

# CULTURAL WORKFORCE INDEX™

WHITE PAPER | 2026

*A Proposed National Framework for Cultural Workforce Recognition,  
Structural Load Measurement, and Legislative Consideration*

## INSTRUMENT THREE OF THREE

CWA Structural Measurement Suite: DCL • ILV • CWI™

### Copyright and Intellectual Property Notice

© Penny Thomas and the Creative Women's Association Australia Pty Ltd, 2026. All rights reserved.

The Cultural Workforce Index™ (CWI) — including its conceptual framework, terminology, sector definition, formula, structural integration with the DCL and ILV instruments, scoring model, and proposed policy and legislative applications — was developed by Penny Thomas and is the intellectual property of the Creative Women's Association (ABN 54 693 315 043).

As set out in this White Paper, the CWI™ is the third instrument within the CWA Structural Measurement Suite, designed to identify, quantify, and make legible the cultural workforce as a distinct, governable sector of economic and social infrastructure .

This document is released for the purposes of establishing intellectual priority, enabling academic validation, and supporting engagement across policy, workforce, and legislative domains. It may be read, cited, and referenced, provided full attribution is given as follows:

Thomas, P. (2026). The Cultural Workforce Index™ (CWI): A Proposed National Framework for Cultural Workforce Recognition, Structural Load Measurement, and Legislative Consideration. CWA White Paper. Creative Women's Association. [creativewomensassociation.org](http://creativewomensassociation.org)

No part of this document may be reproduced, adapted, republished, or incorporated into workforce classification systems, certification frameworks, economic models, policy instruments, legislative drafting, or commercial applications — in whole or in part — without prior written permission from the Creative Women's Association.

The terms Cultural Workforce Index™, CWI™, cultural workforce, cultural work, and all associated structural definitions, along with the formula  $CWI = DCL \times P^{-1}$  and the Participation Discount Factor (P) and its inverse ( $P^{-1}$ ), are original to the author and must be attributed accordingly in any academic, policy, or applied use.

The designation of cultural work as a formal workforce category, and the framing of a Cultural Work & Provenance Sector, constitute original structural and policy concepts developed by the Creative Women's Association and are protected as intellectual property.

Enquiries regarding collaboration, validation partnerships, licensing, certification alignment, or legislative application:

[creativewomensassociation.org](http://creativewomensassociation.org)

### Sector Recognition Clause:

The Cultural Workforce Index™ is proposed as a national measurement instrument for identifying and defining a Cultural Work & Provenance Sector. Any use of this framework in sector classification, workforce modelling, certification systems, or legislative design must be undertaken with formal attribution and, where applicable, agreement with the Creative Women's Association.

## TERMINOLOGY AND FRAMING

---

For the purposes of this document, culture is the governing noun. The word ‘creative’ is used only as a descriptive adjective. The Creative Women’s Association adopts the term cultural work to refer to labour that contributes to cultural transmission, continuity, heritage, and social infrastructure — encompassing both intangible cultural knowledge, skills, and practices, and the tangible outputs through which that knowledge is expressed.

This framing aligns with UNESCO safeguarding principles and with Japan’s Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (Act No. 214, 1950), which recognised that the human bearers of cultural knowledge require formal state designation, registration, and protection. References to ‘creative’ activity describe the nature of practice, not its governance status.

TERM	CANONICAL USE
<b>Cultural work</b>	Default term for all labour contributing to cultural transmission, continuity, heritage, and infrastructure
<b>Cultural workforce</b>	The full body of practitioners engaged in cultural work, paid and unpaid
<b>Cultural practitioner</b>	Any individual whose labour constitutes cultural work — equivalent to Japan’s designated bearer of intangible cultural heritage under Act No. 214 (1950)
<b>Cultural provenance</b>	The traceable origin, transmission, and integrity of cultural knowledge and practice
<b>Creative practice</b>	Acceptable adjective use: the mode or method of cultural work
<b>Creative industries</b>	Acceptable only when referencing existing datasets or government reports
<b>Creative health</b>	Acceptable where already an established policy term (WHO framework)

***The distinction between creative and cultural is not rhetorical. It is structural. Adjectives describe qualities of work. Nouns determine whether that work is recognised, governed, measured, and protected.***

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

The Cultural Workforce Index™ (CWI) is a proposed integrated metric designed to evaluate structural load, workforce capacity, and economic participation for women engaged in cultural work. It is the third instrument in the CWA structural measurement suite, completing a proposed evidential foundation for the Australian Cultural Work & Provenance Act.

The CWI is presented here as a framework seeking academic validation, expert review, and legislative consideration. It is grounded in established empirical constructs, aligned with international precedent spanning 75 years, and developed in conjunction with the DCL Index (structural harm) and the ILV Index (economic value and remuneration).

The Index addresses a foundational structural problem: women's labour has been framed as creative rather than cultural. This framing is not semantic. It is the mechanism by which women's work has been excluded from workforce classification, standards frameworks, certification pathways, procurement systems, and legislative protection.

Japan identified and corrected this same mechanism in 1950, through binding legislation that formally named the bearers of intangible cultural heritage, registered them, and paid them. That payment has continued without interruption for 75 years. The CWI proposes the measurement instrument that would make an equivalent recognition actionable in Australia.

INSTRUMENT	FUNCTION	EVIDENTIAL ROLE	IN ONE LINE
DCL Index	Cost / Risk	Structural harm requiring protection	Names the damage
ILV Index	Value / Payment	Economic debt requiring correction	Names the debt
<b>CWI™ (Cultural)</b>	Sector / Participation	Sector requiring legislative recognition	Names the sector

***DCL names the damage. ILV names the debt. CWI names the sector. Together they constitute the proposed evidential basis for the Australian Cultural Work & Provenance Act.***

## INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATIVE PRECEDENT

---

The CWI is grounded in 75 years of demonstrated international legislative practice. The following precedents establish that formal recognition of cultural practitioners, national registration systems, and mandatory economic support mechanisms are not theoretical — they are operative, proven, and reproducible.

### Japan: Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (1950, Act No. 214)

Japan enacted the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties in 1950. The law formally recognised that the human bearers of intangible cultural heritage — individuals whose sustained practice carries cultural knowledge across generations — require state designation, registration, and economic support. It created three things that map directly onto the CWI framework: a sector classification for intangible cultural heritage; a national register of designated practitioners; and mandatory annual government payment to registered bearers, non-discretionary and operative from the date of designation.

► **INTERNATIONAL PRECEDENT: Japan Act No. 214 (1950) — Sector Classification, National Register, Mandatory Payment**

*The national government designates especially significant Intangible Cultural Properties, simultaneously recognising individuals or groups who have achieved advanced mastery of the technique as the holder. The national government provides special grants (¥2 million per year) for recognised individual holders and subsidises training programs for successors. By December 2020, 371 individuals had been designated since enactment. The payment has operated without interruption for 75 years. (Agency for Cultural Affairs, Japan, [bunka.go.jp](http://bunka.go.jp); Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, Act No. 214)*

The CWI proposes the measurement instrument that performs, for Australian cultural women, what Japan's designation system performs for its cultural bearers: it identifies who they are, quantifies the structural conditions under which they work, and establishes the evidential basis for their formal recognition under a proposed national Act.

### Japan's 1975 Amendment: The Most Directly Relevant Precedent

Prior to 1975, Japan documented folk cultural expressions — the everyday practices of ordinary communities, not elite performing arts — without legally protecting them. The 1975 amendment brought these expressions within the protection framework, recognising that documentation without protection is insufficient.

This is precisely Australia's current position with respect to women's cultural labour. It is documented in ABS time-use surveys. It appears in WGEA reports. The DCL Index quantifies the structural harm it produces. The ILV calculates the resulting debt at \$5.63 trillion on the conservative basis, accruing at \$502 million per day. None of this documentation triggers legal protection. None of it triggers mandatory payment. The proposed Cultural Work & Provenance Act is Australia's 1975 amendment.

► **INTERNATIONAL PRECEDENT: Japan 1975 Amendment — Australia's Current Position**

*Folk cultural expressions were for a long time not considered cultural properties under the law, but were seen as only requiring documentation. This changed in 1975 when folk cultural expressions were legally recognised as Important Intangible Folk Cultural Properties. Australia is currently in the pre-1975 position: the labour is documented, the harm is quantified, the debt is calculated. The protection has not followed. (International Journal of Intangible Heritage, 2007)*

## **Japan's Basic Act on Culture and the Arts (2001, Revised 2017)**

Japan's Basic Act on Culture and the Arts, substantially revised in 2017, established that cultural policy is cross-sectoral infrastructure rather than an arts supplement. The Act mandates collaboration across social welfare, education, health, regional development, and industry, treating cultural practitioners as contributors to national capability. The 2017 revision extended this to the economic conditions of practice: the state has an obligation to support the conditions under which cultural practitioners can sustain their work economically.

This is the legislative model for the Cultural Work & Provenance Sector that the CWI proposes to name. The Sector is not an arts category. It is a cross-sectoral economic and workforce infrastructure category.

## **Harris Tweed Act 1993 (United Kingdom)**

The Harris Tweed Act 1993 created a statutory certification mark that can only be applied to cloth produced by islanders in the Outer Hebrides from pure virgin wool dyed and spun in the islands. It made it a criminal offence to apply the mark to non-qualifying fabric. The Act uses provenance certification as a mandatory economic protection instrument: the mark prevents devaluation of practitioners' labour through imitation and attaches a legislatively protected price premium to certified work.

► **INTERNATIONAL PRECEDENT: Harris Tweed Act 1993 (UK) — Provenance as Mandatory Economic Protection**

*The Harris Tweed Act 1993 established a statutory definition and a certification authority with power to protect the Orb mark. It is a criminal offence to apply the mark to non-qualifying fabric. The provenance premium flows as a legislatively protected entitlement to the producer, not as a voluntary market outcome. This is the model proposed for the Southern Cross Mark under the Australian Cultural Work & Provenance Act.*

## **UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)**

The UNESCO 2003 Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as encompassing practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognise as part of their heritage, and establishes that safeguarding requires ensuring the viability of those

practices — including through recognition of practitioners. The Creative Women's Association is preparing an application for NGO accreditation under this Convention, recognising its work in safeguarding living cultural practice through systems that support skills transmission, provenance, and recognition of cultural practitioners as bearers of heritage.

Although Australia has not ratified the 2003 Convention, CWA is developing practical frameworks aligned with the Convention's safeguarding principles, connecting cultural practice, workforce infrastructure, and economic participation.

# THE STRUCTURAL ARGUMENT: CULTURAL, NOT CREATIVE

---

## Adjectives and Nouns in Policy Governance

In policy and workforce governance, language is not decorative. The distinction between an adjective and a noun determines whether work is recognised, governed, measured, and protected by law. An adjective describes a quality. A noun names a thing that can be counted, classified, certified, and legislated.

For decades, women's labour has been held in the adjective: called creative, framed as expressive and supplementary, celebrated symbolically and ignored economically. Japan made the same classification error with folk cultural expressions before 1975. It corrected that error through legislation. The political decision preceded the system; the system then made protection mandatory.

The CWI proposes to move women's labour from the adjective to the noun. Cultural work is a classifiable category. A cultural workforce is a governable entity. A Cultural Work & Provenance Sector is a legislatable domain. Japan proved this is possible in 1950. The CWI provides the proposed Australian measurement instrument that makes it actionable.

## What Cultural Work Encompasses

Under the CWA framework, and consistent with the UNESCO 2003 Convention's definitional domains, cultural work is defined as any labour that contributes to:

- cultural transmission — the passing of knowledge, practice, and value across generations
- cultural continuity — the maintenance of social and community cohesion
- cultural heritage — the preservation and expression of intangible and tangible practice
- cultural infrastructure — the systems and relationships that enable cultural life
- cultural production — the making of objects, works, and practices that embody cultural knowledge

Under this definition, and consistent with Japan's bearer recognition framework: childcare is cultural transmission; teaching is cultural continuity; craft is cultural heritage; care is cultural infrastructure; intangible knowledge is cultural capital; tangible making is cultural production.

***Cultural Work & Provenance exists to ensure that what is given to society — knowledge, care, skill, craft, and continuity — is not exhausted or erased, but recognised as essential infrastructure for human, social, and economic life.***



# THE PROPOSED CULTURAL WORKFORCE INDEX™

---

## Overview

The Cultural Workforce Index™ (CWI) is a proposed integrated metric designed to evaluate structural load, economic participation, and workforce capacity for women engaged in cultural work. It provides a proposed measurable structure capable of integrating unpaid labour, care load, cognitive load, physiological stress, and economic precarity into a single interpretable indicator for workforce and policy use.

The Index formalises what existing national data already demonstrates:

- Women perform 76% of unpaid labour in Australia (ABS, 2023)
- Women perform 71.8% of primary care, creating a persistent labour supply constraint (WGEA, 2024)
- 0% of the cultural workforce currently operates under nationally recognised standards
- Australia has no national certification authority or standards framework for cultural work
- Japan has had both since 1950, grounded in binding national legislation

## The Formula

The CWI is built on the Domestic & Care Load (DCL) formula, extended by a Cultural Participation Dimension:

---

$$\text{CWI} = \text{DCL} \times \text{P}^{-1}$$

---

Where  $\text{DCL} = (\text{U} + \text{C} + \text{M}) \times \text{A} \times \text{F}$ , and  $\text{P}$  = the Participation Discount Factor: the structural barriers that prevent women from translating cultural labour into economic recognition.  $\text{P}^{-1}$ , the inverse, restores the participation value that has been suppressed.

This inverse structure is consistent with the ILV Index's  $\text{G}^{-1}$  (Gender Discount Inverse). Both apply the same mathematical principle: the current economic system has applied a discount approaching zero to the value of women's cultural work. The inverse of that discount, correctly applied, restores the suppressed value. The formula structure, domain weightings, and scoring thresholds are primary subjects for the proposed validation pathway.

## Proposed Scoring Framework

SCORE	LOAD LEVEL	INDICATIVE PROFILE	JAPAN EQUIVALENCE
0–20	<b>Low Load</b>	Stable finances, shared duties. Cultural participation accessible.	Bearer function sustainable. Protected conditions.
21–40	<b>Moderate Load</b>	Emerging strain. Cultural participation constrained by time poverty.	Bearer function under pressure. Successor transmission at risk.
41–60	<b>High Load</b>	Primary carer, limited support, financial instability.	Bearer function significantly impaired. Structural support indicated.
61–100	<b>Critical Load</b>	Single parenthood, precarity, high allostatic stress, complex care.	Bearer function near collapse. Designation and support required.
100+	<b>Crisis Load</b>	Health deterioration, DV vulnerability, complete cultural exclusion.	Bearer function lost. Cultural heritage loss event.

This index reflects proposed risk thresholds and structural exclusion patterns, not diagnosis. Threshold definitions and scoring ranges are indicative pending psychometric validation.

## THE RETROSPECTIVE CALCULATION

---

The CWI, alongside the DCL and ILV, informs a retrospective calculation of the structural debt owed to Australian women for uncompensated cultural labour since the Equal Pay Case (1969). This calculation applies established ABS, WGEA, and OECD data using methodology consistent with the ABS unpaid work satellite accounts, aggregated across the eligible population across a 56-year period. Full methodology is available in the ILV White Paper (CWA, 2026).

BASIS	INDICATIVE RETROSPECTIVE DEBT (1969–2025)
Conservative (minimum wage for unpaid labour)	<b>\$5.63 trillion</b>
ILV replacement cost (full market rate)	<b>\$44.52 trillion</b>
Current annual accrual rate	\$183.4 billion per year
Current daily accrual rate	\$502 million per day
Australian GDP 2024 (context)	\$2.7 trillion

These figures are indicative calculations based on established data sources and are presented to illustrate the scale of structural exclusion. Independent economic validation of the full retrospective methodology is part of the proposed research pathway.

For context: Japan's total expenditure on bearer grants since 1950 is approximately ¥15 billion (≈ AUD \$160 million). Australia has accumulated an indicative \$5.63 trillion debt to millions of unprotected bearers over the same period. The cost of protection is a fraction of the cost of its absence.

## WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC INTERPRETATION

---

The CWI links structural load to measurable economic impact. National data demonstrates the scale of the failure to recognise and remunerate cultural work:

- Gender productivity loss attributable to structural exclusion: \$6B annually (ABS, WGEA)
- Cultural sector underemployment among women: \$1.2–1.5B annual loss
- Financial precarity in cultural work: approximately \$8,300 annual cost per woman
- Superannuation gap: 31% — the direct lifetime penalty for unpaid cultural labour (WGEA 2024)
- 0% of the cultural workforce operates under nationally recognised standards
- Zero national procurement initiatives targeting women’s cultural workforce development (2015–2025)

High CWI scores correlate with reduced cultural workforce participation, higher dropout rates (particularly for women over 45), decreased capacity for training and enterprise development, increased vulnerability to economic coercion and domestic violence, and loss of cultural knowledge through practitioner attrition.

This is not a skills deficit or a participation problem. It is a system design problem — and the CWI is the proposed instrument that makes the system’s design visible and measurable.

# POLICY GAP AND SYSTEM FAILURE

---

Australia currently lacks each of the four instruments Japan has operated under binding legislation since 1950:

## 1. A recognised Cultural Work & Provenance Sector

No formal sector classification exists for cultural work as a distinct economic and workforce category. Japan created one in 1950. Australia has documented the need for one across every major gender equity, cultural policy, and workforce framework produced since 1969. It has not created one.

## 2. A national certification authority for cultural practitioners

No designation system exists for bearers of Australian women's intangible cultural heritage. Japan has formally designated 371 individuals since 1950 and paid them annually by law. The CWA proposes to establish this function, aligned with Japan's bearer recognition framework and the Harris Tweed Authority's provenance certification model.

## 3. A procurement pathway for cultural work

No procurement category exists for women-led cultural workforce development. Japan subsidises training programs for designated bearers and successors under Act No. 214. Australia has no equivalent mechanism.

## 4. Legislative protection for cultural practitioners

Without the proposed Australian Cultural Work & Provenance Act, the structural harm documented by DCL, the debt calculated by ILV, and the sector defined by CWI have no binding legislative remedy. Japan made that legislative choice in 1950. Australia has not yet made it.

***Japan proved in 1950 that a government can identify an unprotected category of cultural practitioners, name them, register them, and pay them by law. The CWA proposes that Australia make the same choice — applying that legislative model to the largest unprotected category of cultural practitioners in the country.***

## PROPOSED LEGISLATIVE PATHWAY

---

The three CWA instruments together constitute the proposed evidential basis for an Australian Cultural Work & Provenance Act. Each instrument addresses a distinct dimension of the legislative case.

INSTRUMENT	EVIDENTIAL ROLE	PROPOSED LEGISLATIVE PROVISION
<b>DCL Index</b>	Establishes structural harm	Duty of care provisions; health obligations; DFV structural evidence standards; mandatory load assessment
<b>ILV Index</b>	Establishes economic debt	Superannuation correction; Care Credit; Replacement Cost Floor; Provenance Premium; Retrospective Correction Fund
<b>CWI™ (Cultural)</b>	Establishes sector existence	Sector classification; Cultural Practitioner Register; certification authority; procurement pathway; Southern Cross Mark

The proposed Act would establish: a formal Cultural Work & Provenance Sector; the CWA (or a successor national body) as the certifying authority; the Southern Cross Mark as the national provenance certification mark; a Cultural Practitioner Register modelled on Japan's bearer designation system; mandatory structural assessment prior to workforce decisions affecting cultural practitioners; and alignment with UNESCO 2003 Convention safeguarding principles.

## VALIDATION AND IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAY

---

The CWI is at the conceptual development stage, consistent with the DCL and ILV instruments. The following pathway is proposed.

1. Expert review: engagement of specialists in psychometrics, gender economics, cultural heritage, public health, and workforce policy to review the CWI framework, formula structure, and scoring rationale
2. Pilot study (n=20–30): reliability and convergent validation with DCL Index, ILV Index, K10, PSS, HRV, and economic indicators, across Primary Health Networks, DFV services, cultural organisations, and women’s workforce programs
3. UNESCO NGO accreditation: formal application establishing CWA as a recognised safeguarding body for women’s intangible cultural heritage under the 2003 Convention
4. National sector recognition: parliamentary briefings and cross-party engagement using the three-instrument suite as the proposed evidential package for the Cultural Work & Provenance Sector
5. Legislative drafting: development of the proposed Australian Cultural Work & Provenance Act, with all three instruments as the evidential foundation
6. Sector infrastructure: Cultural Practitioner Register, Southern Cross Mark certification, and Cultural Practitioner designation framework

The CWA is actively seeking academic partners, psychometrics specialists, gender economists, cultural heritage researchers, and public health practitioners to collaborate on the validation pathway. This is the immediate next step.

## CONCLUSION

---

Japan named the bearers of folk cultural heritage in 1975 and brought them within a protection framework that had been operating since 1950. It took a political decision — not a change in the underlying reality. The practitioners were already there. The knowledge was already being transmitted. The cultural labour was already being performed. The legislation named it and protected it.

The Creative Women's Association proposes to name Australia's bearers of women's cultural heritage in 2026.

The Cultural Workforce Index is the proposed instrument that makes that naming measurable. The Cultural Practitioner Register is the instrument that would make it official. The Australian Cultural Work & Provenance Act is the instrument that would make it permanent.

This framework is in development. The evidential case is established. The international precedent is 75 years old. The validation pathway is the next step. The CWA invites the academic, policy, and legislative community to engage with this work.

---

$$\text{CWI}^{\text{TM}} = \text{DCL} \times \text{P}^{-1}$$

---

---

$$\text{DCL} + \text{ILV} + \text{CWI}^{\text{TM}} = \text{The proposed Australian Cultural Work \& Provenance Act}$$

---

### **Creative Women's Association**

[executivedirector@creativewomensassociation.org](mailto:executivedirector@creativewomensassociation.org)

[www.creativewomensassociation.org](http://www.creativewomensassociation.org)