

## Opera Queensland National Cultural Policy Submission

### 1. Are you submitting this submission (tick all that apply):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation
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#### About Opera Queensland

Based in Brisbane and engaging communities across the state, Opera Queensland is guided by its vision to grow a community connected by the transformative power of opera. This is done through classic, contemporary and new work by diverse artists for local, national and international audiences.

In addition to its critically acclaimed mainstage works, Opera Queensland is known for its extensive regional, community and education programs, fostering engagement with singing and music from Prep students to seniors.

Opera Queensland believes a National Cultural Policy is central to the development of a mature, empathetic, and complex Australia.

### 2. 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:

#### 2.1 First Nations

- 2.1.1 We support a thriving and self-determined First Nations creative ecosystem and focus areas as described in Australia Council's *Towards a national cultural policy 2022*.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.1.2 We look forward to the outcomes of the upcoming Purrumpa First Nations arts and culture gathering on Kurna country in 2022. (<https://australiacouncil.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/events/purrumpa/>)

#### 2.2 A Place for Every Story

- 2.2.1 We provide programs across Australia's most decentralised state and welcome investment models which enable us to connect high quality artistic experiences with audiences regardless of their geographic location within Queensland.
- 2.2.2 Queensland stories are a rich source of enjoyment, celebration and reflection. We encourage investment in First Nations' stories and new operatic works which provide a reflection on who our communities are and the people who live within them.

#### 2.3 The Centrality of the Artist

- 2.3.1 The arts industry is a vibrant ecosystem spread across independent, commercial enterprise, small to medium and national performing arts partnership framework contexts. By operating in silos, our creative sectors are limited in their opportunities to build and create works of scale. We encourage new investment models that assist partnerships across sectors to create art that speaks to Australia's rich diversity of stories and artistic practice.

#### 2.4 Strong Institutions and Ecosystems of all sizes, creating jobs

- 2.4.1 Queensland has a dynamic arts, cultural and creative ecology fuelled by a unique mix of local talent and rich and diverse artistic practice. COVID-19 has disrupted our skilled casual workforce and investment in training pathways and programs is essential to rebuild skilled artists, arts workers and technical staff.
- 2.4.2 The ongoing effects of COVID-19 have exposed the arts sector's interdependencies with other industries, particularly tourism, hospitality, education and health. The arts and cultural sector play an essential role in ensuring sustainability and resilience across all

facets of society. In the COVID recovery, a holistic national arts and cultural plan that considers and strengthens these linkages and interdependencies would better account for the total value of the Australian arts and cultural sector.

## **2.5 Reaching the Audience**

- 2.5.1 We believe in connecting a broad and deep cross-section of the community through opera in both digital and live performances. Strategic investment in shared digital platforms and models would assist reaching new audiences and maintain connectivity in the digital age.
- 2.5.2 We work to remove barriers to the art form for people from diverse backgrounds.

## **3. Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable:**

### **3.1 First Nations**

Opera Queensland recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (First Nations) as the first voices singing the stories of this land. We affirm they continue to hold, protect and tell the stories of this land in song, stories and dance.

We work with communities across Queensland to seek their guidance and support for the creation of respectful partnerships. Through learning First Nations stories we become more in tune with the stories of our country.

First Nations artists and their stories will always be a part of Opera Queensland's program. We are currently developing a new musical "Straight from the Strait" with Torres Strait artists and commissioning a new children's opera written by a leading First Nations singer / songwriter.

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

We celebrate our regional communities and attest that our programs provide positive economic and social impact for the people who live in them.

In 2021 and 2022, the program of events in the Festival of Outback Opera attracted local, intrastate, interstate, and international visitors to five local government areas in Outback Queensland. Attendance numbers demonstrate the success of the initiative, exceeding planned targets for visitors in all segments.

In 2021, across the festival there were 767 local attendees (128% of target), 1,078 intrastate attendees (216% of target), and 425 interstate attendees (213% of target), driving significant economic outcomes for the region.

To ensure the viability of the art form we must invest in the development and presentation of new opera. We remain open to the complexity inherent in all communities and guided by our Values, we create a space where diverse voices interrogate stories with respect, virtuosity and joy.

### **3.3 Strong Institutions and Ecosystems of all sizes, creating jobs**

We actively create pathways for artists and arts workers to strengthen the Queensland and national arts sector. Our employees come from all walks of life, diverse cultural backgrounds, regional and remote areas and capital cities, people across all age demographics and genders.

We employ a wide range of artists, primarily singers, musicians and conductors, and some of the nation's leading directors, choreographers and designers. Working with these are a complex network of crew, stage managers, lighting technicians, set builders, riggers and front of house staff.

An Opera Queensland mainstage or large scale production employs an orchestra (up to 90 musicians), chorus (up to 60 singers), lead or principal cast, dancers, actors, large production crews, Front of House staff and administrative support. A single production often employs more than 300 people.

When Opera Queensland tours in regional and remote communities some of this employment is sourced locally, providing essential paid work and performance opportunities to regional artists. Regional programs also stimulate domestic tourism, not only attracting increased visitation to regional communities, but motivating higher expenditure with local businesses.

The Australia Council for the Arts report *Domestic Arts Tourism: Connecting the Country* found the average length of stay in 2018 for an arts focused trip was five nights compared to the base average of three and a half nights spent away from home on any overnight trip. The average amount spent on an overnight arts trip was nearly \$400 more than the overall average.<sup>2</sup>

### **3.4 Reaching the Audience**

Arts and cultural participation also support healthy communities, boosting creativity, health, wellbeing, social inclusion, education attainment and employment prospects in individuals and communities.

Arts and culture also provide connectivity; through our large-scale mainstage performances, audiences delight in the virtuosity of musical and artistic excellence. Participating in our works creates joy and happiness for many Australians. This can be particularly important for marginalised cohorts, such as older people in residential care or remote communities.

Opera Queensland is deeply engaged with communities across the state to foster belonging, creativity, mental and physical wellbeing and regional pride through singing and performance. We have seen the positive effects of such efforts, as well as those of other arts companies, on the vitality of communities.

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

### **4.1 Increase funding to the Australia Council to grow strategic investment in Queensland.**

Additional investment to the Australia Council is requested to address the inequity of funding allocated to Queensland artists and organisations through its investment programs.

ABS figures show that Queensland's population is increasing at the highest rate in the country. Currently companies under the NPAPF framework in Queensland receive 20% of their core funding from the Australia Council and 80% from Arts Queensland. This imbalance severely impacts NPAPF companies' artistic output and audience reach. To redress this an immediate increase in Federal funding to Queensland NPAPF companies is necessary.

### **4.2 Support funding for innovation and research**

Current arts funding frameworks force arts practitioners to choose between applying for funding for innovation or for core activities. The budgets of other portfolios routinely include incentives for industry to undertake R&D, including grants, tax incentives and skills funds.

Specific support for arts practitioners to undertake research, collaboration and resilience-proofing would help overcome the financial risk of innovation. This should include expanded grant criteria and schemes to encourage research collaboration with universities.

**4.3 All layers of government need a voice at the table.**

Opera Queensland works in partnership with local, state and Commonwealth government. While a large portion of our ongoing funding comes from the Commonwealth and Queensland governments, most of our engagement with audiences and communities is facilitated at state and regional levels. Through our extensive touring and community work in remote and regional areas, we have understood and valued the critical role of local councils in facilitating arts and cultural participation as a part of daily life and vibrant, healthy communities.

Outside of capital cities, local councils are also the primary owner of cultural infrastructure, libraries, regional galleries and performance venues and therefore are a lynchpin in ensuring access and inclusion for audiences. An expansion of the Cultural Ministers Council to include representation and participation of local government would facilitate better coordination of arts policy and public investment.

The Commonwealth Government could also better coordinate policy engagement with other portfolios and policy domains, such as health, education, regional development and industry, particularly in gathering input to a national arts strategy and recruiting partners in its implementation.

**4.4 A “cradle to grave” approach to building arts participation**

A national plan for fostering engagement and participation among young people and communities builds a ‘backbone’ of acceptance that arts and culture is central to life at all ages. This in turn builds opportunities for talented creatives to build professional careers, fosters policy and funding support for arts as an essential social good, and popular support among communities.

**5. We may use some of your words as part of the National Cultural Policy Report. If we do, how would you like us to attribute your words?**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Please attribute this submission to: Opera Queensland
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**6. Publishing your submission online?**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I give permission for this submission to be published online
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Under this name: Opera Queensland

<sup>1</sup> Australia Council for the Arts, 2022. *Towards a national cultural policy 2022*, Australia Council for the Arts. Available: [National-Cultural-Plan-Framing-Submission.pdf \(australiacouncil.gov.au\)](https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/national-cultural-plan-framing-submission)

<sup>2</sup> Australia Council for the Arts, 2020. *Domestic Arts Tourism: Connecting the Country*, Australia Council for the Arts. Available: <https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/domestic-arts-tourism-connecting-the-country/>