National Cultural Policy Submission

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I'm writing to support an evidence-led shift in Australian arts policy, with five concrete asks.

The most important international development in arts policy over the past five years has been Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) pilot. From 2022, 2,000 artists and creative arts workers received an unconditional weekly payment of €325 for three years. The independent cost-benefit analysis by Alma Economics, commissioned by Ireland's Department of Culture and published in 2025, found:

For every €1 of public funding invested, society gained €1.39 in return. The pilot delivered over €100 million in social and economic benefits, with a net fiscal cost of just under €72 million after additional tax revenue and reduced welfare. Recipients' arts-related income rose by over €500 a month on average; their reliance on welfare fell sharply. 97% of public consultation respondents backed making the scheme permanent — which the Irish government is now doing.

That is one of the cleanest cost-benefit cases for an arts intervention anywhere in the OECD. Australia should not ignore it.

At home, the structural picture is grim. Decades of arts funding contraction, layered over rising real costs of making and touring, mean institutions with largely inelastic infrastructure and administration costs end up squeezing the artists and the work itself. Contemporary Dance, where dancers need to stay \,dance fit\, through continuous training and employment, is especially exposed. Audience literacy in contemporary work erodes as quality and volume fall. This is a death spiral — and the most efficient lever to pull on it is direct payment to artists.

I ask the next National Cultural Policy to:

• Recognise the structural underfunding of live performance — and Contemporary Dance and First Nations Contemporary Dance in particular — as a national priority, and substantially increase recurrent investment in the small-to-medium contemporary performing arts sector.

• Build a properly resourced, federally funded small-to-medium First Nations Contemporary Dance sector, with consistent commissioning pathways, embedded cultural governance and ICIP frameworks, and clear organisational sustainability pathways.

• Pilot an Australian Basic Income for the Arts modelled on Ireland's BIA scheme, paired with a per-artist non-wage project budget and a peer-pitching platform that pools artist budgets to commission new work from the bottom up.

• Establish a dedicated funding stream enabling a small cohort of choreographer-led Contemporary Dance companies — explicitly including First Nations-led companies such as Joel Bray Dance — to employ and sustain permanent ensembles.

• Establish a dedicated live performance export fund, including a presenter-fee matched funding model and a quick-response international disruption fund, with dedicated First Nations-led international exchange infrastructure, and resource the implementation of the existing Tri-Nations Indigenous-to-Indigenous exchange strategy.

Australia's current model overweights buildings and underweights artists. The Irish data shows what is possible when that is corrected.

Thank you.