

National Cultural Policy Submission

1472200

Public and anonymous

Individual

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I am an independent woodworker operating in [REDACTED] Australia. I operate out of a shared workshop with a number of other independent woodworkers. I make and design furniture & lighting. I volunteer for a woodworking organisation which supports woodcraft in [REDACTED]. I have trained at international schools of design and woodworking internationally. I teach at the University as well as at a US-based woodworking school. My work has been collected internationally & locally, & has been widely published across both design and woodworking print media as well as in text. My work sits in the best and most expensive new restaurant in [REDACTED], hangs in the [REDACTED] boardroom and has been commissioned for a major visitors centre for a significant new tourist destination. Many look to me as a successful example of a woodworking practice, and I've been invited to speak at numerous woodworking events and teach internationally. But when I compare myself to friends from High School who just have 'normal' jobs, the financials just don't stack up. When I look at my colleagues – people who are not just leading their fields in Australia, but leading their fields internationally – it just doesn't make sense. I don't see how a woodworker would be able to raise a family or get into the property market on the sort of income that you can expect as a fine woodworker in Australia today. And it is not through lack of hard work – I regularly work 10 hour days and 6 days a week, and watch everyone in my studio do the same. I feel a pang of guilt teaching and guiding young and emerging woodworkers to the craft as I can see the impossible road ahead of them.

Some issues:

- lack of understanding in the market of what it costs to purchase fine, locally made furniture due to an overexposure to cheaply manufactured international goods.
- Some in the market are unable to discern the 'art' from the 'service' of woodwork and therefore don't realise they are engaging an artist and not just a trade.

The above issues require education and advocacy as a solution.

- Rent and access to space is incredible difficult to find. Every warehouse within a certain range of the centre of Melbourne is either being turned into apartments or a trendy croissanterie. These workshop & warehouse spaces are the bones of a city that once manufactured and made for itself. The overheads of being a woodworker are incredibly high, as are insurances premiums and as a result many woodworkers are pushed to the industrial fringes, where they are far from the markets that they need to sustain them. Craft workers are inherently socially sustainable – we typically work, buy from and sell to our immediate communities.

The above issue could be remedied through policies to support spaces for industrial arts such as woodworking within the inner city, as well as grants and subsidies, particularly for insurances.

My partner works in the film industry which is notoriously feast or famine in the way it pays. She has a special tax allowance that allows her to tax average over a 5 year period. Why are craft workers not able to do this?

- Craft workers are typically operating independently, they are on the tools rather than running a business or sales platform. Therefore they struggle to compete with competitors that focus heavily on sales but outsource/offshore production.

For solutions beyond those raised here, I point to the ACDC's submission.