

# National Cultural Policy Submission

**David Bridie**

Submitted: As an artist

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## Submission to National Cultural Policy

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this process.

### About me

I am a composer and musician based in regional Victoria. As an artist I have been active since my band Not Drowning Waving emerged in the 1980s, and has included my work with the band My Friend The Chocolate Cake and as a solo artist over six albums. In addition I have an active practice as a soundtrack composer for film and theatre having worked on over 100 films. As a record producer I have worked with numerous artists including George Telek, Christine Anu, Archie Roach and Emily Wurramarra. My work in recent years has expanded to include large scale multi media installations that have been exhibited in galleries around the world.

Outside the studio I have contributed to regional cultural development through the establishment of the Wantok Musik Foundation, a not-for-profit record label focused on Melanesian and Indigenous artists. I have been deeply immersed in Melanesian music since 1990 when Not Drowning Waving collaborated with George Telek and the musicians of Rabaul to create the seminal album Tabaran, a collaboration which has had global resonance and been fundamental to both our careers.

In addition to several ARIA and other industry awards, I received the Australia Council's Don Banks Award in 2018.

### **1. First Nations**

I strongly support this pillar of the proposed platform. It must be the priority for our cultural policy.

Providing appropriate resources for our First Nations artists and cultural leaders is essential to achieving meaningful progress. Self-determined, First Nations-led approaches that support artists, communities, organisations and sustainable practice and ensure that recognition, rights and revenues flow back to the creators of the works is the appropriate way forward.

The proposed National Indigenous Arts and Culture Agency/Authority (NIACA) warrants further development and consideration.

Opportunities which support and facilitate Global First Nations exchange are also a priority.

## **2. Reaching the audience: Pacific Priority**

My engagement and collaborations with artists and communities from Oceania has been built on the principle of genuine artistic exchange.

I have been privileged to listen to and learn from artists across the region over several decades. I am acutely aware of the vibrant culture of the region. I am also aware of the challenges created by unstable infrastructure, widespread poverty and the rapid onset of climate change within the region.

I am also acutely aware of the obligation on Australian artists to leverage our access to resources and opportunities for the benefit of our regional collaborators.

As outlined above, in addition to my own artistic work I have also supported the establishment of the Wantok Musik Foundation which has facilitated numerous projects from First Nations Australian and Oceanic artists. I note Wantok's separate submission and support it.

In addition to delivering projects in the region, Wantok also supports First Nations Australian artists such as Frank Yamma, Kutcha Edwards and Emily Wuramurra and this remains a central focus for the organisation. Furthermore Wantok also acknowledges the significant Pacific diaspora communities now based in Australia and has worked with artists from these communities such as Ngaiire and Charles Maimarosia to support commercial music releases and tours.

### **Cultural engagement with our region should be a priority of the new cultural policy.**

In particular this means prioritisation of cultural diplomacy initiatives in Oceania with a matching budget allocation. I note that the Wantok Musik Foundation already produces regional projects with the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This highlights the potential of a more formal partnership between the Arts and DFAT Ministries to increase our presence in the region through the support of local culture and exchange with Australian artists.

As noted above the potential to support and encourage First Nations exchange within our region is a particular priority. The Wantok Musik Foundation has supported some work in the area with significant cultural impact, and the potential for further First Nations led projects is substantial.

As a long term ambition, using the model of agencies such as the British Council and Goethe Institute, there is a clear opportunity for the creation of an Australian cultural diplomacy agency focused on Oceania.

## **3. Centrality of the artist**

I strongly support this pillar. Artists are the indispensable ingredient of arts and culture.

Government support for arts and cultural activities prioritises organisations, to the detriment of the individual artist.

As an individual artist, I have produced projects of scale that have reached significant audiences and employed numerous artists and arts workers. The fact that I have delivered these projects without a permanent organisational infrastructure has not diminished their success or impact.

In my experience neither audiences, artists or private capital are particularly concerned with whether a project is delivered by an individual or an organisation.

As such I encourage a thorough reconsideration of the ways in which government support for arts projects is delivered, and in particular the arbitrary limits on amounts available to individuals.

As noted above in 2018 I received the Australia Council's Don Banks Award, which came with a significant cash amount. The impact of both the public acknowledgement and the financial support is difficult to describe. In particular the financial security to pursue risky but rewarding projects was extremely powerful in developing my artistic practice. In discussions with colleagues I have become aware that this is consistent with the impact of the fellowships offered by the Australia Council, Myer Foundation and other institutions.

I strongly encourage the new cultural policy to prioritise increasing the number of fellowship opportunities for individual artists as a tool through which to acknowledge the centrality of the artist.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this process.

Sincerely  
David Bridie