

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I have been deeply involved in the Australian arts sector as a performer, a curator, festival director, arts org board member, and grants assessor since 2001. I hold a PhD in music, cultural studies and design, and am a Senior Lecturer at The University of Sydney.

It is crucial that the forthcoming National Cultural Plan reflects current issues faced by artists and arts workers, as well as the arts sector at large. I am deeply concerned by the prevalence of censorship, political interference and racism in the arts. As such, this submission is grounded in core values of and commitment to decolonisation, anti-racism, anti-discrimination; artists as the moral compass of the sector; freedom of artistic expression without limitations; and freedom from political interference in the arts.

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."

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.

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. 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.

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 'arms 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.

I look forward to being a part of the change.