

Dear Minister Burke,

My name is Jack Sheppard, a First Nations independent artist of the Tagalaka Clan Group of Far North Queensland.

The Australian Governments review of the National Cultural Policy comes at a time of increasing censorship, political interference and racist decision-making within the arts landscape across Australia. Arts bodies have flagrantly disregarded organisational obligations to uphold anti-racist, decolonial & anti-discrimination frameworks, policies and mission statements in favour of practices that compromise community safety, erode the social fabric of our arts community and undermine the safety & freedoms that should be afforded to all who live within a so-called free democratic society. These are transgressions that sit outside of the value systems that are formally recognised within an Australian democratic society and are expected to be upheld by all in this country, as set out in the Department of Home Affairs website's 'Australian Values Statement'. The disregard for these principles by peak Australian arts bodies, organisations and people who sit in positions of power require an urgent response by the Government. These factors must be at the forefront of the review of our National Cultural Policy, to protect the rights of artists, arts workers, communities and voices, especially of those who come from underrepresented or marginalised populations, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, including First Peoples, Bla(c)k, Pan-Indigenous & People of Colour (BIPOC/CALD); Migrant & Refugee; disabled & LGBTQIASB+ populations.

As a First Nations artist, the dilapidation of freedom of speech across our arts sector, along with silencing and racism has created significant concern around the future of First Peoples arts, and our human right to engage in self-determined artistic, Cultural & political expression without fear of censorship, blacklisting or other repercussions. First Peoples artists must be supported and well-resourced to undertake Cultural maintenance & continuation; truth telling; healing & community connection; economic justice; and Cultural revival & reclamation as urgent responses to the ongoing erasure and decimation of First Peoples Culture and peoples. First Peoples artists continue to resist extinction of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, by exercising our Sovereignty and asserting our right to exist authentically and unapologetically through Cultural expression, visibility, activism, ceremony & truth telling. This right must be upheld and protected with absolute rigour.

As an artist with Hungarian Jewish heritage, whose family was directly impacted by the holocaust, I am deeply concerned about the conflation between antisemitism with pro-Palestinian activism. I am equally concerned about the mis-identification of zionism as a practice of Jewish faith, and how this sentiment is used to silence Palestinian artists and artists who stand solidarity with Palestinians, who not only stand in alignment with international law, but who stand firm on their right to exercise their freedom of speech to speak out against genocide in Palestine and across the world. I am concerned that the conflation of anti-zionism with antisemitism waters down the impact of identifying and

standing against true antisemitism, a growing phenomenon that has caused Palestinian and pro-Palestine artists to be wrongly branded as antisemitic.

The National Cultural Policy's heading clearly states its key principle: 'a place for every story, a story for every place'. In this spirit, and in conjunction with the Australian Arts Sector, I call upon the Government to pro-actively embed decolonial, anti-racist and Cultural Safety frameworks and protections within the National Cultural Policy, by delivering on the following requests:

Pillar 1: First Nations First:

- The National Cultural Policy must bolster Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP), First Nations self-determination and Creative + Cultural Sovereignty across the National Cultural Policy.
- The National Cultural Policy must embed, update and invigorate Cultural Safety frameworks and trainings within the National Cultural Policy.
- The National Cultural Policy must re-humanise the process of decision-making within the policy, by broadening its scopes to embed Culturally safe and relevant within the research processes that informs the National Cultural Policy.
- The National Cultural Policy must take a decolonial, anti-racist and anti-discrimination approach. It should respect and take leadership from those in the sector who are already working from a strong decolonial, anti-racist and anti-discrimination framework.
- The IHRA definition of antisemitism must be removed from all arts, cultural and educational institutions and be replaced with the UN Core Stance of Values: "The UN asserts that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, without distinction of any kind, including race or ethnic origin. It maintains that no state, institution, group, or individual should make any discrimination in human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Pillar 2: Centrality of the Artist (Artists are the moral compass of the sector):

- The National Cultural Policy must support artists to continue to be ethical and values-driven leaders of the sector and broader community.
- Artists must be able to speak freely, sign letters and participate in boycott actions without harming their reputation and livelihoods.

- Arts and cultural institutions must respect cultural diversity, and support, champion and care for the diverse conversations that artists bring to their programs, particularly those who have been targeted in the media for speaking out against injustices.
- Artists must not be instrumentalised by institutions, lobbyists, the media and politicians.

Pillar 3: Freedom of speech and artistic expression; Centrality of the Artist & Strong Cultural Infrastructure:

- Strong cultural infrastructure must be based on artistic freedom of speech. This is already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act (11.e “to uphold and promote freedom of expression in the arts”) and needs to be upheld in the National Cultural Policy.
- In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, art must be able to facilitate critical discourse, address political issues and critique power and class structures.
- In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, there must be an end to the culture of intimidation that prevents artists from expressing and creating art freely.
- The National Cultural Policy must address the prevalence of censorship, targeting and cancellation of artists who speak out against injustices, particularly in relation to nations that have been condemned by the UN for acts of apartheid, genocide and war crimes.

Pillar 4: Freedom from political interference in the arts; Centrality of the Artist & 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

- In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, the arts must remain independent and free from political interference.
- The National Cultural Policy must ensure independent and ‘arm’s length’ funding processes across federal, state and local government. This includes ensuring that politicians at all levels must not influence or give advice that results in the provision or removal of funding support of a particular project or artist. This is already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act (article 14.2) and needs to be upheld in the National Cultural Policy.
- A key action for the National Cultural Policy must be to implement an inquiry into political interference in the arts, including through donations and board membership and lobbying.

- Donors must not influence arts organisations and institutions.
- Board members with connections to political parties or lobbyists must be removed.

Yours sincerely,



Jack Sheppard

Tagalaka Clan Group

First Nations Performance | Storytelling | Cultural Revival | Facilitation

Living and working on the lands of the Kulin Nations.