

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

The most pressing issue threatening individual artists and cultural workers' ability is liveability. While things like residencies, development grants and platforming opportunities are wonderful mechanisms for those who receive them, the cost of living affects us all. Writers, for example, are not solitary animals, lurking in the shadowed corner of your local library, lit up only by a slowly dying laptop screen. We cobble together income on a patchwork of projects, working across many forms, all whilst advocating for our communities and working at the intersections of mental health, literacy, youth and inequality. And for all this, the average annual income for a writer in Australia is \$18,200. I call on the Office for the Arts to address these structural challenges through a Universal Basic Income for Artists, which has international precedents in Ireland, France and recently New York City's Guaranteed Income for Artists initiative. This is being called for by the Australian Society of Authors. Tax reform is a significant area for reform, particularly in the way grants, prizes and income are treated. A rolling 5-year income averaging scheme would make a tangible difference in the financial stress experienced by artists. Opportunities to provide living and work arrangements that have an effect on the lives of artists, such as the The Rocks Creative Terraces, should be implemented throughout Australia.

The most pressing issue threatening artists and cultural workers as a community is political interference. At a time when Palestinian voices and those critical of the ongoing genocide in Gaza are being treated as dangerous, cultural institutions in Australia are bending under political pressure in full view of the world. Artists are the moral compass of the sector, and the National Cultural Policy must support artists to continue to be ethical leaders of the sector. Artists must be able to speak freely, sign letters and participate in boycott actions without harming their livelihoods. The National Cultural Policy must ensure independent and 'arms length' funding processes across federal, state and local government. This includes ensuring that politicians at all levels must not influence or give advice that results in the provision or removal of funding support of a particular project or artist. This is already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act (article 14.2) and needs to be upheld in the National Cultural Policy. A key action for the National Cultural Policy must be to implement an inquiry into political interference in the arts, including through donations and board membership and lobbying. Donors must not influence arts organisations and institutions. I'm particularly concerned by the way Board Members have overstepped their responsibilities time and time again, and defaced the reputation of institutions. Board members with connections to lobbyists should be removed.

So many artists and community leaders do their work despite their own precariousness and vulnerability, both in terms of their income in the face of the cost-of-living crisis, and in their commitment to critiquing genocidal regimes in their artmaking practice.