

Council Reference: 2123E (D22/322905)  
Your Reference:

12/08/2022

Hon Tony Burke MP  
Minister for the Arts  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development,  
Communications and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Submitted via website

To the Hon. Tony Burke MP,

### **National Cultural Policy Submission – Shoalhaven City Council**

The following information has been collated by Shoalhaven City Council in consultation with members of the Shoalhaven Arts Board and staff from Arts and Culture related departments, in response to the call for submissions on the new National Cultural Policy.

Shoalhaven City Council is a Local Government Authority which owns and manages one Regional Gallery with a collection of almost 900 works; one performing arts venue with two state of the art theatres with the capacity for over 1,000 patrons; and a library service that includes four buildings and two mobile library services. The Shoalhaven has a population of 105,000 residents and receives over 3 million visitors each year.

The information below outlines our responses to the five pillars proposed, the challenges, opportunities and importance of these pillars for our region.

#### **First Nations**

The Shoalhaven has a high proportion of residents who identify as Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander people with 5.5% of residents (national average 2.8%). With communities with long cultural connections – including the Wreck Bay and Jerrinja communities, as well as people displaced from their own Country and now connected to the Shoalhaven through the Bomaderry Aboriginal Children's Homes (Stolen Generation) - the stories of our First Nations people are of significant importance to this place. We believe that this pillar needs to clearly state the need for projects to be First Nations led, and that the policy needs to clearly promote the right for self-determination of projects and needs within communities.

Supporting the development of sustainable, professional careers in the arts for First Nations artists is critical to the growth and success of the sector. This support should include the opportunity for artists to develop their practices on Country.

National and Regional touring arts activities (performing arts and visual arts) are excellent but need to be balanced with opportunities from national companies to spend time in regional locations, working with emerging artists and elders and developing programs that are specific to that place.

We have experienced the challenges of presenting shows from other parts of Australia which have no real significance to our First Nations community, and even use language that is not understood or has a vastly different meaning.

A Federal Policy that supports a thriving and self-determined First Nations creative sector with capacity for artists to live and work in regional areas would only be of significant benefit to all in the Shoalhaven.

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

This pillar has real significance for Regional and Rural areas of Australia. We firmly believe that it should be refocused to instead be called **Every Story has its Place**. Our stories need to reflect the diversity of our places, we need to value the contribution of all, and we also need to recognise the right of all Australians to have access to cultural experiences of quality that reflect their lived experiences and realities. It is important that local stories are told in local venues and that there is opportunity for the importance of these activities to be recognised and funded through federal avenues.

It is well recognised that arts have a central role to play in community resilience and recovery post disaster, and also the broader role arts have in health and wellbeing factors for individuals and communities. Access to arts is critical for a wide range of health and wellbeing outcomes in communities. The right to access quality programs, locally relevant and produced needs to be central to the development of the National Cultural Policy.

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

We encourage the Federal Government to deeply consider the ways in which artists can be supported as workers and be provided with meaningful support that recognises the different stages of an artist's career.

Across state and federal funded programs, the perception is that there is an emphasis on 'excellence' for achieving grant funding. This is often phrased as quality of work and is assessed by public response to previous work and the significance of the work for the individual's practice and / or community. We would encourage a greater focus on development of sustainable careers and support for artists that enhances their ability to grow and develop.

In working with, speaking to, and collaborating with artists across the Shoalhaven, we would strongly encourage a National Cultural policy that supports artists through:

- Funding to restart arts and cultural industry across regional areas devastated by COVID shutdowns and multiple natural disasters. The national Cultural Policy and associated funding programs need to acknowledge the impact of the past few years on arts production and development and the associated loss of continuity for artists and arts organisations.
- National roll out of Training programs that support artists to develop their transferable skills and encourages organisations to employ people trained as artists.

- The reinstatement of Creative Fellowships that provide 2-4 year taxable grants paying the average annual wage for Australia, allowing artists time to develop themselves through their mid-career period and grow into well established and recognised artists.
- A National Agreement on artist fees and commissioning agreements. Providing clarity and certainty for artists and organisations on the costs needed when commissioning an artist and ensuring that funding opportunities are sufficient to support these costs.

### **Strong Institutions**

The 2019 report by *A New Approach* titled *The Big Picture: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia*, noted the increasing role of local government in the provision of cultural infrastructure and support for artists. A census run by Museums and Galleries NSW in 2018 showed that the majority of public galleries in NSW were reliant on local government as their primary funders. This research finding is in clear evidence in the Shoalhaven with Shoalhaven City Council covering all operational costs for the Entertainment Centre and Gallery that are not able to be met through ticket sales and associated revenue. State and Federal funding is project based and does not cover core staffing or essential operational costs.

Strong institutions require a harmonisation of funding across local, state and federal levels. There needs to be a recognition that at present local governments are carrying the majority of the risk in the arts and are the primary driver for artistic and cultural endeavours outside of the major cities. This is at the same time as local governments are facing increasing costs across all areas of operations, but particularly in infrastructure and disaster response.

Shoalhaven City Council continues to be highly supportive of the Arts and seeks grants from public and private funds to support innovation and development of programs that bring new opportunities to the region, but grants are increasingly difficult to achieve and when future programs are dependent on that funding, the level of service to our audiences is inconsistent.

For local government arts and cultural organisations, programming and community engagement are both of critical importance, and cannot happen in silos. Deep engagement with our community requires time, resourcing and flexibility. It requires consistency of programming and certainty that the large companies / artists will have the ability to spend time supporting that engagement strategy. We encourage funding programs and outcomes to move away from quantitative data of audience numbers and revenue and move to qualitative outcomes of engagement, connection, development and opportunity.

### **Reaching the Audience**

As noted in **A place for Every Story** we believe that the national Cultural Policy should clearly state the right for all Australians to have the ability to access cultural experiences of quality. The past few years have highlighted the role arts play in everyday lives, but also the challenges posed by the digital divide – digital literacy and access to high-speed internet is critical to supporting artists to reach audiences both within and external to Australia.

As previously noted, to reach audiences the stories must be relevant and told locally. We encourage funding and KPI's for major performing arts companies that support them to work in regional areas, developing content alongside regional artists, organisations and knowledge holders and presenting that work in the community that holds the story. Shoalhaven City Council is currently working with nationally recognised playwright Alanna Valentine to develop a local story on a national platform. Local stories often have national significance, and with the right support can be a powerful platform for engagement.

Reaching the Audience also needs to address the delivery of arts and culture in schools. Shoalhaven City Council and the Shoalhaven Arts Board have supported a community driven initiative that delivered an Artist in Residence in Schools program with artists from the visual, literary and performing arts working with schools across a period of time. The results of this are still being collated, but anecdotal feedback shows a significant increase in confidence and engagement with all arts by the students involved. Audience growth and development needs to be supported across all ages and stages of life, and schools are a key audience that need to be supported with meaningful, sustained and sustainable connection to artists and the arts.

### **Other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy**

Intellectual, moral and cultural rights are a critical issue for artists and organisations that needs clear guidance and legislation at a federal level. The National Cultural Policy needs to support changes to relevant legislation to ensure artists' rights are protected and organisations have clarity around their requirements.

Local Government arts and cultural organisations regularly have staff working across multiple areas of operations without the ability to specialise, and this can cause difficulty and confusion when working with and commissioning artists. It is also a challenge for emerging and mid-career artists to advocate for themselves and know what their rights are. Clear guidance on rights will help.

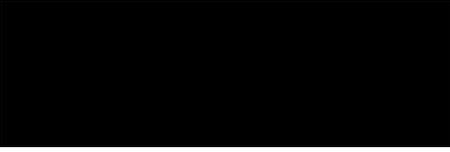
We encourage the National Cultural Policy to clearly address the benefits and opportunities for the arts in supporting a wide range of health and wellbeing outcomes. In the Shoalhaven, as with other parts of Australia, the high rates of depression and suicide amongst young people has a significant impact on our community. There are many different research projects that show how the arts have positive effects on mental health and support improved mental health outcomes. With nearly half the population impacted by mental health challenges by the time they are 40 this is an issue that must be addressed. The arts offer evidence-based solutions for promoting mental health and societal wellbeing. Access to, and engagement with the arts needs to be deeply supported from a young age, with creative pathways provided, supported and encouraged for all.

The economic impact of the arts, and the opportunities provided by the Creative / Cultural sector for diversified and sustainable economies should also be addressed in the Policy. Over the past 50 years the Australian economy has moved away from a goods-based economy and towards a service-based economy. In the Shoalhaven, we have seen a similar shift with strong growth in the tourism sector and associated services. We encourage this policy to consider the changing economy and the place of the arts within that, where creative businesses, and businesses operated by / for creative and cultural output will provide career pathways and opportunities for regional youth to stay in their localities, encourage economic growth and new avenues for people moving to regional centres and support more resilient and vibrant communities.

We look forward to the development of the National Cultural Policy and the opportunities for Local Governments and the arts and cultural programs delivered by Shoalhaven City Council to continue to grow and develop while also supporting artists across the breadth of their careers.

If you need further information about this matter, please contact Bronwyn Coulston, Manager – Arts and Culture, City Lifestyles on (02) 4429 5441. Please quote Council's reference 2123E (D22/322905).

Yours faithfully



**Stephen Dunshea**  
**Chief Executive Officer**