

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous

Individual



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Any national cultural policy should prioritise a ground up, tiered approach and must not only target artists but audiences. I am a playwright living in Sydney, so my feedback is mostly centred around my experience in the theatre scene, however, I believe it is more broadly applicable to performing arts nationally.

Australia has produced so many world class creatives our are a credit to our nation. However, we would not have Hugh Jackman, Margot Robbie or Toni Collette without a thriving scene to support and nurture talents here at home.

We would never expect our Olympians to hit the world stage fully formed. We understand that for every Jess Fox or Mary Fowler, there must be thousands of girls getting up early and putting on the gear, ready to go compete in the local under-15 comps for their chosen discipline. Before Pat Cummins joined the Australian cricket team, he was playing for NSW and the Sydney Thunder, and way before that he was at the Penrith Cricket Club. Now I'm not a cricket fan (I am simply held hostage by Jim Maxwell's voice in my house each summer) but I understand when the nation stops to watch the Boxing Day test that it is the culmination of billions of hours we Australians have collectively spent building up a culture of playing, practicing, watching and loving cricket. Where do we learn to play sport? At school and our local clubs. Where do we learn to love sport? From everybody around us. We see from a young age how others value it, how it brings us together and gives us something to talk about. We see a path to pursue it for as long as we want to play, for fun or for glory.

Now consider our arts scene. It's not a one-to-one comparison of course, and it won't be unless betting companies work out how to advertise the odds of David Wenham dropping a line in tonight's performance of 'An Iliad' at the Sydney Theatre Company but the principle remains the same. Without a thriving small scene, where artists (like fast bowlers) can hone their craft, make mistakes, build confidence and improve their game, we will have an increasingly small pool (or perhaps only a puddle) of fantastic artists to draw on for the next blockbuster (shooting in Sydney or the Gold Coast perhaps?)

In housing policy we're used to hearing about the missing middle, neither sprawling suburbia nor tightly packed metropolis, but a happy medium density; liveable, walkable, mixed used neighbourhoods. I would like to see an emphasis in our national cultural policy on the missing middle of the arts. Ensuring funding and attention goes towards not just our elite institutions (For example Opera Australia or the Melbourne Theatre Company) but to the middle ground (our independent venues, our regional venues) and, of course, to education.

All kids should be able to see theatre, not just once as a special treat, but many times! Without seeding a love for Australian stories and storytellers early, we won't have any luck getting a sustainable arts scene going. And of course I centre theatre in this feedback, but this could be taking students to live music venues or to see Australian movies at the cinema. This could be talking to local visual artists, not just studying dead painters.

There are smarter people who could tell you how to do it, but unless cultural policy focuses on getting young Australians invested in the arts as consumers and creators, then the money spent will be a waste