cultural base on which it depends.

The sector is facing an urgent tipping point that threatens its sustainability. Pressures are coming from many directions, and the evidence is now visible in the sector's own data: in 2024–25, the lowest number of new artists joined in 15 years, while artists aged 60 and over produced 28% of all artworks. Per-centre funding was down 25% in real terms, and artwork sales were down 27%. Centres are increasingly unable to meet their workplace health and safety obligations, and the consequences of this gap are serious. At the same time, Northern Australia is on the front line of climate change, already experiencing increased and more severe cyclones and flooding.

The crisis is financial in the immediate term but structural at its core. While an immediate increase in funding is essential, it alone will not resolve the issue. Correcting this structural mismatch is the key to securing a sustainable sector for the next fifty years.

This structural problem has a history. From their beginnings, remote Indigenous art and culture centres have been embraced by the communities that built them as both cultural and commercial institutions. This was more clearly reflected in the sector's early funding through the Australia Council, under cultural policy. Since 1992, when responsibility shifted to the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio under an industry framework, the funding rationale has moved decisively towards the commercial; today, cultural maintenance is excluded from what is funded.

Minister Burke described *Revive* Australia's National Cultural Policy (2023–2027) as ‘a starting point, not the end of the story’ and committed that ‘the role of art centres is going to have to be central to what we do next’.[1]

Revive's foundational First Nations First pillar, its commitment to self-determination, and its principle that First Nations programs must be 'designed by and with First Nations peoples and organisations' are the starting point. This submission sets out what a central role for remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture centres looks like in practice in the next National Cultural Policy.

Remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture centres, and their peak organisations, are a uniquely Australian achievement. Over fifty years in the making, they have been built by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, operating in some of the most remote communities in the country. They are the foundation of one of the world's most internationally acclaimed contemporary art movements and are Australia's most dominant export visual art form.

Art and culture centres are also far more than spaces where art is created. They are cultural keeping places, learning centres, and community spaces that are at the heart of the communities they serve. The centres are responsible for supporting the maintenance and transmission of the inherited cultural knowledge that is core to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and wellbeing from generation to generation, and they generously share that knowledge with the wider world. They are the proven cultural infrastructure through which Pillar One of *Revive*, 'First Nations First,' will be realised.

The next policy must take concrete steps to secure the sector's sustainability for the future – not just to protect community-controlled engagement with the art market, but to secure the infrastructure which underpins Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural maintenance.

If the government allows remote Indigenous art and culture centres to fail, the Indigenous art market does not disappear; it moves to operators outside community control. Once this occurs, rebuilding the community-controlled sector will cost far more than sustaining it would have, and the chain of cultural transmission and maintenance will have already been broken.

The four recommendations in this submission are the product of decades of ANKA's ground-up community consultation. They have been developed through dedicated conversations with Elders, artists, arts workers, and centre management across remote Australia, as well as through regional meetings, summits, and direct consultation. Together, they answer the call made at the Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit: to work with us to keep our art and culture centres strong for the next fifty years and beyond.

The title of this submission is drawn from Professor Mick Dodson AM's address to the National Press Club, *Before It's Too Late: A Call to Secure Australia's Indigenous Heritage*, 12 November 2014.

This submission sits alongside and supports the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Centre Alliance submission, of which ANKA is also a signatory.

The Four Recommendations

	Recommendation	Timeframe
1	**Immediate stabilisation of art and culture centres** • Restore Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) funding to at least the 2016 per-centre levels, adjusted for inflation: ~$7.8m p.a. (urban CPI floor); $11–12m on a remote cost index.	Year 1 forward
2	**A co-designed Sector Map** • Document the full range of work art and culture centres do and the sectors they contribute to, including, for example, education, employment, health, national heritage, caring for Country, the ceremonial economy, language, Elder care, disability, youth and cultural tourism • Establish how those contributions can be measured, recognised and remunerated, including cultural and social value, not only economic • To be developed in a co-design process with government and Aboriginal art and culture leaders represented through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Centre Alliance.	Years 1–2
3	**A co-designed Sector Strengthening Plan for remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture centres and their peak bodies** • Recognising and resourcing art and culture centres as the primary institutions for cultural maintenance in remote communities, not only as enterprises for making and selling art • Indigenous arts and culture centre workforce development pathways (to sit alongside the *Revive* action of developing a First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy) • Remuneration for next-generation teaching and learning • A national infrastructure fund with climate adaptation • Two-way governance support • Resourced centre-based community collections, keeping places and museums • Wellbeing: connection to culture and Country • The business and money story.	Years 2–4
4	**A dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy** • Establish the policy framework that recognises cultural maintenance as a core function of art and culture centres alongside art production and sale • Create the cross-portfolio framework that ICIP legislation and other cultural protections require • Develop the measurement framework needed to give genuine substance to Closing the Gap Outcome Area 16 • Provide the policy foundation for coordinated cross-sector funding for art and culture centres across portfolios • Give culture a clear policy home and definition, so it no longer falls through the gaps between portfolios and funding streams • Position Australia to meet its obligations on cultural rights under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).	Years 1–4

PART B

Introduction: About ANKA and How We Got Here

About ANKA

VISION

To keep art, country and culture strong

MISSION

To support self-determination of Aboriginal artists and art and culture centres

ANKA (Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation) is Australia's first peak body for Aboriginal art and culture and will celebrate its fortieth year in 2027. Founded in 1987 as the Association of Northern, Central and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANCAAA), it brought together 16 remote and regional art and culture centres from across the Kimberley, Top End and Central Desert. Desart, which supports art and culture centres across Central Australia, grew out of the same founding organisation and became an independent peak body in 1992.

From these beginnings, a national network of around 100 Indigenous community-controlled art and culture centres has grown, with five Indigenous community-controlled peak bodies representing their interests: ANKA founded in 1987, Desart in 1992, Ananguku Arts and Cultural Aboriginal Corporation (Ku Arts) in 1998, Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA) in 2011, and Art Centre Hub Western Australia (AACHWA) in 2009/2015.

ANKA is at the heart of one of Australia's oldest and strongest community-controlled sectors and has maintained unbroken governance and representation of remote art and culture centres for nearly forty years. Community control means that local Aboriginal artists and their communities own, govern, and direct their own art and culture centres: determining what is made, how it reaches the world, and how cultural and economic outcomes support community life on Country. This principle – Aboriginal control of Aboriginal art – was ANKA's founding objective in 1987, declared at the then-largest-ever meeting of Aboriginal artists and their representatives. It remains ANKA's core mission today.

More than 50 Aboriginal language and cultural groups are represented across ANKA's membership. Over half of ANKA's supported centres sit on islands or are cut off from road access by seasonal flooding. ANKA's all-Aboriginal board is elected with representatives from across its four regions – Arnhem Land, the Kimberley, Darwin/Katherine and the Tiwi Islands. ANKA has been named a national finalist in the Indigenous Governance Awards twice.

ANKA is a Supporter Member of Indigenous Art Code and supports its principles for fair, transparent and ethical trade with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual artists.

'ANKA is a voice of those artists who are in their own land. Sitting at home under the tree. ANKA gets the message from them and shares it and talks for their rights because they cannot go and meet the government but ANKA can talk for the artists.'

Dr Djambawa Marawili AM,
ANKA Chairperson, 2008

Image details: Dr Djambawa Marawili, *Artists and community members sitting under a tree*, Representation of Advocacy (Part One): pen on paper, 2026, collection: ANKA

ANKA's ongoing consultation with members

The recommendations in this submission come directly from Aboriginal artists, arts workers and cultural leaders on the ground. Since 2001, ANKA has held four Regional General Meetings every year, before its AGM and Annual Conference, giving members a direct voice in setting priorities and electing their own representatives. What comes back from those meetings, year after year, is consistent: culture must come first, the next generation must be able to learn it, and the institutions that make this possible must be properly resourced. This is not a policy position ANKA has adopted. It is what ANKA members say in language, on Country and in community every time they meet.

In 2020, when COVID-19 closed communities and threatened to collapse the art market overnight, ANKA hosted 44 large-group Zoom meetings with remote art and culture centres. Those conversations, held in a moment of acute crisis, gave ANKA an unusually detailed picture of what matters most to centres and what they actually carry – not just art production, but support services that include education, employment, health, national heritage, caring for Country, the ceremonial economy, language, Elder care, disability, youth and cultural tourism. The four ANKA Regional General Meetings that year focused specifically on sustainability. At the end of 2020, ANKA produced an extended submission to the federal Growing the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry consultation, marking the beginning of ANKA's current structured, strengths-based exploration of what the sector needs to survive and thrive over the next 50 years.

That work has continued without interruption. In September 2023, ANKA and Desart jointly wrote to the federal Ministers for the Arts and Indigenous Australians, proposing what became Recommendations 2, 3 and 4 in this submission. That case was made face-to-face when ANKA and Desart met with Ministers Burke and McCarthy during the peaks' joint board meeting in April 2024. In late 2024, ANKA and Desart planned the Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit in Darwin, hosted by ANKA. Over 100 participants – artists, arts workers, directors and managers – worked through an Appreciative Inquiry process and produced a seven-theme framework and a Call for Urgent Action (Appendix 1). Desart ran its own strengths-based consultation with members in April 2025, and ANKA's November 2025 Annual Conference reviewed and sharpened the Djalkiri themes.

Through 2025, AACHWA, Ananguku Arts, ANKA, Desart and IACA came together as a formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Centre Alliance (the Alliance), with working-together principles formalised at a meeting in Canberra in December 2025. What the Alliance brings together is not just institutional representation, but the accumulated knowledge of communities across the country about what their remote and regional centres are, what they do, and what they need.

For government, the Alliance offers something that has not existed before – five Indigenous community-controlled peak bodies, speaking with one coordinated voice, on behalf of the art and culture centres and artists they represent. The co-design process this submission calls for is now practically achievable.

The Alliance has made its own submission to this consultation, *Art, Culture, Country, As One* (May 2026), presenting the sector's collective national position, to which ANKA is a signatory. ANKA's submission complements it by providing the depth behind the shared position, the historical analysis of how the sector came to be funded as it is, the evidence base from ANKA's regions across northern Australia, and the detailed case for a National Indigenous Cultural Policy, which extends the Alliance's call for culture to be recognised as a priority domain. Together, the two submissions demonstrate the coordinated, community-controlled policy capability that the recommended co-design processes depend upon.

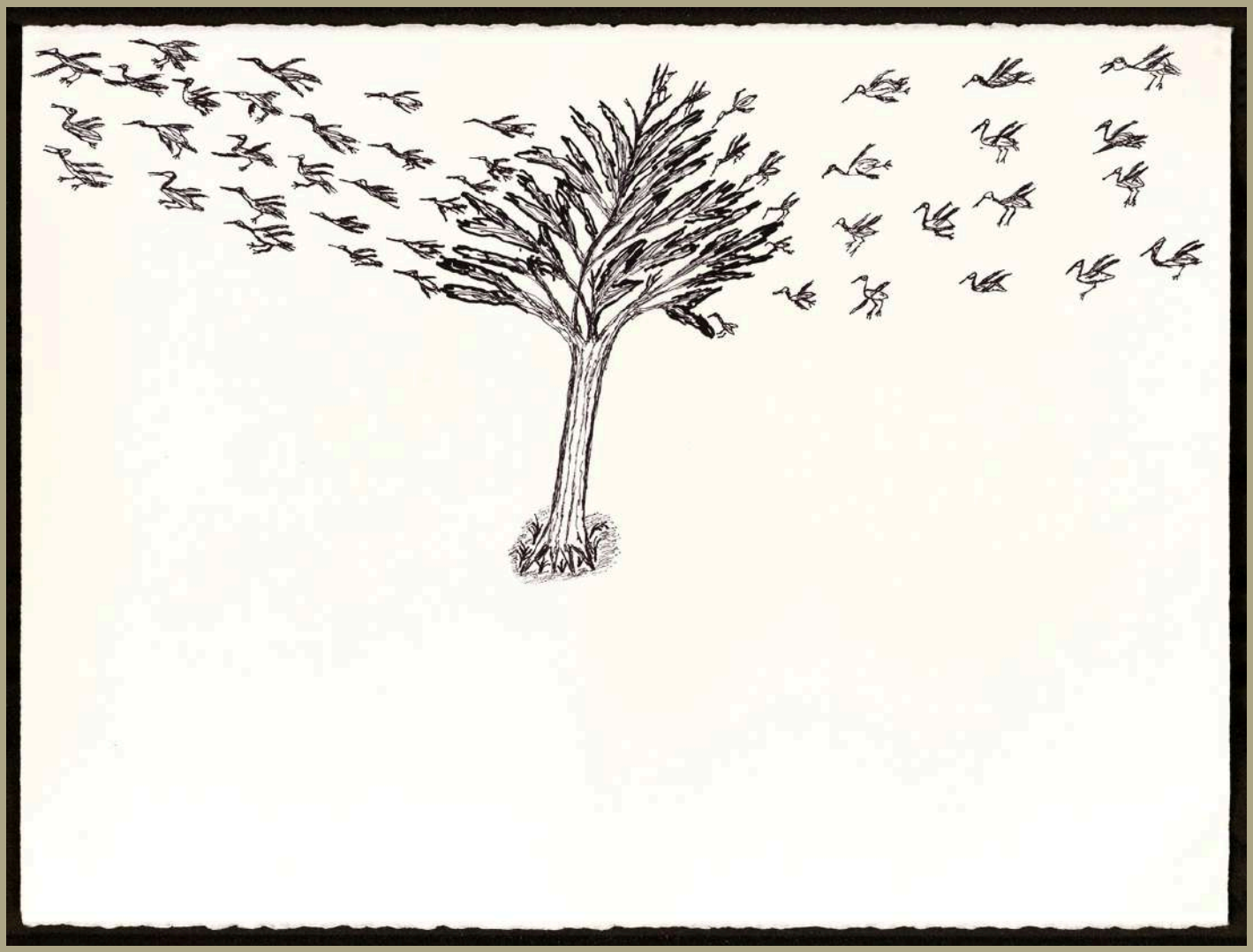


Image details: Dr Djambawa Marawili AM, *Tree of Knowledge*, Representation of Advocacy (Part Two), pen on paper, 2026, collection: ANKA.

Dr Marawili explains: this drawing is a poem. It shows a healthy tree growing on ancestral Country at my homeland Baniyala at Blue Mud Bay in North East Arnhem Land. The tree was planted by the people who came before us and its roots go down deep into the soil. It is the tree of knowledge and it is growing lots of healthy fruit. The birds flying down into the tree represent Yolngu (Aboriginal) and Napagi (Non-Aboriginal) people who all come to eat the fruit and get the knowledge passed down from our ancestors, to our grandparents, to us. The land has a vision, has a dream, has a future. The birds get nourishment from the fruit and fly out the other side of the tree – with lots of energy and power. They take that knowledge and connection to Country and culture back to the places they came from across the world.

PART C

What Has Been Built

'We need wider Australia to properly understand that in homelands, in our communities on Country, we are caring for the oldest living culture on earth; and we are the only people qualified to look after this global inheritance. These are not just words about a distant, imagined past. We need support for our self-determination to care for the seeds of a shared future for all Australians.'

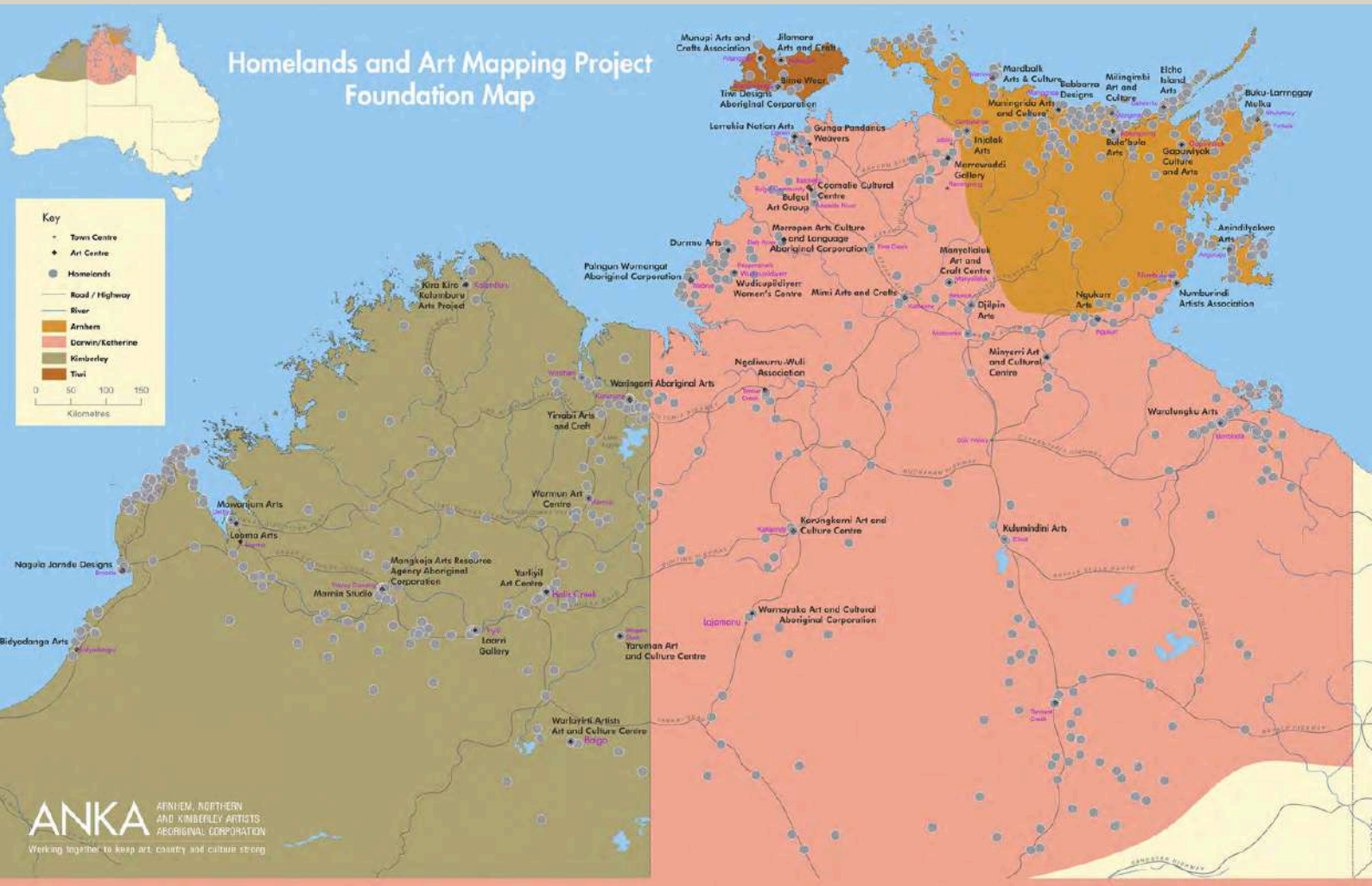
Dr Djambawa Marawili AM, ANKA Chairperson, 'Support for Cultural Legacy', 2018

Over fifty years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have built a network of around 100 community-controlled art and culture centres across remote and very remote Australia. There is no comparable model anywhere else in the world of institutions that simultaneously sustain a living cultural tradition, underpin one of Australia's most significant commercial art markets, and deliver employment, education, health, wellbeing and social outcomes in some of Australia's most materially disadvantaged communities.

The Aboriginal art movement and Aboriginal art and culture centres both emerged from the self-determination era of the 1970s. At that time, large numbers of Aboriginal people in northern and central Australia walked back to their ancestral country to re-establish homeland communities– reviving languages, ceremonies and cultural knowledge that colonialism had tried to erase. The extraordinary flowering of the art movement grew side by side with this cultural renaissance, and the art and culture centres that emerged were designed to sustain both strong art and strong culture and to develop the commercial opportunity that the art movement opened up.

The Aboriginal community-controlled art and culture sector emerged during the same historical period as the Aboriginal community-controlled health and legal sectors, amid a growing movement of Aboriginal self-determination. Like those sectors, it was built from the ground up by Aboriginal communities establishing their own institutions to pursue community-defined social, cultural, economic and political goals. Peak bodies followed later, emerging to support and represent existing community-controlled organisations.

Map p.10: Today there are more than 720 homeland centres in the ANKA regions — across Arnhem Land, the Kimberley, the Tiwi Islands and Darwin–Katherine. Their existence as small communities reminds us that the land between the large Aboriginal settlements in northern Australia is not empty, and that it is not only the art and culture centres that nurture and support art practice. Homeland centres are where much of the art is produced and, as the centres of ceremonial life, are the conceptual and spiritual heartlands of the Aboriginal art movement.



Homelands: Keeping Art, Country and Culture Strong

What has been achieved

> **'Art and culture centres are a peculiarly Australian invention, like the Hills Hoist or the rotary engine, but few realise how effective they are … Something that Australia does better than anyone else. It is a model that delivers equitable returns for Indigenous creativity, that allows cultural intellectual property to enter the mainstream without compromise or exploitation.'**
>
> **Will Stubbs, Coordinator, Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, 2015** [2]

From the 1970's the Australian Government supported the growth of the Indigenous community-controlled art industry and the return on that investment has been significant, spanning economic, cultural, and social dimensions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is credited with transforming how both Australian and contemporary art are understood internationally. Remote Indigenous Art and culture centres have been central to this by providing a community-controlled framework for artists to create work, develop careers and engage with the art market and with mainstream, and do so on their own terms.

Whilst current comprehensive data on the sector is lacking, in 2022 the Productivity Commission valued the Indigenous visual art market at no less than $250 million over 2019–20, including approximately $35 million generated through art and culture centres directly[3]. In 2014, it was documented that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represented approximately 1.7% of Australia's population, yet they accounted for at least 25%, and probably more likely around 50%, of all working visual artists in Australia, creating more than half the total value of Australian visual fine art, and dominating the export market.[4] Community-controlled Indigenous art and culture centres are a mechanism that made a significant proportion of this possible, ensuring equitable returns to around 20,000[5] artists working through art and culture centres across regional and remote Australia, authenticating provenance, and maintaining the cultural integrity on which the market's value depends.

Art and culture centres also contribute to the growing cultural tourism economy, as documented in the 2024 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade report, *First Nations businesses succeeding internationally*. In some communities, art and culture centres provide authentic, community-controlled cultural tourism experiences: First Nations businesses in tourism-related industries generated nearly $1 billion in total turnover in 2022–23, with tourism-specific revenue growing at 38% per year over the three preceding years.[6] Exhibitions and cultural displays drew 740,808 international visitors in 2023, 6% above pre-pandemic levels, making them the most accessed Indigenous experience for international visitors.[7]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is now a global phenomenon, featuring in the collections and major exhibition programs of every national and state gallery in Australia, including a prominent place in Canberra's Parliament House Collection. Recent international highlights of ANKA supported art and culture centres include artist representation in *The Stars We Do Not See*, the most extensive overseas survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art ever mounted, at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 2025, and *Maḏayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from*

Yirrkala exhibition which toured 4 US venues from 2022-2025; the New York Times called it ‘ravishing’[8] and the Asia Society described it as ‘a watershed moment in global art history.’[9]

In Australia, *Yolngu Power: The Art of Yirrkala* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2025, a ticketed exhibition developed in partnership with Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka, Yirrkala, drew more visitors than the gallery's landmark 2019 exhibition of works by Marcel Duchamp, one of the most influential artists of the 20th century[10].

‘Art Centres are only for art, that's what I've been told. But in Aboriginal way you can't separate language, dance, song, country, story and traditional knowledge from art. Everything connects, art cannot stand alone – that's the thing we really have to fight for.’

Gabriel Nodea, ANKA Director, Chairperson Warmun Art Centre, ANKA Kimberley Artists Statement 2012/2017

More than just places for making and selling art

As curator and author Arrernte woman Hetti Perkins said in her 2026 acceptance speech for her Red Ochre Award for Lifetime Achievement in Cultural Advocacy and Leadership, 'Art Centres are the backbone of Australia's cultural identity. And they are under immense pressure.'

Remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture centres are uniquely complex institutions. They are the foundation of a globally recognised art movement, yet their real function is misunderstood by their operational funding model, leaving them dangerously under-resourced.

In Australian cities and many regional centres, cultural, artistic and community functions are recognised and funded separately: community and cultural centres receive specific program and infrastructure grants, art schools are funded as education institutions, regional museums receive dedicated heritage and collection funding, with paid curatorial staff and conservation programs, and commercial galleries operate as separate enterprises. Each function has its own institution with a dedicated funding stream with no expectation to subsidise anything beyond its core business. Art and culture centres carry all of these functions simultaneously in communities where no other arts and culture institutions exist, while receiving operational funding from the arts portfolio for only one of them – the making and marketing of art – and are expected to fund everything else from the margins of artwork sales.

From their beginnings, remote art and culture centres were understood by the communities that built them as both cultural and commercial institutions. The ANKA Values Statement captures it directly: 'it is important to balance culture and money business in everything.'[11]

But that understanding has not been reflected in government policy. Professor Jon Altman, writing in 2005, documented the gap: '[T]here has been some resistance to recognising…the centres as hybrid institutions that combine the cultural (or customary) and the commercial (or economic)… an ongoing failure to recognise this hybridity lies at the core of art centre fragility and vulnerability.'[12]

Altman traced the policy history.[13] Early government support sat within the Australia Council under a cultural policy rationale; from 1992, funding shifted to the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio under an industry framework, and the framing has moved decisively towards the commercial ever since. The current Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) program – an initiative of the Office for the Arts that provides operational funding to 138 art and culture centres, industry service organisations, regional hubs and art fairs[14] – only supports activities explicitly connected to the making, selling and marketing of visual art. Cultural maintenance is not recognised as a funded activity[15]. This prioritising of the commercial contrasts starkly with what centre members have consistently said since the early 1970's: that balancing the cultural and the commercial is fundamental to what these institutions are.[16]

By funding only the commercial activity of making and selling art, government has come to treat centres almost as if they are remote equivalents of urban commercial galleries – institutions that should, with the right support, eventually become self-sustaining. But this assumption is only sustainable if you exclude their functions of cultural maintenance, art education (funded from education budgets elsewhere in Australia), museum and keeping place (funded from heritage budgets elsewhere), and the logistical challenges of operating in remote and very remote locations. The aspiration for commercial self-sufficiency is both unrealistic and unjust under these circumstances.

The case for funding cultural maintenance rests on three well-established public good rationales.

First, heritage and cultural patrimony: Western countries established publicly funded galleries and museums, after the French Revolution, on

the basis that cultural heritage belongs to all citizens and cannot be sustained by market forces alone. Art and culture centres hold collections, archives and living cultural knowledge of national and international significance, serving as a heritage function, not a commercial one. As Altman observed in correspondence with ANKA in June 2026, 'in many ways IVAIS should underwrite the cultural/customary component as a public good and national treasure.'[17]

Second, art education equity: in universities and art schools across mainstream Australia, the teaching of artistic practice is funded from education budgets, with teachers paid to instruct and students financially supported to learn. In remote Indigenous art and culture centres, the same teaching, by senior artists who are the acknowledged experts of their tradition, takes place without any equivalent recognition or funding, and primarily without pay. It is simply expected to be undertaken on a 'volunteer' basis or to be self-funded from the proceeds of selling art. The inequity is indefensible on any principled basis.

Third, the importance of the Closing the Gap agreement. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap establishes that strong culture is essential to improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,[18] yet Closing the Gap Outcome 16, which recognises the importance of culture and language, currently has targets only for languages, leaving cultural maintenance without a measurement framework or accountability mechanism. Funding the network of art and culture centres for their cultural maintenance functions as well as for their direct commercial functions is the most efficient and logical next step to meeting these outcomes, and the one most squarely within the policy framework the government has already committed to.

Under the current funding model, the cost of delivering essential services in addition to making and selling art falls on three sources: shrinking commercial art sales margins; a never-ending cycle of competitive project grants that centre coordinators must identify, apply for and acquit on top of everything else; and the unremunerated labour of staff and artists who carry the extensive cultural and community work that no funding covers. Throsby and Petetskaya's national survey found remote artists work an average of 49–51 hours per week in total, with other cultural activities – ceremony, teaching, caring for country, language and cultural governance – representing the largest single block of working time (approx. 50%), the majority of which is unremunerated.[19]

Governments demonstrate what is valued by where and how they invest public funds. Currently, the implicit message is that Aboriginal community-controlled art and culture centres are valued as commercial art enterprises only. Yet the commercial art market they underpin depends entirely on the cultural base that goes unfunded.

‘At my art and culture centre, we take school kids out on Country and it's about health and wellbeing. It's not only for kids — for older people, for healing people to be sober and fit and healthy. When you go out bush, on Country, it's a healing for us. It builds us up, makes us feel good inside.’

Leon Milmurru, Milingimbi Art and Culture, Djalkiri Summit 2024[1]

ART & CULTURE CENTRE WORK

Sectors

A map of the remote Aboriginal art and culture sector ecology. Map collectively developed by ANKA members at Regional General Meetings in 2023–24. Making and selling art sits at the centre of this map as a central activity. It is the only activity currently funded by IVAIS. Source: Djalkiri Summit Report 2025, p.4

What is at stake

Ceremony – 'with its rich and complex song and dance cycles, and inherited patterns, designs and objects passed down from ancestors' – is, as Dr Djambawa Marawili AM has described it, 'Australia's first high culture. Our opera as well as our Law.'[20] Dr Djambawa Marawili has identified 2 distinct but deeply interconnected ways of looking after Indigenous cultural heritage on Country.

The first operates through art and culture centres – community keeping places and archives that store objects, documents and digital recordings for current and future generations and support the repatriation of significant items held in national and international collections. The second is older and distinct – the transmission of traditional knowledge through ceremony, Law and living practice on Country.

These ceremonies are typically held on Country and in homelands, not inside art and culture centres. They sustain what Will Stubbs, long-term Coordinator of Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka at Yirrkala, described at the Djalkiri Summit in November 2024 as the spiritual cleanliness and health of the people and the land.

> 'Art is based on culture. And culture, then, is based on him [Djambawa Marawili] spending his entire life in remote homelands, running ceremonies for weeks and weeks at a time in the rain and the sun, with no support from anyone, with no one in the government knowing anything about this happening.'
>
> **Will Stubbs, Coordinator, Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala. Djalkiri Summit, November 2024.**[21]

The inherited knowledge systems embodied in ceremony that connect Country, culture and Law are irreplaceable. They are the foundation of identity, health, wellbeing and art – 'Australia's first high culture.' The people leading and practising ceremony on Country are among Australia's most materially disadvantaged, yet they live in the money-world like everyone else and need support to carry out this foundational work. For this ceremony to continue for the next generations, new creative sources of funding, under community control, are essential.

Art and culture centres do currently provide some support for ceremony, such as documentation, recordings, materials and logistical help, but they have not been designed or resourced to be the primary vehicle for resourcing ceremony. Ceremony itself is almost entirely unfunded and requires its own direct form of recognition. The vital importance of this direct cultural work, and the failure to recognise and support it, is a key reason why Recommendation 4 calls for a dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy to sit alongside the next National Cultural Policy.

The collections held inside art and culture centres face a parallel challenge. ANKA's 2017 Safe Keeping Report established that 24 of 29 responding art and culture centres already held significant community cultural collections, ranging from multi-room museums to archives of precious heritage objects and digital recordings, almost entirely without government funding. ANKA named and championed this network through its Cultural Legacy Program.

These art and culture centre based not-for-sale collections are the foundation of ANKA's partnership with the University of Melbourne in the multi-million dollar ARC Industry Laureate project *Safekeeping: Effecting Solutions for Risk to Remote Indigenous Heritage* (2026–2030), awarded because 'Indigenous community-held cultural heritage is a national resource at risk' and safeguarding it delivers

'intergenerational economic, education and cultural benefit for all Australians.'The project will identify and address risks to remotely held Indigenous cultural heritage and demonstrate the long-term social and economic value of safeguarding this material at the community level. [22]

These collections are special because they are held on Country, in active relationship with living culture. They are not currently on government's lists of national cultural assets, and they are excluded from IVAIS funding. Both should change.

Collections are one part of a larger cultural maintenance story. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Priority Reform 5) recognises that strong cultures are fundamental to improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Art and culture centres are the organisations in remote communities most directly responsible for sustaining that cultural strength, yet they currently lack formal government recognition and resourcing for that function.

A co-designed Sector Strengthening Plan (Recommendation 3) will establish the building blocks to keep the sector strong for the next 50 years. A National Indigenous Cultural Policy (Recommendation 4) will provide the policy framework to protect and recognise culture across portfolios. Both are needed; neither substitutes for the other.

'Everyday when the artists wake up and go to the art and culture centre and they sit there, each of the artists is teaching, weaving, making connection. Each needle that they add into a basket they are making, they make connection to the manager, the centre itself and out to the world. Looking back to history and forward towards the horizon and beyond the horizon to where there is an invisible generation that is yet to come.'

Jacinta Burukumalawuy, Arts Worker, Milingimbi Art and Culture,
ANKA Arts Worker Extension Program presentation at the
Art Gallery of New South Wales, 29 May 2026

PART D

We Are Now At A Tipping Point

Art and culture centres are places where multiple complex systems overlap. They now stand at a tipping point and face a dual crisis: financial in the immediate term and structural at its core.

The consequential gap between the funded mandate and real function of Aboriginal art and culture centres – as hybrid institutions with both cultural and commercial functions – has been identified since at least the federal Review of the Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry (1989) chaired by Jon Altman and in the literature since Wright and Morphy (1999).

One of the most pressing present-day consequences is the difficulty many centres face in meeting their Human Resources and Workplace Health and Safety obligations. Under WHS law, legal responsibility sits with each centre's volunteer board – directors who currently carry the duty without funded provision for the resources and capacity building required to discharge it.

The seriousness of this gap was made visible earlier this year when NT WorkSafe laid workplace health and safety charges against an Aboriginal art and culture corporation in another region, following the death of a centre manager.[23] The charges remain before the courts.

These compromised conditions are present across the sector. They are arguably not failings of individual centres or directors but rather the consequences of a funding model that has never adequately resourced the obligations these centres and directors are expected to meet, and of multiple external pressures.

Funding has not aligned and has not kept pace

In addition to the failure to fund art and culture centre activity beyond commercial art making, over the past decade, data from the Office for the Arts show that per-centre operational funding through IVAIS has declined in real terms by more than 25%, while the number of funded centres has grown.[24] The conservative estimate of the sector's decline, adjusted for inflation and CPI, is $7.8m, rising to $12m when factoring in the cost of operating in remote communities.[25]

Documented decline in artwork sales and artist engagement

The latest data from Desart's Industry Report records a 27% reduction in income from art and culture centre sales across the sector since 2021-2.[26] This means a decline in both income for artists and a decline in the commercial margins that centres have long relied on to cross-subsidise everything beyond the narrow scope of IVAIS operational funding. Given the real terms funding decline, these margins are shrinking at precisely the moment they are most needed.

In 2024/25, it was reported that there were 5,360 artists across 91 art centres creating artwork;[27] this is the lowest number of artists for almost ten years. On the broader measure of artists with any recorded activity through art centres, numbers stand at 19,678 in 2024/25 – itself 14% lower than in 2022/23[28]

Cultural knowledge transmission is at risk

The art movement's next generation is not entering at the rate needed to sustain it. New artists joining centres in 2024/25 reached a 15-year low at less than half the 2022/23 number.[29] Artists aged 60 and over produce 28% of all artworks.[30] These figures are presented as commercial indicators, but they are also a precise measure of how much knowledge is concentrated in one generation, and how vital it is to engage new and next generation artists.

Cultural knowledge transfers through practice, working alongside, watching, and being taught by someone who holds the authority to teach. Senior artists have that authority. Research

with remote artists in the North-West NT and Tiwi Islands found that senior artists expressed a strong desire to transfer their knowledge but recognised there are limited avenues to do so on a regular basis outside their families.[31] The art and culture centre is the institution that creates those avenues; however, they require the resourcing and capacity to do so.

Governance succession crisis

The same pipeline that is failing to bring in young artists is failing to develop the next generation of community leaders. Art and culture centres are governed by volunteer Aboriginal boards, elected by community members. They are among the few institutions in remote Australia where Aboriginal people hold genuine decision-making authority. The directors who sit on those boards today are, in many centres, the same generation as the senior artists. Without a deliberate strategy to develop community members as board directors and cultural leaders, the community-controlled model itself faces a succession crisis. Self-determination is not self-sustaining. It requires institutions strong enough to develop the next generation of people who will govern them.

Remote cost of living crisis

In 2024, a CHOICE investigation reported that remote Aboriginal communities pay, on average, 39% more at the supermarket checkout than capital city shoppers and in some communities, a basket of essential groceries costs more than twice the city price.[32] The cost for essential goods has skyrocketed even further recently, with geopolitical instability and the flow-on effects of global trade tariff disruptions driving up the cost of freight and imported goods. These are pressures that hit remote communities, entirely dependent on long supply chains, far harder than urban Australia. Reports from communities indicate diesel is near $4.00 per litre.

It is important to realise that while some in-demand artists may achieve high financial returns for their art, they are a small minority with high visibility. According to the latest data from the *Desart Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Centres Industry Report*, core artists – those who sell more than ten artworks in a year – make up around 20% of artists but generate around 80% sales.[33] The returns this sector generates for the economy overall, which include not only sales through art and culture centres but commercial galleries, dealers retailers and the secondary market, are not matched by what reaches the artists.

Increasing compliance demands

Art and culture centres have always carried significant two-way governance obligations. As the sector has professionalised, those obligations have grown – corporate governance under the CATSI Act, workplace health and safety legislation, the Fair Work Act, grant compliance and acquittal, compliance with the Indigenous Art Code, Resale Royalty Scheme administration, copyright and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protections. Stronger governance, fairer artist protections, and higher professional standards have been the sector's goal for decades. Progress on each of them is important, but the capacity for compliance is a real challenge. The operational load falls most heavily on centre managers and coordinators, and responsibility for non-compliance sits with the board.

The growing international profile of the sector has added further complexity to compliance. Works by ANKA-supported artists are now held in major international collections and subject to international copyright law, repatriation protocols, and provenance standards. Managing this from a remote community, with limited legal support and no dedicated budget, is an increasingly unreasonable expectation.

Complex operating context

Art and culture centres operate simultaneously in two worlds that make entirely different demands. On one side, a remote Aboriginal community, governed by kinship relationships, cultural protocols, ceremonial obligations, multiple Indigenous languages, and community governance structures that predate and sit alongside Western corporate frameworks. On the other side an international art market, major collecting institutions,

auction houses, state and national galleries, government departments, grant bodies, and an expanding network of international museum relationships. Centre coordinators are expected to move fluently between these worlds, moment to moment throughout the day.

This complexity has grown in direct proportion to the sector's success. The international recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art has generated not just prestige but obligations: provenance requests, touring agreements, repatriation discussions, media management, and the cultural and legal work of ensuring that communities retain control of how their culture is presented and what is shared.

Within communities, the social conditions of remote life add layers that are rarely acknowledged in funding models. Coordinators and arts workers navigate sorry business and the obligations it places on artists and staff, seasonal closures for ceremony, the responsibilities of kinship, ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma, and the chronic housing and infrastructure pressures that affect everyone in their community. Centres are not separate from these conditions – they exist within them, and their staff and artists absorb the weight of them while trying to run a professional cultural institution. The sector's funding model was not designed for this operating context, and has not been adjusted to reflect it.

Workforce Crisis

Attracting and retaining suitable candidates for centre manager and coordinator positions in remote communities is a challenge. Salaries are lower than equivalent roles in other remote-sector organisations, and the workload has expanded far beyond what is resourced. Remote living is demanding, housing is often inadequate and professional development pathways are limited. Burnout is widespread.

This, in turn, leads to reduced artist engagement, creates challenges in engaging younger artists, and impacts the retention of local Aboriginal arts workers who benefit from consistent, on-the-job training and mentoring. Aboriginal arts workers are underemployed. Genuine career pathways, competitive salaries and paid senior leadership positions remain elusive despite decades of community advocacy. Their skill development in taking on art and culture centre roles is vital for centre sustainability, but is not achievable with the demands on and, in some communities, high turnover of centre managers.

ANKA's Arts Worker Extension Program (AWEP) demonstrates what is possible when pathways are properly supported. Since 2010/11, ANKA has provided tailored, supported professional development to a small group of Aboriginal arts workers employed in remote community art and culture centres annually. The AWEP program has included interstate internships and higher education access and reaches 100 graduates of the Foundation Program in 2026. To date, 19 graduates of the AWEP Pathways program have gained Postgraduate university qualifications, and pathways to Masters study are underway. The program is proof of concept: Aboriginal arts workers can and do build leadership careers in the sector when the appropriate infrastructure exists to support them. This depends on centres that are stable enough to sustain it.

Infrastructure and Climate Change

Art and culture centre buildings are often old and repurposed, with high maintenance needs. Staff housing is in chronic shortage. Art and culture centre-based keeping places and museums that hold irreplaceable cultural objects and digital records urgently need investment. Insurance costs are rising steeply, and in some cases, coverage is being refused entirely.

Remote Indigenous communities are among the most climate-exposed in Australia, and climate adaptation has not been addressed in current IVAIS funding arrangements.[34] Many art and culture centre buildings are unsafe, inadequate or deteriorating and cyclones, flooding, extreme heat, and fire are increasingly accelerating these pressures. The communities bearing this weight are among Australia's most geographically isolated and economically marginalised, yet they contribute to, and are celebrated for achieving, national and international cultural goals at the highest

level. The cultural heritage these centres hold also cannot be protected without resilient and adaptive infrastructure.

This tipping point is the context for which ANKA puts forward the following recommendations for the new National Cultural Policy. Every centre that would be forced to close from these continued pressures would take with it not just an arts business, but the only employer and the essential cultural and social support system many remote communities rely on art and culture centres for. The cost of rebuilding what is lost will far exceed the cost of sustaining it.

It is also critical to bring attention to the fact that if the government allows Aboriginal art and culture centres to fail, the Indigenous art market does not disappear; it moves to operators outside community control.

There is an immediate need to stabilise the sector before what has been built over 50 years, and what has existed for more than 65,000 years before that, is lost. Cultural loss cannot be recovered with funding. We are asking you to invest in Aboriginal-led solutions to the challenges we are currently facing, before it is too late.

‘You don't get strong art without strong culture. We would like the government and the funding bodies to understand that stronger and ongoing support, for all this together, is needed now and into the future.’

ANKA Kimberley Artists Statement, 2017

PART E

The Four Recommendations

The four recommendations that follow form a single, coherent response to the current state of the sector. Recommendation 1 is urgent to stabilise centres enough to buy the time needed for the structural work that Recommendations 2, 3 and 4 set out. Those recommendations focus on transformation through co-designed planning that sets the sector up to operate sustainably for the next fifty years.

1	**Immediate stabilisation: increase in IVAIS funding restoring real per-centre funding to at least 2016–17 levels**
2	**A co-designed Sector Map**
3	**A co-designed Sector Strengthening Plan**
4	**A dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy**

Recommendation 1

Immediate stabilisation: increase in IVAIS funding restoring real per-centre funding to at least 2016-17 levels

ANKA calls on government to address this tipping point and increase IVAIS funding immediately, restoring real per-centre funding to at least 2016–17 levels. Unpublished data provided by the Department of Infrastructure, Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts shows that per centre operational funding through IVAIS has declined in real terms by more than 25% over the last ten years.[35]

Based on urban CPI, this requires approximately $7.8 million in additional annual funding across the sector as a conservative floor. Remote-specific costs consistently outpace national CPI; the true requirement is larger and must be calculated against a remote-specific cost index. A review process should accompany any immediate increase, with a remote CPI-indexed review within 12 months and consideration of the needs of the peak support organisations.

Restoring this funding secures jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers, preserves income pathways for artists, and protects an art market worth more than $250 million. For government, this investment protects decades of prior public expenditure and the cultural infrastructure on which Australia's international artistic reputation rests.

Recommendation 2
A co-designed Sector Map

A co-designed Sector Map will convert decades of undocumented cross-sector contributions into measurable, reportable outcomes that align with the Australian Government's *Measuring What Matters*[36] framework and Closing the Gap targets.[37] This is not additional work the sector must do, but is documentation of work already being done.

Once mapped, through a co-design process with the Alliance, government must address funding these centres appropriately for their contributions across portfolios – such as education, employment, health, national heritage and collections, caring for Country, the ceremonial economy, language, Elder care, disability, youth and cultural tourism - rather than expecting a single arts program to subsidise all of it.

A Sector Map gives government the evidence base to fund art and culture centres as the complex, multi-function institutions they already are. This has been recognised in Revive through the following statement and needs to be followed by action and investment:

> **'Programs supported and run by First Nations peoples enhance connections to culture and Country, inherently improving Closing the Gap outcomes for First Nations peoples in education, employment, justice, health and wellbeing, and languages.'**
>
> **Revive: National Cultural Policy, 2023, p.22**

For further detail on how the work of remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture centres aligns with Closing the Gap priorities, see Appendix 2: Closing the Gap Outcomes Alignment

Recommendation 3

A co-designed Sector Strengthening Plan for remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture centres and their peak bodies

Government can protect its investment in the sector by committing to co-designing a Sector Strengthening Plan with the Alliance. The plan should build on existing sector strengths, use the Sector Map as its blueprint, and establish the strategic building blocks for long-term sector sustainability. Priority elements of the plan should include:

- Acknowledging and funding Indigenous art and culture centres as the primary institutions for cultural maintenance in remote communities, not only as enterprises for making and selling art
- Indigenous arts and culture centre workforce development pathways (to sit alongside the *Revive* action of developing a First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy)
- Remuneration for next-generation teaching and learning
- A national infrastructure fund with climate adaptation
- Two-way governance support
- Centre-based community collections, keeping places and museums
- Wellbeing: connection to culture and Country
- Recognition and support for the central role of homelands, homelands studios and the ceremonial economy in a healthy art and culture sector
- The business and money story: Support business and financial capability for artists and arts workers; and explore philanthropic & endowment models

The Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit – a strengths-based, Aboriginal-led consultation with approximately 100 participants from remote and very remote communities – has already produced a consultation evidence base this policy needs: a seven-theme framework for sector strengthening and a Call for Urgent Action (see **Appendix 1**). Desart's parallel *Strong Business, Strong Culture* conference drew a further 100 Central Australian participants with a parallel approach. Together with consultations by other Alliance peaks, this is exactly the community-led evidence base that Pillar One of Revive calls for.[38]

See Appendix 3: Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit Report

Recommendation 4
A dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy

A dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy gives genuine substance to First Nations First. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it delivers the recognition and funding that cultural maintenance – ceremony, language, intergenerational knowledge transfer – has never received from any source. For Australia, it creates the cross-portfolio accountability needed to make progress on Closing the Gap Outcome Area 16, positions Australia to meet its UNDRIP obligations on cultural rights, and strengthens the cultural diplomacy foundation on which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art's international standing rests.

ANKA calls on government to develop a dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy, to be co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies, including the Alliance, to sit alongside and inform the next National Cultural Policy. The policy would:

- Establish the policy framework that recognises cultural maintenance as a core function of art and culture centres alongside art production and sale
- Create the cross-portfolio framework that ICIP legislation and other cultural protections require
- Develop the measurement framework needed to give genuine substance to Closing the Gap Outcome Area 16
- Provide the policy foundation to support coordinated cross-sector funding for art and culture centres across portfolios
- Give culture a clear policy home and definition, so it no longer falls through the gaps between portfolios and funding streams
- Position Australia to meet its obligations on cultural rights under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

See Appendix 4: The Case for a National Indigenous Cultural Policy

PART F

Alignment with the Policy Framework

Whilst the recommendations in ANKA's submission fall firmly under *Pillar One: First Nations First*, the Indigenous visual arts sector's contribution, and return on government investment, is seen across all five pillars of the new National Cultural Policy, as demonstrated in the table below:

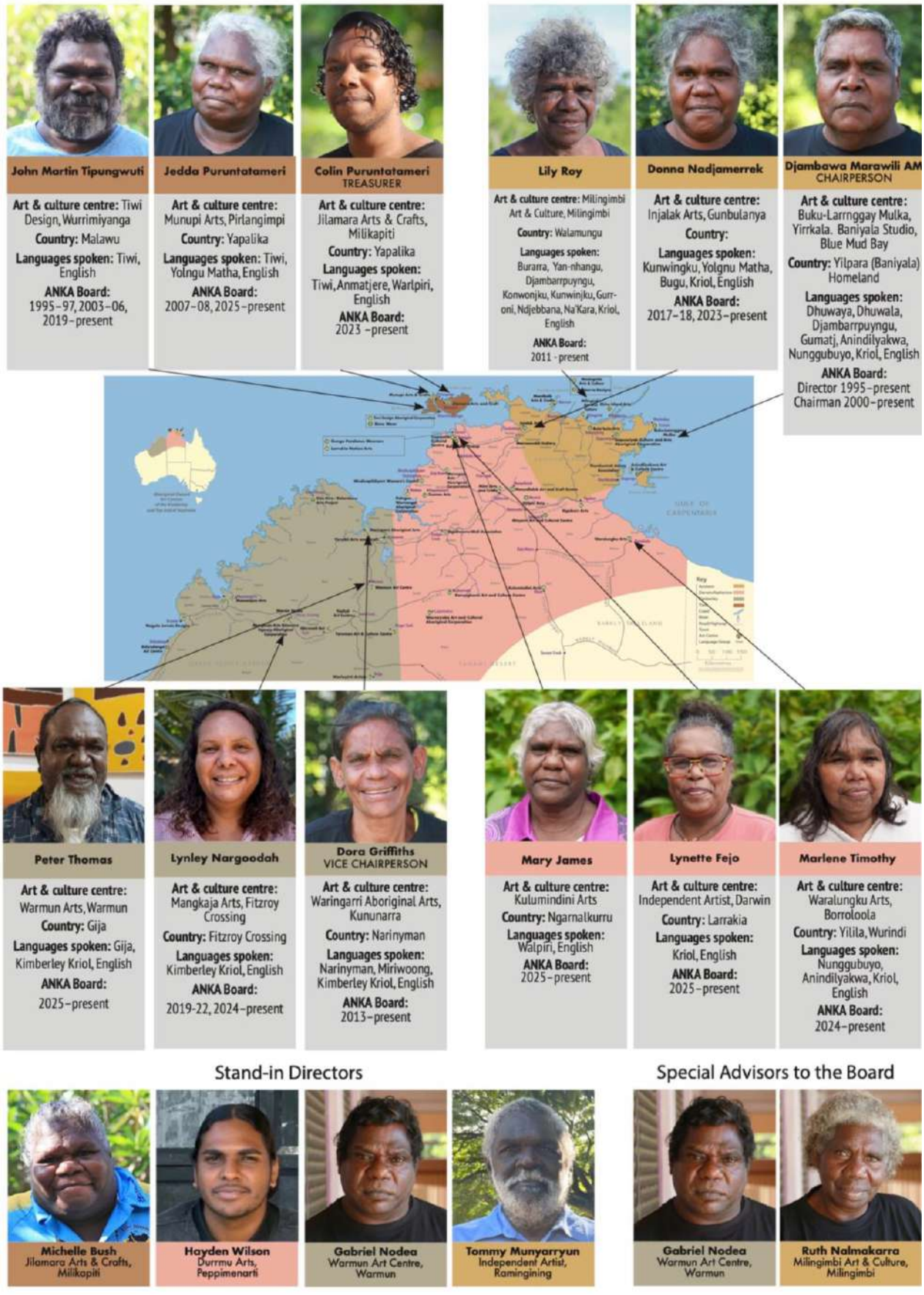
Revive Pillar	Sector contribution and strategic alignment	ANKA Rec.
1 — First Nations First *Recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture*	- The remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture sector, with 100 centres and 5 peak bodies, has a 50-year track record of self-determined leadership. - A co-designed Sector Map (Rec 2) will make the full contribution of art and culture centres as - hybrid organisations combining commerce and culture - visible across all-of-government for the first time. - A co-designed Sector Strengthening Plan (Rec 3) will establish the strategic building blocks to keep the sector strong for the next 50 years. - A dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy (Rec 4) would give First Nations culture the policy home it has never had.	2, 3, 4
2 — A Place for Every Story *Reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture*	- Remote Indigenous art and culture centres hold the most diverse and irreplaceable cultural ecosystem in Australia – stories, language, ceremony, and visual art kept alive across generations. - Community-controlled keeping places, museums, and archives (Rec 3) protect this on Country, where it belongs. - Intergenerational teaching programs (Rec 3) create paid pathways for Elder mentoring and arts worker training, keeping culture living rather than archived.	3
3 — Centrality of the Artist *Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators*	- Remote artists are among Australia's most significant but are also our least supported. Mean income from creative work is only $3,200 per year and senior knowledge holders teach the next generation without pay. - Increasing IVAIS operational funding (Rec 1) addresses chronic underfunding that causes burnout and workforce shortages. - Endowment and philanthropic models (Rec 3) will reduce dependence on fluctuating sales cycles.	1, 3
4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure *Providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage*	- Remote Indigenous art and culture centres are climate-threatened and chronically underfunded. - A dedicated national infrastructure fund (Rec 3) should invest in fit-for-purpose buildings, climate-resilient design, staff housing, vehicles, and digital systems. - Workforce pathways (Rec 3) will build career progression and leadership for Indigenous arts workers. - Community collections and keeping places (Rec 3) are nationally significant heritage infrastructure that require the same sustained investment as major cultural institutions.	1, 3
5 — Engaging the Audience *Making sure our stories connect with people at home and abroad*	- The audience is already there. *Madayin* and *Yolŋu Power* drew international critical attention and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural tourism generates $1 billion annually, with 740,000 international visits in 2023. - Remote art and culture centres make this possible and sustained investment in operations and infrastructure (Rec 1, 3) is what keeps the pipeline of world-class work flowing.	1, 3

Reading this submission with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Centre Alliance submission

ANKA supports the **Alliance's Recommendations 1 and 2, calling for formal recognition of the Alliance as an advisory body and ongoing operational funding for it**. Every co-design process called for in this submission depends on an Alliance resourced to participate. The table below outlines further alignment between the two submissions:

ANKA recommendation		Alliance recommendation	
1	Immediate stabilisation: restore IVAIS funding to 2016 per-centre real levels	**3**	Stabilisation: restore core funding to the real per-centre level of ten years ago
2	A co-designed Sector Map	**7**	Sector Mapping (co-designed)
3	A co-designed Sector Strengthening Plan (including infrastructure fund and workforce pathways)	**5** **6** **8**	National Infrastructure Fund; Workforce Development; Co-designed sector plan with a 50-year horizon
4	A dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy	**9**	Supporting Culture: culture as a priority domain with measurement and cross-portfolio accountability (ANKA's Rec 4 provides the policy vehicle to deliver this)

The ANKA Board of Directors
2025-2026



Participants at the Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit in Darwin in November 2024, working together on the Positive Core activity, identifying the common strengths necessary for a strong and sustainable future for remote Aboriginal community-controlled art and culture centres.

Endnotes

[1] Tony Burke, transcript of meeting with ANKA and Desart, Darwin and online, 24 April 2024. Transcript provided to the Minister's office.
[2] Will Stubbs, quoted in Jeremy Eccles, "Award for Art Co-ordinator," blog post, 11 March 2015, accessed 10 November 2024, http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/news/events/australia-council-awards-2015/awards/#rba (URL no longer active).
[3] Productivity Commission, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts and Crafts*, Study Report, (Canberra, December 2022), 2.
[4] Tim Woodhead and Tim Aker, *The Art Economies Value Chain Reports: Synthesis*, CRC-REP Research Report CR004. (Alice Springs: Ninti One Limited, 2014), viii.
[5] Desart Inc (2026), *Financial Snapshot of Art Centres 2004/05–2024/25:* 19,678 artists with recorded activity through art centres in 2024/25 (SAM database).
[6] Austrade, Department of Foregin Affairs and Trade, and Supply Nation, *First Nations Businesses Succeeding Internationally* (August 2024), 19. International visitor data sourced within that report from: Tourism Research Australia, *International Visitor Survey*, 2024.
[7] Ibid., 21.
[8] Arthur Lublow, "Sacred Mysteries In Striking Designs," *The New York Times*, 24 October 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/10/arts/design/aboriginal-art-australia-review.html.
[9] Asia Society, *Maḏayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala,* nd., exhibition page, https://asiasociety.org/new-york/exhibitions/madayin-eight-decades-aboriginal-australian-bark-painting-yirrkala
[10] *The Essential Duchamp*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2019; *Yolngu Power: The Art of Yirrkala*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2025, developed in partnership with Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala. Attendance comparison: Will Stubbs, Coordinator, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, in conversation with ANKA, November 2025.
[11] ANKA, Values Statement, 2007 (updated 2021) (Darwin:ANKA, 2021), https://anka.org.au/assets/About/Who-We-Are/ANKA-Values-Statement-FINAL-2022.pdf.
[12] Jon, C, Altman, "The Indigenous Hybrid Economy: A Realistic Sustainable Option for Remote Communities?" paper presented to the Australian Fabian Society, Melbourne, 26 October 2005, published as Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Topical Issue No. 2/2006, 11.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Office for the Arts / Creative Industries / Visual Arts and Design, *IVAIS 10-year Funding — Further Information*, response to ANKA, 14 May 2025.
[15] The most recent IVAIS operational funding guidelines (closed non-competitive, October 2025) explicitly state under clause 5.4 that grant funds cannot be used for 'activities that are primarily focused on community development or cultural maintenance' (p. 9). The guidelines further clarify that IVAIS provides funding for 'professional visual arts activities that have strong connections with the arts market. It does not fund activities focused on community arts development, indigenous languages or cultural maintenance. This means funding is not available to support cultural centres and keeping places.....' (IVAIS operational funding guidelines, Footnote 5, p. 9).
[16] Culture and cultural transmission are widely understood as primary functions of art and culture centres — by the centres themselves, their artists, their peak bodies and academic researchers. Peak body Desart's tagline is 'Culture First'; ANKA's vision is 'To Keep Art, Culture and Country Strong.' See also ANKA's *Kimberley Artists Statement* (2012/2017). The tension between this understanding and government funding definitions has been documented in academic literature since at least the 1980s, as outlined elsewhere in this submission — see also as examples Stolte (2009) and Schmidt (2022).
[17] Jon, Altman, personal correspondence with ANKA, June 2026.
[18] Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and all Australian Governments, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (July 2020), Priority Reform Five: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures — "Strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are the foundation of community wellbeing and are essential to closing the gap."
[19] David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, *Integrating Art Production and Economic Development in North West NT and the Tiwi Islands: National Survey of Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists*, Research Paper 2/2019 (Department of Economics, Macquarie University, May 2019), 69 (Table 12.7) and vii (Executive Summary.
[20] Djambawa Marawili*, "Support for Cultural Legacy",* ANKA Arts Backbone, August 2018,1
[21] Will Stubbs, Coordinator, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, contribution to Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit, Darwin, November 2024. Unpublished video recording of sessions.
[22] Australian Research Council, "Safekeeping: Effecting Solutions for Risk to Remote Indigenous Heritage," Industry Laureate Fellowships, application for funding commencing 2024, Project ID: IL240100061, First Investigator: Prof Robyn Sloggett, University of Melbourne.
[23] NT WorkSafe..*"Aboriginal Corporation faces WHS charges over rollover incidents." Media release, 9 June 2026*
[24] Office for the Arts / Creative Industries / Visual Arts and Design, *IVAIS 10-year Funding — Further Information*, response to ANKA, 14 May 2025.
[25] According to the data provided to ANKA by Office for the Arts in May 2026, a 52% increase in funded centres (from 64 to 97) outpaced a 49% increase in the IVAIS pool. Average per-centre funding fell in real cash terms before inflation is factored in. Apply urban CPI and the conservative estimate of real per-centre decline is approximately 26%, equal to $80,387 per centre per year, or $7.8 million across the sector annually. Remote-specific costs are steeper, with food and essential items costs running 30–52% above urban prices, basic goods 39% higher, fuel costs currently $4+ per litre in remote NT. Against those costs, the real decline is closer to 35–40% and the sector-wide shortfall closer to $11–12 million per year.

[26] Desart Inc., *Financial Snapshot of Art Centres – 2004/05 - 24/25* (April 2026),3. https://desart.com.au/publication/a-financial-snapshot-of-atsi-art-centres-industry-report-fye-24-25/.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, *Integrating Art Production and Economic Development in North West NT and the Tiwi Islands: National Survey of Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists*, Research Paper 2/2019 (Department of Economics, Macquarie University, May 2019).
[32] CHOICE,*Remote Community Grocery Price Investigation* (2024), https://www.choice.com.au/about-us/media/media-releases/2024/october/groceries-cost-more-than-twice-as-much-in-some-remote-first-nations-communities.
[33] Desart Inc., *Financial Snapshot of Art Centres 2004/05–2024/25* (April 2026). https://desart.com.au/publication/a-financial-snapshot-of-atsi-art-centres-industry-report-fye-24-25/.
[34] Australia's National Climate Risk Assessment (2025) identifies northern Australia as likely to experience 'escalating challenges as its proneness to hazards increases as global temperatures rise' and finds that climate change is likely to have 'disproportionate impacts' on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ways of life, health and wellbeing, as well as on their food and water security and economic livelihoods. Australian Climate Service, *Australia's National Climate Risk Assessment*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2025.
[35] Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, "IVAIS 10-year Funding – Further Information," unpublished data provided to ANKA, 14–15 May 2025.
[36] The Treasury, *Measuring What Matters Statement* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2023).
[37] Productivity Commission, *Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report* (uly 2025). Of 19 national socioeconomic targets under the National Agreement, only 4 are on track. Four are worsening: children developmentally on track across all 5 AEDC domains (Target 4); adult imprisonment (Target 10); children in out-of-home care (Target 12); and suicide rates (Target 14). Remote communities record the worst outcomes across nearly all measures. In the Northern Territory, where the majority of ANKA supported centres operate, only 7 of 15 assessed targets are improving.
[38] The Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit, Darwin, November 2024, was the first in a planned series of sector strengthening events. Desart held a parallel conference with its Central Australian membership in April 2025 (Desart Inc., *Strong Business, Strong Culture,* 2025), developed in the same strengths-based, community-led spirit. Other Alliance peak bodies have undertaken consultations with their own memberships, and ANKA has since conducted further consultations testing and refining the Djalkiri themes (ANKA, *Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit Report,* 2025). See also Appendix 3.

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APPENDIX 1

Call for Urgent Action, Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit, Darwin, November 2024

Signed by ANKA members and supporters from across the sector, and addressed to the Ministers and Shadow Minister for the Arts and Indigenous Australians

ANKA ARNHEM, NORTHERN AND KIMBERLEY ARTISTS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
Working together to keep art, country and culture strong

desart
Culture First.
Supporting Aboriginal Art Centres of Central Australia

Sector Strengthening Summits

for the Remote Indigenous Community-Controlled Art and Culture Sector 2024–25

CALL FOR URGENT ACTION

The Hon Tony Burke
Minister for the Arts
Parliament of Australia

The Hon Paul Fletcher
Shadow Minister for Science and the Arts
Parliament of Australia

Senator The Hon Malarndirri McCarthy
Minister for Indigenous Australians
Parliament of Australia

Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians
Parliament of Australia

We come together, as Aboriginal leaders – both Elders and young people – from across remote and very remote communities and homelands in Northern and Central Australia. We meet to talk about how to put the right things in place, so our art, culture and traditional knowledge is there for the next generations. So, we can look after it and continue to share it with all Australians and the world.

Our cultures, languages, patterns and designs were given to us by our ancestors. It is our responsibility to keep our culture going. Our culture goes back to the beginning of time.

Remote community-controlled Art and Culture Centres help us keep our culture strong.

The Art and Culture Centre movement in remote Aboriginal communities is more than 50 years old. We have built it up ourselves, from nothing, using our inherited cultural knowledge. The movement supports the art now appreciated by people across the world and we use it to care for our ancient cultural knowledge.

Aboriginal community-controlled Art and Culture Centres bring important social, economic and health outcomes to our communities and give meaningful jobs to our young people. They do this while achieving cultural heritage outcomes for the whole world. We need you to work with us to keep our Art and Culture Centres strong for the next 50 years and beyond.

We urgently call on all sides of government to join with us and co-design:

1. A Sector Strengthening Plan for the remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture sector. To ensure sustainability for the next 50 years and beyond.
2. A realistic map of the remote art and culture sector – showing what Art and Culture Centres and their peak bodies do and how they contribute to remote community life and the objectives of different sectors (e.g. health, education, disability, youth, aged-care).
3. These will contribute to a National Indigenous Cultural Policy.

We cannot afford to wait for this important work; we must start now. We need to work together and plan wisely for our future.

We support this call for action:

ANKA ARNHEM, NORTHERN AND KIMBERLEY ARTISTS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Working together to keep art, country and culture strong

desart

Culture First.
Supporting Aboriginal Art Centres of Central Australia

Signed in support of the call for action of Sector Strengthening Summit 1: Djalkari

Darwin, 28 November 2024

Colin Puruntatameri Milikapiti, Jilamara Arts
Jude Emmett - Ngukurr Arts
Syria Guyula - Baniyala
MICHELLE WOODY JILAMARA ARTS Tiwi Islands
Andrew Wanamilil - Bula Bula Arts
Leon Milmurru - Milingimbi Art and Culture
Arthuvina Moreen, Jilamara Arts
Liyawaday Wirrpanda Baniyala
Jedda Puruntatameri Munupi Arts Pirlangimpi
Trevor van Weeren - Gapuwiyak
JOSEPHINE JAMES, BABBARRA WOMEN'S CENTRE
CHRISTINA DAVIDSON, GARRAMILLA, ANKA
Leann Collier - Waringarri Arts
Hannah Raisin - Jilamara Arts, Milikapiti
M Charlie
DORA GRIFFITHS - WARINGARRI Arts Kununurra Kimberley.
Gabrielle Sullivan Indigenous Art Code Ltd.
Hayden Wilson Durrmu Arts
(DHÄLINYBUY) Tommy Munyarryun OAM
Kevin Lucas INDIGIMATTA HOMELAND STUDIO.
Tracey Mulardy - BROOME CIRCLE + BIDYADANGA Art Centre.
Carly Day - Broome CIRCLE AAFH
Dr Djambawa Marawili AM HC.
Amanda Young - DESART
Marlene Kaiñkadoo Waralungku Arts Centre
Honey Abbott, ANKA
Penny Smith - Karungkarni Art and Culture
Alan John Kerinaiua. Tiwi Design BI.
Mervyn Street MANGKAJA ARTS FITZROY CROSSING
CDU
Michael Christie CDU
Lesley Phillips - Injalak Arts
Lindy Nagarra Mangkaja Arts Fitzroy Crossing
Rosita Holmes - Milingimbi
Sherri Jones Arts Code KU ARTS
Cathy Ward WARINGARRI ARTS KUNUNURRA WA
Anjelica Gordon Girrwarli Arts
Melissa Johanson - KU ARTS
David Roy milingimbi ART centre
Angela Kelly Layamanu Warnakaya Art
Samantha Lillie - ANKA
Mary N James
Peggy Griffiths Waringarri Arts Kimberley
Mandi King Milingimbi art & culture
MEL STORE BULA'BULA ARTS RAMINGINING
John Martin Tipungwuti TIWI DESIGN.
Tiwi Design Bathurst Is
Kulimdini Arts Elliott
Lynette Fejo Garramilla Larrakia Artists
Michelle P. Baron Jilamara Arts MBrd.
KELLY BUTLER, Maningrida Arts & Culture.
WILL STUBBS BUKU-LARRNGGAY MULKA CENTRE
INGRID JOHANSON WALTER ROGERS NGUKURR ARTS
Agnes Armstrong Waringarri Arts Kimberley
Christopher Hardwick
Kira Kiro Artists - Kalumburu W.A.
Janeie Munungurr - Numbulwar - Numbulwar Numburindi Arts
M. Charlie
Warmun Art
E Bara
S. Dumulla
Anindilyakwa Arts
ROSE WILFRED Numbulwar Numburdi Arts
Bitharr Maymuru - Buku Larrŋgay mulka Centre
Allison Cooper Maningrida Art & Culture
Peter T WARMUN ART
Stanley Taylor Mowanjum W.A
Anulgit - Warmun Art
WARINGARRI ARTS
Lloyd Nulgit - Mowanjum ARTS WA
JOHN ANDERSON injalak Arts
PRISCILLA Badari ingalak Arts
Nathan Thomas - Warringarri Arts.
Narelle Morris KarungKarni Arts
Emerson Rodisich - Barkly Regional Arts.

Sector Strengthening Summit 1 - Participants

on Larrakia Country, 27 - 28 November 2024

Summit 1: Djalkiri, hosted by ANKA, brought together approximately 100 leaders representing 29 Aboriginal art and culture centres and over 50 language and cultural groups across ANKA's regions of northern Australia.

Art and Culture Centres Represented

Anindilyakwa Arts, Groote Eylandt, Arnhem Land, NT (population approx. 2800)
Artists Away from Home Program - Broome Circle, Broome, Kimberley, WA (population approx. 14,600)
Babbarra Women's Centre, Maningrida, Arnhem Land, NT (population approx. 2500)
Baniyala Homeland Art Studio, Baniyala, Arnhem Land, NT (population approx. 150)
Bidyadanga Art Centre, Bidjydanga, Kimberley, WA (population approx. 850)
Buku-Larrnggay Mulka, Yirrkala, Arnhem Land, NT (population approx. 700)
Bula'bula Arts, Ramingining, Arnhem Land, NT (population approx. 800)
Durrmu Arts, Peppimenarti, Darwin/Katherine, NT (population approx. 200)
Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts, Gapuwiyak, Arnhem Land, NT (population approx. 650)
Goŋ Wanhurr, Dhalinybuy Homeland, Arnhem Land, NT (population approx. 90)
Injalak Arts, Gunbalanya, Arnhem Land, NT (population approx. 1200)
Jilamara Arts & Crafts, Milikapiti, Tiwi Islands, NT (population approx. 500)
Karungkarni Art & Culture Centre, Kalkarindji, Darwin/Katherine, NT (population approx. 400)
Kira Kiro Arts, Kalumbaru, Kimberley, WA (population approx. 470)
Kulumindini Arts, Elliott, Darwin/Katherine, NT (population approx. 280)
Larrakia Nation Arts, Darwin, Darwin/Katherine, NT (population approx. Indigenous 13,154)
Mangkaja Arts, Fitzroy Crossing, Kimberley, WA (population approx. 1000)
Maningrida Arts & Culture, Maningrida, Arnhem Land, NT (population approx. 2500)
Milingimbi Art & Culture, Milingimbi, Arnhem Land, NT (population approx. 1300)
Mowanjum Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre, Derby, Kimberley, WA (population approx. 3230)
Munupi Arts and Crafts Association, Pirlangimpi, Tiwi Islands, NT (population approx. 420)
Ngukurr Arts, Ngukurr, Darwin/Katherine, NT (population approx. 1200)
Nagula Jarndu Designs, Broome, Kimberley, WA (population approx. 14,600)
Numbulwar Numburindi Arts, Numbulwar, Darwin/Katherine, NT (population approx. 680)
Waralungku Arts, Borroloola, Darwin/Katherine, NT (population approx. 880)
Warmun Arts Centre, Warmun, Kimberley, WA (population approx. 450)
Warnayaka Art, Lajamanu, Darwin/Katherine, NT (population approx. 610)
Waringarri Arts, Kununurra, Kimberley, WA (population approx. 5300)
Tiwi Designs, Wurrumiyanga, Tiwi Islands, NT (population approx. 1500)

Art and Culture Peak Body Attendees

Aboriginal Art Centre Hub Western Australia (ACHWA), WA
Ananguku Arts and Culture Corporation (Ku Arts), SA
Arnhem Northern and Kimberley Artists, Aboriginal Corporation (ANKA), NT
Desart, NT
Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA), QLD

Industry and Funding Partner Attendees

Indigenous Art Code Ltd, National
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, NT
Museum of the Sea, NSW
Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University, NT
Office for the Arts, Australian Government, ACT
University of Melbourne, VIC

Participants in Sector Strengthening Summit 1 - Djalkari on Larrakia Country in Darwin, 28 November 2024

ANKA Chairperson Dr Djambawa Marawili AM and Desart CEO Philip Watkins, Co-Chair of Creative Australia's First Nations Board, with the call to government for a Sector Strengthening Plan signed by participants of Sector Strengthening Summit 1 - Djalkari on Larrakia Country in Darwin, 28 November 2024

APPENDIX 2
Closing the Gap Outcomes Alignment

ARNHEM, NORTHERN AND KIMBERLEY ARTISTS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (ANKA)

Working together to keep art, country and culture strong

Closing the Gap Outcomes Alignment

Remote Indigenous Community-Controlled Art and Culture Centres

May 2026

Key: **PRIMARY** = direct and specific delivery; **STRONG** = significant contribution; **CONTRIBUTING** = consistent supportive contribution

Closing the Gap Outcome	How ANKA-Supported Art and Culture Centres Contribute	Alignment
CULTURAL FOUNDATION -- Holistic Contribution Across All Outcomes		
The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Part 5) acknowledges the foundational principle that strong cultures are fundamental to improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Art and culture centres are the primary community-controlled institutions in remote and regional Australia dedicated to strengthening culture. They are places for intergenerational sharing of Indigenous knowledge, language and Law; they host community archives and cultural collections; and they are widely recognised safe and trusted community places that support wellbeing. This foundational principle underpins every specific contribution listed below.		
STRONGEST DIRECT CONTRIBUTIONS -- Country, Culture and Language		
Outcome 15 Distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical & economic relationship with land and waters **Targets 15a/b: 15% increase in land/sea under Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal rights or interests by 2030**	- Art made from Country: northern Australian art is inseparable from Country -- painted with ochre on bark, woven from pandanus, dyed with native plants. Making art IS practising connection to Country. - Art and culture centres actively support artists' access to Country as a source of knowledge, inspiration and practice -- a direct contribution to the cultural and economic dimensions of Targets 15a and 15b. - Cultural projects delivered by art and culture centres document, transmit and reinforce people's spiritual and physical relationships with specific land and waters, and by extension ceremony. - Artworks created through art and culture centres have provided decisive evidence in successful land and sea rights cases in the High Court of Australia. For example: - The Saltwater Collection (1997) -- 80 bark paintings of Sea Country by 47 Yolngu artists, led by current ANKA chairperson Chairman Dr Djambawa Marawili AM - was central evidence in the Blue Mud Bay sea rights victory (2008). (*Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala*)	**PRIMARY**

Closing the Gap Outcome	How ANKA-Supported Art and Culture Centres Contribute	Alignment
	- The Ngurrara Canvas II (1997) – painted by 43 artist claimants at the first Ngurrara Native Title hearing led by Mr Ngarrlja Tommy May Native Title victory (2009) (*Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency, Fitzroy Crossing: Mr May was ANKA Chair).* - Traditional ecological knowledge embedded in cultural practice is maintained through art and culture centre programs, supporting land management practices that advance Aboriginal land rights and interests. - Art and culture centres collaborate with ranger programs and host caring-for-country activities that directly contribute to the land and sea targets.	
Outcome 16 Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing **Target 16: Sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken by 2031**	- Art and cultural activity intrinsically incorporates language -- songs, performance of traditional dance, naming of Country and storytelling are embedded in the regular rhythm of art and culture centres. - Multiple ANKA-supported art and culture centres host formal language programs. For example, Warmun Art Centre (Warmun, WA) hosts weekly Elder-led Gija language classes. Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre (Yirrkala, NT) maintains an extensive Yolngu language archive. Maningrida Arts and Culture hosts active language activities. These directly contribute to Target 16 measures. - Intergenerational exchange is built into the art and culture centre model - Elders and young people work side by side, ensuring language and cultural knowledge passes to the next generation. - Art and culture centres host community archives, recordings and cultural collections that preserve languages for future generations. - Art and culture centres are a direct delivery mechanism for Target 16 alternative indicators: languages spoken in community settings and organisations, and languages taught and transmitted in Aboriginal community settings.	**PRIMARY**
STRONG CONTRIBUTIONS -- Education, Employment and Economic Outcomes		
Outcome 6 Further education pathways **Target 6: 70% of 25-34 year olds with Certificate III or above by 2031**	- ANKA's Arts Worker Extension Program (AWEP) founded in 2010-11 provides structured vocational pathways for Aboriginal arts workers, building skills that lead to accredited qualifications. To date this has included 19 remote art and culture workers receiving a postgraduate certificate in Cross Cultural Heritage and Conservation from the University of Melbourne. - Art and culture centres provide mentored, on-Country learning environments that bridge to further education for people for whom mainstream institutions are inaccessible.	**STRONG**

Closing the Gap Outcome	How ANKA-Supported Art and Culture Centres Contribute	Alignment
	- Cultural and art practice skills are increasingly recognised in accredited pathways; art and culture centres provide the practical foundation for these qualifications.	
Outcome 7 Youth engaged in employment or education **Target 7: 67% of 15-24 year olds in employment, education or training by 2031**	- Art and culture centres are among the most significant employers of young Aboriginal people in remote communities, offering culturally safe entry-level employment. - ANKA's Strong Business Program and AWEP aim to articulate structured pathways from casual to part-time to full-time employment in arts administration, cultural and collection management and conservation and curatorial practice. - Art and culture centre programs engage youth in meaningful cultural and creative activities that serve simultaneously as education and employment preparation. - Throsby's national survey (2019) documents that over 44% of remote artists would like to spend more time on their art practice -- evidence of unmet demand for supported, culturally grounded employment / income generation pathways.	**STRONG**
Outcome 8 Strong economic participation and development **Target 8: 62% of 25-64 year olds employed by 2031**	- Art and culture centres generate income for artists and communities through art sales, cultural tourism and related enterprises — and are often a principal employer of local people in remote and very remote communities where other employment is scarce. - Art and culture centres provide strengths-based employment grounded in the cultural knowledge young people bring from family and Country. - In addition to the more than 500 First Nations arts worker roles funded nationally through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) program, many art and culture centres across northern Australia are now also receiving new Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) positions — including roles caring for community cultural collections. - Art and culture centres model and develop Aboriginal-led entrepreneurship, supporting artists to understand business, markets and income generation. - Austrade/DFAT data (2024) confirms First Nations arts and heritage businesses — of which community-controlled art and culture centres are the community foundation — employ over 7,000 workers nationally with nearly $1 billion in total turnover.	- **STRONG**
CONTRIBUTING -- Health, Wellbeing and Social Outcomes		
Outcomes 1 & 14 Long and healthy lives; High	- Engagement in art and cultural activities promotes mental health, emotional regulation	**CONTRIBUTING**

Closing the Gap Outcome	How ANKA-Supported Art and Culture Centres Contribute	Alignment
social and emotional wellbeing **Target 14: Sustained reduction in suicide rates towards zero**	and social connection -- recognised protective factors for wellbeing and suicide prevention. - Art and culture centres provide safe, purposeful community spaces that reduce isolation and build social cohesion including intergenerational support and knowledge sharing. - Studies of Elders' roles in art and culture centres have identified practices as benchmark standards for culturally safe aged care nationally. - Strong cultural identity -- fostered through art and culture centre practice - is a documented social and emotional wellbeing determinant.	
Outcomes 3-5 Children engaged in education and thriving in early years	- Art and culture centres provide culturally appropriate programs that integrate traditional knowledge with school-age learning. - Family and community engagement through art and culture centres supports child development and school readiness. - Partnerships with schools embed cultural education in learning curricula.	**CONTRIBUTING**
Outcomes 10-13 Safety, justice and family wellbeing	- Cultural engagement and strong community identity are protective factors against criminal justice system involvement. - Art and culture centres provide safe spaces for cultural expression and community gathering, contributing to safer family environments. - Youth engagement in art and cultural programs provides positive pathways that reduce risk of justice system involvement.	**CONTRIBUTING**
Outcome 17 Access to information and services for informed decision-making	- ANKA and supported art and culture centres provide information and advocacy to help community members make informed decisions about cultural, economic and social matters. - The art and culture centre model practically supports self-determination for Aboriginal art and culture workers -- a direct expression of Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement: Building the Community-Controlled Sector.	**CONTRIBUTING**

APPENDIX 3
Djalkiri Sector Strengthening Summit Report

ANKA
ARNHEM, NORTHERN AND KIMBERLEY ARTISTS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
Working together to keep art, country and culture strong

Djalkiri

SECTOR STRENGTHENING SUMMIT FOR THE REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED ART AND CULTURE SECTOR

REPORT | APRIL 2025

SUMMIT HELD AT THE VISITOR AND EVENT CENTRE
GEORGE BROWN DARWIN BOTANIC GARDENS
27–28 NOVEMBER 2024

ANKA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

The ANKA board of directors and staff pay their respects to them and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists (ANKA) Aboriginal Corporation

ANKA is a not-for-profit Aboriginal corporation governed by an elected all-Aboriginal board of directors. It is the peak support and advocacy body for Aboriginal artists and Aboriginal community-controlled art and culture centres spread across over one million square kilometres of country in the top end of the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

ANKA represents almost 50 remote Aboriginal-owned art and culture centres and more than 6,000 artists. Many ANKA members are internationally acclaimed artists, arts professionals and important community leaders. ANKA serves four regions: the Kimberley, Arnhem Land, the Tiwi Islands and Darwin–Katherine.

Working together

In April 2024, the Desart and ANKA boards of directors met in Darwin and agreed on the principles of a memorandum of understanding to support the two peak bodies working together on advocacy for the sector. The Djalkiri summit was planned and codesigned by ANKA and Desart as the first in a series of summits to advance the case for a Sector Strengthening Plan for the remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture sector.

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A map of the remote Aboriginal art and culture sector ecology **P 4**

An Appreciative Inquiry approach **P 5**

Vision and design: ideas for sector growth and development **P 6**

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Attendance **P 11**

ANKA Chairperson Dr Djambawa Marawili AM, ANKA Director Colin Puruntatameri, Cathy Ward

The Djalkiri summit

On 27 and 28 November 2024, Aboriginal artists and arts workers together with art and culture centre coordinators from remote communities across Australia's north met in Darwin for the Djalkiri summit.

> Art and culture centres are our keeping places for culture and art

The summit was organised in response to concerns about the current sustainability of the remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled art and culture sector. It was the first in what is envisaged as a series of consultations organised by the peak bodies representing the sector.

Djalkiri is a Yolŋu word meaning footsteps/footprints of the ancestors. It is used to express the idea of the foundations of culture and the concept of looking to the past to see the path to the future.

> They celebrate our Country and our storylines. For our people and for the world

The summit was an opportunity for the ANKA membership and key stakeholders to come together to reimagine a strong future and think through what is needed to get there. The central goal of the summit was to identify key directions, themes and building blocks to inform a Sector Strengthening Plan.

> A sustainable future for art and culture

At the conclusion of the Djalkiri summit, participants signed an urgent call for action, addressed to both sides of politics, requesting support for a Sector Strengthening Plan to be codesigned with government in alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Introduction

In response to growing concerns about the sustainability of the remote Aboriginal art and culture sector, the boards of directors of ANKA and Desart – Australia's two longest-standing art and culture peak bodies, together representing 70% of art and culture centres nationally – initiated a focused advocacy agenda in 2023.

They have since been joined by peak bodies Aboriginal Art Centre Hub of Western Australia (AACHWA), Aṉanguku Arts and Cultural Aboriginal Corporation (Ku Arts) and the Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA), advocating for sector-wide change.

Despite decades of committed work, persistent structural challenges remain unresolved. These include the underemployment of Aboriginal arts workers; limited local training and career development opportunities; insecure or inadequate facilities; staff recruitment difficulties; language and cross-cultural communication barriers; and lack of recognition or remuneration for the cultural foundations that sustain the work. These issues cannot be solved through isolated project funding or the goodwill of individual managers alone. The cumulative strain has reached a critical tipping point.

ANKA Vice-chairperson Dora Griffiths

As art historian Terry Smith wrote in 2011, 'Aboriginal art is the only art produced in Australia that has a substantial presence in the world's contemporary art circuits'. While Aboriginal artists continue to gain global recognition, the remote art and culture centres that underpin this international success remain under-resourced and fragile. Without a sustainable foundation, both the livelihoods of artists and Australia's global cultural reputation are at risk.

Former ANKA director Walter Rogers (left)

Art and culture centres are often understood – and funded – primarily as places for making and selling artworks. Yet this commercial role represents only a small part of their remit. These centres are vital cultural institutions: they are archives, language hubs, schools, safe spaces and sites of intergenerational learning and healing. They foster cultural transmission, community wellbeing and self-determination. They also provide platforms that connect remote Aboriginal communities with national and international audiences.

To ensure the sector's future, funding frameworks must recognise and resource the full breadth and depth of what these centres do. A sustainable future for Aboriginal art and culture in Australia depends on it.

Mervyn Street, Arthurina Moreen and Rebekah Raymond

Summit objectives

1. Identify key directions, themes and building blocks to inform a Sector Strengthening Plan for the remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture sector codesigned with the Australian Government
2. Map what happens at art and culture centres when they are at their best
3. Track the contributions made by art and culture centres across other sectors and to community wellbeing
4. Create an image of what a sustainable future for art and culture centres looks like
5. Build a compelling case for an appropriately resourced sector

Key advocacy objectives

1. A Sector Strengthening Plan for the remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture sector codesigned with government
2. A realistic mapping of the sector ecology – including consideration of contributions to other sectors
3. A national Indigenous cultural policy (being called for by various sectors)

A map of the remote Aboriginal art and culture sector ecology

Map collectively developed by ANKA members at Regional General Meetings in 2023–24

An Appreciative Inquiry approach

> The Djalkiri summit was run on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strengths-based approach designed to discover what 'gives life to a complex system when it is at its most effective, alive, and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms' (David Cooperrider, 1986).

The AI method seeks to listen to and learn from the lived experience of participants from all levels within a system, organisation or sector, to value their knowledge and from it generate energy for innovation.

It focuses on positive change rather than problems to solve. In the discovery phase it seeks to identify what works well within an organisation, community or sector. Building on that, it invites participants to create a powerful, positive collective vision of the future. In the design phase, the group then workshops how to achieve that vision.

Trevor van Weeren (left) and ANKA Stand-in Director Peter Thomas (right) with group members

The three stages of the Djalkiri summit Appreciative Inquiry

Discovery – What makes us strong now and in the past? What are our core strengths?

Vision – What is our vision for the future?

Design – What do we need to do to achieve our vision?

An AI summit encourages participants to share their stories, imagine a desired future and explore ways to work together to achieve it.

AI was selected as a vehicle that could lift up the voices of ANKA's membership. An AI summit is not a conference, but rather a large group conversation guided by facilitators. It is made up of a series of smaller paired conversations and group discussions which are reported back to the main group; sometimes these are supported by activities such as drawing, collage and model-making.

At the Djalkiri summit, key areas of activity identified during the vision phase as vital to the future of art and culture centres became the thematic focus for the design phase, where participants collaboratively generated new ideas.

Vision and design: ideas for sector growth and development

1. Theme: Next-generation teaching and learning

Sector strength: Intergenerational knowledge-sharing is embedded in community life

Opportunity for growth: Establishing a 'bush university of cultural knowledge' – a place-based model for transmitting knowledge to future generations

> How to support a multi-generational art renaissance and assure its continuity?

- Recognising how cultural knowledge is passed between generations
- Supporting structured, intergenerational mentoring and teaching roles for Elders and senior artists, as in mainstream art schools
- Engaging cultural advisors from the same communities the students are drawn from, to support them in their learning
- Valuing senior artists and cultural leaders as educators and paying them fairly for their work
- Creating dedicated spaces for learning and gathering, such as a bough shed
- Integrating traditional knowledge systems with contemporary education models
- Offering cultural education for Balanda/Napagi coming to work in communities
- Helping Yolŋu understand how Balanda think, so they can confidently teach Yolŋu knowledge

2. Theme: Governance

Sector strength: Deep understanding and application of traditional governance systems

Opportunity for growth: Building bridges between traditional governance and the requirements of corporate governance

> Politics between the clans and with the traditional owners can be complicated

- Developing governance models that respect traditional authority while meeting modern legal and funding requirements
- Acknowledging that art and culture centre governance operates within Balanda systems, not traditional ones
- Recognising complexities of existing clan-based governance systems
- Providing place-based governance training tailored to remote communities and their art and culture centres
- Funding practical support for managers to organise meetings – including help with paperwork and tasks like picking up directors
- Paying fair sitting fees that value board directors' time and cultural knowledge
- Supporting community-led approaches to achieving quorum and encouraging active participation by board directors

3. Theme: Job pathways

Sector strength: Indigenous arts workers bring long-term commitment, cultural authority and deep community knowledge, providing continuity, trust and leadership as others come and go

Opportunity for growth: Supporting transitions into management and leadership roles through mentoring and job-sharing initiatives

> Ongoing investment is essential to create new positions – including shared leadership and mentoring roles – so arts workers can grow into senior positions

- Planning and supporting long-term career development
- Creating roles that grow and recognise cultural strengths
- Expanding opportunities for trusted leadership roles
- Providing housing, equipment and time for development
- Funding co-leadership and two-way mentoring with managers
- Embedding business, governance and finance training into daily work
- Aligning with peak body and industry training to grow sector skills
- Establishing a new IVAIS stream for centre leadership pathways and national growth

4. Theme: Infrastructure and climate change

Sector strength: Art and culture centres reflect the unique environments and cultural values of their communities, acting as places of both traditional knowledge and contemporary creativity

Opportunity for growth: Empowering the next generation to lead the design of culturally grounded, climate-resilient infrastructure

> Meanwhile, the waves of the ocean are lapping at the older structures, including the original art and culture centre, now a dilapidated shed for the canoes

- Designing buildings that respond to local climate, Country and cultural protocols
- Building resilient structures using sustainable design principles to withstand increased flooding, cyclones, fire and high temperatures
- Creating culturally appropriate and accessible multipurpose spaces that support intergenerational making, meeting and learning
- Ensuring separate spaces for gender-specific and culturally distinct activities
- Including climate-controlled archives, keeping places and digital infrastructure to protect and share cultural knowledge
- Incorporating interpretive spaces to support education and cultural tourism
- Repurposing or retiring unsafe buildings with community leadership and consent

5. Theme: Wellbeing

Sector strength: Art and culture centres maintain vital connections to Country and cultural identity

Opportunity for growth: Expanding on-Country programs that support youth wellbeing and cultural healing

> At my art and culture centre, we take school kids out on Country and it's about health and wellbeing. It's not only for kids, for older people, for healing people to be sober and fit and healthy. When you go out bush, on Country, it's a healing for us. It builds us up, makes us feel good inside – go out bush and hunting and collecting the bush medicine and bush food – Leon Milmurru, Milingimbi Art and Culture

- Taking school-aged children out on Country to strengthen cultural knowledge and pride
- Supporting intergenerational learning and paid mentoring roles for Elders and senior arts workers to foster cultural knowledge, connection and belonging
- Strengthening partnerships with health, education and community services to support holistic wellbeing on Country
- Acknowledging art and culture centres as part of a wider community net of care, identity and resilience
- Supporting Elders and cultural bosses to strengthen physical and mental health through bush activities, cultural practices and ceremony
- Using time on Country – including bush food, medicine and physical activity – to support healing, healthy living and strong identity, including sobriety

6. Theme: Homelands

Sector strength: Artistic practice is rooted in traditional cultural and ceremonial knowledge

Opportunity for growth: Respectfully exploring the relationship between the market-based art economy and cultural and ceremonial production beyond the marketplace

Cultural and ceremonial life on homelands is the deep foundation of the art sold through art and culture centres. These ceremonies – often closed to outside audiences – are essential to place-based cultural transmission, passing knowledge, law, language and artistic authority from one generation to the next.

> Ceremonial activity and practices that keep culture strong and alive are the foundations of the art you see in art and culture centres

Despite this, contemporary cultural and ceremonial practice is largely unsupported, taking place in remote locations with poor infrastructure and no funding. To ensure its continuation, there is an urgent need to:

- recognise the cultural, spiritual and civic importance of cultural and ceremonial leaders as caretakers of cultural and environmental health
- recognise ceremonial practice as core to the cultural and artistic economy
- invest in infrastructure that enables cultural practice to take place on Country
- support artists to balance cultural obligations with art production
- integrate respect for ceremonial and traditional knowledge systems into sector planning and policy
- establish a funded program to recognise and support cultural leaders.

Strengthening recognition between the ceremonial economy and the art economy will support both cultural sustainability and artistic innovation.

7. Theme: The business and money story

Sector strength: Strong collaboration across art and culture centres and through peak body networks

Opportunity for growth: Developing long-term financial strategies under Aboriginal leadership

- Establishing an endowment fund, managed through a peak body, with interest used to support priority projects across art and culture centres and their regions
- Building collective impact by uniting centres to attract and manage shared investment
- Promoting strategic philanthropy that strengthens Aboriginal control over cultural and financial futures
- Supporting money skills in communities through culturally grounded education and partnerships

> What could change if centres had increased financial freedom to realise their own priorities – on their own terms?

ANKA ARNHEM, NORTHERN AND KIMBERLEY ARTISTS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
Working together to keep art, country and culture strong

desart
Culture First.
Supporting Aboriginal Art Centres of Central Australia

Sector Strengthening Summits

for the Remote Indigenous Community-Controlled Art and Culture Sector 2024–25

CALL FOR URGENT ACTION

The Hon Tony Burke
Minister for the Arts
Parliament of Australia

The Hon Paul Fletcher
Shadow Minister for Science and the Arts
Parliament of Australia

Senator The Hon Malarndirri McCarthy
Minister for Indigenous Australians
Parliament of Australia

Jacinta Nampijinpa Price
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians
Parliament of Australia

We come together, as Aboriginal leaders – both Elders and young people – from across remote and very remote communities and homelands in Northern and Central Australia. We meet to talk about how to put the right things in place, so our art, culture and traditional knowledge is there for the next generations. So, we can look after it and continue to share it with all Australians and the world.

Our cultures, languages, patterns and designs were given to us by our ancestors. It is our responsibility to keep our culture going. Our culture goes back to the beginning of time.

Remote community-controlled Art and Culture Centres help us keep our culture strong.

The Art and Culture Centre movement in remote Aboriginal communities is more than 50 years old. We have built it up ourselves, from nothing, using our inherited cultural knowledge. The movement supports the art now appreciated by people across the world and we use it to care for our ancient cultural knowledge.

Aboriginal community-controlled Art and Culture Centres bring important social, economic and health outcomes to our communities and give meaningful jobs to our young people. They do this while achieving cultural heritage outcomes for the whole world. We need you to work with us to keep our Art and Culture Centres strong for the next 50 years and beyond.

We urgently call on all sides of government to join with us and co-design:

1. A Sector Strengthening Plan for the remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture sector. To ensure sustainability for the next 50 years and beyond.
2. A realistic map of the remote art and culture sector – showing what Art and Culture Centres and their peak bodies do and how they contribute to remote community life and the objectives of different sectors (e.g. health, education, disability, youth, aged-care).
3. These will contribute to a National Indigenous Cultural Policy.

We cannot afford to wait for this important work; we must start now. We need to work together and plan wisely for our future.

We support this call for action.

Attendance

Art and culture centres

Anindilyakwa Arts, Groote Eylandt, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 2,800)
Artists Away from Home Program – Broome Circle, Broome, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 14,600)
Bábbarra Women's Centre, Maningrida, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 2,500)
Baniyala Homeland Art Studio, Baniyala, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 150)
Bidyadanga Artists, Bidjydanga, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 850)
Buku-Larrnggay Mulka, Yirrkala, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 700)
Bula'bula Arts, Ramingining, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 800)
Durrmu Arts, Peppimenarti, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 200)
Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts, Gapuwiyak, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 100)
Girrwarli Art & Cultural Centre, Yiyili, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 275)
Goŋ Wanhurr, Dhalinybuy Homeland, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 800)
Injalak Arts, Gunbalanya, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 1,200)
Jilamara Arts & Crafts, Milikapiti, Tiwi Islands, NT (pop. approx. 500)
Karungkarni Art and Culture, Kalkarindji, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 400)
Kira Kiro Arts, Kalumbaru, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 470)
Kulumindini Arts, Elliott, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 280)
Larrakia Nation Arts, Darwin, Darwin–Katherine, NT (Indigenous pop. approx. 13,154)
Mangkaja Arts, Fitzroy Crossing, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 1,000)
Maningrida Arts & Culture, Maningrida, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 2,500)
Milingimbi Art and Culture, Milingimbi, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 1,300)
Mowanjum Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre, Derby, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 3,230)
Munupi Arts and Crafts Association, Pirlangimpi, Tiwi Islands, NT (pop. approx. 420)
Nagula Jarndu Designs, Broome, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 14,600)
Ngukurr Arts, Ngukurr, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 1,200)
Numbulwar Numburindi Arts, Numbulwar, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 680)
Tiwi Design, Wurrumiyanga, Tiwi Islands, NT (pop. approx. 1,500)
Waralungku Arts, Borroloola, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 880)
Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 5,300)
Warmun Art Centre, Warmun, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 450)
Warnayaka Art, Lajamanu, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 610)

Art and culture peak bodies

Aboriginal Art Centre Hub of Western Australia (AACHWA)
Aṉanguku Arts and Cultural Aboriginal Corporation (Ku Arts), SA
Arnhem Northern and Kimberley Artists (ANKA) Aboriginal Corporation, NT and WA
Desart, NT, SA and WA
Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA), QLD

Industry and funding partners

Australian Government Office for the Arts
Australian National Maritime Museum, NSW
Indigenous Art Code (IartC)
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT)
Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University, NT
The University of Melbourne, Vic

Independent artists

Consultants and specialists serving the sector

Arnhem Northern and Kimberley Artists (ANKA) Aboriginal Corporation
anka.org.au | @ankaaboriginalartists
info@anka.org.au | +61 8 8981 6134
Ground floor, 8 McMinn St, Darwin City NT 0800
GPO Box 2152, Darwin NT 0801

Australian Government
Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support
Australian Government
Creative Australia
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APPENDIX 4
The Case for a National Indigenous Cultural Policy

APPENDIX 4

THE CASE FOR A NATIONAL INDIGENOUS CULTURAL POLICY

Supporting material for Recommendation 4

ANKA — Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation

May 2026

This document sets out the detailed case for Recommendation 4 of ANKA's National Cultural Policy submission.

> *'Strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are fundamental to improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.'*
> **— National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Section 5, Point 20[1]**

> *'Culture is the foundation of our art and culture centres.'*
> **— Alliance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Peak Bodies, 2026[2]**

For decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders have said the same thing: strong culture is the foundation of strong people, strong communities and strong art. Governments have agreed in principle. The evidence is unequivocal. And yet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has no dedicated policy home, no measurement framework, and no funding stream for cultural maintenance as a distinct domain.

The next National Cultural Policy is the opportunity to change this. Retaining First Nations First as its foundational pillar continues Revive's visionary commitment. A dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy would practically realise that commitment. Co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through peak bodies, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Centre Alliance, and sitting alongside the next National Cultural Policy, it would give First Nations culture its own dedicated framework across government.

A National Indigenous Cultural Policy would:

- Establish the policy framework that recognises the support and care of culture (cultural maintenance) as a core function of art and culture centres alongside art production and sale
- Develop the measurement framework needed to give genuine substance to the Closing the Gap Outcome Area 16 commitment that 'cultures and languages are strong, supported and

flourishing.' This commitment is currently measured by only a single Indigenous language use indicator — with no wider assessment of, for example - ceremony, Indigenous knowledge transmission, care and connection to Country, or contributions of arts and cultural practice

- Create the cross-portfolio framework that Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) legislation and other cultural protections require but currently lack — ensuring these can be implemented coherently across portfolios including heritage, land management, health and foreign affairs
- Provide the policy foundation for coordinated cross-sector funding for art and culture centres across sectors including arts, education, heritage, health, science and community service portfolios. This would end the unsustainable situation where remote centres must piece together fragmented funding streams, alongside the proceeds of art sales, to resource essential services including the support, care and transmission of culture
- Give culture a clear policy home and definition, so it no longer falls through the gaps between portfolios and funding streams
- Position Australia to meet its obligations to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), particularly on cultural rights — including Australia's obligations under Articles 8, 11, 12, 15, 33 and 34

1. Our centres sustain culture — but no funding program is designed to resource this

Art and culture centres in remote communities are the organisations most directly responsible for sustaining the cultural knowledge and practice that underpins the art and supports improved life outcomes for individuals and communities. They support intergenerational knowledge transfer, connection to Country, community cultural collections and keeping places (physical and digital), school culture classes, adult education programs, language sharing and teaching, and the work of senior knowledge holders. Many centres also maintain dance grounds — spaces where cultural transmission takes place. Ceremony is distinct — often closed to outside audiences and not run by art and culture centres — but centres provide vital support to the people and communities that sustain it. This cultural work is not peripheral to their function — it is integral and essential. It is driven and led by senior knowledge holders, and the art that has achieved international recognition and market value flows directly from this cultural foundation.

The Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program (IVAIS) — the primary national funding program for remote community-controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture centres — is built around supporting art production and sales. It is not designed to resource the cultural foundation that makes the art possible, or the teaching function which is essential to intergenerational cultural transmission. The 2025 IVAIS grant guidelines state explicitly that the program 'does not fund activities focused on community arts development, Indigenous languages or cultural maintenance' and that 'funding is not available to support cultural centres and keeping places.'[3] A National Indigenous Cultural Policy (ANKA's Recommendation 4) provides the overarching framework within which IVAIS can contribute to properly recognising and resourcing art and culture centres as cultural infrastructure — not just commercial enterprises. But Recommendation 3, the co-designed Sector Strengthening Plan, delivers the on-the-ground change and must proceed in parallel, not in sequence.

Over 25 ANKA supported centres across northern Australia hold not-for-sale community collections and keeping places of significant cultural heritage value[4]. The vast majority are supported only with the minimal funds available from the centre's commission on art sales, from occasional project grants or short term philanthropic funding. Under the Culture and Capability Stream of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (NIAA), the Heritage program supports

conservation of on-country physical heritage sites — rock art, sacred sites, land and sea Country. It does not fund community-held living collections. The Languages and Art Program (Office for the Arts) is in heavily weighted to language preservation outcomes. No federal funding program is designed to resource the community collections and keeping places held within the majority of art and culture centres in ANKA's regions as cultural infrastructure of local and often national and international importance.

2. The government has agreed culture is foundational — but there is no policy to deliver on that agreement

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap commits all Australian governments to the principle that strong cultures are fundamental to improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. *Revive* – National Cultural Policy 2023-2027 –places First Nations First as the foundational pillar.

These are significant national commitments. Yet Revive mentioned art and culture centres — the foundational institutions of cultural maintenance in remote communities — only once, and then only to commit to continuing an IVAIS funding program that is both depleted in real terms and explicitly excludes support for centres' cultural function.

The National Agreement has only one measure for Outcome Area 16 — 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing' — the number of languages spoken. There is no measurement of intergenerational Indigenous knowledge transfer, of maintenance of ceremonial practice and connection to Country and the knowledge systems embedded within that connection. Treasury's own Measuring What Matters Framework explicitly acknowledges its indicators are 'not an accurate measure of First Nations wellbeing' and defers to the Closing the Gap framework — which relies on that same single language proxy[5]. Wes Morris observes that comparable nations use 4 to 7 indicators: Vanuatu/Melanesia uses 5, Aotearoa/New Zealand uses 7, Bhutan uses 4[6]. In-principle agreement without measurement is agreement without accountability. A National Indigenous Cultural Policy would mandate the multi-domain measurement framework these commitments require.

3. We cannot make the case for cultural investment because 'culture' remains largely undefined in policy

In Indigenous affairs policy, the words 'cultural' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably, argues Wes Morris. Everything touching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people gets labelled 'cultural'. The result, as Morris documents in *Are We Measuring What Matters? First Nations Culture (2025*), is that the word loses all specific meaning: 'The all-pervasive use of 'culture' as a synonym for 'Indigenous' renders the word 'culture' meaningless.[7]'

This directly undermines our sector's ability to make funding arguments. When culture means everything, governments can claim they are supporting culture through health, employment or ranger programs — while the art and culture centres that specifically sustain cultural practice most centrally in communities remain chronically underfunded. A National Indigenous Cultural Policy introduces the definitional rigour our sector needs: a clear, specific account of what culture is, what it requires, and how it is measured.

4. ICIP and other cultural protections need a policy home

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) legislation is currently under development — and it is a welcome step. But ICIP alone cannot do the work required. It will need to draw on heritage law, land management, health and foreign affairs — and there is currently no cultural policy framework to coordinate action across those portfolios. A dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy would provide that architecture, ensuring ICIP and other cultural protections can be implemented coherently across government.

Australia's obligations under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) — particularly Articles 8, 11, 12, 15, 33 and 34, which relate to cultural maintenance, heritage and traditional knowledge — point in the same direction. That policy framework would give both ICIP and those obligations the coherent foundation they need to be fully realised.

5. Our centres deliver health and wellbeing outcomes — but are funded only as arts organisations

As Wes Morris documents in *Are We Measuring What Matters? First Nations Culture* (2025), more than 52 reports identify culturally-based programs as the primary preventative mechanism for First Nations suicide and social and emotional wellbeing decline. First Nations suicide rates are at their highest recorded level, up 30% over 5 years. The Productivity Commission's *Delivering Quality Care More Efficiently inquiry* (2024–26) is developing a national Preventative Program Funding Framework that explicitly calls for upstream, community-based prevention investment.[8]

Art and culture centres deliver exactly this — but the funding they can access for health and wellbeing work is piecemeal and project-by-project, not systematic. A National Indigenous Cultural Policy would change that, creating the framework for art and culture centres to be consistently recognised and resourced for the full range of outcomes they deliver across portfolios — affirming in practice the principle the National Agreement on Closing the Gap has already established: that strong cultures are the foundation of quality of life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

It is also worth being clear: the case for properly resourcing the cultural work of art and culture centres does not rest on their health outcomes alone. Culture and cultural heritage deserve to be supported in their own right — the health argument shows how much is at stake, but it is not the whole of the case.

6. Direct cultural investment is less than 1% of Indigenous expenditure — and will not change without dedicated policy

Strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are recognised in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap as central to positive life outcomes and self-determination. They are recognised in the National Cultural Policy as central to Australia's national identity and cultural life. But in neither framework has that recognition yet translated into meaningful or coherent resourcing of cultural maintenance beyond the preservation of Indigenous languages.

The Government does not clearly publish what it spends on Indigenous culture. That absence is itself a policy problem. Wes Morris reports that the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Expenditure Reports show that combined federal and state investment in First Nations arts and cultural programs represented 0.74% of total Indigenous expenditure in WA in 2012–13 —

seemingly the most recent disaggregated figure publicly available. The total IAS budget is $7.2 billion over 4 years to 2026–27, but the proportion allocated to culture is not publicly disaggregated. In the absence of a policy that names culture as a priority domain and creates accountability for investment across portfolios, this structural underfunding will not change,[9] The arts portfolio cannot shift this figure alone.

7. The call is broad, the evidence is strong, and the moment is now

Among those calling for a dedicated National Indigenous Cultural Policy:

- Close the Gap Campaign Report 2023 (Recommendation 8)[10]
- Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC)
- ANKA and Desart, letter to Minister Burke, September 2023
- NT Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, October 2023
- Wes Morris, two detailed research papers (2025, 2026)[11]

The development of the next National Cultural Policy is the right moment — to give First Nations First the dedicated policy framework it needs to reach beyond the arts portfolio and deliver on the commitments all Australian governments have already made.

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[1] Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and all Australian Governments, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (July 2020).
[2] Romlie Mokak, *Report on Outcomes of the Workshop of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Culture Centre Peak Organisations, Canberra, 2–4 December 2025* (unpublished report, 2026).
[3] Australian Government. Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts. 2025 Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) Program Closef Non-Competative Grant Guidelines, 31 October 2025, 9. https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/ivais-program-closed-non-competitive-grant-guidelines-2025.pdf
[4] See ANKA, *Safe Keeping: A Report on the Care and Management of Art Centre-based Community Collections* (Darwin: ANKA, & University of Melbourne 2017). This 2017 report found that 24 of 29 responding art and culture centres already held community collections, with the remaining 5 planning to establish them. An updated survey is in preparation; it is understood that at least 25 art centre-based community collections are currently held across ANKA's regions of northern Australia.
[5] The Treasury, *Measuring What Matters Statement*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, July 2023, p.17 The Statement explicitly acknowledges that 'the whole of population indicators outlined in this Framework are not an accurate measure of First Nations wellbeing as they are limited in their ability to represent these intrinsic cultural differences.' https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2023-mwm
[6] Wes Morris. *Are We Measuring What Matters? First Nations Culture.* Discussion paper, version 1, November 2025, p. 13. Available via the author's LinkedIn page: linkedin.com/in/wes-morris-3098059b/recent-activity/all/
[7] Ibid.19
[8] Ibid.19
[9] Ibid.
[10] Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee. *Strong Culture, Strong Youth: Our Legacy, Our Future — Close the Gap Campaign Report 2023.* Produced by the Lowitja Institute, March 2023. Recommendation 8: Australian governments partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to develop, fund and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural policy that: a Complements and reinforces the Revive – National Cultural Policy that respects the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the Australian arts, entertainment and cultural sectors. b Asserts the centrality of culture to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. c Informs investment in cultural

governance, maintenance and revitalisation projects, initiatives and activities both for community and nation building. d Provides environmental and heritage protections for sites that are sacred or culturally significant, recognising the impacts on Country, social and emotional wellbeing and the cultural determinants of health. e Improves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community access to opportunities and resources that support the cultural determinants of their health and wellbeing according to their needs, priorities and aspirations. f Includes cultural knowledge holders in decisionmaking positions that affect communities. g Establishes a monitoring, evaluation and actionlearning framework.

[11] Wes Morris. "Are We Measuring What Matters? First Nations Culture." Discussion paper, version 1, November 2025. Available via the author's LinkedIn page: linkedin.com/in/wes-morris-3098059b/recent-activity/all/

Wes Morris. "Measuring and Evaluating Aboriginal Cultural Outcomes — Australia's Compliance with UNDRIP Articles Regarding Cultural Maintenance." Unpublished paper, circulated 2026. Available via the author's LinkedIn page: linkedin.com/in/wes-morris-3098059b/recent-activity/all/

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Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee. *Strong Culture, Strong Youth: Our Legacy, Our Future — Close the Gap Campaign Report 2023.* Produced by the Lowitja Institute, March 2023.

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