

National Cultural Policy Submission

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SUBMISSION

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CONSULTATION

This submission is from me in a private capacity. I am not an artist, but have been involved in the arts in Australia since 1977, and was made a Member of the Order of Australia in January 2022 for significant service to the arts through a range of roles and organisations. I am particularly interested in the visual arts in Australia.

I strongly support the revised five pillars of the National Cultural Policy. I congratulate the Australian government for undertaking this consultation process and for wanting to introduce a national cultural policy.

My comments below are:

Importance of the Arts

Access and involvement in the arts have proven to be beneficial, particularly in the past two years during COVID.

Research done by the independent Canberra based arts, creativity and culture research think tank A New Approach (ANA) (www.newapproach.org.au) clearly shows :

“...when a considered effort is made to direct cultural and creative activities towards improving social cohesion , the impacts are significant including :

- building feelings of community belonging and trust, enhancing empathy and inclusion
- help in combating the growing issues of loneliness and isolation.
- increasing civic participation and making cities, suburbs and regions more liveable
- help individuals and communities recover from disasters and trauma”.

And we must not forget artists, and the significant contribution they make to the appreciation of art in Australia.

Strong Institutions

For consideration under the heading “Strong Institutions”, I have been concerned about the withdrawal of funds from what has been termed ‘service organisations’ or peak bodies. Some state funding bodies do provide assistance to state-based organisations, but I am referring to national organisations, for example NAVA and Ausdance National.

In my experience, service organisations make a major contribution to the success of individual artists by assisting them with a range of activities, including assisting with writing grant applications, managing successful grants, and acquitting grants. Service organisations can undertake research into major issues that an individual artists would not have the time or resources to undertake (eg healthy dancing for dancers, post-dancing career options, and the need for sprung floors. These organisations can, and do, advocate on behalf of the art form they represent and act as a voice for the art form.

Merger of the Australia Council and Creative Partnerships Australia

I am also concerned about the announcement that the government proposes a merger of the Australia Council and Creative Partnerships Australia (CPA).

The CPA has built up a strong and trusting relationship with those who support it, from people in the community of an individual artist to major Foundations who support significant national institutions. I believe the CPA and the Australia Council serve two entirely different roles. The Australia Council assesses grant applications for arts activities. The CPA processes money that individuals and organisations have chosen to support for a specific project, to be conducted by an individual or organisation. The donors have not necessarily chosen to support the project on its artistic merit.

Donors like to make their own judgements about the projects they support. I can see occasions when staff at the Australia Council would have to make one decision regarding a grant application on its artistic merit, but then have to make a second decision on the support a project has received from donors.

The CPA is a very successful organisation with a specific focus, although this has taken several years to build.

I have been a donor on many occasions to the CPA, supporting projects that I believed to have merit. I believe I would think differently if I knew the Australia Council were to be involved in the decision-making.

As the CPA's website states: "[we] bring the arts, donors and business together for mutual benefit, creating a more vibrant ambitious and sustainable cultural sector for the benefit of all Australians".

The arts in Australia deserve to have more than one national organisation to approach for funds.

The most recent newsletter distributed by the CPA (which I received while finalising this submission) announces the survey it has conducted for the past three years that focusses on the impact of private sector support: donations, sponsorship and volunteer hours. The results of the survey "**Giving Attitudes**" "... helps [CPA] build programs that support the arts and cultural sector". The Australia Council once had a strong and very successful research arm, but that was unfortunately disbanded several years ago. While the survey is undertaken by a consultant, it might cause some confusion in the minds of both donors and Australia Council staff who have to administer the survey. The survey assists organisations "... raise money allowing for accurate benchmarking and realistic fundraising conversations with your board and stakeholders."

Education

I would also like to comment briefly on education. I have been concerned that tertiary arts education has been decimated over the past five years, with practical arts courses closing all over the country. This reduction in practical courses, in all areas of the arts, will result in fewer artists being trained and diminished trained artists to the arts in the future.

Australia deserves better than this to fulfil the aspirations in all five pillars in the new cultural policy. I would like to see a sixth pillar added to the five given which covers Education.

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