

## Anonymous

### National Cultural Policy submission

-submitted by [REDACTED] on behalf of [REDACTED]

#### Who are we?

We are a volunteer led, not-for-profit organisation running an annual music camp as our core project. It was brought into being through the collaboration of [REDACTED] and ran [REDACTED] for four years before transitioning to independent not-for-profit status. The camp centres traditional music of varying genres each year and is immersive in nature. Description and further background information can be found at [REDACTED]

#### Why do we write?

We write this as a very small, unfunded, volunteer led community organisation that is, to quote Ruth Hazleton's submission *"without market might – run on small budgets by volunteers with passion and vast skill sets who do not have the resources to seek funding or compete for places in elite arts networks."*

We write in full support of Ruth's submission from the perspective of long-term volunteers in Australia's community folk music scene and wish to emphasise the level to which so many arts events and community groups are completely dependent on volunteer labour. They are also unable to properly seek potential funding opportunities, even when they do exist, because they do not have the time or industry specific expertise to do so.

Any National Cultural Policy that seeks to benefit arts development in Australia needs to ensure it looks at how community arts and its volunteers are supported. Without this grass-roots level of support and opportunity to thrive in a safe environment, many more artists will miss out on key developmental opportunities.

The five policy pillars below are addressed from the point of view of volunteers in the community folk music scene in Victoria and the, often invisible, contributions they make to creating opportunities for artists to connect and develop. We also write in support of the broader community benefit brought by the arts, the *"intangible value of arts, its importance to cultural identity, expression and conversation"* (Ruth Hazleton, submitted August 19, 2022). While there is value in being a "consumer" of the arts, there is far greater and longer-lasting community value in being a participant, either as an amateur artist or in support of the creation of safe spaces. Community groups and camps like ours provide this opportunity, but they cannot continue to operate, particularly post-pandemic without strong and intentional support.

#### The Pillars

- **First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.**

This is an area that the community folk scene in Australia finds difficult at times. Whilst there are many and varied folk traditions practiced in Australia, it is true that the Anglo-Celtic traditions often celebrated at a community level are representative of the very same cultures that oppressed and brutally decimated Indigenous Australians as part of the ongoing colonisation process.

This is not a conflict that is going away anytime soon, but any policy directions that actively reward authentic education opportunities and increased collaboration between non-Indigenous and Indigenous artists and event organisers at a local level would be welcomed.

- **A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.**

There is a place for every story and stories are told through multiple forums and mediums. It is important that we value the stories as told by professional artists as they are representative of various social niches and can go a long way to helping communities feel seen and heard.

It is perhaps because our volunteers live across three states, and we invite participants and artists from all Australian states and territories as well as from overseas, that the physical sense of place created by the immersive nature of our camp is important to us. We can only hope that in addition to this being important to us for emotional and artistic reasons, it is noticed for the economic benefit of encouraging interstate and international tourism revenue into Victoria.

- **The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.**

Artists can be creators of culture, but they are also reflective of it. Many grew out of community events, clubs and camps run by volunteers. These same groups go to great lengths to appropriately pay and value their artists (greater lengths than many larger, more economically viable venues do), yet their volunteers often reach states of burnout and exhaustion. This is largely due to numerous unpaid hours of work and the high-level of administrative demands whilst balancing mainstream employment in a usually unrelated field.

- **Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.**

Whilst it is right that attention be paid to large institutions, more attention and increased funding opportunities to community groups and small not-for-profits would not go astray. More opportunities for them to fund staff instead of being wholly reliant on the volunteer labour of invested community members would make a big difference. Many of these groups that run small festivals, camps or create regular opportunities for communities to participate in the arts provide a learning ground for young musicians and, upon their later success, a positive feedback loop and mentoring opportunity.

There are also many strong examples across the country of grassroots community and volunteer groups playing a large role in disaster relief and fundraising. The community of Cobargo comes to mind. The key role their festival organisers and artists played in community recovery following the devastating bushfires is undeniable, even from afar. Artists and organisers often give up their own fees and time to give back to others, raise awareness and build positive, supportive communities. The Arts has always been used as an avenue to create change and build awareness for political and social causes, sometimes politically beneficial, such as the campaign the music industry ran encouraging vaccinations. These community groups and events may not be strictly what is meant by the “strong institutions” title of

this pillar, but they certainly play a core role in repairing and maintaining the strength of our social fabric which leads to a society capable of sustaining arts and culture.

- **Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.**

For artists in any medium to successfully reach their audience, they need opportunities and safe spaces within which to learn, develop and practice their craft. So many of these spaces are facilitated and run by volunteers who love the arts and wish to see more people thriving in it. They are people who see the value in a strong arts culture. They need to be considered by policymakers as well as the artist. Without them, our cultural landscape would be bleaker, and artists would have even fewer opportunities to learn, explore and fully focus on their craft.