

National Cultural Policy Submission

Dr Lindy Hume AM

Submitted: as an individual and as an artist

I am making this submission as an individual and an artist and artistic/festival director based in regional Australia. I live and work in Tathra, NSW (20 years) and Port Sorell, Tasmania (5 years). I pay respect to the Djiringanj people of the Yuin Nation on the Far South Coast of New South Wales, and the palawa/pakana, the First People of lutruwita Tasmania.

My focus on regional Australia is reflected in my 2021 PhD thesis *The Bigger Picture – Toward a Landscape Oriented Creative Practice*, <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/225930/> which follows my 2017 Currency House Platform Paper *Restless Giant – Changing Cultural Practice in Regional Australia*. My thesis articulates the need for a more expansive narrative in our national arts conversation, reframing it from a regional perspective. This research informs my submission to the NCP.

In my thesis, I use the familiar shift from portrait to landscape orientation as a metaphor for the rearrangement of aesthetic and cultural values experienced between metropolitan and regional milieus. Reduced in the iPhone era to an instant binary choice, millennia of cultural significance reside in the forms known as 'portrait' and 'landscape'. I argue that in landscape orientation the picture is bigger, more complex, than the subject alone; that relationships, place and situation are all in play. Unsurprisingly, I argue that in Australia's regional communities, the horizontal or landscape orientation is the more influential cultural paradigm. The act of reframing Australia's arts discourse in landscape orientation - has broader implications as the genesis of a manifesto for creative and community leadership.

For context - about me:

- I am Artistic Director of Ten Days on the Island (Tasmania) 2019-2023 and recently Creative Director 2021/22 for Four Winds Festival (South Coast NSW). Previous executive roles have included Artistic Director of Opera Queensland (2012-2017) Festival Director of Sydney Festival (2010-2012) and Artistic Director of the Perth International Arts Festival (2004-2007)
- As an opera director for 35 years, I have created 80+ new productions for major opera companies in Australia/NZ, Europe, America and the UK, and have served as Artistic Director of West Australian Opera, Victoria State Opera/OzOpera and Opera Queensland.
- I was the recipient of an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Western Australia in 2007, and awarded Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the 2021 Australia Day Honours, for "significant service to the performing arts, particularly to opera."

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? What would you like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

Statement:

I believe it's finally time, with this national consultation, to look at our cultural landscape through a regional lens; as a portal to alternative ways of imagining and valuing the arts in Australia. On the 2013 Gillard/Crean policy, I make the point that in the 2013 document, specifics on an approach to the arts in regional Australia aren't discussed until Page 102 toward the end. This is largely a listing of existing regional arts infrastructure, accompanied by three objectives for social and economic outcomes. It was dispiritingly silent on any artistic aspiration or even hope for "excellence", a word less popular now but used liberally throughout that document (46 times, in fact, most often when discussing the work of the Major Performing Arts sector). In a cultural policy for a post-pandemic Australia, placing the creative voices, ideas and ingenuity of Regional Australia at the centre of this new National Cultural Policy, rather than at its margins, would be tangible progress from 2013.

I encourage policymakers to review all five of the National Cultural Policy pillars through a regional lens. Indeed, prioritising a regional perspective across all five pillars offers a more expansive, inclusive approach to this policy development exercise.

1. First Nations:

Every part of Australia is, always was and always will be, Aboriginal land. Acknowledging that Culture, community gatherings and pedagogies of music, storytelling, dance and image-making have been practiced on Country for millennia by Australia's First People, our National Cultural Policy draws on the inspirational landscapes, narratives, languages and expanded horizons of regional Australia, best understood by the original custodians of Culture and Country in those places. Imagine the greater local impacts of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* interpreted in a myriad of authentic and nuanced experiences of Country and Culture and expressed from the perspectives of First Nations communities and artists across regional Australia.

2. A Place for Every Story:

The diversity, cultural confidence and storytelling capacity of contemporary regional Australia has evolved seismically in the two decades since the framing of the 2013 Cultural Policy. Reflecting on the past two years curating festivals in northern Tasmania and the Far South Coast of NSW, I assert that the conceptual and practical ingenuity and ideas emerging from regional places are a resource to this policymaking process.

In my observation two rapidly evolving areas, equally resonant in both metropolitan and regional Australia, deserve particular focus for their potential impact on the national cultural landscape. I would characterise these as landscape-oriented activities in which *relationships, place, situation and surroundings are all in play; in which the picture is bigger, more complex, than the subject alone:*

- 'Hyper-local' projects
- Socially engaged projects

Hyper-local: Festival directors around Australia enthusiastically threw the switch from global to local for their 2020-22 programs. Many will have experienced, as I did at Ten Days and Four Winds, the artistic rewards and community impacts of curating a hyper-local festival. At Ten Days, the

expressiveness and empathy of local projects shine even more brightly through the lingering darkness of Covid. Experiences shared with the community are social transactions whose impact resonates in the collective memory of the participants. In extraordinary times artists living in regional places have extraordinary perspectives to share: Who better than the artists of Cobargo or Lismore to tell the world about the fires and floods? Or the artists of lutruwita Tasmania to interpret the island's unique narratives?

Although we can now resume international travel and gather in larger numbers, something has shifted. We are not all snapping back to global programming with pre-Covid alacrity. Collaborations with local communities and artists during Covid have left an indelible imprint on our organisational values. Like wildflowers amid undergrowth given a couple of years of nourishment, rich home-grown art has flourished, asserting itself in the story of this time with authentic connectedness to place.

Embodying the concept of hyper-local, First Nations stories come from, exist in, and continue the narrative of a particular place or Country. On the NSW South Coast in April thousands attended the joyfully mud soaked Giiyong Festival at Twofold Bay, a hugely popular coming together of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. It celebrates hyper-local narratives from local bands and dancers to the fight for the repatriation of the Gweagal Shield from the British Museum. Similarly at this year's Four Winds Festival the festival's bicultural opening event, *Songs from Yuin Country*, was a local reconciliation journey, largely sung in the local Dhurga language, with a local narrative encompassing First Contact, Colonisation and the search for Common Ground. The national significance of these hyper-local stories is undeniable.

In Lismore, NORPA's planned post-Covid return to theatre with a joyous outdoor event will now have even more resonance as a symbol of the whole region's spirit. 'It will bring us together and celebrate who we are' said Artistic Director Julian Louis: "*Love for One Night* is full of fictional moments that celebrate the culture and history of the Northern Rivers and explore themes that are hyper-local and universal.'

Socially engaged practice: This fast-evolving field was largely absent from the 2013 policy document but deserves to be part of the discussion within this 2022/23 consultation. Loosely defined as art created with/for communities, the evolved sophistication of socially engaged practice in 2022 is evident. Methodological rigour, artistic ambition, diversity and well-documented positive public impacts are signatures of the current crop of practitioners. In all its complexity, socially engaged practice can have particular resonance in regional places where at its best, it can spark the social imagination of communities and offer huge scope for innovation and creative brilliance. It can offer rich cultural benefits for the post-crisis world, reflecting the themes and civic concerns of the times we're in. It can be framed as social justice activism, giving voice, visibility and creative expression to the lived experiences of participants. In festival contexts, investment in new work of this nature, a covenant between collaborators on agreed social and artistic outcomes, challenges the transactional nature of relationships with commissioning or presenting partners or venues.

3. Centrality of the Artist:

In demonstrating respect for the centrality of the artist, I urge policymakers to consider that like many of my colleagues, I consider the generic label "regional artists" a term that implies a junior

relationship to artists who live in mainstream metropolitan centres. Artists who choose to live in regional Australia or live outside cities are simply artists, not “regional artists”. As an artist who lives and works in Tathra and Burnie but also in Seattle, Stockholm and Sydney, I’m happy to be called a global artist, a professional artist, an Australian artist. But the term “regional artist” confers a categorical limitation I do not experience or identify with and prefer not to use. It could be replaced by something less diminishing like “artists living outside cities/metropolitan centres” or “artists living in regional places” or “artists who live in regional Australia”.

4. Cultural leadership/Strong Institutions:

I note that through long, focussed efforts of many terrific colleagues, the cultural infrastructure supporting artists in regional places has strengthened markedly in the last decade, with machinery like Performing Arts Connections Australia, Regional Arts Australia and collaborative initiatives like Local Giants underpinning a more ambitious sector. A gap or weakness in this machinery, however, is an inconsistency of cultural and creative leadership across regional Australia. In parallel with support for this infrastructure, I would urge policy makers to explore new cultural leadership and organisational models for the creation and curation of diverse, rigorous, high-quality work in regional places.

In my observation, those artistic projects created in regional Australia currently cutting through to “mainstream” cultural consciousness are honed through focussed artistic leadership. Companies like Marrugekku (Broome) NORPA (Lismore), The Farm (Gold Coast), Dancenorth (Townsville), smaller festivals like Bleach, Ten Days, Unconformity, Darwin and Castlemaine Festivals and the most adventurous Tasmanian companies like Rooke, Van Diemens Band, Big hART, Archipelago and Terrapin all have ambitious and well networked artistic/creative directors with specialist skills who understand the national and global markets and who conceive, curate and quality-control creative programs at all stages of development.

If more regional communities, like their metropolitan counterparts, have access to colleagues with skills like assembling creative teams; dramaturgy; talent, audience and artform development; national/global networks; producing and creating pathways for new work, they are more likely to optimally contribute to the national cultural fabric. Progressive creative leadership can be an arrowhead, a catalyst for a region’s creative ambition.

The opportunity exists for regional Australia’s creative communities to contribute more, to say more, and be more visible in the national culture through targeted creative leadership and advocacy. As a proof of concept, I would propose identifying for realistic funding key regional centres where such progressive curation models seeking to develop ambitious new work or programs can be explored in community contexts led by experienced, skilled, networked artistic/creative directors. Start with two perfect places to test this initiative: northern Tasmania and the Far South Coast of NSW.

5. Reaching the Audience:

As has been proven over centuries, a symbiotic flourishing of artform and audience development is possible in the right social and cultural conditions. Part of the challenge for the NCP is to create those conditions in which artists in regional Australia can reach new and untapped audiences with their work. The potential for this reach in digital modalities is limitless and has been explored with new urgency as a result of Covid, however I would argue that now a more urgent imperative is exploring ways in which the most innovative work created by artists in regional places can be experienced live by more Australians, and indeed globally.

Here I propose a national funding initiative to bring the most exciting work from regional Australia to Australian and international festivals and presenters, not just as some kind of “regional showcase”, as sometimes happens, but as part of the core curation of the festival, alongside national and global counterparts. To access this funding initiative, metro-based festival directors and presenters would have a role to play in its commissioning and development; and would certainly need to get out to regional places at various stages to see the work being created and performed first-hand, ideally learning from those communities’ landscape-oriented practises. This alone would, over time, assist in bridging the divide that still exists in the national conversation between regional and metropolitan Australia.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. If useful, I am happy for you to use any or all of my words as part of the National Cultural Policy Report, attributed as below, and for my submission to be published online.

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22 August, 2022