Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

BUREAU OF COMMUNICATIONS, ARTS AND REGIONAL RESEARCH

Frequently Asked Questions: Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia, 2015–16 to 2024–25

September 2026

Overview

What is the purpose of this publication?

This publication quantifies the economic contribution of cultural and creative activity in Australia from 2015–16 to 2024–25. It provides an annual update to the Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research (BCARR) statistical working paper *Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia, 2008–09 to 2022–23 (Methodology Refresh)—Statistical Working Paper* released in December 2024. This update measures cultural and creative activity over a 10-year period.

The methodology refresh was an action listed in *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place—Australia's cultural policy for the next five years*. Its purpose was to ensure that measures of cultural and creative sector remain relevant and fit-for-purpose in our changing economy. Stakeholder consultation informed and refined the methodology refresh.

The refresh included major revisions to the methodology and the scope of activities considered to be cultural and creative. These changes were guided by a decision-making framework developed by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (the department). BCARR undertook stakeholder consultation to develop and refine the approach for estimating cultural and creative activity.

This annual update applies the same methodological approach established in BCARR's 2024 statistical working paper. The tables and figures align with those in the original publication to support comparability over time.

Unless otherwise noted, the 10-year period refers to 2015–16 to 2024–25. Data is subject to revisions by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to the national accounts. Estimates in this updated release may vary from those published in 2024.

What is cultural and creative activity?

Cultural and creative activity refers to the economic activity generated from the production and support of goods and services created by cultural and artistic means.

Cultural and creative activity is recognised as an important part of knowledge-based economies, and it makes a valuable contribution to Australia's economic and social wellbeing.

The estimated value of cultural and creative activity depends on how the sector is defined and measured. The Australian Bureau of Statistics first published estimates in 2014, and BCARR produced annual updates from 2018 to 2022. The original scope of the sector was broad, including not only the production and creation of cultural and creative goods and services, but also activities related to their manufacture and distribution.

BCARR's statistical working paper *Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia, 2008–09 to 2022–23 (Methodology Refresh)—Statistical Working Paper* sets out the current approach to measuring cultural and creative activity. The methodology refresh revised the scope of activities considered as cultural and creative, resulting in a narrower scope that better represents the sector. It also aligns with accepted best practice in economic measurement and enables estimates to be updated by incorporating newly-available datasets with more granular data.

As part of this revision, several activities previously classified as 'creative only' have been removed from the industry scope, including computer system design and clothing and footwear manufacturing, wholesaling and retailing.

What is a 'thematic account'?

A thematic account (or 'satellite account') measures the economic contribution of activities that are not explicitly defined as industries within the national accounts. It expands the national accounts to provide insights for a selected area of interest while maintaining the concepts and structures of the core national accounts.[1]

Key findings in this update

Cultural and creative activity remains a significant contributor to the Australian economy. In 2024–25, the sector generated an estimated $70.3 billion in economic activity, representing an increase of $22.5 billion (47%) since 2015–16. To put this into context, cultural and creative activity is comparable in size to Australia's Accommodation and Food Services industry.

Over the decade, cultural and creative activity has grown in absolute terms, but growth has been slower than that of the Australian economy overall. This largely reflects the continued strength in the Mining industry (buoyed by high commodity prices), and the Health Care and Social Assistance industry (supported by an ageing population). These industries fall almost entirely outside of the scope of cultural and creative activity.

As a share of total Australian GDP, cultural and creative activity declined from 2.9% in 2015–16 to 2.5% in 2024–25.

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[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), Australian System of National Accounts: Concepts Sources and Methods, ABS Cat. no. 5216.0, p. 664.

Questions relating to domains

In the current scope, cultural and creative activities are grouped by 15 domains. The activities within the domains are grouped in terms of the input-output product classification (IOPC) codes, and the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification 2006 (ANZSIC 06) class codes.

Thirteen of the 15 cultural and creative domains grew in nominal terms from 2015–16 to 2024–25. Much of this growth occurred in domains which have large amounts of commercial activity, such as:

- Advertising and promotion, which increased by $6.9 billion.
- Print media and publishing (excl. internet), which increased by $6.7 billion.
- Design and fashion which increased by $2.7 billion.
- Architecture services which increased by $2.2 billion.

The only domains to record a decline over the period were film and television activities, and radio broadcasting, which fell by $696 million and $172 million respectively. These declines were likely influenced by rising competition from online and cloud-based media platforms and falling demand from advertisers.

Which domain experienced the largest increase?

Advertising and promotion experienced the largest increase from 2015–16 to 2024–25. Activity in this domain grew by $6.9 billion, from $11.2 billion to $18.1 billion, and accounted for 25.7% of total cultural and creative activity in 2024–25. However, as a share of the overall economy, this domain declined slightly from 0.67% of GDP in 2015–16 to 0.65% in 2024–25.

Which domain experienced the strongest growth?

Digital games development experienced the strongest growth of any cultural and creative domain between 2015–16 and 2024–25, with an average annual growth rate of 13.1%. From its small base of initial activity, cultural and creative GDP in digital games development has increased significantly – from $111 million in 2015–16 to $322 million in 2024–25.

How are ‘events (arts)’ captured under the current methodology?

The current methodology provides an opportunity to better capture other activities such as events (arts) activity. Previously, such activity was excluded from pre-2024 estimates as it could not be identified directly from the latest ANZSIC classification. The current methodology resolves this issue by identifying events (arts) activity through the product details level.

Under the current methodology, events (arts) includes activities that provide event management, promotion and ticketing services, and events-related administration services, as well as theatre and concert booking services. Estimates are apportioned to capture activities associated with arts and cultural events, while excluding non-arts event services, such as those related to sporting events.

How can I find out more about the activity captured in each domain?

Detailed information on the size and composition of cultural and creative activity in Australia by domain and industry division is provided in BCARR’s *Visual Summary: Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia, 2015–16 to 2024–25*.

Methodology

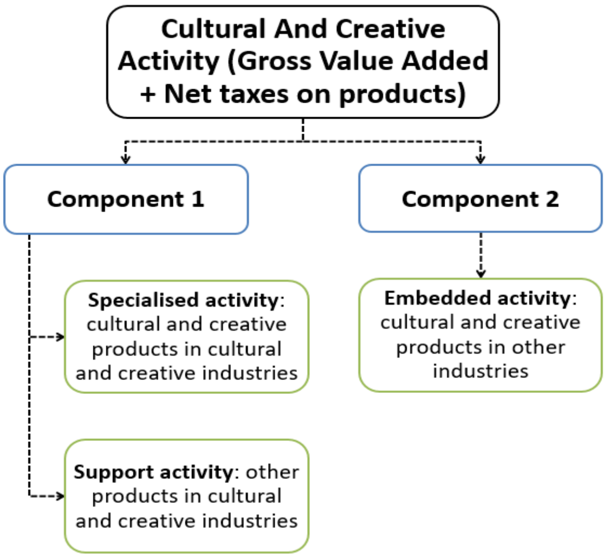
How was cultural and creative activity measured under the current methodology?

This annual update uses the same methodology introduced in BCARR's December 2024 methodology refresh.

The framework

The current methodology follows a framework to capture cultural and creative activity within the production boundary of the national accounts (comprising activity of cultural and creative gross value added plus net taxes on their products), by re-identifying cultural and creative activity as three categories: specialised activity, embedded activity, and support activity.

Figure 1. Framework of cultural and creative activity, national accounts production boundary



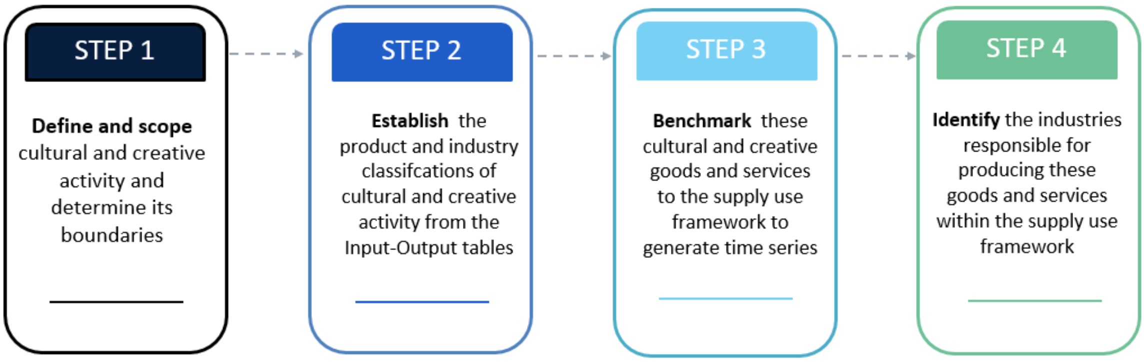
Source: BCARR.

This framework allows the economic value of all three types of cultural and creative activity to be captured wholly through the production side of the economy – by products and industries – and is now measured using a consistent approach. This differs from the previous framework that estimated cultural and creative activity through both the production and income sides of the economy.

Best-practice estimation process

The current methodology is a best-practice approach to produce estimates by quantifying the economic value of cultural and creative activities through a four-step approach.

Figure 2. Current estimation process to quantify the economic value of cultural and creative activity



Source: BCARR.

Scope

In the current scope, cultural and creative activities are identified through both products and industries – as classified and defined by the Australian Input-Output Product Classifications (IOPCs) and Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC).

Production-focused measures

Cultural and creative activity is measured from the production side of the national accounts, which includes domestic output, gross value added (GVA) and gross domestic product (GDP). Estimates of compensation of employees for the cultural and creative workforce – which includes wages and salaries – are expected to be developed and released together with employment estimates in the next phase of this research.

Estimates of cultural and creative activity in this publication are limited to activity within the national accounts production boundary. As a result, they exclude volunteering and other forms of non-market-based production, which are not captured in GDP calculations. The emphasis on the direct economic contribution broadly aligns with cultural/creative thematic accounts developed in other countries. While this initial methodology refresh does not examine potential or intangible values from cultural and creative activity, BCARR may explore these topics in future research.

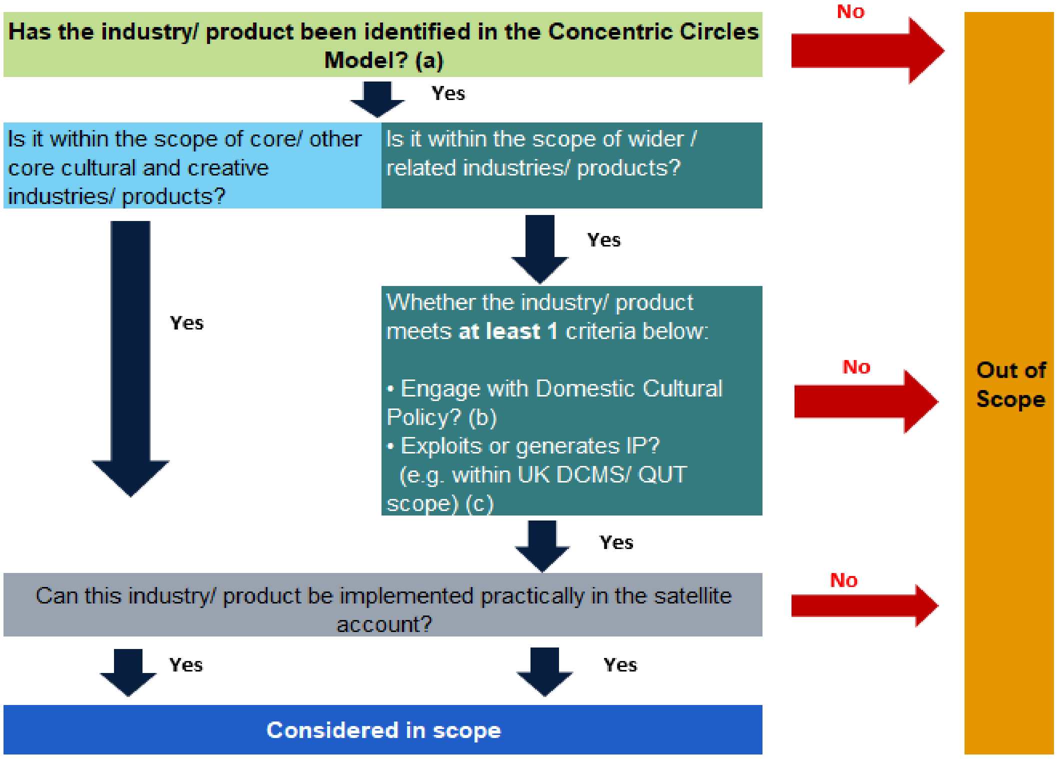
More information on the new scope

How was the current scope of cultural and creative activity determined?

The current scope is supported by a transparent decision-making framework used to identify the industries and products included in the cultural and creative activity account. This was a pragmatic approach created to make the scope consistent and transparent. It also supports a key aim of the methodology refresh, which was for the cultural and creative sector to see itself in the current measure.

The framework is underpinned by existing theoretical models of cultural and creative industries, combined with criteria on whether industries have engaged with domestic cultural policy through various mechanisms, including through submissions to various arts and cultural policy consultation activities and parliamentary inquiries in the period 2013 to 2023.

Figure 3. Decision-making framework to determine the scope of cultural and creative industry and products



Source: Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts.

Notes:

(a) The Concentric Circles Model of cultural industries developed by Professor David Throsby includes four layers: *Core creative arts* (incl. Literature, Music, Performing arts, and Visual arts); *Other core creative industries* (incl. Film, Museums, Galleries, Photography, and Libraries); *Wider cultural industries* (incl. Sound recording, Television and radio, Video and computer games, Heritage services, and Publishing and print media); and *Related industries* (incl. Design, Fashion, Advertising, and Architecture).

(b) This criterion refers to the engagement with domestic cultural policy from the period 2013 to 2023.

(c) The UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)/ Queensland University of Technology (QUT) model defines creative industries as 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.'

Why do we use a decision-making framework?

There is no universally accepted definition of cultural and creative activity to guide scope. As a result, a decision-making framework was developed to provide a consistent and transparent basis for determining the scope of the cultural and creative activity account.

The framework draws primarily on the Concentric Circles Model as the foundation to determine the activities in scope for cultural and creative activity. The cultural and creative areas in which the Australian Government makes substantial investments are considered by many to be the 'core' creative arts and cultural industries. This concept has been articulated by the Concentric Circles Model in examining the structure of the sector, while these core parts of the sector also enable broader cultural and creative production that reaches into the more commercial realms of the economy.

The decision-making framework contains a criterion of industry engagement with domestic cultural policy over the previous decade (including the recent national cultural policy, parliamentary inquiries, and with older cultural policies such as the 2013 *Creative Australia* policy). Engagement with domestic cultural policy was one of two further criteria used in the decision-making framework. The other criterion was whether the industry or product exploits intellectual property. Activities which exploit intellectual property is in line with the creative industry models developed by the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Queensland University of Technology (QUT), and captures some creative activity that is not captured by the domestic cultural policy criterion.

Why are current cultural and creative estimates smaller than BCARR's pre-2024 releases?

Current estimates are lower because the methodology refresh narrowed the scope of cultural and creative activity. Most notably, it removed computer system design and related services and clothing and footwear manufacturing, wholesaling and retailing from the measure. Gross value added for these (now-excluded) industries was estimated at over $50 billion and represented 41.4% of total cultural and creative GDP in the 2019–20 estimates.

How does this methodology compare to other nations, and across states and territories?

There is no universally-agreed definition of cultural and creative activity. While many government and non-government organisations publish estimates of the economic contribution of cultural and/or creative industries, they apply different definitions, classifications and methodologies. As a result, direct comparisons between countries should be made with caution.

The data source and methodology used for the recent update is consistent with other thematic accounts frameworks such as the digital economy account, which has been broadly adopted by many countries including Australia. For example, the current methodology has estimated the cultural and creative activity GVA through an 'output-associated' approach – this approach was used by the US Bureau of Economic Analysis to measure the digital economy in 2018, and was further adopted in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' *Australian digital activity satellite account* and BCARR's *digitalisation satellite account for measuring the Internet of Things, Information and Communications Technology, and digital activities*. In addition, using the input-output tables and supply-use tables as the main data sources in the refreshed cultural and creative activity methodology is also consistent with the Australian and international digital activity accounts. The department expects these consistencies will provide further opportunities to measure these emerging technologies within the cultural and creative sector in the future.

The cultural and creative economic contributions of states and territories have not been covered in either the current or previous estimates. In December 2025, BCARR released an interim report, *Measuring Australia's Cultural and Creative Workforce, 2008–09 to 2023–24*, as part of Phase 2 of its cultural and creative research program. This phase develops a methodology for measuring the cultural and creative workforce with additional analytical dimensions, including state and territory estimates, demographic characteristics, and First Nations representation. A final report is expected in 2027–28, following the release of 2026 Census data and labour market statistics based on updated occupational classifications. The department proposes to develop a methodology for estimating state and territory economic contributions once the final cultural and creative employment estimates are available.