

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

My submission focuses on a single, urgent issue: the sustainability of independent artists' careers, particularly in the context of significant new cultural infrastructure being built across Australia.

The central question:

Major capital projects such as the Lyric Theatre and similar venues are reshaping the cultural landscape. These investments are welcome, but they raise a question policy must answer directly: how does new infrastructure actively support local independent artists to grow, develop and tell their stories, rather than primarily operating as receiving houses for established touring product?

Challenge 1: Infrastructure without embedded creative roles

New venues are typically resourced for technical, operational and administrative functions, but rarely include sustainable ongoing creative roles.

Response: Public funding for new cultural infrastructure should be conditional on the creation of permanent or long-term creative positions. These could include resident artists, associate directors, dramaturgs, First Nations creative leads, and community engagement creatives. Funding agreements should specify minimum percentages of operating budgets dedicated to local creative employment.

Challenge 2: Touring product crowding out local development

It is cheaper and lower risk for venues to programme imported work than to commission and develop local independent work. Without policy intervention, the default will be venues full of out-of-town shows while local artists remain underemployed.

Response: Introduce a local development quota tied to public investment. Any venue receiving capital or operational funding above a defined threshold should allocate a minimum percentage of its programming slots, commissioning budget and creative development resources to new locally-generated independent work, with public reporting against those targets.

Challenge 3: Arts workers whose creative practice is being killed by their day jobs

A significant proportion of arts administrators, producers, programmers and front-of-house staff are themselves practising artists. They take these roles to sustain a livelihood, and in doing so, gradually lose the time, energy and access to development that their own practice requires. Arts organisations are quietly among the largest drags on the careers of the artists they employ.

Response: Cultural policy should incentivise arts organisations to embed staff creative development as a core operational responsibility, not a perk. Practical mechanisms include:

- Funded creative development leave, modelled on academic sabbaticals, for arts workers with active practice.
- In-kind support such as rehearsal space, technical resources and venue access for staff projects.
- Internal commissioning streams through which staff artists can pitch and develop work within their own organisations.
- Reporting requirements so organisations publicly disclose how they support the creative practice of their workforce.

Final Remarks

Buildings do not make a culture. Artists do. If the new National Cultural Policy is to be transformative, it **MUST** fund, mandate and measure the conditions that allow independent artists, including those working inside arts organisations, to sustain and grow their practice over a lifetime. This is the urgent for arts workers to tell our story.