

DARWIN FRINGE FESTIVAL (DARWIN FRINGE INCORPORATED)

SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY REVIEW

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ABOUT DARWIN FRINGE

The biggest platform for emerging, independent and experimental artists in the Northern Territory, Darwin Fringe is your 10 day multi arts Festival with bite. The Darwin Fringe has existed locally since the mid 80's having had a range of costume changes, with the current era now in its 11th year.

Our Vision | A supportive, diverse, and exciting local arts sector with multiple opportunities for artistic growth, attracting local and national interest.

Our Mission | The Darwin Fringe is a hybrid open-access festival that supports the development of the arts community, providing opportunities for all artists to emerge, experiment, and showcase new and diverse works in Garramilla/ Darwin to local and national audiences.

RESPONDING TO THE PILLARS

First Nations First

Darwin Fringe asks Creative Australia to:

- Elevate and recognise the voices of First Nation's Australians as we echo their calls made to this submission as experts on their community.
- Recognise and advocate for Treaty and Sovereignty discussions lead by First Nation's people. As stated in the Consultation Paper, "*Arts and culture reflect who we are, and shape who we become*", we need to leverage the power of art and culture to better intertwine truth telling into the future of Australia as one small aspect of attempting to reconcile and repatriate the horrors of colonisation.
- Better support open access platforms which by nature adhere to cultural protocols of ICP being retained by the artists and communities and offer accessibility. The combination of open-access models with formal First Nations programming structures provides a distinctive vehicle for First Nations creative leadership at scale.*
- Deliver a 4 year investment into a National Artist Creation and Presentation Fund: \$10 million. Within the Fund, dedicated streams support First Nations artists, supported by First Nations curators, producers and advisors. Fund also resources independent producer capacity building administered through the network.*
- Deliver a 4 year investment into a National Touring and Mobility Fund: \$7 million. A National First Nations Festivals Pathway operates within the Fund: a coordinated commission-to-tour model in which First Nations artists develop work at their home festival and tour through the network with built-in fees, mentorship, and ICIP protocols.*

Darwin Fringe asks Creative Australia to:

- Explicitly recognise and support artists and audiences with disability within the new cultural policy and respond to their submission and requests made through this process.
- Recognise and coordinate with the hospitality sector as providers of venues, a vital part of the independent artist and wider cultural ecosystem and to create a funding pool that commercial businesses can access to book Australian artists to present cultural events; minimising the red tape required to source auspicing whilst increasing opportunities for performers. Conditions could exist around ticketing costs to assure that the events receiving support remain accessible.
- Coordinate with infrastructure to increase promotion to the business community about existing pools of money available to improve building access.
- Recognise the existing open-access model and better invest in its capacity to provide accessible creative opportunities for people of any demographic, life experience or background.*
- Codify the open-access model. Federal recognition of the open-access registration model as a defining feature of cultural infrastructure worth protection: democratic by design, anti-gatekeeping, and demonstrably effective at surfacing diverse voices.*
- Deliver a 4 year investment into a National Sector Capacity and Investment Fund: \$4 million. Specific investments include national accessibility standards (captioning, Auslan, audio description pools; accessible venue mapping; sensory-relaxed performance protocols), cultural protocols and safety infrastructure (cultural safety training, Elders-in-residence programs, ICIP literacy, and support for First Nations curatorial roles).*

Centrality of the Artist

Darwin Fringe asks Creative Australia to:

- Advocate for the urgent need to increase tax rates for AI companies operating in Australia whose generative models rely on the theft of artist work to establish their tech conglomerates, with this funding acquired through the tax increase then being allocated to departments such as Creative Australia.
- Advocate for the urgent introduction of improved Copyright Laws, better protecting Australian voices, stories and work that is being stolen for generative AI models.
- Advocate for the constant evaluation of conflict of interest potential within the National Artificial Intelligence Centre (NAIC).
- Create and distribute education campaigns around the ethical and environmental issues caused by using generative AI.
- Include a National Independent Festivals Framework within the next phase of REVIVE. Such recognition formalises independent festivals as a distinct category of national cultural infrastructure, establishes coordinating governance for a sector that currently operates without it, and integrates the federal portfolios that already touch independent festival activity.*
- Deliver a 4 year investment into a National Artist Creation and Presentation Fund: \$10 million. Direct, accessible funding for independent artists to create and present new Australian work within the festival network. The Fund converts an accidental national circuit into a deliberate, equitably accessible one, unlocking interstate mobility for hundreds of independent artists per cycle. *
- Deliver a 4 year investment into an International Independent Arts Connections Fund: \$4 million. A dedicated fund building international export pathways for Australian independent artists, in direct alignment with Creative Australia's International Engagement Strategy and existing international funding programs.

Darwin Fringe asks Creative Australia to:

- Advocate for a Universal Basic Income that is above the poverty level. Theatre Network Australia's 2024 report on the working trends of independent artists and creatives in the performing arts in Australia stated that *'The average income from creative projects across all 273 respondents was \$21,608'*¹. The Universal Basic Income should be made available for all Australians who need it.
- Advocate for tax reform for lower income earners and businesses.
- Advocate for the need to develop a sovereign wealth fund that can finance departments like Creative Australia through the re-issuing of any contract currently selling off public assets such as minerals.
- Implement a cultural shift away from pressuring small to medium arts organisations to develop public philanthropic cultures and instead save millions of dollars spent on this work by advocating for the need to increase taxes for high income earners, the ultra wealthy who personally make more than a billion dollars annually. Increasing tax rates is a much more efficient and cheaper way to improve funding for departments such as Creative Australia and will organically free up staffing resources on the ground. This is not to dismiss the practice and the skill set required to steward relationships or the culture of donations entirely however it would far better equip small to medium organisations and provide more opportunities to deliver on the policies desired outcomes.
- Recognise Independent venues as vital cultural infrastructure.*
- Recognise independent festivals as national cultural infrastructure. Formal acknowledgment in REVIVE's next phase that major independent festivals constitute a distinct category of cultural platform delivering federal policy outcomes at scale.*
- Establish coordinating governance. A National Independent Festivals Council, convened under Creative Australia, with representation from each Alliance member and relevant federal agencies.*
- Deliver a 4 year investment into a National Sector Capacity and Investment Fund: \$4 million. A strategic investment to strengthen independent festivals as national cultural infrastructure. The Fund supports coordinated national initiatives across festivals; pilots innovative models of artist support, digital engagement, and audience development; advances sector-wide priorities including access, inclusion, sustainability, and audience diversity; and resources sector-wide data, evaluation, and benchmarking.*

Engaging the Audience

Darwin Fringe asks Creative Australia to:

- Establish a federal Affordability Guarantee, federally subsidised low-income and first-timer ticketing schemes providing an affordable cultural participation answer to the cost-of-living crisis. This model could be built using existing infrastructure such as previous tourism voucher/ subsidy programs.*
- Australia's independent festivals are among the highest-performing cultural tourism assets in the country, with measurable, attributable economic impact at a scale that warrants federal recognition as cultural tourism infrastructure.*
- The Alliance proposes that the Framework include a coordinating partnership with Tourism Australia and DITRDCA: inclusion in international cultural tourism marketing; a nationally consistent visitor economy data and measurement framework; coordinated international export and inbound buyer programs; and recognition of independent festivals within visitor economy strategy as year-round cultural tourism infrastructure.*

REFERENCES

- * In reference to the National Cultural Policy Review Submission, *Recognising Independent Arts Festivals in Australia's National Cultural Policy*, a submission by National Fringe Festivals Alliance (NFFA): Adelaide Fringe Festival, Darwin Fringe Festival, FRINGE WORLD Festival Perth, Melbourne Fringe Festival, and Sydney Fringe Festival.
- ¹ Theatre Network Australia's *'This Is How We Do It'* Report published in 2024, Page 33