

National Cultural Policy Submission

Oska Morrison-Petersen

Submitted: On behalf of an organisation with arts-components (e.g. community organisation, tourism, venue, health, education etc); As an artist

As a young student currently studying Music at Monash University I am experiencing firsthand the ups and downs of a career in this industry. It is exciting to see, and participate in, the development of a new National Cultural Policy.

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 importance of a National identity is crucial, and this identity can be largely driven by culture. I believe the importance of representing our nation through First Nations arts is crucial to our society's development. 75% of Australians agree First Nations arts are an important part of Australia's culture. Despite this, only half of all Australians believe that First Nations arts are well represented¹. This demonstrates a significant issue which the new National policy could address. This issue is further emphasised with the finding that First Nations people also feel the most disconnected from the arts. A focus of the new National Policy should include the backing of First Nations artists, both financially and through other means. Additionally, the inclusion of more First Nations people in all levels of government would certainly be a welcome change. For far too long First Nations people have gone unrecognised in their importance to Australia. In order to abolish the systemic racism that First Nations people have had to endure, more reparations and support are needed. First Nations people should be put at the forefront of our nation moving forward. Australia has the opportunity to foster a more inclusive, accepting and unified country. Let Australia be an example to the rest of the world through the promotion of our rich, historical indigenous culture and empower us to move on from our destructive, cruel and colonial past.

A Place for Every Story

Inclusivity in the arts sector is increasingly on the forefront of artists' minds, and for good reason. More accessible art, means bigger reach for any artist and is therefore beneficial for all parties involved. An increase in funding for organisations such as the NDIS or even the development of new organisations designed to support those living with disabilities and mental health conditions would certainly be a step in the right direction. Again, referring back to the National Arts Participation Survey, 92% of Australians with an intellectual disability participate in the arts. However, when compared against all Australians, they are less than half as likely to

¹ "Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey," Australia Council for the Arts, August 16, 2022, <https://australiacouncil.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/creating-our-future/>.

attend. This is likely due to the various barriers people living with disabilities must face. This can include small things such as venue websites not having information on accessibility, to bigger things such as the attendance of an AUSLAN interpreter. Many of these barriers could surely be addressed with simple solutions such as accessibility information requirements. A further issue for inclusivity for everyone in the arts is cost. Cost is one of the main barriers for attending the arts. 3 in 4 Australians with a household income under \$40,000 rank the importance of low cost and free events highly.² This demonstrates the urgent need for financial support for low socio-economic households and individuals in order to dramatically increase attendance. An increase in financial support for students, people with disabilities and First Nations people in regard to attending the arts would also certainly help to address this issue. More Australians getting involved with the arts helps more Artists to get exposure and hopefully obtain a more reliable income.

The Centrality of the Artist

Artists are in need of support, three quarters of all artists in Australia hold a university degree compared to just 22 percent in the wider labour force³. In addition to this the cost of a degree in the humanities doubled while the cost of degrees in the so-called STEM subjects was reduced.⁴ Time and time again artists have been left behind on policies, so much so that now “The ‘arts’ are no longer represented in the title of a government department”, following a merger of government departments in 2019.⁵ As a young artist hoping to enter the scene, the current economic climate gives me little hope for my future. This is certainly one of, if not the only, factor that ever sways me from continuing to pursue a career in the arts industry. The post war economic landscape gave rise to a promising arts sector however was not sustained through a shift in our economic framework. This tension between the old Keynesian approach and the new Neoliberal approach restricted the arts sector. The Major Performing Arts Inquiry (MPAI) conducted discussed the issues of the sector and proposed many solutions however since this inquiry, financial outlooks for the sector have not improved.⁶ The lack of longevity in policies seems to be a recurring theme. A focus of this new policy should focus on the *long term* support of artists. This policy needs to be concrete, yet hold the capability to adapt the always changing economic conditions. Being on the recovery from a global crisis is the perfect time to reinvigorate our arts sector, and enable it to truly shine. At the center of all this are the artists, and if our government cannot support them and their endeavours then the future of our cultural identity will begin to look bleak. Jennifer Craik wrote “Recognising that the arts are for everyone; and that Australia should have a financially viable major performing arts sector that supports

² *Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*, 56

³ Throsby, Charles, and Katya Petetskaya. "Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia." (2017).

⁴ Parsons, Harriet. "Introduction: A Snail May Put His Horns Out." *TheNew Platform Papers* 1 (2021): 3-12.

⁵ Hands, Karen. "Too Big to Fail: Rethinking the Foundations of Australia's Performing Arts Policies". *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 27, no. 4 (2021): 437–48. doi:10.1080/10286632.2020.1786079.

⁶ Hands, Karen. "*Too Big to Fail*"

artistic vibrancy”⁷. This statement truly resonates with me and strikes me as something that should be at the core of this new policy. The ability to not simply look at the quantitative, financial output that the arts sector provides, but also more holistically, is of utmost importance. The impact of arts is more nuanced than dollar bills, it leads to more engaged citizens, contributes to the development of empathy and improves health and well being.⁸ It can be difficult to measure just how far the impact of culture reaches but through frameworks such as the Artistic Vibrancy Framework it can be done, and can be understood.

I am truly hopeful for this new policy and all the things it will provide. I look forward to seeing how this will shape my future and anticipate it will do so positively.

⁷ Craik, Jennifer. “Re-visioning Arts and Cultural Policy: Current Impasses and Future Directions”, 2007. doi:10.26530/oopen_459486.

⁸ Crossick, Geoffrey, and Patrycja Kaszniska. Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture: The Ahrc Cultural Value Project. Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2016. Report. <https://apo.org.au/node/199546>.