trails blaze

towards a **games** and **interactive art** strategy for Australia

June 2026

FreePlay

Foreword

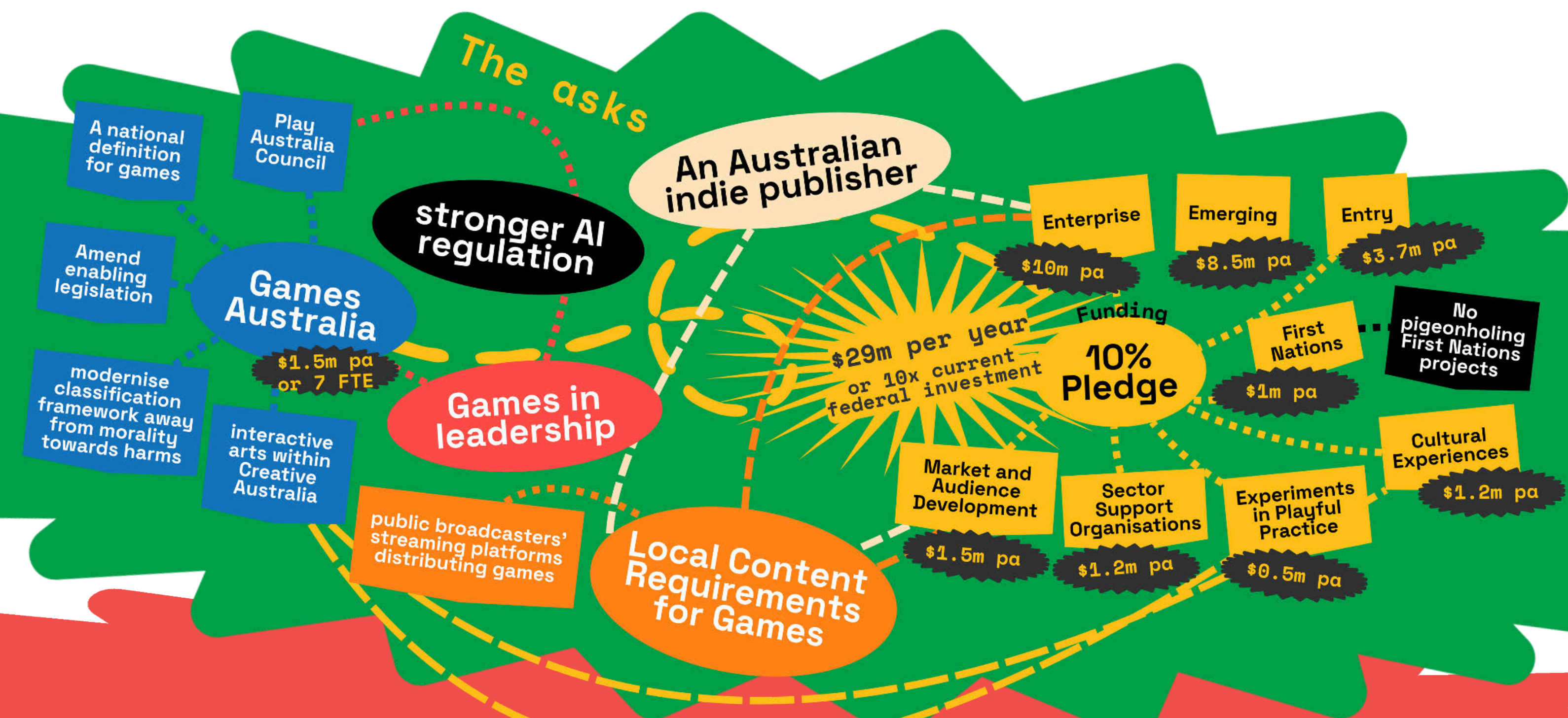
Over the last three months, sector support organisations, studios and gamemakers have come together to form the games and play working group to ensure our sector's advocacy **better reflects the real priorities of working gamemakers across Australia**.

We tore down the artificial line between art and industry that has been holding our sector back. **This is both a cultural strategy and an industry strategy and it isn't ashamed of being either**. Every artist is a creative worker and every creative worker is an artist. Artists in every practice move seamlessly through their life between commercial production and artistic expression — and so must the systems and strategies that scaffold us.

The national games and play working group is a coalition of ten community and industry organisations and dozens of gamemakers, artists, producers and academics representing a cross-section of the games sector nationally.

The goal of convening the working group was to **give voice to the thousands of gamemakers and games-curious artists** whose views are not reflected by the international publishers and shopfronts who dominate the global advocacy ecosystem.

The working group was convened by **Freeplay**, Australia's home of experimental and independent gamemaking and host of the world's longest running independent games festival, Angles.



This is the culmination of **three industry roundtables**, nearly **fifty face-to-face interviews** and the collective contribution of many more individual gamemakers and playercreators. It builds on a fifty year heritage of modern Australian gamemaking and countless millenia of human playmaking.

My sincere thanks to everyone who helped on this — especially **Dr Taylor Hardwick**, **Kathryn Gledhill-Tucker**, **Zainab Darbas**, **Jason Qian**, **Amelia Laughlan**, **Chloe Appleby**, **Liam Esler**, **Ben Armstrong**, **Joel Davison**, **Dr Jane Turner**, **Jackson Ryan**, **Dr Dan Golding**, **Ryan Penning**, **June Rhodes**, **Ceri Hutton** and the teams at **Waypoint**, **Serenade** and **IGDA**. This was an entirely volunteer project and I can't thank everyone who lent their time, expertise and stories to help.

I didn't use any generative AI in any stage of producing this paper — and I hope you don't use any reading it either. (:

With love

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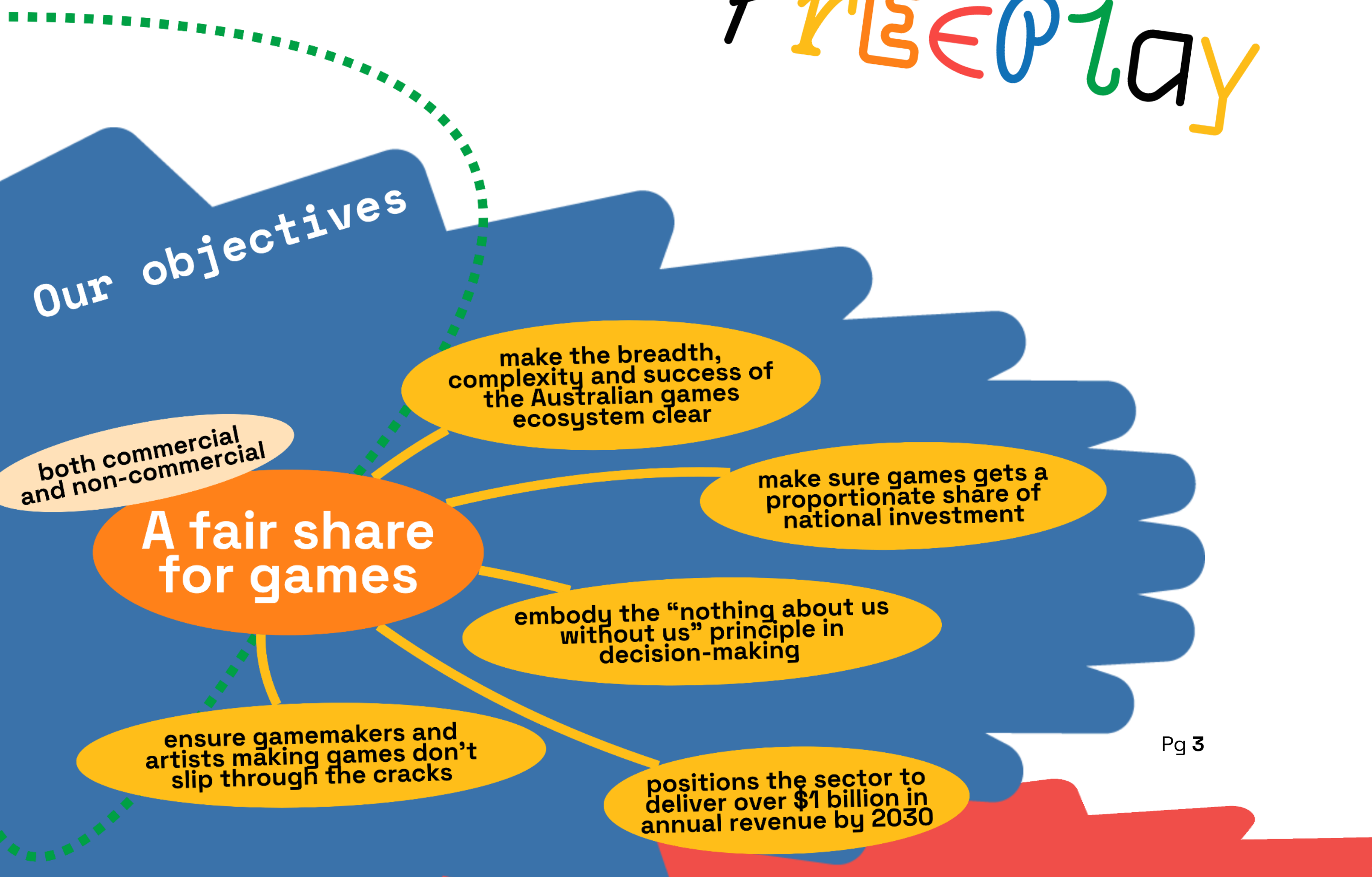

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Executive summary

Games are no longer an emerging practice. Our sector is mature, highly developed and as complex and nuanced as any other arts sector.

Games are one of Australia's favourite art forms, with **82% of Australians playing a game every month** — only a few shy of the 88% who regularly watch television.

Australian games are our largest cultural export market with a half dozen Australian titles from the last decade **outselling some of our most successful film exports**.

The games sector is one of Australia's **largest creative employers**, with at least 2,500 full time workers and between 2,000 and 7,000 contractors, bitworkers and solo artists.

Gamemaking practice has underpinned some of the most exciting creative projects in visual art, literature and performance art in the last decade — with **gamemakers taking out top awards at Melbourne Fringe and more**.

Despite all this, **games remain an outsider in Australia's arts ecosystem**. We are seen as less culturally important, less worthy of support and less serious an art form.

Filmmakers would not accept policymakers defining their whole practice by Marvel blockbusters or children's TV shows. Theatre would revolt if people's first thought was of the latest *Hairspray* tour. Music isn't less worthy of support because Taylor Swift is a billionaire.

But among so many in arts and government, games are still subconsciously thought of as just children's toys or only the most mass market shooting game.

For decades, **policymakers have treated games as synonymous with film production** — and for a narrow band of studio-based game development, it largely is. This saw games added to the remit of state and federal screen agencies, governments replicate for games the tax offsets that had successfully buttressed film production for years, and more experienced film people put in charge of games governance.

Unfortunately for policymakers, **the systems that underpin distribution, workforce and creative development for games are completely different to film's** — and attempting to jam film's intuitions about those into games means either end of the creative pipeline either doesn't work or doesn't exist at all.

Games distribution globally has consolidated so much that over **95% of all digital sales take place through just six digital shopfronts and a handful of subscription-based live-service games**. Film contends with a multitude of cinemas, broadcast channels, distribution partners and film festivals. Games do not.

Games distribution is already the endgame for the global television streaming market — where companies like Netflix and Amazon Prime don't even have to compete with local players like Stan or iView.

At the other end of the pipeline is workforce — and how creatives coalesce and form creative enterprises. The studio model that saw game development paired with film from the beginning has disintegrated over the last decade. The majority of Australia's most successful games exports were not made by large, scalable studios — **they were made by scrappy teams of less than a dozen creatives working out of coworking spaces all across the country**.

These new models make **gamemaking look less like film production and more like music**. Small teams of the same few people producing a sequential series of games, like bands make albums, only engaging contractors in the final sprint or publishers to promote and distribute.

And none of this contends with **the conspicuous gap for support for Australia's thriving non-digital games sector**, which need to fight for scraps against more conventional literature, visual and community arts projects — despite spawning some of the world's most popular titles which in turn led to a dozen television spinoffs.

These differences highlight the need to move on from games playing second fiddle to film. **Games deserve our fair share of attention and funding.**

We canvass solutions to the three big problems facing our sector today:

- Australia's existing cultural **governance is miscalibrated** with the strategic needs of the games sector,
- the need to catch-up on a decade of **underfunding and uncertainty** in the face of global sector disruption, and
- games has a **weak industrial culture** without which we lack the strong collective agenda and identity of other artforms.

These policy directions forge a new path for games as **a mature, independent and culturally important sector** of Australia's arts ecosystem. One that traces around everything from small and scrappy arts practice to global commercial dominance, from experimental to mass market, from hobbyist to magnate.

In a time when the previously dominant national players in games production are struggling, and new national players have invested orders of magnitude more than us to take advantage of the opportunity that offers, **now is Australia's chance to lead**.

Recommendations

1. Ensure **government bodies that make funding and policy decisions about games include gamemakers**, and in particular include working artists not just business owners.

2. Develop **a coherent and nationally-consistent definition of games** that acknowledges that gamemaking is a highly experimental artform that is treated as a toolbox by other practices — and are far more than just commercial digital games.

3. Top up the **aggregate nationwide public funding for games to equal 10% of that given to film and television production** — roughly $29 million per year — and make sure that financial support is split equitably across:

   a. enterprise and at-scale investment

   b. emerging studios

   c. entry and early career gamemakers

   d. First Nations gamemakers

   e. playful experiences in cultural institutions

   f. interactive arts outside digital games

   g. games sector support organisations

   h. market and audience development

   i. public sector arts administrators for games

4. Set up **a new dedicated agency for the games sector** — *Games Australia* — tasked with managing games funding, delivering sector capacity building programs, leading industry research, providing education and skills advisory services and being a government champion for games, led by a legislated and majority-practitioner *Australian Games Council*.

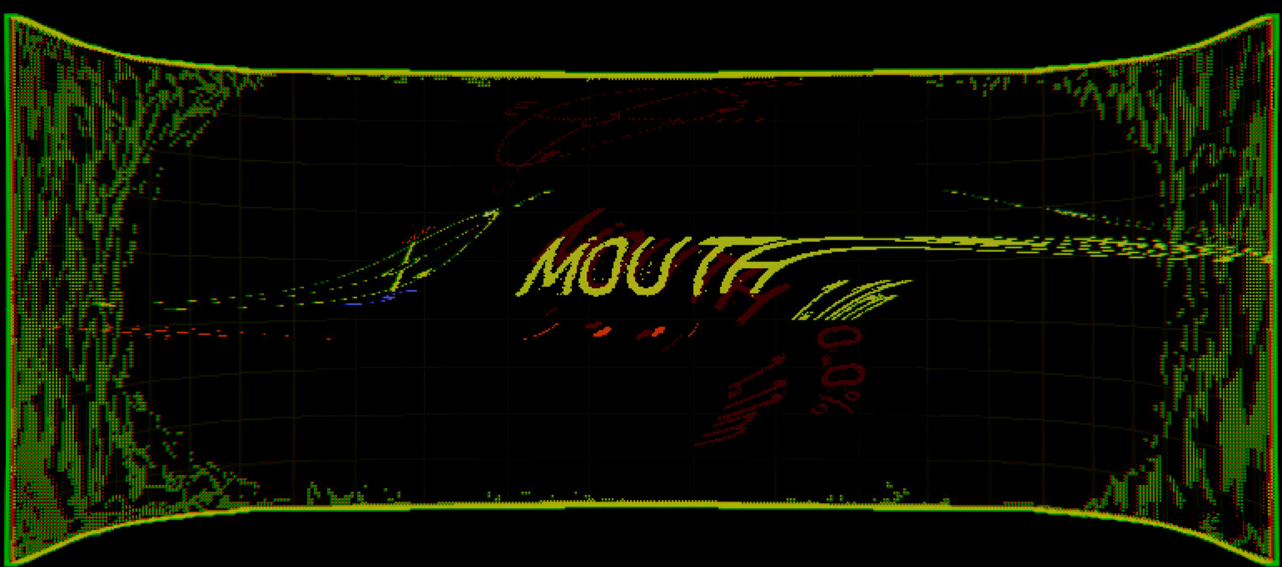
5. Amend Screen Australia's enabling legislation to create a new power — ***support creative, artistic and technical initiatives that contribute to the development of screen production talent*** — and a *no gaps* provision to ensure pipeline projects that exist outside conventional screen content are captured.

6. Create a new **dedicated arts practice panel within Creative Australia for interactive arts** with ringfenced funding to support non-digital games that have to compete with more conventional projects under the experimental and emerging arts practice panel.

7. Keep games profits onshore and unlock millions in investment by **co-investing in an Australian games publisher**, frontloading multi-year enterprise investment in an equity agreement with an existing local publisher or a new aggregating fund.

8. Extend **prominence frameworks** to games shopfronts and **local content quotas** to games publishers — using the proceeds to set up an **aggregating and contestable national screen content fund** to supplement public funding.

Cain Maddox's PROXIMATE (2024), a horror game that uses an image recognition tool to translate what would be visual information into best guesses at words. Don't ask what the ketchup really is.

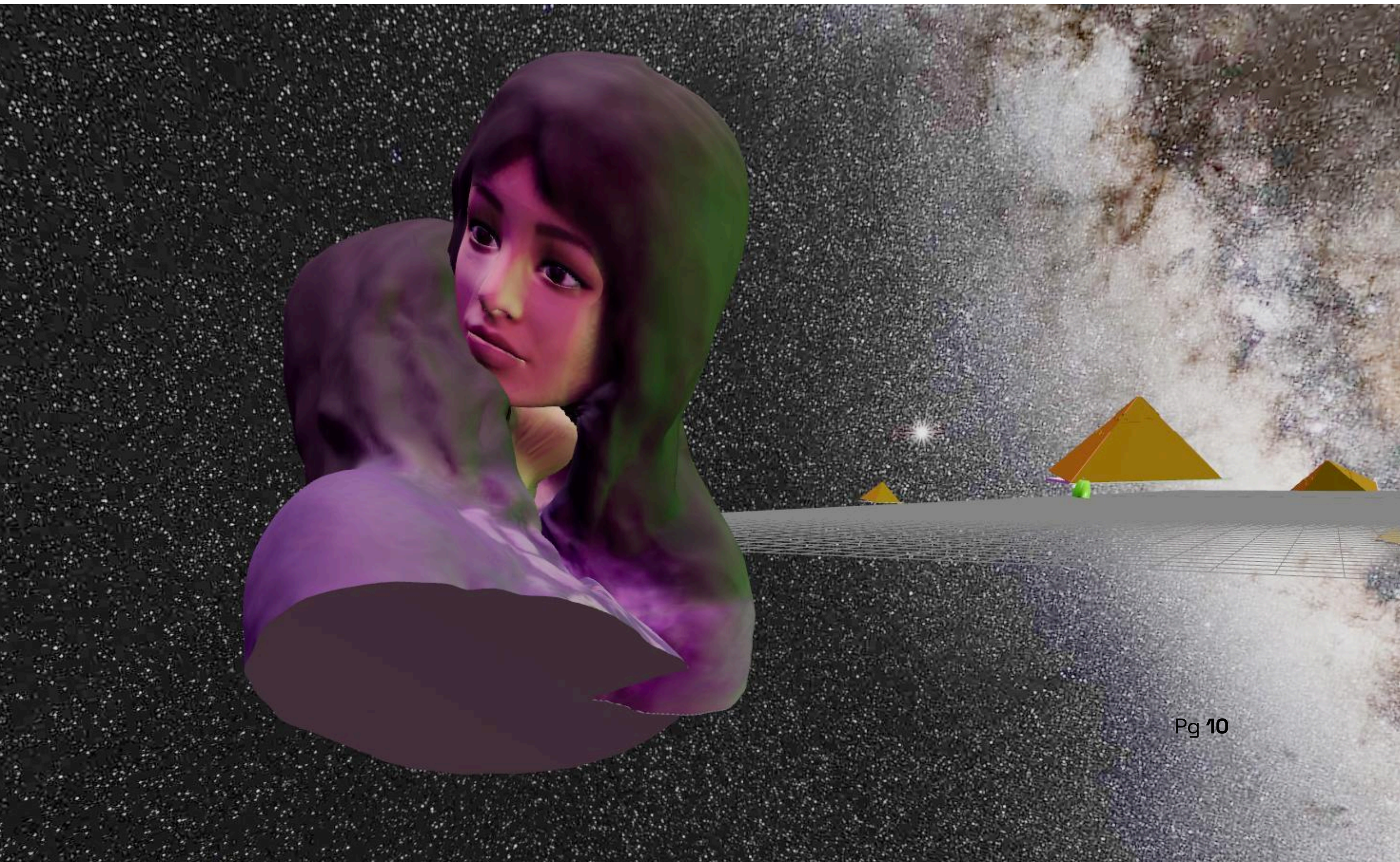


9. Expect public broadcasters to **leverage their digital streaming services to commission, promote and distribute Australian games** and amend ABC's Charter to expand the obligation to promote performing arts to all arts, including film and games.

10. **Avoid pigeonholing First Nations creatives into smaller and more limited First Nations dedicated funds** by ensuring the the maximum amount that can be given under a designated fund is equal to the maximum allocated under general production funds, and First Nations led projects that are successful at being selected for both designated and general production funding be allowed to choose which they use.

11. Regulate the use of generative AI in screen industries by **ensuring public funds do not support projects that use generative AI tools in the creative process** and projects over a certain budget guarantee the provision of entry-level creative positions likely to be displaced by generative AI usage.

Vidya Rajan's In Search of Lost Scroll (2023), interactive fiction and online performance piece.



Australian games in context

Games industry economics and workforce

Australian digital games generate **over $600 million in revenue** each year, and non-digital games contribute millions more. **Total games sales in Australia approach nearly $4 billion a year**. This makes games one of the largest segments of Australia's cultural economy, generating nearly 70% of the revenue of film.

The games sector **employs around 2,500 creative workers** according to ABS data. Screen production — that is the parts of the screen industry that actually make films and television programmes — account for around 30,000 jobs nationally.

However this is likely **a significant undercounting of the real employment figures**. ABS notes nearly all of these are full-time roles, while nearly half of screen production's employment figures are casual.

The games sector has **many freelancers or contractors who work across many projects** and move fluidly between games and other artforms, and games and the broader tech ecosystem. There are also thousands of "hobbyists", gamemakers working on their first game or a project unpaid and unfunded while juggling other work.

ABS data is imperfect insofar as it misses all these creatives who — because of bitwork or economic factors, or poor classification or data design issues — are not counted in headline figures.

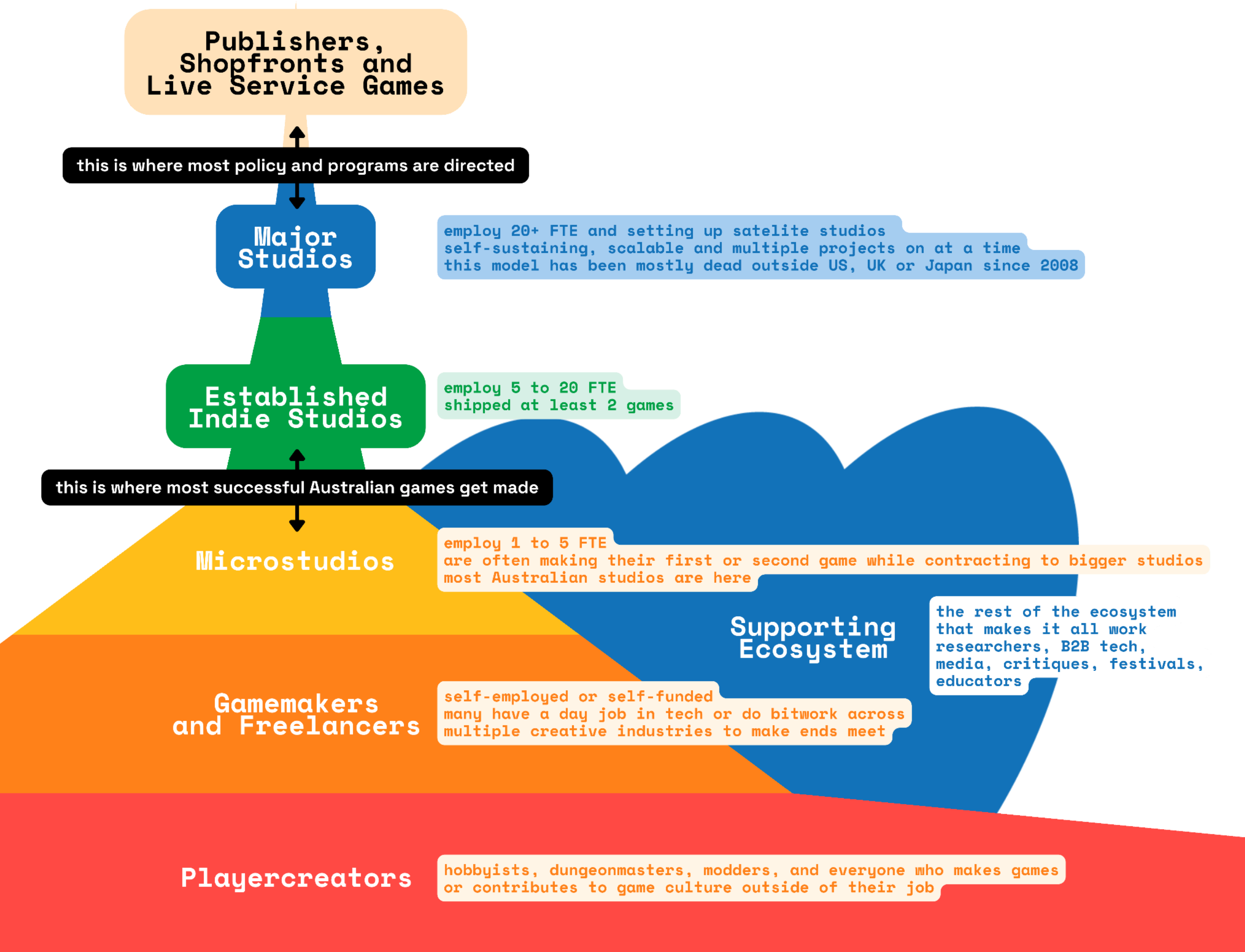
ABS methodology changes have improved data collection. However, as **game development still does not have a dedicated ANZSIC category** and ABS collates businesses to survey manually through consultation with industry organisations, their data **misses the vast majority of early career and emerging gamemakers**.

Based on industry evidence, we believe the real figure for workers with some form of gamemaking practice to be **nearly 10,000 Australia wide** — which means that games employ somewhere between 10% (ABS estimates) and 35% (industry estimates) of film's nationwide employment.

The vast majority of gamemakers — including the majority of Australia's most successful export studios — work in small teams, occasionally engaging freelancers or contractors during the final push.

These workers coalesce in a small number of studios and production companies, with **many more working on solo or informal projects that have not yet coalesced in a formal studio**.

The **majority of these studios employ between 2 and 15 fulltime equivalent staff**, including some of the most commercially successful studios that have shipped games with millions of unit sales. Many of these studios have no interest or reason to scale outside of production "crunch".



Financial, employment and production activity statistics for screen industries (ABS, 2022)

		2015-16	2021-22
Digital games development	Businesses	80	188
	Employment	734	2,225
	Wages	$51.2m	$183.2m
	Income	$111.1m	$459.3m
Film and video production	Businesses	2,819	4,506
	Employment	14,638	26,808
	Wages	$640.1m	$1,577.3m
	Income	$2,302.5m	$4,575.3m
Film and video post-production	Businesses	414	572
	Employment	2,462	3,405
	Wages	$174.2m	$222.6m
	Income	$398.5m	$604.0m
Commercial broadcasters and streamers	Businesses	46	45
	Employment	13,428	10,266
	Wages	$1,292.0m	$1,079.0m
	Income	$9,313.5m	$8,176.4m

Despite this, the design of government programs and policy support have been **driven by the preferences of very large studios, international publishers and live-service games**, which represent only a very small proportion of the Australian industry, fewer still Australian workers and next to no Australian made games — but do make up a large proportion of total domestic sales.

In some ways, **the domestic games industry more closely resembles the music industry than film**, with a few large publishers, cooperative infrastructure used by a large number of creatives, and a lot of cross-pollination between creatives — but the core of creative production being done by a relatively small and consistent group over multiple projects.

That cooperative infrastructure is provided by **a vibrant ecosystem of sector support organisations** — most of which are small, volunteer led and unfunded, a small number being commercial enterprises providing free or at cost support to the sector, and a few large ones supported by cultural institutions and universities.

That infrastructure ranges from co-working spaces and incubators, expos and showcases, professional and artistic development programmes, to research, critique and sector media.

Many of Australia's largest cultural exports of the last ten years emerged from our games sector — *Hollow Knight, Unpacking*, *Cult of the Lamb*, *Untitled Goose Game*, *Florence*, *Blood on the Clocktower* and many more.

Unfortunately, many sales figures for games remain commercial-in-confidence and are significantly harder to pin down compared to other screen industries. This is especially true of multi-platform games which sell across multiple shopfronts in both physical and digital media.

However, we have some public visibility to sales through Steam, which accounts for over 80% of PC games sales. That allows us to make some **ballpark estimates of total sales of some of the most successful Australian games**.

We estimate Steam accounts for between 40% and 50% of total sales of multiplatform games, depending on the genre. Many games — including best-selling Australian AAA title *LA Noire* (2011) — were not originally released on Steam so their lifetime sales cannot be estimated, while others like *Schedule 1* (2025) were released only on Steam.

Estimated unit sales of recent Australian games based on VG Insights (original).

Game	Lifetime Steam unit sales	Estimated lifetime total unit sales
Hollow Knight	8,800,000	19,800,000
Silksong	5,200,000	11,700,000
Schedule I	8,700,000	8,700,000
Cult of the Lamb	3,700,000	8,325,000
Getting Over It	2,800,000	2,800,000
Unpacking	1,200,000	2,700,000
Untitled Goose Game	730,000	1,642,500
Florence	479,000	1,077,750
Heavenly Bodies	130,000	292,500
Stray Gods	114,000	256,500

Even smaller narrative driven indie or experimental art titles like *Florence* (2018) and *Unpacking* (2020) sell hundreds of thousands of copies globally — while **some of our breakout hits like *Hollow Knight* (2017) reach millions more people than some of our best-selling films**.

Games retail for between $20 AUD and $120 AUD with complex dynamic pricing embedded in digital shopfronts — which **makes it challenging to translate to the equivalent of cumulative box office revenue for films**. However, by means of comparison, global box office sales for recent Australian hit *Talk To Me* (2022) is estimated at $128 million AUD, while one of the highest grossing Australian films of all time, *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015), is estimated to have made around $450 million AUD globally.

Both games and film figures are dwarfed by the mobile game market that boomed in the early 2010s, which saw Australian titles like *Crossy Road* (2014) sell over 100 million units while *Fruit Ninja* (2010) was downloaded over 1 billion times across paid and free versions. However, **the mobile game market has changed significantly since then** and should not be seen as a predictor for future growth in that segment.

case studies

Hollow Knight and **Silksong**

Team Cherry | Adelaide | 2017 and 2025

Hollow Knight is a Metroidvania game in which players must save the fallen kingdom Hallownest as insectoid warrior The Knight. It was developed by Adelaide-based studio Team Cherry, a team of three gamemakers, and was initially crowdfunded, raising $57,000 AUD on Kickstarter.

From this humble beginning, *Hollow Knight* and its sequel *Silksong* have become one of the **highest-grossing Australian cultural products of all time**. A global indie darling, ***Hollow Knight* has generated $158m AUD in revenue** just through Steam sales. It won Australian Game of the Year at the 2018 Australian Games Awards, and received a BAFTA nomination.

In 2025, the much-anticipated sequel *Silksong* became the most wishlisted game of all time on Steam and its release caused every major digital games storefront to crash. ***Silksong* has sold 5.2 million units, totalling nearly $157 million on Steam alone in less than a year.** *Silksong* won **Game of the Year at The Game Awards 2025**, and received three BAFTA nominations.

Hollow Knight and *Silksong* tell a story of massive Australian success — and reconfigures how we see the impact of Australian cultural products.

A brief history of Australian games

The history of Australia's videogame development industry begins in 1982, with the release of Melbourne studio Beam Software's *The Hobbit*.

Over the next 25 years, **Australian games workers built a solid landscape of development studios** — largely supported by foreign investment and buyouts, and developing licensed games based on popular brands.

Australian game developers had a global reputation for quality — but they were attractive to publishers from the United States and Japan **because of the comparatively weak Australian dollar**.

This advantage collapsed during the global financial crisis of 2008.

In 2007, there were 1,431 games workers in Australia, who cumulatively earned $117 million AUD. Game development was primarily located along the East Coast, with dense clusters of studios in Brisbane and Melbourne.

By 2012, there were only 581 games workers in the country, income was down to $45 million AUD — and most major studios had closed, with the few surviving companies concentrated in Victoria.

In the aftermath, **nearly 70% of games workers had moved industries or countries in search of better opportunities**. The industry was gutted.

This series of events is often referred to as **'The Crash'** among Australian games workers, and the drive to avoid another industry collapse defined how gamemakers in Australia thought about rebuilding the industry.

For the next few years, games workers were left without formal employment, but remained highly skilled and operating in a landscape of emerging and increasingly accessible game development tools. Developers began to form small studios of their own, and began focusing on emerging markets — particularly developing games for the new and rapidly growing mobile games market.

Studios like Brisbane-based Halfbrick — who made *Fruit Ninja* (2010) and *Jetpack Joyride* (2011) — and Melbourne-based Hipster Whale who made *Crossy Road* (2014) took global mobile games markets by storm. ***Fruit Ninja* has been downloaded over a billion times in the last fifteen years.**

Here it is worth noting that, despite Australia's historical success in the mobile games market, **the mobile games sector is largely dead**. While mobile games revenue remains high, that is driven largely by "freemium" models which are essentially online gambling, and is captured by only a few key players.

The post-Crash games industry was almost completely transformed. In 2007, the industry's revenue base was 80% foreign contracts working on licensed intellectual property. In 2014, there were roughly two hundred small, independent (or 'indie') game development studios in Australia, and 75% of their output was original intellectual property.

Today's industry was built on these foundations. In Australian games, nearly everyone is indie.

While some larger game development studios exist in Australia, **most studios in Australia employ fewer than 15 people**. This remains true even after massive commercial success. For example, Team Cherry has only 3 full time employees despite *Hollow Knight* (2017) being the most successful Australian games export of all time.

Growth isn't necessarily a priority for Australian gamemakers – continuing to make games is.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the global games industry saw massive growth thanks to optimistic investment and players suddenly having much more time on their hands. Companies began to expand. In Australia, the number of people in full time games employment grew.

This optimism didn't last long. Rising development costs, global instability, and post-COVID sales declines led to management and investors shying away from risky expansion and investment.

Beginning in 2023, **massive layoffs at games studios worldwide saw companies haemorrhaging staff**, leaving a glut of highly-skilled gamemakers unemployed.

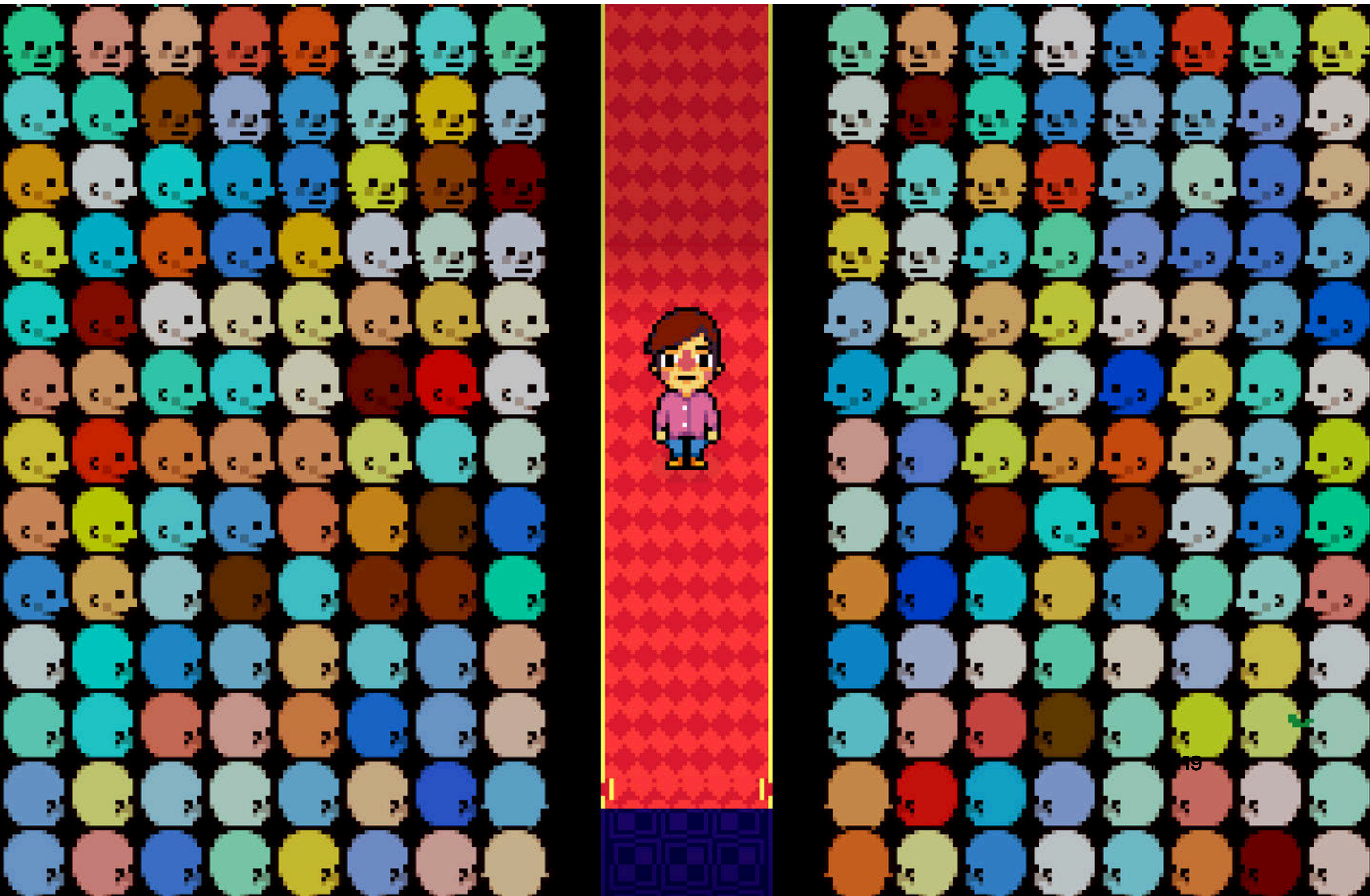
Australia was hit, too. **Over 200 Australian gamemakers have been laid off since 2023**, and there is no concrete information on developers who were quietly let go or contracted games workers who lost opportunities. Several studios — including acclaimed Melbourne-based studio League of Geeks — closed down for good.

Continuing global instability, resource shortages, cost-of-living crises, and emergent technologies such as generative AI, will continue to pose risks to Australian gamemakers in the short- to long-term future.

If it acts quickly, the federal government can avoid another industry crash. A strong national cultural policy for games could provide crucial stability, security, and opportunities for Australian gamemakers.

In turn, Australia will reap the creative, cultural and economic benefits of a thriving games sector.

Andy Brophy's Knuckle Sandwich (2023), a surreal mystery RPG set in a strangely Melbourne-like city.



Untitled Goose Game

House House | Melbourne | 2019

Untitled Goose Game, developed by Melbourne-based studio House House and published by US-based Panic Inc, is a stealth puzzle game where players control a cheeky goose who wreaks havoc through a small English village.

The game received $80,000 AUD in funding from VicScreen. It reached #1 on the Nintendo charts **and sold an estimated 1,643,000 copies globally.** On Steam alone, *Untitled Goose Game* has **generated over $12.5m AUD in revenue**.

Untitled Goose Game won **Game of the Year** at both the Annual D.I.C.E. Awards and the Game Developers Choice Awards in 2020. It was awarded **Best Family Game at the BAFTA Games Awards,** where it received another Game of the Year nomination. Dan Golding's soundtrack was the first ever game soundtrack to receive a nomination for Best Original Soundtrack at the ARIAs.

In 2022, ACMI and Orchestra Victoria collaborated with House House on an orchestral performance of the soundtrack alongside a live playthrough. *Revive* cited this performance, noting how it ***"brought together multiple art forms and new audiences."***

The games policy landscape

Government intervention in games has a spotty history in Australia. Dedicated programs supporting games have been occasional and piecemeal, and typically led by state governments. **Rarely a year goes by without one state or the Commonwealth abandoning the sector entirely**.

Outside of these infrequent and temporary programs, government intervention has predominantly taken the form of censorship or disparagement towards games as anti-social or aberrant to people's — particularly children's — development.

As a result, **games workers' trust in the government is extremely low**.

Australia has had some form of public funding for games for just over 25 years, beginning with scattered digital media grants awarded to the occasional game project in the very early 2000s. These programs have always been the remit of government screen agencies like VicScreen.

For much of the '00s and '10s, **federal governments were reluctant to create any dedicated games industry policy**, leaving a gap to be sporadically filled by state policymakers. For most of this time, unless you lived in Victoria, there were no practical avenues for support as a practicing gamemaker.

Federal support for gamemakers was delivered by the Australia Council for the Arts, which had no dedicated programs or guidance for gamemakers trying to apply under legacy practice areas. Instead, game projects were occasionally funded under the categories of *digital media* or *interactive art*, when those practice areas inconsistently existed.

This changed in 2008 when Screen Australia was established and introduced the Serious Games Fund for a year, followed by an Innovation grant program for the next two financial years.

In 2012, following a sustained lobbying effort from games workers and industry, **the Gillard Government announced a $6.7 million a year Australian Interactive Games Fund**.

After the 2013 federal election, the Abbott Government promptly cancelled this fund — after just one year of the program's operation — and the funds were "redirected to budget repair".

Following this, Screen Australia had no games funding program for almost a decade — until the Morrison Government introduced a games production fund and tax offset in 2022, which were subsequently expanded by the Albanese Government in 2023 after the publication of *Revive*.

At the state level, most jurisdictions offered grant funding for multiple stages of game production, except for New South Wales, which offered only development funding, and South Australia which lacked grant funding entirely. **Victoria's games industry policy dates back to 2012, while all other states and territories introduced their current programs in 2021 or later**.

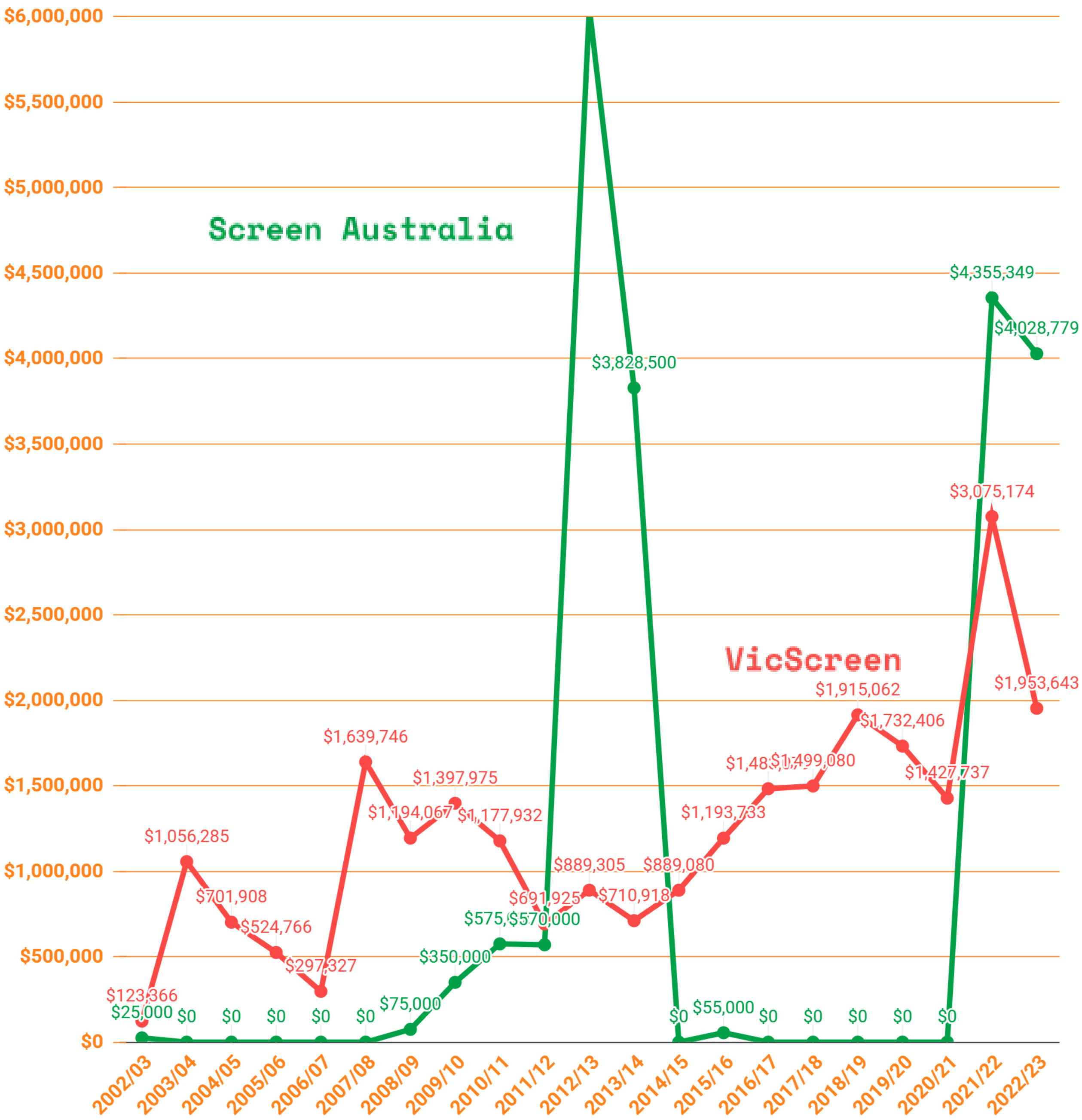
There is wide variation in the amount offered in each state, ranging from $30,000 in New South Wales to a maximum of $500,000 per project in Victoria.

Games funding policies by jurisdiction as of 2023 (Darbas, 2024).

	C'TH	VIC	NSW	QLD	WA	TAS	NT
Year introduced	2022	2012	2024	2022	2022	2021	2023
Development funding	$30k	$300k	$30k	$100k	$25k	$20k	$25k
Production funding	$100k	$300k	X	$200k	$100k	$50k	$40k
Tax offset or rebate	30%	10%	10%	15%	-	-	*
Placement funding	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-
Travel funding	✓	✓	-	✓	X	-	-
Event funding	✓	✓	-	-	X	-	-
Diversity criteria	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	-
ATSI content criteria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Victoria's commitment to games funding has been consistent over the past two decades, while **federal spending on games grants has been visibly inconsistent over the same timeframe**. That volatility has amplified games' already acute exposure to economic boom and bust cycles. **The sector cannot sustain sporadic injections of investment followed by extended periods of none**. "Brain drain" is a serious concern for the games industry: workers who leave the sector after a bust rarely return — and even if they do, the pace of technological progress in the sector means workers are often left behind by their peers if they go more than a few months with no work.

Games funding spend by national and Victorian screen agencies (Darbas, 2024).



Comparing aggregated government funding by arts sector over time, excluding radio and television services ([ABS, 2024](#))

	2015/16		2017/18		2019/20		2021/22		2023/24	
Totals	*$1,273.8m*		*$1,719.8m*		*$1,724.3m*		*$2,489.5m*		*$2,321.6m*	
Interactive arts (inc. digital games)	**$2.6m**	**0.2%**	**$5.7m**	**0.3%**	**$5.8m**	**0.3%**	**$13.0m**	**0.5%**	**$11.4m**	**0.5%**
Film and video production	$164.9m	12.9%	$213.4m	12.4%	$257.6m	14.9%	$360.6m	14.5%	$378.4m	16.3%
Circus and physical theatre	$8.6m	0.7%	$6.8m	0.4%	$6.9m	0.4%	$11.1m	0.4%	$6.5m	0.3%
Comedy	$1.7m	0.1%	$1.8m	0.1%	$2.9m	0.2%	$7.5m	0.3%	$2.5m	0.1%
Dance	$42.1m	3.3%	$54.0m	3.1%	$43.7m	2.5%	$58.9m	2.4%	$43.9m	1.9%
Design	$8.9m	0.7%	$11.3m	0.7%	$8.0m	0.5%	$27.3m	1.1%	$22.8m	1.0%
Literature and writing	$43.6m	3.4%	$42.2m	2.5%	$50.5m	2.9%	$62.8m	2.5%	$61.9m	2.7%
Music	$115.3m	9.1%	$140.6m	8.2%	$156.0m	9.0%	$356.2m	14.3%	$230.7m	9.9%
Musical theatre and opera	$47.4m	3.7%	$47.8m	2.8%	$46.6m	2.7%	$131.4m	5.3%	$34.2m	1.5%
Theatre	$57.3m	4.5%	$106.0m	6.2%	$67.5m	3.9%	$108.5m	4.4%	$75.7m	3.3%
Visual arts and crafts	$87.5m	6.9%	$102.6m	6.0%	$93.0m	5.4%	$121.7m	4.9%	$143.4m	6.2%
Arts administration	$133.3m	10.5%	$141.4m	8.2%	$184.8m	10.7%	$151.2m	6.1%	$202.8m	8.7%
Arts education	$150.1m	11.8%	$168.5m	9.8%	$186.9m	10.8%	$237.2m	9.5%	$143.2m	6.2%
Multi-arts festivals	$60.1m	4.7%	$71.2m	4.1%	$64.9m	3.8%	$127.4m	5.1%	$109.8m	4.7%
Performing arts venues	$185.6m	14.6%	$383.3m	22.3%	$418.6m	24.3%	$478.9m	19.2%	$479.6m	20.7%

Unpacking

Witch Beam | Brisbane | 2021

Unpacking is a puzzle game where the player unpacks the protagonist's possessions as she moves home over the course of her life. Developed by Brisbane-based studio Witch Beam, *Unpacking* was published by US-based company Humble Bundle.

The game received around **$60,000 AUD in funding from Screen Queensland's Screen Finance Fund**. *Unpacking* went on to sell over 1.2 million copies worldwide solely on Steam, generating **over $18m AUD in revenue.**

Of four nominations **at the 2022 BAFTA Game Awards, *Unpacking* won Game of the Year and Best Narrative.** It also won three awards at the 2021 Australian Game Developer Awards, including Game of the Year.

Unpacking has **received acclaim for its representation of LGBTQ+ stories and voices**. It represents a style of Australian indie games which tell honest, quiet stories about authentic experiences.

Our asks

Put gamemakers on games decision-making bodies

Despite the many champions for games within various screen and creative organisations around Australia, the great cultural relevance and economic success of games means little when **the few programs that do exist are swiftly defunded and our artistic practice is reduced** to only the most attractive projects to international investment.

This lack of appropriate investment is driven by the fact that games are functionally treated as an outsider by both the screen and arts worlds.

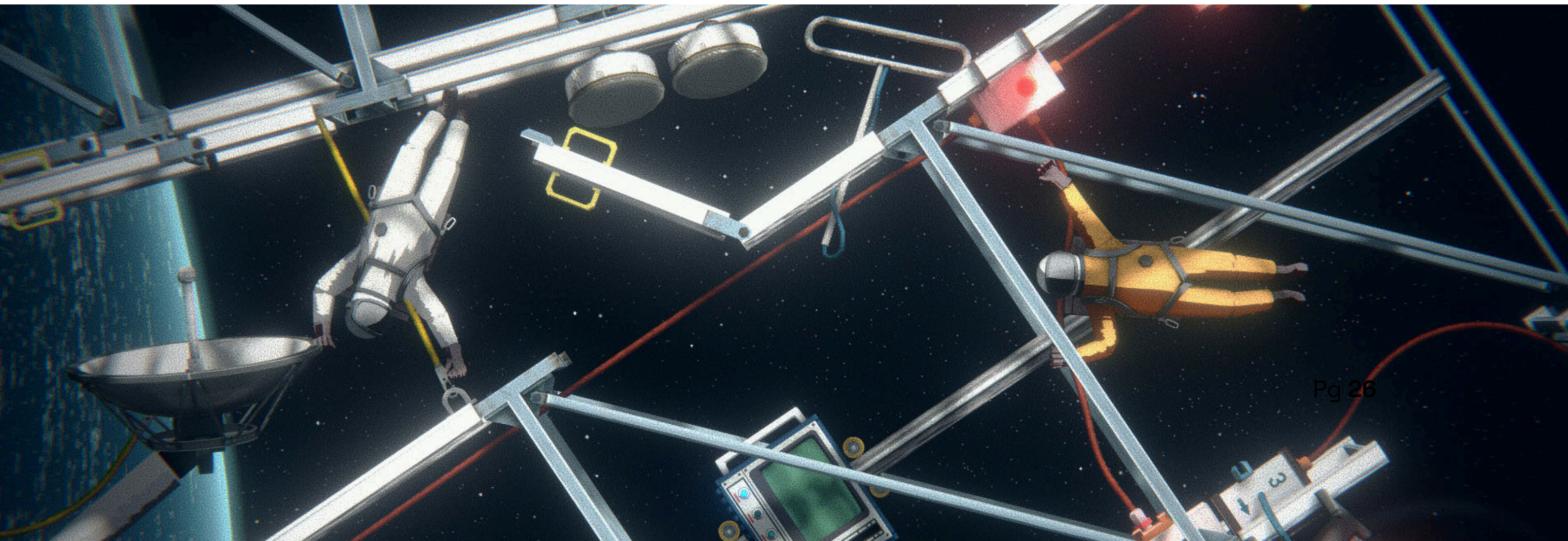
Not a single member of the National Cultural Policy policy advisory group, nor any of the five advisory panels, have any connection to games.

We conducted a review of the governance bodies of major cultural institutions with some responsibility for games and digital art — boards, advisory committees and senior executive teams — and identified whether those appointed had any experience in games.

Of the five major national cultural institutions with some responsibility for games or digital — Screen Australia, Creative Australia, the Classification Board, National Film and Sound Archive, and Australian Film, Television and Radio School — there is only one person with relevant experience.

One person with games experience out of seventy-eight appointments — and they sit on the Classification Review Board, not in any strategic or policy role.

2pt Interactive's Heavenly Bodies (2021), an anxiety inducing cooperative puzzle game in space.



Reviewing board and executive appointments to Commonwealth cultural agencies with responsibilities for games and interactive arts (original)

		Members	Games exp.
Creative Australia	Board	14	0
	Executive	5	0
Screen Australia	Board	8	0
	Executive	8	0
Classification Board		11	0
Classification Review Board		6	1
National Film and Sound Archive	Board	7	0
	Executive	7	0
Australian Film, Television and Radio School	Board	9	0
	Executive	3	0

State bodies do better. **Some like Screen NSW have a statutory obligation to appoint members with games experience**, while the South Australian Film Corporation and Screen Tasmania have been more proactive about recruiting local games leaders into these positions.

As this research draws on publicly available data — organisational charts, annual reports, public biographies on websites — our data is incomplete, but it is indicative.

Reviewing board and executive appointments to all relevant Commonwealth, state and territory agencies (original)

	Members	Games exp.
Arts and Creative	46	0
Screen	106	9

The lack of games figures in leadership positions means that **the intuitions, assumptions and language that shape screen arts policy will always be couched in film first** — despite games being just as economically and culturally important — while creative agencies are plagued with unconscious bias against practices that are seen as low or mere entertainment.

While many filmmakers in leadership positions do their best to promote gamemaking, the implicit hierarchy this lack of intuition creates — and how many fewer advocates our sector has compared to film — **makes it harder to compete with the much larger market of film projects and events**, and harder to defend the few bespoke programmes games have against rationalisation.

As two examples, Screen Australia set up two funds in response to the last National Cultural Policy — the First Nations Games Studio Fund and the Games Festivals Fund. These funds were set up to support the implementation of Revive's Five Pillars for the games sector, as well as in recognition that equivalent funds across the wider industry were dominated by film projects, both in administration and applications. **These funds were transformative for our sector but were sadly discontinued** and merged into the wider funds at the end of their initial two-year round.

This complaint is common across many arts sectors.

A "nothing about us without us" principle that aimed to ensure **working artists (not just business owners) are represented on every decision-making body from peer assessors to top-level agency boards** was advanced by many sectors in the last National Cultural Policy.

Bodies from Theatre Network Australia, Australian Screen Industry Guilds and Australian Writers Guild to Australian Recording Industry Association and Live Performance Australia advocated for sector-specific representation. The latter bodies succeeded with the creation of Writing Australia and Music Australia.

Given the breadth of arts practice and how few opportunities are available once necessary governance, finance and operations positions are filled, it is not feasible to embed this rule for every sector and every agency.

However, sectors that are sufficiently complex, economically and industrially important, and underserved by representation by other sectors deserve more.

All these factors are complicated by the comparably larger gap that is formed between the strict screen development Screen Australia is limited to under their enabling legislation and those prioritised by Creative Australia. **This practice gap then echoes out through cultural policies and strategies states and territories adopt** and eventually through to their own funding rounds.

These gaps are created by definitions and boundaries designed to respond to the needs of the film industry years in the past, rather than the way screen arts practitioners work in the 21st century.

These issues are not unique to games. **The feeling of playing second fiddle and falling into programmatic gaps is felt by other screen arts: online and comedy, audio and podcasts, and animation**.

These arts, like games, have practitioners who work across technical and creative work in their sector, across screen arts sectors and in many cases **work intersectionally across multiple non-screen art forms** — from visual arts and illustration, through installation and performance, music and composition, to writing and theatre.

In all these fields, but especially games, **the line between screen, arts and technology are blurred to the point of meaninglessness**. Policies, programs and the legislation underpinning all of it must erase those artificial boundaries.

The Drifter

Powerhoof | Melbourne | 2025

The Drifter, developed and self-published by Melbourne developer Powerhoof, is a point-and-click adventure set in a fictional Australian city. It follows a down-on-his-luck protagonist who has returned to his hometown for a funeral, only to be swept up in a dark conspiracy.

Only available on PC with console releases to follow in future, ***The Drifter* has sold 88,000 units** — with 28,000 sold in the month after its release. To date, the game has generated **approximately $1.6m AUD in Steam sales**.

Of its six nominations at the 2025 Australian Game Developer Awards, ***The Drifter* won four awards: Game of the Year, Excellence in Visual Art, Excellent in Narrative, and Excellence in Sound Design**.

The Drifter **creatively recreates Australian landscapes, people, and stories**, which are woven through its science-fiction narrative. The game is stylistically reminiscent of Australian thriller films, reflecting how Australian arts inform, and are informed by, other artistic practices.

Set a national definition of games

Australia lacks a coherent and nationally-consistent definition of games. The majority of games funding comes from state screen agencies, restricted by legislation to only fund screen projects or a few offline projects that directly aid screen.

Some creative agencies — with their wider scope — will occasionally include interactive arts in their classification schema, although more often **non-digital games or interactive arts are bundled in with "experimental arts" or excluded from creative programs altogether**.

Any successful national cultural policy for games needs to **adopt an expansive and flexible definition of games** that recognises that — while the majority of successful games will remain digital, board or tabletop — **gamemaking is a highly experimental artform that is treated as a toolbox by other arts practitioners** for their own work.

Playful spaces at a library or public square, the trivia night at the local pub, the play that asks an audience member to improvise their participation — these are games as much as a videogame or a boardgame are.

They might not need as much funding support, nor do the policies and programs that support these forms necessarily look the same as those that support classic games.

But **our national policies should not discriminate by format** nor should they ignore the cultural contribution of the rich and deep games ecosystem. We would not accept our cultural policies ignoring film festivals or experimental films while pursuing blockbusters. We should expect the same of games.

Our instincts are not to be prescriptive. "What are games?" has triggered as many arguments as "Are games art?". Games are ever-changing, **moving with the speed of technological innovation** and whatever experimental, transgressive and intersectional practice gamemakers are pursuing.

Canada's screen agency, the Canadian Media Fund, moved away from platform definitions like film and games towards a more **functional** approach — **interactive storytelling**, **linear storytelling** and **industry support**.

Our working group has adopted a very expansive definition of games that avoids defining games by the medium — screen, tabletop, et cetera — in favour of **themes** which unite them all:

- **interaction**,
- **interface** and
- **active participation**

Games are anti-passive. In all their forms, they blur the line between audience and participant, performer and performed-to.

Throughout, we use games and play interchangeably. We refer to everyone who incorporates play in their own artistic practice as gamemakers, and the audiences as playercreators, to recognise their own active contributions as essential to the art.

Unfortunately, that approach is not compatible with the need for strict definitions in legislation, regulations or grant eligibility.

As an alternative, games could be defined as a kind of **nested practice**: a series of cascading categories that get progressively constrained, where every category before contains all the categories below.

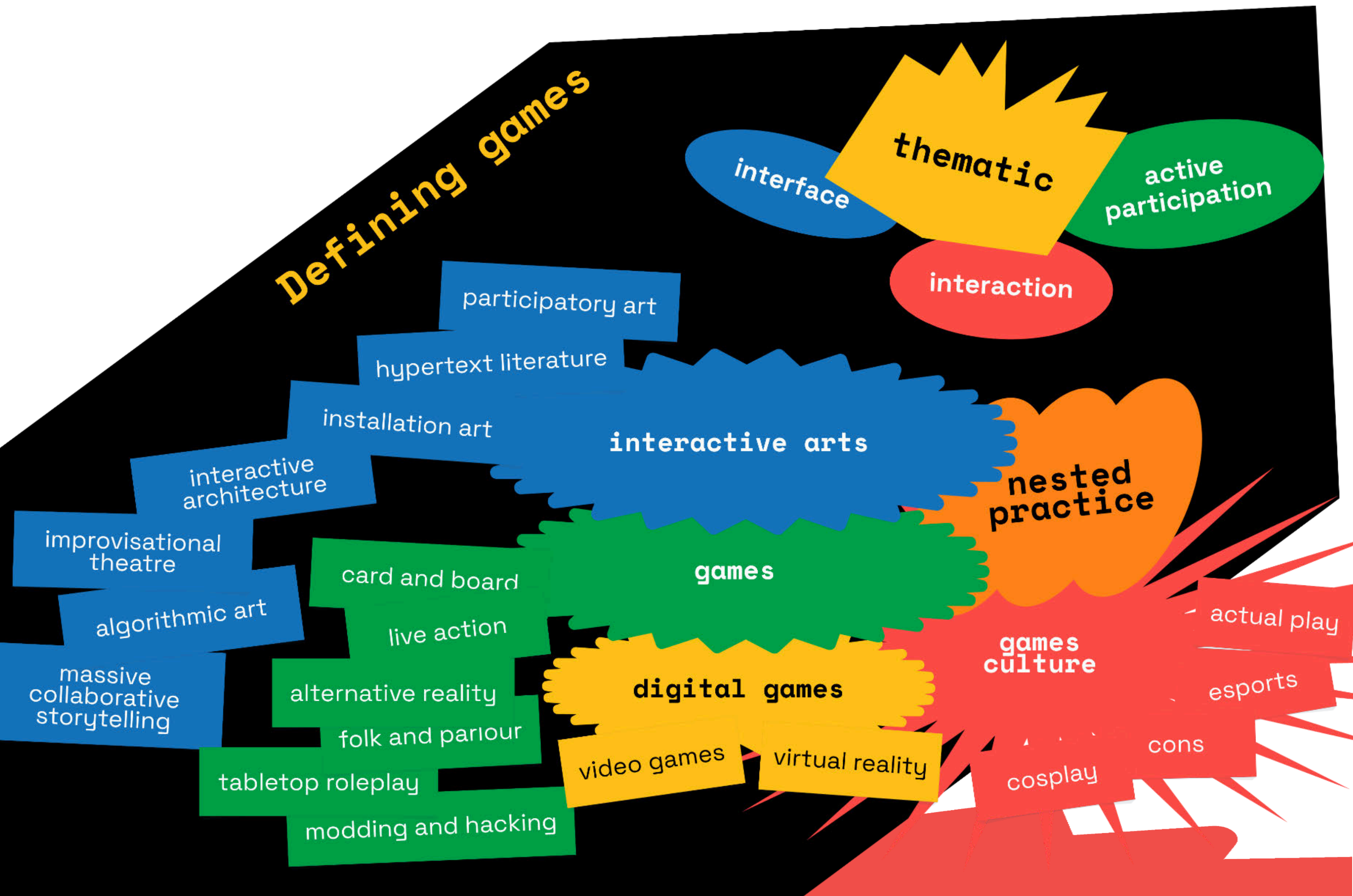
To highlight and correct for the distortions created by the games funding ecosystem being limited to screen agencies with a legislated obligation to only fund screen content, creative agencies need to adopt a more expansive definition — while screen agencies should understand these cascading practices act as a pipeline for talent.

interactive arts

The broadest category — which includes many practices that would be captured by Creative Australia's existing *experimental and emerging arts* category despite being a distinct (if constantly evolving) practice for over a century — captures all games, as well as many interdisciplinary arts practices where the art itself is changed by the audience viewing or interacting with it.

In institutional settings, interactive arts typically take the form of **interactive installation art**, **improvisational theatre** or **participatory or communal art**. Interactive installations like Douglas Wilson's *Canopy Co-op* (2023) challenge players' relationship with space and their own senses and unlock greater empathy with people who do not have the full use of their own senses.

Interactive architecture and the concept of **playable cities** have grown as an architectural and city-building practice over recent years but owe as much if not more of their practices' lineage to gamemaking and game design than architecture. Urban installations like Helen Kwok's *Street Tape* (2020) and Troy Innocent's *64 Ways of Being* (2021) have both featured at Freeplay.



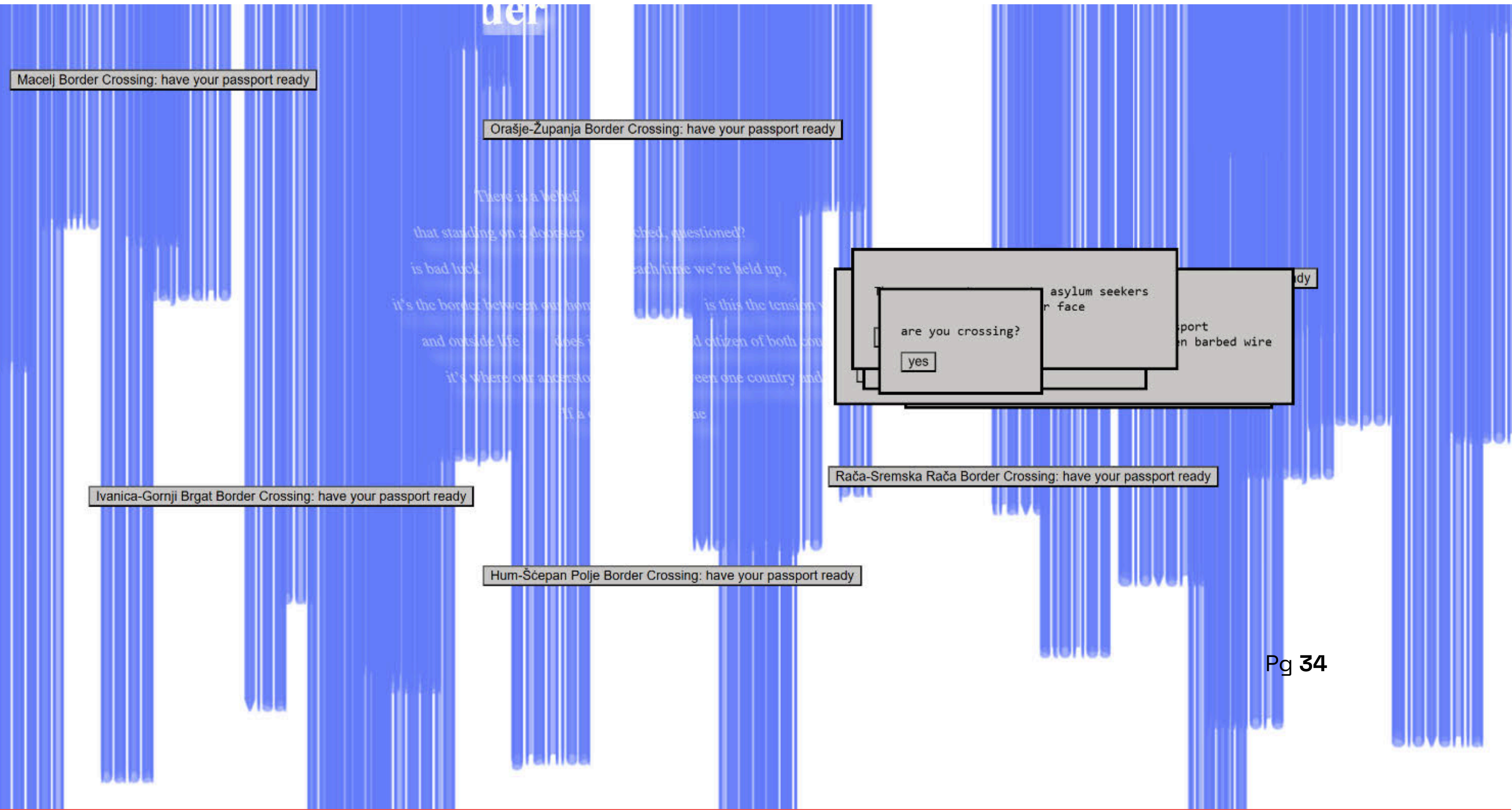
The proliferation of personal computers and the internet in the 90s led to a simultaneous proliferation of interactive arts. **Collaborative storytelling** went from being something a small group of writers can do, to thousands. This led to projects like the *SCP Foundation* (2008) which continues to iterate today.

Massive online collaborative storytelling developed hand-in-hand with **hypertext literature**, where stories unfold through links and nested searchbars — a practice that has a large crossover with the more conventionally "video gamey" **visual novels**. Cecile Richard's *Under a Star Called Sun* (2021) and Vidya Rajan's *In Search of Lost Scroll* (2023) are both Freeplay Award winners and are celebrated visual novels in literature circles.

The digital journal *Crawlspace* has been publishing interactive and multimedia art from local and international artists since 2022. These games-like artworks use the web browser as a platform to explore artistic and poetic applications of technology.

The Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts has created a new program, *boorda yeyi*, to support local artists building careers in immersive, experimental and interactive art, including supporting the creation of new artworks that utilise virtual reality, augmented reality, projection mapping and motion capture.

Crawlspace journal (2026 edition)



games

Within interactive arts are the manifold forms and artistic practices that make up games — a form of play that is structured and bounded, where a new alternative consensus reality with new rules and strictures are defined for and by those playing within those bounds.

Everyone plays games. **Folk and parlour games** have been around as long as society has. **Boardgames and card games** are played by almost everyone some time in their life. Some of the world's most popular boardgames are Australian, from *Nightmare* (1991) to *Sushi Go!* (2013).

Many workplaces from design agencies to consultancies to militaries use **serious games** as a way to break through psychological barriers to creativity. These practices evolved into the modern **tabletop game** practice, best known by the archetypical *Dungeons & Dragons*, but encompass a wide range of storytelling, roleplaying and tactical games. *Relics* (2020) and *The Good Society* (2019) are award-winning Australian tabletop games. *Blood on the Clocktower* (2022) became one of the world's best-selling tabletop games **spawning television spinoffs and touring live shows**.

Live action games would be most familiar to people through TV shows. Shows like *The Amazing Race* and *Survivor* owe their inspiration to live action practice — which ranges from reenactment and crisis simulation to city-wide games like *Assassin* and *Zombies*. Sydney's *Zedtown* (2014) and Melbourne's *Watch The Skies* (2019) had hundreds of participants over days of gameplay. The explosion of **escape rooms** and **immersive experiences** over the last ten years follow many of the same design lineages as live action games.

Through the internet, live action and tabletop game practices merged into **alternative reality games**, impossibly complex puzzles and networked narratives that need thousands of people to crack — the best known being *Perplex City* (2005) and *I Love Bees* (2004). People may not even realise they're seeing an ARG, with real websites, shell companies and even whole office buildings filled with actors for weeks on end being part of these elaborate games, blurring the lines of fiction, gameplay with just real life.

digital games

Now squarely in territory familiar to most people, digital games — which includes **videogames, browser games and virtual reality games** — have been embedded in our public screen funding programs for years.

More so than film, gamemaking is a deeply intersectional arts practice. Some of Australia's most successful gamemakers don't have a games or screen background at all.

The award-winning *Mixtape* (2026)'s Johnny Galvatron and *Getting Over It* (2017)'s Bennett Foddy were touring musicians and recording artists. Dan Golding, composer of *Untitled Goose Game*'s ground-breaking soundtrack, is a radio host and composer. The team behind the upcoming *My Arms Are Longer Now* (2026) are improv comedians and illustrators who decided to develop a game that's on track to become one of Australia's bestselling.

This underlines the importance of **understanding digital games as the culmination of a funnel of talent that pulls from other — primarily non-screen — arts sectors**.

Toot Games' My Arms Are Longer Now (upcoming)

Here's just a few of the best-selling, critically-acclaimed and award-winning Australian digital games from the last five years:

Game	Studio	Year
Big Walk	House House	2026
Don't Stop Girlypop!	Funny Fintan	2026
Mixtape	Beethoven Dinosaur	2026
Baby Steps	Bennett Foddy	2025
Silksong	Team Cherry	2025
Mars First Logistics	Shape Shop	2025
The Drifter	Powerhoof	2025
Schedule 1	TVGS	2025
Dead Static Drive	Reuben	2025
Conscript	Catchweight	2024
Proximate	Cain Maddox	2024
Leap Year	Daniel Linssen	2024
Solium Infernum	League of Geeks	2024
Frog Detective: Corruption at Cowboy County	worm club	2023
Stray Gods: The Roleplaying Musical	Summerfall Studios	2023
Knuckle Sandwich	Andy Brophy	2023
Final Profit	Brent Arnold	2023
A Date With Death	Two and a Half	2023
Queer Man Peering Into a Rock Pool.jpg	Fuzzy Ghost	2022
Cult of the Lamb	Massive Monster	2022
Wayward Strand	Ghost Pattern	2022
Heavenly Bodies	2pt Interactive	2021
Unpacking	Witch Beam	2021
Apartment	Kalonica Quigley	2021

games culture

Games culture — sometimes called fandom — is the ecosystem of events, media and crafts that **fans generate to celebrate their favourite games**, and **industry creates to sustain itself and create a strong industrial culture.** Some of this is industry-facing, with a vibrant ecosystem of sector support organisations (like us), industry media and secondary professions that specialise in supporting gamemakers.

Much of it is consumer-facing. "Cons" — **conventions, expos and live shows** — have been a mainstay of games culture for decades, with *PAX* in Melbourne and *Supernova* touring around Australia attended by tens of thousands of people every year.

Cosplay, a distinct fashion practice that aims to bring fictional characters to life with elaborate costuming and animatronics, introduced thousands of Australians to textile and sculpting practices, reinvigorating their craft organisations and schools.

Esports — the transformation of competitive multiplayer games into spectator sports — now rank alongside AFL and cricket as some of the most watched sports in Australia.

Games media had a strong heritage in Australia with long-running television shows like *Good Game* and magazines like *Hyper.* Sadly, many games outlets closed or sold to disreputable companies over the last decade leaving a fairly hollow sector. New initiatives like *CONTINUE*, *Back Pocket* and *Thumb Cramps* have successfully sustained themselves on subscriptions and crowdfunding but struggle to scale or reach new audiences.

Actual play, a practice that has emerged out of improvisational theatre and tabletop games, is now one of the most widely consumed forms of unscripted television in the world, with *Critical Role* and *Dimension 20* being watched by millions and selling out ICC Sydney and Rod Laver Arena for live tours. Australian actual plays *Dragon Friends* and *Trope* are very popular, selling out regular live shows and supporting a vibrant ecosystem of independent film studios, theatres and improv schools.

Blood on the Clocktower

The Pandemonium Institute | Sydney | 2022

Developed and published by Sydney-based gamemakers at The Pandemonium Institute, *Blood on the Clocktower* is a social deduction tabletop game where players take a job in a demon-infested Victorian town and teams secretly work together to win.

Over 50,000 copies of the game have been sold globally, for an estimated revenue of over $10 million AUD. A fan favourite from the start, *Blood on the Clocktower* was crowdfunded via Kickstarter, raising $570,000 USD — far exceeding its $65,000 USD goal.

The game received critical acclaim and was named as one of the world's best social deduction games. It received the **Best Party Game award at the 2022 Tabletop Gaming Awards,** and remains the #1 party game on boardgamegeek, the largest review aggregator for tabletop games.

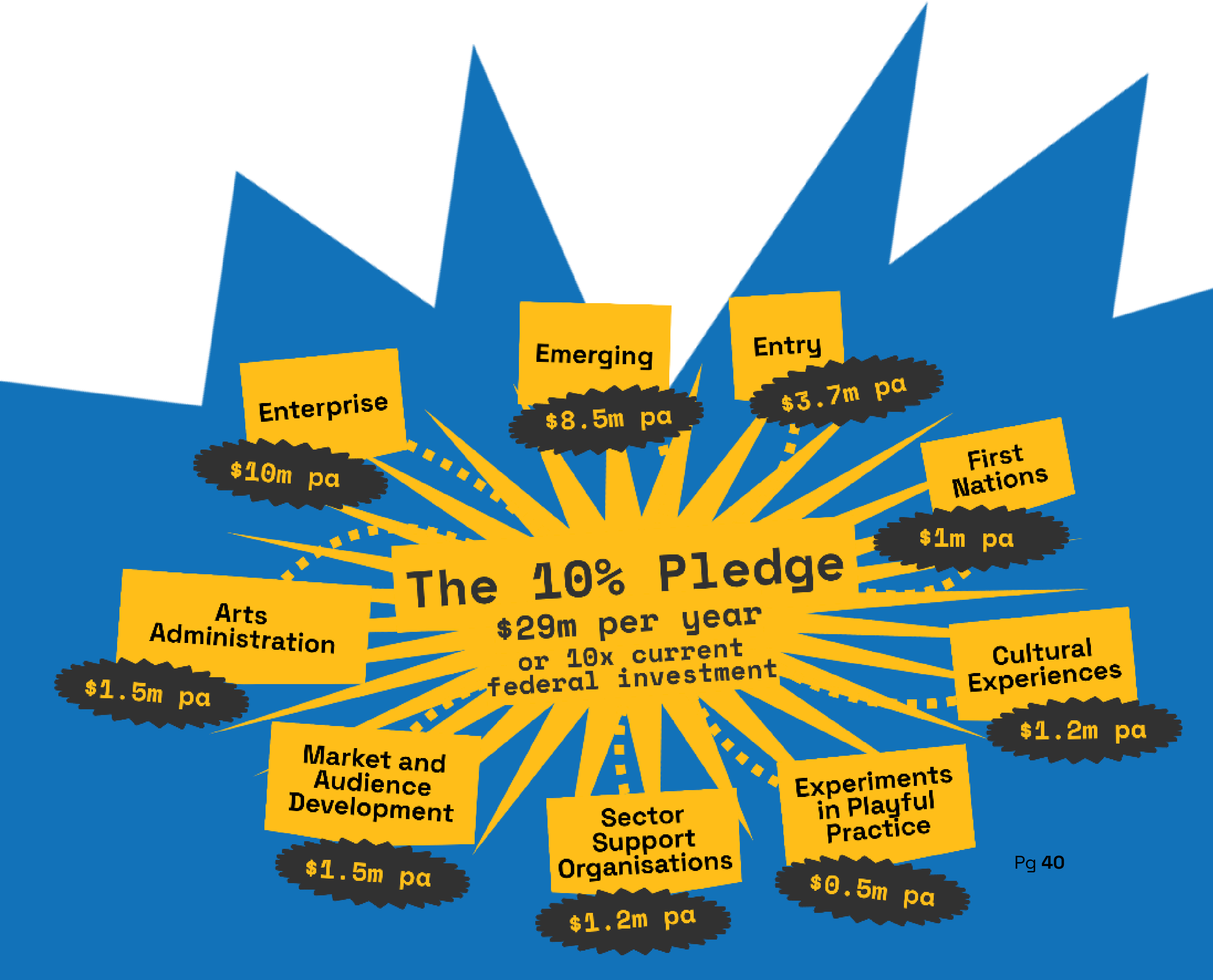
Since 2023, a live show version of *Blood on the Clocktower* has been performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Several online television outlets like Dropout and Yogscast have also adapted it for audience of millions.

Pledge to match 10% of national film funding

Australia's public funding for games and interactive arts is extremely inconsistent between states and territories. **The Victorian Government provides nearly 70% of all public investment in games nationally**.

The Commonwealth funds the majority of other screen content but leaves the lion's share of games funding to states, resulting in gamemakers being forced to move cities to pursue even brief opportunities.

Gamemaking is a dispersed, digital arts practice. Many gamemakers, including those in established studios, work remotely, often with inter-state collaborators, and gamemakers see themselves as much a part of a global community of creators as they are connected to a local scene. Having such a significant proportion of **public funding being geographically locked into one part of the country is unsustainable** and not conducive to a growing sector.



It's time for the Commonwealth to **step up and plug the gap**. We are calling on the Commonwealth to **match funding for the games sector to 10% of total funding for film production**. Once you exclude existing state investment, this works out to **approximately $29 million per year**.

This is a modest request. Games employ at least 10% of the workforce film production does and generate roughly two thirds of the domestic revenue as film. **But games receive only 3% as much public funding as film production**.

Comparing Commonwealth, state and territory funding in 2023/24 (ABS, 2024)

	Interactive arts (inc. digital games)		Film and video production	
Totals	***$11.4m***		***$378.4m***	
Commonwealth	**$2.1m**	**18.3%**	**$149.8m**	**39.6%**
New South Wales	$0.8m	7.0%	$59.4m	15.7%
Victoria	$8.0m	69.6%	$64.2m	17.0%
Queensland	$0.1m	0.9%	$42.9m	11.3%
South Australia	$0.1m	0.9%	$9.9m	2.6%
Western Australia	$0.2m	1.7%	$44.3m	11.7%
Tasmania	$0.1m	0.9%	$3.0m	0.8%
Northern Territory	$0.1m	0.9%	$3.1m	0.8%
Australian Capital Territory	$0.0m	0.0%	$1.9m	0.5%

Now is the time. Several **other countries have made significant investments in interactive arts over the last three years** in dual recognition of the risk to the sector from global economic disruption and the possibility for rapid sectoral growth following localised disruptions to the sector in the US.

Last year, Germany announced a raft of new tax offsets along with over **$203m AUD annual public investment in interactive arts** — up from $81m AUD in 2024 — ranging from commercial support, co-investment in a tripartite trade board for games, and a dedicated games culture foundation that **supports serious, social and non-commercial gamemaking** and events.

Earlier this year, the United Kingdom announced they would double games sector funding to $19m AUD per year as part of their Games Industry Sector Plan which would also see a $1m AUD annual investment in games festivals, a **new publicly funded Video Games Council** and a national strategy for games.

In 2024/25, Canada's Canadian Media Fund, which collates both Canadian Government funding for screen industries and the proceeds of the CanCon local content regulations, disbursed $48m AUD in funding to interactive arts projects and $0.7m AUD in funding for games sector support organisations. This is in addition to $11.5m AUD in funding from the Canadian Council of the Arts for non-commercial media and digital arts, which includes gamemakers and their sector support organisations.

In their first funding round for 2026, the Norwegian Film Institute, Norway's government agency responsible for film, drama, and games, awarded $2.8m AUD in funding to Norwegian games. This scheme is targeted solely at digital games development and runs three times a year.

Last year, the New Zealand Government doubled the funding for the Centre of Digital Excellence, a sector support organisation that disburses grants and delivers programmes for early career gamemakers, building on the Game Development Sector Rebate established in 2023.

Comparing countries' indicative aggregated public funding for games and interactive art for the next financial year, excluding any tax offset or similar scheme (original)

	Public funding in AUD (ex. tax offsets)	**Funding per person** (national population)
Australia	$11.4m	$0.42
Germany	$203.0m	$2.43
Canada	$60.2m	$1.49
New Zealand	$4.5m	$0.85
Norway	$2.8m	$0.49
United Kingdom	$19.0m	$0.27

This scale of public investment has seen these other countries' games ecosystems balloon over recent years. Canada's games sector employs more than 34,000 creative workers and contributes $5.4 billion AUD to its economy, while New Zealand's generates $655 million AUD and is on track to hit $1 billion NZD two years ahead of schedule in 2028.

Much like for other sectors, the cost of producing a game has also increased significantly over the last ten years. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' most recent Film, Television and Digital Games industry dataset from 2023, **the average cost of producing a digital game increased by 226% over seven years** — from $264,000 to $595,000 per production.

What these figures obscure, however, is that the overall increase of games produced and released were driven by growth at both the bottom and top end of the market. Over this period **it became easier and cheaper for individuals to release their own game to market** — thanks to the advent of standardised shopfronts, the democratisation of the skills required to make games via the internet, and engines-as-a-service like Unity — while **simultaneously becoming more expensive for large ventures with mass appeal**.

Games — much like other media and screen arts — struggle to access philanthropic funding, which act as important sources of funding for non-commercial sector support organisations, as well as early career and emerging artists in other creative sectors. **Philanthropists tend to see media and screen arts as either fundamentally commercial or culturally irrelevant** — regardless of the viability or artistic merit of individual programmes or the widespread cultural impact of the medium. Many arts institutions, particularly sector support organisations, have been able to **rely on small project funding from philanthropic funders in between major government funding rounds** — but that is not a luxury afforded to screen arts.

We see **a global economy that has made the domestic games industry more vulnerable to disruption,** at a time when the games sector employs more people, is more highly engaged with domestic and international audiences, in a more competitive global funding environment.

Australia needs a funding ecosystem as diverse and robust as the sector it's serving. We propose that 10% Pledge — $29 million — be **split nine ways**: each to hold up a distinct and important part of the games ecosystem.

enterprise and scale — $10m per year

The success of the Digital Games Tax Offset (DGTO) has meant that many larger Australian developers report **more certainty and stability in their production than ever before**. Even so, they still face challenges in trying to compete with large consolidated global publishers with in-house studios, especially those taking advantage of the labour economics of outsourcing core development work to developing countries where wages are cheaper.

This cohort reflects the small number of mature studios who have shipped multiple titles and retain a sizable workforce between projects. Some of these studios are local offshoots of global powerhouses, while others are local studios who have successfully scaled.

These projects have budgets into the millions of dollars and have longer development cycles than smaller titles.

The biggest gaps this cohort face are the acquisition of appropriate senior talent and C-suite-level studio leadership to match the scale of their business, plus **post-production and distribution challenges**, especially long-tail community management and live service work, and scaling to be able to have **multiple projects at various stages of development at the same time**. Many of these challenges are best addressed with stronger trade agency support, a new export attraction agency or a new domestic publisher.

Other than the Producer Offset — on which the DGTO is modelled — the main public support for film production in Australia is from Screen Australia's Narrative Content Production Program. This fund is **functionally uncapped** with maximum eligible funding based on total project budget rather than an arbitrary cap set by the fund guidelines.

Games are explicitly excluded from the Narrative Content Production Program. Despite Screen Australia having an "online and direct-to-audience" category that includes virtual and augmented reality experiences, the guidelines note that any experience that is "primarily a game experience" must only use dedicated games funding — which are currently limited to a maximum contribution of $100,000 per project.

Providing at-scale direct funding to gamemakers modelled on the Narrative Content Production Program— with a similar combined cap with tax offsets — would **empower studios to scale earlier**. This cap should only apply to Commonwealth funding — not any state funding they might have secured.

	Proportion of project budget determines maximum funding	Combined cap for both direct funding and digital games tax offset
Up to $1,000,000	40%	Max. 50%
Up to $5,000,000	20%	
Over $5,000,000	15%	

Similarly to the arrangement for film, access to this **funding should be contingent on projects that engage Australian creative talent**, not just technical or back-office talent. Public arts funding should avoid subsidising large international studios taking advantage of Australia's highly skilled and affordable workforce while also accessing generous public subsidies.

Given the audience for this funding is more mature studios who most likely have relationships with major publishers, this funding should be structured as **concessional loans, profit-sharing agreements or an equity stake**.

State screen agencies have had considerable success with these models and, while they have relatively high upfront costs, have the potential to be **revenue-neutral or even cashflow-positive** for the administering agency.

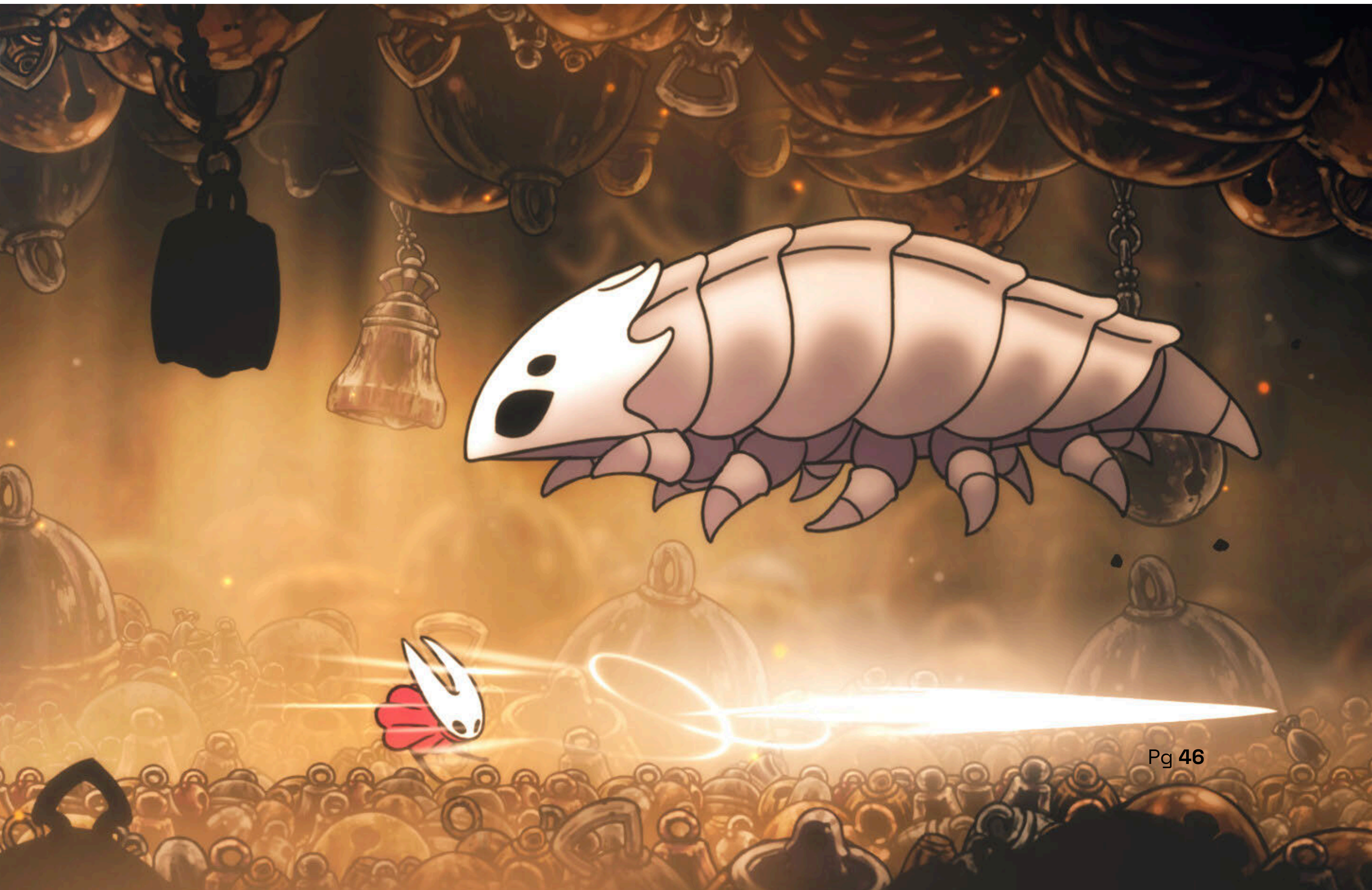
The DGTO's success does not mean it is faultless. We echo the calls from other games organisations to **reduce the annual total qualifying Australian development expenditure to be eligible for the digital games tax offset to $150,000 per year.**

That expenditure's scope also needs to be expanded to include marketing, distribution and community management roles which not only have significant overlap with creative work in games but are essential to the post-production of a game when other funding tends to dry up.

The flipside is that — unlike film's Producer Offset — **the Digital Games Tax Offset does not currently contain a Significant Australian Content test**. This has resulted in some projects in receipt of the offset having functionally no Australian creative input, **receiving a public screen arts subsidy to deliver functionally back-office IT projects** like server, systems and tool development.

The offset — particularly if the annual expenditure threshold is lowered and broadened — should be redesigned with some analogue to the Significant Australian Content test to ensure that **projects in receipt of this subsidy have Australian creative leadership, engage Australian creative workers and tell Australian stories**.

Team Cherry's Silksong (2025)



emerging studios — $8.5m per year

Most direct public funding for games at both federal and state levels have been directed towards this cohort: established gamemakers taking a risk to make something big together. **Form a studio, develop a prototype or thin vertical slice as a proof-of-concept, scale, and get it to market**.

It is no surprise either that this cohort creates some of Australia's most celebrated and best-selling games. **These are studios of 5 to 20 people who have the expertise and experience to make something great**, but might lack the networks or proven track record to secure international publishing deals.

The **success of the short-lived Australian Interactive Games Fund (AIGF) in 2012** — and how the fight to restore that fund defined games advocacy for the next decade — proves how important substantial direct grants are to derisk new ventures, help studios secure additional finance, and enable developers to push narrative and design boundaries that might spook conventional funders.

The AIGF allowed studios to apply for up to $500,000 per project. Amounts below $50,000 were provided as a direct grant, whereas those over $50,000 were treated as a recoupable investment.

The AIGF had $20m earmarked over three years ($6.5m per year), however the Fund was only allocated $10m over two years in the Budget ($5m per year) — before being discontinued entirely in the next Budget.

In 2019, the then-Opposition promised to restore the AIGF at $25m over three years ($8m per year) — **but when they came into government, the new Games Production Fund was only provided $12m over five years** ($2.4m per year).

The new GPF provides direct grants to studios up to $100,000 per project — provided the project's budget was less than $500,000, the point where the Digital Games Tax Offset would kick in. The GPF also did away with recoupable investments entirely.

Given what we know about how much more games cost to produce now compared to 10 years ago, **this budget cap and maximum grant cap are both insufficient for today's market**.

State funds have been quicker to respond. By comparison, VicScreen's Victorian Production Fund caps at $300,000 per stage and $500,000 per project, and Screen Queensland's Games Grants cap at $300,000 per project. This is much more aligned with the realities of modern development.

VicScreen's programs — and in particular how consistently they have been delivered year-on-year over the last decade — are a big part of why Melbourne is the home to most Australian gamemakers.

Regardless of the total pool of funds available, the Game Production Fund needs to increase its caps. A redesigned fund should:

- **increase its total budget cap to $1.5m per project**,
- **increase its direct grant cap up to $250,000 per project,** and
- **create a new stretch cap of up to $750,000 per project as a recoupable investment**, either concessional loans, revenue sharing agreement or an equity stake.

However, **providing only project-based funding for game studios risks perpetuating a workforce boom-and-bust cycle that entrenches sector precarity**. During this time, studios may shed contractors and early career creatives in between shipping a game and securing funding for the next project, which can take years. Some studios sustain themselves on contract work from major international publishers, but that work rarely allows studios to retain creative talent.

This is especially true for regional and experimental studios who might make multiple small releases a year in between large projects.

These small releases are often aimed at children, schools or cultural institutions — an experience exemplified by Secret Lab, the successful Hobart-based studio that produced *Night in the Woods* (2017) and has subsequently developed several small games for ABC's Play School and a tool called *Yarn Spinner* that helps gamemakers plan, write and better integrate more complex narrative and dialogue in their games, helping nearly 100 other indie games to market.

A parallel operational funding model could be set up to support studios on a continuous production basis rather than a per-project basis. Studios could choose whether to be funded at a higher rate per-project — or take a lower rate of multi-year funding with performance measured against reach rather than project deliverables, like other artforms.

Offering studios a choice to take up to $100,000 per year for up to four years would make small studios more sustainable.

For studios in regional areas — namely outside of Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney and Perth — the cap should grow to $250,000 per year to reflect the need to attract and retain talent and the substantial risks gamemakers take in relocating to regions with fewer opportunities.

Secret Lab's Night In The Woods (2017)

entry and early career gamemakers — $3.9m per year

Like any career in the arts, it is rare for someone to decide they want to make games in high school, study gamemaking at university, land an entry level job at a developer and work their way up to making their own game.

Entry level jobs are few and far between — especially doing creative work — and those that do exist tend to be very poorly paid, short term and often subject to poor working conditions associated with “crunch”, the sprints just before project milestones.

Few larger studios have the resources or risk appetite to take a chance on new projects from inside their own teams — and smaller studios have fewer opportunities to upskill.

This leaves most gamemakers working another full-time job — often not in games at all — while working on their own projects outside of business hours. To this group, **the biggest barrier to making games is their own personal financial risk**.

Developing a prototype or vertical slice for a funder takes thousands of hours of work. Early career gamemakers are being asked to step away from their full-time job, risking their home and career and going into significant personal debt, to take a high risk gamble for what rarely amounts to enough initial investment to pay their own salary, let alone any foregone. If that game successfully ships, they might recoup most of that — but that’s a big if.

It’s at this stage — the initial personal risk assessment — that direct supports are critical.

The simplest fix is the hardest to do. Artists from all sectors talk about the 1990s as a golden age for artistic innovation and creativity because artists could afford rent, bills and the bare essentials just on government income support payments. Gigging, sales and grants were bonuses, not a lifeline.

Gamemakers, like any artists, would be a huge beneficiary of raising the rate of JobSeeker and Rent Assistance to a livable wage.

Short of that, direct grants and wage subsidies aimed at supporting early career and entry level gamemakers need to be **calibrated at a high enough level to offset the risk those gamemakers are taking to pursue their practice**.

Anything less reinforces the same class divide in every other art form, where people with family safety nets, who can speak the language of grantwriting and who went to the right schools and events to set up personal networks — those who are arguably less in need of public support to create — are better placed to know about, apply for and secure arts grants.

That means direct grants for early career artists need to:

- have **project caps set at a high enough threshold to cover full-time wages** for the duration of the project, and
- be simple enough to apply for and acquit that people new to the arts and gamemaking can **navigate the process without sacrificing too much of their own time and creative energy**.

Compare that with Screen Australia's current early career grants program — the Emerging Gamemakers Fund. **The fund is well designed for its target audience**. It is flexible in the support it provides and supports the development — not just delivery — of new creative projects. Both emerging independent gamemakers and more established ones looking to experiment in their practice more are eligible to apply. Gamemakers can choose to use this to fund a prototype to pitch for a larger project — or deliver a micro-scale game.

The problem is the quantum. The Emerging Gamemakers Fund is capped at $30,000 for projects up to $500,000. The project cap — while on the smaller end — would cover most prototypes and micro-scale games. But **$30,000 would barely stretch to cover licences, IT equipment and renting a coworking space — let alone wages** at a sufficient rate to put early career gamemakers' minds at ease at stepping away from their full time job.

Raising that cap to $100,000 for solo gamemakers or $250,000 for small teams would provide more certainty and peace of mind to working artists.

Once that initial risk proposition is passed, early career gamemakers get a better return on public investment from indirect support.

Coworking spaces, incubators and residencies remove much of the non-personal overheads for solo or small teams of developers while providing access to mentors and new networks. Programs like ACMI's *ACMI X*, Screen Queensland's *Games Residency*, Massive Monster's *MASS Co.*, City of Melbourne's *Collins Street Studios*, and GDAA's *The Arcade* have proven track records of fostering new talent and keeping creatives in the sector.

Some screen agencies have translated successful placements and internship programs from film to games or supported business leadership and mentorship programmes provided by successful studios or consultancies.

The provision of these indirect supports have been very inconsistent nationally — in part because they rely on a strong local ecosystem already existing but mostly because **VicScreen and Screen Queensland have more heavily invested in them than other state governments**.

Some funding for entry and early career gamemakers should be reserved to level the playing field and make up for some state government's unwillingness to provide these supports themselves. **A Regional Games Infrastructure Fund should provide recurring funding to local sector support organisations outside Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane** to provide some of the supporting infrastructure those cities benefit from.

Beethoven and Dinosaur's Mixtape (2026)

First Nations gamemakers — $1m per year

Screen Australia quietly dissolving the First Nations Games Studio Fund is a sad reflection of *Revive*'s commitment to *First Nations First*. Without this fund, there is **a vacuum left behind in the funding landscape for First Nations games studios**.

Screen Australia provides dedicated funding for First Nations projects in areas such as documentary and film, but not games. Creative Australia explicitly excludes gamemakers and games projects.

In the last few years, several new and exciting First Nations-led projects have been established and supported through state and federal grants. **The First Nations Games Studio Fund could have ensured the continued support of these creative professionals over the long term**.

First Nations creatives in the games sector, like other marginalised workers, benefit from systemic support to address the historic exclusionary practices — not "underrepresentation" — in the arts. This support **must be First Nations-led** and sufficiently funded to reach both emerging or established gamemakers, or those looking to change careers.

First Nations games developers need to be trusted and empowered to tell First Nations stories. Application practices often require any projects containing First Nations content to provide additional documentation regarding the intention, detail, and consultation plans — **regardless of whether the project is led by a First Nations person or team**.

This practice makes sense for projects who need to engage responsibly with First Nations communities, but is burdensome for First Nations peoples telling their own stories. Paradoxically, **requiring additional strategic documentation proving their own connections with First Nations culture, country and community creates a barrier for First Nations peoples** to access meaningful funding and thereby engaging in the games development industry at all.

Restoring the First Nations Games Studio Fund at $1 million per year — with additional resources for mentorship, training and leadership enabling programmes for First Nations gamemakers to ensure the success of both the recipient studios and the fund itself — is critical to the next National Cultural Policy living up to its *First Nations First* pillar. **Without it, a major cultural sector is functionally ignoring First Nations creatives and the stories they have to tell**.

This needs to come hand in hand with rethinking how evidence of First Nations consultation, engagement and management of Indigenous cultural intellectual property is managed in grant applications from First Nations led projects — and a commitment to not pigeonholing First Nations-led projects into just smaller dedicated First Nations funds when they could be eligible to access larger general funds.

There is an opportunity to support a thriving ecosystem of First Nations games. **Games provide a unique opportunity to tell immersive stories grounded in culture and self-determination**, reflecting the diversity of experiences on this continent.

Agencies need to make a deliberate effort to engage with First Nations gamemakers — not just in consultation, but to co-create the future of our industry.

First Nations-led gamemakers Wali Studio's Wyrmspace Tactics (upcoming)

experiences at cultural institutions — $1m per year

Museums, galleries, heritage sites and cultural institutions have been integrating play and game design into their curation for decades. The sector has responded to evolving audience needs and changes of public perceptions of these institutions, where audiences are seeking new experiences that are interactive, playful and engaging when visiting places of learning and community.

More than any other spaces, **cultural institutions seamlessly blend digital games, non-digital games, interactive art and other artforms into totalising immersive experiences**. By facilitating interaction and participation, these experiences endeavor to change how people make meaning from our culture.

Cultural institutions in Australia have been world leaders in this — and almost entirely off their own bat. **There have been few dedicated government legislations and programs encouraging these institutions to adopt these innovative models**.

Notably, three major Australian cultural institutions, ACMI, the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) and Powerhouse Museum, partnered together on a ground-breaking joint acquisition into their collections with the successful Australian-made videogame *Untitled Goose Game.* This partnership was to further digital preservation efforts and form a national video game collection for the benefit of the Australian public. Games are already being utilised for institutions in Australia to expand collecting and engagement practices.

Despite this, these experiences are expensive and unevenly distributed around the country. While institutions in Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane have had the resources and local gamemaking networks to take chances on immersive experiences, **regional institutions have not had the privilege due to staffing, equipment and funding restraints**. Even large institutions that have invested heavily in immersion, do not always have the flexibility within their existing funding envelope to experiment or push boundaries as much as they would like.

A dedicated project fund for significant cultural institutions within the GLAM sector would:

- support the **creation and curation of new playful exhibitions**,
- create **tourable exhibitions packages** for regional institutions to licence,
- engage gamemakers as **guest curators**,
- **commission custom games** for exhibitions,
- host **playful special events** like the Hellenic Museum's LORE, and
- **licence Australian games** to cultural institutions globally.

Depending on national priorities, that could look like one headline exhibition — which costs well in excess of $1 million — or many smaller projects.

Notably this is not an operational fund that major institutions could shift costs from their existing funding envelopes across to make room for other non-games projects. This is about making museum games a more accessible and stable field of practice.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's Atmospheric Memory (2023), an interactive, immersive and multi-sensory exhibition at the Powerhouse, curated by José Luis de Vicente and photographed by Zan Wimberly

experiments in playful practice — $0.5m per year

This is a catch-all for projects that fall outside the mainstream of games production in Australia today — namely **how we would financially support inter-arts, transmedia and non-digital projects that are built on gamemaking as an artistic practice**.

There are **few programs anywhere in Australia explicitly aimed at crosspollinating gamemaking with other arts sectors** — despite gamemakers on one hand benefiting from the expertise of visual and textile artists, building and lighting designers, and writers as much as film does, while many other arts practices particularly in performing arts leveraging game design systems in their own practice.

Similarly, **non-digital gamemakers struggle to compete with more traditional formats in their respective arts practice categories**, typically *community arts* for live action games, *literature* for visual novels, and *experimental and emerging arts* or *multi-arts* for everything else. Not coincidentally these are also **the four categories that are the least supported areas of practice by overall investment from Creative Australia**.

A $500,000 annual interactive arts fund should be ringfenced and attached to **a dedicated *interactive arts* practice area for Creative Australia** to allocate.

Dropout's television adaptation of Blood on the Clocktower (2025)

funding for sector support — $1.2m per year

Sector support organisations provide critical social infrastructure that sustains and empowers both artists and industry. They deliver events and festivals, conduct research and advocacy, create industry and professional networks, provide training and mentorship programs, commission and exhibit new works, and more.

Currently, **no sector support organisation for games receives multi-year funding anywhere in Australia**. Several — including Freeplay — are privileged to have received limited public support for some of our events.

Without dedicated funding, there can be no dedicated workforce. Outside of games-adjacent roles in cultural institutions, universities and screen agencies, there are no full time workers in games support who do not either work as a private business consultant or work for IGEA, the peak body for publishers and large studios. This naturally constrains the research, advocacy and programmes they run — particularly for early career, low-income and marginalised people.

Most of our sector's support organisations are entirely volunteer-run. This research project and the hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars in travel behind this consultation were conducted for free by volunteers. Almost all industry events in the country are designed and curated by volunteers — with a lucky few able to afford to pay event service staff and creative talent for their contributions.

Around Australia, **most funding for sector support organisations come from creative agencies, not screen agencies**. Creative agencies offer multi-year core funding rounds at a significant enough scale to cover wages, overheads and some programs.

Creative Australia's Four Year Investment for Organisations fund for example funds over 160 organisations between $100,000 and $500,000 per year — many of which also access philanthropic funding, other arts project and infrastructure funding and receive income through fees for service and ticket sales.

The few funding opportunities for sector support organisations offered by screen agencies are limited to short-term industry event funding. **Screen agencies are not resourced by governments to support the sector in the same way creative agencies are**. Few if any philanthropic funders fund any screen projects either — and none support games.

Freeplay had benefited for some years from an ambiguity as to whether games were supported by creative or screen agencies in Victoria — which enabled us to access their two-year Creative Ventures core funding, aimed at small and emerging sector support organisations. That two-year period allowed us to hire creative directors on an ongoing basis for the first time and significantly expand our professional development and exhibiting programs.

Unfortunately last year, a policy change amid a more constrained fiscal environment saw responsibility for games shifted fully to VicScreen who were not resourced to support sector support organisations. Melbourne International Games Week — one of the most important industry events globally — was shifted to ACMI. Creative Victoria subsequently cancelled the Creative Ventures program and shrunk their larger four-year Creative Enterprises program. **Of the 81 arts organisations supported by Creative Enterprises in the 2026-2029 funding round, none are games or interactive arts organisations**.

A similar story unfolded at Screen Australia.

For two years, **Screen Australia set up the Games Festivals and Events Fund** in recognition that games industry events have different funding needs and operational conditions to film festivals — and were struggling to compete with film festivals, film awards and film producer conferences to access screen culture funding which tended to be led and assessed by film leaders.

That new fund supported Freeplay, ALT, Play Now, Frosty, Queensland Games Festival, Level Up Tasmania and more. Most of those events had not received public support before, certainly not at the scale offered by this fund. This short burst of investment led to a flourishing of games events and games festivals and events have now been established in almost every capital city around Australia.

The Games Festivals and Events Fund was cancelled last year and **once again rolled into Screen Industry Partnerships to compete with major consumer-facing film festivals and film industry conferences**.

As a result, games sector events are back to sustaining themselves on volunteer effort and the occasional consumer-facing event that can be priced sufficiently high to be profitable.

Games sector support organisations and the events we run only ever see sufficient support in the rare event that screen agencies have enough cash to spare and a strong champion for games among their senior ranks.

Sector support organisations have been struggling for years, and whole sectors have been un- or under-served as a result. **Creative Australia recognised that these gaps were undermining the entire artistic ecosystem** and developed their Delivery Partner program, closed investment programmes to significantly boost the capacity of specific sectors' leading support organisations.

The partners are empowered to do direct creative development and commissioning, exhibiting and performance, festivals and events, conferences, audience development, advocacy, research, and more — depending on each sector's needs. They currently have delivery partners for Dance, First Nations Writing, Disability Arts, Climate Action and Research, Playwriting and First Nations Editorial Development.

This proactive gap-filling does not occur in screen arts.

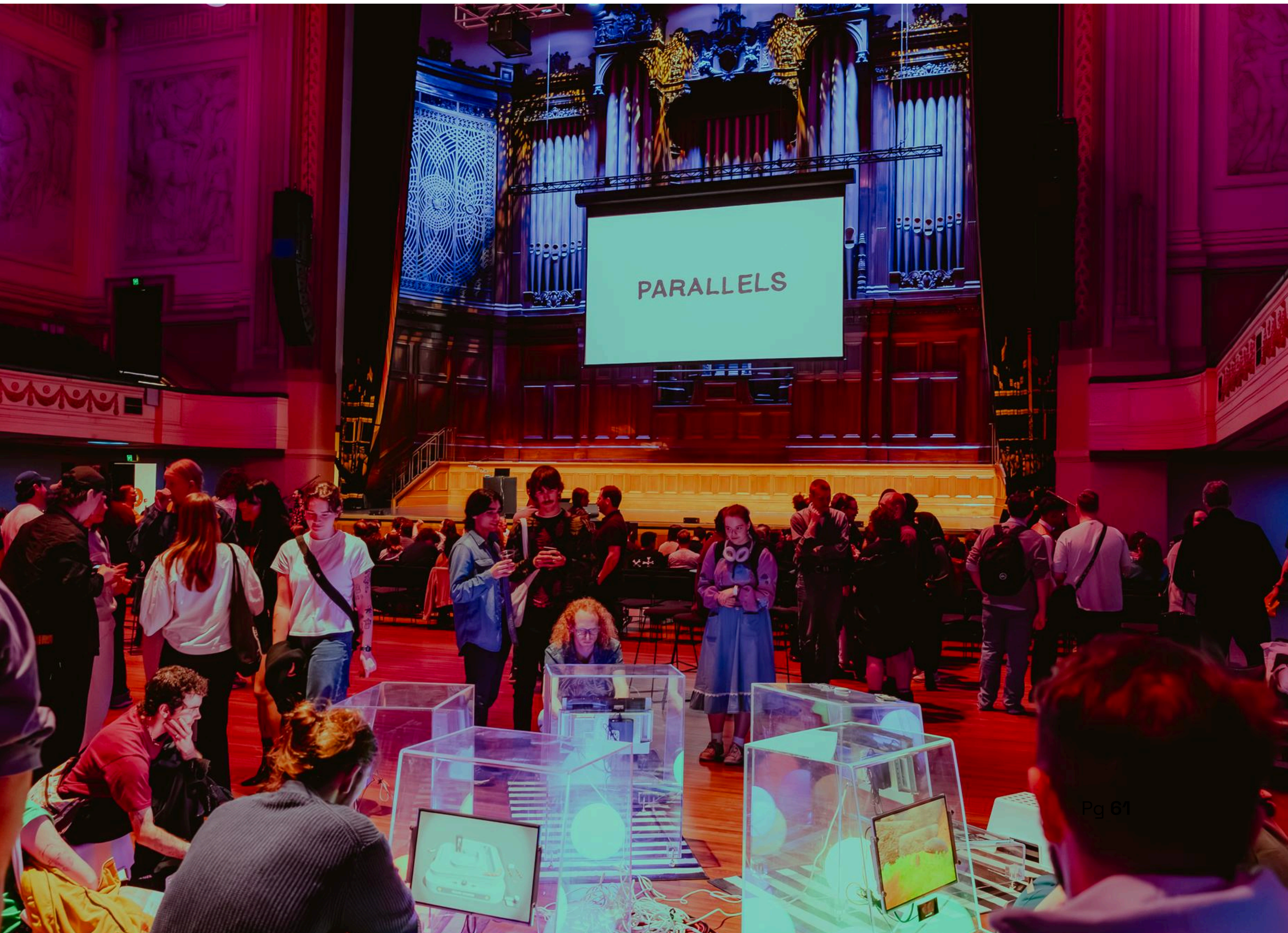
A dedicated $1.2 million annual fund to support games sector support organisations could:

- provide up to **$150,000 per year in an open four-year core funding round**, staggered every two years,
- provide up to **$100,000 per year in an open two-year funding round for to games media, critique and research projects**,

- provide up to **$80,000 per year to projects, events or initiatives** that support gamemaking in Australia,
- engage **a First Nations gamemaking delivery partner** to deliver culturally–safe and self-determined leadership for the sector, and host a **global Indigenous gamemaking conference**,
- engage **an ongoing delivery partner for services to interactive arts** broadly to address the lack of sector coordination and capacity, and
- **match sponsorship, philanthropic and membership contributions up to $25,000 per year** for smaller organisations ineligible for larger pools.

Sector support organisations can also risk **falling afoul of total public investment caps** due to their limited non-public funding options. Raising those caps to at least 50% — or abolishing them entirely — would help them remain sustainable.

Freeplay's Parallels at Melbourne Town Hall (2025)



market and audience development — $1.5m per year

Australia does not have a domestic market promotion agency nor an international export promotion agency for games. Some of this work has been taken on by champions in screen agencies — particularly VicScreen through their Play Now initiative and Screen Australia in ensuring Australian gamemakers have some presence at international industry expos.

Volunteer-led organisations like Frosty have emerged in recent years to coordinate international showcases and shopfront takeovers but are expected to compete with other games sector support organisations for already very limited event funding. Almost all other export facilitation work is conducted ad hoc by private contractors without strategic coordination.

For other major creative export sectors, governments have been proactive in setting up and supporting joint public-private partnerships.

Austrade established Ausfilm to conduct outreach and set up networks in global film hubs like Los Angeles in 1994. Creative Australia established Sounds Australia in 2009 in partnership with APRA AMCOS to promote discovery of Australian acts in global streaming and promote live touring.

Compared to those proactive efforts, **governments efforts to support games have moved in the opposite direction — restricting the use of public funds to engage marketing and export facilitation contractors**.

The Australian games sector needs four kinds of audience and market development to thrive:

- promoting Australian games to our **domestic market** to encourage Australians to live Australian stories,
- promoting Australian games and gamemakers **globally** through expos, showcases and shopfront take-overs,
- facilitating global **publishers' investment** in Australian games, and
- attracting international publishers and studios to **set up local operations**.

All of these initiatives require different people leading them and different tactics to be successful. A one-size-fits-all strategy risks over-leveraging in one of these areas and limiting opportunities for Australian games.

Part of the solution is **expanding Ausfilm's remit to cover all screen industries and opening a second satellite operation in Tokyo**, one of the global centres for game development and a gateway to the Asian market.

Another is allowing game developers to **include the wages of marketing and post-production workers in their allowable expenditure under the Digital Games Tax Offset**.

Travel grants are critical to early career gamemakers no matter what project they are working on. Gamemaking is a global practice and gamemakers develop their practice through conferences, expos and networking — all of which costs a lot of money. Without a sponsor, these events are out of reach for most solo creatives.

Agencies have been understandably conservative with travel grants in the past. It can be seen as largesse and might bring unwanted scrutiny on an agency's program. The result has been travel grants being too small a total pool, and too small individually. **The cost of travel in the last ten years has grown significantly — especially internationally**. Someone from Perth wanting to attend Melbourne International Games Week would be looking at over $800 for flights, around $1,200 for accommodation and $800 to attend the events at Games Week. Getting to Bitsummit in Kyoto or Day of the Devs in San Francisco would be twice or three times that.

However, **many domestic travel grants offer a maximum of less than $2,000 per project, and international grants are rarely more than $4,000**. To make travel more accessible and equitable, travel grants should:

- **raise caps for domestic grants to at least $2,000 per year** and **international grants to $7,500 per year** — and regularly adjust these to reflect the real cost of attending major international games events,

- **increase the domestic cap to $3,000 per year for gamemakers outside of Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane** — in recognition that their travel expenses are higher and most games events are in those three cities,
- allow funded projects to **aggregate their travel caps for the entire project period** — for example, a three year project could choose to use $22,500 in international travel in one year to send multiple team members to Bitsummit, and
- permit gamemakers who are not attached to an existing funded project to **apply for domestic travel grants provided they had been a participant in another local indirect support program** — like a mentorship or an incubator.

But a big lift needs big ideas. Investing $1.5 million per year into developing games markets and audiences would pay for national advertising strategies **encouraging Australians to play Australian games**, generous rolling travel grants for gamemakers to be present at international events, and a dedicated team to ensure **every major international screen and games event has a large and visible Australian games presence**.

Origame's Umurangi Generation (2020), an experimental urban exploration and photography game.

❥ **arts administration** — $1.5m per year

Designing and administering systems to allocate all this funding fairly and transparently — not to mention all the relationship-building and network facilitation needed to make sure a diversity of people apply — costs money.

Funding allocation, research and policy, tastemaking and curation, industry and audience development programs, strategic coordination, outreach and export promotion, programs to empower marginalised people, advising education providers on what skills the industry needs — **all of this takes people-power, and people cost money**.

Right now, Screen Australia has four employees who work in games — all embedded in investment and operations. In all other areas of work conducted by Screen Australia in policy, research and enablement, games have to compete with the high demands of film and television to get any attention.

Across all state and federal screen and cultural agencies, **there are only 13 people working in digital games nationally**, almost all of whom are focused on funding and investment — and zero working in non-digital games. **That simply is not enough capacity to deliver the policy support our sector needs**.

This bucket would fund the **establishment of *Games Australia***, a new agency dedicated to supporting the games sector. This would enable the agency to:

- employ **around 7 full-time equivalent roles** on an ongoing basis, including a senior executive to publicly champion the sector,
- design and **deliver a five-year games culture and industry strategy**, and
- engage contractors for **long-term recurrent research and data projects**.

This is a modest investment. Screen Australia has approximately 100 full-time equivalent workers, while Creative Australia has 152, VicScreen has 64, and Screen Queensland has 35. **A $1.5m annual operating budget is just 5% of Screen Australia's current annual operational expenditure**.

While this figure may underestimate the cost of providing corporate services — finance, human resources, ICT, communications support, etc — even twice this investment would be modest by public sector agency standards.

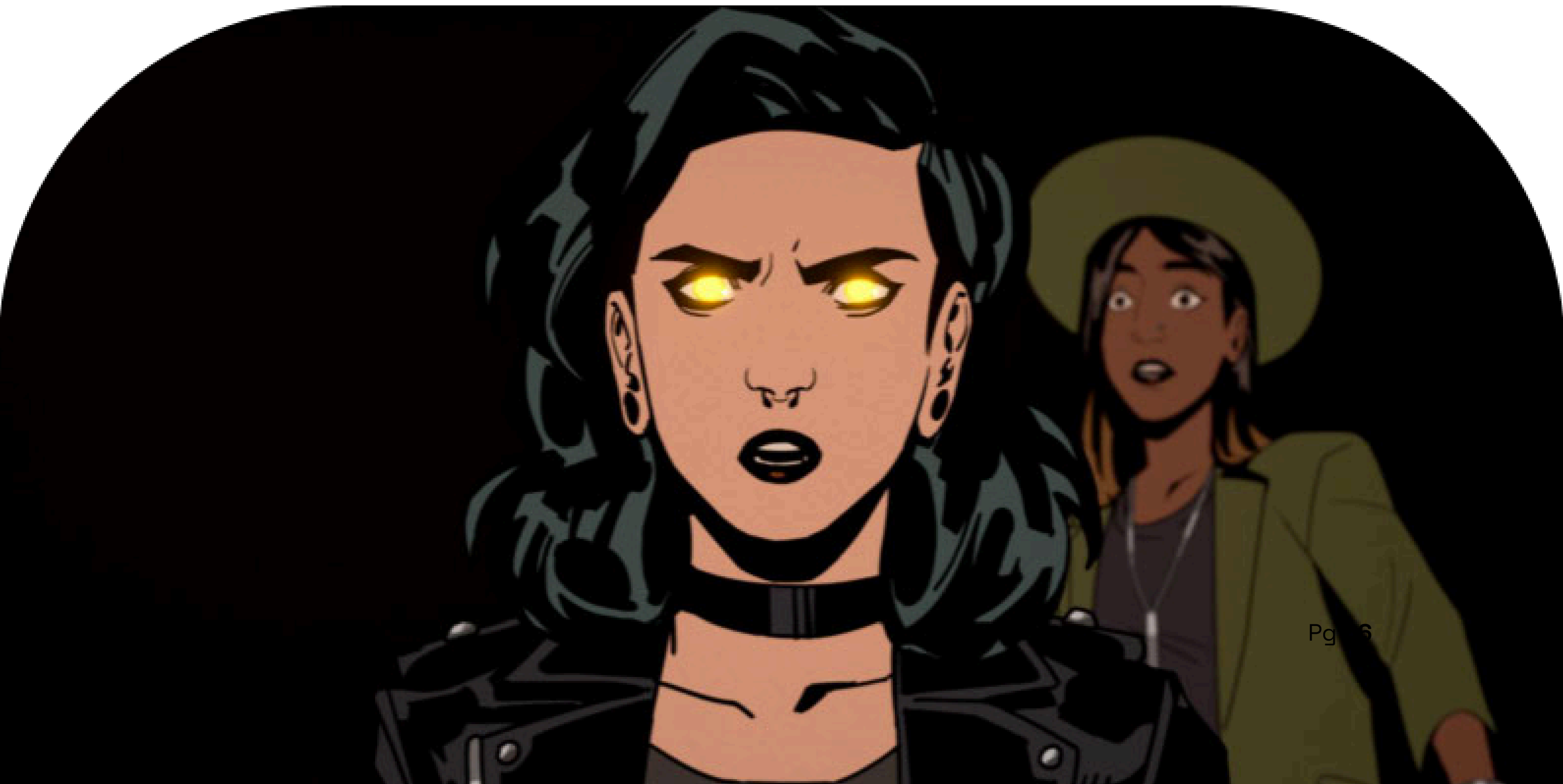
Stray Gods: The Roleplaying Musical

Summerfall Studios | Melbourne | 2023

Stray Gods: The Roleplaying Musical is an interactive musical adventure – **among the first of its kind**. Developed by Melbourne-based Summerfall Studies and published by Humble Games, *Stray Gods* tells a story of Greek gods navigating life in a contemporary world through song.

***Stray Gods* has made almost $1.5m AUD** on Steam sales. *Stray Gods* received $400,000 AUD from VicScreen, and additional support from Creative Victoria and the Victorian Music Development Office. A crowdfunding campaign raised an additional $960,000 AUD.

Stray Gods won Game of the Year at the 2023 AGDAs, and was nominated for the 2024 BAFTA for Best Debut Game. It was the **first Australian game to be nominated for a Grammy**. The soundtrack was **written with Australian musicians Montaigne and Tripod**, and recorded live with Orchestra Victoria. This game — which is unlike any other — shows how Australian games collaborate with other arts sectors, take risks, and innovate.



Establish a new agency — Games Australia

Imagine if theatre directors decided which novels got public support or if musicians decided what visual art was worth investing in. There'd be riots.

But for the entire history of games policymaking, **the leadership of games in the public sector has been led by film people**.

Head of Games at screen agencies are functionally senior investment managers, leading a small team of funding administrators. They rarely if ever sit on senior leadership teams, lead advocacy campaigns or advise on research directions. Despite their hard work and staunch championing of the games sector, **their lack of seniority limits the real impact they have when budget cuts and efficiency dividends bite**.

When Screen Australia got back into funding games in 2022, there was only one person at the entire agency with games industry experience. There's now four — out of one hundred. None of Screen Australia's board members or senior leadership team had a games background, a situation that remains unchanged four years on.

Many of the new and innovative initiatives and the most generous funding programs at Screen Australia exclude games. As just some recent examples that are either only targeted at film creatives or exclude games creatives:

- **Talent Gateway** and **Global Producers Exchange** programs strengthens film creatives' professional capabilities and access to a global market
- **Audience Testing** and **Channel Management** programs helps producers do domestic and global audience testing at multiple stages of development, create a cohesive audience strategy and increase discoverability on social media channels
- **International Festivals and Awards Fund** that promotes Australian content and talent at international festivals and awards event

In fact, **games are an eligible medium for only three of the twenty-nine funding opportunities Screen Australia currently offers**.

Games funding was enshrined and highlighted in *Revive* but merely **highlighting games' successes did not result in a strategic focus nor strategic leadership nor nuanced programs that respond to the holistic needs of the games sector**. That same dissonance is what led to *Revive* calling for the creation of Writing Australia and Music Australia.

Independent Australian games hold an internationally recognised reputation for excellence but our national story and international presence is not coordinated to take advantage of this incredible cultural heft.

The time has come for *Games Australia*, a dedicated public agency for the games and interactive arts led by the talented leaders our sector has created and tasked with empowering Australian gamemakers, champion Australian gamemaking and selling Australian games around the world.

This idea is hardly new. The [2016 Senate inquiry into the future of Australia's video game industry] heard from many gamemakers about the need for a games expert advisory committee. This came after concerns that **advocates had to spend the little time they had access to decision-makers justifying the games sector's existence** and explaining the basics — and always ran out of time to get to the nuance and real challenges they had.

We envision a lean agency of **just a few people based in either Melbourne or Brisbane**, led by a CEO who has the experience and authority to truly champion games.

The CEO would be supported by a **Ministerially-appointed Australian Games Council**, a nine person strategic board and advisory committee from across Australia, representing a broad cross-section of the games sector — from major studio execs to independent gamemakers, from consultants to academics, from union representatives to sector support leaders. This Council could be the successor to the existing DGTO Advisory Committee which operates under the *Income Tax Assessment Act*.

Our preference is for a standalone agency with **its own enabling legislation to protect games from once again being written out of Australia's cultural landscape by a cut-hungry government**. But we recognise that an embedded agency within Screen Australia — as Music Australia and Writing Australia are within Creative Australia — would create backoffice efficiencies.

Either way, Games Australia would need legislated independence, with the Council enshrined in legislation and **changes to the enabling legislation so that the majority of Screen Australia's board appointments are screen industry professionals reflective of all their practice areas** — film, television, documentary, games and online.

The role of Games Australia wouldn't just be to make funding decisions. The key deliverable for Games Australia would be a **five year national games and play strategy**.

While *Revive* was a five year strategy, most sectoral strategies and programs — particularly at a state level — are between two and four years, at the whim of the budget cycle.

More so than any other artform, **games have a very long development cycle**. There's rarely a game that can be delivered from initial creative spark through to stable release in less than **two years for a small game or five years for a major title** — while many titles enter **a post-release "live service" cycle, continuously providing new content, expansions, balance patches and bug**

fixes for 10 years or longer after release. That post-release cycle is often unfunded and has to be carefully budgeted for as audiences expect continuous support for many years after their initial purchase.

Short-term policies mean that **unless a gamemaker is at exactly the right moment in their development cycle to take advantage of whatever program is available, they're unlikely to engage with it at all.** While publishers, expecting whole-of-cycle certainty, can be spooked off by erratic funding patterns.

Games as a sector needs long-term certainty and stability in its strategic leadership. Games are barely afforded a footnote in current screen, creative and economic strategies — who are happy to celebrate the sector's successes but rarely engage deeply with the sector's problems.

And even getting to that first strategy is a long, uncharted road. Outside of the 2016 Senate inquiry, the games sector has not been afforded many opportunities for coordinated consultation and gamemakers will need more support and encouragement to contribute productively.

For many gamemakers, **a strategy like this would be the first time they've been asked about the challenges they face and what would make their creative practice better** — and they almost certainly lack the language and intuitions to articulate that immediately.

A strong strategy would need to factor in a long and comprehensive consultation with industry-wide upskilling before it's even written.

Beyond a strategy, funding certainty and the myriad other programs explored in this paper, dedicated sectoral leadership would empower Australia's gamemaking sector to build a much stronger industrial culture through:

- **Strategic coordination** | acting as an interface between Australia's games and interactive arts communities, state and territory screen, arts and cultural agencies, and export and trade facilitation agencies, helping them work together effectively

- **Policy development** | creating novel and often world leading programs to respond to the ever-changing needs of the games sector demands expertise, connections and a willingness to take risks that aren't possible in a small team in a much bigger agency

- **Data leadership** | whether that's workforce, sales or audience engagement, data on the games industry is piecemeal, incomplete and ad hoc, meaning we can't even fully quantify the opportunities we are missing out on — but fixing that demands the resources and influence that only a government agency would have access to

- **Marketplace data** | Screen Australia has a dedicated marketplace team whose function is to help producers navigate deals, capture market intelligence and understand the health, opportunities and risks of linear screen media — but this in-depth market research service is not offered to interactive media like games despite many of the same pressures applying to gamemakers and the significantly more opaque data environment they exist in

- **Co-investment** | more sophisticated, enterprise-scale investment requires much more relationship building, embedding investment managers deeply in the machinery of gamemaking, and moving to a co-publishing or equity based model for large public investment will be a challenge without strong executive leadership

- **Education and skills advisory** | a weak industrial culture and comparably few well-resourced sector support organisations means that many of the organisations that would normally lead engagement with Jobs and Skills Councils, university and TAFE syllabus reviews, workforce planning roundtables and immigration skills assessment reviews lack the capacity to do so, necessitating strong public sector leadership

- **Sector capacity building** | actively partner with sector support organisations to identify gaps in the industrial and cultural support fabric, collaborating on programs to address those gaps while providing responsive skills training and professional development opportunities

- **Cultural diplomacy** | games lack a Brand Australia at our sector's critical international events — like London Games Festival (UK), GDC Festival (US), Gamescom (Germany and Thailand), China Joy (China), Tokyo Game Show and BitSummit (Japan) — despite these events showcasing many high-impact Australian games, and Games Australia has an opportunity to coordinate a strong national brand for export markets

- **Audience development** | shopfront consolidation and a massive 300x increase in content releases has made discoverability a key challenge for new releases, making curation and tastemaking critical to a games' success, but in a global market, many of these personalities and outlets that drive that are also international, making fostering those relationships, connecting that talent with local creatives, and actively developing domestic tastemakers to take on a global audience all the more important to the success of an Australian title

- **Empower diverse and marginalised creators** | limited national funding and inconsistent program delivery between states has meant that non-direct initiatives like mentorship and placement programs, incubator opportunities and specific programs to uplift and empower marginalised groups aren't available to many Australian gamemakers

Cecile Richard's Dawn Chorus (2026), an interactive novel set in a Melbourne beset by cosmic horrors

Cult of the Lamb

Massive Monster | Melbourne | 2021

Cult of the Lamb is a roguelike game developed by Melbourne studio Massive Monster and published by US indie publisher Devolver Digital. The game centres on a lamb who is ordered by a mysterious deity to form a cult and defeat ‘heretics’ while meeting the cult members’ various needs.

Receiving about $40k AUD from VicScreen in funding, *Cult of the Lamb* has sold 3.7 million copies and generated $90 million AUD in revenue on Steam alone. Massive Monster recently released their Woolhaven expansion, which has made over $400,000 on Steam since release in January 2026. *Cult of the Lamb* is Devolver Digital’s highest-selling title.

The game **won four awards at the 2022 Australian Game Developer Awards, including Game of the Year.** It won Best Indie Game at the Golden Joystick Awards, and was nominated for three BAFTAs in 2023.

Cult of the Lamb’s success has **enabled Massive Monster to pay it forward for the local Victorian games industry**. The studio offers funding and mentorship support to indie gamemakers, and recently opened games co-working space MASS in collaboration with VicScreen and Creative Victoria.

Amend Screen Australia's enabling legislation

Not only is a large proportion of games practice not related to screen production at all, the practices that are closely related to screen production have many touchpoints with other sectors — visual arts, music, theatre, writing, textile, design and more.

By adopting narrow definitions based on finished products rather than broad definitions based on actual creative practice, **policymakers risk cutting off entire pathways to practice and unnecessarily constraining talent pipelines**. To underline the point, much of the creative energy in unscripted television — especially game shows — has come from tabletop design practice in the last ten years.

Adopting expansive definitions in strategies and policies is an important start — but **there are fundamental problems with how boundaries are drawn by Screen Australia's enabling legislation**.

The lack of **a "no gaps" power** in both acts means that projects that enable screen production but are not screen production can fall afoul of the strict legislative definition of screen production that applies to Screen Australia but also struggle to access Creative Australia support where it's likely the project is relegated to experimental or emerging in the absence of a defined sectoral funding bucket.

By **adding a new power — *support creative, artistic and technical initiatives that contribute to the development of screen production talent*** — we would ensure that projects that are *prima facie* creative and contribute to the long-term sustainability of screen industries as their talent move in and out of screen industries are supported throughout.

While Screen Australia does some of this already, creating dedicated powers within their Act sends a strong signal to leadership that pipeline facilitation is an important part of their role.

The **Frog Detective** series

Worm Club | Melbourne | 2018, 2019 and 2022

Beginning with 2018's *The Haunted Island*, The *Frog Detective* series was developed by Melbourne gamemakers Grace Bruxner and Thomas Bowker who later formed the studio Worm Club, and follows a detective — who is a frog — as he solves mysteries and makes new friends.

The *Frog Detective* series has become an indie cult classic. The games have **collectively generated over $1.4 million in revenue in Steam sales alone**, and in 2022 was added to Xbox Game Pass. The second and third installments in the series were published and partially funded by US indie developer Superhot. The team also received approximately $260,000 AUD from Vicscreen.

When making *The Haunted Island*, Bruxner was studying games design at RMIT University. **After its release, *The Haunted Island* was nominated for the Best Student Game award at the Independent Games Festival awards.** Students are a vital part of the Australian games scene and supporting early career experimentation bolsters the industry as a whole.

Create an interactive arts practice area

Creative Australia's enabling legislation already empowers it to support non-digital games — **but it doesn't provide any programs that do so**. Very few gamemakers have been successful at accessing any Creative Australia project or organisational funding. Gamemaking does not feature in their programs or strategies despite the high rates of intersectional practice.

Gamemaking has to compete with many worthy projects under *community arts*, *experimental and emerging* or *multi arts* practice areas — with those other projects often far more tractable to arts administrators with the language and practice forms they use.

This is doubly a problem for sector support organisations, as **screen agencies often do not offer or have very limited resources for multi-year organisational funding**, which are predominantly provided by creative agencies.

In the last reporting year, **Screen Australia provided $236,000 or around 16% of its sector support funding to games** — delivered through single-year industry event and screen culture programmes. **Creative Australia** on the other hand disbursed nearly $205 million to sector support organisations, **none of which went to any games organisations**.

Creating a new dedicated arts practice panel for interactive arts with ringfenced funding — even a small amount — would be transformative to Australian gamemaking practice, ensuring the thousands of projects that derive from or contribute to gamemaking practice but happen to not produce a screen product at the end have some institutional support.

This change would flow through to other Creative Australia programs like the Australian Cultural Fund which currently requires games related projects to register as *video* or *design* projects to be eligible for registration.

This one, largely administrative change, would support the hundreds of games projects — from interactive architecture and playable streets, to roleplaying games and board games — who currently miss out on any support whatsoever.

Queer Man Peering Into A Rock Pool.jpg

Fuzzy Ghost | Sydney | 2022

Queer Man Peering Into A Rock Pool.jpg is an experimental narrative adventure game which centres around a middle-aged queer man trying to piece together his memories. Heartfelt, weird, and deeply queer, *Queer Man* was developed by Sydney-based independent studio Fuzzy Ghost.

Selling almost 3,000 units on Steam, *Queer Man* has made almost $19,000 AUD in revenue. It won **the Excellence in Emerging Games award at the 2022 Australian Game Developer Awards**, and the 2024 Freeplay Award. At the 2023 Independent Games Festival, *Queer Man* was nominated for the Nuovo Award, which celebrates "abstract, shortform and unconventional" games.

Queer Man demonstrates how, although Australian games can be massive commercial successes, **they're most powerful when given the space and resources to experiment and take risks.** The game has since been acquired by the Powerhouse Museum for their permanent collection.

Invest in an Australian games publisher

Australia is currently missing out on a huge opportunity — using public funds to co-invest in Australian games publishers. Independent gamemakers are producing games that make millions of dollars but the lack of Australian publishing infrastructure leaves gamemakers no choice but to work with international publishers to distribute and sell their work effectively.

Publishers in a games context are external businesses who engage a developer and act collectively in a role analogous to a film's executive producer and distributor. A publisher can engage a developer at many stages of development and **take on some of the financial risk of completing the project**, while providing essential back-office functions like licensing, legal, localisation, marketing, distribution and **navigating the regulatory complexities of a global games market**.

Depending on the particulars of the revenue share arrangement, these publishing deals — where gamemakers are provided cash advance or services to improve the effectiveness of their game's launch — can see **as much as 90% of the game's revenue go to the publisher**.

Australia is home to only a small handful of publishers — Fellow Traveller, Playside, Unikat and Blowfish. These publishers are either small or genre-specific and do not provide enough infrastructure to support the hundreds of small and powerful studios operating in Australia.

This means that **almost all of Australia's multi-million dollar indie game hits have been published by international publishers**, including:

- ***Cult of the Lamb*** — developed in Melbourne with **over $71m AUD** in revenue, but published by US-based Devolver Digital
- ***Unpacking*** — developed in Brisbane with **over $18m AUD** in revenue, but published by US-based Balor Games
- ***Untitled Goose Game*** — developed in Melbourne with **over $12m AUD** in revenue, but published by US-based Panic Inc

- ***The Forgotten City*** — developed in Melbourne with **over $7m AUD** in revenue, but published by France-based Dear Villagers
- ***Mixtape*** — developed in Melbourne and only freshly released only a few days prior to the time of writing but with **already over $3m AUD** in revenue, but published by US-based Annapurna Interactive

The problem of Australian gamemakers accessing publishing support runs deep. Until a few years ago, there was an earlier-stage barrier. With all major publishing opportunities based overseas, **accessing and pitching to those publishers was only possible for gamemakers with the resources to regularly afford to travel internationally**.

VicScreen have made huge headway with solving this problem by establishing Play Now — a premier games market for Australia — building relationships, flying in scouts and representatives of major publishers and facilitating matchmaking and introductions to enable Australian gamemakers to pitch their projects without the costly international travel that was previously necessary.

This has been a boon to Australian gamemakers, but the more sustainable, longer-term fix is publicly co-investing in an Australian games publisher so that **these projects' profits can remain sovereign and create a virtuous domestic cycle of re-investment**.

Profitable Australian game studios are already eager to reinvest into the local scene, actively forming relationships with smaller studios and engaging in small-scale investment.

Massive Monster, the Australian developer behind *Cult of the Lamb*, is already working with VicScreen on a re-investment initiative — the Monster Fund. **VicScreen matched Massive Monster's $2M AUD investment** to deliver the capital expenditure related to the project and set up their MASS co-working space. Monster Fund will provide investment and limited mentorship and support.

It's a step in the right direction but lacks the marketing, PR, merch, social media, release management, localisation, porting, distribution, production and technical support and post-release and liveops strategy support that international competitors can provide.

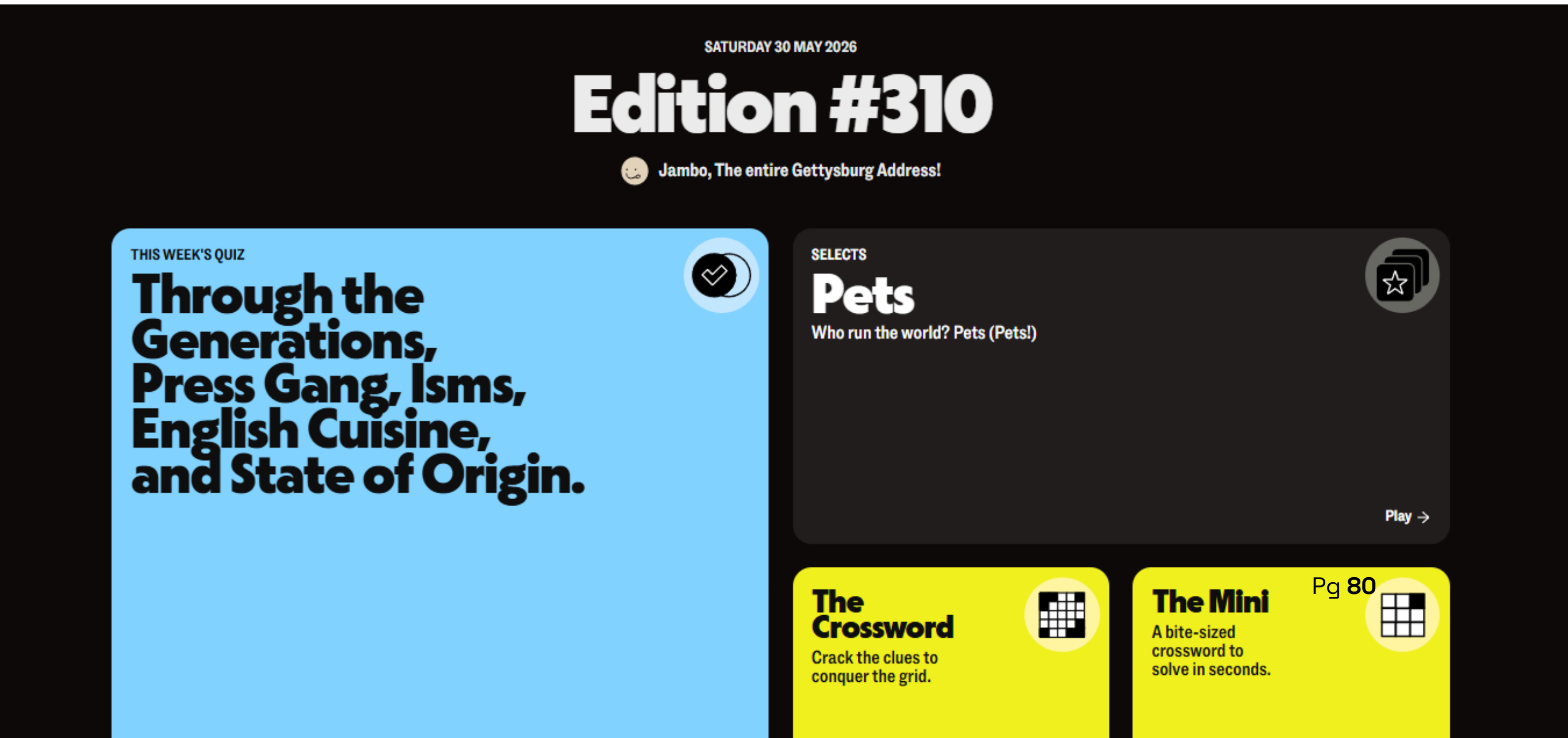
Another recent attempt to solve this problem is the establishment of Midnighters, *"an expert production collective, providing bespoke video game production and publishing support for developers and publishers who need an extra set of hands."*

They are an international collective half-headquartered in Australia and successfully capitalising on the publisher gap in the Australian gamemaking ecosystem by providing some of the services Australian developers are in serious need of in order to properly capitalise on the opportunities their game projects represent.

While these local initiatives are exciting steps in a great direction, there remains a huge opportunity that Australia is missing out on. The $10m a year enterprise and scale investment flagged earlier could be **frontloaded with equity investment in existing publishers or in a new aggregating fund**.

A commitment from the Commonwealth to match — upfront — any investment in an Australian indie publisher will **unlock millions of dollars in domestic investment** and create a new revenue stream for the Commonwealth to sustain games funding nationally for years to come.

Saturday Quiz Time (2026), a weekly word puzzle subscription service launched during COVID-19 by people who loved doing the newspaper crossword, now with over 15,000 paying subscribers



Mixtape

Beethoven & Dinosaur | Melbourne | 2026

Mixtape, developed by Melbourne studio Beethoven & Dinosaur and published by US-based Annapurna Interactive, is a narrative-driven adventure following three teenagers in the late 1990s on their final day together before leaving high school, accompanied by the perfect playlist.

Since its release in early May 2026, ***Mixtape* has already sold 110,000 units on Steam, earning $2.3 million AUD on the platform alone**. The game received $90,000 AUD from VicScreen to support development. ***Mixtape* won Game of the Year at the 2025 SXSW Sydney Game Awards**. It notably received acclaimed games news outlet IGN's first 10/10 review for 2026.

Despite being set in the US, the game showcases Australian music heritage with the protagonist wearing a shirt emblazoned with ABC's rage identity and the playlist that forms the game's **soundtrack featuring Australian music royalty — Silverchair, Mondo Rock, and John Paul Young** — bringing great Australian artists to a new global audience.

Extend local content quotas to games

The games sector is **structurally disincentivised from telling distinctly Australian stories** by the global funding ecosystem we are embedded in. Publishers demand games for a global audience — which in most cases means distinctly American voice, writing and setting.

Australian consumers are not encouraged by our government to play Australian games nor are there public awareness campaigns promoting Australian made games.

Over 95% of global digital games sales are transacted through **just six digital shopfronts**:

- Valve's Steam
- Nintendo's eShop
- Microsoft's Xbox Games Store
- Sony's PlayStation Store
- Apple's App Store
- Google's Play Store

These platforms **shape consumer behaviour**. They write the rules for how people interact with games and other players and design the spaces where they do so. They curate online shop displays and best-seller lists and most importantly design algorithmic recommender systems, positioning themselves as a necessary intermediary between gamemakers and players.

These recommender systems are essential to the functioning of any digital system. All the information and media in the world means nothing if there is no meaningful way to curate it. **These systems define how people navigate shopfronts — and decide what games they buy and play**.

Australians today have no meaningful way to find Australian-made games. It is common for Australian players of hit games such as *Hollow Knight* and *Cult of the Lamb* to wrongly believe that these titles were developed overseas. Both titles have made millions of dollars and are some of Australia's most successful digital cultural exports of all time. Knowing that games of such cultural and economic stature were made locally changes the conversation for aspiring Australian gamemakers, encouraging them to imagine and pursue similar success.

These shopfronts are effectively tastemakers driven by sales targets alone — and **they take on average 30% from every sale for the privilege**.

All this market consolidation is a problem for consumers and regulators alike — but it is also an opportunity. Consolidation makes regulation possible. Any content regulation needs only be implemented by large, sophisticated, multinational tech companies.

Content quotas for television were set up in the early 1990s in recognition of ownership of broadcast television channels having **consolidated into a few companies causing a market failure**. An oversupply of cheap international content and Australia's small domestic audience meant that **Australians were not being provided enough variety of recognisably-Australian content**.

Policymakers at the time recognised the critical role television played in influencing public opinion and forming Australians' cultural identity — and that **a robust local production industry buttressed by guaranteed minimum programming ratios would be necessary to protect our distinct culture**.

Australia's public broadcasters played a part, but the government correctly recognised commercial broadcasters needed to be forced by regulation to take the necessary actions to preserve Australia's screen culture.

Thirty-five years later, games are played as regularly as broadcast and catch-up television is watched. Four in five Australians play games at least once a month, the same as watch TV. For younger people, **games and games culture (especially livestreaming and actual play) is one of their biggest parts of their cultural life**, in both time engaged and money spent — far bigger than commercial television broadcast and, in many cases, bigger than streaming.

Those same policy pressures that led to the creation of broadcast quotas in 1992, streaming quotas in 2024 and smart TV prominence requirements in 2025 are just as real and present in games today.

The easiest regulation to implement would be replicating the intent of the recent smart TV prominence framework. The prominence framework currently requires smart TV manufacturers to pre-install Australian free-to-air broadcast TV apps and to make them clearly visible on the device home screen without any user interaction like scrolling or clicking.

Implementing a prominence framework for games shopfronts would involve **requiring a certain proportion of visual real estate on the front page be reserved for Australian-made titles**, particularly in featured and recommended sections — and that a dedicated Australian games category be displayed on the front page with the most recent Australian releases.

While a prominence framework helps Australian games compete domestically in a flooded market, it does not necessarily support the production of new games. For that, a more aggressive reinvestment mechanism is necessary.

Publishers should be required to **set aside a small proportion of Australian gross domestic sales of non-domestic games and reinvest them in Australian content**. Even just 2% would see $15m in additional investment in Australian games every year. Publishers would either have to show evidence that they are investing at a sufficient scale — or contribute to a local investment fund.

Publishers and shopfronts would likely respond by increasing Australian prices — but as the allegations of games price-gouging in 2012 showed, they are not above that anyway.

There is a risk that this replicates the pre-GFC conditions for the Australian industry, where nearly 80% of all games jobs were doing non-creative, technical and back-office work in a local branch of a major international studio or publisher.

Current Digital Games Tax Offset arrangements incentivises just this scenario. The Qualifying Australian Development Expenditure test only assesses if qualifying workers are based in Australia and if they work in a development role — and even **excludes some creative roles which in games might fall under support or marketing**. It functions similarly to the Location Offset for film.

The Producer Offset, the equivalent tax offset program for the film and television industry, has a Significant Australian Content test, which considers whether it is an Australian story or set in Australia, whether the film is predominantly made in Australia, and whether the director, writers or principal cast are Australian citizens.

The Significant Australian Content test has [been criticised]() as being a "passport test", where producers largely ignore Australian stories and setting in favour of the much-easier to achieve bar for Australian production and talent.

But the expectation that **creative leadership — not just technical gruntwork — in publicly-subsidised creative projects be local** is still a marked improvement on the existing structure of the Digital Games Tax Offset.

Major public subsidies for creative industries should expect not just investment in an Australian workforce — but **Australian stories, Australian landscapes, Australian creative control, Australian intellectual property, and Australian ownership over that reinvestment**.

A single-minded pursuit of distinctly Australian stories may risk flattening Australian culture, othering marginalised people and deprioritising popular genres like speculative fiction — which is why a well designed public investment framework would be structured in such a way that gave weight to each of those factors — but ensured no one was required or could be ignored.

For a lesson on this, we can look to Canada. **Canada is the global gold standard for content requirements**. CanCon is an integrated points-based system that combines content quotas administered by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission and tax credit programs administered by the Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office, and parts of the revenue from which flows through to the public-private partnership Canadian Media Fund to be reinvested in creative projects.

Points-based systems ratchet down the financial or broadcast obligations based on multiple factors — co-ownership, workplace conditions, local creative control, local stories or locations, domestic investment. The more points you have, the smaller the obligation.

Contestable screen content funds contributed to by companies subject to content quotas — like the Canadian Media Fund — has previously been supported by Screen Producers Australia, the Australian Children's Television Foundation and MEAA.

Games are instrumental in shaping Australians' cultural context as much as television or film. Failing to take the idea that games influence identity and influence how people relate to each other and the world **seriously risks leaving behind generations of young people**.

While global superpowers like China and the United States and legacy powerhouses like Japan and the United Kingdom will continue to dominate games culturally, that cannot excuse our national obligation to use Australian stories in Australian games to advance our cultural norms, here and abroad.

Any content quotas for games would be a global innovation and **make Australia a world-leader for culturally responsible gamemaking**.

Effort Star's Enter the Chronosphere (2026), a new psychedelic action roguelike

Wayward Strand

Ghost Pattern | Melbourne | 2022

Wayward Strand is a narrative adventure developed and self-published by Melbourne studio Ghost Pattern, recounting the stories of patients in an airborne hospital flying above Victoria through the eyes of a curious teenager named Casey.

The game **received approx. $170,000 AUD in funding from VicScreen** to support its development, and has made approximately $68,000 AUD in sales. *Wayward Strand* won the award for Best Narrative at the 2024 Freeplay Awards.

Wayward Strand is an undeniably Australian game and **features voice acting from iconic Australian actors** Michael Caton and Anne Charleston. It tells uniquely Australian stories, while dealing with difficult themes around aging.

Set along the Victorian coastline, **the team worked closely with the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation** to ensure appropriate representation of the land and its traditional owners.

Expect public broadcasters to amplify games

Australia's public broadcasters were instrumental in the development of the Australian games ecosystem. ABC especially was an early adopter, **producing radio and TV news programs about games** and even **directly commissioning games for their websites**, with notably heavy investment over the life of their short-lived young adult station Fly TV.

Unfortunately, ABC discontinued most of its games media coverage with the exception of *Spawn Point* that moved to ABC Family. This was partly in recognition of changing viewing habits of young adults and an attempted pivot to online that did not eventuate. Similarly, as browser games ebbed away from popularity in the early '10s, ABC's direct investment in gamemaking also dried up.

Since then, ABC and SBS have both made significant investments in online streaming services. Despite it **never being easier for them to produce and distribute unscripted content for niche audiences** on these streaming platforms, neither have shown much particular inclination to do so. Likewise, the success of dozens of Australian content creators on Twitch especially creates a natural talent pipeline and audience that are not being leveraged to promote Australian content.

These streaming services have also not followed Netflix's or Apple's lead of embedding games in their platforms or allowing users to download and play games for free using their streaming login.

Our public broadcasters have **an obligation to reach younger people where they are and bring Australian stories with them** — but in retreating from games, they have failed in that.

They need to try harder. ABC's Charter contains an obligation "*to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia*". That **obligation should be expanded to cover all arts and culture, including Australian film and games** — with an expectation that the ABC **once again commission, promote and distribute Australian games through their digital streaming services**.

Sushi Go!

Phil Walker-Harding | Sydney | 2013

Sushi Go! is a card-based boardgame created by Sydney-based gamemaker Phil Walker-Harding, and published by US-based Gamewright Games, where players collect cards in order to create the highest-scoring sushi dish combinations. The game was initially crowdfunded via Indiegogo, receiving $10,077 AUD, before being published by Gamewright in 2014.

***Sushi Go!* has sold over 2 million copies globally,** and has been translated into 20 languages. Walker-Harding has released two other games in the franchise, *Sushi Go Party!* (2016) and *Sushi Roll* (2019), both published by Gamewright. In 2015, *Sushi Go!* won **Best Australian Game** at the 2015 Boardgames Australia Awards, as well as Best General Card Game at the UK Games Expo Awards.

Walker-Harding was a hobbyist gamemaker working on small and experimental boardgames. However, **the success of *Sushi Go!* allowed him to pursue game design full time**, and he has continued to create social, family-friendly boardgames with broad and global appeal.

Avoid pigeonholing First Nations creatives

There have been very few dedicated programs or funding opportunities for First Nations gamemakers in Australia. **Screen Australia's First Nations Games Studio Fund was set up in the wake of the last National Cultural Policy** to elevate and amplify First Nations creatives in gamemaking — **but sadly ended after its initial two year funded round**.

That brief experience however led to many First Nations gamemakers identifying a key problem with the way designated programs work.

First Nations creatives report the experience of having all First Nations projects pigeonholed into First Nations designated funds — even when they would be eligible for and equally viable to access larger programs.

This is especially a problem for larger, more established studios producing games with budgets in the hundreds of thousands. The small pot of First Nations games funding could either be directed to a larger cohort of emerging creatives or First Nations creatives embedded in other projects — or fund just one or two full games.

Not only must dedicated funding for First Nations gamemakers be reestablished, **dedicated First Nations funding must be resourced sufficiently to support both major studio-led games and emerging individuals**. It is also critical that **the maximum amount that can be applied under First Nations designated funds are equal to the maximum allocated under production funds**, not an arbitrarily lower amount.

First Nations games should also be empowered to apply for both First Nations funding and other broader funding rounds — and **if they are successful at both, be allowed to choose which program they use**. That should be their decision, not the agencies' — and it should come after the offers are made, not before applications are submitted.

LEGO Party!

SMG Studio | Sydney | 2025

LEGO Party! is a party game developed by Sydney-based SMG Studio and published by American publisher Fictions, where up to four players compete with each other to progress through handcrafted LEGO worlds.

During development, the game received funding from VicScreen and Screen Queensland. Through Steam sales alone, ***LEGO Party!* has earned over $5m AUD, selling almost 130,000 copies.** A commercial and critical success, *LEGO Party!* received two nominations at the 2026 BAFTA Game Awards, and **won the BAFTA for Best Family Game**. It also won Family Game of the Year at the 2026 Annual D.I.C.E. Awards.

Although most games made in Australia post-2010 are based on original IP, **Australian gamemakers' skills are still valuable to international companies,** and games based on existing brands are still part of the industry landscape.

And, in today's polarised online landscape with rising concerns about children's safety, **social and family-friendly games like *LEGO Party!* are crucial** for giving kids safe spaces to socialise and have fun.

Regulate using generative AI in screen industries

Not all "artificial intelligence" is cut from the same cloth. Gamemakers ourselves use the term AI to describe **object behaviour in a game engine**, a perfectly innocuous technology that has been used safely since the very first digital games in the 1960s.

Generative AI — the bundle of technologies and commercial and consumer deployments that make up the majority of the current AI hype cycle — is a different beast entirely.

Generative AI violates copyright and denies creatives the control over their own creative identity or endeavours by training on their previous work. This does not just occur in the open market, it also happens in a single workplace. Employers have less incentive to retain creatives in post-production and maintenance phases if they can train generative AI tools on the creative works ideated by creatives earlier in the production cycle. This has **a corrosive effect on job security in an already precarious industry**.

It has a social effect in the workplace, reducing workers' bargaining power relative to their employers. Rather than having jobs replaced outright, **creatives risk having the threat of generative AI used to justify wage cuts, worse conditions and shorter contracts** — a process called deskilling.

The majority of gamemakers in the Australian games sector are in agreement with other arts and screen sectors that **generative AI has the potential to be ruinous to workers' rights, creative endeavour and our cultural fabric**.

Large commercial interests in screen industries are self-motivated to reserve their own use of these tools. They will argue for industry self-regulation and that governments are ill-equipped to know the idiosyncrasies of the games industry. These commercial interests are already advocating for policy changes with strategic ambiguity in what they're asking for — signalling support for regulation broadly while protecting their own interests with a blanket carve-out for games.

Those are not compelling reasons to not regulate generative AI and its use in the games sector. The protection of workers' rights and the risk of bad actors using public funding in harmful and anti-social ways outweigh any minor gains.

Creative and screen agencies have been proactive in ensuring that funding applications have a mandatory disclosure on the use of generative AI in preparing the application and on whether the project intends to use generative AI in any deliverables or outputs. **This is the bare minimum.**

Creative Australia's Principles on Generative AI and creative work are — in our opinion — far too weak and conciliatory to **an industry that has openly flouted abusing copyright laws and builds regulatory evasion into their business model**. Screen Australia's AI Guiding Principles are far more robust, fit for purpose and have all the limbs necessary to create something stronger, but still lack the hard lines, guardrails or enforcement mechanisms the sector expects.

ProudlyHuman is a service that verifies human-made content with a combination of identity-matching, legal declarations and AI detection tools and certifies with a proprietary trust mark. While something similar might be deployable in the acquittal of grants for other creative sectors like music and literature, **the complexity of screen arts makes a similar validation process far more difficult to implement**.

That is why screen needs stronger — and more strongly enforced — safeguards up front, before any applications have been made. Creative and screen agencies must ensure public funding:

- **does not support projects that use generative AI tools in the creative process** — ideation, design, writing, music composition, etc,
- is conditional on projects that use any generative AI tools in their operations — including for coding — **disclosing that use to consumers on both shopfronts or streaming platforms** and in their credits, and
- for projects over a certain budget, **guarantee the provision of entry-level creative positions**.

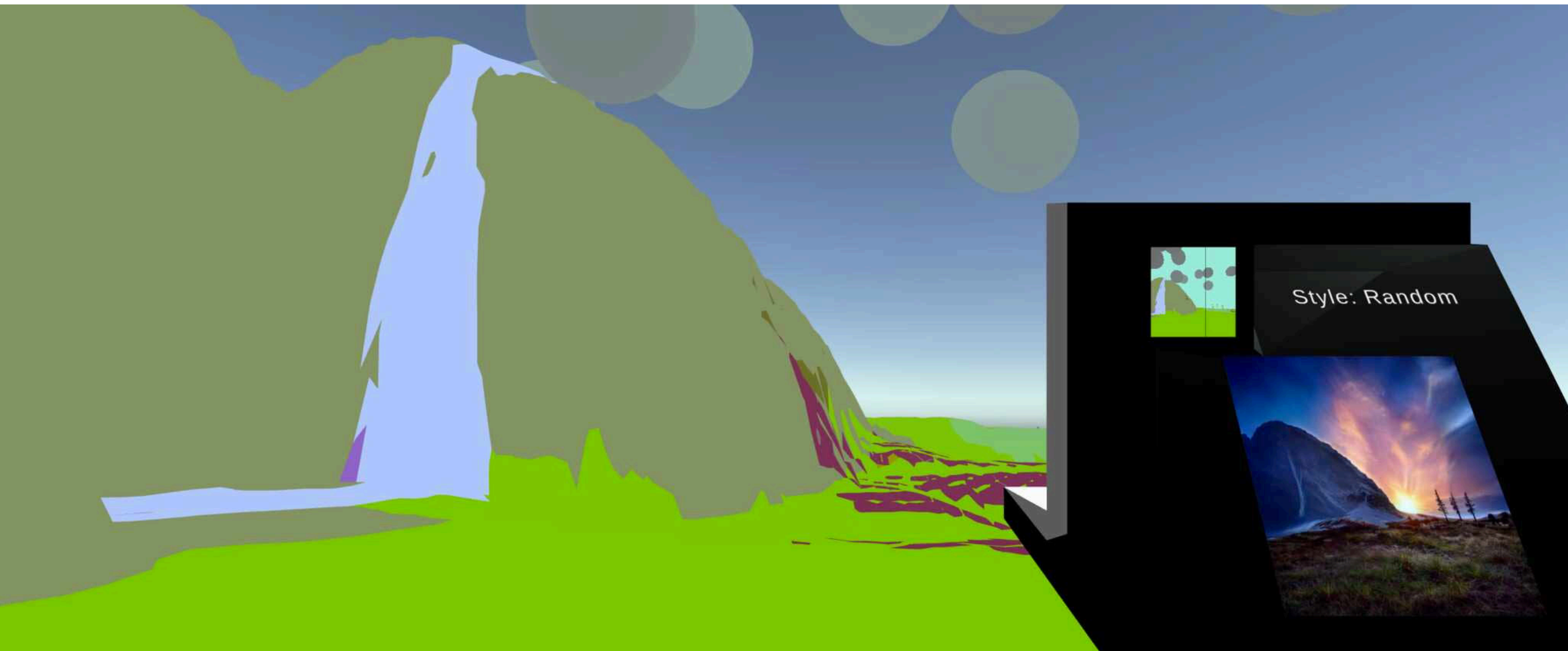
As with all technology, there are subversive and transgressive art pieces that use these exploitative tools against themselves.

Freeplay exhibited Ben Koder's surreal photography game *Beyond The Lens* (2022) which hijacked a generative AI image generation service to print photorealistic Polaroids of a low-poly dream-like gameworld. Art pieces like this exist regardless — or even in spite of — public support for AI or their art, and **artistic innovation should not be a reason to not put up firm guardrails against the use of AI** in art or screen projects.

The integration of data harvesting and generative AI systems in games also create new risk vectors for the exploitation of children. That's why Freeplay has called for **the Australian classification framework to regulate the integration of generative AI systems in games**, particularly where players could prompt dialogue or images in-game. Games marketed for children should not contain embedded generative AI systems and those marketed at teenagers or adults must include appropriate guardrails.

The Commonwealth is more than capable of developing regulations that use finer grade definitions and classifications of what AI systems are so that **harmful, anti-social or anti-worker technologies are captured** – **but well-established and low-risk technologies used in games are not**.

Ben Koder's Beyond the Lens (2022)



Further reading

In addition to the feedback of working gamemakers, artists and industry professionals, we drew inspiration from a few incredibly useful resources:

Ben Egliston, '**Innovation financing in the Australian video game industry**' [2026] (Online First) *Media International Australia*

Brendan Keogh, ***The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist: Why We Should Think Beyond Commercial Game Production*** (MIT Press Open Access, 2023)

The Office of the Arts, ***Cultural Data Online*** (data index)

Interactive Games and Entertainment Association, ***Policy Advocacy Compendium*** (May 2025)

John Banks and Stuart Cunningham, '**Creative destruction in the Australian videogames industry**' (2016) 160(1) *Media International Australia*

Nellie Seale, Wally Smith and Melissa Rogerson, '**A Typology of Museum Games: Towards a Museum Game Design Toolkit**' [2024] *Proceedings of the 36th Australasian Conference on Human-Computer Interaction*

Sari Rossi, Angela Vivian and Kate Fielding, '**Government, Culture and Creativity: It's about more than just funding.**' (Paper No. 2025-01, *A New Approach*, June 2025)

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications, ***Game On: More than playing around — The future of Australia's video game industry*** (Report, April 2016)

Taylor Hardwick, Ben Egliston and Marcus Carter, '**"We'll always go with what's more sustainable": Understanding the Financialised Logics of Game Development**" [2025] *Proceedings of the Digital Games Research Association*

Zainab Darbas, '**Commercialisation, community, and culture: A production perspective on public arts funding for video games in Australia**' [2025] (OnlineFirst) *Media International Australia*

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