

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous

Individual



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I live in a regional town, and I'm writing because live performance — especially Contemporary Dance and First Nations Contemporary Dance — is one of the few chances we get to experience world-class Australian culture without driving hours or flying to a capital city.

When a company like Joel Bray Dance tours to our region, it's an event. The whole town knows about it. It's not just the theatre that benefits — it's the cafes, the accommodation, the economy. And more importantly, it gives our kids the chance to see Australian stories, made by Australian artists, told with skill and ambition that matches anything overseas.

In regional towns and cities we need a greater understanding of the full gamut of Australian culture as we learn to live better together.

But those tours are becoming rarer. Decades of funding contraction since the Howard era, combined with rising costs of travel, freight, and wages, mean institutions have less and less to spend on actually paying artists. Regional touring is expensive, and when budgets are tight, we're the first to be cut. Companies are offered \,free space\, with no money. Development time has collapsed from months to weeks. Dancers can't stay \,dance fit\, on casualised employment. Quality falls. And audiences in towns like mine lose access entirely.

Meanwhile, our cultural diet becomes more digital, more online, more imported. We lose the habit of going out. Venues struggle. The idea that live performance might come to us starts to feel like a luxury from another era.

Ireland has just shown a different path. Their Basic Income for the Arts pilot — 2,000 artists at €325 a week for three years — has been independently evaluated as returning €1.39 in social and economic value for every €1 invested, with over €100 million in benefits, and is now being made permanent with 97% public support. That's the kind of policy that creates the conditions for artists to keep making work and touring it to places like ours.

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.

Regional Australia deserves access to the best of Australian culture. Right now, we're being left behind.

Thank you.

