

To:

Office for the Arts

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,

Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

GPO Box 594 | CANBERRA ACT 2601



Dear National Culture Policy creators,

Rodney Hall, poet, novelist and one-time head of the Australia Council, made a useful point. Artists are like farmers, they are primary producers, and like farmers they deserve all the help they can get.

A lot of artists are doing fundamentally important work, on survival wages, and often derive their income from sources that take them away from their main work...as the primary producers of Australian culture.

It's easy to forget the important role artists play in Australia. For example, all those ads on the tele have actors, writers, musicians, directors, and sound recordists on board. We are surrounded by the work of our artists, though we are frequently unaware of it...

There's a case to argue that every town in the country should have its statue that salutes the work of The Unknown Artist, because in many ways they've helped create this country, and carry it, and do so to this day.

Australia got the cultural cringe off its back not only because we took the America's Cup off The Yanks, but also because our bands, actors, filmmakers, costumemakers, directors and so on proved they were the equal of the world's best. We are often at the forefront of global cultural evolution, such as The Saints inventing punk rock in Bjelke-Petersen's Brisbane in the 1970s.

On any given day, Australians are more involved in the arts than they are in sport. Weekends included. Sport gets the backpage, and the headlines, while the artists labour away quietly, building our culture, maintaining it, extending it, as we all listen to the music, read the books and articles and essays and poems, sing the songs and anthems, go to the concerts, gigs and performances, watch the tele or fall asleep to Rage at 3am on a Sunday morning...

Let's find ways of taking better care of our artists. There are real life benefits for all of us.

One example is Hobart's MONA, where art has become a driver of the state's economy, a focus for its tourism and cultural tourism industries, and put Hobart on the national and global cultural map.

That's one of the powers of art, and shows the benefit of treating artists fairly, with respect, and paying them what they're worth.

Surely our National Cultural Policy can find some ways to ensure that the arts, and our artists, remain part of the fabric of our national lives.

I'm 71. I've been a self-employed artist since I was 22 years old. I did a Bachelor of Arts (Communications) at Bathurst many years ago, and am a Graduate of the Lecoq theatre school in Paris.

Over the decades, I've worked as a writer. Director, performer, teacher, arts administrator, run a theatre company, done five oral histories of [REDACTED] published two novels, won writing competitions, published a literary bestseller and had books published in Germany, the United States and China.

I've worked as an artist in [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ...and a lot of other places! Artists often move around for work, and performances, planting seeds, and their work in the community, and as community artists, is often unheralded, and yet vitally important.

It would be great if a National Cultural Policy could:

Continue to protect author's copyrights, including as new technologies like AI continue to evolve...

Protect artists from piracy of their work...

Fund the arts like sports gets funded...

Find ways of looking after individual and freelance artists. They frequently don't have access to the resources of any company structure, in some cases might lack administrative skills, but be excellent artists in their chosen fields.

Make arts education affordable. Remove the punitive costs on arts degrees at tertiary level.

Find ways to continue to support artists in remote areas of the country, and artists from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Implement a ten-year National Arts and Culture Policy.

Make grants, fellowships and prize money tax exempt. Or, at least, allow them to be assessed as income when the project is actually running. There have been times when I've received grants for projects that were not happening until later in the year, but have had to include that income in my end of financial year tax return. I've then paid tax on an inflated income, and experienced short term duress as a result.

Like many artists, I've spent much of my life living on the proverbial 'smell of an oily rag'. You take a vow of poverty when you commit to being an artist. Anything the National Cultural Policy can do to improve the artist's lot would be welcome....

Thank you, and good luck drafting the new policy document.

Regards

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Friday May 22 2026