

# Gravity & Other Myths submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation

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Prepared by Gravity & Other Myths

## Working position

Gravity & Other Myths makes this submission as a small and mighty Australian company whose work has been shaped by touring, collaboration, physical risk, trust and long-term international relationships.

We also make it from inside an ecology. GOM does not exist on its own. We rely on training institutions, independent artists, small-to-medium companies, regional presenters, major venues, festivals, producers, technicians, agents, audiences and the international partners who keep inviting Australian work back.

This submission sits alongside, and cross-endorses, key sector submissions from ALPEA, Arts8, Circa and Merrigong Theatre Company.

For transparency, Darcy Grant, Artistic Director of Gravity & Other Myths, is one of the authors of the ALPEA submission. Darcy and Kate Ben-Tovim stand strongly behind that live performance export submission as the core export position endorsed by GOM.

The short version is this: Australia has built something extraordinary in live performance, and particularly in contemporary circus. The appetite is there. The reputation is there. The work is there. The problem is not lack of demand. The problem is feasibility.

## Summary

Disruption is the new normal. Costs have risen. International touring is harder to get over the line. Insurance is harder. Freight is harder. Visas are harder. Audiences are under pressure. Artists are leaving. Companies are being asked to carry more risk with less room to move.

At the same time, Australian live performance continues to punch well above its weight internationally. GOM knows this directly. Contemporary circus, physical theatre, dance and other live performance forms carry Australia into major venues, festivals and cultural conversations all over the world.

This is not soft value. It is cultural diplomacy, export income, audience development, artistic reputation, tourism interest and Australian IP moving through the world. But we cannot keep pretending that reputation alone will hold the system together.

If Australia wants the return, it has to back the infrastructure. That means export support that understands how touring actually works. It means risk-sharing, not project-by-project luck. It means recognising contemporary circus as a distinct artform, not squeezing it into categories built for different kinds of work. It means supporting the independent and small-to-medium ecology that graduates and artists actually move through. It means funding artists and audiences, because a sector without audiences is not sustainable no matter how good the work is.

Gravity & Other Myths supports the Arts8 concern, including the point raised through the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, that training pathways are only meaningful if the wider ecology is healthy enough for graduates to enter. We support Circa's call for contemporary circus to be recognised as a distinct artform with distinct workforce, insurance, training and touring needs. We support Merrigong's argument that government should fund success, not only survival, and that audiences and regional gateway cities need to be part of the strategy.

## Recommendations

### 1. Name live performance export as a strategic national priority

International live performance export should be named clearly in the National Cultural Policy as a cultural, economic and diplomatic priority.

When Australian companies play major international festivals and venues, they do something no trade mission can do in quite the same way. They put a contemporary Australian identity in front of audiences who may have no other relationship with this country. They build trust, reputation and long-term relationships.

This work should not sit at the edge of policy. For export-ready companies, it is not an optional extra. It is core business, core artistic development and core public value.

### 2. Create a dedicated live performance export fund

Australia needs a live performance export fund that backs confirmed demand and helps companies get real opportunities over the line.

The model should include matched support against guaranteed international presenter fees, with a benchmark contribution of around 30 per cent of presenter fees once tours are confirmed.

This is not about subsidising imaginary markets. It is about helping companies respond to demand that already exists. It gives presenters skin in the game, keeps companies accountable, and makes it possible to say yes when the invitation is real but the budget no longer stacks up.

The fund should also support market development, strategic missions, reciprocal presentation, post-market conversion and the long, slow relationship work that international touring depends on.

### 3. Build a quick-response disruption fund

Disruption is no longer exceptional. Policy needs to stop treating it that way.

Airfares, freight, illness, visa delays, political instability, presenter risk, extreme weather and insurance escalation can all break an otherwise viable tour. Small and mid-sized companies do not have the reserves to absorb this over and over again.

A quick-response disruption fund would protect confirmed international activity when the demand is there but an external shock threatens the tour. This should sit beside realistic contingency lines in touring budgets, not replace them.

### 4. Keep export policy coordinated and in conversation with the sector

Live performance export sits across arts, trade, diplomacy, tourism, education and industry development. The policy response should reflect that.

Creative Australia, the Office for the Arts, DFAT, Austrade, state governments and overseas posts all have a role to play. What is missing is a clearer shared frame, regular consultation with export-active companies and a practical mechanism for turning international demand into viable touring.

This does not need to be complicated. A standing advisory group or regular export roundtable with companies, presenters, producers, peak bodies and government would help keep policy close to the reality of the market.

### **5. Fund success, not only survival**

Gravity & Other Myths supports Merrigong Theatre Company's argument that public funding needs to do more than keep things barely alive.

Of course public funding must support risk, experimentation, diversity and work that would not otherwise happen. But the system also needs to back the small fires that are already burning.

Too often, signs of audience demand or commercial potential are treated as reasons not to invest. That is backwards. When a work, company or model is showing traction, public support can help turn that traction into long-term sector value.

We need seed funding, but we also need growth funding. We need to start things, but we also need to help the right things travel, deepen and scale.

### **6. Fund artists and audiences together**

The live performance sector has a supply problem, but it also has a demand problem.

Artists need support. Companies need support. But audiences also need to be part of the policy picture. Cost-of-living pressure, changed attendance habits and rising ticket prices are all reshaping the live performance market.

Government should invest in audience development as cultural infrastructure. That means long-term audience research, regional marketing, youth and schools access, community connection, touring audience data, and direct audience-side measures such as cultural vouchers or ticket access programs.

A sector without audiences is not a healthy sector. Audience development cannot just be left to marketing departments with shrinking budgets.

### **7. Develop Australia's Second Cities as gateway hubs**

Gravity & Other Myths supports Merrigong Theatre Company's call to develop Australia's Second Cities as serious performing arts hubs.

Places like Wollongong, Geelong and the Gold Coast matter. They are not simply outer edges of capital city markets. They are gateway cities for much wider regional audiences.

Current touring support does not always see this properly. If a venue postcode is classified as metropolitan or outer metropolitan, the program can miss the fact that the actual audience is regional.

Playing Australia should be reformed, or a complementary program created, so that support can follow the audience, not just the venue classification. This would help build a stronger second-tier market for Australian work and make touring of larger-scale work more viable.

### **8. Recognise contemporary circus as a distinct artform**

Australia has become genuinely world-leading in contemporary circus. That should be named in national policy.

Contemporary circus is not just theatre with tricks, dance with danger, or sport with lighting. It has its own training pathways, workforce realities, insurance pressures, touring models, physical demands, ensemble structures and audience relationships.

Recognition matters because it changes how policy sees the work. If policy sees the artform clearly, it can respond to the real conditions of the artform.

It also sends a message internationally that Australia understands the value of one of its strongest cultural export forms.

### **9. Recognise the employment realities of physically demanding performance**

Circus, physical theatre and dance performers share many realities with elite athletes. Careers are physically intense. They are finite. Injury risk is real. Ensemble trust is not a nice extra. It is often a safety requirement.

Australia has recognised some of these realities in sport. Similar thinking should be applied to physically demanding performing artforms.

A fixed-term contract setting that reflects the nature of the role would allow companies and performers to build ensembles in ways that make artistic, practical and safety sense.

### **10. Support the transition from training into the profession**

Australia trains brilliant artists. The question is whether the profession is healthy enough for them to stay.

The gap between graduation and a sustainable career is where a lot of talent is lost. Artists need time, income, insurance, networks, space to fail and space to get better.

Gravity & Other Myths supports a targeted graduate-to-establishment model that combines time-limited income support with portable insurance, including injury cover and income protection.

This also connects directly to the Arts8 point. Training is only one part of the pipeline. The independent and small-to-medium ecology is where early career artists actually learn how to become professionals.

### **11. Invest in performer health, longevity and career transition**

Physically demanding performers need better support across the whole life of a career.

That means injury prevention, rehabilitation, mental and physical health support, and real pathways into coaching, directing, rehearsal direction, teaching, dramaturgy, company leadership and training.

When experienced performers leave the stage, they should not have to leave the sector. Their knowledge is part of the infrastructure. It should be retained, not wasted.

### **12. Fix insurance and workers compensation settings for touring and high-risk artforms**

Touring companies are currently navigating complex and inconsistent insurance and workers compensation settings across jurisdictions.

For high-risk artforms, this is not just annoying administration. It affects whether work can tour, whether companies can plan, and whether the risk becomes impossible to carry.

Australia needs a nationally coordinated framework for touring companies operating across state and territory borders. Government should also investigate an insurance pool or supported facility for high-risk artforms where the commercial market prices essential cultural activity out of reach.

### 13. Rebuild the independent and small-to-medium ecology

The independent and small-to-medium sector is not a training ground to be used up and ignored. It is where work is tested, artists meet, new forms emerge, audiences are built and future major companies are made.

If this part of the ecology keeps weakening, the whole system weakens with it.

Gravity & Other Myths supports the Arts8 argument that the health of graduate pathways depends on the health of the wider ecology. It is not enough to train artists well. There has to be somewhere for them to go.

### Cross-endorsement statement

Gravity & Other Myths recognises and endorses the aligned concerns raised by ALPEA, Arts8, Circa and Merrigong Theatre Company.

Gravity & Other Myths particularly stands behind the live performance export submission authored through the ALPEA process by Darcy Grant and Kate Ben-Tovim. That submission should be read as the core export policy position endorsed by GOM.

We support the ALPEA argument that international live performance export is a proven area of Australian cultural strength, but that it needs proper infrastructure: dedicated export funding, risk-sharing, coordinated government support and long-term market development.

We support Arts8's concern that the training pipeline is only as strong as the ecology graduates enter.

We support Circa's call for contemporary circus to be recognised as a distinct artform, with policy settings that reflect its real workforce, touring, insurance and physical performance conditions.

We support Merrigong Theatre Company's argument that the sector needs to fund success, develop audiences and take Second Cities seriously as gateway hubs for regional audiences.

### Summary

Australia does not need to invent the talent. It is already here.

It does not need to invent the demand. In many cases, the demand is already here too.

What is missing is the policy infrastructure to make the work viable, durable and ambitious at the scale Australia says it wants.

Gravity & Other Myths asks the National Cultural Policy to recognise live performance export as strategic cultural infrastructure, contemporary circus as a distinct and internationally significant artform, and the independent and small-to-medium ecology as the ground future excellence grows from.

The choice is not between art and economics, or between artists and audiences, or between home and overseas. A good cultural policy understands that these things are connected.

The opportunity now is to back what is already working, support what is under strain, and build a policy framework elastic enough for the next decade of disruption.