

Cultural Ministers Council Communique

The 13th Meeting of the Cultural Ministers Council (CMC) was held in Adelaide today, Friday 27 February 1998.

The meeting was chaired by the Hon Diana Laidlaw MLC, Minister for Transport and Urban Planning, Minister for the Arts and Minister for the Status of Women (SA).

Ministers attending included:

- Senator the Hon Richard Alston, Federal Minister for Communications, the Information Economy and the Arts;
- Mrs Lorraine Elliott, MLA, Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier for the Arts (Vic);
- the Hon Joan Sheldon, MLA, Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for the Arts (Qld);
- the Hon Peter Foss QC MLC, Attorney General, Minister for Justice and the Arts (WA);
- the Hon Sue Napier, MHA, Minister for the Arts, Sport and Recreation (Tas);
- the Hon Daryl Manzie, MLA, Minister for the Arts and Museums, Minister for Asian Relations, Trade and Industry, Minister for Regional Development (NT).

New Zealand was represented by Jane Kominik, Deputy Chief Executive of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Councillor John Ross of the Australian Local Government Association also attended. The NSW Premier and Minister for the Arts, the Hon Bob Carr, was represented by the Secretary of the Ministry of the Arts, Mr Evan Williams.

Meeting Summary

Ministers were pleased to have the CMC meeting in Adelaide to coincide with the Telstra Adelaide Festival, Festival Fringe and the Australian Performing Arts Market - providing the perfect backdrop for this gathering.

Ministers observed that the Adelaide festivals were outstanding examples of the role that cultural festivals of all types - major international events, as well as regional festivals - play in community life. While Ministers recognised the positive impact festivals have on the economy, they particularly appreciated that festivals provided increased opportunities for enjoyment of and participation in, cultural activity.

Ministers congratulated the Australia Council and the South Australian Government on the success of the third Performing Arts Market which has attracted 67 performing arts companies and delegates from 27 countries.

Ministers commented that the Performing Arts Market represented a new era in coordinated and professional marketing by performing arts companies of their products. It was noted that the market had been supported by all member governments of the CMC.

New Technologies

Ministers recognised that increased globalisation and new technologies presented new challenges and opportunities for Australia's cultural institutions - especially the need to address the impact of these on Australian cultural life.

Ministers agreed to foster greater use of digital technology by Australia's cultural sectors, in order to build new audiences; enhance the performance of cultural institutions; and project Australia's culture into a global market.

Ministers endorsed a 'vision' for a national strategic framework for more effective use of digital technology, within which Commonwealth, States/Territories and local government will work together to:

- encourage new collaborative partnerships between cultural organisations, government and private enterprise to produce quality, market - oriented products and services;
- encourage best practice standards for inter-networked cultural databases and collection management systems;
- identify issues relating to intellectual property rights in cultural institutions and the development of national protocols for copyright owners and users in the digital environment;
- develop management models for integration of digital technology and intellectual property within overall business planning frameworks and practices at national and State/territory cultural institution level.

Ministers also endorsed the development and national distribution of *The Digital Environment: New Technologies & Australian Culture*, a CD-ROM produced by the National Technologies Working Party (NTWP) for distribution to government and cultural institutions across Australia. This CD outlines suggested approaches to digitisation issues such as content identification, copyright and database interoperability.

Major Organisations

Ministers considered an interim report on the issues facing major organisations in the performing arts sector.

Ministers welcomed the turnaround in the financial situation of a number of the organisations since the Ministers last met at the end of 1996. Observing that company boards and managements had taken strong steps towards placing organisations on a firmer financial and artistic footing, Ministers agreed to distribute a best practice guide on corporate governance so that other organisations might benefit from the lessons it contains.

They also endorsed a strategic planning kit *The Art of Strategic Planning - Visions and Strategies for Cultural Organisations* to assist companies to increase their focus on longer - term strategic planning. Cultural organisations were encouraged to use this resource to define and monitor their strategic direction.

Ministers congratulated the arts community for their positive and forward - thinking approach to initiatives such as resource - sharing collaborations and urged other organisations to respond to this lead.

Ministers agreed that a report be prepared on strategies for a coordinated approach to the funding of major organisations in the performing arts industry.

Return of Indigenous Cultural Property

At the meeting in December 1996, Ministers commissioned the development of a strategic action plan for the return of indigenous ancestral remains and secret/sacred objects. Ministers today considered a report on the development of that plan following detailed consultation with the museums sector.

As a result of this activity, it has been identified that some 7,200 Aboriginal ancestral remains, 11,000 secret/sacred men's business objects and a range of women's business and Torres Strait Islander secret/sacred objects are still held in museums throughout Australia.

Objectives of the strategic plan are to:

- identify where possible, the origins of all ancestral remains and secret/sacred objects held in museums, with records placed in national databases;
- notify all affected indigenous communities; and
- negotiate with museums and communities concerning repatriation when and where requested.

A commitment was given for greater cooperation between governments, their collecting institutions, and indigenous communities to ensure the success of the strategy.

Ministers acknowledged the valuable progress achieved in the repatriation of indigenous cultural property and agreed to consider, in consultation with their governments, the provision of funds for the continuation of the program.

Orchestras

Ministers noted that three more of the six ABC Symphony Orchestras had been corporatised since the last CMC meeting. Two orchestras - Queensland and Tasmania were working towards corporatisation.

It was noted that Symphony Australia (formerly the ABC's concerts division) was assisting the Queensland and Tasmanian Orchestras in their preparations for corporatisation.

Ministers noted the main benefits of corporatisation to date were that:

- musicians, staff and local communities already have a much greater sense of ownership in their individual orchestras;
- orchestras were driving their own artistic planning; and
- sponsors appear to view corporatisation favourably.

Ministers noted that these benefits were already being realised in the case of the newly corporatised orchestras and expressed confidence the process would be completed on schedule.

Private sector support

Ministers re-affirmed the importance of private sector support for cultural organisations. They observed that while many cultural groups and organisations made use of taxation incentives to

attract philanthropic contributions, there was potential to expand the level of support, particularly from the corporate sector.

Ministers applauded the successful efforts of cultural groups who had already formed mutually beneficial partnerships with the corporate sector. They noted the role Arts Ministries could also play in assisting these relationships - through matched grant arrangements; awareness - raising of benefits; and by programs acknowledging supporters.

In recognition of the significance of private sector support for the arts, Ministers agreed to provide funding - through the Statistics Working Group - for the third sponsorship survey. This will be conducted as part of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Economic Activity Survey.

Training and Education

Ministers endorsed the need to develop closer dialogue between the arts and education sectors. As a first step, the CMC has agreed to commission work to develop a close understanding of the relationship between arts training and sustainable levels of employment in the cultural sector.

Specifically, Ministers agreed to fund Australian Bureau of Statistics research into the supply of graduates in the cultural sector and the number and composition of current jobs. Ministers considered that the research could be used to inform policies within government arts agencies, as well as in the tertiary/vocational sector dealing with balancing demand for courses, the relative cost of providing places and employment opportunities.

Statistics

Ministers applauded the economic contribution of the cultural sector and the wide popularity of cultural attractions as outlined in the most recent statistics on cultural activity.

Ministers welcomed the release of the latest brochure prepared by the Statistics Working Group (SWG) with cultural employment figures compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, including employment growth of 20 per cent in comparable cultural industries between 1991 and 1996. (This compares with a figure of 7.4 per cent for employment in all industries).

Ministers agreed that the provision of quality information was essential for informed policy - making. To that end, approval was given to expand the work of the SWG. This expansion includes the forward work program commissioning work on indigenous artists and cultural tourism.

Heritage

Ministers welcomed the recent launch of the *National Conservation and Preservation Strategy for Australia's Heritage Collections*, highlighting that it put Australia at the forefront of international best practice in developing a structured national approach to caring for our cultural heritage collections, including those of indigenous communities. Ministers urged all levels of government, collecting institutions, the private sector, community organisations and individuals, to support this strategy.

Ministers were pleased with the progress report of the Heritage Collections Council, which was established last year to ensure Australia's national heritage collection becomes more accessible to all Australians.

Ministers noted that the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney had been awarded the contract (until June next year) for the continuing development of Australian Museums On Line (AMOL). AMOL is a comprehensive Internet site with information on 950 museums; more than 170,000 museum items; a forum with more than 100 members where museum issues can be debated and information exchanged; an events calendar; and links to related sites.

The next two years will see the site increasingly explore and showcase the resources of our cultural institutions across Australia. This expansion will include the development of thematic stories based on collections of participating museums, creation of resource directories containing conservation expertise, course materials and resources for museums and art galleries.

Ministers noted that AMOL would be linked to Australia's Cultural Network, which would be launched in April. Australia's Cultural Network is an interactive Internet gateway promoting wide public access to collections, activities and events in cultural institutions.

Archives

Ministers agreed the fourth and final project of the Archives Working Group (AWG), *Records of National Cultural Significance Stage 2—Indigenous Australians* should continue until June this year.

This would allow the project, which involves the preparation of descriptive guides to the records relating to indigenous Australians, to consider the findings of the *Bringing Them Home* report.

Ministers noted the completion of the *Records of National Cultural Significance Stage 3—Immigrant Australians* project, a guide to the description and availability of records. They endorsed the report and approved the release of the *Immigrant Arrivals* publication.

Ministers noted the move this week by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Alexander Downer, to establish an Australian International Cultural Council to devise a series of rolling three - year strategic plans for overseas cultural promotion and export, and would welcome the opportunity to be involved.