

The Sydney Fringe Festival Submission: National Cultural Policy

CONTACT: Kerri Glasscock: CEO & Festival Director

ph 02 7813 4527

Submission may be made public

Executive Summary:

The Sydney Fringe Festival is now the largest independent arts festival in NSW. Each year we provide performance opportunities for over 2500 independent artists from all genres including performing arts, live music, visual arts, arts education, art making, multi-media and experimental arts. Over 80% of the participating artists reside in NSW, with the majority living and working in Sydney, with over 75% identifying as emerging or early career. During the 30-day festival, they perform in existing small, medium and large sized cultural spaces and businesses; and pop-up and temporary performance spaces activated by the Sydney Fringe. We work with over 50 existing venues/small businesses and across 29 postcode areas within the Greater Sydney region. Each year we activate over 30 temporary performance spaces across the festival footprint. In 2019 our last full scale festival before Covid induced shutdowns, 69,000 people attend the Sydney Fringe in 2019 contributing to an economic impact of \$12 million dollars to the city.

Throughout the festival we are able to provide annual, real time reporting on the current trends, requirements and issues facing the independent arts sector in Sydney. This places the Sydney Fringe in an unique position to other arts organisations that may be focused on a single genre or representative of only one business stream within the sector. We are able to provide a holistic snapshot of the current climate. This data is then utilised when working closely each year with government, private sector and stakeholder partners to investigate and pilot solutions for sector issues, drive regulatory and policy reform and activate more space for the creative industries.

Between 2015-18 we directed three important pilot projects that investigated the regulatory restrictions placed on activating new permanent and temporary performance space in NSW:

2015 Temporary Theatre Pop-up Pilot Project in partnership with the City of Sydney

2016 Off Broadway Project in partnership with the Inner West Council

2017 HPG Festival Hub Project in partnership with HPG Australia and the City of Sydney and the NSW Government.

This work has been published in:

An Anthology of Space 2015-2018: Activating unused and underutilised space for the creative industries and performing arts sectors of NSW: <https://sydneyfringe.com/article/an-anthology-of-space-2015-2018/>

In 2019 we worked on our fourth major infrastructure project FRINGE HQ a collaboration between property owner Greycliff, the NSW Government and LGH: City of Sydney to activate a vacant night club within the Kings Cross area, into a new multi venue independent arts hub. This project aimed to create a template for the creation of a new business model where risk is shared between the private and public sector to ensure that new, diverse night-time offerings with a cultural focus can be opened and sustained in Sydney.

We prepare this evidence-based submission as an outline of the current needs and challenges facing the independent arts sector, with a focus on artists practicing in the greater Sydney area and the small-medium sector.

Most professional NSW based artists will never perform/present in the major performing arts centres, the Opera House or the major cultural institutions of our country. They earn their annual income through the presentation of work in the small to medium sector. This sector of independent, commercial and/or unsubsidised venues located in NSW, operate in the harshest conditions of any State/city in Australia. They are venues that receive limited to no Government subsidy and continue to independently bolster up the cultural vibrancy, and feed the global reputation of our country.

The independent sector is the engine house to the broader industry, it provides touring networks, career development pathways, the bulk of new Australian work development and the majority of regular employment for artists and arts workers.

The lack of affordable, appropriate cultural facilities is the single most pressing issue facing all art forms from our sector in our city, and a key issue that prohibits the enhancement, vibrancy and health of the creative industries. It is also one of the most critical prohibitors of meeting the five goals of the 2013 Creative Australia National Cultural Policy and impacts all five pillars of this consultation. Without affordable and appropriate space for all parts of the sector we cannot expect to have a vibrant, thriving, sustainable sector into the future. We cannot expect to support diverse voices, welcome diverse audiences or support the creation, development and export of Australian voices that truly represent Australia.

In NSW Sydney Fringe Festival is now the only annual opportunity young emerging artists have to guarantee themselves a season in a theatre due to a lack of non-curated, appropriate and affordable performance spaces.

In 2020, after nearly a decade of advocacy by The Sydney Fringe, the Live Music Office, APRA AMCOS and the sector more broadly the NSW Government enacted the 2020 Liquor Bill Reforms removing over 500 outdated pieces of regulation that directly prohibited cultural activity from taking place in most building types. These changes corresponded with the removal of NSW's lock out laws and paved the way for the sector to have a major resurgence. Unfortunately the impacts of these reforms have not yet been felt as they have been overridden by the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic. As such this submission focusses on incentives for activating space and encouraging creative use of building stock to ensure that the private sector is incentivised and supported in their efforts to bring more small to medium cultural space online; and to safeguard existing space. Protecting the engine house of the sector.

The Sydney Fringe has provided submissions and subsequent evidence at the following State and Federal inquiries:

2020- Australia's Creative and Cultural industries and institutions inquiry, Australian Government:

2019- Joint Select Committee on Sydney's Night Time Economy, NSW Government

https://sydneyfringe-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/p/hq/Ea_bTyPwRj5LrhvG3nKXKB4BDUDcDrT3i-IJ4p8ILshM8w?e=sbP5SQ

2018- Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 6 - Planning and Environment – Inquiry into the Music and Arts Economy in New South Wales

<https://sydneyfringe-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/p/hq/EW8kRljwEw5ArwrfPSPLmMBnmhblkgmiU-GRisayQP1w?e=tMSYT8>

The Sydney Fringe has contributed to the following strategies:

2021: Inner West Council Economic Recovery Strategy
2019: NSW Government 24 Hour Economy Strategy
2018: Randwick City Council Night Time Economy Strategy
2017: Committee for Sydney- Sydney a 24hour City report
2014: City of Sydney- Live music and Performance Action Plan

A Place for Every Story

Challenges:

- 1) **Lack of affordable appropriate small-medium sized cultural spaces for performance, rehearsal and multi-purpose use:** In Sydney all independent theatres operate with a curated overlay. This is required as business conditions are incredibly difficult and venues need full control over their offering. This is appropriate for the business' survival but results in an exclusion of many artists particularly emerging artists who have not yet built up a reputation or audience. It also prohibits experienced artists from being able to present work in development or test out new work that might not yet be ready for a full public season. In addition to curatorial restrictions there is simply not enough stock to meet sector demand. With only 11 independent theatres currently in Sydney supply does not meet demand. Galleries and live music venues are also limited with the later being heavily impacted from the pandemic which has resulted in permanent venue closures.
- 2) **Inadequate funding levels specifically for independent arts and cultural businesses, companies and artists. Culminating in disproportionate funding distribution across the sector:** We acknowledge the need to support excellence but encourage Government to review their policy around excellence being a key determiner in funding allocations. Assessing applications purely on excellence excludes a large proportion of artists, and limits the sectors ability to develop and grow. Many independent companies need support at the 5 year mark, well before they meet most of the current criteria required for funding. Additionally most independent/privately owned cultural venues are excluded from funding rounds completely as for-profit businesses.

Opportunities:

- 1) We commend the Live Music Australia funding program that provided targeted support for small to medium sized independent live music venues and would support the expansion of this program to include theatres and other performance spaces that support **all** artforms not just live music.
- 2) We commend the current criteria of RISE funding being investment focussed and allows commercial and for profit businesses to apply. We would endorse a continuation of this program or a review of permanent funding programs to include this ethos.
- 3) Stimulus investment for events and activations in existing businesses such as retail, hospitality and light industrial to encourage the uptake of new regulations that enable low risk arts and cultural events taking place in existing businesses and empty building stock
- 4) Tax incentives to land owners who utilise vacant stock for temporary cultural activity, tax penalties to land owners who landbank vacant building stock.
- 5) The creation of funding rounds that provide seed funding for companies/artists in the early stages of their careers.
- 6) The creation of a funding round for existing arts centres to be able to support provision of open access space use during dark times of the calendar.

The Sydney Fringe endorses submissions made by the Live Music Office and APRA AMCOS