

# National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: As an individual

**What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:**

## **First Nations**

A commitment to First Nations-led practice is long overdue and presents an extraordinary opportunity to increase the visibility of First Nations culture and creators, learn from and embed First Nations ways of working, and begin to decolonise our sector's prevailing monoculture.

## **A Place for Every Story**

Many Australians don't have equal access to arts and culture. We need to strategically remove barriers to ensure everyone has the opportunity to take part in all areas and at all levels: from who can participate and what stories they can tell, to where they're from, what they do, and what roles or art forms they choose.

Equity comes from providing whatever is needed to make everyone equal. This includes equity of access for all locations, all art forms, types and sizes, and all points of engagement with the arts.

A new national Cultural Policy should work in concert with State, Territory and Local Governments to impact and be accessible for all Australians, regardless of where we live.

It must also be applicable across all traditional, contemporary and increasingly hybrid art forms, across community and professional practice, and across all scales – including directing more investment toward independent practitioners and the small-to-medium sector that outperforms its bigger and better-funded counterparts at every level other than operating budgets.

Existing initiatives to increase diversity still tend to approach the issue from an audience perspective. The monoculture will persist until we improve access and representation for all points of arts engagement – from audiences and participants, to artists and arts workers, leaders and members of Boards.

## **The Centrality of the Artist**

We need a national Cultural Policy that addresses practitioners' precarious and subsistence living conditions (which have worsened during the pandemic, even as we relied more heavily on their work as entertainment, distraction and stress relief). During the pandemic, some artists were eligible for JobKeeper payments. This gave many independent artists and writers a chance to experience a living wage and regular income for the first time. Many artists were not eligible for this type of support and struggled through alone or with community support, unable to access payments. Now that

pandemic support has been withdrawn, artists are experiencing burnout and recognising how unsustainable their working lives had become, even before the pandemic.

The idea of “creative industries” is a flawed model. The arts are not an industry – this was a term developed in the UK in the 80s. A new national Cultural Policy needs to recognise artists and cultural workers as essential workers, with the same rights as those in other industries – either through a minimum basic income scheme, wage standards, job guarantees, fellowships, public employment opportunities, other forms of income support, or following international examples to support those who are out of work without ‘mutual obligation’ requirements.

And we need to reverse the value, funding and support systems that put writers and literary professionals amongst the sector’s lowest income earners and funding recipients.

### **Strong Institutions**

Strong institutions need significant and stable investment. State and Local Governments have offset some of the last seven years of Federal arts funding cuts, but overall investment in Australian arts and culture isn’t matching our growing population. By international standards, we rank in the bottom quarter of OECD countries (investing just 0.9% of GDP in arts and culture in 2019)

We need to reverse the “slow strangulation” of the Australia Council and ABC and resist the recent Parliamentary Inquiry recommendation that the Productivity Commission should consider “arrangements which govern funding of artistic programs”. We should reverse the trend for Governmental overreach and interference in these agencies, and return and ambitiously increase their operating, commissioning and devolved funding budgets.

Our sector needs the independence and transparency of the Australia Council. We need the expertise that only a room full of knowledgeable, representative peers can provide. And we need to stop wasting limited resources on duplicating unnecessary decision-making processes often processes (often with confusing, inconsistent or inferior results, as the Catalyst and RISE funding models have revealed).

The Minister should stay out of arts decision making and take the advice of the Australia Council.

### **Why these pillars are important to me:**

#### **First Nations**

I believe we should recognise and acknowledge and appreciate the people who were in this country long before anyone else. Their history and oral traditions and view of the world provide an amazingly different perspective from which we can learn and be proud. First Nations people should be supported in their arts practice and respected.

#### **A Place for Every Story**

Our society is diverse, multicultural, and has people from all around the world who have chosen to join us. We should make room for all voices and perspectives, rather than presenting an artificially homogenous view of what is Australian art in any art form. I welcome and love to see different perspectives, hear varying opinions and be introduced to new thinking and opinions through the arts.

## **The Centrality of the Artist**

Without the artist there is no art. All the arts infrastructure in the world is meaningless if there are no artists to create work, present it, interpret it and re-imagine it for new audiences and new settings. My view is that we need to be looking more at artists and less at arts institutions, infrastructure and organisations, to create a system where there is room for emerging artists to grow, present their work and feel valued within our society. More opportunities and funding for artists will lead to more art and therefore more to put into our major institutions and infrastructure such as galleries, theatres and concert halls. We need to consider more of a bottom up approach.

## **Strong Institutions**

I believe that our arts institutions are fairly well supported at the moment, despite the pandemic and despite the drop in funding over the last two decades. There needs to be a balance between support for institutions and support for the artists who fuel them with their imaginations, their intellectual property and output and their ambitious visions. I feel that support for particular major institutions presents an exclusionary practice which ranks or rates arts organisations in a negative way.

## **Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?**

I am writing as an individual who is an audience member, an amateur musician, a former board member of arts organisations and as a donor to arts organisations.

The arts are a key element in maintaining a functioning and healthy civil society. The arts give us an opportunity to express ourselves, learn about others and see things from different perspectives with joy, delight, surprise and elation. Without the arts we are just a dull functional economy – with the arts, we have books, music, film, performance, games, education, inclusion and diversity

For the arts to flourish in Australia we need to give them higher priority and status – firstly through recognising the arts as its own portfolio, and by providing more significant funding for artists through the Australia Council – at arms length and by supporting individual artists and the arts ecosystem as well as the major institutions. We can not afford to ignore the contribution of emerging and younger artists who are making their way in this field.