

# National Cultural Policy Submission

**Peter Butler**

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**

For many Aboriginal communities, remoteness is an issue, both for expressing their art and for accessing the art of others. I also believe that internet access probably isn't universally available. This makes it hard for Aboriginal Communities to interact with the mainstream cultural industry. Universal access to the NBN should be one of the foundations of cultural policy. I think the opportunity for Aboriginal communities is that they have a unique culture which can enrich the culture of the broader Australian community.

## **A Place for Every Story**

As above, making the NBN available with high download speeds in rural and regional areas is a key factor in the ability of those communities to engage with the national and international arts communities. Funding must also be made available for arts and music festivals in regional areas to provide opportunities for those communities. Arts, including music, needs to be taught from Kindergarten to Year 10 at all schools, by qualified teachers to help develop the talent in our regional communities.

## **The Centrality of the Artist**

I think consideration should be given to providing a "living wage" to artists, who often struggle to obtain housing or pay bills when their income is so intermittent and unpredictable. We must provide funding to small regional theatre companies, art galleries and music schools, not just large companies in capital cities. Sadly many artists have suffered significant financial hardship over the last two and a half years as Covid has effectively shut down their industry. I don't believe that the former government did enough to support artists – and support staff – in this period and sadly many will have moved on to different careers and may never come back to the arts. This is a loss for all of us. The Arts are often treated as a hobby, rather than a vocation, despite the cultural sector contributing "\$50 billion towards Australia's GDP, including over \$4.2 billion from the arts." <https://australiacouncil.gov.au/news/media-releases/the-arts-matter-to-australia-and-the-data-shows-it/> Also, from the same web page "85% of Australians think the arts make for a richer and more meaningful life." There are no arts without artists, there is no Australian film and television industry without Australian actors, producers, scriptwriters, camera operators... We need to support ALL of these sectors, from the ground up, or we will be condemned to a future of streaming American sitcoms. When someone says the arts isn't a career, I think "Tell that to the Wiggles"

## **Strong Institutions**

I think the best way to support institutions, other than funding, is to ensure a flow of new talent into the organisations. Quality arts education, support for parents to pay for instruments and music lessons, possibly a voucher system. Ensure there is a qualified music and art teacher in every primary and high school up to Year 10 at least (More than one of each in larger schools) "Music manifests

itself in students being able to perform much better in mathematics, much better in science, much better in languages and a variety of other things, because they have the benefit of what music does to make their brains very much more elastic and flexible and giving them a much greater capacity to listen and learn." <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-03/richard-gill-school-combines-music-creativity-and-science/13113446>

### **Reaching the Audience**

Although there will always be a place for live music, theatre, cinemas and other public cultural events, culture is also significantly accessed online, through streaming services or websites like YouTube. As well as education in music and the arts, education of school students in how to capitalise on these technologies is also vital.

**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**

Like many Australians, I was born overseas. The majority of the population are the descendants of migrants, from the First Fleet onwards. The only truly unique culture in Australia is the Aboriginal culture of our First Nations citizens. We must ensure that Aboriginal communities, particularly remote ones, are able to access culture and also to share their culture with the rest of Australia and the world. Most music and film of the last 100 years has been heavily influenced by US culture. We need to record, promote and celebrate the diversity of our First Nations people.

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

Australia is one of the largest countries in the world, although it has one of the smaller populations. Although there are many things we have in common, every town has its own culture and we need to support, fund and celebrate that diversity. We must find a way to foster creative people in smaller towns, to train and support them and encourage them.

### **The Centrality of the Artist**

Artists are the people that make life interesting. When people finish work, they generally listen to live or recorded music, or watch films or go to the theatre to see a live performance. Silo art is putting a lot of small towns on the map. Most Australians are consumers of the arts. We need to support and encourage artists, musicians, actors, dancers and all the other creative people out there, wherever they live

### **Strong Institutions**

We need strong institutions like the National Gallery and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, but we need to support the grass roots and foster the emerging talent as well. There needs to be a focus on the next generation of talent, in all areas. You can't have a symphony orchestra unless you have a lot of school bands.

## Reaching the Audience

We are part of an international society, our culture comes from all over the world – and our cultural products can go all over the world. Australia is only a small country by population, but it has produced many world class artists, musicians and actors. Supporting networking to allow artists from different regions to collaborate on projects through an improved NBN but also through websites and networks to facilitate communication.

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

Other thoughts:

I am part of a very important group in the arts sector, a “bum on seat”. I have been to a number of exhibitions in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, before Covid making me mostly work from home, I was a regular lunchtime visitor to Wollongong Art Gallery. I have lost count of the number of music and theatre and comedy performances I have been to, ranging from AC/DC at Sydney Cricket Ground to avant garde performances in small venues where the performers outnumber the “crowd”. I count a number of musicians and artists among my friends. The arts have enriched my life, from listening to music while I work or in the car. or to going to festivals and concerts. The Arts are an invaluable part of our society, I feel they have been neglected in the last 10 years – particularly the last 3 – and I feel strongly that we need to support the arts more, from Kindergarten all the way up to the Symphony Orchestras. A few points that didn't fit in the boxes above:

1. Provide tax breaks or other financial incentives for small venues offering live performances.
2. Provide funding for music festivals that provide opportunities for emerging artists, particularly youth artists.
3. Take steps to ensure streaming services pay a reasonable fee to content creators.
4. Provide subsidies/incentives for venues replacing poker machines with performance spaces,
5. Set significant, meaningful local content requirements for radio, TV and streaming services and government funded arts organisations like Sydney Symphony Orchestra,
6. Bring back the glory days of pub rock: I remember in the early 80s the weekend gig guide for Wollongong was a whole page in the Illawarra Mercury each Friday, a wide range of local bands as well as national acts (Angels, Rose Tattoo, Redgum, Divinyls, Radiators and many more), sadly a lot of the rooms that used to be used for small concerts have been replaced with the scourge of poker machines and there are a lot less concerts than there used to be;
7. Provide better protection for artists from being ripped off by managers and record labels through an independent industry ombudsman or similar,
8. Teaching the full story of Australian history – frontier wars, massacres, Stolen Children...We need to tell Our Story, warts and all, as part of reconciliation and moving forward and also because Australia has its own stories to tell, I don't want a film industry that is all about making Marvel films on the Gold Coast, I want to see Australian films with Australian stories and Australian actors in Australian locations (The Castle, Crocodile Dundee, Puberty Blues, Mad Max, Rabbit Proof Fence and so many more),
9. Encourage more frequent and realistic roles for multicultural actors in film and TV – we have been a multicultural society for centuries: "A quarter of the population in Bendigo was Chinese-born during that gold rush period," Bendigo's Golden Dragon Museum's Leigh McKinnon said.' <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-08-21/the-life-and-legacies-of-bendigo-chinese-/101348162>
10. Education in the arts has many benefits. A lot of importance is placed on STEM subjects, but fields like engineering require creativity, not just technology. As one famous example, 'In

later years, Einstein would turn to his violin while trying to work out his scientific problems and formulae. Once, when asked about his theory of relativity, Einstein explained, "It occurred to me by intuition, and music was the driving force behind that intuition. My discovery was the result of musical perception."

<https://www.kindermusik.com/mindsonmusic/einstein-and-his-violin/>

11. I did a Bachelor of Science at uni, so although maths and science background played a big part, for many subjects I had to draw what I saw before me, whether it was a cell or other sample under a microscope or an animal, or geological feature. My high school art lessons were more useful than maths for those tasks. Arts and Sciences are not mutually exclusive, there is a huge overlap between them, neglecting Arts education will lower the quality of the next generation of scientists and engineers.

In closing, I quote the University of Florida: "A literature review from *Frontiers in Psychology* outlined several studies linking aesthetic experiences with broad improvements in subjects' emotional states that promote physical and psychological well-being. Giving learners the time, space, and materials for creative expression can lower stress, improve memory, and make them feel more socially connected.

"Appreciation for art also makes a significant difference in people's lives on a macro level. Entire societies may stand to gain from an investment in the arts. Drawing on data from the General Social Survey, researchers from the University of Illinois at Chicago's Department of Public Administration linked participation as either an audience member or creator to higher levels of civic engagement and social tolerance. This work suggests that learning how to draw, paint, sing, or just appreciate the works made by others can help us become not just happier and healthier, but also better people." "

<https://arteducationmasters.arts.ufl.edu/articles/importance-of-art-education/>