

# National Cultural Policy Submission

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**How to improve our nation's arts, entertainment and cultural sector. 22 Aug 2022**

With regard to the new policy being shaped around the five pillars outlined below, I recently took part in the Regional Arts NSW Webinar on a National Cultural Policy. The participants named in my submission made a number of important points, based on long experience working in the arts, and enjoying regional arts in many forms. My own experience as a regional artist and audience member for the arts, supports these points, as outlined briefly below.

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

Respected Indigenous artist Mr Djon Mundine (initiator of the Burial Poles Memorial, Australian National Gallery) pointed out that high quality high speed internet, with access in all areas of the country, is essential for Indigenous artists in regional areas to be able to connect with artists in other regions, and to display their works widely.

Djon pointed out that something like 50% of country towns across Australia have Aboriginal names – but the Aboriginal history of very many towns and cities is still denied and excluded from the town's story about itself.

Aboriginal and Non-Indigenous artists across all cultural forms need support and funding to work together, and individually, to express the Indigenous history of our country towns and its intersection with Settler history, through all kinds of works of art.

And equally they need support to make imaginative works that may speak to a much wider perspective, and still surprise and delight regional audiences.

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

Lindy Hume, leading opera and festival director, wanted us to see “the national cultural landscape through a regional lens”, and put Regional Australia at the centre of our cultural landscape. To broaden our focus on the arts and artists, to include women, immigrants, first nations people, country people, as part of the big picture.

We have so many stories to tell in Australia, in so many forms and ways. And our stories belong to all of us, and come from all of us. As Archie Roach said, “Story belongs to everyone. We are all story, we all have story. People come, people go, but story remains . . .”

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

Creating theatre, dance, paintings, stories, music, sculptures and all forms of art is hard work. It can be enjoyable, but a lot of it is hard slog, often over years, in many cases self-funded by part-time paid work, which takes up a lot of time that could otherwise be dedicated to making our work better, and getting more of it done.

Artists are workers – but few artists are paid a living wage while they are actually producing their work. Often a payment received for the end result is very small recompense for the many hours of planning, effort, and production that finally produce the creative result.

Djon Mundine suggested that the Irish and European Union models of taxation for artists be adopted, allowing artists to earn a certain amount before being taxed.

Regional artists, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, have few funding opportunities. Funds available for regional arts are tightly constrained, which limits paying artists properly. Regional infrastructure costs are much the same as costs in cities, but fewer funds are available.

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

Taking this policy pillar from another perspective, Vic McEwan, artist and director, urges us to embed the arts in all national government policy areas. It is hugely important to include artists and the arts working across all government portfolios. The arts are so rich in engaging with all portfolios, from health to defence to roads – for instance, artists designed and created the decorative elements that beautify the noise barriers on many of our city roads.

But to do this effectively, our national cultural policy must establish conditions which really nurture the artists. And this, as Barbara Lepani pointed out, will allow the artists to nurture their communities in so many ways.

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

Again, Djon Mundine pointed out that high speed internet reaching into the smallest, most remote communities, settlements, and regions, is crucial for all Australian artists to be able to reach audiences. Particularly for Indigenous artists living and working in remote communities, where few facilities are available.

We must also remember that today's audiences, young and old, include the people who will become tomorrow's artists.

In finding ways to reach the audiences for all our various arts it is also important to break out of the "institutional" mind-set, and take art to where the audience is.

In Burkina Faso, West Africa, I witnessed marvelous outdoor theatre performances, which attracted enthusiastic audiences. Arts in the fresh air is a very positive experience for artists and audiences – and healthy, too, in this age of pandemics.

Think of the wonderful performances at the recent Garma Festival, with dancers in the dust and musicians playing under the stars. Outdoor performances and other arts events are very special, and bring people together in the celebration of life in marvelous and unexpected ways.

There is so much more to say, but this is my third page, and it is closing time. Thank you for this opportunity to contribute, I really appreciate it.