

National Cultural Policy Submission

Margrete Helgeby Chaney

Submitted: As an individual

To “know ourselves and each other through Australian arts and stories that resonate within, and for, every postcode”, **we need to recalibrate federal funding.**

My name is Margrete Helgeby Chaney. I am an independent artist with an extensive career in the arts, dancing both within major companies and as an independent; and as a producer, director, project manager and now Chair of Co3 Contemporary Dance Company in West Australia.

At the Town Hall meeting held by Minister Burke in Perth recently, several key messages were stated. It's based on the following that I make my submission:

- The National Cultural Policy will be initially implemented as a 'working document'; a starting place from which to learn, adjust and grow.
- Pillar 2 refers to a place for every story – and to paraphrase the Minister's words – in every postcode and for the communities of every postcode.
- Pillar 4 concerns itself with strengthening institutions and includes a conversation around the Australia Council developing its role in advocacy.
- Projects will be judged on a 'for purpose' basis.
- With an ambition to accelerate our reach into 'every postcode' I propose a means by which we could facilitate excellence: where creative works reach and resonate deeply with their audiences and flourish, within every State:

THE IDEA

For an initial trial period of 5 years, the Australia Council allocates all performing arts funding not designated for the MPAF on a per capita basis to the State and Territory Government Agencies, who have direct knowledge of the sector and the communities in which they operate. This model would ideally commence to coincide with the expiration of the current four-year contracts in December 2024.

As per the MPAF model, funds could be allocated by the States on a 5-year basis with KPI assessment in Q1 of year 4 and confirmation of funding given in the same year. This allows for substantive analysis to be done on the efficacy and outcomes

arising from the funding. This also allows for a year's notice to any recipient whose funding is not to be renewed, to unwind accordingly. This model provides organisational stability; stability in operations with the capability and confidence to forward plan, whilst also providing a clear exit path for underperformers, allowing new organisations to enter.

THE ISSUE

The Federal funding and advisory body for the arts builds its rationale and actions on the platform of the Australia Council Act 2013. A central tenet of this, and its predecessor, the Australia Council Act of 1975 is to support and foster excellence; "We invest in artistic excellence through support for all facets of the creative process, and are committed to the arts being accessible to all Australians". Today, their purpose is described as "to champion and invest in arts and creativity to benefit all Australians."

So, where are Australia's "seats of excellence" currently and do they reach all Australians? Historical funding practices have embedded a self-perpetuating cycle that prevents truly national representation. Sydney- and Melbourne-based entities have been more visible and, after receiving higher levels of funding, have been able to grow and develop. This in turn has made them more likely to receive subsequent funding and so the cycle goes on. This bias was recently acknowledged by the Australia Council.

We need truly national representation of artistic excellence; in both the creation of, and access to it. As we look to building audience engagement and participation, we must support creativity that is diverse, bears relevance and redefines where excellence exists.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY:

State Arts/Cultural bodies are best positioned to understand which entities/individuals in their respective States demonstrate creative readiness, relevance and financial competency positioning them for growth. Those identified should be able to lift themselves towards levels of nationally recognisable excellence within the space of four years, though perceptual biases may take longer to shift. The process of assessment for this must be driven by the States and can be carried out in conjunction with peak bodies and with representation from the Australia Council.

As noted above, a condition of this process must be that the States offer multi-year as well as project support. This should not be challenging given their existing multi-year funding practices. Multi-year funding is widely recognised and understood as a capacity building resource. It gives confidence to small to medium entities that can

be realised through contracting, longer term programming and touring. Not insignificantly, conceived works can be presented fully realised and given every opportunity to reach their intended audiences. Put simply, it allows entities to operate strategically rather than reactively.

This overall shift in activity would see the Australia Council freed to focus on championing the arts through vital advocacy, sector development and fundraising (Creative Partnerships Australia) support.

Creating this 5-year pilot circuit breaker would allow small to medium organisations, groups and individuals outside Sydney and Melbourne to grow and flourish over the long term. This brings with it economic and cultural gains for each State, region and community resulting in a program that truly is for every postcode.

TO NOTE:

- This proposal does not factor in the MPAF allocation.
- The argument has been put that there is no real inequity in funding allocation, but does this take into account the diminishing number of applicants from under-supported States like QLD, WA and TAS? Is this due to disillusionment with the system?
- Funding that is allocated on a per capita basis is consistent with the generally accepted COAG federal funding principles.
- It's commonly understood that the cultural, and related economic, flourishing of those States under-supported by the Australia Council sees the Australian Government continually blamed. This is a chance to improve those State/Federal relationships.
- A fairer distribution based on population share will ensure the Australian Government's national support of the arts is understood by more and by different communities. This enables it to speak of a truly national policy.
- This broadening and deepening of relationships with the whole Australian community will directly improve the economic development of regional and Aboriginal communities providing a political dividend in key areas.
- Excellence will be preserved – and indeed better understood - through joint decisions made by subject experts at the national, State and community level.