

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Review

Submitted by: [REDACTED]

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I submit this response in my personal capacity as a board member of [REDACTED] where I also chair the Artistic and Marketing Committee. My views are informed by direct operational experience of the constraints facing a mid-sized performing arts company in Western Australia.

I make four recommendations, in priority order.

### **Recommendation 1: Upgrade His Majesty's Theatre to contemporary production standards**

Pillar: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Perth's His Majesty's Theatre (HMT) is the primary venue for opera, ballet, and large-scale theatre in Western Australia. Its backstage infrastructure — lighting, sound, and stage machinery — is not comparable to equivalent venues in other Australian capital cities. This is not a minor inconvenience. It has direct, measurable consequences:

- WAO spent seven years attempting to acquire a production of Puccini's *Turandot* that could be staged within HMT's technical limitations. None existed. We ultimately had to commission and build our own production at a cost of \$2.5 million — a cost that would have been avoided with a properly equipped venue.
- A production of Massenet's *Werther*, which WAO wishes to present, cannot be staged at HMT because the venue's stage machinery cannot "fly" set pieces. Perth audiences will not see this work until this changes.
- WAO spends approximately \$600,000 per year on temporary lighting equipment hire simply to meet the minimum standard required to stage any opera at HMT. This is dead money — recurrent, unavoidable, and entirely attributable to infrastructure deficit.

Beyond direct costs, inadequate facilities drive talent out of the state. Stage designers and technical creatives who trained in Perth are leaving for the east coast or overseas because they cannot practise their craft at HMT. WA is losing creative professionals not for lack of talent, but for lack of a functional workplace.

**Ask:** Capital funding for a comprehensive upgrade of HMT's lighting, sound, and stage machinery to contemporary standards. This is a one-time infrastructure investment with permanent ongoing benefit to all companies that use the venue.

### **Recommendation 2: Fund shared infrastructure for WA's NPAP companies**

Pillar: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Western Australia has five National Performing Arts Partnership (NPAP) companies: West Australian Opera, West Australian Ballet, West Australian Symphony Orchestra, Black Swan State Theatre Company, and Perth Theatre Company. Each operates its own separate back-office systems — CRM, ticketing, marketing

databases — most of which are outdated and poorly integrated. This is an inefficient use of public funding.

The NCP should fund the development of shared infrastructure across these five companies, including a common CRM platform, integrated ticketing, and joint marketing capability. The expected benefits are: lower operating costs for each company, better audience data, more effective marketing, and — critically — the ability to offer cross-company subscription products. A subscriber who can attend an opera, a ballet, a symphony, and a theatre production on a single pass is a subscriber who is more deeply embedded in the arts sector and less likely to lapse.

This requires both funding and policy direction. Funding alone will not be sufficient — companies will need a strong policy signal, tied to NPAP agreement conditions, to prioritise shared infrastructure over maintaining independent systems.

**Ask:** \$10 million over two years, allocated as a shared infrastructure grant to the five WA NPAP companies jointly.

*[Note: this figure is a proposed ask, not a costed estimate. It reflects the likely scale of procurement, integration, and transition costs for five organisations moving to shared platforms simultaneously.]*

### **Recommendation 3: Reward the use of local creative talent**

Pillar: Centrality of the Artist

The NCP should adopt an explicit local-talent incentive, analogous to the “A Future Made in Australia” framework applied to other industries. Companies that direct a defined percentage of their creative spend toward Australian artists — singers, musicians, directors, designers, lighting and stage professionals — should receive additional funding recognition for doing so.

This should be accompanied by a structural apprenticeship or shadowing requirement: where an international or interstate artist is engaged, a funded local counterpart should be attached to that engagement. This builds the pipeline rather than simply rewarding existing practice.

**Ask:** A tiered funding incentive based on percentage of locally-sourced creative spend, plus a matched-shadow funding line for any internationally-sourced creative role.

### **Recommendation 4: Structurally expand audience access to opera and classical arts**

Pillar: Engaging the Audience

The primary barrier to opera attendance is unfamiliarity, not disinterest. In my direct experience, audiences at accessible outdoor events — including WAO’s Opera in the Park, which ran for 30 years in Perth’s Supreme Court Gardens — consistently discover that they already know the music. The conversion from first-time attendee to repeat subscriber is high once that initial exposure occurs.

Two structural interventions would significantly expand this pipeline:

- **Schools program at scale:** WAO’s existing music-in-schools program, which embeds a singing-focused curriculum in primary schools for a full year, should

be funded to expand significantly — both within WAO's capacity and as a model for other NPAP companies to replicate.

- **Reinstated large-scale outdoor events:** Perth's climate makes it uniquely suited to a permanent annual outdoor summer opera event. The previous Opera in the Park model demonstrated strong demand. A nationally supported program of free or low-cost outdoor performances across capital cities would reach audiences who will not, or cannot, attend a ticketed indoor performance.

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I am happy to provide further detail on any of these recommendations.