

National Cultural Policy Submission

About Black Swan

Black Swan is the heart of our theatre industry in Western Australia, with our home in the State Theatre Centre of WA. From our actors and creatives, to our technicians, designers and costumiers, and committed and passionate arts managers, Black Swan is a core creative institution in Western Australia.

Black Swan is a driver of creativity, skill and talent for the country, and creates far greater wealth and job opportunities beyond the doors of the theatres where we work, our workshop and our office. Since 1991, Black Swan has presented more than 200 productions, 55 national tours and collaborations, 45 world premieres, 6 international tours / collaborations and has travelled the length and breadth of Western Australia. Black Swan has had an enormous cultural and social impact on the WA and national community. Our proud history includes stage adaptation of seminal works including *Bran Nue Dae*, *Cloudstreet*, and *Jasper Jones*, to name a few.

In 2021, we celebrated our 30th anniversary – a terrific achievement.

The uniqueness of Black Swan, that we still celebrate today, began with the work of founding Artistic Director Andrew Ross, who sadly passed in 2022. From its inception the company was celebrated for its original works, Western Australian stories, site-specific and promenade productions presented outside the theatre, Perth Festival presentations, extensive touring, and cross-cultural collaborations that uplifted and celebrated Aboriginal artists.

Whilst COVID has taken a toll on all Australians over the past few years, it has offered Black Swan the chance to reset, reimagine and reignite the creative energy that is synonymous with the company. The pandemic has emboldened us to look at systemic change, our agility, and our long-term commitment to artists and their livelihoods.

National Cultural Policy - Context

Black Swan welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Cultural Policy.

The potential of on-going interruption to 'business as usual' is likely to impact live performance for many years to come, and has had a dramatic impact on our 2020, 2021, and 2022 seasons so far. It has been enormously draining on our staff, artists and the wider community.

We endorse the comments by Minister Burke that the question on how to plan for a better future is framed from the point of view of how do we rebuild?

In an ever-increasing secular population, we look to culture and the arts to guide and question our moral principles and dilemmas as a society. Australia has to date often failed to place its cultural capital at the forefront of what it means to be Australian. The arts have been shoved into the background, indeed if referenced at all, in political circles of power. This lack of focus and erosion of support has manifested in the depletion of artistic output and cultural relevance in this country.

The pursuit of visionary and impactful artistic practice is not unlike scientific or medical research and discovery. It requires, time, resources, risk-taking and expertise. In order to apply these same principals to artistic endeavours the arts require serious investment on all levels.

When a society's cultural life flourishes, it instils a questioning and imaginative mind in a child, opens conversations across differing belief systems and is a supportive yet rigorous forum for the most pressing questions of our times.

CAST submission

Our submission below is to be read in conjunction with and in addition to the submission made by the Consortium of Australian State Theatre Companies, of which we are one, and endorse.

Pillar One - First Nations

We wholeheartedly endorse the principle of 'First Nations first'. Our very DNA was created from consistent artist-led First Nations productions, which became some of our most well-known and successful work.

All Australians can learn from the stories that are our shared culture, history and future.

We encourage the Government to instil cross-government policies across the portfolios and tiers of Government, and allow the greater encouragement of First Nations culture and artists, and the protection of traditional knowledge and cultural expression.

Pillar Two – A Place for Every Story

Australia is an incredibly rich vibrant society, and Black Swan embraces the diversity of our community here in Western Australia. Our value of 'Walking Together' signifies the importance and commitment of this principle to us.

Clear policy settings need to carefully acknowledge and support the breadth of diversity - culture, ability, gender, geography, age, class, artform, practice mode, platform, career stage, opportunity, organisational culture, governance, advantage and disadvantage – and beyond.

Pillar Three – Centrality of the Artist

Similarly to pillar two, Black Swan's values highlight the importance of 'Artist First'. After a period when the artist has not been recognised as being part of the economy and thereby even further financially disadvantaged, this is the time for re-balance and redress, that should come with at the least an aim to increase the average incomes of artists above the poverty line.

Policy implementation across Government, and all levels of Government, must include new funding and new support to a sector that has been left behind in so many areas.

Pillar Four – Strong Institutions

Our cultural and arts institutions have been hammered by policy neglect, funding, along with the effects of the pandemic.

New and increased funding must be a priority to reinforce strong institutions like Black Swan, which are the bedrock of the arts and cultural sector.

The Federal Government must set the right policy framework, with not just increased funding to the institutions, but a wide range of support that would include

- a form of insurance scheme to take out some of the risks of undertaking live performance.
- At least match CPI for the major performing arts organisations, due to the ever increasing costs of production.
- provide greater incentives to improving reserves, after reserves have been smashed by COVID. Matched funding is a key to unlocking greater philanthropic support.
- a form of tax offset, similar to the UK, to incentivise companies to create works of scale and importance and lessen the risk of live performance.

Pillar 5 – Reaching the Audience

Black Swan fully supports the importance of our work reaching the greatest possible audience, and urges the Government to focus on policies and programs that will increase audiences to create stronger outcomes.

This will entail policies that focus on direct attendances (including consideration of venues and physical access) as well as digital reach.

Improved frameworks for international, interstate and regional touring is an additional opportunity, with the right level of support to make this a viable opportunity, and clear benefits for undertaking the additional risks involved.

Additionally, Black Swan readily identifies the cultural diplomacy value the arts can have, and in particular the immediacy and directness that performances of great live theatre can create.

Please attribute this submission to Black Swan State Theatre Company.

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Kate Champion, Artistic Director

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