

# National Cultural Policy Submission

Suneeta Peres da Costa, writer

Submitted: As an artist

**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:**

## **A Place for Every Story**

- The lack of equity and diversity in the Australian arts has been clearly identified in recent reports, including the Australia Council for the Arts' 2022 [Towards Equity: A research overview of diversity in Australia's arts and cultural sector](#) and Diversity Arts Australia's 2019 [Shifting the Balance: Cultural Diversity in Leadership Within the Australian Arts, Screen and Creative Sectors](#). Importantly, the *Towards Equity* report confirmed that First Nations and CALD Australians are still often unable to access or shape resources and decision-making.
- As a CALD woman writer, [I can personally attest](#) to professional barriers of equity and diversity and about institutional racism as a key determining factor in the lack of CALD cultural leadership in Australia:
- In my view, opportunities must respond to the challenges outlined in such reports by ensuring a national cultural policy achieves:
  - Increased targeted, measurable CALD artist access and participation rates that reflect Australia's demographic and cultural diversity
  - Minimum protocols and standards for publicly funded programs and activities and strong mechanisms of accountability – such as reporting on, not just collection of data about – CALD participation and representation in the arts
  - Compulsory anti-racism, cultural awareness and cultural safety training for publicly funded arts institutions and the implementation of equity and diversity quotas and codes of conduct where necessary
  - Enhanced infrastructure and funding to overcome under-resourcing and under-compensation of CALD artists from intersectionally marginalised, socio-economically disadvantaged and linguistically underrepresented groups
  - Boosted funding and subsidies for CALD cultural leadership training and skills development, including support for institution
  - al and private sector partnerships and collaborations involving CALD cultural leaders and future leaders.

## **The Centrality of the Artist & Strong Institutions**

- We need an ecosystem approach to assess and address the challenges that exist and envision meaningful and equitable alternatives and opportunities. From a national cultural policy perspective, given current conditions, I don't think it's possible to imagine a future for Australian artists and the arts without government strengthening the capacity of the cultural sector.
- As an Australian writer (and reader) I am dismayed about the climate of policy neglect, austerity and the dramatic decline in funding for literature since 2014. Compared to other artform

practices, literature is allocated the smallest portion of Australia Council for the Arts funding. Ben Eltham summarised the status quo for writers and Australian publishing in his article in [The Conversation](#) following the 2022 Federal Budget.

- The [submissions](#) from many acclaimed Australian writers (and their creative collaborators) to the 2020 House of Representatives inquiry into Australia's cultural sector revealed the desperate conditions in which Australian literature is being made.
- The literary prize culture promotes recognition of excellence – but in the absence of other metrics also places unrealistically high expectations of 'exceptionalism' on what constitutes a successful career. Neither individual excellence nor individual success guarantee the vitality, health and long-term sustainability of the whole ecosystem.
- Australian artists already pursue and achieve global levels of excellence with their creative collaborators. They shouldn't need to be seen as 'special' for it to be understood that the work they do should be socially and economically valued and fairly remunerated – commensurate with expectations of workers in other industries nationally.
- Successive neo-liberal policies and budget cuts to arts institutions and funding bodies have created conditions of chronic economic precarity and a scarcity reality; austerity increases unhealthy competition and reproduces [class privilege](#), offers less chance for collaboration and limits democratic participation in the arts.
- The Coalition Government's failure to understand the industrial precarity that characterises arts work – typified by the refusal to provide support of targeted subsidies or insurance to support the livelihoods of artists affected by the COVID-19 pandemic – will have long-term consequences for Australian artists.
- Inevitably younger artists, and particularly those from already underrepresented or marginalised communities, whose voices most need to be heard, will be among those most disadvantaged by the longer-term social and economic impacts of the pandemic on arts practice.
- We should be careful about romanticising artists' resilience, industrially and psychologically. Additionally, the flow-on effects of limited means to access and participation, to undertake and make work, to strive for and achieve excellence, will have consequences for national cultural identity and the reputation of Australian arts at home and internationally.
- Reforms like the [Republic of Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot](#) could provide critical infrastructural support to, and help revitalise, the Australian arts sector, and dignify conditions of labour for Australian artists.