

## National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Thanks for the opportunity to contribute. Redevelopment of the National Cultural Policy is a vital step in making Australian culture central to Australian life. I am a multi-award-winning playwright and theatre-maker living in the Illawarra. My theatre work has toured regional Australia, played at major festivals like Adelaide Festival, RISING and Perth Festival, been commissioned and staged at the Sydney Opera House and invited to headline festivals internationally. This is all in the last two years! By these opportunities you would assume I am one of the lucky theatre artists in Australia able to make a living solely from my practice. Yet in 2024/25 tax year, I made less than \$27,000.

I make theatre as a freelance artist, collaborating with both MainStage programmers and independent companies to get work on. Much of this work is unpaid, or precarious, subject to the whim of funding rounds or programming changes. Until recently, I supplemented my income as an artist by working in the tertiary sector. But the Morrison era 'Job Ready Graduates' scheme led to huge increases in the cost of drama degrees at the same time universities were undergoing restructure post-COVID. As such, the degrees I used to teach into are being cut down or disappearing, enrolments are tanking. This is a huge threat to the future viability of our theatre sector.

Any National Cultural Policy must account for the eco-system of arts education, properly funding the pipeline of youth theatres to tertiary study to early-career opportunities for recent grads. This is what Strong Cultural Infrastructure means, long term Arts and Cultural strategy that recognises the Arts' innate value to Australian life and promotes excellence in training and professional practice. This brings the arts in line with something like the National Sports Strategy Horizon policy. By focusing on funding regional youth theatres, regional universities we can build pathways into professional practice and ensure the long-term health of our sector. Australia can become a world leader in arts education and practice.

I also urge serious consideration trialling a living wage for artists. Pilot programs internationally have shown the economic benefit and audience building such schemes can produce. This would show serious commitment to the Centrality of the Artist and Engaging the Audience outlined in REVIVE. When you invest in artists, audiences follow.

While this submission process is a good step, I would encourage further research into the state of the theatre sector nationally. A national review would allow targeted and specific responses in any subsequent policy shifts. I urge you to listen to artists. We might have plenty to say but we know what we're talking about.