

Cultural Ministers Council Communique

The 12th Meeting of the Cultural Ministers Council was held in Canberra on Tuesday 17 December 1996. The meeting was chaired by Senator the Hon Richard Alston, Federal Minister for Communications and the Arts.

Ministers attending the meeting were:

- the Hon Jeff Kennett MLA, Premier and Minister for the Arts (Vic);
- the Hon Bob Debus MP, Minister Assisting the Minister for the Arts (NSW);
- the Hon Peter Foss QC MLC, Attorney General, Minister for Justice, Environment and the Arts (WA);
- the Hon Diana Laidlaw MLC, Minister for the Arts (SA);
- the Hon Sue Napier MHA, Minister for the Arts, Sport and Recreation (Tas);
- Mr Gary Humphries MLA, Minister for the Arts and Heritage (ACT); and
- the Hon Daryl Manzie MLA, Minister for the Arts and Museums (NT).

Queensland was represented by Mr Philip Pike, Senior Policy Adviser to the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for the Arts. New Zealand was represented by Ms Jane Kominik, Deputy Chief Executive, Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

Councillor John Wearne, Senior Vice President of the Australian Local Government Association, attended the meeting as an observer.

Partnerships for the Future

The central theme of the meeting was the development of partnerships for the future. The Ministers made it a priority to strengthen and develop partnerships so that cultural programs deliver the maximum value with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. There was a strong consensus that all levels of government had a stake in providing the right environment in which cultural activity can prosper for the benefit of all Australians.

Orchestras

Ministers agreed in principle to establish the orchestras as ABC subsidiary companies along the lines of the successful Sydney Symphony Orchestra model. This provides the potential for greater local ownership, autonomy and flexibility, whilst retaining the benefits of a national orchestra network, and a continued association with the ABC particularly for broadcasting and recording.

Ministers welcomed the agreement of the ABC Board to transfer existing orchestra funding to the proposed new structure.

In reaching the agreement, Ministers indicated their expectation that the total level of Commonwealth funding currently provided through the ABC for the orchestras (\$32m) would be fully transferred and indexed. Ministers agreed that approximately \$500,000 of that amount could be allocated over three years for any costs associated with corporatisation and that any costs of structural adjustment beyond that level particularly associated with redundancies would be subject to further consideration by the Commonwealth.

Ministers agreed to monitor the corporatisation process to ensure that no orchestra was financially disadvantaged.

Ministers noted that the Darwin and Canberra Symphony Orchestras were the only capital city orchestras that were not part of the present funding arrangements.

Major performing arts companies

A strong and creative major performing arts sector is crucial to the cultural life of the nation. Ministers reviewed the financial position of the sector, and endorsed certain strategies developed by the Australia Council's Major Organisations Fund to improve the performance of the companies. A working party formed under the auspices of the Standing Committee will explore further strategies to address the financial position of major organisations and to identify opportunities for further collaborations to position the arts for the 21st century. The working party will report to Ministers by July 1997.

Private sector support

Ministers agreed that a concerted national approach is necessary to maximise private sector support. This support currently represents only about 0.5% of total government assistance to cultural activities. This approach will include promoting the benefits of two existing schemes—the Register of Cultural Organisations and Tax Incentives for the Arts—and supporting the development of a national sponsorship education series, based on the model recently trialed by the Australia Foundation for Culture and Humanities in association with the Department of Communications and the Arts.

The Council will assess the effectiveness of activities which are designed to help the cultural sector attract private sector support, and obtain a fuller picture of the extent and nature of this support.

Regional Cultural Development

Ministers affirmed the importance of meeting the cultural needs of Australians in regional areas-both in terms of ensuring equitable access to cultural experiences and services, and contributing to regional prosperity by generating income and employment. The growth in cultural tourism demonstrated in recent years was noted as a trend with future potential for regional areas.

Ministers agreed that the Commonwealth would devolve the Regional Arts Fund allocation within the Australia Council to States and Territories on an agreed basis from 1997/98. States and Territories would provide proposals to the Commonwealth, and would report annually on the administration of these funds.

Heritage

Council reviewed the heritage partnerships which had been fostered among Australian government agencies through the work of the Heritage Collections Committee and acknowledged the good results which had been achieved through partnerships among members. These include the establishment of Australian Museums on Line; the National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage; and a multimedia package of conservation, training and resource materials.

Ministers acknowledged the contributions these initiatives had made to heritage development, and agreed that further work in this sector would be strengthened by the establishment of a Heritage Collections Council. This new Council would continue collaborative efforts to ensure that Australia's heritage is accessible, well-conserved and available to be enjoyed now and by future generations. The work will culminate in 2001, the year of the Centenary of Federation.

Indigenous Cultural Development

Council reviewed the preliminary conclusions of a survey of members' policies on indigenous cultural development and noted that several key agencies-including ATSIC and the Australia Council-were in the process of significant policy and funding reviews. Council acknowledged that these reviews were likely to have a significant impact on the indigenous cultural sector during 1997, and agreed that a working group should be established to monitor developments and to identify opportunities for joint action which would be reported to the next meeting of Council.

New technologies

Council's initiatives to enhance the application of new technologies to the digitisation of collections, to allow greater access to cultural content, were reviewed. Members agreed to support the development of joint Commonwealth-State/Territory projects similar to the proposed Commonwealth-Victoria Performing Arts Multimedia Library (PAML).

They also agreed to encourage the development of appropriate courses and programs which will develop necessary professional and business skills within institutions to manage digitisation programs (including outsourcing). This could be done through partnerships between the Cooperative Multimedia Centres and business departments in the States and Territories. A working group of Standing Committee will prepare recommendations for future action.

Australia's Cultural Network

Ministers also endorsed Australia's Cultural Network (ACN) and the development within it of sectoral networks-including Australian Museums On Line and other networks to be established initially in the library, archives and screen culture areas-to provide a framework within which collecting institutions can work together to provide electronic access to cultural material.

Intellectual Property

Intellectual property issues were discussed in the light of a report on current developments. The report surveyed international and domestic developments in intellectual property, including moves to update the legal framework in Australia. Other issues covered by the report included protection for indigenous intellectual property, collective administration regimes, cultural material and digital technology.

Council Working Groups

Council Working Groups responsible for statistics, libraries and archives reported on key outputs for 1996 and presented future work plans. Ministers endorsed the reports of the working groups and approved plans for their operations in 1997.