



**Inclusive Prosperity**  
The Creative Economy  
as a Catalyst for  
Inclusive Prosperity

**2026**



## McKell WA's Inclusive Prosperity Series

McKell WA's Inclusive Prosperity Series is a conversation about how Western Australia can shape economic change for the benefit of all people — ensuring growth in emerging sectors translates into shared opportunity and long-term social cohesion.

**Event 2: The Creative Economy as a Catalyst for Inclusive Prosperity with Hon. Simone McGurk MLA, Minister for Creative Industries; Heritage; Industrial Relations; Aged Care and Seniors; Women**

Exploring how the creative industries drive economic diversification, workforce growth, regional development and inclusive community outcomes.

Thank you to Minderoo Foundation for generously hosting the event.

# Remarks from John Hartman, CEO Minderoo Foundation

## A Long-Term Commitment to WA's Creative Ecosystem

Minderoo has long championed WA's arts and cultural sector — from the Minderoo Artist Fund to partnerships with Black Swan, PICA, Barking Gecko and others.

Minderoo's 25-year partnership with Edith Cowan University to deliver a new home for WAAPA was framed not simply as infrastructure, but as investment in people and skills.

## Creativity as Economic Capability

The address made clear that creativity is not peripheral to economic growth — it is foundational.

There was a call to be “bolder and more innovative” in supporting the sector, and to better promote creativity as a core workforce capability — particularly as emerging technologies accelerate and reshape the skills people will need. Developing creative thinking, adaptability and innovation was positioned as essential not only for the arts sector, but for the broader economy of the future.

**“For Minderoo, investing in WA's creative ecosystem reflects our belief that creativity, culture and education are essential to thriving economies and communities.”**

John Hartman, CEO Minderoo Foundation



# The Minister's Speech

Minister McGurk positioned the creative industries as both an economic driver and a social infrastructure; central to community wellbeing and WA's diversification strategy.

## Creative Industries as Economic Infrastructure

Creativity is not peripheral, but central to WA's economy.

Creative industries contribute:

- \$6.2 billion annually to WA's economy
- More than 51,000 jobs (likely an undercount due to gig and secondary employment)
- Innovation across sectors including mining, health, education and technology

Under Diversify WA, creative industries are recognised as one of nine priority sectors, alongside defence, manufacturing and energy.

**“We want to foster a vibrant and creative economy... we want our creatives to live and work right here in WA.”**



## **Building and Protecting the Creative Workforce**

The Minister emphasised that inclusive prosperity depends on strengthening the creative workforce, that includes artists, technicians, arts workers and support professionals.

Key priorities include:

- Fair pay, safe and inclusive workplaces
- Long-term career pathways
- Addressing skills shortages
- Exploring tax reform as an economic lever for the sector

The Government's partnership with Creative Australia and support for Creative Workplaces aims to promote fair conditions and culturally safe working environments.

The 2025 Art of Tax Reform Summit, discussed tax reform at the national level including:

- Exempting arts prizes from taxable income
- Expanding tax offsets
- Incentives for philanthropy
- Extending existing economic incentives to cultural production

## **Made in WA — Creativity as Industry**

In her remarks, the Minister challenged traditional notions of what "Made in WA" looks like, positioning the creative industries firmly within the state's economic diversification agenda.

**“It’s easy to imagine hospitals, roads and manufacturing when we talk about making more things here. But we’re talking about songs, about art, about performances, about games, about movies.”**

Creative output is not ancillary to economic growth, rather it is a driver of export competitiveness, tourism attraction, workforce development and global brand identity.

## Screen Industry and Economic Diversification

The Minister pointed to the screen sector as a tangible example of creative industries driving diversification:

- \$290 million investment in Perth Film Studios
- \$31.9 million for the WA Screen Industry Strategy
- Workforce development funding
- Strong regional production benefits

***Mystery Road alone returned more than \$25 million to WA, with significant regional spend.***

Screen production supports:

- Regional employment
- Tourism activation
- Skills pipelines into TAFE and universities
- Export capability

## Access, Equity and Wellbeing

Inclusive prosperity requires more than economic growth.

The Minister highlighted:

- Creative WA's principles of equity and inclusivity
- Investment in Creative Learning program in 300 schools across all WA regions
- \$1 million over two years for Creativity and Wellbeing for Young People
- Targeted engagement for disadvantaged and CALD communities

Research cited in the speech found that regular arts engagement significantly improves mental wellbeing .

**“Equity won’t come from simply treating everyone equally, but from providing the support and investment needed to give everyone equal access in the long term.”**

## Panel of experts



**Di Bain**

Chair, Tourism WA  
Chair, WAAPA



**Ian Booth**

CEO  
Black Swan State Theatre Company



**Dr Pilar Kasat**

CEO  
Regional Arts WA

The panel extended the Minister's remarks into practical and policy-oriented discussion, focusing on workforce sustainability, measurement of impact, regional development and social cohesion.



# Highlights of Panel Discussion

## 1. Enabling Workers and Sustainable Careers

Panelists emphasised that creative growth must translate into secure, sustainable employment.

Key themes:

- Many artists operate below the poverty line
- Incremental growth is insufficient — structural reform is needed
- Innovative funding models must be explored
- Long-term organisational funding builds stability

The example of Ireland's basic income pilot for artists was cited as demonstrating both cultural and economic returns.

There was strong support for:

- Moving beyond short-term project funding
- Creating innovation pathways rather than “charitable” funding models
- Recognising creative professionals as skilled contributors to the economy

**“We can't keep doing the same thing and think it's going to get better — we need to fundamentally rethink and be innovative about what we do.”**

Ian Booth, CEO, Black Swan State Theatre Company



## 2. Measuring Impact — Without Losing Meaning

A central tension is how to measure social and economic impact without reducing creativity to narrow metrics.

Key insights:

- Governments require economic framing
- Treasury models prioritise direct ROI
- Social cohesion, wellbeing and cultural identity are harder to quantify

There was recognition that while economic modelling is important, the intangible value of arts — identity, belonging, storytelling — must not be lost in translation.

## 3. Creative Industries and Social Cohesion

The panel addressed current social tensions and the role of arts in rebuilding connection.

Creative practice was positioned as:

- A tool for storytelling and empathy
- A platform for community voice
- A mechanism for strengthening cultural confidence
- A vehicle for place-based dialogue

It was argued that arts investment contributes to:

- Social licence
- Intercultural understanding
- Regional resilience

Peer review remains critical to protecting creative independence.



**“Addressing regional disadvantage requires very specific, long-term, place-based policy settings informed by the communities that are impacted.”**

**Dr. Pilar Kasat, CEO Regional Arts WA**

## **4. Regional Development and Place-Based Opportunity**

Regional Arts WA highlighted the importance of:

- Community-led models
- Long-term, place-based funding
- Local control of creative initiatives
- Keeping economic benefit within communities

The example of the Margaret River Region Open Studios program demonstrated:

- Significant visitation
- Strong sales for artists
- Authentic, location-specific cultural tourism

Regional arts should not be “add-ons”, but drivers of economic participation and identity.



**“People are looking for experiences now when they travel ... when people come to WA, we know they’re looking for a cultural experience.”**

**Di Bain, Chair Tourism Australia, Chair WAAPA**

## **5. Tourism, Brand and Economic Narrative**

Tourism WA emphasised the importance of integrating creative industries into WA’s broader economic narrative.

Discussion included:

- Treating creative industries as economic infrastructure
- Ensuring authenticity in Aboriginal cultural experiences
- Using tourism data and holistic return on investment

Creative industries were framed as critical to:

- Attracting interstate and international visitors
- Extending visitor stay
- Building WA’s global cultural brand



# McKell Institute's Research

Over the years, McKell has explored many issues that are relevant to the challenges and opportunities across creative industries.

## **More than Books: Libraries on the Frontline**

The Case for Greater Investment in Libraries and Their Staff

Public libraries are evolving to meet rising inequality, climate stress and digital exclusion, yet without policy reform and adequate investment, their growing role risks becoming unsustainable.

[Read the report: More than Books](#)

## **Micro but Mighty: Magnifying Microbusiness in Australia**

This report finds that Australia's fastest-growing small business sector — microbusiness, employing 2.9 million people — is increasingly driven by women who balance caring responsibilities while navigating structural labour market barriers.

[Read the report: Micro but Mighty](#)

## **Insecure Work & Portable Entitlements: A Solution for Australia**

This report examines how a portable entitlements scheme could improve security and livelihoods for the growing number of Australians in insecure work.

[Read the report: Insecure Work & Portable Entitlements](#)

“Creativity doesn’t just entertain us. It shapes our identity, strengthens community, and creates real economic opportunity”.

Jess Bukowski, Executive Director, McKell WA

## What’s next?

The Minister’s remarks and panel discussion reinforced:

- The creative industries are central to WA’s diversification strategy
- Workforce sustainability must underpin growth
- Measurement frameworks must evolve
- Regional and community-led models are essential
- Creative industries contribute not just to GDP, but to identity, belonging and cohesion

We hope to extend these ideas in our formal policy research.

Our **Inclusive Prosperity Series** will continue over the next 12 months, as we discuss and debate the Government’s economic diversification agenda.

At McKell Institute WA, our focus will remain on the people—exploring how these emerging, often complex, industries can not only drive massive economic growth but also ensure the benefits—the jobs, the training, the improved liveability, and the wealth—are shared equitably across our state.



**McKell Institute WA**

Jess Bukowski, Executive Director

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