

As an established Australian artist, I am delighted to contribute to the redevelopment of the National Cultural Policy. For our national identity to thrive, it is imperative that these strategies are taken seriously.

I have worked professionally as an actor, theatre maker, musician and technician since 1996. I started my career in Perth, studied at WAAPA, and moved to Melbourne in 2002. While I have predominantly worked in theatre, I have also worked in film and television, voiceover and animation. I have performed in every Australian state and territory, as well as in New Zealand, China, Canada and the United States, most recently touring North America with an independent musical that closed at Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Even with this level of experience, I still struggle to be paid more than \$1,400 a week, if at all. On independent and small-to-medium company theatre projects, grant funding is often so limited that there is little room to negotiate fair pay. Asking for more money in a grant proposal can even make a submission appear less competitive.

In screen work, performers are often the only people in the process not paid for preparation time. Auditions regularly involve many hours of unpaid labour: learning lines, analysing scenes, sourcing costumes, arranging readers, setting up lighting and sound, filming multiple takes, editing footage, uploading files and completing administration.

Across all areas of my work there is an overwhelming sense that artists should simply feel grateful to be employed at all; that our work is not important enough to deserve reasonable pay or respect. Yet when communities seek empathy, connection or comfort, the arts are often the first place they turn. We reach for music, stories and literature because they help us make sense of the world and remind us that we are not alone.

Artists contribute enormously to the social and emotional fabric of this country, as well as financially to the national economy — \$67.4 billion in 2023–24, representing 2.5% of Australia's GDP. Yet artists are continually left behind when trying to build sustainable lives and support families.

There are already examples, both internationally and within Australia, of policies that recognise the long-term value of investing in culture and people: tax incentives for creative industries, Ireland's Universal Basic Income for Artists, and Australia's Horizon policy in the sporting sector, to name a few. I also encourage consideration of dedicated First Nations commissioning initiatives, embedding climate policy into arts funding and production practices, supporting affordable access to rehearsal venues and touring accommodation, undertaking a 12-month national review of the not-for-profit theatre sector, and establishing enforceable KPIs for funded theatre organisations around minimum cast sizes.

I have no experience in policymaking, but I implore you to consider my thoughts, and those of my peers, in the drafting and implementation of this Cultural Policy. Without a strong arts sector, Australia will be poorer for it.