

## **Submission to the Victorian Government's Creative State Consultation**

**This submission is made on behalf of CLIMARTE and Cultural Gardeners - Australian Cultural Alliance for Climate Justice.**

**CLIMARTE** is a Victorian based art and climate focussed charity listed with the [Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission](#). As an initiator, an educator and a catalyst for artists and arts organisations to participate in groundbreaking, socially engaged exhibitions, events and projects intersecting climate science and culture, CLIMARTE's work harnesses the creative power of the arts to inform, engage and inspire action towards a fairer, zero emissions future. Since 2010 CLIMARTE has brought together a broad alliance from across the arts, humanities and sciences to advocate for immediate, effective and creative policy action to restore a climate capable of sustaining all life.

CLIMARTE is also a co-convenor of [Cultural Gardeners](#), with Arts Front and Pippa Bailey. Representing more than 300 individuals and organisations from all states and territories, working in the cultural sector, Cultural Gardeners are deeply committed to taking effective action on the converging climate and ecological crises. Around 30 per cent of registered Cultural Gardeners are based in Victoria.

### **We believe the Climate Crisis reflects a deep Cultural Crisis**

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

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

Please see our [Principles for Action](#).

### **Intersectional and collaborative approaches to policy making**

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

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

A holistic and imaginative approach to transition—with a clear focus on arts and culture—could be aligned to the interconnected goals of reducing carbon emissions, eradicating pollution and waste, improving health and wellbeing, ensuring resilient communal housing, reimagining social services, place-making with nature at the centre, and involving communities more deeply in civic life.

These are key policy areas where arts and culture have an important contribution to make, addressing converging crises and leading the systems change that many are calling for.

Victoria's Creative State Strategy should elevate cultural discourse and advocate for artists and cultural workers to play a key role in co-designing plans for a future that serves all people and the ecosystems that all life depends on.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) [6<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report](#), the Climate Emergency is deepening at terrifying rates. Australia leads the world in mass extinction of species and increased incidents of extreme weather events. The global pandemic—a predicted symptom of climate disruption—has led to unprecedented global responses and continues to impact people's lives all over the world.

Culture has been radically disrupted. As a sector, the Australian Arts community has been detrimentally impacted by neglect, systematic defunding, lack of appropriate policy and general lack of care. As a leader in the Arts and Treaty with First Nations people, Victoria needs a future facing cultural policy with an interconnected systems approach, linking policy to practice that serves the wider community.

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

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

**We call on the Victorian Government to:**

- Invest in Arts and cultural activities that provide place-based and virtual spaces where people connect with each other to reimagine, experiment, play and express. This includes opportunities for creative and cultural work that are integrated within all aspects of society: valuing all forms of culture at this time of deepening environmental crises and growing societal pressures.
- Ensure access to trustworthy public interest information and make room for other aspects of culture that are harder to articulate and define, and are critical to fostering and safeguarding a healthy democracy.
- Develop policy that acknowledges the tensions between:
  - tangible and intangible values, highly skilled specialists and wider community participants, commercial for-profit businesses and vital not-for-profit services that will always require investment;
  - bio-regional and local perspectives across Victoria; and
  - real place/time and virtual experiences - all developed through diverse cultural lenses that reflect our broader society and will lead to better community outcomes for all Victorians.

## **Addressing the framing of Arts and Culture as ‘Cultural Industries’**

The root of the term ‘cultural industries’ comes from German scholars Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) calling attention to the industrialisation and commercialisation of culture under capitalist relations of production. Their cautionary thesis has played out across the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century compacted by globalisation. In this industrial model, arts and culture have become tools of ongoing colonisation, homogenising diverse practices, perspectives and expression.

At the very moment when the world is waking up to the devastation that industrialisation processes have had on the natural world, it seems extraordinary that the Victorian Government, with a previously strong reputation for progressive and nation leading arts policy, should frame this new strategy in these reductive and destructive terms that wholly deny the intrinsic value of the Arts. It undermines the unique intangible cultural values of First Nations, and many other cultures, reducing creative practice and expression to focus on production and transaction of cultural product.

Australia’s community of artists have been infantilised in funding systems, in part because of an increasingly mechanised understanding of creation and production emphasising skills from other sectors (marketing, finance, fundraising and administration) above the intrinsic creative practice skills that are unique to arts and culture. Forced to act as businesses that cannot compete or thrive in the current broken economy, artists and culture workers have suffered in the same way as people working in other vocations such as teachers, social workers, health care workers, and environmental protectors.

Working with wellbeing focussed agencies in other sectors, the Victorian Government and Creative Victoria could help build a case for revaluing all of these forms of ‘essential work’.

We cannot allow arts and culture to continue to deny the burgeoning ecological and biodiversity crises. We urge the Victorian Government and Creative Victoria to reconsider this framing in the belief that it undermines the former principles of cultural strategy and a commitment to reducing environmental impact. We embrace systemic change that many sectors, including the arts, are calling for, and urge the Victorian Government to utilise creative practices to help imagine new paradigms by contributing to economic and social transition focused on a net zero regenerative future.

As history shows, when governments invest in public programs in strategic ways that address disadvantage and inequality, everyone in the community benefits. To suggest that such fair and reasonable public spending to counter decades of systemic injustice causes inflation, creates a burden of debt and/or a ballooning deficit is ideological nonsense.

### **We urge the Victorian Government to acknowledge the relevance of the previous five strategic principles and include these values in the new policy:**

- 1. First Peoples First: First Peoples knowledge, practice, protocols and cultural authority is at the heart of the creative industries.**
  - We call for processes that are led by First Nations people, particularly Traditional Owners, and that centre First Nations values and principles. This includes support for and equitable representation of women, diverse cultural communities, refugees, people with disability and LGBTIQ+. We call for processes that prioritise the climate crisis, with a commitment to brokering and hosting tough conversations as we resurrect a plan for and implement a Voice to Parliament and transition to a zero emissions culture.

- [Victoria's State of the Environment Report 2023](#) strongly referenced knowledge systems of Traditional Owners and this must be integrated with Victorian cultural policy. Further, our call for cultural policy that works across different Victorian Government departments and sectors is inspired by holistic First Nations cultural principles, in the belief that everything is connected and there is urgent need for arts and cultural workers to help join the dots as part of weaving us out of divisive self-serving silos and into reinvigorated and regenerative civil society.
- 2. For every Victorian: A commitment to ensuring every Victorian can take up their right to participate in the cultural and creative life of the state regardless of cultural background, age, gender identity, location, income or ability.**
  - 3. Whole of state: Ensuring that remote, regional and outer-metropolitan areas have improved and more equitable access to cultural experiences.**
    - This aligns directly to A Creative Society for all Victorians
  - 4. Health and wellbeing: Foster healthy, safe and respectful working environments in the creative industries.**
    - According to the World Health organisation 3.6 billion people already live in areas highly susceptible to climate change. Doctors for the Environment Australia call for climate action in recognition of the health harms caused by global heating and climate change.
    - Currently the vital focus on health and well-being in arts and culture does not meaningfully consider the impacts of Climate Change or the health benefits of connecting to the natural world. These must be integrated into long term strategies.
    - The deteriorating conditions for artists, particularly in the past decade, has resulted in a weakened sector seriously affecting health and wellbeing. For artists to be centred and play a leading role in cultural transition in the Anthropocene, there needs to be specific training and support that Victorian Government agencies are well placed to support and learn from. This is new practice and requires new creative approaches and appropriate investment.
  - 5. Environmental impact: A commitment to reducing our environmental impact**
    - Putting Government's 43% emission reductions as a baseline target for all sectors, and specifically the cultural sector, would immediately see creative responses that could help deliver new solutions. To do this we must reimagine resource intensive activities such as Festivals, focus on green tourism, grow slow touring models for cultural work and rethink how we engage internationally.
    - Aligning cultural policy to climate policy enables a reframing of the cultural ecosystem. Our cultural ecosystem is part of a global cultural ecosystem; one that is also deeply rooted in extractive behaviour, reliant on fossil fuels, and elite hierarchical structures. Australian cultural institutions need to help reimagine international engagement so that Australians are confident in our own cultural identity, resilient, future-facing and able to exchange. We must move away from the cultural cringe that continues to diminish home grown activities, take responsibility for our relative wealth and privilege in the world, and be a good neighbour in the Asia Pacific region.

## Responding to the Victoria Government New Priorities

### 1. Home Grown, World Class

In our view, notions of 'class' in this context relate to inequitable and unsustainable ideals that use arts and culture to divide society. Australia perpetuates stories of classlessness when it is clearly informed by and perpetuates colonial ideas of class inherited from British systems and structures.

This needs addressing and clarifying. Further the accolades identified in the 'Examples of Home-Grown, World-Class' activity are retrospective awards that do not consider adaptive and transformational agendas that meet current crises. We believe that Victoria needs to focus on new ideas and processes that align to the converging crises rather than linger nostalgically in past triumphs.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, unique to Australian identity, includes a holistic worldview where care for the natural world is a vital part of ongoing cultural practice.**

- We must follow this leadership. We endorse the submissions from First Nations led organisations, and the many Aboriginal cultural centres in communities across Victoria. We ask that this policy be meaningfully aligned to the ongoing Victorian treaty process and recognise that honouring First Nations culture as the oldest living culture in the world with protocols that can help guide and unite Australians to lead the world: Care for Country, Care for Kin, Respect for Elders and Responsibility for Future Generations.
- As place based social change and collective impact initiatives (aligned with First Nations communities and practised in Social Services and Educational settings across Australia) have shown, home grown culture is deeply connected to place and helps build strong local communities. Strong communities are essential in times of crisis and will speed a rapid transition to a fairer more sustainable future. Developing greater connection to local artists, arts and culture, respecting First Nations culture and local biodiversity, helps to develop understanding of Australia's unique biodiversity and deepen curiosity for other contexts and experiences. This is critical to respect the rich diversity of peoples and places across the world.
- Valuing the diversity of a successful multicultural society so that every Victorian has access to culture and is contributing to home grown stories that can disrupt alarming trends of homogeneity and mirror the unique biodiversity of the world around us. This approach is world leading.
- By recognising that many Victorians walk in at least two worlds, the dominant white Australian culture and either First Nations cultural heritage or cultural heritage from another country and culture, we could strengthen intercultural understanding through existing connections in diverse communities. This focus includes strengthening the role of cultural diplomacy, reimagined with reduced environmental impact, to help develop intercultural understanding, advocating for peace and non-violent conflict resolution, and modelling equitable cultural exchange to learn from others as part of creating a fairer sustainable world.
- As already identified, the notion of world class is complex in a changing world. The articulated incentives to respect biodiversity and local diversity help to clarify the unique attributes of Australian culture that determine its excellence. This needs prioritising in a culture that continues to suffer from cultural cringe and slavishly follows trends from dominant cultural colonisers.

## 2 A Creative Society for all Victorians

- Taking a long view, and following First Nations principles, this new cultural policy must take an intergenerational approach, recognise the importance of mature and Elder artists in the ecosystem and urgently address the educational and financial barriers for young people to study humanities and develop creative skills. This must be applied at all levels of learning from preschool, through primary and secondary education to tertiary and vocational training where fees have been made prohibitively expensive. Lifelong creative learning for artists and the wider community can help replace unsustainable cultural habits. Access to arts must be a society-wide priority.
- We recognise that the most disadvantaged in our society have least access to arts and culture and are already most impacted by increased natural disasters and the wide-ranging impacts of climate change. To enable all Victorians to have access to a cultural and creative life, an intersectional approach is required that includes disaster preparedness, response and recovery, and actively supports Victorians to express their fears and concerns with programs to help them imagine new futures and transition their lives.
- We align to the principles outlined by [Diversity Arts Australia](#): as follows:
  - We believe creative expression is a fundamental human right, which strengthens and connects communities.
  - We want to contribute to, and be part of, a creative sector that reflects Victoria's true cultural diversity.
  - Anti-racism, equity and inclusion work in the creative sector must foreground First Nations communities and must not conflate First Nations and settler-migrant experiences of racism and exclusion.
  - We believe that Culturally, Linguistically and Racially marginalised (CLaRM) settler-migrants must develop meaningful solidarity with First Nations communities, and support First Nations-led initiatives and programs.
  - We call for ethno-cultural diversity and racial equity to be promoted and safeguarded in the creative sector. Crucially, diversity and equity principles must be embedded into all pillars of the policy.
  - We align to Arts Access Victoria to support transformative, and systems change that benefits all Deaf and Disabled people.

## 3 Innovative and Thriving Creative Organisations and Businesses

- To honour First Nations cultures as the oldest living cultures in the world, we must intentionally disrupt and dismantle colonial behaviours, get out of the silos and reimagine existing structures. Since invasion in 1788, our cultural history and systems are founded on British and European models that subjugated, abused and annihilated First Nations cultural practices. They also discriminate against other diverse cultures from different parts of the world. This devastation has been compounded over recent decades by the industrialisation of culture where economic imperatives in profit driven globalised business models consistently undermine local place based creative and regenerative activities that care for country. This specifically relates to corporate investment and the primacy of organisations that are not connected to place and assume leadership and Australian identity without respecting First Nations processes or consult and collaborate across different Indigenous nations. The process of change must be First Nations led.
- Victoria is home to incredibly diverse and creative communities, each with vibrant and valuable cultural practices and stories to tell. These communities, however, are not reflected within our arts and cultural monoculture—with Victoria's statutory authorities, publicly owned companies and funded arts organisations not adequately mirroring the diversity of the communities and constituencies they serve and represent.

- Institutional change is slow. By centring artists and their practices, who are nimble, adaptive, better equipped to innovate and imagine sustainable change, institutions will be more able to meet the challenges and ongoing crises of our challenging times.
- We call for the innovation associated with digital and new technological strategies to consider carbon footprint and environmental impact. Connecting stories with place in a climate and ecological crisis calls into question the heavy emphasis on digital technologies, disconnected from real place real time experiences or planetary boundaries. Digital footprints already exceed aviation as a major source of carbon emissions. The UK based company [erijio studio](#) reports: “ By far the most significant contributor to our individual Internet carbon footprints is our use of online video, which generates 60% of world data flows and over 300 million tonnes of CO2 per year.” (please refer to the [Website Carbon Calculator](#) to see what this looks like).

#### **4 Sustainable Creative Careers**

- The climate crisis is a cultural crisis. There is nothing sustainable about a career in the Arts in the current paradigm that ignores the threat of Climate Crisis. Addressing environmental impact and the role of arts and culture in addressing the ecological crisis is new creative practice that requires radical new approaches, new training, new working principles, new leadership and new courage. We are entering a new era of artistic expression and the commitment to reducing our environmental impact must be embedded in and embrace new practice, including discarding habits and behaviours that are helping to drive crises. We urge the Victorian Government to focus on learning and developing ambitious carbon emissions and resource reduction plans that are led by First Nations cultural protocols and low carbon creative practices.
- As stated, we align to a Just Transition that requires considering the lives and livelihoods of artists and cultural workers when considering social and economic transition.

#### **5 Creating in a Changing World**

- Again, converging crises will continue to see further global disruption with a key role for arts and culture in emergency response, finding ways to protect and support adaptation for refugee cultures as parts of the world become uninhabitable.
- New policy and the stories we tell need to be dynamic and open to change in a rapidly changing context.
- The Arts are uniquely placed to lead the changes that are already being planned by leaders in other sectors, that they are largely excluded from. We urge the Victorian Government to be bold and courageous in imagining new roles for artists in cross sector collaborations that put imagination, collaboration and creative practice at the heart of planning a more equitable and sustainable future.
- Finally, we urge the Victorian Government to work in collegiately with other states and territories, and align to the [National Revive cultural policy](#), with more ambitious climate and environmental action. The whole country and indeed the world is undergoing transformative change, demanding collaboration rather than competition and collegiate bi-partisan approaches to ensure no one is left behind.

On behalf of CLIMARTE and Cultural Gardeners, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Victorian Government's Creative State Consultation. As we would welcome the opportunity to discuss all aspects of our submission, please do not hesitate with any queries you may have.

Yours faithfully,



Deborah Hart  
Chair, [CLIMARTE](#)  
Co-convenor, [Cultural Gardeners](#)  
E: [deborah.hart@climarte.org](mailto:deborah.hart@climarte.org)  
M: 0458 447 702