The New National Cultural Policy: Cultural data needs

Submission to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts – Office for the Arts

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Foreword

We are pleased to contribute recommendations to the consultation process of the new National Cultural Policy.

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Acknowledgement

We proudly acknowledge all First Nations peoples and their rich culture of the country we now call Australia. We pay respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge First Nations peoples as Australia's First Peoples and as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we live.

We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of First Nations peoples and communities to Australian life, and how this continuation of 75,000 years of unbroken storytelling enriches us. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards ensuring an equal voice and the equality of outcomes in all aspects of our society.

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Australian Government's development of a new cultural policy for the decade ahead. We acknowledge its purpose to establish a comprehensive roadmap to guide the skills and resources required to transform and safeguard a diverse, vibrant and sustainable arts, entertainment and cultural sector now and into the future.

Data will be essential to guide and track the progress of the new cultural policy. However, while existing data sets address many of the relevant areas, issues and gaps remain.

These limitations are well-understood by researchers and were also recognised in the final report for the House of Representatives Committee inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions, *Sculpting a National Cultural Plan: Igniting a post-COVID economy for the arts (2021)*, which included the following recommendations:

- **Recommendation 15:** The Committee recommends the Commonwealth Government provide additional funding to the Australian Bureau of Statistics to produce the Cultural and Creative Satellite Accounts annually, gather and publish data on levels and type of employment, trends, revenue, geographic trends across the creative and cultural industries.

- **Recommendation 16:** The Committee recommends the Australian Bureau of Statistics add questions to the Census which better account for the professions of those working in gig economies, and across the creative and cultural industries with recognition of paid and unpaid work.

In the context of the cultural policy, issues on the availability and timeliness of data have become even more important since the policy and its measurement will need to be informed by robust data.

We note that the Government response to the Inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions is pending.

In the meantime, we are pleased to provide this submission outlining the data needs in order to understand, track and measure activity and value in Australia's cultural and creative sector.

Summary of Needs

1. Provision of core data on the cultural and creative industries

There is a need for core cultural and creative industries data, delivered on a consistent basis, annually where possible. Core industry data collections would be of benefit to many stakeholders, including cultural industry organisations, government agencies at all levels, arts policy makers, and artists. They would also be of benefit to many other industries – for example, a core collection for cultural and creative industries data could serve as a pilot for other service-based sectors such as tourism. Core data would also assist in measuring performance of new frameworks, policies and programs adopted by the Australian Government. This includes measuring performance against any targets or principles of the finalised national cultural policy.

As such, there may be need to identify additional data as the national cultural policy develops, in consultation with states and territories (and local governments).

A core data collection for the cultural and creative industries would include data on (but not necessarily limited to):

1. Economic contribution
2. Employment
3. Institutional matters, including cultural funding by all levels of government
4. Attendance and participation
5. Household expenditure
6. International trade

Where possible, the parameters for the above data collection should align with international standards. Ideally, data collection would enable insight into digital/non-digital activities (acknowledging, of course, that drawing distinctions between these categories can be challenging and would require careful consideration).

Given so much cultural production, distribution, and consumption relies on the internet and digital technologies, further data collection is also needed to track the full range of cultural and creative activities in the digital sphere. This is especially critical given the heightened attention to digital inequalities revealed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, it would be useful to consider the provision of subjective data in the context of discussions occurring about measuring Australia's wellbeing performance, in line with international trends in this field of assessment. More specifically, we may increasingly need data on the change in subjective wellbeing after participating in arts and culture, as an indication of its broader social benefits.

2. Updating of the Cultural and Creative Satellite Accounts

The Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts have been adopted broadly as a key source of understanding of the scale and scope of the cultural and creative industries. However they remain limited by the currency of their data.

The first experimental framework for the Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts was published in 2013, with the first Satellite Accounts published in 2014 for the 2008-09 reference period. The Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA) produces annual updates of the Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts. However, the framework for the Satellite Accounts have not been updated to reflect changes to the cultural and creative industries since publication, nor to address gaps and issues surfaced in response to the initial publication.

There is a need to update the framework for the Cultural and Creative Satellite Accounts, particularly the volunteering and non-market outputs components. The Satellite Accounts themselves should ideally be published annually, as soon as practicable after the National

Account Input-Output tables on which they are based become available. Our recommendation is that resources should be allocated to the ABS to enable a review and update of the framework.

3. Investment in exploration of untapped data sources

Beyond the core data sets mentioned under Point 1 above, there is opportunity to explore emerging data sources, and to further explore the potential of existing data sets, in order to provide data that will be needed for tracking the progress of the new cultural policy.

For example, knowledge gaps remain around the substantial number of Australians generating economic activity through cultural and creative roles as secondary jobs and unpaid work. There are some indicators of the extent of this phenomenon from periodic surveys of professional artists. More broadly, there are potential approaches to drawing better insights across the cultural and creative sector out of Census data. But there are still significant improvements that could be made.

There is limited data on working conditions for First Nations artists in metropolitan and regional areas, and on the increasing economic activity around First Nations textiles, fashion and homewares. Investment in the identification of data in relation to First Nations in this area could help to build the evidence base and contribute to the achievement of targets within the Closing the Gap framework. There is also a lack of meaningful data on cultural diversity in the arts and cultural sector that is comparable across measures.

Researchers have been exploring untapped sources to address some of these knowledge gaps, such as the capacity for the ABS Cultural Participation survey to pick up gaps in creative employment data related to secondary jobs. There is also unexplored potential for the ABS Linked Employer-Employee Database (LEED) and the Business Longitudinal Analysis Data Environment (BLADE) to help build a more complete picture of the cultural and creative industries.

This and other exploratory work could guide investment in examining untapped data sources to address knowledge gaps across the cultural policy's priority areas.

4. Centralised management of data on the cultural and creative industries

A range of approaches have been developed to measure and report data on combinations of cultural and creative activities, the components of which are located across a number of ABS classified industries. Each approach provides useful information and each is relevant to specific policy questions. However, inquiries and public discussions over recent years have highlighted confusion about appropriate application of data about these industries.

There is need for a centralised hub for coordinating, drawing together and providing access to and guidance on the various data sets from the ABS and other sources. This would most appropriately be housed with a trusted and authorised body. Such a body could be modelled on something similar to the previous National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics (NCCRS), a specialist agency of the ABS until 2014. Alternatively, it could be managed by the Bureau of

Communications, Arts and Regional Research, within DITRDCA. Whatever the model, in addition to custodianship of core data sets, this body should also help to guide the development and the conduct of data collections.

A further, long term option to canvass is the management of these data through future whole-of-government or indeed whole-of-economy performance frameworks, as is currently the case in some Australian jurisdictions (ACT), Scotland, New Zealand and other nations that have a wellbeing frameworks.

Conclusion

We thank the Department for consideration of these four recommendations, which we summarise in conclusion below:

1. Provision of core data on the cultural and creative industries

2. Updating of the Cultural and Creative Satellite Accounts

3. Investment in exploration of untapped data sources

4. Centralised management of data on the cultural and creative industries