

# National Cultural Policy Submission

**Hugh Cowie**

Submitted: As a worker/professional in an industry who uses arts (e.g. art therapist, tour guide); As an artist

**What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars**

<b>1. First Nations</b>	
<b>2. A Place for Every Story</b>	<p>Gender diversity is still a major issue in the arts world. For the musical world I am involved in, the Melbourne rock, psych and heavy music gigging scene, non-male artists are still heavily underrepresented on the stage. To begin countering this, many venue bookers have begun requesting that line-ups be gender diverse in some way, meaning that there should be at least one non-male performer on the bill. This is a step in the right direction, as it makes artists to look harder and give non-male artists a chance that they may not have had before. However, it still presents its own issues. Often it can feel tokenistic choosing a band just because they fill a gender diversity quota, rather than purely because of their relevance to the overall gig. Secondly, this is a grassroots movement where the artists have the responsibility to bring about change with little institutional support. In Triple J's 2020 'By the Numbers' report into representation of women in the music industry, Rae Cooper argues that the gender gap is due to structural inequalities with most positions of power 'largely held by men'.<sup>1</sup>The report also found that while representation of women in board positions has been gradually rising since 2015, in 2019 men still representing 62% of these roles.<sup>2</sup>This demonstrates that while artists themselves are taking it into their own hands to tackle the issue, at a higher industry level, progress is lagging. Additionally, in the Australian orchestra world, a sector which received \$81.9 million in government funding during 2020, the Living Music Report (2020) used quantitative data collection of shows over the year to reveal that only 4% of works performed were written by female composers.<sup>3</sup>These statistics are telling of how systematic inequalities are still affecting the industry, as while boards such as the Australian Council for the Arts are heavily focussed on projects which consider diversity and equity, the people that govern these decisions are still a male majority.</p>
<b>3. The Centrality of the Artist</b>	
<b>4. Strong Institutions</b>	<p>With the university fee increases implemented by the Australian government in 2020, many future arts students were faced with a 113% rise in the cost of their units.<sup>4</sup>Discouraging artists from pursuing their passions at a tertiary level sends the message that they are less important to Australia than someone interested in science or engineering. In fact, the education minister at the time stated that this change to university fees was to encourage 'job ready graduates', perpetuating the idea that artistic careers are less valuable to the country.<sup>5</sup>Ironically the minister argued that these changes would be 'encouraging students to embrace diversity', but in reality it simply tries to funnel future creatives into pathways that they are not interested in.<sup>6</sup>By doing this, the Australian government has weakened its cultural institutions instead of strengthening them. Unfortunately, artists are still in many respects reliant on government policy to support them. As</p>

	Schultz argues, there is a need for a dedicated Federal Ministry of Culture which would draw together elements that are currently 'scattered across the cabinet'. <sup>7</sup> These exist in most other countries at a similar level to Australia and would assist in assessing cultural impact of new policies made by the government. If a dedicated Ministry of Culture had existed at the time of the tertiary education fee changes, then perhaps the Government's attack on the arts could have been held accountable.
<b>5. Reaching the Audience</b>	

**Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:**

<b>1. First Nations</b>	Like most musicians I have other non-musical disciplines that I am involved in, mine being archaeology in Australia. In this field First Nations issues are paramount, and we are always taught how to go about processes respectfully and how to run projects in ways that decentralise the colonial roots of the discipline. This is a significant part of my identity as a non-Indigenous person living in Australia and it inevitably it affects my creative practice as well. For example, it is important to me that I acknowledge the people whose lands I have created a piece of work on as a sign of respect and as part of a constant decolonisation.
<b>2. A Place for Every Story</b>	It is important to me that my practice can help build a more inclusive culture of the arts. For me it is important that the context around my practice works towards a more inclusive space, whether that be in considering deaf and disabled people in event planning, acknowledging Indigenous sovereignty, or finding bands with non-male members to increase diverse representation on stage. Aside from simply being the right thing to do, I believe it will make for a fuller arts culture with more people involved and more diverse voices being heard. I have seen the overrepresentation of men in my preferred genres, and I see myself as having a responsibility to do better since I am in a privileged position as a white man. It is unfair to have an industry which still allows systemic inequalities to keep one homogenous group in power. I believe that while they will feel tokenistic at first, quotas for non-male representation will force organisations to look further and eventually this practice will become the norm.
<b>3. The Centrality of the Artist</b>	
<b>4. Strong Institutions</b>	
<b>5. Reaching the Audience</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Ange McCormac, "The gender gap in Australian music is slowly narrowing. Here's what still needs to change," *Hack, Triple J* (blog), March

<sup>2</sup> McCormac, "The gender gap in Australian music is slowly narrowing."

<sup>3</sup> "Living Music Report," Living Music Report, 2020, <https://livingmusic.report/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Australian university fees to double for some arts courses, but fall for Stem subjects," The Guardian, 2020, [https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/19/australian-university-fees-arts-stem-science-maths-nursing-teachinghumanities#:~:](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/19/australian-university-fees-arts-stem-science-maths-nursing-teachinghumanities#:~:text=Teahan%20says%20the%20student%20contribution,increase%20from%20%2434%2C000%20to%20%2443%2C500.)

[text=Teahan%20says%20the%20student%20contribution,increase%20from%20%2434%2C000%20to%20%2443%2C500.](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/19/australian-university-fees-arts-stem-science-maths-nursing-teachinghumanities#:~:text=Teahan%20says%20the%20student%20contribution,increase%20from%20%2434%2C000%20to%20%2443%2C500.)

<sup>5</sup> "Australian university fees to double for some arts courses, but fall for Stem subjects."

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "National cultural policy a chance for radical rethink," ARTS hub, 2022, <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/features/national-cultural-policy-a-chance-for-radical-rethink-2572835/>

<sup>8</sup> 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/by-the-numbers-2020-representation-of-women-in-australian-music/12033388>

**Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?**

I would like to see more financial support for people in the creative arts industry. It is a struggle for artists to earn a living solely through their trained profession due to the gig-by-gig nature of performing and often unregulated payment amounts from venues. A system of legally enforced minimum performance fees would help provide security to performing musicians, such as the one outlined by Musicians Australia as a response to the impact of COVID-19. Venues would then need to be funded by the government so they can afford this, as they have also seen severe financial hardship from lockdowns.