

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: As an artist, 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

The ultimate problem for First Nations artists is continuity of funding. To overcome this, it is here submitted that the annual interest generated on \$250 million of the Future Fund be directed to and held by an *Indigenous Living Arts Fund* independent of, and separate too, Arts Council funding and decision making, for distribution to indigenous living artists. The trust would be separately managed by indigenous people for indigenous artists.

A similar arrangement could be implemented for indigenous artists in electronic arts such as filmmakers, video artists and audio recording artists.

A Place for Every Story

There is far too much emphasis in government funded arts programmes and grants on identity and identity politics. This 'ghettoises' the arts into *calder sac* demographics and limits audiences by making the work uninteresting and irrelevant to the majority of Australians. This limits possible audiences and the revenue and income (box office) that artists can obtain from their work and restricts audience choices and experiences. This policy is also responsible for the failed box office of most Australian films.

This focus upon identity politics and identity in funding arrangements places emphasis upon subject matter rather than artistic form and has led to the limitation of artistic styles and methods as it creates artificial and naive expectations in an audience. It has lead, for instance, to the prevalence of naturalism in drama and cinema at the expense of other legitimate styles and forms. Experimentation in other artistic genre and styles is largely discouraged in favour of more conventional work using naturalistic conventions and representations to depict issue based identity themes. This limits audience experience and leads to moribund and bland art and a moribund industry lacking artistic and creative vitality and diversity.

The current funding arrangements favouring 'mainstream' flagship institutions is a large part of the problem. These organisations are statutory bodies exempt from competition laws and, consequently, their decision makers - both administrative and artistic - are largely unaccountable and have broad discretions in regard to the work they produce and the artists they engage. The unaccountability of decision makers leaves the work largely capricious, eccentric and self-indulgent. It also creates opportunities for nepotism and cronyism which limits the artists that are employed or engaged and the stories told.

Public funding is itself inherently problematic. It is basically monopolistic. The financial success of an artist, arts enterprise or artistic work is not dependent upon an audience's reception or relationship to the work but upon the artist's, organisation's or work's relationship to a government funding bureaucracy. This shifts emphasis from the artists, as the drivers or crucibles of the success of an enterprise and drivers of culture - as occurs in private arts enterprises - to the administrators of the organisation and to their tastes and decisions. The relationship of the management of the enterprise with the government funding body is prioritised above the value of the artistic work for an audience. The enterprise does not earn its income by the work produced by artists but by the relationship of its management to a funding body. This means the value of the artist and the artist's work to an enterprise is devalued and under rewarded while the value of management is over exaggerated and over rewarded.

To overcome these problems it is submitted that the funding of mainstream/flagship organisations be reduced, limited and restricted to the performance of specific functions and for specific purposes and to the discharge of specific duties and satisfaction of specified criteria. These functions and purposes should be largely historical and museum like where, for instance, a flagship theatre company performs, largely, works in the established cannon.

To complement this, it is submitted that funding for new work be redirected to independent, smaller but adequately funded organisations and to individual artists.

It is also submitted that mutual obligation requirements for unemployed artists be expanded to include a 6 week 'grace' period twice yearly where artists can use the time and work they perform while unemployed in preparing work for a presentation to the public to satisfy their job search and other mutual obligation requirements.

Artists who elect to utilise the 'grace' period should be able to have any income they earn from the work undertaken during the grace period exempt from Centrelink income rules up to a maximum amount, for example, of \$5000. Implementing a 'grace' period for unemployed individual artists is a cost effective way to stimulate creativity, innovation, the creation of new art and to invigorate national culture. It would not impact upon the national budget to any significant extent.

To supplement the above arrangements arts funding grants for materials could be made to artists utilising their grace period.

These arrangements would create greater diversity in the artwork produced, the artists working, the stories told, greater innovation and resituate and empower artists, the audience and the Australian people themselves as the drivers of their own culture as audiences will have more choices and determine artistic and cultural trends by the choices they make.

As a corollary of the 'grace' period for unemployed artists it is submitted that the Australian content laws in radio and television broadcasting be reintroduced but provide for more localised content such that broadcasters are required to include, as a proportion of their Australian content requirement, content produced in and sourced from the zone, area or state into which they broadcast. The royalty payments commercial radio stations are required to pay APRA/AMCOS for playing recordings sourced in their broadcast zone could be entirely or partially subsidised by public funding.

The Centrality of the Artist

Notwithstanding that the submissions above under heading '**A Place for Every Story**' situates artists at the centre of culture, it is further submitted that, in addition to the trust referred to under heading '**First Nations**', several other trusts be established using only the interest component of some of the Future Fund. To this effect, the annual interest from e.g. \$1 billion of the Future Fund could be directed to, held by and distributed by a Regional Independent Film Makers Fund. Interest from e.g. \$500 million of the Future Fund could be directed to, and held by, a Living Artists Fund for distribution to individual artists working in sculpture, literature, scriptwriting, painting, musical composition, choreography, print making etc and for public presentations of their work. Interest from e.g. \$500 million of the Future Fund could be directed to, and held by, an Indigenous Film Makers Fund for distribution to indigenous screen artists.

Utilising only part of the interest component of the Future Fund would not diminish the principle amount of that fund and these individual and specific trust funds would not diminish the grants available from the Australia Council or from Screen Australia but would be additional to the programs of those bodies.

Strong Institutions

Institutions are secondary to the creative work of a nation but have become central and monopolistic in the Australian cultural environment. They absorb too much of the available funding in their administration and, thereby, divert scarce resources to their maintenance that could otherwise be directed to artists and to the creation of art and to the generation of a vibrant living culture. They should have strict criteria and duties relating mostly to work of an historical and museum nature. New work should be largely the responsibility of smaller less risk averse artistic enterprises and individual artists.

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

See '**A Place for Every Story**' and '**The Centrality of the Artist**' in relation to the establishment of arts specific trusts.