



Legislative Council
Economy and
Infrastructure Committee

Cultural and creative industries in Victoria

Inquiry

June 2025

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About the Committee

Functions

The Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquires into and reports on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with agriculture, commerce, infrastructure, industry, major projects, public sector finances and transport.

The Committee consists of members of the Legislative Council from the government, opposition, and other parties.

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Terms of reference

Inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria

On 23 May 2023, the Economy and Infrastructure Committee agreed to the following self-referral motion:

That the Economy and Infrastructure Committee resolves under Standing Order 23.04(3) that, given the economic and social significance of Victoria's cultural and creative industries, for the Committee to inquire into, monitor and report, by November 2024*, on—

- (1) the economic and social impact of the Commonwealth Government's Australian cultural policy, Revive, on Victoria's arts and cultural industries including, in particular, Victoria's share of national arts and cultural spending;
- (2) regional Victoria's share of national arts and cultural spending;
- (3) the importance of spending in the Victorian economy and the cultural dynamism and representation in Victoria of government funded national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, and, in particular, whether these broadcasters are spending in Victoria a share of their budget that matches the size of Victoria's population, economy and unique place within national cultural life;
- (4) the ongoing financial sustainability of the seven national performing arts training organisations including whether Victoria's share of this funding is adequate; and
- (5) whether the Revive policy and relevant state government policies and spending provide sufficient support and impetus to rebuild and sustain Victoria's cultural and creative industries following the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector.

* The Committee resolved to extend the tabling date to 25 August 2025.

Chair's foreword

In undertaking this inquiry, the Committee recognised the economic and social impact of the cultural and creative industries, and particularly the performing and visual arts, on the lives of Victorians. In doing so, the Committee accepts that it has defined the cultural and creative industries quite narrowly and freely accepts that there are many industries that could be defined as cultural or creative. However, the Committee has chosen to limit the scope of the inquiry for strictly practical purposes and to make the inquiry more manageable given the Committee's inquiry schedule.

The scope of the Inquiry's consideration covered a wide range of issues, including the funding and investment in the cultural and creative industries across governments; access and participation in regional and rural areas; representation and role of public broadcasters, the ABC and SBS; workforce development and industry sustainability; and sector recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and future resilience.

The Committee is grateful to the arts organisations, industry representatives, regional communities and public sector agencies, as well as individuals, who took the time to make a submission to the inquiry and to appear before the Committee in public hearings.

In addition to thanking those who made such a valuable contribution to the Committee's work, I would like to express my appreciation for the collegiate and positive approach taken to the inquiry by the Committee members. Committee members may have come to the subject matter from different places but were at all times respectful of different perspectives and conducted the inquiry in a highly professional manner.

I would also like to thank the Committee's secretariat of Michael Baker, the Committee Manager, Jessica Summers, Inquiry Officer, Alyssa Topy, Research Assistant, Caitlin Connally, Inquiry Officer and Julie Barnes, Senior Administrative Officer and Sylvette Bassy, Administrative Officer, for the professional and thorough assistance they have given the Committee throughout the inquiry. I would also like to thank Matilda Dunn, the Committee's Intern for her excellent background research work. The Committee has greatly appreciated the support.



Georgie Purcell MLC
Chair

Findings and recommendations

2 Overview of Victoria's cultural and creative industries

FINDING 1: The Victorian cultural and creative industries are economically significant, contributing \$40.5 billion to the Victorian economy in 2022–23. 11

FINDING 2: The Victorian cultural and creative industries are an important employer, employing more than 320,000 Victorians or almost 9 per cent of total employment in the state. 11

FINDING 3: The Victorian cultural and creative industries provide significant economic stimulus to the state by attracting visitation and tourism. 11

FINDING 4: Victoria is a significant cultural audience, which rated higher for cultural participation than all other jurisdictions surveyed, including New York, Sweden and the United Kingdom. 11

FINDING 5: Engagement with the Victorian cultural and creative industries brings communities together, breaks down barriers between different groups within society and encourages greater communication and cohesion. 14

FINDING 6: There is a growing body of evidence that recognises the crucial role arts and creativity can play in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes. 14

FINDING 7: The COVID-19 pandemic severely damaged the Victorian cultural and creative industries. It significantly limited opportunities to present and engage with works publicly, and consequently restricted practitioners' income. 18

FINDING 8: The COVID-19 pandemic took away critical training opportunities from those looking to enter the Victorian cultural and creative industries during this time. 18

FINDING 9: Exclusion from COVID-19 financial support programs exacerbated the financial issues experienced by many in the industry and created ongoing skill gaps in the industry. 18

FINDING 10: Children and young people’s creative participation and attendance between 2017–18 and 2021–22 has significantly declined. **18**

FINDING 11: Several live music venues have closed following the COVID-19 pandemic due to various pressures, such as rising costs and inconsistent financial support. **18**

FINDING 12: The COVID-19 pandemic led to worsening mental health for many in the Victorian cultural and creative industries, particularly amongst children and young people. **20**

FINDING 13: Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the costs to produce and present work have significantly increased. **21**

FINDING 14: It has never been harder for Victorians to make a living in the cultural and creative industries. **23**

FINDING 15: Insecure or low wages impacts retention in the industries and discourages people from pursuing a career in the industries. **23**

FINDING 16: Many people who want to engage with the Victorian cultural and creative industries cannot afford to do so due to the cost of living crisis. **26**

FINDING 17: Ticket prices are a key barrier for people wanting to engage with the Victorian cultural and creative industries. **26**

FINDING 18: The COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis has accelerated the decline of volunteerism in the Victorian cultural and creative industries. **26**

FINDING 19: The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and intensified existing systemic issues within the Victorian cultural and creative industries, such as barriers to participation for women and gender diverse people, particularly those with caring responsibilities and long-term financial precarity. **27**

3 Government investment in Victoria's cultural and creative industries

FINDING 20: Failing to index Victorian cultural and creative industries funding has led to a decrease in financial support in real terms. **37**

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Victorian Government should ensure that Grant programs for the Victorian cultural and creative industries should be indexed to account for CPI increases. **37**

FINDING 21: Grant and reporting requirements can be very onerous, particularly on individuals and organisations who are made up of volunteers or part-time staff. **38**

RECOMMENDATION 2: Creative Victoria should take steps to reduce the administrative burden of grant programs to ensure such requirements are proportionate to the amount of funding on offer, particularly those grant programs capped at \$20,000 or less. **38**

FINDING 22: Unpredictable grant programs cause instability in the industries and prevents forward planning and investments in longer-term projects and strategies. **40**

RECOMMENDATION 3: Creative Victoria should release grant calendars in advance, which include all available grant programs, to improve predictability and aid planning in the industries. **40**

FINDING 23: Infrequent grant programs can negatively impact the industries by leaving greater numbers of applicants without government support for longer periods of time. **41**

FINDING 24: A low maximum grant cap of \$20,000 in some grant programs limits what recipients can achieve and may necessitate multiple grant applications to fund a project, consuming significant time and resources of applicants. **42**

FINDING 25: There needs to be a balance between investment in infrastructure and investment in artists. Without this balance, Victoria runs the risk of being dependent on interstate and international artists to fill these venues. **43**

FINDING 26: By requiring a developed concept or project, grant programs exclude creatives who are unable to undertake significant unpaid ideation work. 44

FINDING 27: The role that each level of government plays could be better defined to assist the industries in understanding where to go for relevant investment and support. 45

FINDING 28: People should not need to leave regional Victoria to engage with its cultural and creative industries. 46

FINDING 29: Victoria receives its fair share of funding from Creative Australia. 57

FINDING 30: It is difficult to determine whether Victoria receives its fair share of other funding captured in the cultural funding by government dataset, as state and territory breakdowns are not released. 57

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Victorian Government should advocate for the federal cultural funding by government dataset to release state and territory breakdowns. 57

FINDING 31: Regional Victoria does not receive its fair share of funding from Creative Australia. 59

FINDING 32: It is difficult to determine whether regional Victoria receives its fair share of other funding captured in the cultural funding by government dataset, as remoteness level or geography breakdowns are not released. 59

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Victorian Government should advocate for the federal cultural funding by government dataset to release remoteness level or geography breakdowns. 59

4 National Broadcasters role in Victoria's cultural and creative industries

RECOMMENDATION 6: The Victorian Government advocate to the Federal Government to appoint at least one more Board member from Victoria to the ABC Board to be adequately represented. 65

FINDING 33: No state or territory has an ABC headcount that accurately reflects its population size; an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of ABC employee headcount exists to varying degrees in all states and territories.

69

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Federal Government that more ABC jobs be based in Victoria proportionate to Victoria's population.

69

FINDING 34: The ABC's decision to relocate its Ultimo office to Parramatta was influenced by multiple external factors, including legal obligations under the ABC Enterprise Agreement 2022–2025, budget constraints that made New South Wales the most cost-effective option, the Parramatta office's proximity to key state departments and agencies, and a strategic goal to better reflect New South Wales' population demographics.

69

FINDING 35: It is disappointing that both of Australia's national broadcasters the ABC and SBS expanded their presence to Western Sydney instead of Victoria.

69

FINDING 36: The ABC's impact and ability to culturally represent any particular state goes beyond the headcount or location of ABC offices.

69

FINDING 37: The Committee calls on the Victorian Government to continue to advocate to the Federal Government and the ABC for the return of a Victorian 7:30 Report.

74

FINDING 38: ABC spending is unevenly distributed across all states and territories when compared to their population sizes. No state or territory receives funding proportionate to its share of Australia's population.

74

FINDING 39: The ABC's content production decisions are shaped by state screen agency policies and funding availability. External pressures, including rising production costs and a 14% real-term reduction in the ABC's budget over the past decade, have constrained the broadcaster's capacity to create content and ability to expand its footprint in the nation's states and territories.

74

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government should increase funding for its screen and creative agencies to enhance investment opportunities and partnerships with the ABC; and support the national and global competitiveness of Victoria’s cultural and creatives industries in content production.

74

FINDING 40: No state or territory reflects an SBS FTE employee number that is proportionate to its share of the Australia’s population.

76

FINDING 41: The geographic distribution of SBS staff does not reflect the availability of its content. While a significant portion of SBS’s workforce is based in New South Wales, its services are national and platform-agnostic, ensuring all Australians, regardless of location, can access and benefit from SBS content.

76

FINDING 42: The SBS’s decision to relocate to Western Sydney was determined by funding requirements set by the Federal Government.

78

FINDING 43: It is unclear why Victoria was not considered as an option for the Federal Government’s relocation feasibility study for the SBS.

78

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government should appeal to the Federal Government to clarify decision-making surrounding the relocation feasibility study for SBS’s office to Western Sydney.

78

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Federal Government and SBS to establish a physical presence in an appropriately culturally diverse location in Victoria, such as Broadmeadows or Dandenong.

78

FINDING 44: SBS provides significant financial and creative investment to Victoria.

80

FINDING 45: SBS’s content remains nationally accessible regardless of the production location.

80

FINDING 46: Between 2020 and 2025, the ABC commissioned 75 external and 52 internal projects where the majority of production took place in Victoria, demonstrating its vital role in supporting the state’s screen industry.

82

FINDING 47: The ABC partners with major Victorian cultural institutions to create educational content and showcase Victorian talent. **83**

FINDING 48: Through initiatives like VicScreen internship and Indigenous placements, the ABC actively develops Victoria creative and cultural workforce. **83**

FINDING 49: The ABC delivers 16 regional radio programs in Victoria which produces over 112 hours of weekly local content across 9 stations, ensuring broad community representation. **84**

FINDING 50: One of the main challenges for the ABC in producing content in regional Victoria is the lack of independent production sector proposals for shows to be made in regional Victoria. **85**

FINDING 51: The cost of producing content in regional Victoria requires significant financial investment. **85**

FINDING 52: Producing content in regional areas delivers significant benefits, including social benefits, such as better representation and celebration of local communities and economic benefits, like job creation and increased local spending. **85**

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government provide targeted funding and financial incentives to the independent production sector to boost content production that represents regional and rural Victoria. **85**

FINDING 53: SBS's receives about one-third of the ABC's funding, which restricts its ability to produce and commission content for and in Victoria. **87**

FINDING 54: SBS sustains substantial Melbourne-based operations, producing language programs that reach 3.42 million Victorian viewers monthly, while supporting diverse communities through partnerships with VicScreen and local creatives. **87**

FINDING 55: The SBS deeply engages with Victoria's multilingual and multicultural communities by supporting community events and major cultural events in Victoria. **87**

What happens next?

There are several stages to a parliamentary inquiry.

The Committee conducts the Inquiry

This report on the Inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria is the result of extensive research and consultation by the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

The Committee received written submissions, spoke with people at public hearings, reviewed research evidence and deliberated over a number of meetings. Experts, government representatives and individuals expressed their views directly to us as Members of Parliament.

A Parliamentary Committee is not part of the Government. The Committee is a group of members of different political parties (including independent members). Parliament has asked us to look closely at an issue and report back. This process helps Parliament do its work by encouraging public debate and involvement in issues.

You can learn more about the Committee's work at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/committees/legislative-council-economy-and-infrastructure-committee>.

The report is presented to Parliament

This report was presented to Parliament and can be found at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/inquiry-into-the-cultural-and-creative-industries-in-victoria/reports>.

A response from the Government

The Government has six months to respond in writing to any recommendations made in this report.

The response is public and put on the inquiry page of Parliament's website when it is received at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/inquiry-into-the-cultural-and-creative-industries-in-victoria/reports>.

In its response, the Government indicates whether it supports the Committee's recommendations. It can also outline actions it may take.

Chapter 1

Inquiry background

1.1 Purpose and scope of the Inquiry

The Committee undertook this Inquiry in recognition of the economic and social significance of Victoria's cultural and creative industries. It assessed the impact of the Commonwealth Government's Australian cultural policy, *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place* (Revive), on Victoria's cultural and creative industries, with a particular focus on the equitable distribution of funding and resources across the state. The Committee considered a range of factors, including national funding allocations, regional access to cultural investment, and the role of public broadcasters in Victoria's creative landscape.

The scope of the Inquiry's consideration covered a wide range of issues, such as:

- funding and investment in the cultural and creative industries
- access and participation in regional and rural areas
- representation and role of public broadcasters
- workforce development and industry sustainability
- sector recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and future resilience.

The Committee acknowledges that the cultural and creative industries encompass a broad range of sectors and disciplines. These industries are generally understood to encompass a broad range of professions and skills that involve creative thinking, imagination, and artistic expression across various mediums and formats. The industries span disciplines such as visual arts, literature, music, theatre, film, design, events, and digital media, among others.

There is no single, universally accepted definition of the cultural and creative industries. Instead, multiple definitions exist across different public and institutional frameworks, each emphasising different aspects of creativity, production, and economic contribution. These definitions can vary significantly depending on factors such as cultural context, policy priorities, and the classification criteria used by governments, industry bodies, and academic institutions. Some definitions focus on the artistic and cultural value of creative work, while others emphasise its economic impact, particularly in relation to employment, innovation, and intellectual property.

To focus the Inquiry, the Committee examined issues related primarily to the creative arts sector. The Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) provides a useful framework for categorising the various industries within the creative arts, offering a structured approach to understanding the sector's composition

and economic contribution. In its submission, the Victorian Parliamentary Budget Office identified the sub-sectors of the creative arts industry based on the ANZSIC classifications (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Sub-sectors of the creative arts industry

| Creative arts industry | |
|---|--|
| Architectural services | Motion picture and sound recording |
| Art education | Printing |
| Art galleries and museums | Professional photography |
| Broadcasting (incl. radio, television and internet) | Publishing (incl. books, music, and internet) |
| Creative and performing arts | Specialised design services (incl. fashion, graphic, and interior) |
| Libraries and archives | |

Source: Victorian Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 14*, p. 14.

1.2 Terms of Reference

On 25 May 2023, the Committee agreed to self-refer this Inquiry into Victoria’s cultural and creative industries. The following Terms of Reference were adopted by the Committee:

- That the Economy and Infrastructure Committee resolves under Standing Order 23.04(3) that, given the economic and social significance of Victoria’s cultural and creative industries, for the Committee to inquire into, monitor and report, by November 2024, on —
- (1) the economic and social impact of the Commonwealth Government’s Australian cultural policy, Revive, on Victoria’s arts and cultural industries including, in particular, Victoria’s share of national arts and cultural spending;
 - (2) regional Victoria’s share of national arts and cultural spending;
 - (3) the importance of spending in the Victorian economy and the cultural dynamism and representation in Victoria of government funded national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, and, in particular, whether these broadcasters are spending in Victoria a share of their budget that matches the size of Victoria’s population, economy and unique place within national cultural life;
 - (4) the ongoing financial sustainability of the seven national performing arts training organisations including whether Victoria’s share of this funding is adequate; and
 - (5) whether the Revive policy and relevant state government policies and spending provide sufficient support and impetus to rebuild and sustain Victoria’s cultural and creative industries following the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector.

The Committee further resolved to extend the tabling date for the Final Report to 25 August 2025.¹

1.3 Inquiry process

The Inquiry was conducted with input from key stakeholders, including: arts organisations, industry representatives, regional communities and public sector agencies. The Committee's findings contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the needs of Victoria's cultural and creative industries and inform future policy directions to support the sector's growth and sustainability.

The Inquiry received 42 submissions and conducted 2 days of public hearings. Public hearings were held on the Parliamentary precinct and included representatives from

- Creative Victoria
- VicScreen
- Community Music Victoria
- Theatre Network Australia
- Association of Artist Managers
- SBS
- St Martins Youth Arts Centre
- Theatre Works
- Arena Theatre Company
- Rawcus Theatre Company
- La Mama Theatre
- A New Approach
- Public Galleries Association of Victoria
- Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria
- Bendigo Theatre Company
- Sertori Consulting.

In total, the Committee spoke to 21 witnesses at public hearings.

1.4 Scope of the Inquiry

The Committee emphasises that given the breadth of sectors that fall within the remit of the cultural and creative industries, and the lack of an accepted definition,

¹ *Hansard*, 27 August 2024, p. 2981.

it is challenging to accurately assess their overall size and economic contribution to Victoria. The industries encompass a diverse range of activities, from traditional arts and performance to design, media, and digital content creation, each with varying economic models and employment structures.

Even when focusing on creative arts industries specifically, measurement is complicated by factors such as the prevalence of freelance and contract work, informal and unpaid creative labour, and the intersection of cultural production with other sectors like tourism and education. These complexities mean that while existing data can provide insights into industry trends, employment figures, and economic output, a comprehensive picture remains difficult to establish.

The Committee acknowledges that the cultural and creative industries include a very broad range of industries, activities and sectors. In correspondence with the Committee, Simon Thewlis raised concerns about the breadth of the potential sectors and professions that could be captured within the terms “cultural” and “creative” industries.

Simon Thewlis highlighted the fact that the arts had only a small financial share of cultural and creative industries funding, stating that:

For a long time, the Australia Council and many others used to say that the economic value of the Arts, the creative industries, or the creative and cultural industries was \$111.7 billion. This has been quoted everywhere. However, it has always been very misleading – even though it was based on data from the ABS.²

He suggested that the:

vast majority of the \$111.7 billion is areas like the advertising industry and media buying, computer software, the manufacturing and retailing of clothing and footwear, the whole printing industry (inc printing Bunnings catalogues), jewellery retailing ...³

He told the Committee that the performing arts – while often viewed by the public as being a big part of this whole area – accounted for just 2%, while the Event Industry is a \$40 billion a year industry nationally.⁴

The Committee recognises that there are a number of industries outside of the visual and performing arts that are very significant and important industries to Victoria. It freely acknowledges that the events industry, the games development industry, advertising and a range of other industries are creative industries and make substantial contributions to Victoria’s cultural and economic well-being.

However, the Committee decided to limit its inquiry focus to the arts, both visual and performing, as to include all of the other sectors would expand the breadth of the Inquiry excessively, given the Committee’s current schedule of Inquiries. The vast

² Mr Simon Thewlis, Event Consultant and Producer, correspondence, 18 November 2024.

³ Mr Simon Thewlis, Event Consultant and Producer, correspondence, 18 November 2024.

⁴ Mr Simon Thewlis, Event Consultant and Producer, correspondence, 18 November 2024.

majority of submissions received were from arts-focussed organisations. It is also important to recognise that economic or financial significance is not the only, or even most important, criteria in determining the focus of the Inquiry.

The Committee does consider, however, that an Inquiry into the broader creative industries, including the gaming development and events industries, would be beneficial in the future.

1.5 The Report

This Report consists of four chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter Two provides an analysis of the cultural, social and economic significance of the cultural and creative industries, particularly the arts. The Committee considers how engagement with the cultural and creative industries brings communities together, breaks down barriers between different groups within society and encourages greater communication and cohesion.

Chapter Three considers government investment in Victoria's cultural and creative industries. Issues addressed include an overview of Victorian Government funding; Victorian Government grant programs; details regarding the key Victorian Portfolio Agencies; details of Victorian Government asset investment; stakeholder feedback to the Committee about the Victorian Government funding arrangements, including the onerous nature of grants reporting and the unpredictable nature of the grants process, the limited opportunities to obtain grants and the low level of grant caps; the limited focus of the grants process; confusion about the sources of funding; the limited access of funding for regional Victoria; and details of funding sources from outside Victoria.

The final chapter addresses the ABC and SBS's role in supporting Victoria's cultural and creative industries. The chapter analyses the ABC funding allocations for Victoria, including staffing and board representation, as well as the decision-making around moving its headquarters to NSW, its production spend in Victoria. Similar issues related to SBS are also considered in the chapter.

Chapter 2

Overview of Victoria's cultural and creative industries

2.1 Significance of Victoria's cultural and creative industries

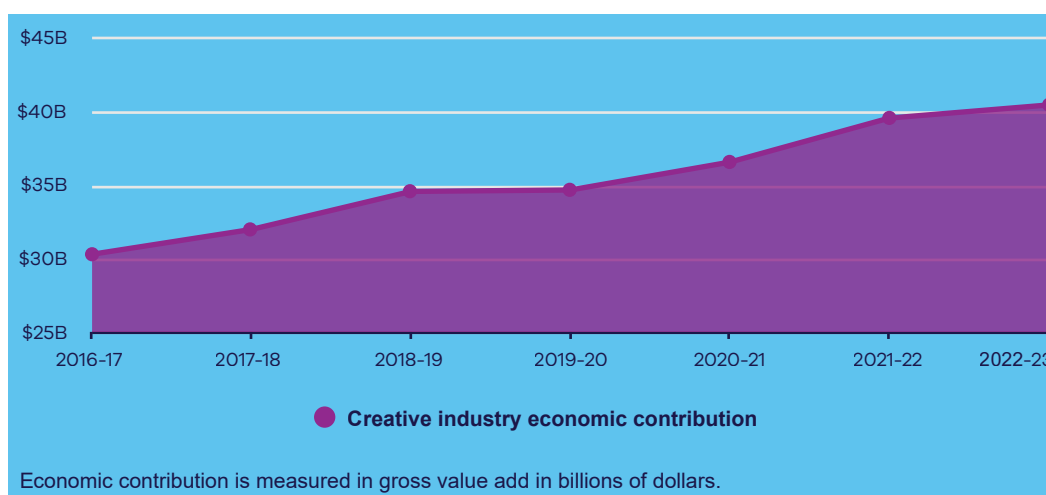
2.1.1 Economic significance

Almost without exception every adult Victorian is in the market for culture. This means they have engaged with at least one cultural activity in the last three years.

Claire Febey, Chief Executive, Creative Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

The Committee heard that 'the creative industries are a major contributor to local economies and to our national economy'.¹ In 2022–23, 'the Victorian creative industries contributed \$40.5 billion to the Victorian economy'.² See Figure 2.1. The industries economic contribution has 'increased at an average annual rate of 4.8% over the last five years'.³

Figure 2.1 Creative economic contribution to Victoria



Source: Creative Victoria, *Economic contribution data: Victoria's creative economy* <<https://creative.vic.gov.au/resources/data-insights/victorias-creative-economy/economic-impact>> accessed 15 May 2025.

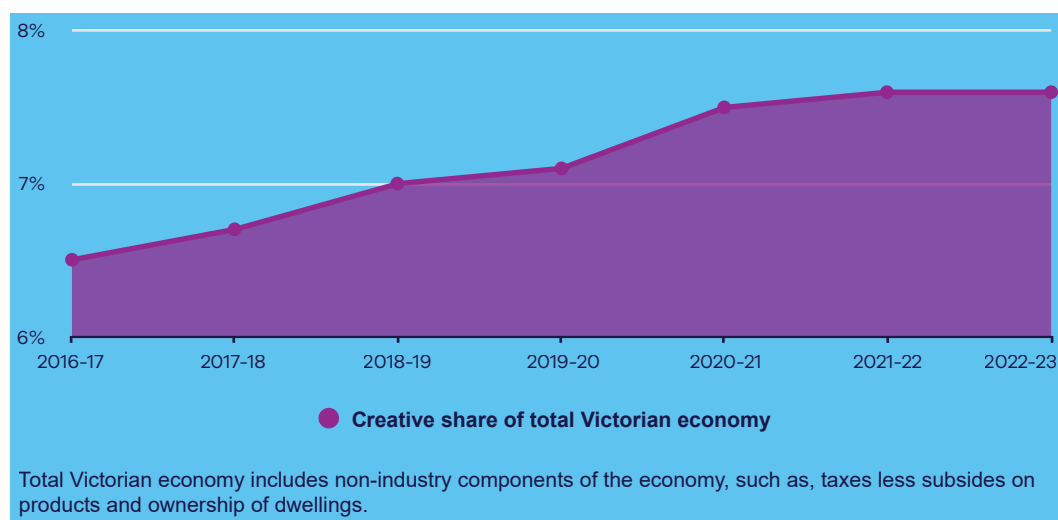
1 Vicky Guglielmo, Manager, Libraries, Arts and Events, Yarra City Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

2 Claire Febey, Chief Executive, Creative Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

3 Creative Victoria, *Economic contribution data: Victoria's creative economy* <<https://creative.vic.gov.au/resources/data-insights/victorias-creative-economy/economic-impact>> accessed 15 May 2025.

As of 2022–23, the creative economy represents a 7.6% share of the total Victorian economy.⁴ See Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Creative share of total Victorian economy



Source: Creative Victoria, *Economic contribution data: Victoria's creative economy* <<https://creative.vic.gov.au/resources/data-insights/victorias-creative-economy/economic-impact>> accessed 15 May 2025.

Claire Febey, Chief Executive, Creative Victoria, told the Committee that these figures 'are based on ABS data and are consistent with the definitions that are used in other jurisdictions. As well as the traditional creative roles, it also captures in this data creative roles that are in non-creative industries. So, it could include, for example, an industrial designer that works in the automotive industry'.⁵

The industries are a significant employer

The creative economy employs 'more than 320,000 Victorians ... that is almost 9 per cent of total employment in the state'.⁶ The Committee heard that the industries 'create a sort of ecology of economic activity around them'.⁷ Maggie Collins, Executive Director, Association of Artist Managers, stated:

Every single artist is a business. They are either a sole trader, partnership, proprietary limited or trust, or whatever it is; they all file a tax return. They are all businesses and they all interact with other businesses – like a manager who is a sole trader or partnership or proprietary limited, or a publicist who is that, or an agent who is booking their shows, or a graphic designer who is doing their work, or anyone else – and in this ecosystem all of these businesses are trying to interact with one another and lift each other's work and businesses up.⁸

⁴ Claire Febey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

⁵ Claire Febey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

⁶ Claire Febey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

⁷ Claire Febey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

⁸ Maggie Collins, Executive Director Association of Artist Managers, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

Similarly, Claire Febey of Creative Victoria, spoke about the Arena Theatre Company in Bendigo, who stimulate local economic activity when they put on a show. She stated:

Arena Theatre Company, based in Bendigo, an amazing theatre company that is focused on making theatre for and with children, will be engaging lots of different technical experts in their front and back of house. There will be management experience; there will be sound production. They are really interested in working with technology, so they will be finding people across other industries to assist them in thinking about how to engage with emerging technology as they share and deliver their work. They will be putting on shows that require, as you are suggesting, food and beverage, unlocking opportunities in that town around transport and other things.⁹

The industries drive tourism

The Committee heard that the Victorian cultural and creative industries provide 'huge economic stimulus to the state in terms of locals and people traveling to'¹⁰ engage with the industries. Joshua Lowe, Theatre Network Australia, emphasised this point by asking:

I want you to imagine Melbourne without Hosier Lane, without the arts centre, the NGV, the comedy festival, the Fringe Festival, concerts at Rod Laver, RISING lighting up the dead of winter, Fed Square alive with performances. Why would people visit the city? How would Melbourne be different to any other city?¹¹

Victorian cultural and creative institutions attract significant visitation. In 2023–24, 'more than 11 million Victorians and visitors came through the doors of our state-owned arts and cultural institutions'.¹² The Public Galleries Association of Victoria, in its submission to this Inquiry, highlighted that in 2024, Victoria's public galleries attracted 7.3 million visitors. It also noted that 'public galleries are driving visitors to Melbourne and across the regions, with 49% of overnight trips to Melbourne and 44% of domestic trips to regional Victoria including a visit to a gallery'.¹³

⁹ Claire Febey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

¹⁰ Tim Stitz, Board Member, Theatre Network Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

¹¹ Joshua Lowe, Chief Executive Officer, Theatre Network Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

¹² Claire Febey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

¹³ Public Galleries Association of Victoria, *Submission 33*, p. 1.

Case Study 2.1 Wimmera Mallee Silo Art Trail

Claire Febey of Creative Victoria, spoke to the Committee about the Wimmera Mallee Silo Art Trail (The Trail). The Trail is 'Australia's largest outdoor gallery, linking the Wimmera Mallee's treasured small towns across 700km through the region'. The Trail has seen 'internationally renowned artists ... transform each grain silo into an epic work of art, each one telling a unique story about the host location'.

Claire Febey told the Committee that The 'Trail has delivered for the region on all accounts. A study showed that by 2019, there were already more than 570 extra visitors coming to the Wimmera Southern Mallee region each month. This is particularly impressive when we think that The Trail is taking people through towns that have populations of 200 or less'.

Source: Claire Febey, Chief Executive, Creative Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

Case Study 2.2 Melbourne Fringe

In 2023, the Melbourne Fringe generated \$23 million in economic activity. The festival attracted visitors from across Australia and internationally, who spent on accommodation, dining and entertainment' in Melbourne.

The festival also activated 'over 90 venues across Greater Melbourne, including theatres, galleries, cafes, bars and community spaces'. Such widespread activation during the festival 'boosts revenue for local businesses through increased foot traffic, hospitality spending, and tourism related services.

The festival supported over 150 jobs, 'including roles for artists, producers, technicians, event staff, and administrative professionals'.

Source: Melbourne Fringe, *Submission 12*, p. 2.

The Committee heard that 'Victoria is one of Australia's most significant cultural audiences'.¹⁴ Claire Febey of Creative Victoria, stated that 'Victoria rated higher for cultural participation than all other jurisdictions where this research has been undertaken. This includes New York City, Sweden and the UK'.¹⁵

¹⁴ Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA), *Submission 35*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Claire Febey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

This is also true at the individual level – ‘Victorians spend more than their state and territory counterparts generating the highest per capita spend at \$142.58 in 2023 (\$26 more than the national average)’.¹⁶ Live Performance Australia, in their submission to this Inquiry, highlighted that in 2023, Victoria led the nation in a diverse range of categories:¹⁷

- **the largest market for theatre**, generating 49.2% of revenue and 42.4% of attendance
- **the largest market for comedy**, generating 34.7% of revenue and 46.9% of attendance
- **the second-largest market** across a significant number of categories, most notably in **contemporary music**, generating 32.6% of revenue and 32.1% of attendance, and **musical theatre**, generating 32.7% of revenue and 32.2% of attendance.

Regional Victorians also account for the highest market share in revenue (47.4%) and in attendance (34.7%) across regional Australia.¹⁸

Put simply – the Victorian cultural and creative industries are a vital part of its economy. It generates revenue, employs Victorians and attracts visitors to our state, who in turn spend in the local economy. It also makes Victoria a place that people want to visit, live or work. ‘Arts and culture are not just a luxury. They are integral to Victoria’s economy, tourism industry and liveability’.¹⁹

FINDING 1: The Victorian cultural and creative industries are economically significant, contributing \$40.5 billion to the Victorian economy in 2022–23.

FINDING 2: The Victorian cultural and creative industries are an important employer, employing more than 320,000 Victorians or almost 9 per cent of total employment in the state.

FINDING 3: The Victorian cultural and creative industries provide significant economic stimulus to the state by attracting visitation and tourism.

FINDING 4: Victoria is a significant cultural audience, which rated higher for cultural participation than all other jurisdictions surveyed, including New York, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

¹⁶ Live Performance Australia, *Submission 39*, p. 2.

¹⁷ Live Performance Australia, *Submission 39*, p. 2.

¹⁸ Live Performance Australia, *Submission 39*, p. 2.

¹⁹ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

2.1.2 Social significance

Social cohesion is 'essential for healthy people, societies and economies'.²⁰ Yet, research warns that Australia 'faces real and immediate social cohesion challenges'.²¹ The Committee heard that engagement with the cultural and creative industries can significantly improve social cohesion by counteracting 'loneliness, isolation and disrupted connections'.²² Katrina Cornwell, Co-Artistic Director, Rawcus Theatre Company, told the Committee:

Theatre combats social isolation by bringing people together and by telling our stories, and that is something that our state still needs after the severity of our lockdowns. Art gives us a sense of who we are and who we want to be, and it builds community at its foundational level.²³

Lauren Mullings, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural Arts Victoria, told the Committee that the arts 'are an incredible networking and collaborative tool'²⁴ that can boost engagement and connection across cultures and other social barriers:

[The arts] allow people to share and to do that in ways that are not necessarily supported elsewhere. They require trust. They require, to a certain level, the ability to engage people. By putting together festivals and content and arts and programming we are inviting people in to have new experiences and we are redefining what art forms are like, and we are doing that in ways that are highly intercultural and often cross barriers.²⁵

Similarly, Nadja Kostich, St Martins Youth Arts Centre, told the Committee:

What we are finding on the ground: that through the act of theatre, through collaboration, through learning in situ, young people are thinking through a humanitarian lens. They are thinking of community, they are thinking of each other and they are working out how to listen to each other. This is one of the most important qualities, it feels like, for our society to learn to listen and work together and work creatively, because there are many problems to solve, right, and they are originating ideas. So I think for us, we are seeing our utter importance in that social cohesion fabric.²⁶

Loneliness, isolation and disrupted connections are not only determinants of social cohesion, but also of physical and mental health. Research shows that 'social

²⁰ A New Approach, *Belong, Trust, Connect: Policy Opportunities for social cohesion through arts and culture* March 2025, p. 11.

²¹ A New Approach, *Belong, Trust, Connect: Policy Opportunities for social cohesion through arts and culture*, p. 11.

²² A New Approach, *Belong, Trust, Connect: Policy Opportunities for social cohesion through arts and culture*, p. 11.

²³ Katrina Cornwell, Co-Artistic Director, Rawcus Theatre Company, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

²⁴ Lauren Mullings, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural Arts Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

²⁵ Lauren Mullings, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

²⁶ Nadja Kostich, Director and Chief Executive Officer, St Martins Youth Arts Centre, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 7–8.

isolation and loneliness have detrimental physical and mental health consequences'.²⁷ Concerning data from the Victorian Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission shows that rates of mental distress and mental illness are increasing – with 1 in 5 Victorians experiencing a mental health condition each year.²⁸ Additionally, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System identified that the economic cost of poor mental health in Victoria is \$14.2 billion annually.²⁹

The Committee heard that 'there is a growing body of evidence that recognises the crucial role arts and creativity can play in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes'.³⁰ Additionally, 'Australians are increasingly acting on that belief and attending arts and cultural events to improve their wellbeing'.³¹ Anne Robertson, Executive Officer, Public Galleries Association of Victoria, told the Committee:

The research out of Western Australia – its catchphrase is 'You don't have to be good at the arts for the arts to be good for you.' They recommend 2 hours of any kind of art activity a week, and it can improve your mental health by 30 per cent.³²

Craig Barrie, General Manager, Community Music Victoria, emphasised that interventions to address loneliness not only improve individual health and wellbeing, but also produce a significant return on investment. He stated:

Some headline figures from that include that a 2021 report from the BankWest Curtin Economics Centre estimated that the cost of loneliness is about \$2.7 billion per year nationally, and that is equivalent to the annual cost of \$1565 for each person who becomes lonely. The 2019 National Mental Health Commission showed that for every dollar invested in programs that address loneliness, the return on investment is between \$2.14 and \$2.87. There is some UK research as well that shows what the non-private and private cost to employers is, which is significant.³³

The Committee also heard that engagement with the cultural and creative industries is 'hugely relevant for the survival of rural and regional communities'.³⁴ Leah Sertori, Founder, Facilitator and Coach, Sertori Consulting, told the Committee:

It is baking in the capacity for rural and regional Victorian communities to meet the challenges that we are facing in this new world and really employ a very unique set of critical thinking skills and an ability to work with people from very diverse backgrounds and be inclusive.

²⁷ Victorian Department of Health, *Mental illness and mental wellbeing*, <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/your-health-report-of-the-chief-health-officer-victoria-2018/mental-health/mental-illness-and>> accessed 15 May 2025.

²⁸ Victorian Department of Health, *Mental illness and mental wellbeing*.

²⁹ Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, *Interim Report*, p. 361.

³⁰ Theatre Network Australia, *Submission 19, Attachment 1*, p. 6.

³¹ A New Approach, *Belong, Trust, Connect: Policy Opportunities for social cohesion through arts and culture*, p. 11.

³² Anne Robertson, Executive Officer, Public Galleries Association of Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

³³ Craig Barrie, General Manager, Community Music Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

³⁴ Leah Sertori, Founder, Facilitator and Coach, Sertori Consulting, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

FINDING 5: Engagement with the Victorian cultural and creative industries brings communities together, breaks down barriers between different groups within society and encourages greater communication and cohesion.

FINDING 6: There is a growing body of evidence that recognises the crucial role arts and creativity can play in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

2.2 Impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on the cultural and creative industries

While the broader economy has rebounded since COVID-19, the arts sector has not.

Joshua Lowe, Chief Executive Officer, Theatre Network Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

The Committee heard that the COVID-19 pandemic had a particularly pronounced impact upon the Victorian cultural and creative industries. Whilst some stakeholders reported that many measures, such as audience engagement, are slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels, other stakeholders painted a very different picture. Maggie Collins Executive Director, Association of Artists Managers, told the Committee:

When we were going through the pandemic, everyone wanted it to go back to normal, and when the pandemic ended it never really did go back to normal. It was not because we were still in the pandemic, obviously, but because this was just a whole new world. And it was not just because of the event of the pandemic but because of so many other events that happened, also a lot of other things that were leading up to it before that.

The Committee found that the following key themes emerged:

- The pandemic caused a loss of audiences and income
- The pandemic caused negative mental health impacts
- Since the pandemic, there have been significant cost increases
- Since the pandemic, it is harder to make a living in the industries
- Since the pandemic, there is a broader cost of living crisis
- The pandemic exacerbated long-term issues in the industries

2.2.1 Loss of audiences and income

Australia's arts, cultural and creative sector was among the first and hardest-hit casualties of the COVID-19 pandemic – nowhere more so than in Victoria.

Kate Larsen, *Submission 13*, p. 2.

The Committee heard that the COVID-19 pandemic 'shut down'³⁵ the cultural and creative industries. Conor Cunningham, President, Bendigo Theatre Company, told the Committee that 'it completely stopped everything we were doing'.³⁶ He stated:

I think we had two productions ready to be staged at that point. The youth theatre were doing *Cats*. We ourselves were doing a production of *We Will Rock You*. Both productions came to a complete standstill, unfortunately. I mean, as grown-ups, the adults were able to deal with the impact of that, but unfortunately our younger people felt the impact of that more because of the work they had put in, the investment of time and love that they gave to that production, only for it to be taken away from them in such a sudden moment.³⁷

This loss of audience was broadly felt across the cultural and creative industries – 'practically speaking, it took away the opportunity for people to present work publicly'.³⁸ Lauren Mullings of Multicultural Arts Victoria, emphasised the negative economic impact the loss of audience had upon the industries:

In terms of the economy that is provided by that opportunity, we are talking about the ability to organise and be paid to organise outcomes, to present work in venues. Whether you are a musician playing in a band or whether you are a theatre maker, without those opportunities for presentation then certainly the economic opportunity would dwindle.³⁹

The Committee also heard that the absence of opportunities to put on work also meant that people who were entering the industries at that time, lost critical training opportunities. Dianne Toulson, Executive Director, Theatre Works, told the Committee:

They are coming into our theatre because we are a training ground for those people, and their physical skill knowledge is so below what it would have been had they been able to do practical work. That then leaves them with anxiety because they do not know or, you know, then they are leaving the industry. So, they have done all that study and they are leaving. There are a lot of challenges post COVID from that disconnection from reality.⁴⁰

Substantially decreased opportunities to engage with the community meant that creatives also had substantially fewer income earning opportunities. The Public Galleries Association of Victoria, in their submission to this Inquiry, highlighted that during the COVID-19 pandemic the Victorian Public Gallery sector lost 72% of its visitation and \$22.4 million in earned income.⁴¹ Significant losses of income are seen across many sectors of the cultural and creative industries, impacting many individuals

³⁵ Megan Champion, Business Development and Facilitator, Sertori Consulting, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 55.

³⁶ Conor Cunningham, President, Bendigo Theatre Company, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

³⁷ Conor Cunningham, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

³⁸ Lauren Mullings, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

³⁹ Lauren Mullings, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

⁴⁰ Dianne Toulson, Executive Director, Theatre Works, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7.

⁴¹ Public Galleries Association of Victoria, *Submission 33*, p. 3.

and organisations who rely upon such income to make a living. The Committee heard that 79% of creatives of colour and First Nations respondents to a Diversity Arts Australia survey reported having lost or expecting to lose significant amounts of income during the pandemic.⁴²

Furthermore, many individuals who work in the cultural and creative industries were ineligible to apply for targeted COVID-19 financial support programs provided by Commonwealth and State Governments. Ineligibility exacerbated the financial issues experienced by those in the industries and meant that they did not benefit from the same payments many individuals in other sectors benefited from during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of being excluded from COVID-19 financial support programs are still being felt by many in the industries who are yet to recover financially. Exclusion from COVID-19 financial support programs also has created skill gaps in the industries. Dianne Toulson of Theatre Works, told the Committee:

There is that ongoing effect of people being nervous about staying in an industry that is so volatile, and parts of the arts sector were not supported through COVID, so they have disappeared. The lack of technical people that can do technical work – they have left the industry because they were not supported. All of those impacts put financial pressure on us.⁴³

Conversely, those creative organisations who did qualify for financial support programs reported that such payments allowed them to 'keep staff on and pay artists'.⁴⁴ Indeed, some organisations told the Committee that their 'budgets over COVID were bigger than they are now'.⁴⁵

Decreased audience engagement with the cultural and creative industries also had a negative impact upon the audiences themselves, particularly children and young people. The Australian Bureau of Statistics 'reported a concerning decrease' in children and young people's creative participation and attendance between 2017-18 and 2021-22.⁴⁶

- Children's attendance at cultural venues or events fell from 94% to 80%, with the majority (67%) attending the cinema. Attendance at at least one performing arts event dropped from 57% to 31%.
 - Only 33% of children visited a library or archive
 - Only 20% of children visited a gallery
 - Only 12% of children attended a music concert
 - Only 9% of children attended a theatre

⁴² Lauren Mullings, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

⁴³ Dianne Toulson, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Caitlin Dullard, Director and Chief Executive Officer, La Mama Theatre Company, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

⁴⁵ Caitlin Dullard, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Theatre Network Australia, *Submission 19, Attachment 1*, pp. 12-13.

- Only 8% of children attended a dance performance
- Only 7% of children attended a musical or opera.
- Young people aged 15 to 24 'also experienced a significant decline in attendance' over the same period.
 - Library visits fell from 36% to 28%
 - Gallery attendance fell from 25% to 17%
 - Performing arts venue attendance fell from 56% to 27%.

Children and young people's participation in the cultural and creative industries has also decreased over the same period. Participation in:⁴⁷

- Creative writing fell from 23% to 19%
- Dancing fell from 17% to 13%
- Singing or playing a musical instrument fell from 23% to 19%
- Drama activities fell from 8% to 5%
- Reading for pleasure fell from 79% to 72%.

The value of creativity is not simply found in entertainment or self-expression, but in the development of the whole person. Debra Allanson, Chief Executive Officer, Arena Theatre Company, told the Committee that:

We understand the value of developing young people as future citizens and have a dual role to play in the sense that those people are our future audiences. We are developing people who are well-rounded citizens, but we are also developing people who may also seek a career in the creative industries or to become creative thinkers in whatever industry they choose to enter. We know the value of children accessing theatre and performance at the earliest stage.⁴⁸

Debra Allanson also said that:

We are extremely concerned that the opportunities for continuing that at the scale that it needs to be available to children in schools, particularly schools outside of the metropolitan area and more specifically in our area of Bendigo and central Victoria, are becoming harder and harder to find.⁴⁹

As discussed above, the Victorian cultural and creative industries provide for significant economic and social benefits – both for young creatives and young people who consume creative content. If left unaddressed, such marked decreases in both

⁴⁷ Theatre Network Australia, *Submission 19, Attachment 1*, pp. 12–13.

⁴⁸ Debra Allanson, Chief Executive Officer, Arena Theatre Company, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

⁴⁹ Debra Allanson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

participation and attendance 'could negatively impact literacy, social cohesion, and health, with significant consequences as children and young people grow up and enter the workforce'.⁵⁰

FINDING 7: The COVID-19 pandemic severely damaged the Victorian cultural and creative industries. It significantly limited opportunities to present and engage with works publicly, and consequently restricted practitioners' income.

FINDING 8: The COVID-19 pandemic took away critical training opportunities from those looking to enter the Victorian cultural and creative industries during this time.

FINDING 9: Exclusion from COVID-19 financial support programs exacerbated the financial issues experienced by many in the industry and created ongoing skill gaps in the industry.

FINDING 10: Children and young people's creative participation and attendance between 2017-18 and 2021-22 has significantly declined.

Live music venue closures

The Committee heard that following the COVID-19 pandemic, 'an increasing amount' of live music venues have closed due to a series of pressures,⁵¹ including 'rising costs and inconsistent support'.⁵² Ariel Blum, Engagement Lead, Yarra City Council, told the Committee that the closure of venues 'has a cascading effect' that impacts 'everyone from the musicians to the tech crews to the rehearsal studios'.⁵³ This not only limits employment opportunities, but also reduces earning potential:

Without venues and spaces there is a much larger shortage of income that artists can earn and subsequently live off.⁵⁴

FINDING 11: Several live music venues have closed following the COVID-19 pandemic due to various pressures, such as rising costs and inconsistent financial support.

⁵⁰ Theatre Network Australia, *Submission 19, Attachment 1*, pp. 13-14.

⁵¹ Ariel Blum, Engagement Lead, Yarra City Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

⁵² Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁵³ Ariel Blum, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Ariel Blum, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

2.2.2 Negative mental health impacts

The mental health impact on artists was quite profound.

Dianne Toulson, Executive Director, Theatre Works, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

The Committee heard that the COVID-19 pandemic had a 'profound'⁵⁵ impact upon mental health in the Victorian cultural and creative industries. Nadja Kostich of St Martins Youth Arts Centre, spoke about how worsening mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased staff attrition:

A lot of staff mental health issues came through and we were then not able to afford to replace certain key members of the staff that we are able to do only now with this small bridging funding. Our executive director we lost during COVID; an inclusion coordinator we lost and we have not been able to regain. The cost of living and the cost of everything has made it very difficult to rebuild the team.⁵⁶

Mental health impacts were particularly pronounced in children and young people. By being 'untethered from community, untethered from school and untethered from in-person social development and social practice'⁵⁷ many children and young people are now struggling with increases in anxiety and depression. Katrina Cornwell of Rawcus Theatre Company, noted that the growing anxiety in children and young people is 'just so palpable':

I remember one young person that I had worked with since she was 10, and she was like – I do not know if you have ever met these young people, but she was like a 30-year-old in a 10-year-old's body. She was so confident, and I was like, 'How are you 10?' That was pre COVID, working with her in the workshop room. Then we shifted our programs online during COVID, and I just saw this slow – she might have been around 12 at that point – decline. Like you could just see it, her engagement, to the point where she started turning her camera off and to the point where she stopped coming – just this absolute disconnection. And then out of COVID I worked with her on a project – like kind of straight out of COVID – and just her whole demeanour had shifted completely as a person. She was very anxious, very socially aware of herself and just had shifted completely. That is what happened. I was in communication with her parent as well during that period, and her mother echoed the same thing. So it was not just my reading of the situation, it was very real.⁵⁸

Megan Champion of Sertori Consulting, emphasised that the opportunity to engage in the creative industries is not 'a nice-to-have; it is actually a necessity'⁵⁹ for creative children. This necessity was taken away during the COVID-19 pandemic, noting:

⁵⁵ Dianne Toulson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Nadja Kostich, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 6–7.

⁵⁷ Nadja Kostich, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Katrina Cornwell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁵⁹ Megan Champion, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

I think it was back in 2021, possibly, but you will remember that obviously football kept going and many sports kept going. The AFL – I mean, we could not go without the AFL, could we? But I think people really understand the need for children especially, for youth, to play sport, and we all know how important that is. But I do not really think we understand the need and the impact for creative children, that it is not a nice-to-have; it is actually a necessity. It is something that they really need to do to be able to express themselves and it is about their mental health, it is about their whole wellbeing, and that is for all creative people. I think it is part of our national identity that we really understand that more from a sport perspective, but not from a creative perspective, and I think that is what needs to come across.⁶⁰

FINDING 12: The COVID-19 pandemic led to worsening mental health for many in the Victorian cultural and creative industries, particularly amongst children and young people.

2.2.3 Significant cost increases

The Committee heard that across the industry the ‘costs to produce and present work have now significantly increased’.⁶¹

Vern Wall, General Committee Member, Bendigo Theatre Company, stated that ‘in the last eight to 10 years the costs roughly have increased by 80 to 100 per cent’.⁶² He stated:

The only way it appears now that we can actually balance our books is as well as having our volunteers provide all their time to create the production, we then have to create fundraising opportunities to get additional funds. And without that funding, the impact on us is that the only way we can meet these increasing costs is obviously by increasing our ticket prices. That then, conversely, reduces our audience numbers due to the lack of affordability for them to attend our shows.⁶³

Victorian Major Arts Festivals Alliance, in its submission to this Inquiry, stated that ‘the core costs of delivering festivals in Australia are now up to 40% more than pre-COVID-19’⁶⁴ levels:

This is having a major impact on the sector. Festivals around the country are pausing, closing and shrinking. Our iconic major festivals are facing a crisis and the arts sector’s critical soft infrastructure is at risk unless there is new investment.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Megan Champion, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

⁶¹ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁶² Vern Wall, General Committee Member, Bendigo Theatre Company, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

⁶³ Vern Wall, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

⁶⁴ Victorian Major Arts Festivals Alliance, *Submission 20*, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Victorian Major Arts Festivals Alliance, *Submission 20*, p. 2.

The Committee heard that traditional means of gaining a return on investment, such as by touring a project, is no longer as valuable as touring 'costs have risen 30 to 50 per cent'.⁶⁶ Simply put – 'costs have gone up significantly, and [the industry] feel it'.⁶⁷

Nirmidha Sankar, a Carnatic Music teacher, spoke about how more expensive hire costs for community centres can be prohibitive to smaller music and dance schools:

Concert venues and community centres have been more expensive to hire out post-pandemic compared to pre-pandemic. This means that for a typical Carnatic music teacher, who has classes on most weekday evenings and weekends, they would be unable to hold their classes at community centres on a regular basis if they kept their pre-pandemic class fees. While the most obvious choice for Carnatic music teachers post-pandemic is to increase their class fees, the majority have not, and some have only made minor increases due to inflation. Many students who attend Carnatic music classes are children from immigrant families who cannot afford exorbitant class fees. This puts existing Carnatic music teachers between a rock and a hard place, as while they too do not want to increase their class fees out of respect for their craft and tradition, they cannot afford to run concerts or events for their students that important in preserving our culture. Unfortunately, it also dissuades potential Carnatic teachers from teaching, as if they charge higher fees than existing teachers, they will be unlikely to attract students.⁶⁸

This is also true of larger venues that hire out spaces. Musica Viva Australia, in their submission to this Inquiry noted that 'many of the venues that MVA works with, such as the Melbourne Recital Centre, Arts Centre Melbourne and Fed Square are also experiencing cost pressures, which are being passed on to presenting companies and small ensembles in the form of significantly increased hire charges'.⁶⁹

FINDING 13: Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the costs to produce and present work have significantly increased.

2.2.4 Harder to make a living in the industries

The Committee heard that 'it's never been harder for Australian artists to make a living',⁷⁰ with 'overall artist income barely exceeding the minimum wage'.⁷¹ Low incomes not only impact those currently working within the cultural and creative industries but also discourages others from pursuing a creative career.

An economic study of professional artists in Australia highlighted that overall, the incomes of those in the industries fell 26% below the national average and 45% below

⁶⁶ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁶⁷ Katrina Cornwell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Nirmidha Sankar, *Submission 38*, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Musica Viva Australia, *Submission 23*, p. 7.

⁷⁰ National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS), *Submission 28*, p. 17.

⁷¹ National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS), *Submission 28*, p. 17.

those with similar education.⁷² Additionally, whilst 'the average total incomes have either plateaued or fallen since 2000, the costs incurred by artists to produce work has increased to 73% of their creative earnings'.⁷³ Similarly, Dianne Toulson of Theatre Works, noted that many 'artists do not have the personal resources to make work because they have got to work'.⁷⁴ This reality is 'exacerbated for artists in regional areas and/or other strategically under-valued groups'.⁷⁵

The Committee heard that 'half of creatives earn less than \$10,000 a year from their creative work'.⁷⁶ Joshua Lowe of Theatre Network Australia, stated:

Let us all imagine what it would be like to live on \$10,000 a year. That would not even cover part of my rent. What we are seeing is that artists are now having to make the choice between doing the thing that they have spent years and years training for and working on – the thing that they are passionate about, the way that they contribute to community – and paying the rent and having a sustainable career.⁷⁷

Similarly, Ariel Blum of Yarra City Council, stated:

Just having a side hustle, I guess language has been created that sort of celebrates a side hustle as being a positive, but fundamentally it is an incredibly systemically challenging situation where you have people who have to work multiple, multiple jobs—it is not just one, two or three jobs; it is like five, six or seven jobs—and the end point of not having a sustainable model for artists to earn a living wage is you have less artists, and less artists means less cultural production, which has a major effect on the local community's enjoyment, wellbeing and health, as well as economically.⁷⁸

Insecure or low wages is impacting retention within the industries. Those creatives being 'forced out' of the industries 'are those from marginalised communities, from regional and outer metro and low-income earners. What we are left with is that only people with a certain amount of privilege and independent wealth can afford to make and engage with the arts, with everyone else shut out'.⁷⁹ Tim Stitz of Theatre Network Australia, stated:

A lot of stage managers and production managers went off and worked in other sideline industries or went off and worked in other operational roles. They love the arts and the creative industries, but actually they are making a judgement call for themselves. Is it worth what you said in terms of their mental health, their families and what support they need to provide, what money they can earn? It does then come down to the fact: who is privileged enough to work in the arts?⁸⁰

⁷² David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, *Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*, Creative Australia, May 2024.

⁷³ National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS), *Submission 28*, p. 17.

⁷⁴ Dianne Toulson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS), *Submission 28*, p. 17.

⁷⁶ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

⁷⁸ Ariel Blum, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

⁷⁹ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

⁸⁰ Tim Stitz, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

Theatre Network Australia's 2024 Member Survey found that '59% of independent artists said they have considered leaving the arts industry, with 33% saying they have taken action to leave the industry (such as retraining). The reasons for considering leaving the industry were':⁸¹

- Burnout (53%)
- Lack of employment/work (46%)
- Seeking better pay/benefits (43%) and seeking a better work/life balance (43%).

FINDING 14: It has never been harder for Victorians to make a living in the cultural and creative industries.

FINDING 15: Insecure or low wages impacts retention in the industries and discourages people from pursuing a career in the industries.

2.2.5 Broader cost of living crisis

Audiences are, in our perspective, keen to engage in the arts, want to engage in the arts, but the barrier I think its money. It is ticket prices. I am sorry to be so simple about it, but I think if there were cheaper tickets or low-cost tickets, people would go to more shows.

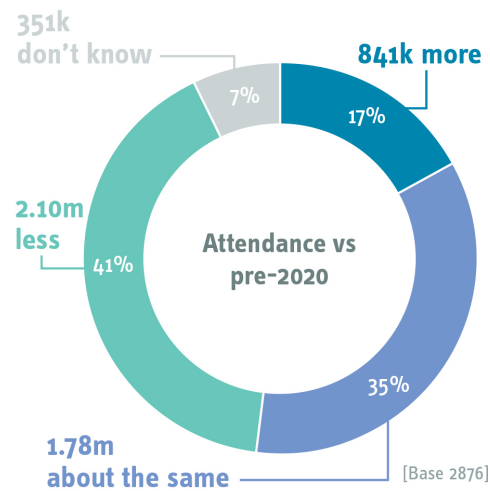
Vicky Guglielmo, Manager, Libraries, Arts and Events, Yarra City Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

The Committee heard that many who want to engage with the Victorian cultural and creative industries, cannot afford to do so due to the current cost of living crisis. Audience Atlas Victoria 2024 found that 41%, or an estimated 2.10 million people, report engaging with the Victorian cultural and creative industries less, compared to five years ago.⁸² See Figure 2.3.

⁸¹ Theatre Network Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 2.

⁸² Creative Victoria, *Audience Atlas Victoria 2024: Exploring the market for arts and culture in Victoria*, report prepared by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, October 2024, p. 21.

Figure 2.3 Attendance at arts and cultural events and places compared to five years ago (pre-pandemic)



Source: Creative Victoria, *Audience Atlas Victoria 2024: Exploring the market for arts and culture in Victoria*, report prepared by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, October 2024, p. 21.

Of the 2.1 million people who attended fewer Victorian cultural and creative industries events, 53% cited that cost of living means they have cut back on everything, 47% cited that ticket prices were too high and 38% cited specifically that cost of living has limited their arts engagement.⁸³ See Figure 2.4.

Multiple stakeholders echoed this finding by identifying ticket prices as a key barrier for people wanting to engage with the industries. Musica Viva Australia stated:

Many Australians are having to make tough decisions about their spending and are looking for free or cheap forms of entertainment.⁸⁴

The Committee also heard that in a cost of living crisis, creatives are reporting 'a sense of social devaluing of the arts generally by Australian society'.⁸⁵ Lauren Mullings of Multicultural Arts Victoria, described the devaluing of the industries as a 'major stumbling block to the pursuit of artistic excellence'. She noted that this 'was exacerbated for culturally and linguistically diverse artists, whose practice may also be culturally devalued by mainstream society'.⁸⁶

⁸³ Creative Victoria, *Audience Atlas Victoria 2024: Exploring the market for arts and culture in Victoria*, report prepared by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, October 2024, p. 24.

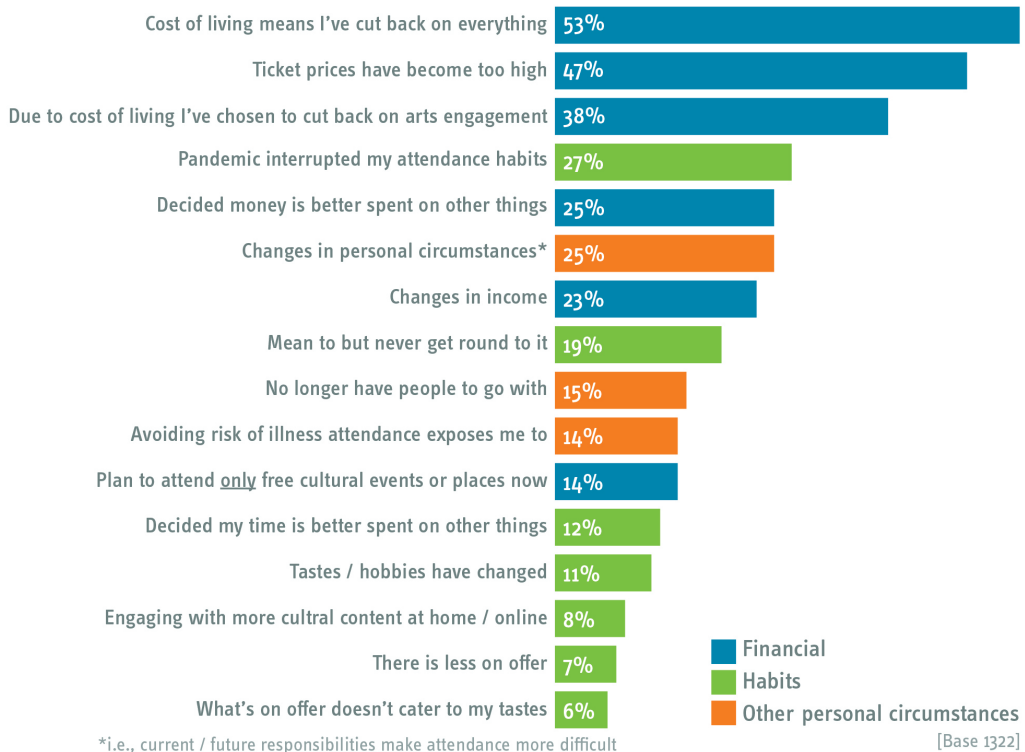
⁸⁴ Musica Viva Australia, *Submission 23*, p.7

⁸⁵ Lauren Mullings, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

⁸⁶ Lauren Mullings, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

Figure 2.4 Reasons for attending less than five years ago or anticipate attending less in next 12 months

Reasons for attending less than five years ago or anticipate attending less in next 12 months



Source: Creative Victoria, *Audience Atlas Victoria 2024: Exploring the market for arts and culture in Victoria*, report prepared by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, October 2024, p. 24.

Loss of volunteers

The cost of living crisis is also preventing many individuals from being able to volunteer their time to the cultural and creative industries. Craig Barrie of Community Music Victoria, noted that those who 'are able to volunteer their time tend to be older, tend to be white and tend to live in the inner city'.⁸⁷ The industry is heavily reliant upon volunteers, so this loss is having a significant impact.

The Committee heard that the 'COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the decline of volunteerism'.⁸⁸ This pronounced loss of volunteers is having a significant impact upon organisations which rely upon volunteers to sustain themselves. The Public Galleries Association of Victoria, in their submission to this Inquiry, noted that the sector had experienced a 16% drop in volunteers. It emphasised that such volunteers 'are crucial to the long-term sustainability of the sector'.⁸⁹ Stakeholders noted that the industry has not seen volunteers resume to pre-pandemic levels.

⁸⁷ Craig Barrie, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

⁸⁸ Dr Ashley Robertson, Executive Director, Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

⁸⁹ The Public Galleries Association of Victoria, *Submission 33*, p. 4.

FINDING 16: Many people who want to engage with the Victorian cultural and creative industries cannot afford to do so due to the cost of living crisis.

FINDING 17: Ticket prices are a key barrier for people wanting to engage with the Victorian cultural and creative industries.

FINDING 18: The COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis has accelerated the decline of volunteerism in the Victorian cultural and creative industries.

2.2.6 Exacerbation of long-term issues

Artists and creatives have always faced financial precarity and were tentatively propped up by a system that was basically a house of cards that toppled over during the pandemic.

Joshua Lowe, Theatre Network Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

The Committee heard that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified and 'exposed systemic vulnerabilities'⁹⁰ already being faced by the Victorian cultural and creative industries.

Many stakeholders acknowledged that the cultural and creative industries have long been characterised by financial precarity and insecurity. Lauren Mullings of Multicultural Arts Victoria, told the Committee:

I do not necessarily think that artists have ever been in an incredibly sustainable position. I think that certainly we see evidence of them having a low income. I think that that is very well documented. In terms of what the funding landscape looks like for them from pre COVID and during COVID till now, I do not know of any statistical data that maps that entirely, but I do not think that things have necessarily moved from a position of great economic opportunity to one of no economic opportunity.⁹¹

Similarly, Kate Larsen, Arts, Cultural and Non-profit Consultant and Writer, in their submission to this Inquiry, noted that 'studies of creative labour have been around for nearly two decades, stressing low pay, lack of pensions or health insurance, no paid holidays, precarity, self-exploitation and, indeed, exploitation'.⁹²

The Committee heard that that challenges persist for women and gender diverse people that exacerbate these issues of financial precarity and insecurity, particularly for those juggling creative work with caring responsibilities.

⁹⁰ Stonnington City Council, *Submission 16*, p. 2.

⁹¹ Lauren Mullings, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

⁹² Kate Larsen, *Submission 13*, p. 3.

During hearings, Megan Champion noted that 'the reality is that creative industries often pay less, and women in the sector are paid even less than men'.⁹³ She shared her experience of seeking to re-enter the creative workforce post-pandemic after parental leave, stating:

I was faced with an uncertain future. The creative sector had shut down, and as a mother I had no viable career prospects.⁹⁴

The Committee heard that whilst 'financial precarity was already an issue for artists generally before the COVID lockdowns',⁹⁵ it was the 'intensity and duration of lockdowns in Melbourne that significantly depressed the creative economy'.⁹⁶ The Committee were cautioned against asking 'the sector to be more entrepreneurial'.⁹⁷ Rather, Vicki Guglielmo of Yarra City Council, stated:

In fact, they are entrepreneurial already; they have tapped into all of their resources that they can, and in my lived experience they are hitting that, despite numerous government investments from a range of tiers of government. So, we need to think in new ways.⁹⁸

FINDING 19: The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and intensified existing systemic issues within the Victorian cultural and creative industries, such as barriers to participation for women and gender diverse people, particularly those with caring responsibilities and long-term financial precarity.

⁹³ Megan Champion, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 55.

⁹⁴ Megan Champion, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 55.

⁹⁵ Lauren Mullings, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

⁹⁶ Lauren Mullings, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

⁹⁷ Vicky Guglielmo, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

⁹⁸ Vicky Guglielmo, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

Chapter 3

Government investment in Victoria's cultural and creative industries

3.1 Victorian Government funding

The Victorian Government provides funding to its cultural and creative industries through multiple programs and initiatives. As such, it can be difficult to precisely quantify the total amount of funding the Victorian Government allocates to these industries.

The Parliamentary Budget Office, in its submission to this Inquiry, identified three broad funding outputs in the Victorian Budget relating directly to its cultural and creative industries, including:¹

- **Creative industries access, development and innovation** – This captures any support to deliver 'economic, social and cultural benefits through talent and leadership, innovation, social impact, participation and international engagement'.²
- **Creative industries portfolio agencies** – This captures the multi-year funding provided to state-owned institutions, such as the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) and Geelong Arts Centre.
- **Cultural infrastructure and facilities** – This captures any support to manage and maintain Victorian owned cultural and creative venues and facilities.

Table 3.1 sets out yearly budget outputs for the three broad funding outputs.

¹ Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, pp. 17–18.

² Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, p. 18.

Table 3.1 Budget outputs related to creative industries

| | 2021-22 (\$ million) | 2022-23 (\$ million) | 2022-24 (\$ million) | 2024-25 (\$ million) |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Creative Industries Access, Development and Innovation | 100.5 | 66.4 | 78.8 | 77.8 |
| Creative Industries Portfolio Agencies | 503.6 | 498.0 | 438.2 | 410.6 |
| Cultural Infrastructure and Facilities | 66.0 | 52.6 | 56.5 | 52.8 |
| Total | 670.1 | 617.0 | 573.5 | 541.2 |

Source: Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, p. 18.

The Parliamentary Budget Office noted that output funding before 2021–22 cannot be directly compared to the funding from 2021–22 onwards. This is because output funding prior to 2021–22 included the Capital Asset Charge (CAC), which levied a charge on the written-down value of controlled non-current physical assets and contributed to an agency's output.³

For completeness, the Parliamentary Budget Office noted that the Victorian Budget also provides output funding for tourism and major events. This output was described as 'quite broad', encompassing sporting, arts, cultural, fashion and retail events, as well as tourism. Whilst some of this output funding contributes to the Victorian cultural and creative industries, the Parliamentary Budget Office considered it was inappropriate to assign the entirety of the output funding to the creative industries.⁴ See Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Tourism and major events budget output

| | 2021-22 (\$ million) | 2022-23 (\$ million) | 2022-24 (\$ million) | 2024-25 (\$ million) |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Tourism and Major Events | 483.5 | 441.8 | 469.8 | 183.8 |

Source: Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, p. 18.

An alternative source of data is the Australian Bureau of Statistics Government cultural funding survey. The most recent survey was conducted in 2021–22. This data estimates that the Victorian Government, through Creative Victoria and other portfolio areas, provided a total of \$745.0 million to support its cultural and creative industries.⁵ This differs from the Parliamentary Budget Office's estimate of \$670.1 million in 2021–22. In its submission, the Parliamentary Budget Office acknowledged that its estimate only utilised the broad outputs which it could confidently attach to the Victorian cultural and creative industries.⁶ The Committee considers this disparity demonstrates data

³ Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, p. 18.

⁴ Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, p. 18.

⁵ Cultural and Creative Statistics Working Group, *Cultural funding by Government – 2021–22*, August 2023, <<https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Cultural%20Funding%20By%20Government%E2%80%942021%E2%80%9322%E2%80%94Victoria%20%281%29.pdf>> accessed 6 May 2025.

⁶ Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, pp. 17–18.

transparency issues. Such issues make it difficult to confidently assess how much the Victorian Government spends on its cultural and creative industries. This issue is discussed further in Section 3.3.6.

3.1.1 Victorian Government grant programs

An important way in which the Victorian Government provides funding to the creative and cultural industries is through grant programs. The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, via the State Government body Creative Victoria, administers most of these grant funding programs. Each grant program will have varying eligibility and assessment criteria.

According to data in the Department's Annual Report, in 2023–24 the Department provided \$64,739,166 in grant funding to various Victorian cultural and creative organisations and individuals. (See Table 3.3).⁷ This grant funding is allocated through various Creative Victoria programs. For example, the Creative Projects Fund which provides grants of up to \$20,000 to support projects lead by Victorian creatives.

Table 3.3 General grant recipients, the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions 2023–24 financial year

| Output Name | Program Name | Amount (\$) |
|--|---|-------------|
| Creative Industries Access, Development and Innovation | Creative Victoria Creative Enterprises Program | 18,091,893 |
| | Creative Victoria Creative Learning Partnerships Program | 357,500 |
| | Creative Victoria Creative Neighbourhood Infrastructure Support Program | 13,067 |
| | Creative Victoria Creative Projects Fund | 64,675 |
| | Creative Victoria Creative Ventures Program | 3,086,620 |
| | Creative Victoria Creators Fund Program | 150,316 |
| | Creative Victoria International Engagement Program | 247,500 |
| | Creative Victoria National Performing Arts Partnership | 14,238,500 |
| | Creative Victoria Regional Partnerships Program | 3,436,400 |
| | Creative Victoria Strategic Initiatives | 16,324,336 |
| | Creative Victoria Touring Victoria | 499,459 |
| | Creative Victoria Victorian Independent Producers Initiative Unlocking Capacity Program | 73,500 |
| | Design Trade | 330,000 |
| Cultural Infrastructure and Facilities | Creative Victoria Strategic Initiatives | 6,198,500 |
| Industry Innovation and Small Business | Creative Victoria Strategic Initiatives | 1,626,900 |

Source: The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, *Annual Report 2023/2024*, October 2024, pp. 231–234.

⁷ The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, *Annual Report 2023/2024*, October 2024, pp. 231–234.

3.1.2 Victorian portfolio agencies

The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, through Creative Victoria, oversees a portfolio of state-owned agencies, including:

- Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI)
- Arts Centre Melbourne
- Geelong Arts Centre
- Melbourne Arts Precinct Corporation (MAP Co)
- Melbourne Recital Centre (MRC)
- Museums Victoria
- National Gallery of Victoria (NGV)
- State Library Victoria
- The Wheeler Centre
- Docklands Studios Melbourne
- VicScreen

The Victorian Government allocates most of its cultural and creative funding to these portfolio agencies. In 2024–25, portfolio agencies received \$410.6 million – representing 76% of all funding to the Victorian cultural and creative industries.⁸

3.1.3 Victorian Government asset investment

Another way in which the Victorian Government funds its cultural and creative industries is through asset investment. The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, through Creative Victoria, has the responsibility for overseeing the 'state's \$7 billion portfolio of creative and cultural facilities, assets and collections'.⁹

The Parliamentary Budget Office, in its submission to this Inquiry, identified 18 asset initiatives relating to the Victorian cultural and creative industries, estimated to total \$2,155.9 million, since the 2018/19 Victorian Budget.¹⁰ The submission acknowledged that 'due to the way in which capital projects are reported in the state budget, it is not possible to identify all capital funding provided to the creative arts industry'.¹¹ As such, this may not be a complete estimate. Table 3.4 outlines the list of initiatives it could confidently relate to the creative industries.

⁸ Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, p. 18.

⁹ Creative Victoria, *About Creative Victoria*, <<https://creative.vic.gov.au/about/about-creative-victoria>> accessed 6 May 2025.

¹⁰ Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, pp. 19–22.

¹¹ Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, p. 19.

Table 3.4 Victorian Government asset initiatives that directly relate to the creative arts industry

| Initiative | Location | Total estimated investment (\$ million) | Notes |
|---|--------------|---|---|
| Arts and Cultural Facilities Maintenance Fund | Statewide | 9.7 | |
| Arts Centre Melbourne building services upgrade | Melbourne | 16.4 | |
| Australian Centre for the Moving Image redevelopment | Melbourne | 39.8 | TEI includes \$5.0 million from philanthropic sources. |
| Building a world class Geelong Performing Arts Centre | Geelong | 140.0 | |
| Collections Storage Victoria – Phase 1 | Statewide | 21.5 | |
| Creative Industries Portfolio Agencies Recovery | Metropolitan | 3.3 | TEI includes \$1.0 million from the private sector. |
| Creative Victoria Cultural Facilities Maintenance Fund | Statewide | 2.8 | |
| Cultural Agencies: Recovery and Adaptation | Statewide | 13.5 | |
| Cultural Facilities Maintenance Fund (2021–22 Budget) | Statewide | 18.8 | |
| Cultural Facilities Maintenance Fund (2024–25 Budget) | Statewide | 16.0 | |
| Exhibition and experience program renewal – Museum Victoria | Metropolitan | 4.5 | |
| Melbourne Arts Precinct transformation Phase One | Melbourne | 1,574.4 | |
| Melbourne Arts Precinct transformation planning and design | Melbourne | 98.8 | |
| Museum Victoria Exhibition Renewal | Carlton | 18.0 | |
| Revitalising our Cultural Institutions | Melbourne | 17.2 | |
| Royal Exhibition Building Protection and Promotion Project | Carlton | 20.0 | |
| Screen Industry Strategy | Statewide | 45.9 | |
| South West TAFE Library and Learning Hub 2019–20 | Warrnambool | 20.3 | TEI includes \$3.12 million from the City of Warrnambool and \$0.83 million from South West TAFE. |
| State Library of Victoria redevelopment | Melbourne | 95.1 | TEI includes \$27.7 million from philanthropic sources. |
| Total | | 2,155.9 | |

Source: Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, pp. 21–22.

Most of the Victorian State Government's asset investment identified above occurred in metropolitan Melbourne – 50% of the initiatives and 87% of total asset funding. The two initiatives in regional Victoria were the Geelong Performing Arts Centre (\$140.0 million) and South West TAFE Library and Learning Hub (\$20.3 million).¹² See Table 3.5.

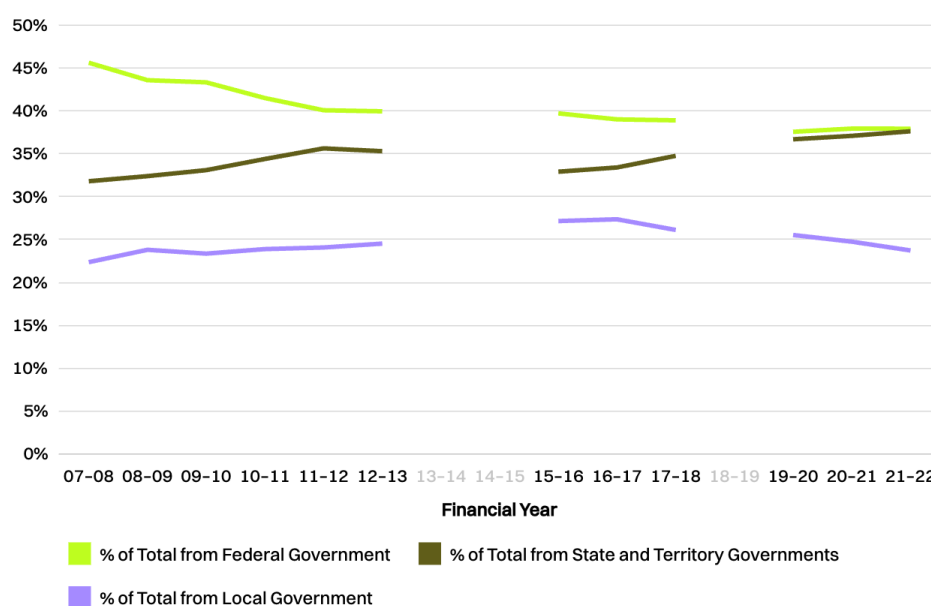
Table 3.5 Asset initiatives that directly relate to the creative arts industry, by region

| Location | Number of initiatives | Total estimated investment (\$ million) |
|------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Metropolitan Melbourne | 9 | 1,867.6 |
| Regional Victoria | 2 | 160.3 |
| Statewide | 7 | 128.1 |
| Total | 18 | 2,155.9 |

Source: Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, p. 22.

A New Approach, which is a national arts and culture think tank, in its submission to this Inquiry, highlighted that state and territory governments financial contributions to cultural and creative industries is at near record levels. Whilst historically, the majority of the funding the industries receive has come from federal governments, recent state governments investments continues 'a long-term trend towards parity of contribution'. See Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Share of non-COVID expenditure on arts and culture by level of government, 2007–08 to 2021–22

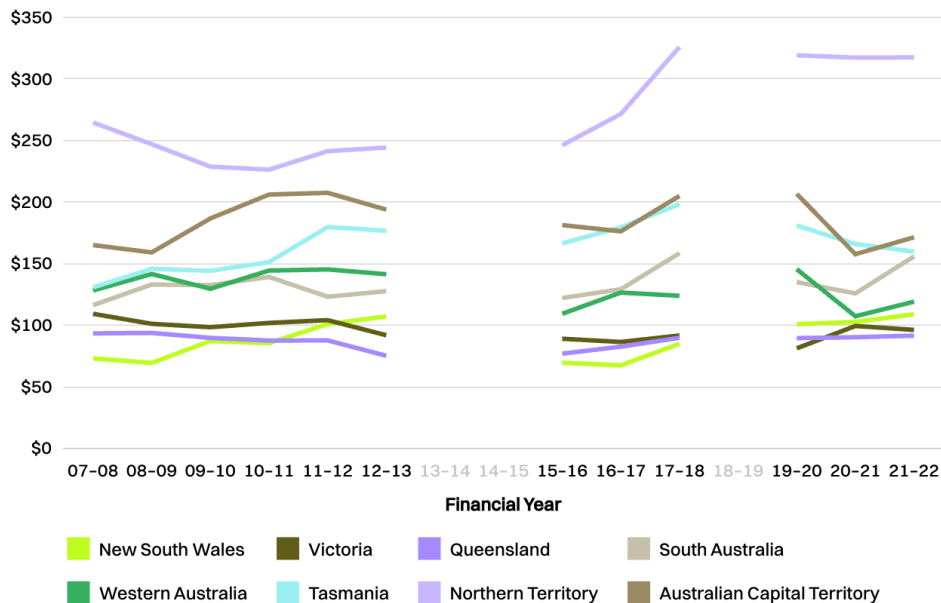


Source: A New Approach, *Submission 9*, p. 6.

¹² Parliamentary Budget Office, *Submission 15*, pp. 22–23.

Despite state government investments representing a larger proportion of cultural and creative industries funding, Victorian Government funding has not kept pace with population growth. Per capita, the Victorian Government expenditure on its cultural and creative industries fell from \$110 in 2007–08 to \$97 in 2021–22 (when adjusted for inflation). Victoria's per capita expenditure is the second lowest amongst all states and territories. See Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 Per capita non-COVID-19 expenditure on arts and culture by jurisdiction, 2007–08 to 2021–22



Source: A New Approach, *Submission 9*, p. 5.

3.2 Stakeholder feedback on Victorian Government funding

We are very fortunate in Victoria. We have had a history of really great investment and an identity as the cultural capital. But it is like a plane when the engine is turned off. It is going to keep going, but it is going to start going down. It will not burst into flames and drop out of the sky, but it will decline.

Joshua Lowe, Chief Executive Officer, Theatre Network Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

The Committee heard from various stakeholders about their experience applying for and acquitting Victorian Government grants. The following common themes emerged:

- Grant funding has not been indexed
- Grant and reporting requirements are onerous
- Grant programs are unpredictable

- Grant opportunities are limited
- Grant caps are too low
- Grant programs place too greater emphasis on infrastructure, rather than artists
- Grant programs don't cover the ideation process
- There is confusion around what level of government funds what
- There is a lack of focus on creative investment in regional Victoria

3.2.1 Funding has not been indexed

The Committee heard that Victorian cultural and creative industries funding is not always indexed to account for CPI increases. As such, funding doesn't stretch nearly as far as it may have done previously. The impacts of a lack of indexation are more intensely felt in the current cost of living crisis. Tim Stitz of Theatre Network Australia, told the Committee:

Stagnation of funding levels... it is a net decrease. It does become harder ... It just becomes too hard for those organisations to survive.¹³

Joshua Lowe of Theatre Network Australia, also told the Committee:

Since 2017 state arts funding has not been indexed to inflation, leading to a real-term funding decrease of 22.8 per cent as of 2024.¹⁴

Katrina Cornwell of Rawcus Theatre Company, spoke of a similar experience as a recipient of Creative Victoria Funding, stating that 'for us it feels like our funding is doing this [pointing downwards], even though it's staying the same'.¹⁵

Stakeholders described current levels of funding from the Victorian Government as 'stagnated'.¹⁶ Joshua Lowe told the Committee that funding stagnation will mean that the 'richness, diversity and the breadth and scale' of the industries will disappear:

When you see investment stagnation or decline, things start going missing, so certain communities will start missing out, certain artforms will start missing out. You will then start to see an erosion of the sector, because our sector is a really complex ecology that supports each other. For instance, most of the workforce are actually independents. They are sole traders who are then engaged on a project basis by other sole traders or by organisations. If there is not enough work to sustain that workforce, then they will start leaving, the bigger players start struggling and then the workforce starts collapsing. We really rely on all parts of the ecology to be supported, and if that

¹³ Tim Stitz, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

¹⁴ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

¹⁵ Katrina Cornwell, *Transcript of evidence*, p 14.

¹⁶ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

investment stays low or is stagnating, you will start to see some of that decline and collapse. Then I guess what we see are that the only things left are things that are financially viable on their own, which is the really big end of town – your commercial ventures, your concerts at the stadium and that kind of thing.¹⁷

Stakeholders told the Committee that at a minimum, Victorian Government funding must be increased to 'account for CPI increases and indexing'.¹⁸ Stakeholders emphasised that whilst such an increase would be positively met, indexing existing levels of funding would only go some way to addressing the broad challenges the industries are facing.¹⁹

FINDING 20: Failing to index Victorian cultural and creative industries funding has led to a decrease in financial support in real terms.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Victorian Government should ensure that Grant programs for the Victorian cultural and creative industries should be indexed to account for CPI increases.

3.2.2 Grant and reporting requirements are onerous

Many, if not all, stakeholders working in the Victorian cultural and creative industries who engaged with the Inquiry had experience applying for a grant program. The Committee heard that 'the cycle of funding applications, reporting and acquitting'²⁰ is one that takes up significant time and resources of the industries. Indeed, some stakeholders described these requirements as so onerous that it 'sidelines its core business'.²¹ Nadja Kostich of St Martins Youth Arts Centre, told the Committee:

We find ourselves now, through sheer necessity, ostensibly becoming centres for fundraising and advocacy who do art on the side, such is the struggle to make ends meet.²²

Similarly, Caitlin Dullard of La Mama Theatre, told the Committee:

I should be spending today programming 2026. I really should be spending today reading a script, but I could not afford to do that because I need to be advocating, I need to be writing grant submissions, I need to be managing staff, all of the things.²³

¹⁷ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

¹⁸ Katrina Cornwell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14; Anne Robertson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

¹⁹ Anne Robertson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

²⁰ Nadja Kostich, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

²¹ Caitlin Dullard, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

²² Nadja Kostich, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

²³ Caitlin Dullard, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

Stakeholders acknowledged that there is a need to apply for grant funding as it is taxpayer money. However, many emphasised that the current grant requirements are disproportionately burdensome, 'overly complex, inaccessible'²⁴ and will favour large organisations with the resources to apply for grants, over smaller organisations and individuals. Lauren Mullings of Multicultural Arts Victoria, told the Committee:

Sometimes those funding applications are extremely difficult to navigate, and they can often appear in very bureaucratic language.²⁵

The Committee heard that grant application and reporting requirements have increased over time. One reason why this is the case is because modern grant programs often also seek to achieve social and equity outcomes. Whilst stakeholders emphasised that steps to improve social and equity outcomes is a worthy goal, it is one that requires 'additional resources, time and community engagement'.²⁶ Katrina Cornwell of Rawcus Theatre Company, told the Committee:

The idea of access, inclusion and equity is I think more of a contemporary proposition in society. Certainly, that is something that Rawcus fulfils, and we try to do best practice as well. That takes expertise, which takes resourcing, which takes funding to hold our ensemble and to support everyone's needs.²⁷

Similarly, Caitlin Dullard told the Committee:

It is a comedy actually to look at what was expected and add all of the nuances of ensuring we are appropriately working with First Nations communities, appropriately working with young people, appropriately working with all sorts of diverse communities, which is all wonderful and necessary, but quite labour intensive and quite costly. All of those expectations have just grown and continue to grow, and as the demand and expectations are going up, the resources are going like this [point upwards].²⁸

The Committee did not hear evidence that advocated for social and equity outcomes being removed from grant programs. This work towards greater diversity and inclusion was consistently discussed in a positive way as something that strengthened the industry. However, it was widely acknowledged that current grant application and reporting requirements are overly burdensome and should be lessened.

FINDING 21: Grant and reporting requirements can be very onerous, particularly on individuals and organisations who are made up of volunteers or part-time staff.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Creative Victoria should take steps to reduce the administrative burden of grant programs to ensure such requirements are proportionate to the amount of funding on offer, particularly those grant programs capped at \$20,000 or less.

²⁴ Bo Kitty, *Submission 6*, p. 17.

²⁵ Lauren Mullings, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

²⁶ NETS Victoria, *Submission 28*, p. 7.

²⁷ Katrina Cornwell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

²⁸ Caitlin Dullard, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

3.2.3 Grant programs are unpredictable

The Committee heard that the timing of grant funding rounds can be unpredictable. Joshua Lowe of Theatre Network Australia, told the Committee:

The sector still does not have a funding calendar from Creative Victoria for 2025, and it never got one in 2024.²⁹

This unpredictability 'puts a lot of financial precarity on the sector',³⁰ can contribute to stress and mental ill health and result in more people deciding to leave the industries. Joshua Lowe stated:

Independents do not know when the next grant round is coming. They might be like, 'I'm going to put a show on at Melbourne Fringe in October, but is there going to be funding for that between now and then?' Who knows? ... We start to see people make the decision: 'Am I going to keep doing this? How long am I going to keep doing this? Is it going to get better?' Then, as we have seen in our statistics, they decide to leave. They train and go to other industries. A lot of people might become teachers. In dancing people go to things like physio. They use their transferable skills to then retrain and go elsewhere.³¹

This unpredictability also prevents organisations who receive multi-year funding, commonly four years in duration, from investing in longer-term programming and taking risks. Dr Ashley Robertson, Executive Director, Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria, told the Committee:

It is really hard for us to do that forward planning when we are operating on a four-year cycle, when we are actually not sure if we are going to be able to invest in new programming and if we are able to take risks. I would say that we are less likely to take risks now, just to ensure the survival of the organisation and that we can continue doing these really foundational programs that the communities rely on. Having more clarity around funding and maybe a slightly longer cycle for applying for them would allow us to think outside of the safe spaces and do a lot more of the work that we want to do and we have had plans to do, but it requires more investment. It is as simple as that.³²

Unpredictability also means that organisations who receive grant funding must 'direct valuable resources away from program delivery'³³ in a constant pursuit of future grant funding. This is because many organisations face 'a very strong reality that its budgets will not allow it to continue'³⁴ if it does not receive further grant funding in the next round. As such, many organisations are restricted to only 'operating on a four-year grant cycle'³⁵ – preventing valuable forward planning and longer-term investment.

²⁹ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

³⁰ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

³¹ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

³² Dr Ashley Robertson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

³³ Arena Theatre Company, *Submission 25*, p. 2.

³⁴ Caitlin Dullard, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

³⁵ Dr Ashley Robertson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

Unpredictability can have particularly damaging effects in Regional Victoria, where ad-hoc investment has already prevented many organisations from establishing themselves in the longer-term. Jo Porter, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Arts Victoria, told the Committee:

With only three regional organisations receiving funding that is anything other than ad hoc project grants, it means that that whole regional sector is somewhat precarious, because they can never make a plan beyond what they know they are already funded for. That might be \$8000 to make a small work or run a pilot, and there is no joined-up thinking in terms of what they can then do to sustain a broader community.³⁶

Regional Arts Victoria, in its submission to this Inquiry, advocated for predictable, multi-year funding in regional Victoria to facilitate the establishment of 'artistic expertise within regional contexts'³⁷ that is retained and nurtured. These outcomes cannot be achieved via ad-hoc funding.

FINDING 22: Unpredictable grant programs cause instability in the industries and prevents forward planning and investments in longer-term projects and strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Creative Victoria should release grant calendars in advance, which include all available grant programs, to improve predictability and aid planning in the industries.

3.2.4 Grant opportunities are limited

The Committee heard that grant programs are incredibly competitive, with some grant programs awarding funding to 'as low as 4% of applicants'.³⁸ Stakeholders also expressed concern that there are fewer grant rounds compared to previous years, further limiting opportunities to successfully secure grant funding. Joshua Lowe of Theatre Network Australia, stated:

There have been just two rounds of project investment since the beginning of the pandemic, when there used to be two a year.³⁹

More limited opportunities to successfully obtain grant funding can produce 'existential circumstances'⁴⁰ for some individuals or organisations. For example, organisations that rely upon two or four-year multi-year grant programs can be left without the possibility

³⁶ Jo Porter, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Arts Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

³⁷ Regional Arts Victoria, *Submission 15*, p. 4.

³⁸ Martin Jackson, *Submission 36*, p. 1.

³⁹ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁴⁰ Martin Jackson, *Submission 36*, p. 1.

of any significant state support'⁴¹ until the grant cycle runs again, two or four years later. Martin Jackson, Artistic Director and Chief Executive Officer, Melbourne Jazz Co-Operative, noted that this is 'a situation which few arts organisations could survive – especially coming after the lockdown years'.⁴² Consequently, organisations may be forced to cease until a suitable grant opportunity comes back around – leaving significant holes in the industries. The Committee heard from La Mama Theatre Company, who was unsuccessful in receiving four-year grant funding from Creative Australia and as a result, has temporarily ceased public performances throughout 2025 to completely review its operations.⁴³

The Committee also heard that larger organisations with the capacity to make more significant economic impacts typically receive multiple grants. This further limits grant funding opportunities for smaller organisations and individuals. Anthony Camm, President, Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria, told the Committee:

You mentioned Bendigo museum, but of course you have got the art gallery that has received multiple grants, has grown substantially and is getting that funding because it is an attractor of visitation so it makes a massive economic impact. In one sphere of the sector you have got a lot of growth and a lot of funding being directed, say, through Regional Development Victoria using these kinds of economic imperatives, but then you have got the smaller museums that still might attract good visitation, they are certainly strongly connected to their community and they are custodians of these really vital community stories and objects that tell those stories – they just cannot compete against a gallery that can attract a blockbuster exhibition or an event that might attract 100,000 people.⁴⁴

FINDING 23: Infrequent grant programs can negatively impact the industries by leaving greater numbers of applicants without government support for longer periods of time.

3.2.5 Grant caps are too low

The Committee heard that grant funding is often capped at a maximum of \$20,000. This cap is 'well below that of other states, [for example] in Western Australia it is capped at \$80,000'.⁴⁵

Those grant programs which are capped at \$20,000 limits what recipients can achieve. The Committee heard that \$20,000 'is quite a small amount of money to put a project on',⁴⁶ particularly in current economic circumstances. Katrina Cornwell of Rawcus Theatre Company, told the Committee:

⁴¹ Martin Jackson, *Submission 36*, p. 1.

⁴² Martin Jackson, *Submission 36*, p. 1.

⁴³ La Mama, *An important update about La Mama's future* <<https://lamama.com.au/an-important-update-2024>> accessed 22 May 2025.

⁴⁴ Anthony Camm, President, Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

⁴⁵ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Katrina Cornwell, *Transcript of evidence*, p 15.

The other thing with those small grants is that what we can do with them at the moment is limited because we are existing in the same world that everybody else is with cost of living and CPI increases. What we can actually do with those small amounts is less now.⁴⁷

The Committee heard that a \$20,000 grant cap in some grant programs makes such opportunities less appealing to apply for, as the effort required to apply for the grant is not proportionate to the funding on offer. Nadja Kostich of St Martins Youth Arts Centre, told the Committee:

We are talking about applying for multiple small grants under \$5000, \$10,000 or \$20,000 over and over again; that is what consumes us. Rarely do we get opportunities for \$50,000 or \$100,000 for projects.⁴⁸

FINDING 24: A low maximum grant cap of \$20,000 in some grant programs limits what recipients can achieve and may necessitate multiple grant applications to fund a project, consuming significant time and resources of applicants.

3.2.6 Grant programs place too great a focus on infrastructure, rather than artists

The Committee heard that whilst investment in Victorian cultural and creative infrastructure is necessary, such investment cannot come at the expense of the artists who will fill such infrastructure with their work. Joshua Lowe of Theatre Network Australia, told the Committee:

If you look particularly in Victoria over the last decade or so at the investment in arts performance venues, the graph looks like this: it just goes up. We have got significant investment in the arts precinct in Southbank happening, which is partly driving that, but we have to make sure that those incredible venues are not empty. We have to think about what goes in those venues, what goes on the stages and what gets put on the walls.

Unless we want it to be exclusively interstate and international artists, we need to make sure that people can have sustainable careers and that they have the resources to make that art here in Victoria. I imagine it is very attractive for a government to build a building and cut a ribbon – I would be delighted if I got to cut a ribbon – but it is not as exciting to invest in something that remains hidden until the performance or the exhibition happens. I think it is really important to have a balance of both.

As Tim was saying, particularly in somewhere like regional Victoria, we want to ensure that the venues are connected with the community, that those local creatives can make and present work in their community, but also that that venue is resourced so that it can do proper audience development, it can reach out to audiences, it can make them feel

⁴⁷ Katrina Cornwell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Nadja Kostich, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

welcome and it can put things in place to let local audiences know that what is going on is for them and is something that is of interest to them. We often see that being a struggle for the sector – that audience development is kind of no-one's job. You cannot just put a poster on the wall and expect people to come. It does not work like that.⁴⁹

Similarly, Caitlin Dullard of La Mama Theatre, warned:

There is quite a lot of money, by comparison, that goes into infrastructure, which we appreciate is necessary, but the reality I see is that we are going to have empty theatres in 40 years' time if we do not urgently and generously inject finances into the independent humans doing the work now.⁵⁰

FINDING 25: There needs to be a balance between investment in infrastructure and investment in artists. Without this balance, Victoria runs the risk of being dependent on interstate and international artists to fill these venues.

3.2.7 Grants programs don't cover the ideation process

The Committee heard that grant programs cover a concept or project, but rarely compensate the ideation process that comes before. As a result, those in the Victorian cultural and creative industries must put in significant unpaid work to develop a project to the stage where it can qualify for grant funding. This is exclusionary – as many creatives are unable to undertake the significant unpaid ideation work, particularly in a cost of living crisis. Megan Champion of Sertori Consulting, told the Committee:

Too often funding models prioritise tangible outcomes over the development of ideas. If we truly want a sustainable creative industry, we must invest in the three Ps: the person, the process and the product. This means supporting creatives not just in production but in education, incubation and cross-industry collaboration.

In order to get the funding, you need to have a project. You need to give a concept, an example of a project. All of the work that goes into that takes time, and then when you receive the funding, if you get the funding, you are only paid from when that funding starts. So that entire ideation process that comes behind that concept is not paid for.

We used to have, built into funding structures, something called research and development, and that is not there anymore. That is what happens with projects like my project and like Rhayven's project – we put these out there because we know that they are important, and we will only get a small portion of the funding. Then we have to make of the rest of it ourselves, and that means us going unpaid.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

⁵⁰ Caitlin Dullard, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

⁵¹ Megan Champion, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 56, 62.

FINDING 26: By requiring a developed concept or project, grant programs exclude creatives who are unable to undertake significant unpaid ideation work.

3.2.8 Confusion around what level of government funds what

The Committee heard that many do not have clarity as to what role each level of government plays in funding the cultural and creative industries. Kate Feilding, Chief Executive Officer, A New Approach, told the Committee:

One of the real barriers in this space is a lack of understanding of what levels of government can do what and where different types of investment are focused and why.⁵²

Kate Feilding noted that this confusion can lead to frustration within the industries. Anne Robertson of Public Galleries Association of Victoria, stated:

We are scrabbling for very small bits of money. It is hard to know what the federal government is actually contributing and how, and that is part of the frustration when we are in these positions of trying to advocate. I spent days poring through information, and I know that Ms Fielding expressed that frustration as well. We need to have that transparency so that we can look at this in a really smart, intelligent way and go 'Where does the funding need to come from to support what our audiences want?'⁵³

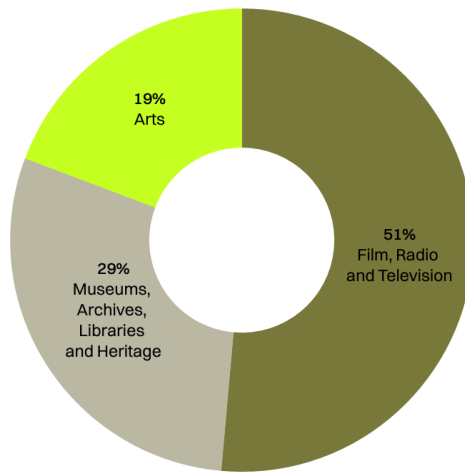
A New Approach, in its submission to this Inquiry, highlighted that Federal and State Governments do focus funding on different parts of the cultural and creative industry. Stakeholders contended that if this information was more widely known, they could target the appropriate level of government more effectively – saving them time and resources.⁵⁴ Figure 3.3 and 3.4 show how expenditure differs based on category.

⁵² Kate Fielding, Chief Executive Officer, A New Approach, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

⁵³ Anne Robertson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

⁵⁴ A New Approach, *Submission 9*, p. 8.

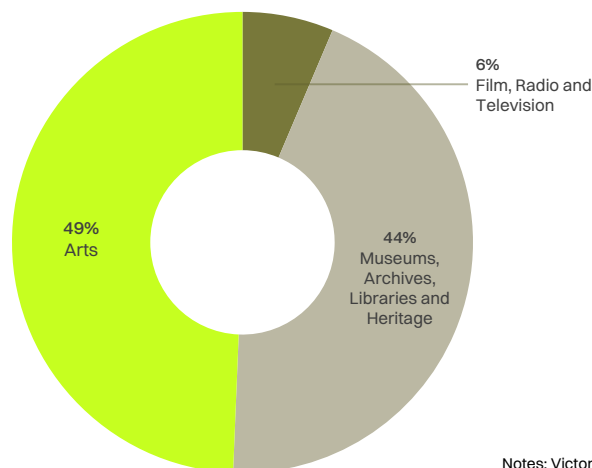
Figure 3.3 Federal Government expenditure by category of cultural and creative experience, 2021–22



Notes: Federal government data only. Includes targeted COVID-19 support

Source: A New Approach, *Submission 9*, p. 8.

Figure 3.4 Victorian Government expenditure by category of cultural and creative experience, 2021–22



Notes: Victorian government data only. Includes targeted COVID-19 support

Source: A New Approach, *Submission 9*, p. 8.

FINDING 27: The role that each level of government plays could be better defined to assist the industries in understanding where to go for relevant investment and support.

3.2.9 Lack of focus on creative investment in regional Victoria

The Committee heard that there is a need for more locally based cultural and creative investment in regional Victoria. Tim Stitz of Theatre Network Australia, told the Committee that programs should not default to supporting regional Victorians to travel

into Melbourne to access the Victorian cultural and creative industries. Instead, the focus should be on developing the Victorian cultural and creative industries in Regional Victoria:

There have been programs that I am aware of that bus kids to Arts Centre Melbourne. That is fantastic; kids should have the experience of coming and seeing what metro kids can see any time of the year. But those communities should also have the ability to see things and to go to their local theatre to see things, whether that is music, dance, circus or whatever it is.⁵⁵

Leah Sertori of Sertori Consulting, told the Committee, that investment in regional Victoria is 'far more likely' to support initiatives 'that are focused on mining, manufacturing, professional services or health care and overlook the relative return on investment in the creative industries:

It is seen as a nice to have rather than a must-have, and that is something that we need to change, because investing in the creative industries is not icing on the cake. It is baking in the capacity for rural and regional Victorian communities to meet the challenges that we are facing in this new world and really employ a very unique set of critical thinking skills and an ability to work with people from very diverse backgrounds and be inclusive. They are not hallmarks of all community groups. The creative industries are by nature incredibly diverse, welcoming, inclusive spaces, and I think that they bring something unique to the mix there. When I take a look at the incubator programs or startup support for the creative industries in Melbourne, Gaelle, compared to what people can access here, it is markedly different.⁵⁶

FINDING 28: People should not need to leave regional Victoria to engage with its cultural and creative industries.

3.3 Australian Government funding

The Victorian cultural and creative industries also receive funding from the Australian Government. According to the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics Government cultural funding survey, in 2021–22 the Australian Government provided \$3,165.2 million to the industries. This estimate includes \$210.1 million of targeted COVID-19 support. See Table 3.6.

⁵⁵ Tim Stitz, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Leah Sertori, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

Table 3.6 Australian Government cultural expenditure, 2019–20 to 2021–22

| | 2019–20 (\$ million) | 2020–21 (\$ million) | 2021–22 (\$ million) |
|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Expenditure | 2,743.8 | 2,967.0 | 3,165.2 |

Source: Cultural and Creative Statistics Working Group, *Cultural funding by government 2021–22*, <https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/cultural_funding_by_government-2021-22-australian_government.pdf> accessed 15 May 2025.

3.3.1 Revive Policy

Australian Government investment in the cultural and creative industries is guided by the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy – Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place (Revive). Revive is a five-year plan to revive the arts in Australia and was released on 30 January 2023.

Revive is structured around 5 interconnected pillars which set out the government's strategic objectives:

- **First Nations first** – recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture.
- **A place for every story** – reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.
- **Centrality of the artist** – supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators.
- **Strong cultural infrastructure** – providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage.
- **Engaging the audience** – making sure our stories connect with people at home and abroad.

Key measures within Revive include:

- The establishment of **Creative Australia**, intended to 'restore and modernise the Australian Council for the Arts'.⁵⁷
- The formation of a dedicated **First Nations-led body**, critical to self-determination and supporting the telling of First Nations stories.
- The establishment of a **Centre for Arts and Entertainment Workplaces** within Creative Australia. It will provide 'advice on issues of pay, safety, codes of conduct and welfare across the sector'.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Office for the Arts, *A New National Cultural Policy*, <<https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/new-national-cultural-policy>> accessed 15 May 2025.

⁵⁸ Office for the Arts, *A New National Cultural Policy*, <<https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/new-national-cultural-policy>> accessed 15 May 2025.

- The establishment of **Music Australia**, intended to support the Australian music industry to grow.
- The establishment of **Writers Australia**, intended to support the literature sector to grow.
- A program of **long-term loans of works** from the National Gallery of Australia's collection to regional and suburban cultural institutes.
- Stand-alone **legislation to protect First Nations knowledge and cultural expressions**.
- A **First Nations Languages Policy Partnership** between First Nations representatives and Australian Governments.
- Enhancing the **Resale Royalty Scheme**, to provide royalty payments to visual artists.
- An **Arts and Disability Association Plan**, to support participation in Australia's cultural life.
- An increase to the **Regional Arts Fund**, intended to support regional arts and culture.

The Australian Government has acknowledged that it will not be possible to address all the needs of the cultural and creative sector immediately. Instead, the investments, priorities, and structural changes introduced under Revive are 'designed to provide a solid foundation for future investment, within broader government fiscal settings'.⁵⁹

Implementation of Revive is overseen by the National Cultural Policy Steering Committee, which is composed of representatives from across government. The Australian Government also committed to establishing a structured evaluation process, including clear benchmarks set in the initial phase to monitor progress.⁶⁰ These benchmarks will inform the development of an updated National Cultural Policy in 2027.

The Office for the Arts (which is part of the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts) provides public updates on the progress of Revive. Table 3.7 below summarises some of the key progress under Revive.

⁵⁹ Australian Government, *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place*, 2023, p. 96.

⁶⁰ Australian Government, *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place*, 2023, p. 96.

Table 3.7 Progress under *Revive*

| Pillar | Key achievements |
|--------------------------------|--|
| First Nations First | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$80 million for the National Aboriginal Art Gallery in Alice Springs. \$1.5 million for professional development and training for First Nations artists. Release of <i>Voices of Country—Australia's Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032</i>. |
| A Place for Every Story | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of Creative Australia, updating the Australia Council for the Arts. Creation of First Nations Arts and Writing Australia to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and literature. |
| Centrality of the Artist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over \$26 million over three years (from 2025–26) to establish Writing Australia, supporting authors and appointing a national Poet Laureate. |
| Strong Cultural Infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$11.8 million over four years for the National Gallery of Australia's Sharing the National Collection initiative, enabling long-term loans of artworks to regional institutions. \$535.3 million over four years to support the financial sustainability of nine National Collecting Institutions. |
| Engaging the Audience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased the Location Offset^a from 16.5% to 30% to attract large-scale screen productions to Australia. \$12 million over four years to support digital game developers and independent studios through Screen Australia, complementing the Digital Games Tax Offset. |

a. A tax rebate for large-budget film and television projects which are filmed in Australia.

Source: Office for the Arts, *Progress under Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*, 2024, <<https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/national-cultural-policy/progress-under-revive-place-every-story-story-every-place>> accessed 21 February 2025.

Stakeholder feedback on the Revive policy

The Committee heard that Revive was welcomed by many stakeholders. Caitlin Dullard of La Mama Theatre Company, described Revive as 'a step in the right direction'.⁶¹ However, some highlighted that whilst Revive is 'an amazing go at a policy ... it needs a second go'.⁶²

Others highlighted that the 'allocation of \$200 million in additional funding for the delivery of the national cultural policy is a fraction of what is required to achieve its goals'.⁶³ The Committee heard that 'to fully realise the ambitions of Revive, at this critical time, additional targeted policy mechanisms and investments are needed at both the national and state level'.⁶⁴

Stakeholders called out shortfalls of Revive that relate to their individual sectors.

⁶¹ Caitlin Dullard, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14

⁶² Tim Stitz, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

⁶³ Anne Robertson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁶⁴ Live Performance Australia, *Submission 39*, p. 3.

Theatre

- Whilst Revive established Music Australia and Writers Australia, it did not establish an equivalent body for the theatre sector – ‘a body like that from a theatre perspective would revolutionise’.⁶⁵ Some considered this omission was evidence of a ‘lack of emphasis on theatre’.⁶⁶
- Revive did not ‘address structural issues in the funding matrix which have seen arts resources directed away from the independent theatre sector’.⁶⁷ ‘Theatre producers, artists, as well as professional youth arts companies, are competing in the same funding rounds as capacity building organisations and creative venues, despite their fundamentally different roles and assessment criteria’.⁶⁸

Museums and Galleries

- Whilst Revive allocated \$11.8 million to facilitate loans from the National Gallery of Australia to regional and suburban galleries, it did not address these galleries ‘urgent need for investment in a centralised approach to collection storage, upgrades to aging infrastructure and investment in collection staff and conservators’.⁶⁹ Such factors limit what a ‘gallery can share with their audiences’.⁷⁰
- Whilst Revive acknowledges the issues faced by many smaller community-run museums, ‘it stops short of providing concrete actions or funding to address these challenges’.⁷¹ The sector needs ‘more than recognition’.⁷²
- The language used by Revive in describing ‘an aging group of volunteers’ and ‘crumbling infrastructure’, is ‘dismissive and quite patronising’. It neglects how ‘dynamic the sector is’.⁷³

Visual art, craft and design touring

- Revive ‘did not include increases to the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy and/or visual arts touring programs the sector advocated for’.⁷⁴ Creative Australia’s Contemporary Touring Initiative will be discontinued from 2025, resulting in ‘minimal or negative flow-on effects for visual arts touring and/or contemporary visual arts practitioners’.⁷⁵

⁶⁵ Caitlin Dullard, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Katrina Cornwell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

⁶⁷ Independent Youth Theatre Organisations, *Submission 26*, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Independent Youth Theatre Organisations, *Submission 26*, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Anne Robertson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁷⁰ Anne Robertson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁷¹ Anthony Camm, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

⁷² Anthony Camm, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

⁷³ Anthony Camm, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

⁷⁴ NETS, *Submission 28*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ NETS, *Submission 28*, p. 6.

- Revive funding is 'disproportionately concentrated in Melbourne and Sydney... creating concerns for artists based in regional areas'.⁷⁶
- Creative Australia's Visual Arts and the Multi-Art Form funding categories 'have reported particularly high instability and turnover, with many organisations losing funding while new entrants have been successful for the first time'.⁷⁷

3.3.2 Creative Australia

Creative Australia, formally known as the Australia Council for the Arts, is the country's principal arts investment and advisory body. Its remit was expanded in 2023 as part of the Revive policy. Under Revive, with an additional \$199 million in funding over 4 years from 2023–24, 'Creative Australia will provide greater strategic oversight and engagement across the sector'.⁷⁸

One of Creative Australia's primary functions is to deliver federal grant programs directed at the cultural and creative industries. Creative Australia invests in:

- **Australian Cultural Fund.** This is a fundraising platform for small to medium arts organisations and artists to campaign for philanthropic investment.
- **Government initiatives,** including the Major Festivals initiative, the Visual Arts and Craft strategy, the Contemporary Touring Initiative, Playing Australia and the Contemporary Music Touring Program.
- **Four-year investment** in small to medium organisations. In 2023–24, it invested in a total of 91 small to medium organisations.
- **Grants and initiatives** which provide support to a diverse range of creatives through peer assessed grants, fellowships and awards.
- **Music Australia,** which was launched in 2023 as a dedicated new body to support and invest in the Australian contemporary music industry.
- **National Performing Arts Partnership Framework.** In 2023–24, it invested in 37 organisations in the fields of dance, theatre, circus, opera and orchestral and chamber music.

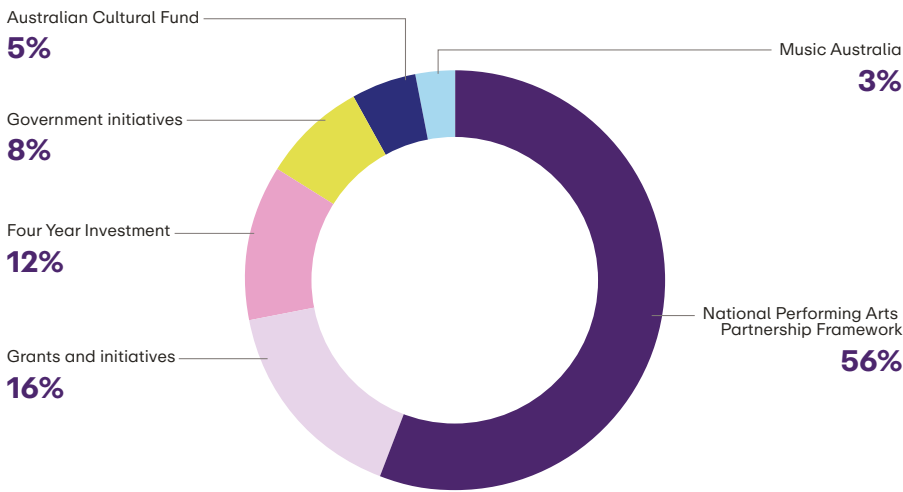
Figure 3.5 breaks down the investment made by Creative Australia in 2023–24.

⁷⁶ NETS, *Submission 28*, p. 6.

⁷⁷ NETS, *Submission 28*, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Office for the Arts, *A New National Cultural Policy*, <<https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/new-national-cultural-policy>> accessed 15 May 2025.

Figure 3.5 Creative Australia 2023–24 investment overview



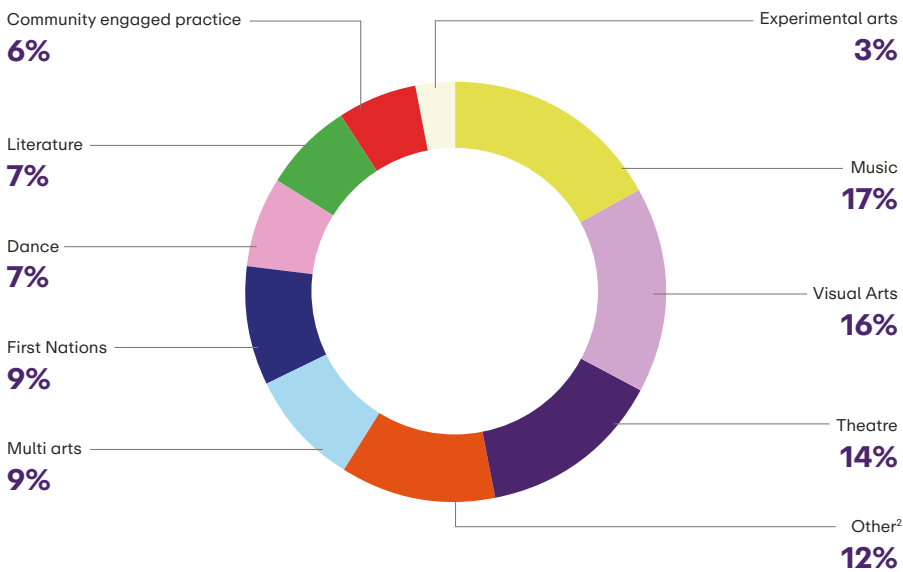
| \$ Millions | 2020–21 | 2021–22 | 2022–23 | 2023–24 |
|--|---------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Four Year Investment | \$29.7 | \$29.2 | \$29.5 | \$29.9 |
| National Performing Arts Partnership Framework | \$120.3 | \$122.7 ¹ | \$125.5 ² | \$132.6 ² |
| Government initiatives | \$18.4 | \$20.5 ³ | \$17.8 ⁴ | \$18.4 |
| Grants and initiatives | \$25.5 | \$25.8 | \$23.8 | \$38.3 ⁵ |
| Australian Cultural Fund ⁶ | — | — | — | \$11.3 |
| Music Australia ⁷ | — | — | — | \$6.9 |
| Grand total | \$193.9 | \$198.1 | \$196.6 | \$237.4 |

Note: Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Creative Australia, 2023–24 Annual Report, p. 20.

Creative Australia invests in a wide range of practice areas, including first nations, literature, dance, visual arts, theatre and music. Figure 3.6 breaks down Creative Australia’s investment by practice area.

Figure 3.6 Creative Australia investment by area of practice 2023–24



| \$ Millions | 2020–21 | 2021–22 | 2022–23 | 2023–24 |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| First Nations | \$5.6 | \$5.5 | \$7.8 | \$9.0 |
| Community engaged practice | \$6.1 | \$6.2 | \$5.3 | \$6.6 |
| Dance | \$5.1 | \$6.3 | \$4.9 | \$7.1 |
| Experimental arts | \$2.1 | \$2.3 | \$2.5 | \$3.4 |
| Literature | \$4.7 | \$5.1 | \$5.2 | \$7.8 |
| Multi arts | \$4.9 | \$5.0 | \$6.3 | \$9.3 |
| Music | \$10.3 | \$10.5 | \$11.1 | \$17.6 |
| Theatre | \$16.1 | \$14.5 | \$13.2 | \$14.7 |
| Visual arts | \$13.8 | \$14.8 | \$14.8 | \$16.6 |
| Strategic development ¹ | \$4.9 | \$5.3 | — | — |
| Other ² | — | — | — | \$12.7 |
| Grand total | \$73.6 | \$75.5 | \$71.1 | \$104.8 |

Note: First Nations grants and initiatives are those where the applicant has selected 'First Nations' as their main area of practice. First Nations-led grants and initiatives are also supported through other areas of practice.

Note: From 2022–23, practice areas are categorised as: First nations arts to First Nations; Community arts and cultural development to Community engaged practice; and Emerging and experimental arts is now known as Experimental arts.

Note: Investment comprises funding to project and career development grants, fellowships and awards, Four Year Investment, government and strategic initiatives. An additional \$132.6 million was invested nationally through the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework.

Note: Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

1. Strategic Development includes capacity building and national and international sector development. From 2022–23, Strategic Development is no longer reported as a separate area of practice, this investment is reported under the other areas listed.
2. Other includes investments for which area of practice has not been specified. This category includes investments via the Australian Cultural Fund, Plus1 and MATCH Lab.

Source: Creative Australia, 2023–24 Annual Report, p. 22.

3.3.3 Regional Arts Australia

Regional Arts Australia is the national peak body representing regional arts organisations in Australia. Its key roles include advocating for and delivering government funding and establishing partnership networks for regional arts organisations. It is also responsible for the management of the Regional Arts Fund.

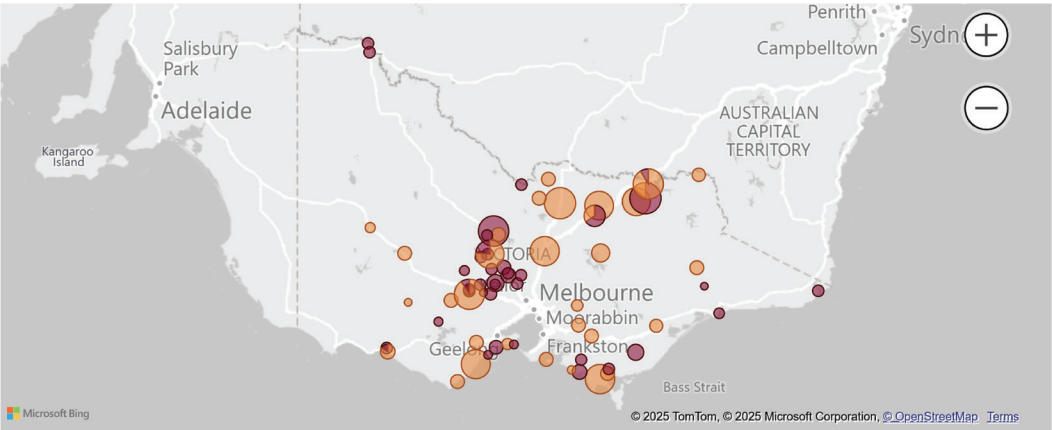
The Regional Arts Fund is an Australian Government program that supports sustainable cultural development in regional and remote communities in Australia. A key initiative of *Revive* is increased support for the Regional Arts Fund of \$8.5 million over four years from 2023–24.⁷⁹

In 2024, the Regional Arts Fund invested a total of \$556,493 in Victoria. This investment was made in 65 locations and supported 85 projects.⁸⁰ See Figure 3.7.

⁷⁹ Regional Arts Australia, *About the Regional Arts Fund*, 2024, <<https://regionalarts.com.au/regional-arts-fund/impact-and-reach>> accessed 2 April 2025.

⁸⁰ Regional Arts Australia, *Impact and Reach*, 2024, <<https://regionalarts.com.au/regional-arts-fund/impact-and-reach>> accessed 2 April 2025.

Figure 3.7 Victorian Regional Arts Fund recipient location, 2024



Source: Regional Arts Australia, *Impact and Reach*, 2024, <<https://regionalarts.com.au/regional-arts-fund/impact-and-reach>> accessed 2 April 2025.

Since 2022, the Regional Arts Fund has invested a total of \$8,255,299, supporting 1,036 projects in 592 locations. Of this, approximately 14% (\$1,123,486) has been invested in Victoria, supporting 164 projects in 106 locations.⁸¹ See Table 3.8.

Table 3.8 Regional Arts Fund total investment by state, 2021–22 to 2023–24

| State | 2021–22 (\$) | 2022–23 (\$) | 2023–24 (\$) | Total (\$) |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| New South Wales | 419,432 | 433,348 | 701,202 | 1,553,983 |
| Queensland | 393,257 | 465,440 | 702,865 | 1,561,561 |
| South Australia | 373,047 | 383,506 | 475,567 | 1,233,120 |
| Victoria | 282,352 | 284,641 | 556,493 | 1,123,486 |
| Western Australia | 267,366 | 293,923 | 543,583 | 1,104,872 |
| Northern Territory | 211,932 | 284,753 | 472,619 | 969,303 |
| Tasmania | 226,403 | 198,967 | 283,604 | 708,973 |
| Total | | | | 8,255,299 |

Source: Regional Arts Australia, *Impact and Reach*, 2024, <<https://regionalarts.com.au/regional-arts-fund/impact-and-reach>> accessed 2 April 2025.

3.3.4 Regional Arts Victoria

Regional Arts Victoria (RAV) is an independent, not-for-profit, membership-based organisation which advises on decision-making through partnerships with federal, state and local government.

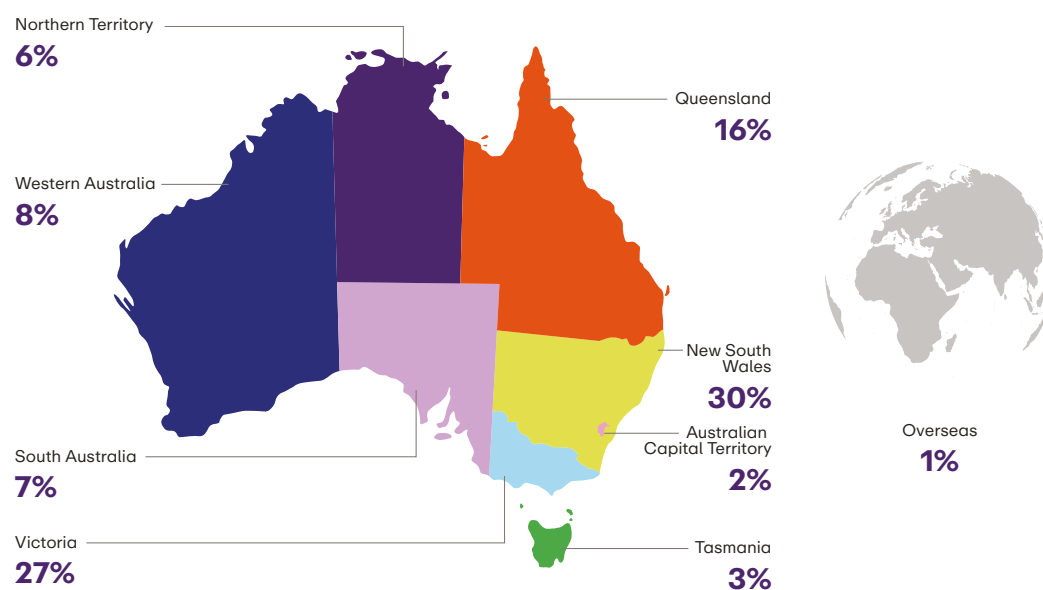
81 Regional Arts Australia, *Impact and Reach*, 2024, <<https://regionalarts.com.au/regional-arts-fund/impact-and-reach>> accessed 2 April 2025.

Regional Arts Victoria manages the Commonwealth Government's Regional Arts Fund on behalf of Regional Arts Australia. RAV also manages the Small Regional Presenters Fund on behalf of the Victorian Government.

3.3.5 Does Victoria get its fair share of federal funding?

Creative Australia does break down its yearly investment by location. In 2023–24, Victoria received \$28.7 million, or 27% of funding.⁸² Victoria accounts for approximately 25% of Australia's total population, leading some stakeholders to conclude that Victoria receives its fair share of funding from Creative Australia. See Figure 3.8.

Figure 3.8 Creative Australia investment by location (applicant residence) 2023–24



| \$ Millions | 2020–21 | 2021–22 | 2022–23 | 2023–24 |
|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| New South Wales | \$23.3 | \$21.9 | \$21.2 | \$30.9 |
| Victoria | \$19.3 | \$19.4 | \$18.9 | \$28.7 |
| Queensland | \$9.8 | \$11.2 | \$10.6 | \$16.2 |
| South Australia | \$6.4 | \$6.6 | \$5.7 | \$7.7 |
| Western Australia | \$6.0 | \$6.2 | \$5.7 | \$8.9 |
| Tasmania | \$2.0 | \$1.8 | \$2.3 | \$2.8 |
| Northern Territory | \$4.8 | \$5.8 | \$4.9 | \$6.1 |
| Australian Capital Territory | \$1.5 | \$1.2 | \$1.1 | \$2.2 |
| Overseas | \$0.6 | \$1.4 | \$0.7 | \$1.3 |
| Grand total | \$73.6 | \$75.5 | \$71.1 | \$104.8 |

Note regarding methodology: This table is based on the location of the applicant/organisation's residence, meaning that touring activity is counted in the home state of the artist or organisation.

Note: Investment comprises funding to project and career development grants, fellowships and awards, Four Year Investment, government and strategic initiatives. An additional \$132.6 million was invested nationally through the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework.

Source: Creative Australia, *Annual Report 2023–24*, p. 24.

⁸² Creative Australia, *Annual Report 2023–24*, p. 24.

On average over the past decade, 'Victoria has received a proportionally higher share of Creative Australia investment relative to its population, second only to the Northern Territory'.⁸³ Joshua Lowe of Theatre Network Australia, told the Committee:

On average the Vic population over the last decade has been 25.7 per cent of the Australian population and has received 28.6 per cent of the funding, so that is 2.9 per cent higher.

This success is seen across multiple funding streams. If we look at our Creative Australia four-year investment program, Victorian organisations make up a third of those securing four-year investment, and in the recent two-year investment pilot, Victorians make up half of the cohort of 12. In the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework, Victoria is home to a quarter of the organisations within that program. In ARTS8, the national training organisations, half have a base in Victoria, so that is four out of the eight. In project funding rounds, Victorian applicants continue to be highly competitive in securing federal support. In 2024, 40 per cent of the project grants to individuals and 32 per cent of project grants in organisations went to Victoria.⁸⁴

Funding from Creative Australia represents only part of the Australian Government investment in the cultural and creative industries. Comprehensive funding is captured in the cultural funding by government dataset. Kate Fielding of A New Approach, told the Committee:

This is the best dataset that we have in Australia to give a comprehensive view of expenditure into the cultural space. It picks up the three levels of government, it picks up broad arts and culture expenditure by government and it picks up things inside the designated arts portfolio as well as expenditure in other portfolios – that could be in health, that could be in regional development, it could be in education, it could be in a range of other places. This is the most comprehensive data in the country on government expenditure in this space.⁸⁵

The cultural funding by government dataset does not release a state and territory breakdown. As such, this dataset does not allow an understanding of how this total annual funding is distributed amongst the states and territories. Kate Fielding told the Committee:

If the cultural funding by government dataset was released, cut by state and territory data in terms of where federal government is sending its cultural expenditure on a state and territory basis, we would be able to have a data-informed conversation about that in a coherent way. But because that data is not released at the moment, we are really left with a very partial view, as you are putting together – getting bits of information and trying to see the whole picture from that.⁸⁶

⁸³ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁸⁴ Joshua Lowe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁸⁵ Kate Fielding, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 25–26.

⁸⁶ Kate Fielding, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

Stakeholders advocated for a state and territory breakdown to be released to support a more holistic conversation around federal cultural and creative industries funding.

FINDING 29: Victoria receives its fair share of funding from Creative Australia.

FINDING 30: It is difficult to determine whether Victoria receives its fair share of other funding captured in the cultural funding by government dataset, as state and territory breakdowns are not released.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Victorian Government should advocate for the federal cultural funding by government dataset to release state and territory breakdowns.

3

3.3.6 Regional Victoria is not getting its fair share

The Committee heard that regional Victoria is not receiving its fair share of cultural and creative industry funding.

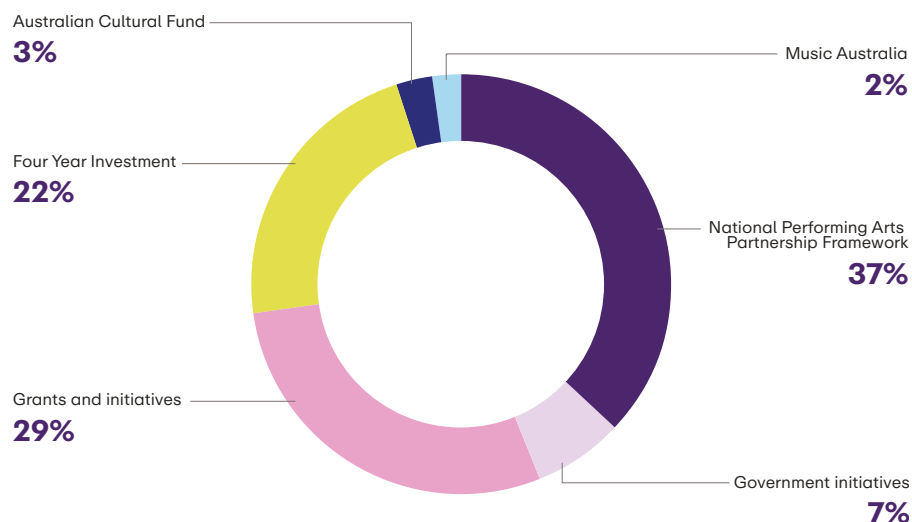
The Committee heard that 'Creative Australia funds all Australian creatives but does not necessarily review its funding for an equitable spread between metro and regional'.⁸⁷

The cultural funding by government dataset does not release a breakdown of funding based upon remoteness level or geography. As discussed above, further data transparency is required to ascertain whether regional Australia, and specifically regional Victoria, receives its fair share of federal funding.

Creative Australia does break down funding by region. Out of the \$237.4 Creative Australia invested in 2023–24, only \$28.4 (approximately 12%) was invested in regional Australia.⁸⁸ See Figure 3.9.

⁸⁷ Jo Porter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

⁸⁸ Creative Australia, *Annual Report 2023–24*, p. 24.

Figure 3.9 Investment in regional Australia

| \$ Millions | 2020–21 | 2021–22 | 2022–23 | 2023–24 |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| National Performing Arts Partnership Framework | \$8.5 | \$9.1 | \$9.7 | \$10.5 |
| Government initiatives | \$1.5 | \$1.6 | \$1.9 | \$1.8 |
| Grants and initiatives | \$4.8 | \$5.3 | \$4.8 | \$8.3 |
| Four Year Investment | \$7.0 | \$6.6 | \$6.7 | \$6.3 |
| Australian Cultural Fund ¹ | — | — | — | \$0.9 |
| Music Australia ² | — | — | — | \$0.6 |
| Grand total | \$21.8 | \$22.6 | \$23.1 | \$28.4 |

Note regarding methodology: This table is based on the location of the applicant/organisation's residence, meaning that touring activity is counted in the home state of the artist or organisation.

Note: Investment in regional Australia does not include regional touring activities if the applicant is not based in regional Australia. The Government's regional touring programs invested \$10.6 million in FY 2023–24 (out of which \$9.6 million was to applicants not based in regional areas) compared with prior year's \$9.9 million.

Note: Four regional organisations transitioned from Four Year Investment to the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework in mid-2021. New regional Partnership Organisations are Dancenorth (QLD), Artback NT Inc (NT), Marrugeku (WA) and Terrapin Puppet Theatre (TAS).

Source: Creative Australia, *Annual Report 2023–24*, p. 24.

As a result, regional Victoria 'continues to demonstrate significant unrealised potential across all art forms'.⁸⁹ This disparity becomes even more significant if you 'take Geelong out of the picture',⁹⁰ which attracts most of the regionally based funding. Jo Porter of Regional Arts Victoria, told the Committee:

Creative Australia's long-term investment in metropolitan centres—basically Melbourne and Geelong—and some project support is really welcome, but my concern is that that investment really masks considerable underinvestment in regional Victoria. We are not seeing the commitment of four-year funding or larger project grants going to regional Victorians. The Regional Arts Fund and Festivals Australia do specifically address regional Victoria's creatives, but unfunded excellence is significant. Those of you who work in the arts will be aware of this rather ironic term, 'unfunded excellence', which is basically what falls below the line in what can be afforded in terms of a grant pool.

⁸⁹ Jo Porter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

⁹⁰ Jo Porter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

We are not seeing the multiyear regional organisational funding which would nurture the opportunities that I listed in my submission.⁹¹

When asked if regional Victoria's share of the national arts and culture spending is inadequate, Jo Porter told the Committee that it is:

Absolutely inadequate.⁹²

This view was reinforced by Arena Theatre Company, which stated in its submission that:

The Revive policy's emphasis on "A Place for Every Story" and recognition of arts education's importance aligns with Arena's mission. However, the implementation has not yet translated into adequate support for specialist youth arts organisations, particularly in regional areas. The current funding matrix does not sufficiently recognise the specific needs and impacts of youth arts programming in regional settings.⁹³

FINDING 31: Regional Victoria does not receive its fair share of funding from Creative Australia.

FINDING 32: It is difficult to determine whether regional Victoria receives its fair share of other funding captured in the cultural funding by government dataset, as remoteness level or geography breakdowns are not released.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Victorian Government should advocate for the federal cultural funding by government dataset to release remoteness level or geography breakdowns.

⁹¹ Jo Porter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

⁹² Jo Porter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

⁹³ Arena Theatre Company, *Submission 25*, p. 2.

Chapter 4

National Broadcasters role in Victoria's cultural and creative industries

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the vital role of national broadcaster expenditure in supporting Victoria's economy and cultural vibrancy. It assesses whether the ABC and SBS allocate funding to Victoria in proportion to the state's population size, economic weight, and unique influence on Australia's creative industries. The analysis also examines how effectively public broadcasting reflects Victoria's diverse communities, ensuring its cultural identity is represented in line with the broadcasters' national mandates.

4.2 Overview of the national broadcasters

4.2.1 Australian Broadcasting Corporation's role in Australia's cultural landscape

As one of two national public broadcasters, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 'plays a major part in [Australia's cultural and creative] industries'.¹ In its submission to the Committee, the ABC emphasised that it 'plays an important role in shaping Australia's national identity, fostering social inclusion and encouraging myriad forms of cultural and creative expression'.² The submission went on to add:

The ABC is a major producer of Australian content across television, radio, and digital platforms. This includes Australian drama series, documentaries, and children's programming that tell distinctively Australian stories and showcase local talent. In accordance with section 6(c) of the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* (Cth) (ABC Act), the ABC supports and promotes the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia.³

Mark Tapley, Director of Strategy, ABC, further clarified to the Committee the role of the ABC in Australia's cultural landscape, stating 'I do not think [the ABC] set the national identity I think it is a question of [the ABC] contributing to the national identity'.⁴

¹ Mark Tapley, Director of Strategy, ABC, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 28–29.

² Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Submission 41*, p. 1.

³ Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Submission 41*, p. 1.

⁴ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

4.2.2 Special Broadcasting Service's role in Australia's cultural landscape

The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) 'plays a distinctive and important role in contemporary Australia ... [as] Australia's multilingual and multicultural and First Nations public broadcaster'.⁵ The SBS provides 'trusted news, information, and entertainment that reaches everyone – including multicultural, multilingual and First Nations communities – supporting civic, social, and economic participation, and social cohesion in contemporary Australia'.⁶ The SBS delivers unique services such as the National Indigenous Television (NITV) which is 'Australia's leading platform for First Nations storytelling and home to the only national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander television news service'.⁷

Clare O'Neil, Director of Corporate Affairs, SBS, provided greater detail to the Committee regarding the role of the SBS in Australia's cultural landscape. Clare O'Neil stated that the SBS network delivers 'national multiplatform services that inform, educate, entertain and reflect Australia's diverse communities. [The SBS is] one of the most linguistically diverse broadcasters, delivering content in over 60 languages'.⁸ She emphasised that the SBS delivers critical services including 'SBS Learn English for people with low or no English proficiency; Australia Explained, a resource for new migrants and refugees; and SBS Examines, which addresses misinformation circulating in the community'.⁹

Clare O'Neil highlighted that the Australian public positively responds to the role the SBS plays in Australia's cultural landscape as shown in the levels of trust demonstrated by the public in consuming the SBS's content. Clare O'Neil stated that that 'SBS News is the most trusted news brand in Australia, according to the latest Reuters Institute Digital News Report'.¹⁰

4.3 Assessment of Victorian ABC funding allocations

Section 4.3 looks at how the ABC are spending in Victoria and whether its funding matches the state's population, economy, and unique role in Australia's cultural life.

4.3.1 ABC headcount in Victoria

The Committee received evidence from the ABC that provided 'a breakdown of ABC full-time equivalent (FTE) staff nationwide along with the staffing costs associated with each state and territory', shown below in Table 4.1.¹¹

⁵ Clare O'Neil, Director, Corporate Affairs, SBS, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

⁶ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 5.

⁷ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 1.

⁸ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

⁹ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

¹⁰ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

¹¹ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, p. 2.

Table 4.1 Breakdown of ABC FTE staff nationwide and associated staffing costs

| State | Headcount | | Full Time Equivalent (FTE) | | Staff Costs | |
|----------------|-------------|---------------|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | # | % | # | % | \$ | % |
| ACT | 189 | 3.8% | 163.4 | 3.7% | 23,192,860 | 3.6% |
| NSW | 2414 | 47.9% | 2149.6 | 48.9% | 330,949,648 | 51.9% |
| NT | 117 | 2.3% | 102.4 | 2.3% | 13,394,232 | 2.1% |
| QLD | 611 | 12.1% | 520.0 | 11.8% | 71,739,060 | 11.2% |
| SA | 325 | 6.4% | 285.8 | 6.5% | 37,055,270 | 5.8% |
| TAS | 161 | 3.2% | 131.9 | 3.0% | 17,060,475 | 2.7% |
| VIC | 937 | 18.6% | 803.2 | 18.3% | 111,498,816 | 17.5% |
| WA | 268 | 5.3% | 222.9 | 5.1% | 29,630,576 | 4.6% |
| Overseas | 18 | 0.4% | 18.0 | 0.4% | 3,442,442 | 0.5% |
| All ABC | 5040 | 100.0% | 4397.1 | 100.0% | 637,963,380 | 100.0% |

Headcount and FTE based on employees paid in the fortnight ended 1 December 2024.

Staff Costs based on employees paid in the 12 months to 1 December 2024.

Source: ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, p. 2.

Table 4.2 illustrates a breakdown of Australia's population at 30 September 2024 (the most current and available data). Victoria is the second most populous state and represents 26% of the nation's total population. The ABC's headcount in Victoria is 937 employees, the second highest in terms of headcount, and reflects 18.6% of the total ABC headcount.

Table 4.2 Breakdown of Australia's population at 30 September 2024

| State | Population ('000) | Percentage of population (%) |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| New South Wales | 8511.2 | 31 |
| Victoria | 7013.0 | 26 |
| Queensland | 5608.7 | 21 |
| Western Australia | 2981.8 | 11 |
| South Australia | 1882.7 | 7 |
| Australian Capital Territory | 475.6 | 2 |
| Tasmania | 576.0 | 2 |
| Northern Territory | 255.6 | 1 |
| Australia^a | 27309.4 | 100 |

a. Includes Other Territories comprising Jervis Bay Territory, Christmas Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Norfolk Island.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National, state and territory population: Statistics about the population and components of change (births, deaths, migration) for Australia and its states and territories*, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/sep-2024>> accessed 23 May 2025.

The ABC emphasised that it ‘contributes to Victoria’s cultural and creative industry with its broad physical presence within the state’.¹² The ABC ‘operates from 10 locations spread across the state, including its Melbourne office in Southbank and nine regional offices ... within those 10 ABC locations, the ... headcount [is] 937 paid active employees’ and ‘93 of those employees were based in regional Victoria’.¹³ In its submission, the ABC specified that the employee headcount for Victoria was ‘based on employees paid in the fortnight [ending on] 1 December 2024’.¹⁴ Mark Tapley of the ABC, underscored to the Committee that several ‘key ABC teams operate or are managed from Melbourne,’ such as:¹⁵

- Radio National
- ABC News breakfast
- Asia Pacific newsroom
- ABC Education
- Heywire
- Double J
- ABC Country
- a major newsroom in Melbourne
- regional news presence across Victoria.

Presence in regional Victoria

Mark Tapley of the ABC, emphasised that the ABC have ‘the largest regional workforce of any media organisation. [The ABC] have got around 600 staff that are located in rural and regional Australia’.¹⁶ Mark Tapley explained the distribution of the ABC workforce in terms of the number of people located in regional Victoria and how that has changed over the last 10 years, stating:

I think overall it has grown ... because of the news media bargaining code being passed ... our chair has made public that we will continue to support those positions in regional Australia. So, I believe it has gone up over that period ...¹⁷

Mark Tapley explained that although the ABC charter does not include protections for regional areas to maintain headcount, the ABC ‘have repeatedly stated its commitment to regional Australia’.¹⁸ He noted that there is ‘obviously a judgement call about what level of investment involves “adequately reflects”’ when assessing whether

¹² ABC, *Submission 41*, p. 1.

¹³ ABC, *Submission 41*, pp. 1–2.

¹⁴ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 27 February 2025, p. 2.

¹⁵ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹⁶ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

¹⁷ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

¹⁸ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

the ABC meets its obligation to represent the entire nation, particularly in terms of rural and regional workforce headcount'.¹⁹ Mark Tapley added that the ABC ensures accountability by annually reporting on 'what its regional and rural workforce is,' which fosters 'public debate and transparency' regarding headcount figures for these communities.²⁰

Mark Tapley also emphasised that 'if we saw that number decline in any significant way, people would be very much expecting some feedback.'²¹ He explained that the ABC highly values its regional presence and is committed to maintaining it, stating that:

With the trouble that the commercial media sector is having, we feel like our regional presence is more important than ever, so certainly there are no plans to reduce that at all.²²

Victorian representation on the ABC Board

In response to the Committee's concerns that only recently had a Victorian been appointed to the ABC board, Mark Tapley clarified that 'the ABC does not appoint the board; it is a decision for government.'²³ He elaborated further, stating:

But Katrina Sedgwick did join the board in October. She is, I am sure you are aware, the CEO of the arts precinct down here and formerly CEO of ACMI and is a very strong advocate for Victoria and the arts sector in particular.²⁴

When asked about the assessment 'that a minimum of two Victorians on the board would be an absolute base number, given the representation around the country,'²⁵ Mark Tapley responded by noting that 'that is a matter before the federal government'.²⁶

Mark Tapley told the Committee that while the ABC maintains its head office in Sydney, the ABC does have to 'balance this desire to represent the Board and management have to balance the desire to represent the breadth and diversity of the country with also an imperative that is in the legislation about efficiency'.²⁷

RECOMMENDATION 6: The Victorian Government advocate to the Federal Government to appoint at least one more Board member from Victoria to the ABC Board to be adequately represented.

¹⁹ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

²⁰ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

²¹ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

²² Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

²³ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

²⁴ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

²⁵ Hon David Davis MLC, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

²⁶ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

²⁷ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

The Committee received evidence from the ABC clarifying the organisation’s headcount distribution and associated role classifications. The evidence reaffirmed that ‘appointments to the ABC Board are a matter for the Government of the day,’ and emphasised that ‘over the last 20 years, the ABC Board has had an almost continuous service of Victoria-based members, including Steven Skala (2005–2015) and Joe Gersh (2018–2023)’.²⁸ The ABC highlighted that a ‘number of senior ABC management and decision-making roles are based in Victoria’ as shown in Table 4.3.²⁹

Table 4.3 Breakdown of senior ABC management and decision-making roles based in Victoria

| Senior ABC management and decision-making roles based in Victoria | Role breakdown |
|---|--|
| Content (screen) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chief Partnerships & Negotiation Officer• Head of Commissioning & Content Planning• Head of Production |
| Audio | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manager, Radio National• Head of Capital City Network & Sport• Head of triple j, Double J & ABC Country• Manager, Double J & ABC Country• Content Director, triple j• Content Director Sport• Group Content Director, CCN• Manager, ABC Local Melbourne• Content Director, ABC Classic & ABC Jazz• Executive Producer, Programs |
| News | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing Editor, Asia Pacific• Editor, Specialist Reporting Team• Victoria Metro Editor• Deputy Metro Editor• Regional Editor, Victoria• Deputy Regional Editor• Bureau Chief, 7.30• Manager, Community Impact & Events• Manager, Digital Content & Strategy• Executive Producer, News Breakfast• Executive Producer, Insiders• Deputy Editor, Indigenous Affairs Reporting Team• Election Co-ordinator• Key Stories Editor |
| Strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Director of Strategy• Head of Communications• Head of Corporate Affairs |
| Product and technology | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Head of Content Management & Distribution |

Source: ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, pp. 12–13.

²⁸ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, p. 12.
²⁹ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, pp. 12–13.

Decision to relocate to Parramatta office

The Committee raised concerns about the ABC's decision to relocate employees from the Sydney office to Parramatta. Following discussions about the difference in employee headcounts between Victoria and other states, the Committee examined the rationale behind this decision, including whether Victoria had been considered as a relocation option, given that New South Wales has a higher number of ABC employees.

The ABC outlined several external factors which underpinned its rationale for relocating its office to Parramatta. The submission outlined demographic considerations which played a role in the choice, explaining that around '1 in 10 Australians live in Western Sydney, and it is one of the fastest growing corridors in the country',³⁰ making it a strategic location for improved audience engagement. The ABC's submission also highlighted how 'rapid changes in the media sector' meant that 'this initiative was an opportunity to create a new, inclusive work environment utilising the latest technology, and designed to improve engagement with more parts of Sydney'.³¹ The ABC pointed to Parramatta's growing cultural precinct, highlighting that 'Parramatta has had significant cultural projects, including the Power House museum and Riverside Theatre developments which also supported [its] relocation to Parramatta'.³² Finally, the ABC explained that 'the number of state departments and agencies within the Parramatta area ... was a key draw factor along with the need to better represent the population of Sydney'.³³

The Committee also heard evidence from Mark Tapley of the ABC, who explained that '[in] determining Parramatta as the location for the move, the ABC was mindful of its obligations under the ABC's Enterprise Agreement 2022–2025'.³⁴ Mark Tapley stated:

The Enterprise Agreement provides the processes that the ABC must comply with in relation to managing change and redundancies, which includes considering the impact of relocating staff to another workplace.

Under the Enterprise Agreement an employee is redundant when their function is transferred to another location that is not within reasonable commuting distance of their current location, they are not willing to relocate and there is no suitable alternative position available within reasonable commuting distance.

Consequently, the ABC did have to consider the possible costs if the location was not within a reasonable commuting distance of a current ABC location.

Mark Tapley explained the economic rationale underpinning the decision:

The situation in Sydney was that we owned land on the North Shore in Artarmon. That land we identified as being surplus to requirements, so we were able to sell that land

³⁰ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, pp. 8–9.

³¹ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, pp. 8–9.

³² ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, pp. 8–9.

³³ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, pp. 8–9.

³⁴ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, pp. 8–9.

and we took the opportunity to lease space in Parramatta for up to 300 people. We have moved the Sydney newsroom out there as well as ABC Sydney radio, the idea being that we decentralise out of Ultimo and we connect better with western Sydney, where I think 11 per cent of the Australian population lives.

Mark Tapley emphasised that the decision 'was able to be achieved without any additional cost to the taxpayer' as the ABC:

had this surplus property that we were able to sell and then I guess refit Ultimo, move some people out of Ultimo and lease out some space in Ultimo, and the leasing in Ultimo covers the cost of being in Parramatta.³⁵

Questioned on the cost of the move to Parramatta, Mark Tapley explained that 'the net cost ... was borne by the ABC.'³⁶ He stated that '[t]here is also just a budget constraint,'³⁷ in terms of the ABC's decision to have an office in Parramatta. The Committee received evidence from the ABC providing greater detail on the costing of the Parramatta relocation:

The Sydney Accommodation Project brings together the elements of work required to deliver the new ABC site in Parramatta along with the staged refurbishment and restack of the Ultimo site, allowing the ABC to sub-let up to 7 floors of the Ultimo tower.

There will be nil additional cost to the taxpayer in the delivery of the project, as the costs for delivery are supported via the sale of aging assets and the sub-leasing of up to seven floors of the ABC's Ultimo facility.

Total project spend to date is \$66.4m at February 2025, with some \$0.8m still to be incurred in finalising the project within the budget of \$67.2m.

Of this, Parramatta spend to February 2025 is \$39.1m with some \$0.4m still to be incurred, mostly within the Technology fit out component of the work.³⁸

Mark Tapley further explained the ABC's consideration of alternative locations to Parramatta, noting that 'there is an issue that arises around redundancies if you are trying to move people.'³⁹ Regarding potential relocation to Victoria, he warned that 'there would be significant redundancy costs involved in moving people holus-bolus'.⁴⁰

Mark Tapley emphasised that 'the ABC's impact does go beyond that headcount', adding that the organisation could 'use the money and invest it in partnership with local cultural institutions and the independent production sector. So we can have an impact around the country that is beyond just the headcount in the relevant cities'.⁴¹

³⁵ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

³⁶ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

³⁷ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

³⁸ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, p. 15.

³⁹ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

⁴⁰ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

⁴¹ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

The ABC underscored its commitment to Victoria through the ABC Southbank redevelopment, which enhanced 'the ABC's presence in Melbourne and capacity to serve' Victorians, while also helping to 'provide greater offering to ABC staff in Victoria and provide a greater connection to the Victorian people'.⁴²

FINDING 33: No state or territory has an ABC headcount that accurately reflects its population size; an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of ABC employee headcount exists to varying degrees in all states and territories.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Federal Government that more ABC jobs be based in Victoria proportionate to Victoria's population.

FINDING 34: The ABC's decision to relocate its Ultimo office to Parramatta was influenced by multiple external factors, including legal obligations under the ABC Enterprise Agreement 2022–2025, budget constraints that made New South Wales the most cost-effective option, the Parramatta office's proximity to key state departments and agencies, and a strategic goal to better reflect New South Wales' population demographics.

FINDING 35: It is disappointing that both of Australia's national broadcasters the ABC and SBS expanded their presence to Western Sydney instead of Victoria.

FINDING 36: The ABC's impact and ability to culturally represent any particular state goes beyond the headcount or location of ABC offices.

4.3.2 ABC spending on content production in Victoria

From 2019–20 to 2023–24, the ABC spent a total of \$728 million on internal and external co-commissioned productions in Australia 'with the total yearly average of \$145 million'.⁴³ More specifically, the ABC allocated \$243.57 million in that period to Victoria with the total yearly average for Victoria being \$48.71 million.⁴⁴ Table 4.4 'attributes expenditure to the state or territory where the majority of production activity and expenditure took place'.⁴⁵

⁴² ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, pp. 8–9.

⁴³ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, p. 3.

⁴⁴ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, p. 3.

⁴⁵ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, p. 3.

Table 4.4 ABC distribution of expenditure across states and territories

| State or Territory | Total over 5 Year Period (FY20 to FY24) | 5 Year Average (FY20 to FY24) | Percentage of 5 Year Average (%) |
|--------------------|---|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| NSW | \$385.48 M | \$77.10 M | 53% |
| VIC | \$243.57 M | \$48.71 M | 33% |
| WA | \$14.57 M | \$2.91 M | 2% |
| ACT | \$4.66 M | \$0.93 M | 1% |
| NT | \$2.62 M | \$0.52 M | 0% |
| SA | \$18.18 M | \$3.64 M | 2% |
| TAS | \$18.73 M | \$3.75 M | 3% |
| QLD | \$40.27 M | \$8.05 M | 6% |

Source: ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 27 February 2025, p. 3.

Victoria received 33% of ABC's expenditure from 2020–2024 (\$243.57 million). Victoria is the second most populous state and represents 26% of the nation's total population, meaning that Victoria received a higher allocation of funding relative to its population. Similarly, New South Wales received disproportionately high funding relative to its population share. In contrast, states like Queensland and Western Australia were allocated disproportionately lower funding levels compared to their respective population shares.

The Committee heard that differences in content production partially 'come down to policy setting' and that all 'states are active with their various screen agencies trying to attract some production into other states'.⁴⁶

Sacha Gregson, Head of Production, ABC, told the Committee that the ABC's decision-making regarding where content is produced, is influenced by funding availability, editorial priorities, and where creative ideas originate nationally.⁴⁷ Sacha Gregson stated that 'from a financing perspective it is incredibly beneficial'⁴⁸ to the ABC to produce content across Australia as it ensures diverse content, national audience representation, and financially viable projects in a competitive market.

Mark Tapley of the ABC, told the Committee that although the ABC operates across '67 locations around the country ... there is always agitation for [the ABC] to have a bigger footprint'.⁴⁹ However, he noted that despite the ABC's \$1.2 billion annual budget, 'in real terms it is 14 per cent less than what it was 10 years ago'.⁵⁰ Mark Tapley stated that 'the cost of production is going up as well, so there are tough choices to be made',⁵¹ which has consequences on the ABC's ability to produce content. Mark Tapley elaborated further:

⁴⁶ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ Sacha Gregson, Head of Production, ABC, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

⁴⁹ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁵⁰ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁵¹ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

We do face a rising cost of production. We do have the big streamers in market ... lifting audience expectations around quality, so then we have to lift as well ... we need the support of screen agencies ... We know they have got an interest now in the games sector, which is growing, but I guess that means that their budget is spread thin, and if it is going to games, then it is not available to film and television production.⁵²

Sacha Gregson emphasised that globally 'it is a challenging environment' to produce content.⁵³ She explained that 'there are a lot of financing challenges internationally ... and following the strikes in the United States ... that has a ripple effect on Australian productions when making high-end drama'.⁵⁴

Sacha Gregson specified that the ABC 'requires international investment to fund the sorts of budgets that have arisen ... and that is a challenge for [the ABC]'.⁵⁵ Sacha Gregson explained that the challenges filter 'through the arts community when you think of all of the different kinds of skills in production and crew and artists, actors ... who participate'⁵⁶ in content production.

The ABC emphasised that despite these challenges, the organisation makes a significant contribution to the creative sector in Victoria. Deloitte Access Economics produced research for the ABC in 2021 'which found that over a three-year period, the ABC commissioned the production of 102 projects in [Victoria]'.⁵⁷ By comparison, there were 247 projects in New South Wales. This has been summarised in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 FY2017/18 to FY2019/20: comparing ABC productions for Victoria and New South Wales

| Activity across a three-year period FY2017/18 to FY2019/20 | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Victoria | New South Wales |
| Projects | 102 (24%) | 247 (57%) |
| Economic contribution of projects to the state economy | \$208 million (28%) | \$353 million (47%) |
| Jobs supported | Over 2,433 FTE roles (28%) | Over 3,839 FTE roles (46%) |

Source: ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 27 February 2025, p. 6.

The ABC's submission also provided compared Victoria and New South Wales ABC production activity over the last 5 years, FY2019/20 to FY2023/24.⁵⁸ Table 4.6 summarises the data and provides a comparison of production data from that period.

⁵² Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

⁵³ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

⁵⁴ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

⁵⁵ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

⁵⁶ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

⁵⁷ ABC, *Submission 41*, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁸ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, p. 6.

Table 4.6 FY2019/20 to FY2023/24: comparing ABC productions for Victoria and New South Wales

| Activity across a five-year period FY2019/20 to FY2023/24 | | |
|---|---|--|
| | External productions | Internal productions |
| Victoria | 91 projects with the independent sector where most of the production occurred in Victoria. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• \$170 million committed to these projects• total production budget of nearly \$330 million.• projects to generate 350+ content hours. | 53 internal projects \$73 million spent |
| New South Wales | 168 projects with the independent sector where most of the production has taken place in NSW. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• \$217 million committed to these projects• total production budget over \$497 million• projects to generate 600+ content hours. | 199 internal projects \$177 million spent |

Source: ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 27 February 2025, p. 6.

Mark Tapley of the ABC, emphasised the ABC’s commitment to developing Victoria’s creative sector, stating ‘we would like to grow the creative sector in Victoria’.⁵⁹ However, he stated that ‘one of the realities [the ABC] are dealing with’ is ‘if you look at the film and production workforce in Australia, [is that] 56 per cent of it does reside in New South Wales’.⁶⁰

Mark Tapley clarified whether ‘audience numbers guide [the ABC] allocation of funding for the states, asserting:

I would say no. We want to maximise the audience for content that the charter directs us to produce ... we are not chasing big numbers for the sake of big numbers, but we are chasing the content that the charter would direct us to. We want to maximise the audience for that ... I do not think the label ‘clickbait’ would apply to our range of stories. I think we have a range of stories that you do not find in other media.⁶¹

In relation to concerns raised by the Committee about the differences in the number of productions made in Victoria versus other states such as New South Wales, Mark Tapley explained that comparing the number is difficult due to the data complexity, stating:

I do want to emphasise as well the data challenge here ... There are a whole lot of other productions where there will be a component of the show that was made in Victoria but it is not the majority. If anything, I think we may have undercooked the level of activity by focusing on the majority of production.⁶²

59 Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

60 Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

61 Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

62 Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

When questioned by the Committee whether Victoria's agencies are deficient in attracting more investment, Sacha Gregson emphasised that she did not consider Victorian agencies to be deficient. She noted:

Different agencies lean on different kinds of mechanisms that help production in addition to direct funding and different kinds of funding criteria. They might have state PDVs that complement the federal PDV tax offset. Some also provide for very low cost financing loans, with the cost of money and interest rates being a pretty significant line item in large production budgets.⁶³

Similarly, Mark Tapley noted that 'different agencies around the country have different objectives depending upon the desires of the state government'.⁶⁴ He elaborated:

Other states are probably not as successful as Victoria and Queensland, which can attract these international productions. Other parts of Australia may be more focused on local productions just because of their ability to get crews in to do those bigger international shows.⁶⁵

Mark Tapley responded further to concerns raised by the Committee in relation to whether Victoria is getting a fair share in terms of content produced in Victoria and ABC spending in Victoria:

It will vary over time ... It is a very competitive market to attract production. Other states do it, and Victoria does it through VicScreen as well. Those screen agencies will from time to time have different objectives. VicScreen has been very successful in attracting international productions like *Better Man* here. So when that is in town and that is getting cast and crew, then we will often look to go somewhere else because of just the availability of crew. The other thing I would say about share is obviously we are a national institution. We are a statutory body set up by the Commonwealth Parliament. I do think the value to Victorians does extend beyond just how much of our budget is spent in Victoria, that Victorians do appreciate what is happening in other parts of the country. So there may be some expenditure in other states –⁶⁶

Sacha Gregson drew the Committee's attention towards *The Newsreader* which is 'a really successful Victorian production with Werner Film Productions' and reinforced how government partnerships shaped the show's success.⁶⁷ She stated:

It is an excellent example of a partnership that involves federal funding and VicScreen funding. We are incredibly grateful for our partnership with VicScreen, who are fundamental to closing finance on a number of our scripted and children's content ... *The Newsreader* has won a swag of awards across the two series that have been broadcast so far, and we are part way through series 3 at the moment. The program is also broadcasting on the BBC and would have prominence in other territories on other

⁶³ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

⁶⁴ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

⁶⁵ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

⁶⁶ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

⁶⁷ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

streaming networks on the basis of having good distribution and contributions to the financing of that production.⁶⁸

Sacha Gregson expressed that there is a lot 'of government financing across the board, in terms of Victorian government, ABC and Screen Australia funding for those series ... and then of course the producer offset' which helped to finance the show.⁶⁹ She emphasised the importance of having those mechanisms available, stating

We need [the mechanism] as an industry in order to finance internationally competitive productions, which is really what we need to be making in Australia now in order for our content to raise the financing to make the quality that we have come to expect by comparison with streamer-supported and Netflix et cetera supported content.⁷⁰

The Committees expressed disappointment about the discontinuation of the ABC's 7:30 Report in Victoria.

FINDING 37: The Committee calls on the Victorian Government to continue to advocate to the Federal Government and the ABC for the return of a Victorian 7:30 Report.

FINDING 38: ABC spending is unevenly distributed across all states and territories when compared to their population sizes. No state or territory receives funding proportionate to its share of Australia's population.

FINDING 39: The ABC's content production decisions are shaped by state screen agency policies and funding availability. External pressures, including rising production costs and a 14% real-term reduction in the ABC's budget over the past decade, have constrained the broadcaster's capacity to create content and ability to expand its footprint in the nation's states and territories.

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government should increase funding for its screen and creative agencies to enhance investment opportunities and partnerships with the ABC; and support the national and global competitiveness of Victoria's cultural and creatives industries in content production.

⁶⁸ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

⁶⁹ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

⁷⁰ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

4.4 Assessment of Victorian SBS funding allocations

Section 4.4 looks at the SBS's spending in Victoria and whether this matches the state's population, economy, and unique role in Australia's cultural life.

4.4.1 SBS headcount in Victoria

The Committee heard that the SBS employed 192 FTE in Victoria. These employees are spread across divisions, including NITV, TV & online content, news and current affairs, audio and language content, and more'.⁷¹ Table 4.7 outlines how SBS's FTE employees are distributed across the nation's states and territories.

Table 4.7 SBS's FTE employee distribution compared to Australia's population by state and territory

| State | SBS FTE employees | | Distribution of Australia's population (30 September 2024) | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------|--|---|
| | (number) | (%) | Population ('000) | Proportion of nation's total population (%) |
| Victoria | 192 | 14 | 7013.0 | 26 |
| New South Wales | 1,108 | 82 | 8511.2 | 31 |
| Australian Capital Territory | 18 | 1 | 475.6 | 2 |
| Northern Territory | 3 | <1 | 255.6 | 1 |
| Queensland | 16 | 1 | 5608.7 | 21 |
| South Australia | 7 | <1 | 1882.7 | 7 |
| Tasmania | 2 | <1 | 576.0 | 2 |
| Western Australia | 7 | <1 | 2981.8 | 11 |
| Overseas | 2 | <1 | | |
| Total | 1,355 | 100 | 27309.4^a | 100 |

a. Includes Other Territories comprising Jervis Bay Territory, Christmas Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Norfolk Island.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National, state and territory population: Statistics about the population and components of change (births, deaths, migration) for Australia and its states and territories*, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/sep-2024>> accessed 23 May 2025. SBS, hearing, response to questions on notice received 10 April 2025, p. 3.

Table 4.7 shows the distribution of SBS's FTE employees across Australia's states and territories, compared to the distribution of Australia's population (as of 30 September 2024, the most recent available data). Outside of 'SBS's Sydney headquarters, the Melbourne office is the largest of its interstate offices'.⁷² 14% of SBS's FTE employees are based in Victoria, which is disproportionately low compared to the State's 26% share of the national population. In contrast, 82% of SBS's FTE employees are located in New South Wales, significantly exceeding the state's 32% share of the

⁷¹ SBS, *Submission 41*, p. 27

⁷² SBS, *Submission 41*, p. 2

national population. However, no state or territory has an SBS workforce distribution that aligns proportionally with its share of Australia's population.

The Committee noted some discrepancies in headcount data provided by the SBS. In response, it was noted that 'FTE is a different measure to the ongoing and non-ongoing employee headcount that SBS regularly reports on through its Annual Reports'.⁷³ The SBS emphasised that 'when calculating the FTE count as a year-to-date average (i.e., the average FTE count between 1 July 2024 and 31 January 2025), the proportion of FTE across each state and territory is the same as the proportions above'.⁷⁴

The Committee heard that SBS's 'decisions about where it bases its workforce are made across a range of factors'.⁷⁵ Clare O'Neil of the SBS, noted factors such as 'the impact of our ability to fulfill our charter and serving audiences, the most efficient use of taxpayer funds'.⁷⁶ Clare O'Neill elaborated further on the considerations that influence SBS's decision-making about staffing numbers in Melbourne, explaining that:

There is the capacity to serve our audiences. For example, in relation to our language services, there will be some language groups that are more highly represented in New South Wales and some that are more highly represented in Victoria, and so when we are looking to staff those services, we look at the available talent ...

Clare O'Neil emphasised that the SBS's 'services are national, and they are platform agnostic'.⁷⁷ She reinforced that 'all Australians have the benefit of' SBS content no matter where it is produced and emphasised that the SBS does 'not produce less content for Victorians, for example, because of our staffing levels'.⁷⁸ She emphasised:

We are committed to the people and communities of Victoria. It has always been a significant part of our operations. I think SBS's staffing and production model is slightly different to the ABC's, for example, in the sense that we have talked about the proportion of production and investment that goes from our commissioning budget into Victoria. That is separate to staffing. Those people are not our staff.⁷⁹

FINDING 40: No state or territory reflects an SBS FTE employee number that is proportionate to its share of the Australia's population.

FINDING 41: The geographic distribution of SBS staff does not reflect the availability of its content. While a significant portion of SBS's workforce is based in New South Wales, its services are national and platform-agnostic, ensuring all Australians, regardless of location, can access and benefit from SBS content.

⁷³ SBS, hearing, response to questions on notice received 10 April 2025, p. 3.

⁷⁴ SBS, hearing, response to questions on notice received 10 April 2025, p. 3.

⁷⁵ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

⁷⁶ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

⁷⁷ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

⁷⁸ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

⁷⁹ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 49–50.

Presence in regional Victoria

Clare O'Neil of the SBS, spoke to the Committee about whether the SBS have any staff based in regional Victoria, stating:

All of our services are nationally based, so unlike the ABC we do not have that specific regional remit as part of our charter, and we are not funded to do that either. So we do not have people based in regional centres, as a rule, anywhere in Australia.⁸⁰

Clare O'Neil discussed whether she would like to be able to have staff based in regional areas and if she thought it would make a difference to the SBS programming, stating:

We do a lot already in terms of community activations and commissioned content in regional areas ... We are just not set up in terms of infrastructure to be able to do that with the way we currently operate. But if we had triple the budget, like the ABC does, we may well be able to do it.⁸¹

Relocation of SBS office to Western Sydney

The Committee expressed concerns regarding SBS's decision to relocate an office to western Sydney. The Committee challenged the rationale behind the decision, emphasising that New South Wales already has a significant share of SBS employees.

Clare O'Neil of the SBS, explained that SBS's planned western Sydney production hub resulted from a federally led process, stating that 'the relocation feasibility study ... was a process commenced and run by the federal government, and that was narrowly scoped to look at western Sydney only'.⁸² She noted that the location feasibility study 'did not consider any other alternative location', emphasising that '[t]he opportunities available to us were within the parameters of western Sydney'.⁸³

Clare O'Neil explained that 'the federal government decided to provide SBS with funding for a production hub in western Sydney'.⁸⁴ She expressed that although 'it is a decision of the SBS board ultimately whether to move', 'full relocation is expensive' and the SBS 'cannot fund [the relocation] ourselves'.⁸⁵ Consequently, she emphasised that 'the available funding to [the SBS] is for western Sydney. That is a matter for the federal government'.⁸⁶

When the minister provided the report to the board for its consideration, she invited a conversation on other options for an SBS presence in western Sydney, and that was the response to that invitation.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

⁸¹ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

⁸² Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

⁸³ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

⁸⁴ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

⁸⁵ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

⁸⁶ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

⁸⁷ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

The Committee clarified if SBS are 'completely ruling out that hub being in the outer suburbs of Melbourne.'⁸⁸ Clare O'Neil explained that the 'the current funding availability is for western Sydney':⁸⁹

We are always looking to expand our facilities. I do not think I am able to get into hypotheticals about exactly where that could be. Even the western Sydney process is likely to be contested by a number of different councils and LGAs, so I cannot really comment on that.⁹⁰

FINDING 42: The SBS's decision to relocate to Western Sydney was determined by funding requirements set by the Federal Government.

FINDING 43: It is unclear why Victoria was not considered as an option for the Federal Government's relocation feasibility study for the SBS.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government should appeal to the Federal Government to clarify decision-making surrounding the relocation feasibility study for SBS's office to Western Sydney.

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Federal Government and SBS to establish a physical presence in an appropriately culturally diverse location in Victoria, such as Broadmeadows or Dandenong.

4.4.2 SBS spending on content production in Victoria

The Committee heard that '[between] July 2021 and February 2025, SBS contributed to projects with a total combined budget of \$55.8m' in Victoria, funded through:⁹¹

- **24.5%** direct SBS investment
- **7%** VicScreen contribution
- **68.5%** other sources including Screen Australia.

⁸⁸ Hon Michael Galea MLC, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

⁸⁹ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

⁹⁰ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

⁹¹ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

'When looking at premium Australian drama,' Clare O'Neil of SBS, noted that 'SBS's [spending] in Victoria is particularly significant', with:

- **34%** of SBS's average annual drama budget directed to Victorian productions (2021–2024).⁹²
- **12 hours** of premium drama supported (38% of SBS's national drama commissions).⁹³

Clare O'Neil told the Committee that SBS invests in Victoria 'because of the strength of talent in Victoria in front of and behind the camera'.⁹⁴ She stated that SBS 'works productively with VicScreen on a wide range of projects and will continue to work with them and others on ... content that meets our charter commitments'.⁹⁵

The Committee also heard that SBS productions deliver tangible value to regional communities with 'the principal benefit' being that 'the township where any of our shows are being made will benefit from having more people spending money in the shops'.⁹⁶ Moreover, regional productions offer 'an opportunity when those productions are in town to peer through that curtain ... [which] for regional townships it might not be an opportunity they get regularly enough'.⁹⁷ Clare O'Neil reinforced that 'there is certainly value from seeing the activity go on in their neighbourhoods'.⁹⁸

SBS emphasised its commitment to 'engaging and inspiring all Australians in the shared project of building a more cohesive and inclusive society' through its investment in community partnerships as well as having an 'active presence at local community events across the country'.⁹⁹ The submission outlined its 2023–24 support and participation in '21 events in Victoria, including 19 across Melbourne and 2 in regional towns including Ballarat and Bendigo'¹⁰⁰ which reflected an investment totalling approximately \$143,000.

SBS outlined the differences in content production between Victoria and New South Wales. SBS's submission showed that 'SBS's total external content production hours amounted to 414 hours between July 2021 and February 2025'.¹⁰¹ Victoria's share amounted to 20% (around 83 hours) and New South Wales share amounted to 33% (around 137 hours).¹⁰²

⁹² Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

⁹³ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

⁹⁴ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

⁹⁵ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

⁹⁶ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 43–44.

⁹⁷ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

⁹⁸ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 43–44.

⁹⁹ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ SBS, hearing, response to questions on notice received 10 April 2025, p. 5.

¹⁰² SBS, hearing, response to questions on notice received 10 April 2025, p. 5.

SBS's submission emphasised SBS's reasoning for producing commissioned content for audiences across Australia from its established studios in Artarmon, Sydney, stating that use of its Artarmon studios as being highly cost efficient for national content production.

Clare O'Neil of the SBS, reinforced that SBS's 'services are national services and ... enjoyed by people all over Australia regardless of where that content is made'.¹⁰³ Clare O'Neil added that she 'hopes everyone enjoys [SBS] services, wherever they come from'.¹⁰⁴

FINDING 44: SBS provides significant financial and creative investment to Victoria.

FINDING 45: SBS's content remains nationally accessible regardless of the production location.

4.5 Cultural representation

Section 4.5 assesses how the ABC and SBS represent Victoria's cultural dynamism in its content production. This section examines how Victorian stories and talent are represented in ABC and SBS national programming.

4.5.1 How ABC represents Victorian stories and talent

The ABC highlighted its role in representing Victoria's cultural dynamisms in its content production, stating that it produces 'a range of content in, for and about Victoria' that 'promotes and creates opportunities for the state's cultural and creative industries'.¹⁰⁵ The broadcaster reinforced that this is 'achieved through its large operational footprint across the state and the broad content catalogue that it produces and broadcasts'.¹⁰⁶ Mark Tapley of the ABC, told the Committee:

We are required amongst other things to provide programming that contributes to a sense of national identity and reflects the cultural diversity of Australia. There are many facets to diversity, including geographical differences. We seek to reflect the breadth of life and experiences across Victoria, from the inner and outer suburbs of Melbourne to regional and rural communities across the state, from Wodonga to Warrnambool.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁴ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁵ ABC, *Submission 41*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ ABC, *Submission 41*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰⁷ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

How is Victoria represented in ABC's content

As highlighted in Section 4.3.2, the ABC has produced numerous internal and external commissions in Victoria. From 2020–21 to January 2025, the ABC has 'commissioned 75 projects with the independent sector where the majority of production [took] place in Victoria'.¹⁰⁸ During the same time period, the ABC also produced 52 internal projects where the majority of production took place in Victoria, examples include:¹⁰⁹

- *Gardening Australia*
- *Back Roads*
- *Offsiders*.

Mark Tapley of the ABC, emphasised that these projects 'have made a significant contribution to the development of the sector, supporting employment and opportunity for talented Victorian creative workers'.¹¹⁰ He added:

They have allowed us to create award-winning shows such as *The Newsreader*, *Utopia* and the internationally acclaimed *Fisk*, all of which were shot in Victoria and draw upon the state's considerable creative talent, as were shows like *Hard Quiz with Tom Gleeson*, *The Weekly with Charlie Pickering*, *Aunty Donna's Coffee Cafe*, *Gold Diggers* and *Shaun Micallef's Eve of Destruction*.¹¹¹

Mark Tapley spoke about content production that has taken place at the ABC's Southbank studio in Melbourne, highlighting production efforts such as 'filming *Q+A* with the Prime Minister, the second series of the cooking show *A Bite to Eat with Alice* and the sports program *Offsiders*'.¹¹² Other programs that the ABC produces at Southbank include *Hard Quiz*, *Gardening Australia*, *Back Roads* and *Creative Types with Virginia Trioli*.¹¹³ Mark Tapley also drew attention to 'the animated shows *Andrew the Big BIG Unicorn* and *Do Not Watch This Show* and the live-action drama *Knee High Spies*'¹¹⁴ which were produced in Melbourne. Finally, the ABC 'produces a number of significant news television programs, including *News Breakfast* and its Asia Pacific News service, in Victoria'.¹¹⁵

Mark Tapley also highlighted an example of ABC content where Victoria is represented in the content, stating 'the ABC-commissioned drama *The Family Next Door*, which is based on the Mornington Peninsula, [and] is currently in production'.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ ABC, *Submission 41*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ ABC, *Submission 41*, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹¹¹ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹¹² Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹¹³ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹¹⁴ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹¹⁵ ABC, *Submission 41*, pp. 1–2.

¹¹⁶ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

FINDING 46: Between 2020 and 2025, the ABC commissioned 75 external and 52 internal projects where the majority of production took place in Victoria, demonstrating its vital role in supporting the state's screen industry.

ABC partnerships with Victoria's cultural institutions and production agencies

Mark Tapley of the ABC, spoke to the Committee about the ABC's ongoing partnerships with Victoria's cultural institutions, explaining that the ABC was 'preparing to cover the 2025 Melbourne International Comedy Festival, and Anzac Day across Victoria in April'.¹¹⁷ The 'ABC's Classic 100 countdown ... will take place on 20 and 21 June. Additionally, last September Triple J partnered with Music Australia to bring One Night Stand to Warrnambool'.¹¹⁸ The ABC elaborated on its role in sustaining Victorian partnerships, drawing the Committees attention to its 'broadcasts of key Victorian cultural events like the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, Classic 100 in Concert with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and triple j's One Night Stand'.¹¹⁹

Mark Tapley also described to the Committee how the ABC partners with Victorian cultural institutions to help represent Victorian stories and talent, stating:

ABC Education has partnered with the Melbourne Museum, the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Hellenic Museum, Sovereign Hill museum, the Bendigo Art Gallery and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image to create content used by teachers and students across the country.¹²⁰

The ABC also highlighted its role in encouraging 'music, dramatic and other performing arts, which it does through connections with cultural institutions like the MSO and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image here in Melbourne'.¹²¹

The ABC described how it 'has partnered with VicScreen, Blackfella Films and GoodThing Productions to offer two 12- month internships in producing and development for early to midcareer Victorian screen creatives'.¹²² The ABC's submission explained that the 'VicScreen internships help to build participants' skills and knowledge of Australia's current commissioning, funding, and production environment'.¹²³

The ABC also partners with the Victoria based Australian International Documentary Conference (AIDC) for the annual Indigenous Documentary Placement. This program is designed to provide one mid-career Indigenous practitioner with a unique opportunity to undertake a four-month paid placement with the ABC.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29

¹¹⁸ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹¹⁹ ABC, *Submission 41*, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁰ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹²¹ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹²² ABC, *Submission 41*, pp. 1-2.

¹²³ ABC, *Submission 41*, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁴ ABC, *Submission 41*, pp. 1-2.

FINDING 47: The ABC partners with major Victorian cultural institutions to create educational content and showcase Victorian talent.

FINDING 48: Through initiatives like VicScreen internship and Indigenous placements, the ABC actively develops Victoria creative and cultural workforce.

Victorian representation across ABC local radio programs and content

The ABC described its production of '16 unique regional local radio programs in Victoria. These collectively represent 6,751 minutes (112 hours) of content each week.'¹²⁵ In its submission, the ABC drew attention to partnerships which centre Victorian stories and talent through radio programs, including ABC's Radio Residency, *ABC Takeover* and Triple J's *One Night Stand*.¹²⁶ Each of these radio programs is based in Victoria and centres Victorian stories and talent. Mark Tapley of the ABC, stated:

Our Victorian news teams produce more than 10,000 hours of unique programming each year, and of course the ABC provides nine local radio services that amongst other things showcase the creative and cultural life of communities across Victoria.¹²⁷

The Committee received evidence from the ABC describing operations for its local radio services in Victoria, stating that 'these services provide 14 hours of local and Victorian programming and 10 hours of network programming'.¹²⁸ The local radio services operating in Victoria include the following:¹²⁹

- ABC Melbourne
- ABC Goulburn Murray
- ABC Shepparton
- ABC Gippsland
- ABC Central Victoria
- ABC Ballarat
- ABC South West Victoria
- ABC Wimmera
- ABC Mildura Swan Hill.

Table 4.8 provides a more detailed explanation of the ABC's local radio services offered in Victoria.

¹²⁵ ABC, *Submission 41*, pp. 1-2

¹²⁶ ABC, *Submission 41*, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁷ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹²⁸ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, p. 4.

¹²⁹ ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, p. 4.

Table 4.8 Local radio services in Victoria

| Service | Programming |
|---|--|
| Local programming | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6.15am: Rural Reports (East and West reports on all Regional Vic stations)• 6.30am: Local breakfast programs including local news bulletins at 6.30am, 7.30am and headlines at 8.30am• 9.00–11.00am: Statewide Regional Victoria Mornings program, hosted by Nic Healey• 12.00–1.00pm: Statewide Regional Vic Country Hour program, hosted by Warwick Long• 3.00–6.00pm: Statewide Regional Victoria Drive program, hosted by Prue Bentley |
| ABC Melbourne programs on regional Victorian stations | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 11.00am: Conversations from 774• 1.30–3.00pm: Afternoons with Bridget Duclos from 774• 7.00pm: Evenings with David Astle from 774 |
| Network programs on regional Victorian stations | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6.00am: AM with Sabre Lane (30 mins)• 1.00pm: The World Today (30 mins)• 6.00pm: PM with Samantha Donovan (30 mins)• 6.30pm: Australia Wide (30 mins)• 10.00pm: Nightlife (4 hours)• 2.00am: Overnights (4 hours) |
| Friday afternoon | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1.30–3.00pm: Friday Review from ABC Melbourne• 3.00–5.00pm: Local Drive Statewide regional Vic with Prue Bentley• 5.00–6.00pm: Thank God It’s Friday, with Charlie Pickering from ABC Melbourne |
| Saturday morning | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6.00–9.00am: Regional Victoria Statewide Breakfast program with Gavin McGrath• 9.00–11.00am: Regional Victoria Stateside Mornings program with Matt Tribe (rest of day is from ABC Melbourne) |

Source: ABC, hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025, pp. 4–5.

FINDING 49: The ABC delivers 16 regional radio programs in Victoria which produces over 112 hours of weekly local content across 9 stations, ensuring broad community representation.

Regional Victoria’s representation in ABC’s content production

Mark Tapley of the ABC, emphasised the radio network’s vital role in connecting with and culturally representing regional communities in Victoria, calling it ‘a really important part of how we connect with those [regional] communities’.¹³⁰

Mark Tapley added that in addition to radio programs supporting regional communities, the ABC also has ‘specialist programs which are often on the road. *Back Roads* would be one example’.¹³¹ Sacha Gregson of the ABC, elaborated further on the impact of *Black Roads* as well as other internal programming which ‘incorporate segments or stories that have a rural and regional focus,’¹³² stating:

130 Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.
131 Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.
132 Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

It is very important to us that we ensure that those shows incorporate segments or stories that have a rural and regional focus, to be communicating the kinds of experiences that occur in rural and regional environments right across the country and to highlight issues and celebrate things that may be happening in those places ... It is very important to us in terms of speaking to all of our audiences to have a good representation of stories covered.¹³³

Mark Tapley noted that a 'main barrier' to having more content produced in regional Victoria is the lack of ideas around shows that would be made in regional Victoria being brought by the independent production sector.¹³⁴

FINDING 50: One of the main challenges for the ABC in producing content in regional Victoria is the lack of independent production sector proposals for shows to be made in regional Victoria.

FINDING 51: The cost of producing content in regional Victoria requires significant financial investment.

FINDING 52: Producing content in regional areas delivers significant benefits, including social benefits, such as better representation and celebration of local communities and economic benefits, like job creation and increased local spending.

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government provide targeted funding and financial incentives to the independent production sector to boost content production that represents regional and rural Victoria.

4.5.2 How SBS represents Victorian stories and talent

In its submission to the Committee, SBS emphasised that it 'devotes a significant proportion of its resourcing to Victoria, producing content and engaging with local organisations and diverse communities'.¹³⁵ SBS invests in 'initiatives to support career pathways for under-represented screen creatives'¹³⁶ in Victoria. The SBS also highlighted that it 'has a significant physical presence in Victoria and has deep and long-standing links with culturally diverse communities across the state'.¹³⁷ SBS stated that its 'network reaches 3.42 million people every month in Victoria via TV broadcast

¹³³ Sacha Gregson, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 32–33.

¹³⁴ Mark Tapley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

¹³⁵ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 5.

¹³⁶ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 5.

¹³⁷ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 5.

and its broadcast video on demand service, SBS on Demand'.¹³⁸ SBS explained that equates 'to 49% of the Victorian population, according to the OzTAM VOZ database'.¹³⁹

The SBS 'government funding is about one-third that of the ABC's' which means SBS produces 'significantly less commissioned scripted drama and commissioned programming generally, scripted drama being the most expensive content to make'.¹⁴⁰ Clare O'Neil of the SBS, emphasised that SBS 'has a long history of partnering and working with Victorian cultural and creative industries,' for example:¹⁴¹

- commissioning productions
- partnering with VicScreen
- Victoria's high-quality cast and crew workforce filming in the state.

Clare O'Neil emphasised that SBS 'simply do not have comparable scale' to the ABC, but 'the significant commissioning investment it makes in Victoria reflects its strong engagement and commitment to the growth and sustainability of the sector'.¹⁴²

Clare O'Neil highlighted other examples of SBS's Victorian made productions:

In terms of non-drama, we have documentary series *Meet the Neighbours*; episodes of the *Great Australian Walks*; *Little J and Big Cuz*, a First Nations Australian kids animation which has won Logies, awards from the Australian Teachers of Media and been nominated for AACTA's award for best children's program, all made in Victoria. And of course we have *Yokayi Footy* and *Yokayi Footy Shorts*, a celebration of Aussie Rules football from a First Nations perspective, and we have more in the pipeline.¹⁴³

Clare O'Neil emphasised that SBS's Victorian content has been highly successful with some of the content produced being 'award winners across a range of categories and ceremonies'.¹⁴⁴ Clare O'Neil outlined examples of successful SBS content produced and shot in Victoria:

We have worked closely with cultural industries in Victoria to create our premium, marquee series, including a scripted drama about family violence in *Safe Home*; edgy family crime drama *Swift Street*, which was created, written and directed by young Melburnian Tig Terera and shot around Thornbury, Northcote and Preston. We have had the magnificent series *New Gold Mountain*, a historic drama about the goldfields of regional Victoria in the 1850s, shot in Ballarat and told from the perspectives of Chinese, female and Indigenous participants; *Hungry Ghosts*, a supernatural drama featuring Melbourne's Vietnamese Australian community; and the drama series *Sunshine*, which was unsurprisingly shot in Sunshine.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 5.

¹³⁹ SBS, hearing, response to questions on notice received 10 April 2025, pp. 4–5.

¹⁴⁰ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

¹⁴¹ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

¹⁴² Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

¹⁴³ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

¹⁴⁴ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

¹⁴⁵ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

FINDING 53: SBS's receives about one-third of the ABC's funding, which restricts its ability to produce and commission content for and in Victoria.

FINDING 54: SBS sustains substantial Melbourne-based operations, producing language programs that reach 3.42 million Victorian viewers monthly, while supporting diverse communities through partnerships with VicScreen and local creatives.

SBS partnerships with Victoria's multilingual and multicultural communities

In its submission to the Committee, the SBS emphasised that along with maintaining 'a highly visible presence in Melbourne', and '[producing a] range of content in Victoria', the broadcaster partners 'with Victoria's multilingual and multicultural communities to celebrate and share in key cultural moments and events'.¹⁴⁶ The SBS highlighted how its community events bring together diverse local groups, mirroring Victoria's multicultural population. During 2023–24, SBS participated in key events including:¹⁴⁷

- The Moon Festival (Box Hill)
- Dussehra Festival (Rockbank)
- Hume Diwali Mela (Craigieburn)
- Melbourne CBD cultural celebrations featuring Greek, Indonesian, Polish, African, Spanish, Korean and Filipino communities, among others.

The SBS outlined its Community Impact Plan, which commits the SBS 'to support key cultural celebrations of Diwali/Deepavali, Ramadan & Eid al-Fitr, Lunar New Year, and NAIDOC Week' through the production of various content, resources, partnerships and activations across the country 'to engage local communities'.¹⁴⁸ The Committee received evidence from SBS outlining the broadcaster's role in participating in festivals, particularly regarding how it selects events. SBS stated:

As SBS is a participating organisation in these events, rather than the organiser, we do not choose their location. However, we endeavour to participate in a wide range of events across the state.¹⁴⁹

FINDING 55: The SBS deeply engages with Victoria's multilingual and multicultural communities by supporting community events and major cultural events in Victoria.

¹⁴⁶ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ SBS, *Submission 42*, p. 4.

How the SBS represents the cultural dynamism of regional and rural communities in Victoria

Clare O'Neil of the SBS, explained that the SBS connects with regional communities in Victoria in several ways, explaining:

There are some special cultural moments that we look to partner with in regional Australia as well as metropolitan areas. Lunar New Year is one and Diwali/Deepavali is another, NAIDOC and Ramadan and Eid. We do have limited resources, but we do always make an effort to include regional communities in those activations and events where we can. We do seek to have representation in every state and territory and in regional communities as well. We sadly do not have an unlimited budget for those sorts of activities, but we make sure that we cover as much ground as we can with what we have got.¹⁵⁰

Clare O'Neil of the SBS, highlighted successful Victorian regional productions such as *'New Gold Mountain'* [which was] shot around Bendigo and Ballarat'.¹⁵¹ Clare O'Neil added that another SBS production, *'Meet the Neighbours'* was shot in 'the regional township in Victoria of Maryborough'.¹⁵²

Chris Irvine, Head of Commercial and Production, SBS, emphasised that SBS outreach programs provide opportunities for people in regional areas, stating:

We routinely as a commissioning team go across the country, the breadth and depth of the country, espousing this opportunity and calling for people from every corner of the country to submit applications to this. So, we absolutely do mine, because, frankly, good ideas come from everywhere.¹⁵³

How SBS is supporting emerging talent in Victoria

Chris Irvine of the SBS, stated that 'it is an incredibly competitive arena, and opportunities are thin on the ground, especially for emerging practitioners'.¹⁵⁴ Chris Irvine stated:

There is no question that when you look at the emerging talent base in this market, it requires an extraordinary level of intervention to create opportunities, especially for talent that for whatever reason has not been prioritised historically. SBS has a really proud history of doing that.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Chris Irvine, Head of Commercial and Production, SBS, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

¹⁵¹ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

¹⁵² Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 43–44.

¹⁵³ Chris Irvine, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁴ Chris Irvine, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 42–43.

¹⁵⁵ Chris Irvine, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 48–49.

Chris Irvine highlighted that SBS programs, such as digital originals and talent escalator, which seek to 'drive new voices and talent to our screens'.¹⁵⁶ Case Study 4.1 and Case Study 4.2 explore digital originals and talent escalator in greater detail.

Chris Irvine spoke about other incubation programs in Victoria and emphasised that the SBS 'would love to do much more to support these ideas. Its only constraint is economics'.¹⁵⁷ Chris Irvine gave several examples of other incubation programs SBS operates:

[We] have a bespoke initiative with Film Victoria to commission the production of theatrical feature films ... We have a partnership which is called Originate, which is looking for unique Victorian voices to publish theatrical movies on commercial screens. We have committed to making three of those over the next few years ... There have been short-form strands that we have created in partnership with state agencies to foster new voices. We have developed documentary factual filmmaking strands in the short form ... A few years ago we had a strand called Curious Australia, heavily supported by Film Victoria, which was a half-hour documentary strand, again with emerging voices finding it hard to break through.¹⁵⁸

Chris Irvine emphasised that for incubation programs such as commissioning the production of theatrical feature films, it 'is something that nobody is doing very much of – certainly not enough'.¹⁵⁹

Clare O'Neil of the SBS, spoke about the emerging writers incubator, another SBS funded incubation.¹⁶⁰ Clare O'Neil explained that the program 'is not for people to work on SBS projects but for people to work on a number of different projects that we do not even see the benefit of'.¹⁶¹ Clare O'Neil emphasised that SBS 'recognises the importance of incubating that creative talent where it otherwise might not have an opportunity'.¹⁶² Chris Irvine further elaborated:

Again, in partnership with state agencies like Film Victoria and seeking to find a year's paid employment for writers to learn the craft of development inside an established production company, the goal being that that writer comes out the other side with experience that they are just not going to be able to garner on their own. We take care of the overhead for a year, which frees them up to be creative.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ Chris Irvine, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 42–43.

¹⁵⁷ Chris Irvine, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 48–49.

¹⁵⁸ Chris Irvine, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 48–49.

¹⁵⁹ Chris Irvine, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 48–49.

¹⁶⁰ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

¹⁶¹ Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

¹⁶² Clare O'Neil, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

¹⁶³ Chris Irvine, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

Case Study 4.1 Digital Originals

Digital Originals is '[the] most successful' program that the SBS operates as part of its programs for emerging practitioners. It has 'been running for just shy of 10 years now'. Chris Irvine of the SBS, explains that it 'is a strand for those creatives to have their own voice – not just be a crew on someone else's project but actually tell their own story'.

Digital Originals 'is a short-form, six-by-10-minute dramatic strand which looks for opportunities to showcase new talent'. Chris explains that 'some of the emerging talent at the time who have come from those teams have gone on to stellar careers, including careers in Hollywood. So it is a small offering that we are able to facilitate, including many, many practitioners in Victoria who have had shows developed through that strand, and there are shows currently in our pipeline which will be made in Victoria in that strand. We are doing as much as we possibly can in this space'.

Source: Chris Irvine, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 48–49.

Case Study 4.2 Talent Escalator

Chris Irvine of the SBS, explains that '[one] of the problems with the Australian screen sector is there are some amazing practitioners who are in very hot demand, but unlike the United States, where there is a far bigger volume of production and therefore opportunities, there are less chances for people to escalate careers'.

SBS's Talent Escalator program aims to address this problem and 'seeks to escalate opportunity'. The program is 'around 10 years old now' and 'is bespoke to individuals just to seek ways to find opportunities to escalate their careers, to take their careers to the next level'.

The program 'escalates talent both in front of and behind the camera, again from backgrounds which are presently under-represented, to give those voices a chance to break through'. Chris Irvine explained that the SBS has 'seen enormous success' as a result of the program.

Chris Irvine emphasised that the SBS 'do not do it alone.' The SBS operates this program 'in partnership with federal agencies like Screen Australia and with every state agency, importantly including Film Victoria'.

Source: Chris Irvine, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 48–49.

**Adopted by the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament of Victoria, East Melbourne
5 June 2025**

Appendix A

About the Inquiry

A.1 Submissions

| | | | |
|----|--|----|---|
| 1 | Coalition Against Duck Shooting | 22 | AWG and AWGACS |
| 2 | Name withheld | 23 | MVA |
| 3 | Craig Coulson | 24 | Confidential |
| 4 | Robert Heron | 25 | Arena Theatre Co |
| 5 | Name withheld | 26 | Victorian Independent and Youth Theatre Organisations |
| 6 | Bo Kitty | 27 | Ausdance Vic |
| 7 | Sophie Travers | 28 | NETS Victoria |
| 8 | Australian Publishers Association | 29 | Confidential |
| 9 | A New Approach (ANA) | 30 | Confidential |
| 10 | Interactive Games & Entertainment Association | 31 | Community Music Victoria |
| 11 | Desmond Beer | 32 | La Mama Theatre |
| 12 | Melbourne Fringe | 33 | PGAV |
| 13 | Kate Larson | 34 | University of Melbourne |
| 14 | Parliamentary Budget Office | 35 | Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria |
| 15 | Regional Arts Victoria | 36 | Martin Jackson |
| 16 | City Of Stonnington | 37 | Sense & Centsability Pty Ltd |
| 17 | Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music & Performance Monash University | 38 | Nirmidha Sankar Kumara Suriyar |
| 18 | City of Yarra | 39 | Live Performance Australia |
| 19 | Theatre Network Australia | 40 | Association of Artist Managers |
| 20 | Victorian Major Arts Festivals Alliance | 41 | Australian Broadcasting Corporation |
| 21 | TEST PATTERN | 42 | SBS |

A.2 Public hearings

13 March 2025

Davui Room, G1 & G2, East Melbourne, VIC

| Witness | Position and Organisation |
|---------------------|---|
| Dianne Toulson | Executive Director, Theatre Works |
| Nadja Kostich | Artistic Director and Chief Executive Officer, St Martins Youth Arts Centre |
| Debra Allanson | Chief Executive Officer, Arena Theatre Company |
| Katrina Cornwell | Co-Artistic Director, Rawcus Theatre Company |
| Caitlin Dullard | Chief Executive Officer and Director, La Mama Theatre |
| Kate Fielding | Chief Executive Officer, A New Approach |
| Anne Robertson | Executive Officer, Public Galleries Association of Victoria |
| Anthony Camm | President, Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria |
| Dr Ashley Robertson | Executive Director, Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria |
| Conor Cunningham | President, Bendigo Theatre Company |
| Vern Wall | General Committee Member, Bendigo Theatre Company |
| Leah Sertori | Founder, Facilitator & Coach, Sertori Consulting |
| Megan Champion | Business Development & Facilitator, Sertori Consulting |

12 March 2025

Davui Room, G1 & G2, East Melbourne, VIC

| Witness | Position and Organisation |
|------------------|---|
| Claire Febey | Chief Executive Officer, Creative Victoria |
| Max Coffman | Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Creative Victoria |
| Caroline Pitcher | Chief Executive Officer, VicScreen |
| Craig Barrie | General Manager, Community Music Victoria |
| Joshua Lowe | Co-Chief Executive Officer, Theatre Network Australia |
| Tim Stitz | Board Member, Theatre Network Australia |
| Maggie Collins | Executive Director, Association of Artist Managers |
| Dale Packard | General Manager, Music Victoria |
| Chris Irvine | Head of Commercial and Production, SBS |
| Clare O'Neil | Director, Corporate Affairs, SBS |

27 February 2025

Davui Room, G1 and G2, East Melbourne, VIC

| Witness | Position and Organisation |
|-----------------|---|
| Vicky Guglielmo | Manager, Libraries, Arts and Events, City of Yarra |
| Ariel Blum | Arts and Engagement Lead, City of Yarra |
| Jo Porter | Chief Executive Officer, Regional Arts Victoria |
| Lauren Mullings | Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural Arts Victoria |
| Mark Tapley | Director of Strategy, Australian Broadcasting Corporation |
| Sacha Gregson | Head of Production, Australian Broadcasting Corporation |

Extract of proceedings

Legislative Council Standing Order 23.20(5) requires the Committee to include in its report all divisions on a question relating to the adoption of the draft report. All Members have a deliberative vote. In the event of an equality of votes, the Chair also has a casting vote.

The Committee divided on the following questions during consideration of this report. Questions agreed to without division are not recorded in these extracts.

Committee Meeting – 5 June 2025

Chapter 2 – Overview of Victoria’s cultural and creative industries.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 2.2.2, Finding 12 be amended to read:

The COVID-19 pandemic and impact of continuous government lockdowns led to social disconnection and worsening mental health for many in the Victorian cultural and creative industries, particularly amongst children and young people.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Ms Copsey moved that in section 2.2.6, the following words be inserted in Finding 19 between “and creative industries, such as” and “long-term financial precarity”:

such as barriers to participation for women and gender diverse people, particularly those with caring responsibilities and

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (5) | Noes (4) |
|-------------|---------------|
| Mr Berger | Ms Broad |
| Ms Copsey | Mr Davis |
| Mr McIntosh | Ms Deeming |
| Ms Purcell | Mr Mulholland |
| Ms Terpstra | |

Question Agreed.

Ms Copsey moved that in section 2.2.6, the following Recommendation be inserted:

The Victorian government should investigate mechanisms to remedy systemic barriers to participation and long-term financial precarity in the creative and cultural industries, such as a Living Wage for Victorian Artists pilot program to give artists a stable foundation to develop, create and innovate.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (2) | Noes (7) |
|------------|---------------|
| Ms Copsey | Mr Berger |
| Ms Purcell | Ms Broad |
| | Mr Davis |
| | Ms Deeming |
| | Mr McIntosh |
| | Mr Mulholland |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Chapter 3 – Government investment in Victoria’s cultural and creative industries

Mr Mullholland moved that in section 3.3.6, the following Finding be deleted:

Victoria receives its fair share of funding from Creative Australia.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Davis moved that in section 3.3.6, the text on page 25 and 26 of the transcript dated 13 March 2025 be inserted.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Davis moved that in section 3.3.6, the following Recommendation be inserted:

That the Commonwealth dataset be regularly published.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Chapter 4 – National Broadcasters role in Victoria’s cultural and creative industries

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Recommendation be inserted:

The Victorian Government advocate to the Federal Government to appoint at least one more board member from Victoria to the ABC Board to be adequately represented.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (5) | Noes (4) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Terpstra |
| Ms Purcell | |

Question Agreed.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be deleted:

No state or territory has an ABC headcount that accurately reflects its population size; an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of ABC employee headcount exists to varying degrees in all states and territories.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be inserted:

Victoria is being shortchanged by more than \$200 million annually in comparison to NSW

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Recommendation be inserted:

That the Victorian Government advocate to the Federal Government that more ABC jobs be based in Victoria proportionate to Victoria's population.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (5) | Noes (4) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Terpstra |
| Ms Purcell | |

Question Agreed.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Recommendation be inserted:

The Victorian Government should meet with the Communications Minister and the ABC to ensure that the disparity in staffing and funding is corrected.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be inserted:

It is disappointing that both of Australia's national broadcasters the ABC and SBS expanded their presence to Western Sydney instead of Victoria.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (5) | Noes (4) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Terpstra |
| Ms Purcell | |

Question Agreed.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be deleted:

The ABC's decision to relocate its Ultimo office to Parramatta was influenced by multiple external factors, including legal obligations under the ABC Enterprise Agreement 2022–2025, budget constraints that made New South Wales the most cost-effective option, the Parramatta office's proximity to key state departments and agencies, and a strategic goal to better reflect New South Wales' population demographics.

and replaced with the following Finding:

The Committee is of the view that enterprise agreements are not a sufficient reason to keep ABC staffing in Sydney.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Davis moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be deleted:

The ABC's decision to relocate its Ultimo office to Parramatta was influenced by multiple external factors, including legal obligations under the ABC Enterprise Agreement

2022–2025, budget constraints that made New South Wales the most cost-effective option, the Parramatta office’s proximity to key state departments and agencies, and a strategic goal to better reflect New South Wales’ population demographics.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be inserted:

That the ABC’s decision to relocate to Parramatta is evidence of the both the federal Labor government and the national broadcasters’ Sydney-centric approach.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the words “goes beyond” is replaced with “is driven by”, so that the Finding reads as follows:

The ABC’s impact and ability to culturally represent any particular state is driven by the headcount or location of ABC offices.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.2, the following text be inserted:

The Committees expressed disappointment about the discontinuation of the ABC's 7:30 Report in Victoria. (pg 39).

And the following Finding be inserted:

The Committee calls on the Victorian Government to continue to advocate to the Federal Government and the ABC for the return of a Victorian 7:30 Report.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (6) | Noes (3) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Ms Copsey | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Davis | Ms Terpstra |
| Ms Deeming | |
| Mr Mulholland | |
| Ms Purcell | |

Question Agreed.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.4.1, the following Finding be inserted:

Condemns the Federal Labor Government for ignoring the importance of Victoria and for claiming this was a decision of the SBS when it was actually a decision of government.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.4.1, the following text be inserted after “diverse locations in Victoria”

such as Broadmeadows or Dandenong.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (5) | Noes (4) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mullholland | Ms Terpstra |
| Ms Purcell | |

Question Agreed.

Minority reports



MINORITY REPORT

Context

The creative and cultural industries provide immense economic and social benefit to Victoria. Throughout this inquiry, the committee heard that despite this value, the people and places that generate these enormous benefits are struggling.

Arts organisations struggle with funding uncertainties, and creatives battle to remain in the sector because it's too hard to make ends meet.

The pandemic also weighed heavily on creatives struggling to make ends meet, with support from governments failing to keep pace with need.

The Victorian Greens offer the following additional suggested policy interventions as innovative and effective ways to support creative and cultural industries to continue to thrive and contribute in our state.

A Living Wage for Victorian Artists pilot program

The inquiry heard evidence of ongoing financial precarity, lack of job security and frequent unpaid work performed by creatives, for example in the ideation and research phase of bringing a project to life¹.

Piloting a living wage program for Victorian artists would provide a stable foundation for creative and cultural industries professionals to develop, create and innovate.

A suggested model for the pilot would involve providing 2000 practicing artists and arts workers a living wage for three years to research, develop and deliver their work.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Victorian Government investigate the running of a Living Wage for Victorian Artists pilot program.

¹ Megan Champion, Business Development & Facilitator, Sertori Consulting, hearing of the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria, transcript Thursday 13 March 2025, p 56.

Insurance costs

The inquiry heard evidence that one of the cost pressures faced by the sector is rising insurance costs.

The challenges faced by live events and music venues in meeting insurance costs have been canvassed² and as the inquiry heard, these challenges have only been exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.

A suggested intervention to provide relief from rising insurance costs is that the state government could offer affordable insurance for the live music industry.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Victorian Government investigate mechanisms for extending affordable insurance for the live events and music industry.

Ongoing funding for small to medium creative organisations

The inquiry heard that uncertainty around availability, frequency and outcome of grant applications adds significantly to the administrative burden of creative professionals, particularly within already-stretched small to medium organisations³.

Ongoing funding for key small-to-medium arts organisations should therefore be provided on a more certain basis to allow them to plan and execute creative programs, create the vital pipeline of technical and creative training and job opportunities they provide and avoid the hand-to-mouth hamster wheel of seeking and acquitting funding that is creating an ongoing administrative burden and hampering execution of their core purpose.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Victorian Government extend ongoing funding opportunities for small and medium creative organisations.

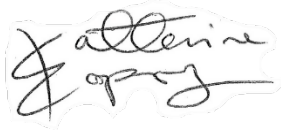
Conclusion

The Committee is greatly appreciative of the efforts of all of the individuals and organisations that took time to contribute to the inquiry. One of the clearest messages from submissions and evidence at hearings was the need for more practical support and funding for those who enrich our state through their creative output. The Greens suggest these additional policy interventions

² For example, Vicky Guglielmo, Manager, Libraries, Arts and Events, Yarra City Council, hearing of the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria, transcript Thursday 27 February 2025, p 5; Jo Porter, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Arts Victoria, hearing of the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria, transcript Thursday 27 February 2025, p 14.

³ For example, Jo Porter, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Arts Victoria, hearing of the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria, transcript Thursday 27 February 2025, p 14; Katrina Cornwell, Co-Artistic Director, Rawcus Theatre Company, hearing of the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria, transcript Thursday 13 March 2025, p 13.

as innovative and practical measures that could go some way to addressing the need identified by evidence to the inquiry. Investing in the people places and champion local organisations that give Victorians will mean we truly live up to our moniker as the Creative State, now and for up-and-coming generations of creatives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Katherine Copsey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The word "Katherine" is on the top line and "Copsey" is on the bottom line, with a large, sweeping flourish that extends from the end of "Copsey" back up towards the start of "Katherine".

Katherine Copsey MP
MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN



**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND
INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO
CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN
VICTORIA: MINORITY REPORT**

LIBERALS AND NATIONALS

June 2025

A Minority Report: Short-changing Victoria's Cultural and Creative Industries – A Critique of Federal Neglect and Sydney-Centric Bias

Executive Summary

This minority report, presented by the Liberal and National parties, examines the findings of the Inquiry into Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria. We assert that the Federal Government's policies and the operational biases of national broadcasters (ABC and SBS) have severely disadvantaged Victoria's vibrant cultural and creative sector. The report highlights the enduring social and mental health impacts of the COVID-19 lockdowns, particularly on children and young people, exacerbated by systemic underinvestment. We condemn the lack of transparency in federal funding data and exposes the persistent Sydney-centric approach of both the ABC and SBS, which shortchanges Victoria by hundreds of millions of dollars annually. This report calls for immediate and decisive action, including a significant reallocation of resources and staff to Victoria, to ensure equitable investment and truly national cultural representation.

1. Introduction

This minority report outlines the critical deficiencies identified by the Liberal and National parties in the Inquiry into Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria. It serves as a stark counterpoint to the Majority Report, advocating for a fundamental re-evaluation of federal policies and national broadcaster operations to ensure Victoria receives its equitable share of investment and recognition.

Victoria's cultural and creative industries are not merely a "nice-to-have" but a vital economic and social engine for the state. In 2022-23, the sector contributed a staggering \$40.5 billion to the Victorian economy, representing 7.6% of the total

state economy¹. Furthermore, it is a significant employer, providing jobs for over 320,000 Victorians, or almost 9% of total employment in the state². This economic activity extends to a wide ecosystem of businesses, from sole traders to support services, creating a "sort of ecology of economic activity" that permeates local economies³. Every artist functions as a business, whether a sole trader or a larger entity, interacting with a network of managers, publicists, agents, and designers, all contributing to a thriving ecosystem⁴.

Beyond its economic might, Victoria is a "significant cultural audience," with participation rates higher than other surveyed jurisdictions, including New York, Sweden, and the UK^{5 6}. Victorians also led the nation in per capita spend on cultural activities, generating \$142.58 in 2023, which is \$26 more than the national average⁷. This strong engagement underscores the deep cultural life of the state. The sector is also a powerful driver of tourism, attracting millions of visitors and generating significant economic stimulus through its renowned festivals, theatres, and arts precincts^{8 9}. For instance, the Wimmera Mallee Silo Art Trail alone attracted over 570 extra visitors per month by 2019 to towns with populations of 200 or less, showcasing the transformative power of cultural investment in regional areas¹⁰. Similarly, the Melbourne Fringe generated \$23 million in economic activity in 2023, activating over 90 venues and supporting more than 150 jobs.¹¹.

The immense economic and social value of Victoria's creative industries establishes high stakes for any discussion about their support. The contrast between this significance and the subsequent criticisms of underinvestment and bias creates a compelling narrative of neglect. The sector's substantial economic contribution means that any underinvestment or misallocation of resources is not merely a blow to a niche industry but a significant detriment to the entire state economy. This report, therefore, is not a mere complaint but a robust defence of a vital state asset being undermined by current federal policies and the operational biases of national

¹ Febey, C. (2025) Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, Transcript of Evidence. P1

² Ibid

³ Febey, C. (2025) Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, Transcript of Evidence. P10

⁴ Collins, M. (2025) Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, Transcript of Evidence. P37

⁵ Australian Museums and Galleries Association. (2025) Submission 35. P3.

⁶ Febey, C. (2025) Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, Transcript of Evidence. P1

⁷ Live Performance Australia. (2025) Submission 39. P2

⁸ Stitz, T. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P23

⁹ Lowe, J. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P21

¹⁰ Febey, C. (2025) Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025, Transcript of Evidence. P2

¹¹ Melbourne Fringe, Submission 12, p. 2.

institutions.

2. The Enduring Impact of COVID-19: Social Disconnection and Mental Health Crisis

Finding 1: The COVID-19 pandemic and particularly the impact of continuous government lockdowns led to social disconnection and worsening mental health for many in the Victorian cultural and creative industries, particularly amongst children and young people.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 2.2.2, Finding 12 be amended to read:

The COVID-19 pandemic **and impact of continuous government lockdowns** led to social disconnection and worsening mental health for many in the Victorian cultural and creative industries, particularly amongst children and young people.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

The COVID-19 pandemic inflicted profound and lasting damage upon the Victorian cultural and creative industries. The Committee heard that the pandemic "shut down"

the sector, bringing activity to a "complete standstill" ^{12 13}. For instance, the Bendigo Theatre Company had two productions ready to be staged, including a youth theatre production of "Cats," both of which came to a "complete standstill".¹⁴ This cessation of public engagement directly restricted practitioners' income, with 79% of creatives of colour and First Nations respondents reporting significant income loss.¹⁵ The pandemic exposed the arts sector as a "house of cards," intensifying pre-existing financial precarity and demonstrating that the sector's "resilience" had been "tapped into" to an unsustainable degree ^{16 17}.

The mental health impact on artists was "quite profound" ¹⁸.

Organisations like St Martins Youth Arts Centre experienced increased staff attrition due to mental health issues and the inability to rebuild teams amidst rising costs ^{19 20}. This "ongoing effect of people being nervous about staying in an industry that is so volatile" has led to skilled technical personnel leaving the industry permanently, creating persistent skill gaps ²¹.

The impact on children and young people was particularly severe. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported a "concerning decrease" in their creative participation and attendance between 2017-18 and 2021-22. ²² This included a dramatic drop in performing arts attendance from 57% to 31%, and significant declines in visits to libraries, galleries, and participation in creative writing, dancing, and singing.²³

Table: Decline in Children and Young People's Creative Participation and Attendance (2017-18 to 2021-22)

| Category | 2017-18 Attendance/Participa | 2021-22 Attendance/Participa | Change |
|----------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|
|----------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|

¹² Champion, M. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P55
¹³ Cunningham, C. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P59
¹⁴ Ibid
¹⁵ Mullings, L. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P20
¹⁶ Lowe, J. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P21
¹⁷ Dullard, C. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P14
¹⁸ Toulson, D. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P6.
¹⁹ Kostich, N. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. Pp 6-7
²⁰ Toulson, D. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P6.
²¹ Ibid
²² Theatre Network Australia. (2025a) *Submission 19, Attachment 1*. Pp 13-14.
²³ Ibid

| | tion | tion | |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Cultural Venues/Events (Children) | 94% | 80% | -14% |
| Performing Arts (Children) | 57% | 31% | -26% |
| Library Visits (Children) | N/A | 33% | N/A |
| Gallery Attendance (Children) | N/A | 20% | N/A |
| Music Concerts (Children) | N/A | 12% | N/A |
| Theatre (Children) | N/A | 9% | N/A |
| Dance Performance (Children) | N/A | 8% | N/A |
| Musical/Opera (Children) | N/A | 7% | N/A |
| Library Visits (Youth 15-24) | 36% | 28% | -8% |
| Gallery Attendance (Youth 15-24) | 25% | 17% | -8% |
| Performing Arts (Youth 15-24) | 56% | 27% | -29% |
| Creative Writing (Children) | 23% | 19% | -4% |
| Dancing (Children) | 17% | 13% | -4% |
| Singing/Musical Instrument (Children) | 23% | 19% | -4% |
| Drama Activities (Children) | 8% | 5% | -3% |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Reading for Pleasure (Children) | 79% | 72% | -7% |
|------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|

Source: *Theatre Network Australia (2025a, pp. 13-14)*

Being "untethered from community, untethered from school and untethered from in-person social development" led to increased anxiety and depression, profoundly shifting the demeanour of young individuals.^{24 25} One witness recounted a confident 10-year-old who experienced a "slow decline" during online programs, leading to disengagement and a complete shift to being anxious and socially aware post-COVID²⁶. For creative children, engagement in the arts is a "necessity" for their mental health and wellbeing, not a "nice-to-have"^{27 28}. The withdrawal of these opportunities during lockdowns had severe, unacknowledged consequences.

The pandemic also accelerated the decline of volunteerism, a critical lifeline for many arts organisations, particularly in regional and outer-suburban areas^{29 30}. This loss disproportionately impacts younger and more diverse demographics who cannot afford to volunteer, leading to a less inclusive and vibrant community arts scene³¹. Engagement with the arts is crucial for social cohesion, combating loneliness and isolation, and fostering critical thinking and inclusivity^{32 33}. The disruption of this engagement has contributed to broader societal challenges.

The evidence points to a twofold blow: the immediate shock of the pandemic combined with pre-existing systemic vulnerabilities in the sector, such as financial precarity, over-reliance on volunteers, and a lack of formal training pathways. This systemic stress test revealed and exacerbated deep-seated issues, with profound long-term consequences for the sector's sustainability and its ability to contribute to societal wellbeing. The exposure of this fragility has led to a long-term exodus of skilled workers and a severe decline in youth engagement, jeopardising the future talent pipeline and cultural dynamism of Victoria. The pandemic was not just a

²⁴ Kostich, N. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P7

²⁵ Cornwell, K. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence.P21

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Champion, M. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P59

²⁸ Public Galleries Association of Victoria. (2025) *Submission 33*. P3

²⁹ Barrie, C. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence.P14

³⁰ Public Galleries Association of Victoria. (2025) *Submission 33*. P3

³¹ Barrie, C. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence.P14

³² Barrie, C. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence.P13

³³ Sertori, L. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P58

temporary setback but a catalyst that revealed and intensified underlying problems, with profound long-term consequences for the sector's sustainability and its ability to contribute to societal wellbeing.

The pandemic was particularly stark in Victoria, which had the world's longest lockdowns. While Melbourne's creative scene was locked down, Sydney was hosting *Hamilton the Musical*. As was identified recently, the curfews were a political decision, rather than based on health advice. These lockdowns had a profound impact on Victoria's creative and cultural scene.

3. Federal Government's "Revive" Policy: A Missed Opportunity for Victoria

The Federal Labor Government's "Revive" cultural policy, launched in 2023, was touted as a five-year plan to revive the arts in Australia.³⁴ While some stakeholders initially welcomed it as "a step in the right direction"³⁵ its implementation has been fundamentally flawed, demonstrating a clear failure to adequately support Victoria and its diverse cultural landscape. The policy's stated ambitions often fall short in practice, particularly concerning equitable funding distribution and transparency.

Finding 2: It is unacceptable that a state and territory breakdown of the comprehensive cultural funding dataset was not released and calls on the Australian Government to release one immediately.

The most comprehensive dataset for understanding government expenditure in the cultural space—the "cultural funding by government dataset"—does not provide a breakdown by state and territory³⁶.

This critical omission makes it "difficult to determine whether Victoria receives its fair share" of overall federal cultural funding.³⁷ This lack of transparency directly hinders informed debate. Stakeholders, including A New Approach, highlighted that this opacity leads to "frustration" within the industry, as they are left with only a "very

³⁴ Office for the Arts. (2025a) *A New National Cultural Policy*. Available at: <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/new-national%E2%80%9393cultural-policy> (Accessed: 15 May 2025).

³⁵ Dullard, C. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P14

³⁶ Inquiry into cultural and creative industries - Chair's Draft. (2025) *Inquiry into cultural and creative industries - Chair's Draft*. P46

³⁷ Ibid

partial view" of federal investment³⁸. This opacity prevents a "smart, intelligent" and data-informed conversation about where funding is truly needed and where it is being disproportionately allocated³⁹. The absence of this data is not merely an oversight; it potentially serves to obscure systemic inequities in federal funding. If the government were confident in its equitable distribution, it would readily release this data. The refusal to do so implies a strategic choice to avoid accountability for disparities, particularly impacting states like Victoria. This is a broader implication of the data transparency issue, suggesting a deliberate choice to maintain a veil over funding allocations.

Mr Mullholland moved that in section 3.3.6, the following Finding be deleted:

Victoria receives its fair share of funding from Creative Australia.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Davis moved that in section 3.3.6, the following Recommendation be inserted:

That the Commonwealth dataset be regularly published.

Question – put.

³⁸ Fielding, K. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. Pp25-26

³⁹ Fielding, K. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P27

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

3.1 Regional Victoria: Shortchanged and Overlooked

Finding 3: Regional Victoria is not getting its fair share.

The "Revive" policy, despite its aspirational pillar of "A place for every story," has fundamentally failed to deliver for regional Victoria. Creative Australia's funding, which is a key component of federal support, does not ensure an "equitable spread between metro and regional" areas⁴⁰. Regional Victoria receives "Absolutely inadequate" federal support, with a stark disparity of only \$1.06 per capita compared to \$3.79 per capita in other states⁴¹. This means regional Victorians are "a few dollars behind what regional people in other states are accessing" from the dedicated funding pool.⁴²

The federal government's "long-term investment in metropolitan centres – basically Melbourne and Geelong" masks "considerable underinvestment in regional Victoria"⁴³. By including larger, more developed centres like Geelong in "regional" figures, the true extent of neglect for genuinely remote and rural communities is obscured, creating a misleading picture of federal support. This statistical sleight of hand allows the Federal Government to claim regional investment while the vast majority of

⁴⁰ Porter, J. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P12

⁴¹ Porter, J. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P16

⁴² Porter, J. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P17

⁴³ Porter, J. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P12

regional Victoria remains starved of resources.

The lack of multi-year regional organisational funding leads to "unfunded excellence"⁴⁴. This refers to quality projects that fall below the funding line, meaning promising projects and organisations in regional areas remain "precarious," unable to plan beyond short-term, ad-hoc project grants, hindering sustainable growth and talent retention^{45 46 47}. This creates a cycle of instability where regional arts organisations cannot build long-term capacity or attract consistent talent. The "Revive" policy's emphasis on arts education has not translated into adequate support for specialist youth arts organisations in regional areas, as the current funding matrix fails to recognise their specific needs and impacts.⁴⁸

Investment in creative industries in regional Victoria is consistently overlooked in favour of traditional industries like mining or manufacturing, despite the unique social and economic benefits that creative industries offer in fostering critical thinking, diversity, and inclusivity in rural communities.⁴⁹ This perpetuates the perception that creative industries are a "nice-to-have" rather than a "must-have" for regional development, further marginalising these vital sectors.⁵⁰

The "Revive" policy, despite its aspirational language, is not delivering for regional Victoria. Its implementation, characterised by skewed funding metrics (such as the inclusion of investment in Geelong), insufficient per capita investment, and a lack of sustained multi-year grants, actively undermines its stated goals. This has created a perception that the Federal Government is more interested in rhetoric than in genuinely empowering regional cultural ecosystems, leading to a long-term erosion of regional cultural capacity.

Table: Creative Australia Investment by Location (Applicant Residence) 2023-24

| State/Territory | Investment (\$M) | Percentage of Total |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|
|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Porter, J. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P14

⁴⁶

⁴⁷ Regional Arts Victoria, Submission 15, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Inquiry into cultural and creative industries - Chair's Draft. (2025) *Inquiry into cultural and creative industries - Chair's Draft*. P41

⁴⁹ Sertori, L. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P58

⁵⁰ Sertori, L. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P58

| | | |
|--------------------|------|-----|
| New South Wales | 30.9 | 30% |
| Victoria | 28.7 | 27% |
| Queensland | 14.1 | 13% |
| South Australia | 8.5 | 8% |
| Western Australia | 7.7 | 7% |
| Tasmania | 3.7 | 3% |
| ACT | 3.7 | 3% |
| Northern Territory | 1.9 | 2% |

Source: *Creative Australia* (2024, p. 24)

While this table shows Victoria receiving a somewhat proportional share from Creative Australia directly, it is crucial to note that this only accounts for a portion of total federal cultural expenditure. The broader argument about the lack of a comprehensive state-by-state breakdown for *all* federal cultural funding⁵¹ and the specific inadequacy of *regional* federal funding⁵² remains.

Table: Creative Australia Investment in Regional vs. Metropolitan Australia (2023-24)

| Location | Investment (\$M) | Percentage of Total |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Regional Australia | 28.4 | 12% |
| Metropolitan Australia | 209.0 | 88% |

Source: *Creative Australia* (2024, p. 24)

⁵¹ Finding 30

⁵² Finding 31

This table directly quantifies the severe underinvestment in regional Australia from Creative Australia, providing strong evidence for the argument that regional Victoria is not receiving its fair share. It highlights the stark contrast between metropolitan and regional funding, reinforcing the critique of the "Revive" policy's implementation on the ground.

4. National Broadcasters: A Persistent Sydney-Centric Bias

Australia's national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, are publicly funded institutions with a mandate to serve all Australians and reflect the nation's diverse cultural life. However, a detailed examination of their staffing, expenditure, and strategic decisions reveals a deeply ingrained Sydney-centric bias that actively undermines Victoria's cultural and economic interests and fails to adequately represent its unique place in national cultural life.

4.1 The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC): A National Broadcaster with a Sydney Focus

Finding 4: Victoria is being shortchanged in comparison to NSW.

The disparity in ABC's financial commitment to Victoria versus New South Wales is profound and unacceptable. While the ABC's total annual budget is approximately \$1.288 billion⁵³ its distribution of staff and production spending heavily favours NSW.

Table: ABC FTE Staff Nationwide and Associated Staffing Costs (2024)

| State/Territory | FTE Employees | Percentage of Total FTE |
|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| New South Wales | 2818 | 56% |

⁵³ ABC. (2025a) *Submission 41*.

| | | |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Victoria | 937 | 18.6% |
| Queensland | 402 | 8% |
| Western Australia | 252 | 5% |
| South Australia | 216 | 4% |
| Australian Capital Territory | 196 | |
| Tasmania | 116 | 2% |
| Northern Territory | 103 | 2% |
| Overseas | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 5040 | 100% |

Source: ABC (2025a, p. 1)

As of December 2024, only 18.6% of ABC's total headcount (937 employees) is based in Victoria, despite Victoria representing 26% of the national population^{54 55}; In stark contrast, NSW accounts for 31% of the population but hosts a disproportionately larger share of ABC staff at 56%^{56 57}. This clearly indicates that Victoria is significantly underrepresented in terms of ABC staff headcount relative to its population size, with NSW grossly overrepresented. The ABC operates from 10 locations in Victoria, including its Melbourne office in Southbank and nine regional offices, with 93 employees based in regional Victoria⁵⁸. Key ABC teams operating or managed from Melbourne include Radio National, ABC News Breakfast, Asia Pacific newsroom, ABC Education, Heywire, Double J, ABC Country, and a major newsroom⁵⁹. Despite these presences, the overall staffing imbalance is undeniable.

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2025) *National, state and territory population: Statistics about the population and components of change (births, deaths, migration) for Australia and its states and territories*. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/sep-2024> (Accessed: 23 May 2025).

⁵⁶ ABC. (2025a) *Submission 41*.

⁵⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2025) *National, state and territory population: Statistics about the population and components of change (births, deaths, migration) for Australia and its states and territories*. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/sep-2024> (Accessed: 23 May 2025).

⁵⁸ ABC. (2025a) *Submission 41*.

⁵⁹ Tapley, M. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence.

In terms of content production from FY2019/20 to FY2023/24, the disparity is equally stark.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be inserted:

Victoria is being shortchanged by more than \$200 million annually in comparison to NSW

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be deleted:

No state or territory has an ABC headcount that accurately reflects its population size; an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of ABC employee headcount exists to varying degrees in all states and territories.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |

| | |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Table: ABC Production Activity Comparison (Victoria vs. NSW) (FY2019/20 to FY2023/24)

| Category | Victoria | New South Wales |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| External Productions | | |
| Number of Projects | 91 | 168 |
| ABC Committed Funds | \$170 million | \$217 million |
| Total Production Budget | ~\$330 million | ~\$497 million |
| Content Hours Generated | 350+ | 600+ |
| Internal Productions | | |
| Number of Projects | 53 | 199 |
| Funds Spent | \$73 million | \$177 million |

Source: ABC (2025c, p. 6)

This represents a direct spending gap of over \$150 million in favour of NSW over five years in these categories alone. A 2021 Deloitte study commissioned by the ABC further revealed that from FY2017/18 to FY2019/20, ABC projects contributed \$353 million to the NSW economy, while only \$208 million to Victoria, a difference of \$145 million over three years, or approximately \$48.3 million annually⁶⁰.

When considering the overall economic impact of the ABC's substantial budget and the multiplier effect of concentrated resources (as highlighted by David Davis *Submission to the SBS Relocation Feasibility Study Steering Committee*, where a 1.8%

⁶⁰ ABC. (2025a) *Submission 41*.

multiplier was applied to spending⁶¹), the annual deficit for Victoria easily exceeds \$200 million. This calculation is based on the significant difference in economic contribution of projects, compounded by the vast disparity in overall staff and operational expenditure.

Finding 5: It is completely unacceptable that both of Australia's national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, have expanded their presence to Western Sydney at the expense of Victoria.

The ABC's decision to relocate its Sydney newsroom and ABC Sydney radio to Parramatta, while framed as a move to "decentralise out of Ultimo" and connect with Western Sydney's population^{62 63} is nothing more than a cosmetic shift within the same dominant metropolitan area. This decision, coupled with SBS's similar move, solidifies Sydney's disproportionate monopoly over national broadcasting resources and narratives. It actively neglects the fundamental need for a truly national footprint that genuinely includes and reflects Victoria's significant cultural contributions and diverse population. This concentration of media power in a single city undermines the very principle of national representation.

Finding 6: Enterprise agreements are not a sufficient reason to keep ABC staffing concentrated in Sydney.

The ABC's justification for maintaining a Sydney-centric workforce, citing "industrial implications" and "significant redundancy costs" related to enterprise agreements^{64 65}, is a convenient excuse. While such agreements exist, they are not insurmountable barriers. A national broadcaster genuinely committed to equitable distribution would actively pursue strategies to overcome these, such as phased relocation, incentivised transfers, or leveraging natural attrition, rather than using them as a perpetual shield for a Sydney-first approach. The fact that the ABC found \$67.2 million⁶⁶ to fund the Parramatta relocation through asset sales demonstrates that financial mechanisms can be found when there is political will and a genuine commitment to a strategic objective. This indicates that the barrier is not truly financial or industrial, but rather a lack of commitment to genuine national equity.

⁶¹ Davis, D. (2023) *Submission to the SBS Relocation Feasibility Study Steering Committee*.

⁶² Tapley, M. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence.

⁶³ ABC. (2025c) *Hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025*.

⁶⁴ Tapley, M. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P38

⁶⁵ ABC. (2025c) *Hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025*. PP8-9

⁶⁶ ABC. (2025c) *Hearing, response to questions on notice received 21 March 2025*.P15

Finding 7: The ABC's decision to relocate to Parramatta is evidence of both the federal Labor government and the national broadcasters' Sydney-centric approach.

The choice to move staff from one Sydney location to another, rather than considering major cultural and population centres like Melbourne, is a clear manifestation of a Sydney-centric bias shared by both the ABC's leadership and the federal Labor government. This decision sends a clear message that genuine national decentralisation is not a priority, and that the interests of Sydney continue to dominate national cultural policy and resource allocation. The ABC's argument that the concentration of the film and production workforce in NSW (56%) justifies its Sydney-centric spending⁶⁷ is a classic "chicken-and-egg problem"⁶⁸.

This is not an immutable fact but a direct consequence of historical investment patterns. The ABC's interpretation of its "efficiency" mandate⁶⁹ appears to consistently prioritise cost-saving (or avoiding redundancy costs) over its charter obligation to reflect national diversity and ensure equitable distribution. This reveals a fundamental tension in the ABC's operational philosophy, where perceived efficiency is used to justify a lack of genuine national representation, leading to significant economic and cultural detriment for Victoria.

Recommendation: The committee recommends that up to 1,000 staff from Sydney be moved to other jurisdictions, principally Victoria.

To rectify the deeply entrenched imbalance in ABC staffing and resource allocation, a bold and decisive step is required. Relocating a significant portion of Sydney-based staff, specifically up to 1,000 positions, to Victoria and other States would be a tangible commitment to national equity. This would not only provide substantial direct economic benefits to Victoria but also ensure that the ABC's content, perspectives, and decision-making processes are more genuinely national, reflecting the diverse experiences and cultural life of all Australians, particularly Victorians.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be inserted:

Victoria is being shortchanged by more than \$200 million annually in comparison to NSW

⁶⁷ Gregson, S. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P31

⁶⁸ Davis, D. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P31

⁶⁹ Tapley, M. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 27 February 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P39

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be deleted:

The ABC’s decision to relocate its Ultimo office to Parramatta was influenced by multiple external factors, including legal obligations under the ABC Enterprise Agreement 2022-2025, budget constraints that made New South Wales the most cost-effective option, the Parramatta office’s proximity to key state departments and agencies, and a strategic goal to better reflect New South Wales’ population demographics.

and replaced with the following Finding:

The Committee is of the view that enterprise agreements are not a sufficient reason to keep ABC staffing in Sydney.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |

| | |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Davis moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be deleted:

The ABC's decision to relocate its Ultimo office to Parramatta was influenced by multiple external factors, including legal obligations under the ABC Enterprise Agreement 2022-2025, budget constraints that made New South Wales the most cost-effective option, the Parramatta office's proximity to key state departments and agencies, and a strategic goal to better reflect New South Wales' population demographics.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.3.1, the following Finding be inserted:

That the ABC's decision to relocate to Parramatta is evidence of the both the federal Labor government and the national broadcasters' Sydney-centric approach.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Mr Mulholand moved that in section 4.3.1, the words “goes beyond” is replaced with “is driven by”, so that the finding reads as follows:

The ABC’s impact and ability to culturally represent any particular state is driven by the headcount or location of ABC offices.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

4.2 The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS): Federal Directives and Victorian Disregard

Finding 8: Condemns the Federal Labor Government for ignoring the importance of Victoria and for claiming this was a decision of the SBS when it was actually a decision of government.

The Federal Labor Government's actions regarding SBS's Western Sydney relocation constitute a blatant disregard for Victoria's importance and a cynical attempt to mislead the public. SBS's own testimony unequivocally states that the relocation feasibility study was "commenced and run by the federal government" and was "narrowly scoped to look at western Sydney only"⁷⁰. SBS further clarified that the "opportunities available to us were within the parameters of western Sydney"⁷¹. This directly contradicts then Minister for Communications Michelle Rowland's public statement thanking SBS for "proposing this exciting project"⁷². This exposes a deliberate misrepresentation by the Federal Labor Government to shift accountability for a politically motivated decision that prioritises Sydney over genuine national equity.

The consequences of this decision are severe: it ensures that both of Australia's national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, now have a physical presence in Western Sydney, further cementing media power and resources in a single metropolitan area to the severe detriment of Victoria. This concentration undermines the very principle of diversity that SBS is mandated to uphold in its charter, which explicitly requires it to "contribute to the overall diversity of Australian broadcasting and digital media services, particularly taking into account the contribution of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation"⁷³. By forcing SBS to also move to Western Sydney, the government actively undermines this diversity, creating a homogeneity of national media presence that is a betrayal of the charter's intent. This reveals a pattern of political expediency where the Federal Labor Government makes decisions for perceived political gain (appeasing Western Sydney) rather than adhering to the public interest and the explicit mandates of the SBS charter.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.4.1, the following Finding be inserted:

Condemns the Federal Labor Government for ignoring the importance of Victoria and

⁷⁰ O'Neil, C. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence.P44

⁷¹ O'Neil, C. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence. P45

⁷² O'Neil, C. (2025) *Public hearing, Melbourne, 12 March 2025*, Transcript of Evidence.P44

⁷³ *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991*. Section 6(2)(g)

for claiming this was a decision of the SBS when it was actually a decision of government.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (4) | Noes (5) |
|---------------|-------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mulholland | Ms Purcell |
| | Ms Terpstra |

Question Negatived.

Finding 9: Victoria is being shortchanged by more than \$200 million annually in comparison to NSW.

The economic impact of SBS's Sydney-centric operations on Victoria is substantial.

Table: SBS FTE Employee Distribution Compared to Australia’s Population by State and Territory (2024)

| State/Territory | SBS FTE Employees | Percentage of Total SBS FTE | Population ('000) | Percentage of National Population |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| New South Wales (NSW) | 1,108 | 82% | 8,511.2 | 31% |
| Victoria (VIC) | 192 | 14% | 7,013.0 | 26% |
| Australian Capital Territory | 18 | 1% | 475.6 | 2% |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| (ACT) | | | | |
| Queensland (QLD) | 16 | 1% | 5,608.7 | 21% |
| South Australia (SA) | 7 | <1% | 1,882.7 | 7% |
| Western Australia (WA) | 7 | <1% | 2,981.8 | 11% |
| Tasmania (TAS) | 2 | <1% | 576.0 | 2% |
| Northern Territory (NT) | 3 | <1% | 255.6 | 1% |
| Overseas | 2 | <1% | N/A | N/A |
| Total | 1,355 | 100% | 27,309.4 | 100% |

SBS. (2025b) Hearing, response to questions on notice received 10 April 2025.

In 2021-22, 82% of SBS's employees were based in NSW, compared to only 14% in Victoria⁷⁴ ⁷⁵. David Davis MP's submission to the SBS feasibility study highlights that with an annual revenue of approximately \$486 million (2021-22), the concentration of SBS resources and spending in Sydney "acts to the detriment of Melbourne to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars annually"⁷⁶. Economic modelling suggests that even a modest shift of 30% of SBS's annual spending to Melbourne could generate an additional economic impact of \$262 million annually, while a 50% shift could yield \$437 million⁷⁷. This clearly demonstrates that Victoria is being severely shortchanged by more than \$200 million annually, a direct consequence of the disproportionate allocation of staff and resources to NSW.

Recommendation 1: Calls on the Victorian Government to advocate to the Federal Government and SBS to establish a physical presence in an appropriately culturally diverse location in Victoria such as Broadmeadows or Dandenong.

⁷⁴ SBS. (2025b) *Hearing, response to questions on notice received 10 April 2025*. P3.

⁷⁵ Davis, D. (2023) *Submission to the SBS Relocation Feasibility Study Steering Committee*. P2

⁷⁶ Davis, D. (2023) *Submission to the SBS Relocation Feasibility Study Steering Committee*. P7

⁷⁷ Ibid

Victoria is Australia's most multicultural state, with Melbourne being its largest city and home to highly diverse corridors like Monash and Dandenong, where over 60% of residents were born overseas and hundreds of languages and faiths are represented⁷⁸. These areas are prime locations for SBS to establish a physical presence, aligning with its charter to reflect Australia's multicultural society and serve diverse communities directly. The current Federation Square office, while central, does not adequately reflect the full multicultural nature of Victoria's population⁷⁹. A presence in Broadmeadows or Dandenong would ensure SBS is truly embedded within the communities it serves, fostering deeper engagement and more authentic representation. This would allow SBS to fulfill its charter more effectively by being physically present in the multicultural hubs it aims to serve, rather than operating from a distant, Sydney-centric base.

It is notable that the Members of the Labor Party and the Greens do not support the majority decision taken in the report that the SBS establish a physical presence in diverse locations in Victoria such as Broadmeadows or Dandenong.

Mr Mulholland moved that in section 4.4.1, the following text be inserted after “diverse locations in Victoria”

such as Broadmeadows or Dandenong.

Question – put.

The Committee divided.

| Ayes (5) | Noes (4) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ms Broad | Mr Berger |
| Mr Davis | Ms Copsey |
| Ms Deeming | Mr McIntosh |
| Mr Mullholland | Ms Terpstra |
| Ms Purcell | |

⁷⁸ Davis, D. (2023) *Submission to the SBS Relocation Feasibility Study Steering Committee*. P2

⁷⁹ Davis, D. (2023) *Submission to the SBS Relocation Feasibility Study Steering Committee*. P9

Question Agreed.

5. Recommendations

Based on the critical findings of this minority report, the Liberal and National parties put forward the following urgent recommendations to rectify the systemic inequities and ensure Victoria receives its fair share of investment and recognition in the cultural and creative industries:

1. **Transparency in Federal Funding:** The Australian Government must immediately release a comprehensive state and territory breakdown of the "cultural funding by government dataset" to ensure full transparency and accountability in federal cultural expenditure.
2. **Equitable Regional Investment:** The Federal Labor Government must overhaul its "Revive" policy implementation to ensure genuinely equitable and sustained investment in regional Victoria, including multi-year organisational funding and a review of how "regional" classifications are used to avoid masking underinvestment.
3. **National Broadcaster Decentralisation - ABC:**
 - The ABC must commit to a significant and immediate rebalancing of its national footprint.
 - Up to 1,000 staff from Sydney must be relocated to other jurisdictions, principally Victoria, to better reflect the nation's population and cultural diversity.
 - Enterprise agreements should not be used as an excuse to perpetuate Sydney-centric staffing, and the ABC must actively pursue mechanisms to facilitate this relocation.
4. **National Broadcaster Decentralisation - SBS:**
 - The Federal Labor Government must cease its deceptive narrative regarding the SBS Western Sydney relocation and acknowledge that this was a government-led decision that ignored Victoria's importance.
 - The Victorian Government must immediately advocate to the Federal Government and SBS to establish a significant physical presence in an appropriately culturally diverse location in Victoria, such as Broadmeadows or Dandenong, to truly serve Victoria's multicultural communities.
5. **Addressing COVID-19's Lingering Scars:** Both federal and state governments must implement targeted, long-term support programs to address the social disconnection and worsening mental health within the Victorian cultural and creative industries, particularly for children and young people, recognising the

systemic vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic.

Conclusion

This minority report unequivocally demonstrates that Victoria's cultural and creative industries, a powerhouse of economic activity and social cohesion, are being disadvantaged by the Federal Labor Government's policies and the entrenched Sydney-centric biases of national broadcasters. The "Revive" policy, while aspirational, has failed to deliver equitable outcomes, particularly for regional Victoria. The decisions by both the ABC and SBS to further concentrate resources in Sydney, often under misleading pretences, are unacceptable and undermine their national mandates.

The time for rhetoric is over. This report calls for urgent, decisive action to ensure equitable federal investment, a genuine rebalancing of national broadcasting presence, and a commitment to truly national cultural policy that recognises and champions Victoria's unparalleled contribution to Australia's creative life. Failure to act will not only diminish Victoria's cultural dynamism but will also have lasting negative impacts on its economy and the wellbeing of its citizens, particularly its children and young people.



The Hon David Davis MP



Evan Mulholland MP



Gaelle Broad MP



Richard Welch MP

Moira Deeming MP

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