

Places for the Future

Embedding Environmental
Sustainability within the
New South Wales Arts
and Cultural Sector



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Introduction

In recent years bushfires and floods have destroyed vast urban and regional areas across New South Wales. These types of catastrophic events are occurring at an accelerating rate in many parts of Australia and are impacting arts and cultural organisations and their communities.

As we are experiencing these devastating weather events, museums and galleries across NSW are preparing for future disasters while at the same time contributing to the urgent discourse around climate change.

Professor Robyn Sloggett summarised this challenge fittingly in her presentation at the Australian Museums and Galleries Association 2022 conference: ‘Museums and galleries have become both agents and victims in the fight against climate change.’¹



¹ Dr Marcelle Scott and Prof Robyn Sloggett (15 June 2022). The right to know: the risk of climate change to cultural heritage [unpublished conference presentation]. Here. Us. Now: AMAGA national conference, Perth.

This report addresses the important role that the NSW arts and cultural sector, with a focus on public museums and galleries, can play in generating civic engagement, education and awareness and sustainable knowledge production for their communities.

It investigates ways to integrate environmentally sustainable principles into arts organisations' strategic planning, operations and artistic programming, and assesses what is required for those measures to have a meaningful and long-term impact – on the sector itself and the communities they serve. In a NSW-wide sector survey, arts and cultural organisations, creative practitioners, artist-run initiatives and independent arts producers were asked to address

their current practices and the challenges and aspirations they face to become more sustainable and foster environmental stewardship within the sector. Their responses form the basis of this report and the free online toolkit that has been developed based on the survey outcomes.

The toolkit includes best practice case studies, an environmental action plan template, a list of sustainable materials for organisations and artists, a glossary and helpful links to current environmental policy and standards.

The sector survey, report and toolkit have been supported by Regional & Public Galleries of NSW through the Alan Sisley Memorial Fellowship.



Topics covered in this report and the online toolkit include:

- **Making use of renewable technologies** and working with sustainability industry leaders to improve the ecological footprint of organisations and artistic productions, including carbon neutralisation and offsetting
- **Sustainable materials solutions** for artists, galleries and museums
- **Economic benefits** of environmental initiatives
- **Operational challenges ensuing from artistic productions** such as waste production, pollution and energy consumption
- **Encouraging environmental literacy** and creating a culture of environmental awareness within the sector
- How practitioners and organisations can **prioritise environmentally focused work and programs to enhance public understanding** and appreciation of eco-sustainability
- How arts organisations and creative practitioners can **collaborate with regional and broader NSW communities to imagine and create sustainable solutions** for their regions, for example, sustainable food production, alternative farming and urban planning.

Purpose

The aim of this research is to aid the sector to improve its ecological footprint and to inspire, educate and collaborate with creatives, audiences and communities on solutions for a more sustainable future.

Its purpose is to enable arts workers and organisations to devise and implement creative strategies to tackle the complex environmental challenges faced by many urban, regional and remote communities today. This report also acts as an evidence based advocacy tool for environmental sustainability within the broader arts industry, with positive implications for arts policy development and future investment.



Contribution of the Arts to the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

In a moment of global significance, in September 2015, 193 United Nations member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (colloquially known as the ‘Paris Agreement’) – a major call for global action against climate change and poverty (United Nations, 2015).

With 17 sustainable development goals at its core,² the Paris Agreement aims to tackle humanity’s greatest global challenges: to protect the planet, end poverty and improve the lives and health of humanity (Planetary Health Alliance, 2006). Governments across the world are working towards integrating these goals into their public policy frameworks, while communities, business sectors and research organisations collaborate to develop new systems and practices relating to improved environmental living, as well as food, energy and resource sharing.



² The 17 sustainable development goals are: 1. No poverty 2. Zero hunger 3. Good health and well-being 4. Quality education 5. Gender equality 6. Clean water and sanitation 7. Affordable and clean energy 8. Decent work and economic growth 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure 10. Reduced inequalities 11. Sustainable cities and communities 12. Responsible consumption and production 13. Climate action 14. Life below water 15. Life on land 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions and 17. Partnerships for the goals. United Nations (2015). Sustainable development goals, UN website, accessed 10 January 2021. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

Since the signing of the Paris Agreement, the Australian arts and cultural sector has contributed significantly towards the important conversation around sustainability and environmental issues (Museums Australia, 2003).

At the same time, **the sector faces pressure to reduce its carbon footprint and develop more energy-efficient systems, while continuing to provide optimal climate control for public collections, exhibitions and certain heritage items** (Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material, 2018). This calls for a cohesive approach across the sector, with support from government and public funding agencies, to enable it to become more environmentally sustainable and contribute to Australia's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Survey Results



Overview



Challenges for organisations



Challenges for individual practitioners



Opportunities for organisations



Opportunities for individual practitioners



Requirements to improve
environmental sustainability



Overview

Over 100 organisations and individual creative practitioners participated in the survey on eco-sustainability within the NSW arts and cultural sector. Contributors included public galleries, agencies, festival organisations, regional arts development organisations, individual creative practitioners, artist-run initiatives and independent arts producers from across NSW. Responses were received from all regions.

The survey results clearly showed that creative practitioners and arts organisations are embracing their role as leaders in environmental action and civic engagement and use their voices and position within local, national and international communities to create space for conversation, advocacy and education.

*Survey participants could select multiple response options.





Overview



88%

of survey participants are already taking environmental action within their operations and creative practice through mindful sourcing of sustainable materials, increased use of renewable energy sources and active creation of artistic programs and artworks that speak to environmental issues and encourage dialogue for sustainable future solutions.

The survey revealed that the sector had a clear understanding of how creative and cultural practitioners, artists and the broader cultural industry contribute to environmental sustainability development.

87%

by highlighting current environmental issues through creative expressions and unique perspectives

80%

by educating and creating civic engagement with environmental and sustainability issues

72%

by highlighting and promoting the value of traditional knowledge to sustainable practices and solutions



Overview

Not only does the sector contribute to awareness-raising and knowledge production, it also leads the way in sustainable development by adopting new technologies and by creating an open discourse on environmental issues that is not indebted to political agendas. Collaboration between science and the arts frequently results in new creative concepts and models that contribute to sustainable living and action. **Of the participants surveyed, 72% agreed that there was a strong demand from audiences and stakeholders to increase the focus on environmental leadership within arts organisations' operations and creative programming.**

There is a strong sense of responsibility within the sector to make institutions and organisations more sustainable and to embed environmental action within their mission statements. The Australian Museum published its Sustainability Action Plan in 2019, setting concrete goals and operational key performance indicators to become more sustainable. The Art Gallery of NSW has established a sustainability working group to drive action on climate change and develop adaptation strategies, in line with the NSW Government's NSW Climate Change Policy Framework.

Georgia Connolly, Manager, Touring & Partnerships Art Gallery of NSW sees many ways in which organisations can contribute to environmental stewardship:

'Broadly, the cultural sector needs a shared language and tool kits to help guide effective action to marry operations with public positions on sustainability. Institutions like the Art Gallery of NSW, with the appointment of a sustainability manager and an internal working group, are developing net zero emission pathways and targets but also navigating the challenge of balancing these targets with current practice considerations such as climate control for collection care and risk management for logistics/insurance/indemnity. Artists and independent organisations can be more agile in adopting sustainable measures like switching to renewables. It's the collaborations with them that will help share knowledge and practice to effect change in our larger institutions.'

Individual practitioners are actively engaged in environmental and sustainability issues and are driving the conversation around sustainability solutions:

Of the artists and creative practitioners surveyed, **88% said that they were engaging with sustainability issues in their creative practice.** Environmental conservation, climate change and the pollution and destruction of natural resources such as water, air, soil and natural ecosystems were the key issues and themes that they were concerned with.

58%

engage with
environmental
conservation

56%

engage with
climate change

53%

engage with pollution
and destruction of
natural resources such
as air, water, soil and
natural ecosystems



Overview

Artists and creatives' active engagement with environmental themes are directly linked to the many environmental challenges that urban, regional and remote communities across NSW have faced in recent years.

Bush fires, floods and pollution of natural habitats were the key issues identified by survey participants. In recent years, arts and cultural institutions have been severely affected by extreme weather events.

Galleries and museums across the Blue Mountains, South Coast and Northern Rivers amongst other areas in NSW experienced unprecedented catastrophic bushfires, floods and soil erosion. The 2019–20 bushfires threatened cultural landmarks and national treasures such as Bundanon Trust and the Blue Mountains Botanic Gardens.

Extreme rainfall in 2020–22 on the North Coast and Northern Rivers devastated communities and both the Lismore Regional Gallery and Byron Bay School of Arts were badly affected.

Other pressing environmental issues that were identified by survey participants were environmental impacts from tourism, especially in regional and remote areas.

'In our region, tourism has a significant negative impact on our national parks and conservation areas. This includes rubbish, vegetation picking, and increased spread of weeds from visitors.' Anonymous

The key hurdle that the sector faces in becoming more environmentally sustainable is twofold: vague arts policy frameworks from local, state and federal governments that guide environmental action for the sector and insufficient funding opportunities to realise sustainable infrastructure projects, operational upgrades and artistic programming opportunities.

'There is insufficient organisational policy, direction and support from auspicing organisations (council).' Anonymous

Clearer guidelines and increasing environmental literacy within organisations and the broader sector were identified as vital to making a meaningful impact and to driving environmental action across the industry.

Of the organisations surveyed, 57% believed that there were insufficient guidelines for environmental best practice for the sector and 54% of creative practitioners surveyed thought that the sector lacked environmental literacy.

Looking ahead, it is evident that the sector is ambitious and committed to contributing to the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and to creating a more sustainable Australia. The key aspirations of survey participants were:



increase programs featuring environmental and sustainability themes



increase environmental actions within organisational operations (for example, waste management and energy consumption)



enhance the organisational reputation by being a leader in environmental sustainability



Challenges: Organisations

There are a number of environmental challenges that the sector faces, however, it is important to note that the sector only accounts for a small percentage of NSW's carbon emissions. The largest contributor is the energy sector, comprising stationary energy, transport and fugitive emissions from fuels, which accounts for 74% of net emissions, including those associated with land use, land-use change and forestry.³

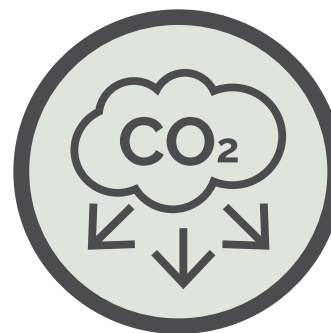
Key environmental challenges identified by visual arts organisations, museums and arts agencies included:



insufficient funding opportunities for sustainable infrastructure upgrades



high energy consumption through electricity, gas and lighting



emissions caused by freight, especially for rural and remote organisations



waste caused by artistic productions such as exhibitions and arts events ending up in landfill

³ Adapt NSW, NSW greenhouse gas emissions, NSW Government website, accessed 19 October 2022. <https://www.climatechange.environment.nsw.gov.au/nsw-emissions>



Challenges: Organisations

Of the organisations surveyed, 55% reported that inadequate infrastructure prevented them from saving energy, especially galleries and museums which have to adhere to strict environmental and climate controls. Maintaining these standards, which include light levels, temperature and relative humidity, consumes vast amounts of electricity and gas.

Over half (57%) of organisations noted that having to balance museum and gallery environmental control requirements such as lighting, temperature and humidity control with more sustainable energy consumption methods was a major challenge.

Most (88%) of organisations stated insufficient funding opportunities to implement energy-saving measures were preventing them from upgrading their infrastructure and operational systems. Waste production was identified as another key challenge.

68%

of organisations listed printing individual exhibition graphics such as wall decals, signage and posters as a major contributor to landfill as many of these materials cannot be recycled

62%

identified freight (of materials, artworks, equipment and touring productions) as a major contributor to their organisation's greenhouse gas emissions

55%

of organisations highlighted that little or no green or recyclable materials were available for use in art productions, festivals and exhibitions

Despite these challenges, arts organisations are actively working towards making their operations more environmentally friendly and sustainable.

Many (45%) arts organisations already had an environmental action plan and/or adhered to internal environmental policies.

Half of the organisations that are part of local government stated that

their council had an environmental action plan or were working with a sustainability team. The majority **(87%) of organisations that didn't have an environmental action plan yet stated that it would be of great benefit for them.**

One quarter of participating organisations monitored and reported on the environmental impacts of their buildings and operations.



Challenges: Individual Practitioners

Individual creative practitioners, artist run initiatives, and independent arts producers commented on the main challenges they are facing in their efforts to be more environmentally conscious and to promote environmental issues:

61%

mentioned insufficient funding opportunities to create work addressing environmental and sustainability issues

54%

outlined a lack of environmental literacy and best practice guidelines for the arts sector and within NSW Government arts policy.

Interestingly, 37% mentioned insufficient demand from audiences and arts organisations to commission, showcase works and produce events that engage with environmental issues.

Many participants commented on difficulties in sourcing and using sustainable materials for the creation of artworks and creative productions. Freight and emissions caused by transporting artworks, materials and production equipment was also a concern.



Opportunities: Organisations

The survey demonstrated that across NSW, the sector shares a vision for the transformative role of arts and culture to tackle environmental issues and showed a strong commitment to challenge the status quo by changing unsustainable behaviours of consumption and production.

Many organisations recognised the opportunities of integrating renewable technologies, working with sustainability industry leaders on improving their ecological footprint, improving their building design and the economic benefits resulting from environmental initiatives.

Organisations saw a real opportunity to meaningfully engage their audiences and create learning opportunities and a shared understanding of environmental living and acting through artistic programming and the commissioning of new work that addresses environmental issues.

When asked what particular opportunities the sector has available to engage with sustainability matters:

- 63% facilitate community engagement programs that involve creative practitioners working in the environmental realm
- 62% felt that part of the role of the arts and cultural sector was to engage and commission artists working in the field of environmental action to creatively raise awareness, educate and to provide new perspectives on environmental issues
- 62% highlighted the importance of working with traditional owners and local elders to share and promote First Nations knowledge as an intrinsic part of environmental balance and sustainable development
- 60% thought that hosting public programs, events, talks and community days that address environmental sustainability matters was a great opportunity to generate engagement
- 50% felt that working and collaborating with their communities to address sustainability issues particular to their regions, and to generate creative solutions for the future, was an important opportunity
- 47% use their collections to educate and inform audiences about environmental issues related to their regions and to present challenging and complex issues in accessible and inclusive ways



Opportunities: Organisations

Operationally, organisations saw opportunities to reduce energy consumption, waste production and generate savings through:

strategic waste management recycling, avoiding single-use plastics products, composting and re-purposing of materials

50%

using energy-efficient lighting

40%

promoting virtual communications technology as an alternative to travelling

27%

strategic procurement including, but not limited to, purchasing appliances with a 4-star (or better) energy rating, assessment of life cycle impacts of products and services, prioritising environmentally conscious suppliers and products

22%





Opportunities: Individual Practitioners

Individual creative practitioners outlined the many opportunities that creative practice affords to generate understanding, connection and empathy for environmental matters.

They highlighted that creative thinkers and makers are best placed to produce and present innovative solutions for sustainable living.

Many participants saw opportunities to reduce the environmental impact of their practice and creative productions by sourcing sustainable material alternatives and using energy-efficient technologies.

- 95% of individual participants already took environmental action in their practice
- 66% undertook environmentally conscious resourcing of materials used in their practice
- 57% used their platform, for example through their work, social media, website or in public speaking engagements to raise awareness about environmental issues
- 54% used energy-efficient technologies and products including recyclable packaging, avoiding toxic products
- 51% saw opportunities to highlight and address current environmental issue through creative expressions and unique perspectives
- 48% highlighted the importance of sharing and promoting the value of traditional knowledge to sustainable practices and solutions
- 48% said that creatives practitioners have opportunities to develop creative solutions for eco-sustainability issues through collaboration and bridging different types of knowledge and areas of experience
- 48% collaborated with organisations, communities and other creatives to address environmental issues
- 45% saw potential in educating and creating civic engagement with environmental sustainability issues



Requirements to improve environmental sustainability

The majority of those surveyed (87%) thought that there were insufficient opportunities within the sector to create artistic productions that address environmental issues and to develop work that speaks to eco-sustainability matters. Over half (58%) wanted to see more opportunities to address environmental issues through such things as exhibition opportunities, commissions, residencies and networking events.

Individual creative practitioners highlighted the urgent need for more creative opportunities that addressed eco-sustainability issues.

Similar to organisational survey participants, 61% of individual creative practitioners commented on the need for greater recognition of the role of the arts in promoting sustainability at local, state and federal government levels and within public funding frameworks.

Over half (58%) wanted to see an increase in the involvement of First Nations people, highlighting and promoting the value of traditional knowledge to sustainable practices and solutions.

Many (45%) wanted to see increased advocacy efforts from within the sector and called upon sector organisations to not only argue for and promote the important contribution of the arts to eco-sustainability but to lobby for better inclusion in arts policy and funding guidelines.



通过最小限度的道具，建立合理的系统。
将各种用途集于一身，可在共通的杆子上装转接头。
另外“自立型扫除用品”不占空间，能随时取出使用。
扫除用品系列

Summary

We are facing critical times. While NSW saw a downturn of carbon emissions in 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, emissions returned to equal, if not higher, rates in 2021 and 2022 as the economy and travel have resumed.

The 2021 and 2022 United Nations Climate Change conferences (colloquially known as COP26 & 27) couldn't have made it more clear: reducing our carbon emissions to limit global warming to below 2°C is absolutely crucial to avoid a climate catastrophe and we have less than a decade to achieve it.

Scientific data presented at the conferences revealed that we need to reduce pollution by 75% by 2030. On 29 September 2021, the NSW State Government set a new objective of halving emissions by 2030 – up from 35% below 2005 levels by 2030.⁴



⁴ NSW Government (29 Sept 2021). NSW set to halve emissions by 2030 [media release], NSW Government website, accessed 2 February 2022: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/nsw-set-to-halve-emissions-by-2030#:~:text=NSW%20is%20set%20to%20attract,Zero%3A%20Stage%201%20Implementation%20Update>

To achieve this, the sector must work together to reduce emissions and find more sustainable solutions for the future.

This survey has shown that the NSW arts and cultural sector is ambitious and is challenging expectations when it comes to environmental sustainability.

Creative practitioners and arts organisations not only want to see the sector reduce its carbon emissions but understand the power of the arts in mobilising and being a catalyst for societal change. The message is clear: they want to position the arts and cultural sector as part of the climate change solution. Change must start at the top: concrete environmental targets and support mechanisms to achieve these need to be set at a state government level and be embedded within arts policy frameworks.

Embedding environmental outcomes within funding criteria and supporting environmental literacy across the sector is crucial to steer arts and cultural industries toward a more sustainable direction.

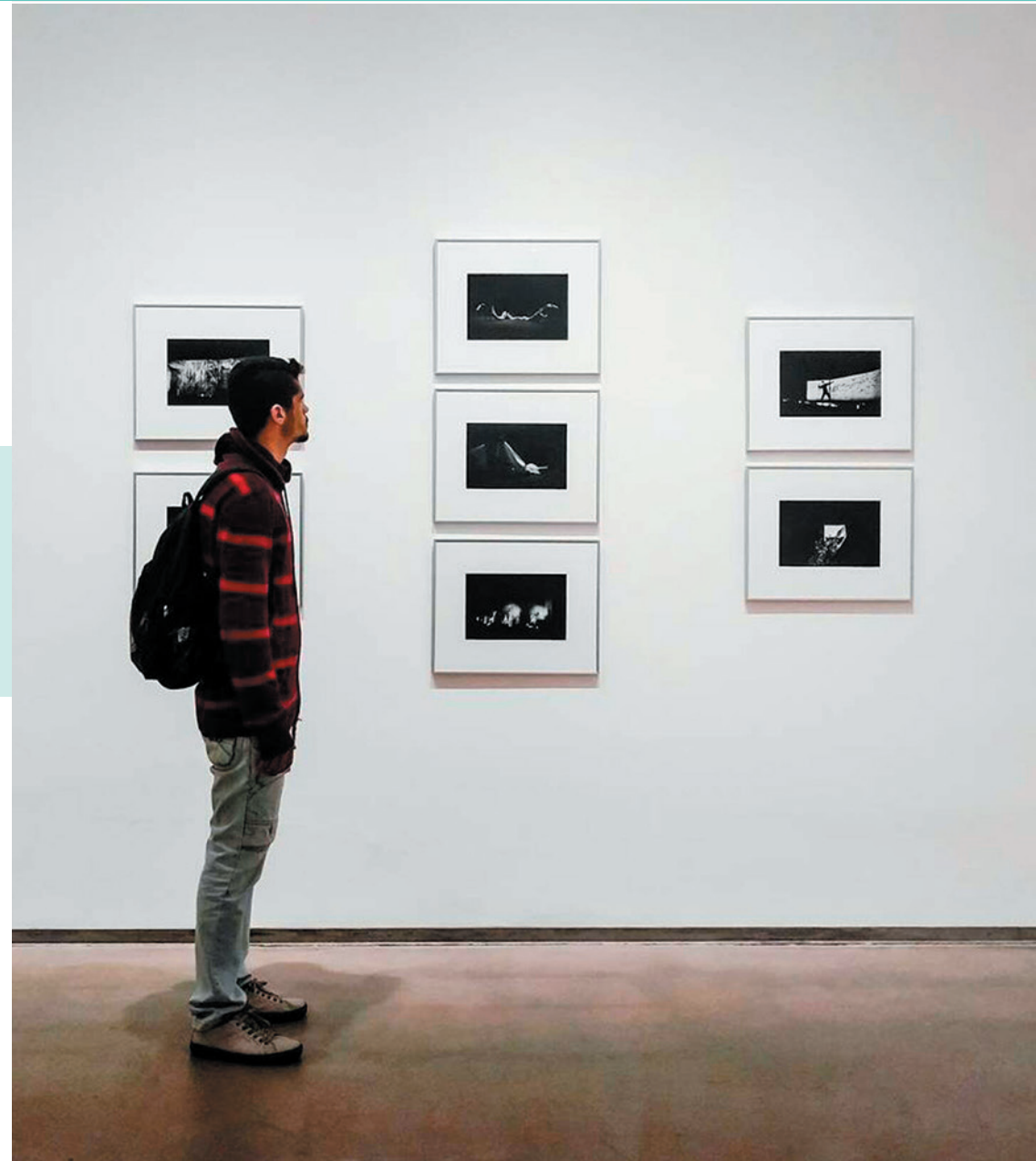
In the UK, Arts Council England is a leading example with its Environmental Program. Through its arts policy intervention in 2012 which saw the implementation of environmental reporting requirements for arts organisations receiving funding, the program managed to reduce the creative sector's environmental footprint by 37% since 2012. This policy has also helped to develop the cultural sector's understanding, agency and leadership on climate and the environment. Led by Julie's Bicycle, 828 national portfolio organisations commit annually to environmental reporting, policies and action plans, supported by a program of training, events and resources including leadership programs. The annual report produced by Julie's Bicycle records progress and celebrates the achievements of NPOs in driving positive change across their governance, operations and creative practice.⁵

⁵ Arts Council England (nd). Environmental programme, ACE website, accessed 10 May 2022. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/environmental-programme>

The sector must lobby and advocate for similar interventions with federal, state and local policymakers in Australia. Arts industry bodies such as the National Association of the Visual Arts, Museums and Galleries NSW and the Regional and Public Galleries Association of NSW are heading the conversation on strengthening the link between environmental sustainability and cultural policy making and are well placed to lobby governments on behalf of arts and cultural organisations and creative practitioners.

The environmental toolkit included with this report provides guidance through a list of sustainable material options, an environmental action plan template, best practice case studies and helpful links to current environmental policy and guidelines, as well as information on carbon reduction and offsetting.

The toolkit is a living document that will grow and adapt as we drive positive environmental change and collectively create a more sustainable and environmentally focused sector.



Glossary

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