

MAPBM

Modern Art Projects Blue Mountains Assoc. Inc

Modern Art Projects Blue Mountains (MAPBM)s welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process for the next National Cultural Policy (NCP). MAPBM is a key cultural organisation, which has been supporting the development and practice of contemporary, multi-form art in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales and surrounding regions for over 13 years. MAPBM's operating model is a not-for-profit incorporated association and registered charity.

This submission has been prepared in consultation with Live at the Village (LATV) in the Blue Mountains and thereby shares some common themes represented in both organisation's submissions.

GENERAL COMMENTS REGARDING THE NCP

We acknowledge that *Revive* has had a major and positive impact on Australia's cultural landscape, in particular through the establishment of Creative Australia. However, there are some aspects which we believe need more consideration in the review beyond a response confined to discussion of the five pillars. These include:

- **Peri-urban Australia:** There is a need to recognise the unique cultural environment presented by the peri-urban areas that surround most major Australian cities. These "zones of transition"(which in relation to Greater Sydney include the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Wollondilly council areas) share a range of characteristics which distinguish them from urban and rural regions and which also present particular difficulties in the provision of cultural funding as they do not fit neatly into those funding streams.
- These areas see the flight of younger artists and performers to metropolitan centres for cultural and artistic activity, who then encounter a high cost of living and housing that deprives them of the time and space it takes to nurture their development, with many abandoning their creative aspirations. Instead of providing incubators of talent in a more geographically distributed manner, the arts sector shifts further to the socio-economically privileged.
- **National and Local:** It is also important that cultural strategies deal more effectively with Australia's federal structure. While it is understandable that the NCP has a national focus (and acknowledging that several local and regional programs have been initiated through the current NCP), most micro and small to medium sized cultural organisations inevitably have far more involvement with state and local government agencies and programs.
- There is an associated perception that NCP initiatives and programs (including for example Creative Australia) are largely aimed at supporting "the big end of town", ie, national and large statewide cultural organisations. The new NCP needs to overcome this perception of the relative remoteness of national cultural policy from smaller and community-based organisations.

PILLAR 1 — FIRST NATIONS FIRST

MAPBM support this important pillar as a critical element of the NCP, but does not seek to comment on it at this stage.

PILLAR 2 — A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

There should be a stronger focus in the new NCP on the critical importance of cultural diversity, including origin, intergenerational and gender diversity, that characterises the Australian population and enriches cultural experience. This is particularly relevant in Western Sydney where people with backgrounds relating to hundreds of different languages and cultures live and work together, especially at a time when social cohesion is coming under increasing pressure. The NCP should reflect Australia's place in the Asian Pacific region.

In association with this there should be much greater recognition of the important contribution made by the "cross-fertilization" of or "hybridization" between the different cultures and cultural traditions that exist in Australia. An NCP and funding bodies should be mindful not to limit the recognition of artists as representatives of social categories under a broad diversity rhetoric.

As noted above, peri-urban Australia (which includes the Blue Mountains) has specific cultural needs which need greater recognition in national cultural planning and development. Currently these needs are not adequately considered in the development of cultural policy and funding priorities at all levels of government as these are often arbitrarily divided along "urban" and "regional" lines. The particular needs of these growing areas should be recognised in the new NCP.

PILLAR 3 — CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

Education

The cost of arts degrees following the previous Coalition Government's Job Ready program has now risen to over \$50,000 impacting access to a higher arts education for many and a disincentive to pursue a career in the arts sector inevitably leading to a lack of diversity in our future arts ecosystem. While the implementation of in-school arts education programs is an important foundation it is essential that pathways to a career in the arts sector post school reflect equality of access regardless of socio-economic background.

Safer and Fairer Workplaces

A heightened awareness of both physical and psychological safety in the workplace has improved in many creative workplaces with codes of conduct and pathways for complaints and resolutions. However, the level of remuneration for hours worked and work created still falls far below the minimum hourly wage and expectations in other sectors. A heavy reliance on volunteer labour in small organisations also goes unrecognised. The National Association of Visual Artists has long been an advocate and source of advice and resources for fairer working conditions for the visual artist and it is important it receives adequate federal funding to fulfill its remit.

The role of micro and small arts organisation in the arts eco-system

Small not for profit organisations like MAPBM are an essential component of the arts eco-system and often the only entry point for the artists in building and sustaining a career in the arts. Like many small to medium cultural organisations across Australia, MAPBM runs on a non-profit basis registered under relevant state legislation and also nationally under the Australian Charities

and Non-profits Commission (ACNC). However, this regulatory framework is not especially well designed to support organisations which support specific target groups and/or the wider community through the development and production of work and other aspects of culture rather than the “traditional” approach of fundraising or the direct provision of services.

The current NCP does not discuss these practical arrangements, nor the resulting implications. For example, in many of non-profit cultural organisations the members of the association (including the Committee) are directly involved in developing and providing performances and artworks. The recognition of these artists and performers as workers, a key tenet of the NCP, raises tensions with the strict rules surrounding the remuneration of members, especially Committee members, embodied in the relevant legislation. These issues should be addressed in the new NCP especially in light of the fact that, like Creative Australia, the ACNC is a national body established by the federal government.

Similarly, the Australian Tax Office (ATO) obligations which require venues and organisations engaging performing artists to pay the superannuation contributions of these artists directly into their super funds has had unintended consequences for small cultural organisations. While the payment of adequate remuneration including super to all artists and performers is supported, the requirement to make payments directly into super funds is extremely difficult to implement. In addition, some super funds require any organisation making a payment to register as an employer which may have other legal implications given the contractual nature of the relationship with the artist. One solution could be that small and micro organisations that are not required to register for GST be made exempt.

The increased layers of regulation and compliance across levels of government are placing an increasing burden on small organisations that risks their sustainability. This issue is not discussed in the current NCP and should be addressed as a matter of urgency in the new policy, which should seek reconsideration of these measures by the ATO in consultation with the cultural sector.

PILLAR 4 — STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

While the current NCP has done much to revive and expand cultural infrastructure at the national level, there is a critical need for much higher levels of practical and financial support by the federal government in conjunction with other levels of government. Measures which could be adopted in the new NCP include:

- For micro and small cultural organisations with a proven track record, the ability to apply for a small annual grant (say a maximum of \$20,000) to support their operations;
- A program to ensure that existing community cultural venues such as galleries, theatres, performance spaces etc are upgraded with infrastructure such as hanging systems, adequate projection, audio and lighting systems, streaming facilities, safety equipment, disable access, etc;
- Adoption of a process to partly offset the losses incurred by cultural organisations in presenting concerts, performances, and exhibitions (similar to an approach used by DFAT to support Australian performers presenting works overseas);
- Support for a national audit of vacant or underutilised properties owned by federal, state and local governments that could be utilised permanently or temporarily as cultural facilities for

small organisations. This initiative, which was proposed in the 2023 NSW *Creative Communities* strategy (but does not appear to have been implemented), could be rolled out nationally.

- More broadly, the adoption of an equitable approach to the allocation of cultural funding that is more inclusive and representative of the entire artistic landscape including smaller organisations and emerging artists and performers;

PILLAR 5 — ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE

Similar to the comments regarding the need to adopt practical approaches to the provision of strong cultural infrastructure, the new NCP needs to develop and support innovative ways of broadening and engaging with audiences in the context of new "discovery pathways and modes of engagement".

This could include providing funding support for artists, performers, organisations and venues to develop their capacity to record, distribute and archive live performances, as well as funding and other assistance including the use of quotas to support them to disseminate their work online via online, print and broadcast media. In addition, the new NCP should also provide a range of resources to support publicity and marketing by artists, performers, organisations and venues.

We thank you for considering our submission.

Kind Regards

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Miriam Williamson
Chair, on behalf of the
MAPBM Committee