

## ***National Cultural Policy Submission***

Stephenie Cahalan, Hobart, August 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the National Cultural Policy consultation process. I am writing from several perspectives: as a published writer; a fundraising and development professional; a voluntary board member and treasurer of Tasmania's most long-standing, not-for-profit literary publication; and as a dedicated audience member of artistic forms ranging from theatre to visual arts, cultural heritage, screen, sound, music of all genres, and literature in all its many guises. The original five goals of the 2013 Creative Australia National Cultural Policy and the premise of the five pillars that sit below them are worthy in principal but need updating following a decade of neglect and the massive negative impact on the arts of COVID-19. All areas are relevant to me in my various ways of engaging with the arts sector and creative community.

### ***The power of policy***

It is encouraging to see a reconsideration of creative policy which I hope will be underpinned by re-affirmation of the massive benefits of culture at both a societal and economic level. This, in turn, must be supported by an increase in funding from the Commonwealth Government after the ongoing reduction in real funding: research by the Australian Academy for the Humanities found that public expenditure for the arts peaked in 2017-18 and per capita public expenditure on culture has dropped by 4.9 per cent in the previous decade, remaining below the average percentage of gross domestic product of other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.<sup>1</sup> Bold and tangible support for the arts and culture will undoubtedly be mirrored and matched by private sector and philanthropic funding who will support Government commitment to the sector and its value to community and quality of life.

### ***Goals can be met with increased funding***

The challenges for the First Nations, Centrality of the Artist, and Strong Institutions pillars are, quite simply, the processes administering funds and the size of funding. With reference

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<sup>1</sup> A New Approach. "The Big Picture: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia." In *Insight Research Series*, edited by A New Approach. online, 2019: 5.

to the goals of supporting excellence and the special role of artists and their creative collaborators; strengthening the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy; and ensuring Australian creativity thrives here and abroad in the digitally enabled 21st century, these all comes down to the ability of artists to enjoy a living wage, while also maintaining their art practice as an expression of their creativity. Noting that ‘excellence’ is a highly subjective term that should not be judged by funding bodies, rather by audiences, patrons and informed critics, the ongoing expectation that the work of artists be squeezed in around whatever activity they must undertake in order to survive is unrealistic, unjust and inconsistent with the expectation of other professional sectors. Public funding must make greater provision for wages and expenses, as well as production or project expenditure, to reflect the high cost of living that all Australian are experiencing today.

Recognising that there are many worthy demands on public funds, the subsidisation of industries is not balanced across all parts of the economy and a massive cash injection into the creative sector would help to fan the fires of the cultural sector and the other social and financial benefits that ensue. Arts grants should be tax-free, as in the sporting sector, and more multi-year funding opportunities should be made available to help artists to get off the grant- application treadmill. It is important to note that excellence is the result of long-held development and practice and therefore to achieve it, more support for emerging and mid-career artists of all genres will be necessary to achieve that goal.

My experience with State and Commonwealth arts funding bodies is that the project officers are incredibly supportive and helpful in facilitating strong applications, all the while knowing that their limited financial capacity will inevitably preclude many of the worthy projects they steward.

### ***Simplifying application processes***

The cumbersome and hyper-competitive nature of acquiring and acquitting public funding is extractive and exhausting to many artists. Applicants invest significant time and effort in assembling the additional components of applications, such as letters of support — budgets and project concept plans are obviously absolutely necessary — yet might be seeking sums that are relatively small, for example, ten, or twenty thousand dollars grants. While some

artists or groups are adept at managing these processes, others are less able which means that funding could conceivably end up aiding excellence in application writing over excellence in artistic practice, concept, and execution. The processes also demand English-language and literacy skills that are obstacles to artists who are from non-English speaking and disadvantaged contexts, undermining the spirit of inclusion and diversity expressed in the 2013 policy. Resourcing capacity to support more accessible and democratic application processes is critical.

Similarly, the processes for achieving Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) or charitable status through the Australian Not-for-Profit and Charities Commission (ACNC) and the Register of Cultural Interests (ROCO) is a laborious process that may require significant investment in legal and financial advice which many smaller organisations simply do not have the resources to undertake. Again, staff within those agencies are knowledgeable and helpful, so the revised policy will need to commit to investing in capacity within these areas so smaller organisations can get the credentials they need to devise their own fundraising efforts within their communities or applications to foundations and private ancillary funds. Please note that fundraising efforts should be in addition to, not in lieu of, increased government funding. This will lead to stronger institutions that can enjoy more diverse income sources as well as amplifying reach into the community so that audience members, patrons and subscribers can also become donors, supporters, or testamentary givers.

### ***State-based institutions are national assets***

In the case of public cultural and educational institutions, some of the states and smaller territories that have smaller populations and funding bases receive far less support from their state government funding bodies compared with larger states. This is usually accompanied by reduced fundraising capacity from private donors or corporations that are nationally-based and therefore do not support outside their larger marketing centres. Yet, these state-based institutions hold collections and offer programming that is of national significance and will be accessed by curators, scholars and other practitioners across the country. Consequently, the Commonwealth Government should share the responsibility of augmenting operational funding to organisations that come from lower-capacity states, territories or regions to ensure the well-being and durability of all cultural institutions and organisations across the country. In this way, strong institutions will be secured for communities both far and wide.