

National Cultural Policy Submission

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- vi. submission can be made public (published)

Riverside's National Theatre of Parramatta (NTofP) creates and presents transformative and inspirational professional theatre experiences that reflect the world around us. *Hence our tagline Putting the Nation on Stage.* Having attended a Town Hall meeting, we are thrilled that our own goals and achievements closely align with the revitalised 5 goals of Creative Australia and our vision for the future. This coupled with being an active creating, producing, presenting, touring and capacity building organisation in the heartland of multicultural Australia, and personally a member of NSW Theatre Producing Companies network and an arts professional working in sectors from small to large such as the Sydney Opera House, Arts Council of England, SIMA Jazz, Ausdance and more, informs this submission, particularly on the current state of the sector in Sydney and potential markets nationally and internationally.

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

We agree with this sentiment and the rationale that all participants matter and deserve a voice. There is a richness of diversity in Western Sydney. It is empowering to see the impact on both story tellers and audience as we integrate new ways of thinking and understanding into the greater Australian cultural landscape. Our productions and bold, diverse stories that shine a light on different viewpoints and experiences have been shared not only in Western Sydney but also at flagship companies such as Sydney Theatre Company, Belvoir, Arts House Melbourne, Queensland Theatre Company, Sydney Opera House, OzAsia, Adelaide and later this year at Home in Manchester and Battersea Arts Centre in London.

Unfortunately this access is not readily available to all, and we agree on the importance of nurturing all voices.

Actively engaging and encouraging existing and future creators of culture are essential. A combination of the following would facilitate this:

- 1) Welcoming all Australians and embracing how they impact story telling as equally valid voices that contribute to enriching our culture.
- 2) Communication, ensuring that culture is seen as a viable occupation and recognising its importance in our lives.
- 3) Breaking down of existing prejudices, to enable outliers the opportunity to access the industry, with assistance navigating the pathways to careers in the arts
- 4) Providing easy access to skills development to enable work to be of a high standard
- 5) Recognising that diversity in Australia is not just in major cities and encouraging more collaboration and partnerships, recognising the vitality of the arts in the regions and fostering partnerships between urban and rural where a skills and knowledge exchanges can take place.
- 6) Support of work at all scales from micro, through to big scale and recognition that all levels are important to the ecology of the arts.

- 7) The integration, distribution and partnering with digital and new forms of creation to ensuring that these stories are also bought to life in line with contemporary culture.

At NToFP our belief in this deep engagement starts with outreach, then listening, nurturing ideas and in many cases bringing these to life in a professional capacity. This is resulting in bringing authentic stories to life for our community, with our reach and engagement with culture being local, national and global.

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

Our focus here is on the crisis in our industry with regards to behind the scenes creatives from designers to stage and production managers. There are currently not enough skilled creatives to fulfil the needs of the sector from Commercial through to the independent sector. A recurring message we are receiving is of people being burnt out and unable to sustain the long hours at often low pay. This skills shortage also critically impacts regional venues.

These often invisible creative voices in productions are essential to the ongoing health of our sector and these skills shortages are leading to being unable to produce shows, cancelling shows and/or quality of performances suffering and in a worst case scenario being physically unsafe.

Required:

- 1) Review of working conditions for designers, directors, producers stage manager, production managers and other roles essential to delivering performances.
- 2) Review of funding system that condones inequitable pay and conditions.
- 3) Finding a pathway to ensure adequate remuneration and safe sustainable working hours.
- 4) Reconsidering working patterns eg can assistants be bought into the mix and if so, how is this resourced?
- 5) Exploring engagement with training institutions for hands on training, and if so, how can this be done safely?
- 6) An outcomes focussed task force to address current and future issues and how to resolve these. NB this issue impacts cross portolios such as employment, education, youth, health etc.

At NToFP we are considering a number of ways to address this issue and are in conversations with key people and potential change makers for new scenarios. I would be very interested in being involved in finding ways to resolve this issue.

We note that training institutions are essential and support their role in resolving this crisis and are currently also in discussions with NIDA as to how to work together to build for the future.

Additionally, we also strongly support safe workplaces including not only the physical, but also cultural safety against micro aggressions. As a company owned by Council, for NToFP physical safety is a given. With regards to the cultural safety, we have an ongoing

commitment to raising awareness in these areas with workshops and by fostering a culture of support, where the mental health and wellbeing of everyone we work with is our highest priority.

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

The significance of Council owned and supported institutions to the cultural landscape should be noted. These organisations have an awareness of place and the needs of their community which touring organisations can never match. This is particularly noticeable in regional NSW and Western Sydney.

They also have infrastructure of bricks and mortar, in many cases digital infrastructure, existing staff and other resources. Money invested in Council operated organisations usually results in a multiplier effect on funding due to the existing resources, not having to be duplicated.

The closure of venues during Covid and their importance has been highlighted through Covid, They are often at the heart of a community. And their capacity to support both artists and audiences cannot be under estimated.

Required:

- 7) Overhaul of Australia Council assessment system. Currently the peer system has no genuine continuity amongst assessors and a result is a short term project, as opposed to a long term strategic focus.. At least one or two panel members should have a multi year overview. Whilst the Australia Council staff do provide input, this capacity for longer term thinking from the actual assessment panel is critical.
- 8) Change in mindset from peer assessors at the Australia Council and a better understanding of the importance of Councils and the projects they implement and support ie acknowledgement that supporting projects by a Council organisation should be regarded as a positive thing, whereby existing resources offered by Council organisations significantly enhances projects and reduces cash costs for the artists. It is not always the case that projects will proceed if they are initiated by a Council.
- 9) Integration and better understanding of how the three tiers of Government can deliver more effective outcomes by working together and leveraging funds and resources.
- 10) Recognition of the economic impact all these sectors play and their specific roles in the eco system..

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

For culture to truly flourish in Australia, it is important that the arts are visible, accessible and welcoming. Culture is a part of every day life for all Australians and we welcome this integration into all walks of life and Government portfolios.

- **First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.** – Agreed on the importance of this, but as this is not my area of expertise, I am leaving this to others with better knowledge.