



Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research (BCARR)
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Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts Methodology Refresh

NAVA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts Methodology Refresh consultation.

The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) is an independent membership organisation that brings together the many voices of the visual arts, craft and design sector to improve the fundamental conditions of work and practice. We do this through advocacy, education and the Code of Practice for the Visual Arts, Craft and Design.

NAVA was established in 1983 as the peak body for the visual arts. Today, our community is made up of over 50,000 members, subscribers, friends and followers, consisting of artists, arts workers and arts organisations.

NAVA commends the Australian Government's new National Cultural Policy, *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place* which commits to updating the methodology used in the ABS Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts to better capture the contribution of the cultural and creative sector.

With the loss of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistical evidence since 2014, the industry's capacity to track what is happening has been severely curtailed. The full size and scope of Australia's visual arts, craft and design sector is currently unknown.

For a number of years, NAVA has advocated for:

- Additional questions to the Census under Income and Work and Unpaid Work to gather data on levels and types of employment, creative practice, hours worked, revenue, and creative and cultural output. Harmonise these where possible with international approaches to facilitate global benchmarking.
- ABS to capture more than just one professional activity in the collection of Census data. A high proportion of artists and arts workers are employed casually and many hold multiple jobs across the sector. A more accurate estimation of artist populations can be achieved by collecting information on the main job, second job and third job to identify practising professional artists whose main job in the Census may lie elsewhere.
- A review or industry mapping through sector consultation to improve our understanding of the full scope and scale of the arts and culture sector, which can be used to guide the composition of ABS data sets.

- Changes to what is considered visual arts to capture the creation, exhibition and sale of contemporary art in public and commercial galleries, the secondary market of sales at auctions or through dealers, and the work of all Aboriginal Art Centres. The definition of visual arts should include painters, sculptors, printmakers, photo and video media artists, ceramics practitioners, textile makers, glass and object makers, jewellery designers and makers, installation artists, public artists, live artists, experimental practitioners and many other contemporary practices. Currently, the BCARR definition of the visual arts is limited to professional photographic services (assumed wedding and fashion photography) and the manufacture and sale of jewellery, watches and clocks, most of which are not considered to be practices of the visual arts by the sector itself.
- A special-purpose study to explore how First Nations activity and cultural production could be identified as a specific category for incorporation into ABS accounts, with the understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural production is not homogeneous but derives from creative activity under a wide variety of circumstances and that there are significant differences between production in non-remote and remote locations.
- Additional data collection on the expenditure on arts and cultural heritage at all levels of government, similar to the [Cultural Funding by Government, Australia, 2011-12](#) survey.

Current issues

Inaccurate picture of visual artist populations

In David Throsby's May 2023 submission to the Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts Methodology Refresh Consultation Paper, he notes the guiding principle in designing any set of statistical data for the cultural sector should be that the resulting outputs should provide what users need in a way that reflects their comprehension of how the sector works. At the same time industry and occupational classifications used must be consistent with the data sources from which the information is to be drawn.

Similarly, Throsby offers that judgements about employment classifications need to recognise the inside knowledge of industry practitioners who can observe labour relationships on the ground. The Australian census asks people to document a job category based on their "main job" in the week that the census is taken. This approach overlooks the many artists who take other work as a means of supporting their artistic practice, and who are therefore working at some other "main job" at the time of the data collection. At the same time, many across the sector are working in three or more different occupations in and out of the sector. All of this information is lost in the current approach.

Undervaluing of the contribution of arts and culture to the economy and social wellbeing

There are currently too many gaps in the data to inform an accurate picture of how many visual art and craft practitioners there are in Australia, let alone demographics, geographic trends, types of employment, revenue and how many are working other jobs. Accurate data is vital for policymaking by governments of all political persuasions at federal, state and local levels.

In 2015 it was reported by the ABS that in 2013-14 [more than 4.1 million Australians](#) participated in the practice of making art or crafts each year. This makes the visual arts and crafts the most important everyday form of cultural participation tested by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The academic literature on the cultural industries suggests that the flow-on economic benefits from the visual arts are large and significant. Economists have long known that economic growth is driven by innovation, and the visual arts are highly innovative by their very nature.

Discontinuation of valuable data collection

The last [ABS survey of commercial galleries in Australia was in 1999-2000](#), while the most [recent data published as part of the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy](#) is from the late 2000s.

The 2017-18 creative and cultural industries figures reported by the Australian Government Bureau of Communications and Arts Research omit significant elements of the visual arts, craft and design economy including the creation, exhibition and sale of contemporary art in public and commercial galleries, the secondary market of sales at auctions or through dealers, and the work of all Aboriginal Art Centres. Instead, the visual arts are classed as jewellery and silverware manufacturing (ANZSIC code 2591), jewellery and watch wholesaling (ANZSIC code 3732), watch and jewellery retailing (ANZSIC code 4253) and professional photographic services (ANZSIC code 6991). The economic contribution of Australia's painters, sculptors, printmakers, photo and video media artists, ceramics and textile practitioners, glass makers, installation artists, public artists, live artists, experimental practitioners and so many other contemporary practices had not been considered at all.

In its Culture and Recreation News bulletin for 2014, the ABS gave examples of the kind of incredibly valuable data it has been collecting which informs both government policy and the industry itself. In response to strong user interest and public consultation, it released the first [Australian National Accounts: Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts, Experimental, 2008-09](#). The ABS commented, "It is one of the few cultural and creative activity satellite accounts in the world and allows users to gain a picture of the value of this sector and how it interacts with the rest of the economy."

In August 2013, the ABS published [Cultural Funding by Government, Australia, 2011-12](#) which provided survey details about expenditure on arts and cultural heritage at all levels of government. Updates to Employment in Culture were released in February 2014 providing summary data on selected cultural occupations and industries from the 2011 Census of Population and Housing for all states and territories of Australia. The profiles also contained information about both adult's and children's participation in cultural and leisure activities and cultural funding by the government.

The ABS also participated in the [UNESCO Pilot Survey in Cultural Employment Statistics](#) which created indicators to measure the contribution of culture to economic and social development, and the conditions of those employed in the cultural sector. Australia was one of 20 countries invited to participate in this pilot survey.

Professor David Throsby AO from Macquarie University affirmed that the work of the National Centre for Cultural and Recreation Statistics over more than 20 years had "provided data on the arts, culture, sport and recreation in Australia that have been vital to policymaking by governments of all political persuasions at federal, state and local levels. The Centre had built up an enviable international reputation as a world leader in the development of statistical services in the cultural and recreational fields," with its pioneering current project on satellite accounts "providing

information essential to an understanding of the role of the creative industries in the wider innovation economy” (Australian Financial Review).

First Nations art economy inadequately covered in formal statistical sources

In 2022, the Productivity Commission’s [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and crafts study](#) sought to estimate the size and value of the market for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts and assess the policies that affect it. One of the areas they were looking to improve for the final report was more accurate estimates relating to independent First Nations artists working outside the art centre system, particularly in the South East, across ACT, NSW, Victoria and Tasmania.

The numbers from the previous year’s census were unpublished and Commission relied on numbers available from the 2016 census, which said there are just over 2,000 visual arts and craft professionals, 2,000 painters, 520 ceramic artists and 608 sculptors across Australia in total. When contacted for information, NAVA advised the Productivity Commission to seek data from Aboriginal Arts Centres and Indigenous visual arts peak bodies as well as the state and territory arts policy and funding bodies, and Aboriginal Arts Officers connected to the Regional Arts Development Officer networks in some states for a more comprehensive picture beyond ABS statistics.

The [Productivity Commission’s final report](#) stated an estimated 17% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 15 years made visual arts or crafts, and about 3% received an income from visual arts or crafts. Overall, the Commission estimated that 7,300 artists sold art through art centres in 2019-20, with artist incomes from sales reaching \$23.6 million.

Outside of the art centres, the Commission estimated that almost 2,000 independent First Nations artists generated sales of almost \$13 million a year and there are about 19,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who earned income from the sale of arts and crafts.

While the Productivity Commission’s report had gaps in its data collection due to issues including inaccurate ABS data and the lack of information in states and territories without Indigenous visual arts peak bodies, the numbers demonstrate a gross misalignment with the total number of artists captured in the 2016 census.

A more accurate data reference through changes to the Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts and collection of ABS employment data relating to the visual arts with reference to the Indigenous Data Sovereignty network to ensure appropriate protocols, will achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the contribution and value of the First Nations art economy.

Supporting our artists as workers in the economy can only be possible with robust and nuanced cultural data. A more holistic and accurate picture of the visual arts, craft and design will lead to better informed decisions, policies, and investments in this vital sector.

Sincerely,

Penelope Benton Leya Reid
Executive Director Advocacy and Communications Manager

