

**Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation
August 2022**

Prepared by:

Burrinja CEO, Gareth Hart
Burrinja Board President: Assoc Prof Elizabeth Dax AM
On behalf of Burrinja Cultural Centre

If required, Burrinja would be happy to speak and present directly on this paper, or contribute further to any coordinated consultation or drafting of the National Cultural Policy.

Opening statement & cover letter:

The Federal Government's new Cultural Policy must outline a vision for greater access to, engagement with and articulation of, the value of the Creative Industries.

Evidence supports that the Creative Industries are necessary for the well-being of individuals and the community at large. Thus, a resilient community, and active citizenship must be fed by a firm and far-reaching policy. Artists develop practice, connect with community, create work that resonates with a community/audience, and contribute meaningfully to social well-being and change.

New policy must include adequate and realistic financial support for the Arts, Creative Industries and Artists, as well as a targeted, thorough and strategic approach to addressing structural and systemic issues of the sector. Many of these issues have resulted from a lack of federal Arts or Cultural policy for the last 10 years. The new policy is a significant opportunity to address future sector needs as well as set a course to repair past damages.

Presently the Creative Industries are precariously balanced. Artists and their industry are experiencing extreme levels of exhaustion, burnout, and unrequited expectation. The Creative Industries have a powerful role to play in shaping the communities all across this country.
Specifically, we submit that regional and fringe Creative Industries are a vital ingredient in building strong, connected, resilient, critically engaged communities.

Burrinja is situated in the unique geography of the far outer suburban area of Greater Melbourne. This suburban geography belies the strength of the thriving, active, engaged and socially progressive creative and cultural climate of the greater Dandenong Ranges Region. Hundreds of artists call this Region the places they live and work. Many operate as solo traders and micro business Creative Enterprises. Regional community support is vital to their creating and supporting community.

Adopting a community-focussed mantra, before the COVID lockdowns, Burrinja welcomed 70,000+ patrons annually through our venue, to our programs and participating in our partnership projects. Burrinja partners with local traders, community organisations, school communities, other not for profit organisations and social service providers to offer essential creative services to the communities of the Region. Its programs amplify the voices of underheard and under-represented communities. The programs support the health and well-being of many regional creative groups.

Response to Pillars:

First Peoples First

Believing in the power of self-determination, Burrinja has chosen not to speak on behalf of First Nations communities in addressing this pillar. Having one employee and one Board Member who identify as having an Aboriginal heritage, we are privileged to have advice but cannot speak for or on behalf of our First Nations communities. Broadly, Burrinja implores the Federal Government to engage deeply with First Nations artists, knowledge holders and cultural practitioners, to hear directly from those communities as to their hopes for the National Cultural Policy. We submit that support for and collaboration with Indigenous art and artists must be centred within the National Cultural Policy.



The Centrality of the Artist

ISSUES

- The 'gig economy' and lack of long term, sustained opportunities for artists to develop their practice leads to many artists exiting the sector after 5-10 years.
- A lack of agreed upon, Industry-wide conditions and benefits for Artists (i.e. supporting reasonable remuneration and sustained employment opportunity) leads to substandard Industrial practices without the opportunity to reach full potential of Australian artists, especially within the regional context and places.
- A lack of multi-year funding opportunities for artists with a demonstrated career path, commitment and impact, also curtails the potential of these vital industries.
- A lack of deep connection between artists and cultural or creative organisations is not supported in policy. These types of relationships are often transactional. If artists were more readily able to access the resources and support of organisations (in supported short, medium and long term programs), they could focus on what they do best: develop practice, connect with community, create work that resonates with a community/audience, and contribute meaningfully to well-being and social change.

PROPOSALS FOR INCLUSION IN THE CULTURAL POLICY

- Adequate, staunch and ongoing Federal support to create a Creative Industries union.
- Development of multi-year funding opportunities for Independent Artists who have demonstrated a clear history of significant contribution and impact to the Creative, Cultural and Community sectors.
- The reinstatement of ArtStart, dedicated funding for the development of emerging artist careers.
- Support for Organisations to embed artists into Human Resources and organisational structures. Organisations should be subsidised to enable the employment of artists for at least 12 months at a time, to yield works of significance.

A Place for Every Story

ISSUES:

This Pillar is only achieved by addressing the still-evident practices of exclusion and disadvantage in our industry. Supporting and amplifying diversity in all its forms (cultural, gender, sexual, ability, geographic) will continue to increase the dynamic, response and representative nature of the Creative industry. Equity in funding, resources and opportunity must be given to communities in regional 'zones' to recognising the compounding and disproportionate levels (read lack) of access to creative engagement.

PROPOSALS FOR INCLUSION IN THE CULTURAL POLICY

- Dedicated funding streams and advocacy campaigns that support increased engagement from marginalised communities, including those communities which experience structural exclusion: The Policy must include the diverse communities across the cultural, sexual, gender, ability and geographic spectrums.
- Increased levels and distribution of funding to counter-urban communities. We submit that funding to regional, remote and outer suburban communities should be doubled over the next four years, supporting the immense growth of populations as people 'exit the city'.
- A national and federally coordinated advocacy and audience awareness campaign around the value, role and impact of the Creative Industries in this country. This should be developed in collaboration with Creative Industries of all levels.
- New federal legislation that sets a requirement for all future Federal Governments to have a current cultural policy in place. We advocate for lasting legislated policy to preserve Australia's cultural and creative future; no matter who holds Government.



Strong Institutions

ISSUES:

- Every cultural organisation below those large, well resourced icons is under resourced. Historically, organisations that sit in the outer metropolitan ring do not qualify for regional arts funding, and are in competition with the 'big players' from inner metropolitan regions. They do not have sufficient resources to generate incomes that are self-sustaining so cannot achieve ongoing sustainability.
- Organisations on the fringes of metro/regional often operate in a climate or context without substantial business and/or industry proximity to support local enterprises. Private giving to the arts is far less likely in outer regions.
- There is a workforce crisis in the industry at present, with the recruitment of specialist workers proving increasingly difficult.
- Equity of pay, and standardised Industrial Relations remain elusive in the Creative Industries. Immense pay gaps between the Not For Profit, Government and Private sector is rife.
- There is a skill gap in the industry, with most roles only being able to be 'learnt' on the job.

PROPOSALS FOR INCLUSION IN THE CULTURAL POLICY

- Greater funding available for a range of arts organisations, especially those in the outer metropolitan / fringe and regional communities.
- The re-instating pre-2014 levels of Australia Council funding, with appropriate CPI and budgetary increases. We submit that a 30% increase to 2014 funding levels is both needed and welcome, as we navigate the increasing demands and rising costs associated with operating in the Creative Industries in a COVID-normal capacity.
- More coordinated and targeted initiatives to champion and ultimately increase private giving in the arts.
- Support for nationwide training programs or longitudinally focussed skills development, including reducing the prohibitive costs of tertiary education for Creative pursuits.

Reaching the Audience

With a swathe of 'accessible' large scale events that continue to attract strong visitation (white night, RISING, major music festivals), the positive role that small events and engagement play within a community context cannot be underestimated.

ISSUES:

- Organisations with limited financial resources to invest in strategic marketing or audience development initiatives.
- Creative Industries value perception within the national psyche.
- The last Federal budget saw a drastically reduced funding level for national initiatives within the "community and cultural development" (CACD) category. The results of this are many, however in the context of reaching the audience, CACD practice is a key driver of engagement in Creative practice leading to lifelong connections to art (and thus developing audiences!).

PROPOSALS FOR INCLUSION IN THE CULTURAL POLICY

- Greater support is required for artists, venues and programming initiatives to reach increased numbers in audiences.
- An increase of funding levels available through the CACD fund of the Australia Council, which was drastically reduced in the most recent Federal budget.
- A federally coordinated advocacy, marketing and PR campaign to raise national perceptions of the value of the Creative Industries.

