

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous

Individual



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I'm a stage and production manager, arts administrator, advocate and educator. I spent the first 15 years of my career working on short-term contracts. Poor pay, instability, excessive hours, an unreasonably broad list of responsibilities, and unsustainable working conditions eventually forced me away from the stage manager life I had loved and into an administrative role in an arts faculty at a leading university. I now earn approximately double my previous wage, have access to paid leave for the first time in my career, and can maintain a healthier and more balanced life. This level of stability should not require leaving the industry, walking away from the job I once loved.

Our sector is facing a workforce crisis. Producers are trimming budgets and cutting essential production roles including assistant directors, company managers, props staff, swings and understudies. Those gaps do not disappear — they are absorbed mostly by stage managers who are already working beyond capacity. I personally know countless stage managers who have left the industry in recent years due to instability, poor pay, excessive hours and burnout. The next National Cultural Policy must prioritise support for arts workers through fair pay, sustainable workloads, and stronger worker protections. Importantly, there must be support for industry-led training and wellbeing initiatives. The Government should consider a guaranteed wage for arts workers. This will not only help to stabilise the workforce but will also alleviate pressure on producers' bottom lines. Without intervention, we will continue losing experienced workers from the sector.

One key issue absent from both the previous and proposed Cultural Policy is environmental sustainability. The arts industry generates significant waste through productions with a short life, and extensive touring, but sustainable production practices can reduce both environmental impact and long-term costs. Many companies are working hard to adopt more environmentally responsible practices by sourcing thoughtfully, reusing materials and goods, and planning for longer-term use of props, costumes and sets. Government support should encourage these initiatives through targeted funding and incentives for sustainable practice.

The ongoing lack of funding across the arts sector continues to place enormous pressure on organisations and workers alike. Companies are being asked to create ambitious and complex work with increasingly limited resources, at the expense of fair wages and sustainable staffing. Tax reform is needed to better support arts organisations so they can continue producing high-quality Australian work, pay workers fairly, and ensure audiences can continue to access diverse local stories.

The next National Cultural Policy must recognise that the sustainability of our industry depends on the sustainability of its workforce. Arts workers, particularly stage managers, are carrying increasing pressure with diminishing support. The Government should look to existing industry initiatives and provide support to ensure their longevity, success and to build a self-sustaining industry. Greater investment in fair working conditions, workforce retention, sustainability initiatives and long-term sector financial support is essential to ensure a healthy and sustainable future for the Australian arts industry.