

National Cultural Policy Submission

Back to Back Theatre Inc

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

**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

Back to Back Theatre affirms the centrality of First Nations to Australian cultural practice.

We note that First Nations cultural practice is not separate to other components of their existence. We believe there is an opportunity for their notion of life and their intrinsic placement of culture within it, to lead all Australians in recognising the centrality of arts and culture in our own lives.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart contains the phrase about First Nations Children – “They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.” Can all Australians also walk in their world?

A Place for Every Story

Diverse stories made and presented by people of diversity is core to Back to Back Theatre’s existence.

Inclusion must be across the spectrum of arts activity, artform and presentation mode: creators, performers, presenters, artists, promoters, administrators, governors, leaders, audiences, etc.

A policy must lead to action – it is more than a mothering statement. Action includes resourcing – planning, personnel, financial, etc.

Inclusion must extend beyond the grasp of the current cultural gatekeepers “letting others in”. Opportunities must be created and direct invitation extended.

The notion of quotas for greater inclusion is, instinctively, not preferred. That said, change requires leadership. A quota for diverse Australian content (across all activity, not just screen) can be a stimulus, uplifting the capacity for creation, and viewing, of all peoples’ stories. We would welcome the day where quotas are not required.

The pandemic has provoked something of a diaspora of people out of metropolitan areas to rural and regional centres. The policy should reflect this, offering stimulus for increased access to cultural practice and platforms for that practice to be shared. Stable broadband access for regional, rural and remote areas is an essential element in the creation and dispersment of all Australian stories.

The Centrality of the Artist

Core to Back to Back Theatre’s strategy for the creation and dissemination is the centrality of the artist. This underpins our success.

The notion of who is, or can be, an artist in Australia can be limiting. Exceptionalism and excellence, whilst useful terms in identifying an artist, can also be a restrictive notion; a barrier to entry. Is there a more inclusive notion?

If we are to value the role of the artist, then time and resources must be dedicated to supporting their activity.

How can the cultural policy change the overall and insidious attitude to artists that pervades much of our society? Can the cultural policy also be a tool for promotion of the status of the artist across

Australia? And can this be embedded in various part of society, with a priority within education curriculum across age-groups.

If an artist is central, then their capacity to make a living wage must also be central.

Strong Institutions

As an NPAPF organisation, Back to Back Theatre embodies the strengthening of cultural institutions. We also represent the diversity of institutions that can be strengthened. Our story began in a funding era that was stronger than currently exists. New and current small to medium institutions do not enjoy the same conditions that assisted in establishing and strengthening Back to Back Theatre as an organisation.

The same circumstance applies to independent artists. Independent practice is not separate to institutional practice. They exist symbiotically. Each sustains the other. New institutions arise from independent practice. Current institutions are stimulated by the practice of the independent artist. Each must be supported.

This cannot be achieved without increased resources.

This applies equally to the education sector as it does the arts and cultural activity sector.

Beyond the not for profit arts sector, we are dependent on strong, non-funded organisations and people for services, be they artists and/or artworkers. Should the policy extend beyond “Strong Institutions” to “Strong Cultural Ecology”?

Reaching the Audience

Digital is not live. Live is not digital. They can, and must, co-exist (within the one artform, cultural organisation, etc) but they do not replace each other.

A capacity to present on multiple platforms (live and digital) increases access and pioneers new audience territories. It can take Australian stories to the world.

Given the above, is cultural presentation, be that Australia wide and the import/export thereof, a moral question within the context of climate change? Artists must be supported to mitigate climate change in their activity and presentation.

The intent of a cultural policy that wants Australian content, diversity and audiences, cannot be achieved without a commensurate policy change and resourcing in education. The cultural policy must extend beyond “reaching an audience” to creating an audience; creating a sustainable and knowledgeable environment for people to develop as artists.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

We welcome a policy that can provide intersectionality between First Nations and other sectors. For our part, we seek to embrace opportunities for intersectionality with disability arts.

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

As the Minister has noted, much has changed since he was previously the Minister for the Arts. Change is a constant, be that in culture or society in general. Social mores, technology and political landscapes (be they global or local) are all subject to rapid alteration. The unknown awaits us. For a cultural policy to remain valuable and effective, it must be a living document. Yes, core principles are vital to the policy but it should have built in reviews and opportunities to adapt. It should be both responsive and lead.