

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

Mandy Nolan

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

My name is Mandy Nolan, I am a comedian, writer and creative arts practitioner who has lived in the Byron Shire for over three decades. In that time I have run workshops that culminate in graduating performances for over 2000 people. I have led teams that founded two separate comedy festivals. I was part of the team that created Mullum Music Festival, I have curated performances in local theatres, pubs and halls with a specific focus on nurturing new and emerging artists, particularly those from diverse or marginalised backgrounds. Creating performance spaces for voices not usually amplified in the public domain has become something of a personal project for me. I am a member of the Byron Greens and a board member of Creative Mullum, an advocacy group for multi-disciplinary arts engagement across the Byron LGA.

1/10th of the Byron Shire is engaged in arts industries, yet critical infrastructure to support and sustain art practise is diminishing, not increasing. The key problem that was identified at a consultation session with MP Cate Faehrmann and members of the Arts Sector recognised the impact of the lack of rehearsal, performance and incubating spaces on emerging and developed artists.

Established and mid-career performing artists identified the need for allocated spaces across a range of venue types — parks, halls, cinemas, warehouses — but noted that affordability is a prerequisite for these to be genuinely accessible. Regionality combined with a housing crisis with less than 1% rental availability which flows on to an inflated commercial and non commercial market, making private spaces inaccessible and public spaces such as halls and community rooms difficult and sometimes impossible to access.

Artists are often competing with regular yoga bookings, meetings, weddings or social events. There is a lack of dedicated artist/creative space, and therefore a lack of continuity for emerging artists and practitioners who must rely on providing their own creative infrastructure - setting it up and packing it down every time.

Emerging theatre and performance artists explicitly called for spaces that are \,fitted out\, — specifically naming lighting, audio, and mirrors as baseline requirements, not extras.

Emerging music artists identified the need for increased access to existing venues such as schools on weekends — low-barrier options for artists without access to instruments or practice rooms. Emerging digital arts practitioners flagged the need for multi-purpose spaces equipped for photography and film, as well as dedicated exhibition spaces. Visual arts participants explicitly named the loss of the Lismore TAFE arts facilities and the decimation

of art education through funding cuts as a direct blow to the pipeline of emerging artists in the region — compounded by flood impacts.

An arts precinct was identified as a priority by visual arts, music, and performing arts groups independently — suggesting this is a genuine cross-sector ask rather than a single-discipline preference. The Policy should include unique strategies for regional artists, allocating funding for dedicated and resourced arts spaces with the government considering certain regions or areas be dedicated as ‘an arts precinct’. The arts and entertainment industry are a vital part of our region, and a key driver for our regional tourism.