THE UNCONFORMITY

Submission to the Tasmanian Economic Diversification and Investment Strategy Draft Strategy Consultation

Submitted by: The Unconformity Inc.
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1. About The Unconformity

The Unconformity is a place-responsive cultural organisation centred in Queenstown on the West Coast of Lutruwita/Tasmania. We present a biennial contemporary arts festival and deliver a year-round program of Explorations — residencies, commissions, creative development and community events — that sustains artistic and community life on the West Coast between festival years.

Founded in 2010, The Unconformity has grown into one of Australia's most distinctive and internationally regarded cultural events. The 2025 festival presented 60 events, 18 world-premiere commissions and 121 artists from across Australia and the Asia-Pacific, with over 80% of the program free and accessible to all. The Tasmanian Government invests in The Unconformity through the Major Event Partnerships Program. In 2023, we became the only festival of our kind to receive multi-year federal funding from the Creative Australia Multi-Arts Panel, in recognition of our national significance and the strength of our place-based model.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Tasmanian Economic Diversification and Investment Strategy. We make this submission from the perspective of an organisation that has operated in one of Tasmania's most remote and economically distinct regions for 15 years, and has direct experience of both the economic contribution that cultural activity can make and the structural challenges that constrain regional organisations and communities.

2. Our Overarching Position

The Unconformity strongly supports the development of an Economic Diversification and Investment Strategy for Tasmania. We make two overarching observations at the outset.

First, the draft Strategy's current framing of culture and the creative industries is too narrow. Culture and creative industries are not incidental to economic diversification — they are a mechanism for it. Cultural organisations generate direct economic activity through visitor expenditure, employment, accommodation, procurement and supply chains. They attract investment by making places desirable to live and work in, differentiating Tasmania's brand in competitive domestic and international markets, and building the social infrastructure that enables communities to attract and retain workers and families. They develop creative and entrepreneurial capability that flows into other sectors. In remote and regional communities like

the West Coast, they frequently produce the most consistent, highest-profile economic and community development activity on the ground.

A Strategy that positions culture only as a social good rather than an *economic driver* as well, will underinvest in one of Tasmania's most distinctive comparative advantages. We urge the Government to ensure that culture and creative industries are explicitly recognised across the Strategy's priorities — particularly in the context of regional activation, innovation and Tasmania's brand as a destination for investment, skilled workers and visitors.

Second, and more fundamentally, we encourage the Government to consider whether the Strategy's current framing of economic success — centred primarily on monetary returns, productivity and private investment — fully captures what a thriving Tasmanian economy could look like.

2.1 Beyond GDP: The International Case for Wellbeing Economies

There is a substantial and growing body of international evidence and practice supporting the inclusion of wellbeing measures alongside conventional economic metrics in national and regional economic strategies. The Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (WEGo) — whose members include Scotland, Iceland, New Zealand, Finland and Wales — has pioneered exactly this approach, working to shift the emphasis of public policy away from GDP growth as the overriding metric of societal welfare, toward frameworks that prioritise the collective wellbeing of people and place.

Scotland has embedded the goal of delivering a wellbeing economy in its National Strategy for Economic Transformation, with the Scottish Government's stated goal to help people live happier and healthier lives with higher living standards, build a more resilient economy, and promote wellbeing and prosperity for all of Scotland's people and places. Scotland's July 2025 Wellbeing Economy report confirms this as an active, cross-government priority. Critically, Scotland explicitly recognises its creative industries as central to this agenda: Scotland's creative industries contribute more than £5.7 billion to the Scottish economy annually, and the Scottish Government's International Culture Strategy 2024–2030 states directly that its “globally recognised culture is intrinsic to our prosperity — an asset at home and abroad.”

New Zealand's Wellbeing Budget, introduced in 2019, committed to putting people's wellbeing and the environment at the heart of economic policy — with priority areas including productive work, child wellbeing, and mental and physical health alongside conventional economic goals. Iceland, facing high rates of depression despite strong GDP, explicitly cited the arts as a mechanism for prevention and wellbeing.

Wales has gone further still with intergenerational justice legislation that fundamentally reorients policymaking toward long-term outcomes rather than short-term economic indicators.

The relevance of this international experience to the Tasmanian context is clear. A Strategy that measures success solely through conventional economic metrics — investment attracted, productivity gains, GDP contribution — will systematically undervalue the social,

cultural and community dimensions of economic development that are in fact the most critical determinants of long-term regional resilience, particularly in remote communities like those on the West Coast. The 18-month wait for economic data to confirm what communities already know about their own wellbeing is not a governance framework fit for the pace of change the Western Region Strategic Partnership (WRSP) and West Coast mining and energy projects will bring.

We recommend that the Tasmanian Economic Diversification and Investment Strategy incorporate wellbeing indicators alongside conventional economic metrics — including measures of liveability, community cohesion, cultural participation, mental health and intergenerational equity — as explicit measures of strategic success. In doing so, Tasmania would align itself with leading international practice and ensure that the Strategy delivers genuine and lasting prosperity for all Tasmanians, not simply improved economic statistics.

Critically, this is not a theoretical argument for Tasmania. Tourism Tasmania's own market research has already identified Wellness and Events as two of its key market opportunities, noting that many visitors are looking for a balanced holiday that leaves them feeling better than when they arrived — with more than 7 in 10 visitors reporting they feel better after a trip to Tasmania. This is the language of wellbeing, not simply economic return.

An Economic Diversification and Investment Strategy that does not explicitly recognise and invest in the wellbeing dimensions of the visitor economy — including cultural events and festivals as vehicles for wellness tourism — risks undermining the very market opportunities that Tourism Tasmania has identified as priorities. The Unconformity's biennial festival, which draws visitors to a remote West Coast community specifically for a transformative cultural experience, sits directly at the intersection of the Wellness and Events market opportunities Tourism Tasmania has prioritised. It is precisely the kind of product the Strategy should be designed to support and grow.

3. Priority: Unlocking Private Investment

3.1 Broadening the Definition of Private Investment

The Strategy's Priority 1 focuses on unlocking private investment to drive economic diversification and growth. The Unconformity strongly supports this ambition and wishes to draw the Government's attention to a set of investment mechanisms that are underutilised in Tasmania but have proven effective in comparable jurisdictions internationally: mandatory and incentivised partnerships between extractive and regulated industries and the not-for-profit cultural and community sector.

The case for this is straightforward. Extractive industries — including mining and energy — derive significant wealth from Tasmania's natural resources, which are held in trust for all Tasmanians. Regulated industries — including gambling — operate under a social licence that is contingent on community benefit. In both cases, there is a legitimate basis for requiring or incentivising a share of the value generated to flow back into the communities and organisations that sustain the social fabric within which these industries operate.

Culture, arts and not-for-profit organisations are the clearest expression of that social fabric but can experience reputational risk when entering directly into partnership with these industries.

This is not a new idea. There are well-established international and domestic precedents for exactly this kind of investment mechanism, and we encourage the Strategy to look to these models as it considers how to unlock new sources of private and regulated investment for Tasmania at a time when the Government is trying to direct the creative industries to diversify their income mix and reduce the reliance on funding.

3.2 Domestic Precedents: Regulated Industries and Community Benefit

Australia already has functioning models for directing regulated industry revenue to community benefit. Queensland's Gambling Community Benefit Fund — sourced from a percentage of gaming machine tax — distributes approximately $60 million each year to not-for-profit community groups, providing services, leisure activities and opportunities across Queensland communities. Western Australia returns profits from lottery products to the community in support of hospitals, the arts, sports and eligible not-for-profit organisations. Victoria's Community Support Fund directs a portion of gaming machine revenue to a range of community programs and projects.

These are not marginal programs. They represent a policy consensus — already established in multiple Australian jurisdictions — that regulated industries generating profit from community participation has an obligation to return a portion of that value to the community. Tasmania should examine whether its own regulatory frameworks for gaming and other regulated industries are generating an equivalent return to the Tasmanian community, and whether the arts, cultural and not-for-profit sector is receiving its fair share of that return.

3.3 International Precedents: Extractive Industries and Cultural Investment

Internationally, a number of jurisdictions have established frameworks that direct a share of extractive industry royalties or revenues toward cultural, community and social investment. Norway's Norsk Tipping has operated under a statutory funding obligation since 2015, directing approximately NOK 450 million annually to sport, culture and health initiatives. The UK's National Lottery Distribution Fund, established in 1994, apportions lottery revenues to the arts, sport, national heritage and community causes by legislated percentage — with Arts Council England receiving a substantial share that has sustained the UK's cultural sector for three decades. The UK has recently gone further, introducing a statutory gambling levy commencing April 2025 that directs operator contributions to research, education and treatment, establishing the principle that regulated industries bear a statutory obligation to fund the communities their activities affect.

In the extractive sector, there is growing international precedent for legislating that a share of mining royalties be directed to local and regional communities, sovereign wealth or future generations funds, or specific social and cultural purposes. Academic literature on adaptive royalty frameworks notes that some jurisdictions legislate a fixed split — for example, a percentage to a community development authority and a percentage to a Future Generations Fund — as a mechanism for balancing local benefits with long-term national

savings. The principle that non-renewable resource extraction should generate lasting community benefit beyond the operational life of a mine is increasingly embedded in international best practice.

We are not prescribing a specific mechanism for Tasmania. We are encouraging the Government to look to these international and domestic models as it designs the investment frameworks that will accompany the WRSP's consultation on the transformative investment program on the West Coast and across the state. The question of how the wealth generated by extractive industries in Tasmania is distributed — and whether arts, cultural and not-for-profit organisations receive a fair share of that distribution — is a legitimate and important one for an Economic Diversification Strategy to address.

3.4 Concessional Blended Finance: A New Investment Pathway for the Creative Sector

Beyond regulatory mechanisms, the Strategy should also consider innovative blended finance models (combining public subsidies, philanthropic capital, and concessional finance) as a vehicle for unlocking private investment in the cultural and creative sector.
Creative Australia, the Australian Government's principal arts investment body, has partnered with international impact investing experts to develop Creative Returns: Getting Started with Impact Debt Finance — a guide outlining how Australian arts organisations and their funders, philanthropists and government partners can safely deploy these models without risking basic operational solvency. For remote and not-for-profit cultural organisations, these investment pathways are most safely and successfully realised as concessional blended finance, ensuring they can leverage private investment without exposing vulnerable regional arts operators to the high risk of servicing commercial-grade debt.

Concessional and blended finance allows private investors to provide capital, low-interest concessional loans, or equity-like instruments to purpose-driven creative organisations, with returns tied primarily to the achievement of social, cultural or community outcomes rather than commercial-rate financial returns. For arts and cultural organisations — which typically operate as not-for-profits and have limited access to conventional capital markets — these structures offer a pathway to leverage state and federal funding to attract non-government capital.

The relevance to Tasmania is significant. If the Strategy genuinely seeks to unlock private investment across the economy, including in sectors that generate social and cultural value alongside economic value, then blended and concessional finance deserves explicit recognition and support. The Tasmanian Government could play a meaningful role by:

- Signalling to Tasmanian arts and cultural organisations that blended and concessional finance is a viable and supported investment pathway, underpinned by strong financial literacy and board governance training.
- Considering whether state government guarantee or first-loss co-investment capital could reduce the risk profile of social/cultural investment in the Tasmanian cultural sector, insulating regional organisations from the burden of high debt-servicing costs.

- Working with Creative Australia to identify Tasmanian organisations that are well-positioned to partner on blended-finance pilots and to facilitate connections with potential investors.

Rather than relying on conventional commercial debt, Tasmanian cultural organisations could explore their impact investment readiness and partner on blended capital models as a potential mechanism for funding capital projects — including infrastructure investment — that generate both cultural and community outcomes on the West Coast. The Strategy's explicit endorsement of capital-grant-matched blended investment would be a meaningful signal to the sector and to investors.

We make the following specific recommendations under the Unlocking Private Investment priority:

- The Strategy should examine whether Tasmania's regulatory frameworks for gaming and other regulated industries are generating an adequate return to the Tasmanian community, and whether the arts, cultural and not-for-profit sector receives a fair share of that return.
- The Government should look to domestic and international models — including Queensland's Gambling Community Benefit Fund, Western Australia's lottery arts funding, Norway's Norsk Tipping model and the UK's National Lottery Distribution Fund — as precedents for directing regulated and extractive industry revenues to cultural and community benefit.
- As the WRSP investment program takes hold on the West Coast, the Government should consider how the wealth generated by extractive industries in the region can be structured to generate lasting community benefit, including for arts and cultural organisations.
- The Strategy should explicitly recognise concessional blended finance as a viable investment pathway for the creative and cultural sector, and consider what state government role — in signalling, co-investment or guarantee mechanisms — could make this model more accessible to Tasmanian organisations.

4. Priority: Activating Our Regions

4.1 The West Coast as a Case Study

The West Coast of Lutruwita/Tasmania presents one of the most compelling — and most challenging — cases for regional economic activation in Australia. It is geographically isolated, historically dependent on extractive industries, and home to communities that have experienced sustained population decline over several decades. It is also, as The Unconformity's work demonstrates, a place of extraordinary cultural and natural distinctiveness, with a community of remarkable resilience and creative capacity.

The Unconformity's 16-year presence on the West Coast provides direct evidence that cultural activity can function as a genuine economic driver in remote regional communities.

Our festival generates significant visitor expenditure in Queenstown and across the West Coast, with interstate and international visitors making dedicated journeys to attend. We employ Tasmanian workers and procure local goods and services. We support local artists and creative practitioners through commissions, residencies and our Ongoing Artist Program.

Importantly, we provide a platform that connects the West Coast to national and international networks, media and audiences — generating the kind of profile and visibility that no amount of conventional economic development activity can replicate.

We raise the West Coast not simply to advocate for our own organisation, but because it is a test case for the Strategy's ambitions. If the Strategy can articulate a credible, coordinated approach to economic activation for a community as geographically isolated and structurally challenged as the West Coast, it will have genuinely addressed the hardest problems of regional activation in Tasmania.

4.2 The Western Regional Strategic Partnership

The Western Regional Strategic Partnership (WRSP) — a Memorandum of Understanding signed in August 2023 by Hydro Tasmania, the Tasmanian Minerals, Manufacturing and Energy Council, West Coast Renewable Energy, Salmon Tasmania, West Coast Council, the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Regional Development Australia – Tasmania — signals an unprecedented period of investment and economic activity on the West Coast over the coming decade.

The investment program of the industries in the WRSP, spanning renewable energy, mining, aquaculture and associated infrastructure, will bring significant workforce, capital and activity to the region. This presents a genuine opportunity for the West Coast's long-term economic resilience. It also presents risks that the Strategy should explicitly acknowledge and address.

Major resource-led economic investment in remote communities has a mixed track record. Without deliberate planning and investment in community infrastructure, liveability, cultural life and social cohesion, growth can be extractive rather than community-building — improving economic indicators in the short term while eroding the distinctiveness, liveability and long-term resilience of the communities it touches. The West Coast's identity, culture and community life are not considerations to be addressed after economic development occurs; they are the foundations on which sustained investment and population growth depend.

4.3 Accommodation as Economic Infrastructure

One of the most concrete illustrations of the tension between the WRSP investment program and the existing regional economy is accommodation. West Coast Council analysis of projected workforce increases across multiple mining and Hydro projects identifies a shortfall of approximately 665 beds during peak periods — a figure that directly coincides with the accommodation demand generated by The Unconformity's biennial festival and the broader visitor economy.

This convergence is not simply a logistical problem. It is an economic opportunity, and a

planning challenge, that the Strategy must explicitly address. Accommodation is not a social amenity — it is economic infrastructure. New accommodation capacity on the West Coast would simultaneously:

- Address the housing and workforce accommodation shortfall that threatens to constrain the WRSP's investment program and the ability of major projects to attract and retain workers.
- Expand the visitor economy's capacity to grow, enabling cultural events like The Unconformity to attract more interstate and international visitors and grow with the popularity of the event without competing with FIFO workers for limited accommodation.
- Improve liveability for permanent residents, providing the infrastructure that makes a remote community attractive to workers and families considering long-term relocation.

We urge the Strategy to frame accommodation investment in remote regional communities explicitly as dual-purpose economic infrastructure — serving both the immediate needs of resource sector workforces and the long-term growth of the visitor and cultural economy. These demands are not in tension, as when they are properly planned, they are mutually reinforcing. This is precisely the kind of place-based economic infrastructure planning that the Strategy's Priorities 4 and 6 address.

4.4 The West Coast Cultural Commons: Regional Capability and Creative Labour

The West Coast Cultural Strategy — developed by The Unconformity, West Coast Council and WD Booth Charitable Trust — identified the West Coast Cultural Commons as an initiative with the potential to coordinate cultural and creative activity across the region. Initially conceived as a community committee, the Cultural Commons has the potential to become a platform for coordinating a functional creative labour market on the West Coast, aligned with the goals of the WRSP and the broader regional economic agenda.

The Strategy's Priority 4 explicitly identifies reviewing and aligning regional partnerships and supporting regional capability and capacity building as a priority initiative. The Cultural Commons is an example of precisely this kind of locally-led, Council-backed initiative. West Coast Council has already invested in developing a Cultural Strategy and establishing the Cultural Commons concept — demonstrating the community leadership the Strategy says it wants to support.

Investment in the Cultural Commons would enable the West Coast's creative industries to strengthen and coordinate their contribution to the regional economy at precisely the moment when the WRSP industries are bringing new workers, capital and attention to the region. A well-resourced Cultural Commons could:

- Coordinate a functional creative labour market on the West Coast, connecting artists, cultural practitioners and creative businesses with employment, commissioning and development opportunities.

- Provide a platform for the creative industries to engage with and contribute to the WRSP's broader community development goals and even be a member of the Partnership.
- Strengthen the West Coast's capacity to attract and retain creative workers, contributing to the liveability and distinctiveness of the region as it grows.
- Build the regional partnerships and sector capacity that the Strategy identifies as a priority, with an existing institutional foundation in West Coast Council's Cultural Strategy.

We recommend that the Strategy identify local initiatives such as the West Coast Cultural Commons as a model for regionally-led creative industry capability building, and that the Tasmanian Government consider targeted investment to support its continued establishment and operation.

4.5 Regional Investment in Cultural Infrastructure

The Unconformity's experience on the West Coast demonstrates that investment in cultural infrastructure has measurable economic returns. Our biennial festival generates substantial direct visitor expenditure in a community with limited other visitor economy infrastructure. Our year-round Explorations program maintains creative sector employment between festival years and our permanent headquarters in Queenstown — activated as a community hub, retail and ticketing presence, digital storytelling platform and drop-in space for artists — contributes directly to the amenity and liveability of the town.

We note with interest the Department of Infrastructure's Growing Regions Program, which offers capital grants from $250,000 to $15 million for community infrastructure projects in regional, rural and remote communities. Programs of this kind — which recognise community infrastructure as an economic investment rather than a social expenditure — represent exactly the kind of thinking the Strategy should embed. We encourage the Tasmanian Government to advocate for and complement federal programs of this nature with its own coordinated regional investment.

4.6 Heritage Buildings as Economic Infrastructure

The West Coast of Lutruwita/Tasmania possesses a built heritage of extraordinary significance — a physical record of the mining, timber, railway and settlement history that shaped this part of the world. This heritage is not simply of cultural or historical interest; it is an economic asset of genuine and largely unrealised potential for the visitor economy, the arts and events sector, and the long-term liveability of West Coast communities.

Among the most significant heritage assets on the West Coast are:

- The West Coast Heritage Centre is housed in a grand Edwardian building that reflects Zeehan's former status as a silver mining boomtown. The museum holds a remarkable collection of mineral specimens, mining artefacts and local history.

- The Galley Museum, Queenstown — housed in the 1897 Imperial Hotel, offers a unique collection telling stories of West Coast survival.
- The Old Evans Store, Queenstown — a distinctive heritage building with significant potential for adaptive reuse as a cultural venue in the heart of Queenstown.
- The Mine Manager's Buildings, Queenstown — significant heritage structures associated with the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company, reflecting the industrial and social history of one of Australia's most important copper mining operations.
- Pioneer Traders Tasmania sawmill — an important piece of the West Coast's timber industry heritage, representing the logging and milling history that was foundational to the region's development.
- Penghana — the former Mount Lyell Mine Manager's residence, a Federation-era heritage house of exceptional quality that has operated as boutique accommodation and represents the kind of distinctive, place-specific visitor experience that Tasmania's most discerning visitors seek.
- The West Coast Wilderness Railway — the historic rack-and-pinion railway offering visitors one of Australia's most extraordinary heritage rail journeys into ancient rainforest and is a significant driver of visitor economy activity on the West Coast.
- The Gaiety Theatre in Zeehan and the Paragon in Queenstown - historically significant theatres that play an important role today in the cultural ecosystem of the West Coast.

These assets share a common challenge: the cost of conservation, restoration and adaptive reuse is significant, and the communities and organisations best placed to steward them are often the least resourced to do so. Without deliberate investment — from government, from philanthropy, from the extractive industries that derived their wealth from the same landscape these buildings represent — there is a real risk that the West Coast's built heritage is lost precisely at the moment when the WRSP's investment program is bringing new attention and activity to the region.

Heritage buildings, when conserved and activated for contemporary use, generate economic activity that is self-reinforcing and sustainable over the long term. They attract visitors who would not otherwise come; they provide distinctive venues for arts, events and cultural programs that cannot be replicated in purpose-built facilities; they anchor community identity during periods of rapid economic change; and they demonstrate to investors, workers and families that the West Coast is a place worth committing to. The Wilderness Railway, for example, is not just a heritage asset — it is an economic driver in Queenstown and Strahan, moves visitors through the region, and provides an internationally competitive visitor experience that reinforces Tasmania's cultural and natural distinctiveness.

We recommend that the Strategy explicitly recognise heritage building conservation and adaptive reuse on the West Coast as a legitimate and high-value form of economic infrastructure investment, and that it identify mechanisms — including capital grants, heritage tax incentives, philanthropic facilitation and community benefit obligations on

extractive industries — to support it.

We make the following specific recommendations under the Activating Our Regions and Strengthening Infrastructure priorities:

- Explicitly recognise the WRSP as a test case for coordinated regional activation, with cultural infrastructure and liveability investment embedded alongside housing, health and transport.
- Frame accommodation investment in regions experiencing WRSP-scale workforce surges as dual-purpose economic infrastructure, serving both resource sector workforce needs and the visitor and cultural economy.
- Identify the West Coast Cultural Commons as a model for regionally-led creative industry capability building and consider targeted investment in its establishment and operation.
- Recognise West Coast heritage building conservation and adaptive reuse as economic infrastructure investment, and identify capital grant, heritage incentive and community benefit mechanisms to support it.
- Support mechanisms for community-led cultural and economic planning alongside major industry investment programs.
- Ensure regional data and projections explicitly include cultural and creative economy data, visitor economy data and liveability indicators.

5. Priority: Accelerating Innovation

5.1 Creative Industries as a Source of Economic Value

The draft Strategy's treatment of innovation focuses primarily on the research-industry interface, technology commercialisation, and export market diversification. These are important priorities. We propose, however, that the creative industries represent an underacknowledged source of innovation and economic value that the Strategy should explicitly address.

Tasmania has developed a remarkable and internationally recognised creative economy over the past two decades. MONA and its associated festivals have transformed Tasmania's visitor economy and national cultural profile. Mona Foma, Dark Mofo, Falls Festival, Ten Days on the Island, Taste of Tasmania and a growing constellation of place-based cultural events have made Tasmania one of Australia's most distinctive cultural destinations. The Unconformity has contributed to this story from the West Coast — demonstrating that world-class contemporary art can originate not from a capital city but from a remote community at the edge of the world.

This creative economy is not a product of accident. It is the result of deliberate investment, risk-taking and the cultivation of a distinctive Tasmanian cultural identity that commands attention nationally and internationally. It is also increasingly fragile: cultural organisations depend on a mix of government funding/investment, philanthropy and earned income that can be disrupted by policy changes, economic conditions and shifting funding priorities.

We make the following recommendations under the Accelerating Innovation priority:

- The Strategy should explicitly identify creative and cultural industries as a priority sector for innovation investment, alongside the technology, green economy and sovereign capability sectors currently referenced.
- Tasmania's distinctive cultural identity — and the organisations and events that embody it — should be recognised as a competitive advantage in attracting investment, skilled workers and tourists, and should be protected and supported accordingly.
- The Strategy should consider how the government can better support the commercialisation, promotion and export of Tasmanian creative content — including digital, screen, music, festivals and visual arts — as a genuine export industry with strong growth potential and an attractor for international visitors to visit the state.
- The creative industries' role in developing innovation, entrepreneurial, adaptive and design-thinking capability across the broader economy should be explicitly acknowledged, consistent with the evidence base on creative economy collaborations.

5.2 Digital Connectivity, Productivity and the First-Mover Disadvantage

Under the Lifting Productivity priority, the Strategy identifies digital connectivity as a prerequisite for technology adoption, particularly for small businesses and those in regional areas. The Strategy also identifies, under Strengthening Infrastructure, the need for targeted approaches to addressing first-mover disadvantages in digital connectivity. The Unconformity wishes to underscore both points from direct experience.

Reliable, affordable digital connectivity is not a productivity enhancer for remote regional organisations — it is a baseline operational requirement. The Unconformity has recently redeveloped The Singularity, a significant digital creative project that requires sustained, high-quality connectivity to deliver. Our experience developing this project on the West Coast has exposed the real and persistent connectivity gap that penalises remote regional organisations attempting to innovate, develop digital products and participate in the national and international creative economy.

The first-mover disadvantage the Strategy identifies is real: remote communities and the organisations within them cannot attract or sustain the commercial investment in digital infrastructure that more populous areas generate, leaving them in a structural connectivity deficit that compounds over time. If the Strategy wants digital creative industries and innovation to grow in regional Tasmania, it must address this deficit directly.

We strongly support the Strategy's commitment to working with the Australian Government on digital connectivity for regional areas, and specifically support the Federal Government's infrastructure investment programs targeting connectivity gaps in remote communities. We urge the Tasmanian Government to:

- Actively complement and leverage Federal Government investment in regional digital connectivity infrastructure, particularly in the most remote communities including the West Coast.

- Identify and address first-mover disadvantages in digital connectivity as a specification under Priority 6, with remote West Coast communities explicitly included in the scope.
- Recognise digital creative industries — and the connectivity requirements they generate — as a legitimate driver of infrastructure investment in regional Tasmania, not just a beneficiary of infrastructure built for other purposes.

6. Priority: Growing Our Capability

The Strategy's workforce and capability priority focuses on skills, training, migration and technology readiness. We make two observations relevant to our experience as a regional cultural organisation.

6.1 Liveability as a Workforce Attraction Strategy

The single most significant workforce challenge facing remote regional organisations and communities is liveability. Skilled workers — in the arts, in government, in health, in education and across industry — choose where to live based on the quality of life a place offers, not just the availability of employment. Cultural life, community identity, amenity and the sense that a place is interesting and dynamic are among the most important factors in that calculation.

The Unconformity's presence on the West Coast contributes directly to the liveability of Queenstown and the entire region. Our festival brings thousands of visitors each year, generates media coverage that presents the West Coast as a vibrant and culturally rich destination, and provides the kind of distinctive cultural life that makes a remote community more attractive to the workers, artists and families the region needs to attract and retain under the WRSP investment program.

We encourage the Strategy to explicitly recognise cultural liveability as a component of workforce attraction and retention strategy in regional Tasmania — and to invest in it accordingly.

6.2 Creative Workforce Development

The Unconformity's Ongoing Artist Program employs West Coast artists one day per week over an extended development period, culminating in new works presented at the biennial festival. This model of sustained creative employment and professional development — modest in cost but significant in impact — creates meaningful professional pathways for Tasmanian creative practitioners that would not otherwise exist in a remote community.

Programs of this kind are precisely what the Strategy's capability priority should support. We encourage the Government to consider how arts and cultural organisations operating in regional Tasmania can be supported as delivery partners for creative workforce development — embedding skills, professional pathways and economic participation in communities where conventional training and employment infrastructure is limited.

7. Conclusion and Summary of Recommendations

The Unconformity welcomes the development of the Tasmanian Economic Diversification and Investment Strategy and commends the Government for seeking broad community input into its priorities. We offer the following summary of our key recommendations:

- Incorporate wellbeing indicators alongside conventional economic metrics — including liveability, cultural participation, community cohesion and intergenerational equity — as explicit measures of strategic success, consistent with leading international practice from Scotland, New Zealand, Iceland, Finland and Wales.
- Explicitly align the Strategy with Tourism Tasmania's identified market opportunities in Wellness and Events, recognising cultural festivals and events as vehicles for wellness tourism and as priority products for investment and growth.
- Examine whether Tasmania's regulatory frameworks for gaming and other regulated industries generate an adequate return to the Tasmanian community — including to arts, cultural and not-for-profit organisations — drawing on the Queensland, Western Australian, Norwegian and UK models.
- Consider how the wealth generated by extractive industries under the WRSP can be structured to generate lasting community benefit for arts, cultural and not-for-profit organisations on the West Coast and across Tasmania.
- Explicitly recognise concessional blended finance as a viable investment pathway for the creative and cultural sector, with state government signalling, co-investment or guarantee mechanisms to improve access to this type of investment.
- Explicitly recognise culture and creative industries as economic drivers — not social goods — across the Strategy's priorities, including in regional activation, innovation and brand positioning.
- Identify the WRSP and the West Coast as an explicit case study for coordinated regional activation, with cultural infrastructure and liveability investment embedded alongside housing, health and transport.
- Frame accommodation investment in regions experiencing WRSP-scale workforce surges as dual-purpose economic infrastructure, serving both resource sector workforce needs and the visitor and cultural economy — with the West Coast's 665-bed shortfall as a specific planning challenge requiring a coordinated response.
- Identify and invest in the West Coast Cultural Commons as a model for regionally-led creative industry capability building and coordination of a functional creative labour market.
- Include cultural and liveability indicators alongside conventional economic data in the regional data and projections framework proposed under Activating Our Regions.

- Recognise Tasmania's distinctive creative economy as a comparative advantage and prioritise its protection, investment and development under the Accelerating Innovation priority.
- Support the commercialisation and export of Tasmanian creative content — including digital products — as a genuine export industry.
- Address first-mover disadvantages in digital connectivity as a specific action under Priority 6, with the most remote communities — including the West Coast — explicitly in scope, complementing Federal Government infrastructure investment.
- Explicitly recognise cultural liveability as a component of workforce attraction and retention strategy in regional Tasmania.
- Recognise West Coast heritage building conservation and adaptive reuse — including assets such as the Galley Museum, the Old Evans Store, Penghana and the Mine Manager's Buildings — as high-value economic infrastructure investment, with dedicated capital grant, heritage incentive and community benefit mechanisms to support it.

The Unconformity is willing to discuss any aspect of this submission further and to provide additional evidence or context as required. We look forward to engaging with the final Strategy and its action plans.

The Unconformity acknowledges the Palawa people as the original and traditional custodians of Lutruwita/Tasmania. We commit to working respectfully to honour their ongoing cultural and spiritual connections to this land.