National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous
Individual
[redacted]
Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I am an actress and theatre maker based in [redacted], and I have worked professionally in the industry for over 20 years. During that time, I have witnessed ongoing funding cuts across the arts sector that have significantly impacted both independent and mainstage theatre companies.

Mainstage companies are increasingly forced into programming decisions driven by financial survival rather than artistic ambition. Productions with small casts, familiar titles and commercially "safe" outcomes are prioritised because companies are under pressure to generate revenue and minimise risk. Yet some of the most important theatre experiences in Australia emerged because companies were once supported to take creative risks. Audiences do not always know what they want until they encounter something unexpected, challenging or transformative.

At the independent level, the situation is becoming unsustainable. Many artists and companies are now effectively self-funding their own work because grant opportunities are too limited and inconsistent. This creates a sector where only those with financial privilege can afford to continue making work, meaning lower socio-economic voices are increasingly absent from our stages. Many talented creatives I know have stopped producing work altogether because the financial pressures have become too great.

If the National Cultural Policy is to genuinely support a thriving arts sector, it must address these structural issues directly.

Firstly, Australia needs meaningful tax reform for the arts. The arts should be recognised as an essential public good, with financial structures that support artists, freelancers and organisations in building sustainable careers.

Secondly, the arts should be funded with the same seriousness and long-term strategic thinking as sport. Australia invests heavily in sporting infrastructure because we understand its value to national identity and community life. The arts deserve equal recognition and investment. The cultural and creative sector contributed $67.4 billion to the Australian economy in 2023–24, representing 2.5% of GDP, demonstrating that the arts are not only culturally essential but also a major economic contributor.

Australia should also explore a Universal Basic Income pilot for artists, drawing on international examples such as Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts scheme. Stable income support would reduce financial pressures and allow artists to continue contributing meaningfully to cultural life.

There must also be significantly greater support for both mainstage theatre companies and independent artists through expanded grant opportunities and increased operational funding. Funding structures should move away from short-term annual or biannual cycles toward four-year funding models that allow organisations and artists to plan sustainably and take creative risks.

Finally, governments should invest in activating vacant and derelict commercial buildings in inner-city suburbs as affordable cultural spaces. Empty buildings could become rehearsal rooms, studios, theatres and community arts hubs through subsidised leasing programs and partnerships with local councils.

A strong National Cultural Policy must recognise that culture is essential infrastructure and that artists are workers whose contribution deserves long-term investment and support.