



Revive



*National
Cultural Policy*

Response from First Nations Media Australia



March 2023

[Contact Details](#)

Professor Shane Hearn, CEO
Level 2/70 Elder Street, Alice Springs NT 0870
PO Box 2731. Alice Springs NT 0871

W: www.firstnationsmedia.org.au

FNMA acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

This submission is made by First Nations Media Australia. Some members may make individual submissions in which case the First Nations Media Australia submission should not be taken to replace those

[First Nations Media Australia](#) (FNMA) is the peak body for the First Nations media and communications industry. Our purpose is empowering Australia's First Nations people through our culturally connected media industry. As of January 2023, FNMA's membership includes 36 organisations and 40 individuals who work in or alongside the community-controlled media industry as broadcasters, freelance journalists, photographers, filmmakers, and allies. First Nations Media Australia supports and amplifies the First Nations media sector and its objectives. Our activities include resource and policy development, skills development, networking events and meetings, content-sharing, promotion, regular communications, annual awards, research activities and representation.

As part of its industry leadership role, FNMA seeks to ensure First Nations communities have access to information required to make informed decisions, including access to public resources such as broadcast spectrum necessary to provide timely and relevant information to First Nations communities.

The crossover of infrastructure, digital literacy, and access to information between telecommunications and media is significant. Therefore, First Nations Media Australia advocates for the digital inclusion and connectivity needs of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The scope of the First Nations media sector includes:

- **Television:** National free-to-air (NITV); satellite delivered narrowcast (ICTV) TV services; local narrowcast TV services (Goolarri TV at Broome, ICTV in Alice Springs and Broome and Larrakia TV at Darwin). The ICTV satellite TV service reaches 371,846 smartcards nation-wide, not including terrestrial services in Alice Springs and Broome.
- **Video & film production:** Production of culture and language-based content for broadcast & online distribution.
- **Print and Online:** A national newspaper (Koori Mail) alongside a strong web presence of journalistic sites such as IndigenousX, National Indigenous Times.
- First Nations media organisations have a strong **social media** following and publish content online daily.
- **Radio:** Over 230 radio broadcast sites coordinated by 35 licensed, community-owned, not-for-profit organisations. These radio services reach around 320,000 First Nations people, including around 100,000 very hard to reach people in remote Indigenous communities, or approximately 48% of the First Nations population. Radio services are prevented from providing a primary radio service to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples due to a lack of funding and spectrum availability. Established stations broadcast live shows, plus interviews, radio documentaries, news, emergency information, community events, government, and other messaging within community broadcasting guidelines through these platforms:

- 157 stations broadcasting on FM.
- 4 stations broadcasting on AM.
- 13 broadcasting via VAST satellite, in addition to FM services.
- 5 metropolitan services broadcasting via DAB+, in addition to FM services in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Darwin.
- Almost all offer online streaming via a dedicated station website.
- Many offer on-demand content either through the station's own website, or Soundcloud or podcast sites.
- 26 stations can be streamed via the indigiTUBE website and app. Some stations also have their own application or use the TuneIn or iHeartRadio apps to reach audiences.
- These channels offer a wide range of programming, including news and current affairs reporting from a First Nations perspective, in over 25 Indigenous languages nationally, including the first language of many people in remote communities.

The sector reaches significant audience share with 91% of people in remote First Nations communities being regular listeners to radio services and watching ICTV at least once per month.¹ In the remote context, First Nations media is the most reliable and ubiquitous radio and media service available to audiences. First Nations broadcasting returns an average \$2.87 in social outcomes for every \$1 invested, with many organisations returning a rate much higher than this nearly 3:1 average ratio.² The communications sector provides enabling services to support opportunities and outcomes in service sectors, such as health and education, and promotes inclusiveness and participation.³



About this submission

First Nations Media Australia has based the responses provided in this submission on past research into and consultation with first media organisation members about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's experiences of participation in the broadcasting and media sector. This submission does not represent the views or concerns of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; nor should it be taken to replace any specific community-based submission. It was prepared by FMNA Senior Policy Officer, Dr Eleanor Hogan and Research Policy Officer, Dr Robin Gregory.

¹ McNair Ingenuity Research and Indigenous Remote Communications Association, *Remote Indigenous Communication and Media Survey*. Report prepared for Indigenous Remote Communications Association, 2016.

² Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017.

³ Department of Communications and the Arts, *The Communications Sector: recent trends and developments*, Bureau of Communications Research, Commonwealth Government, Canberra, October 2016.



Introduction

FNMA commends the Australian government for their renewed commitment to the arts and cultural sector through the development of *Revive: National Cultural Policy* and is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the policy.⁴ We particularly welcome the prominence given within *Revive* to First Nations artists as Pillar 1 of the policy and the creation of a First Nations-led body within Creative Australia. We are also pleased by the federal government's commitment to the establishment of the National Indigenous Art Gallery and of AIATSIS Central Australia: Engagement and Digitisation Centre, both in Mparntwe/Alice Springs. FNMA further commends the government's funding commitment to preserving and safeguarding First Nations languages through a First Nations Languages Policy Partnership between First Nations representatives and Australian governments – a partnership in which FNMA is participating as a member of the Coalition of Peaks.

While FNMA is supportive of these initiatives, we have identified several areas of *Revive* which would benefit from further consideration in relation to the aims and aspirations of the First Nations media sector, including:

- Role of community broadcasters in the Policy and particularly First Nations media;
- Centrality of the artist and creative sector workforce development;
- Role of archives and digitisation in preserving and communicating First Nations stories and culture.

Generally speaking, *Revive's* focus, as in previous national arts/cultural policies, appears to be primarily on 'professional artists' and the 'big end of town' GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) institutions, with community arts organisations relegated to the sphere of local significance. This emphasis tends to overlook how these organisations, including community media and broadcasters, produce material and generate opportunities with multiple economic, cultural and social benefits that are as important for the creative economy and population of their community/region as are larger productions in metropolitan areas, and that this creative work may also be of outstanding quality and of national significance.

In particular, the vital role of the First Nations broadcasting sector, especially in remote and very remote areas, in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and communities is overshadowed in *Revive* by a focus on national broadcasters. While *Revive* refers to the First Nations community broadcasting sector's role in providing news, local stories and emergency messaging, supporting local artists, strengthening First Nations languages and connection to country (p.87), FNMA recommends that further consideration

⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, *Revive: Australia's Cultural Policy*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Pages references from *Revive* are included within the text of this submission.

be given to how this sector's significant aims and activities be integrated more strongly within Australia's national cultural policy with regard to the following areas.

Role of community broadcasters, especially First Nations media organisations

While *Revive* highlights the importance of First Nations arts and culture as a voice and tool for truth-telling, it overlooks the role played by community broadcasters, particularly First Nations broadcasters, in the associated Pillar 1 action: 'Support the telling of First Nations histories and stories in Australia's galleries, libraries, archives and museums' (p.22). The framing of this action favours the role of GLAM-sector institutions in truth-telling and in communicating histories and stories over other organisations, forums and platforms, such as radio, TV or digital media. FNMA recommends that the omission of these additional formats and mediums be addressed in a revised national cultural policy, particularly since they provide vehicle for truth-telling and story-telling encompassing a broad range of spaces, including on Country, in communities, in living rooms, on buses, in classrooms – in fact, wherever you can listen to the radio, watch TV, read a newspaper, a magazine or a book, or stream content to your preferred device.

Further to this, while one of *Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience's* stated actions is to 'increase support for community broadcasting to deliver local news, tell local stories, and provide a platform for diverse voices and Australian music' (p.89), it is unclear from the *Revive* document how this will be achieved and to what extent First Nations broadcasting and media will be supported.

By way of background, First Nations communities were first granted community broadcast licences in the 1970s and 1980s as a policy response to the lack of opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have their voices heard in media outlets. This imbalance in participation in the media still permeates Australia's media landscape today. First Nations broadcasting and media has a vital role in providing balanced and culturally appropriate reporting to promote awareness and understanding among non-Indigenous Australians, to participate in the truth-telling process, to encourage participation in democratic processes and to promote reconciliation.

Within the context of accessibility, critical infrastructure and audience engagement, First Nations media play a significant role in the maintenance, development and preservation of Australia's unique First Nations culture and languages by broadcasting and communicating information in these languages. In many areas of the country, especially remote and very remote areas, Indigenous broadcasters provide the only source of news information and messaging in First Nations people's languages. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters translate and relay key information in languages that are accessible to communities around the country every day. First Nations media is the preferred channel for receiving news and government messaging as it crosses language and cultural barriers to

connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences in a way that resonates in their local setting.

In 2016, the McNair Ingenuity Indigenous Communications and Media Survey found the First Nations media sector reaches significant audience share with 91% of people in remote First Nations communities being regular listeners to radio services and watching ICTV at least once per month.⁵ First Nations broadcasting and media reach approximately 47% of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, with First Nations radio listenership increasing to 63 % in remote and 80 % in very remote areas. Nationally, 48 % of First Nations people said they listened to First Nations radio for ‘the First Nations focus in programs/news & current affairs’, with 61 % of remote-living respondents saying that local Indigenous community radio provided their main news source and 56 % of remote respondents saying they listened to Indigenous radio stations to ‘hear people talking in my own language’.⁶

FNMA further emphasises that mainstream media is influenced by commercial interests in a way that First Nations community and publicly owned media is not. First Nations media organisations offer an important perspective to the national dialogue, including the views of people unlikely to share their stories with non-Indigenous news networks. To ensure First Nations control of and participation in truth-telling and communicating their history and stories, it is essential that First Nations media organisations are adequately funded (across infrastructure, operations, employment and content production) and that training and career pathways for First Nations media workers are expanded and consolidated (see discussion below). For an overview of the First Nations media sector’s aims, scope and funding requirements, we refer the Committee to FNMA’s *Calls for Action for the First Nations Media Sector* and to FNMA’s *Pre-Budget Submission to the Australian Treasury 2023-24*.⁷

The centrality of the artist and creative sector workforce development

FNMA strongly supports the ten principles informing *Revive*’s pillars to guide the Government’s actions and investments over the next five years, especially the following which underpin creative sector workforce development: ‘Artists and arts workers have career structures that are long-term and sustainable, supported by vocational pathways’ and ‘Creative talent is nurtured through fair remuneration, industry standards and safe and inclusive work cultures’ (p.19). We welcome the policy’s acknowledgement of the insecure work conditions, negligible pay rates and lack of professional career pathways with appropriate salary structures available to creative industries workers. FNMA commends the actions for Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist, especially the review of ‘Award coverage of the arts sector and minimum standards as part of the upcoming Review of Modern Awards.’

⁵ McNair Ingenuity Research and IRCA, 2016.

⁶ McNair Ingenuity Research and IRCA, 2016.

⁷ FNMA, *Calls for Action for the First Nations Media Sector*: <https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/about/policy/calls-action>
FNMA, *Pre-Budget Submission to the Australian Treasury 2023-24*: <https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/about/first-nations-media-australia-submissions-and-responses-reviews-and-inquiries>

(p.54) While this aspect of the policy is in development, we encourage the Committee to consider how these issues extend to First Nations workers in the creative industries, including those in the community broadcasting sector.

Like other workers in the creative industries, First Nations media workers are often poorly remunerated or unpaid. First Nations broadcast organisations, like their counterparts across the community broadcasting sector, rely largely on a volunteer workforce who frequently multi-task across a range of creative formats and mediums. FNMA is concerned that the policy's use of broad descriptors such as 'artists' and 'arts workers' may unintentionally exclude other workers in the creative industries sector, such as those in media and broadcasting, from the development of initiatives linked to these principles. A multi-disciplinary dynamic characterises the First Nations media sector, with most media workers fulfil multiple roles: they are community journalists, they are editors, they are reporters sharing news with communities in the form of news stories told through print articles, news bulletins, current affairs discussions, interviews, updates, observations and conversation. They perform a wide range of activities, with or without tertiary qualifications and usually across multiple mediums.

Part of this multi-disciplinary dynamic results from changes in the media landscape. First Nations media organisations must serve their communities in an era where media delivery is both fragmented and convergent, which means being in all the spaces where audiences expect to access content. For example, radio stations are now expected to be 'more than just radio' by audiences, funders, content-maker and marketing platforms. The era of media convergence has made it easier for First Nations radio stations to produce and deliver content across a range of platforms. Therefore, in addition to providing 24-hour radio services, First Nations radio stations are producing an average weekly total of 30 hours podcast content per week, 209 hours of video content and 51 hours of online only content sector-wide.

The multi-functional role that many media workers have, particularly in smaller-medium sized organisations, poses challenges in terms of ensuring remuneration occurs under an appropriate Award. For example, existing Awards such as the Broadcasting, Recorded Entertainment and Cinemas Award or the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010, which is often used in community arts and media organisations, may not encompass digital and social media work undertaken by media workers in community broadcasting organisations.⁸ The lack of clarity around appropriate Award, salary and career progression structures presents obstacles in resourcing and facilitating the development of appropriate skills and training career pathways for First Nations media workers.

⁸ See for example discussion of 'Award coverage for social media & digital marketing employees' at: https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/library/K600613_Award-coverage-for-social-media-digital-marketing-employees.

To address these types of challenges, FNMA worked with the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research to develop an *Employment and Skills Development Strategy* and a Workforce Development Action Plan policy recommendations and assistance for First Nations media organisations and recommends investment in training and targeted employment programs. We recommend that the Committee and those tasked with developing the 'First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy' (*Revive*, p.28) refer to the strategies identified within these documents and consider incorporating them in their strategy.⁹

Adequate funding, remuneration and structured career pathways and salaries are critical to developing a creative workforce strategy. While aspirational targets are commendable, the First Nations media sector's past policy experience it that such targets go unmet without the corresponding funding commitment. For example, the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy set a target of 90% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within funded organisations by 2020. While employment funding of \$6M p.a. was integrated into Indigenous broadcasting funding under this strategy, it was insufficient for this 90% target to be met. Similarly expanding employment needed to be underpinned by a concerted, accredited training effort to support the progression of First Nations people to coordination, management and technical roles.

FNMA also endorses the action accompanying Pillar 3 undertaking to: 'Develop information about the flexibility available for artists looking for work or working in the creative arts sector, and to have this recognised as part of their mutual obligation requirements for unemployment payments.' (p.54) We support recognition of cultural job seeking for creative industries workers as a means of establishing their eligibility to receive income support payments. This is particularly relevant to First Nations people living in remote and very remote areas where there are high levels of poverty and limited or no job opportunities, and where community arts and media organisations often provide significant, meaningful forums for social, cultural and economic engagement and participation.

Role of archives and digitisation in communicating and preserving First Nations stories

For over a decade, FNMA, and its predecessor, Indigenous Remote Communications Australia, have called for dedicated resources to ensure the conservation, preservation and maintenance of First Nations archives to sustain culture, language and create meaningful employment. We are greatly excited by the imminent opening of the Alice Springs Engagement and Digitisation Centre in Mparntwe/Alice Springs – an initiative in which FNMA has worked in partnership with AIATSIS. FNMA's Archiving Team has already provided support, equipment and training for First Nations community media organisations across Central Australia in commencing digitisation of their archives of nationally significant content, largely stored on magnetic tape which is degrading. The establishment of the

⁹ Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018. <https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/projects/workforce-development-action-plan-2019-2024>.

state-of-the-art digitisation and exhibition facility in Mparntwe/Alice Springs is a valuable initiative in ensuring that First Nations languages, stories and histories are preserved and maintained on Country.

However, infrastructure and human resources are required to undertake this urgent work in the remaining timeframe to preserve priority recordings. It has become apparent to FNMA that the nature and extent of material requiring digitisation will require a considerable outlay of funding to support the infrastructure, technical equipment and labour required to facilitate similar archiving projects for First Nations organisations across the country. This also presents an opportunity for the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in culturally meaningful roles as Community Archive Workers to engage in the extensive and time-consuming work of digitising, cataloguing and managing community access for these collections. Localised archiving work will provide digital skills training and employment opportunities for First Nations people in regional and remote areas, as well as facilitating greater community access to heritage audio-visual collections under the oversight from Traditional Custodians, which will significantly contribute to the maintenance of culture and languages.



Concluding comments

FNMA appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Australian government's recently released *Revive: Australia's Cultural Policy*. We echo the comments of the Hon Linda Burney MP, the Minister for Indigenous Australia, that although Australia has a long way to go in recognising and celebrating First Nations peoples and their cultures, it is heartening to see that *Revive* seeks to give 'artistic and cultural voice to First Nations peoples, to protect this for generations to come.' (p.9)

FNMA wishes to emphasise the significance of the issues discussed above in this submission to the development and sustainability of a First Nations creative workforce. Although they are drawn from what could be said to be an adjacent sector – that of broadcasting and media – they are pertinent to the treatment, participation and remuneration of First Nations workers in creative industries across Australia. Additionally, we note there is a degree of inequity throughout *Revive*, between the policy treatment of larger organisations vs small-to-medium arts organisations. For example, there are specific funding commitments for national broadcasters (e.g. five year funding, p.105) to provide much needed certainty for their operation. However, there are no such commitments for smaller media organisations, which encompasses many First Nations media and broadcasting organisations, whose need for funding certainty is arguably greater given their relative capacity to raise alternative revenue streams and attract philanthropic support.

FNMA further notes that while *Revive* mentions the benefits of health and social wellbeing of cultural participation and engagement under Pillar 2 'A Place for every story', that overall the policy situates the art and culture within a predominately 'entertainment' framework. This

enriching relationship could be given more weight within the policy, especially since its benefits are particularly relevant for First Nations people, who continue to experience levels of disadvantage that directly contribute to poorer health outcomes compared to non-Indigenous people such as a reduced life expectancy (median age at death in 2021 was 61.7 years for Indigenous people compared to 82.0 years for non-Indigenous people).¹⁰

FNMA also supports the action under Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience to: ‘Deliver improvements to the National Broadband Network and regional connectivity to improve digital inclusion, and social and economic opportunities for all Australians.’ This is of particular significance for First Nations peoples, especially those living in remote and very remote areas, who experience relatively low levels of digital inclusion compared to other Australians across access, affordability, and digital ability considerations. In 2020, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index score for Indigenous Australians is 55.1, a total 7.9 points below the national average with affordability being a key barrier. More than 2.5 million Australians remain offline. This includes 24.7% of Indigenous Australian households who do not access the internet from home, compared with the national average of 14.7%. Levels of home internet access for Indigenous Australian households diminish further with remoteness, with up to 45.2% of households in remote and very remote locations unable to access the internet.

Internet access is increasingly important in terms of being able to create, produce and distribute arts, to participate and engage in a digital and on-line world. Without connectivity there is no or very limited ability, to participate in the arts, whether it is something as simple as booking a ticket on-line to a performance, or as complex as collaborating on film and sound production. It is important to recognise that even in 2023 there are parts of Australia that lack the type of connectivity that is taken for granted in metropolitan/urban areas. FNMA is therefore supportive of the policy actions relating to improved connectivity and digital literacy. We also refer the Committee to the work of the recently appointed First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, of which FNMA Co-Chair, Naomi Moran, is a member. This group is advising the government on developing policy initiatives to meet Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: that by 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will have equal levels of digital inclusion.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Deaths, Australia*. ABS.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/deaths-australia/latest-release>.