



Stuart McMillen

Gorman Arts Centre, 55 Ainslie Ave, Braddon, ACT, 2612

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Dear Minister Burke and ministerial policy team,

Thank you for this opportunity to shape the National Cultural Policy under development.

My submission is about my personal experiences of how the public funding of arts has enabled me to build a career as an independent artist on the global stage. I encourage you to deepen and broaden these opportunities, so that a wide range of future artists can benefit in ways similar to my experience.

About me

Based in Canberra, I have been a full-time artist since 2011, working as a comics artist and cartoonist. I publish longform social commentary comics: 'thinkpieces' that touch upon issues such as science, ecology, sustainability, psychology and economics.

Since 2011, I have had over **1.5 million unique readers** visit my website and read at least one of my comics. This mind-blowing readership that shows the global impact that just one Australian artist's voice can have in today's connected world.

My personal history receiving public funding for my art

Some of the most fertile creative periods of my life have followed periods of public-funded financial assistance. These have included:

- a 12-month period as a young artist participating in the **NEIS (New Enterprise Incentive Scheme)** program during 2011-12. This scheme paid me the equivalent of a Centrelink allowance for 12 months (which was approximately **\$15,500** at the time). Under the NEIS program's rules, I was allowed to earn income from my art on top of this baseline *without* subtracting from my allowance.
- I received **\$57,825** of various Federal and Territory competitive **arts grants** between 2014 and 2022, awarded as seven separate grants. (Read more about the way I squeezed benefit from this public funding on page 2 of this document).
- I participated in publicly-funded **mentorship programs** (the 'JUMP' and 'Match Lab' programs). I was part of a select group of early-career artists accepted into these Australia Council-facilitated programs in 2014 and 2018. My fellow artists and I were flown to Melbourne to participate in career development training sessions about how to best thrive as an artist, including valuable information about the best way to utilising crowdfunding and philanthropic partnerships.
- I received payments from the **JobKeeper** program during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21 totalling **\$33,900**. Though not specifically an arts program, the publicly-funded financial assistance of JobKeeper gave me the ability to continue my practice as a self-employed artist during the pandemic.

Like the NEIS scheme (above), I was able to earn income from my arts practice on top of this baseline *without* this income subtracting from my JobKeeper payments. It was critical that the JobKeeper program was delivered in this free-flowing way, without the bureaucratic 'mutual obligations' that lumber so many funding opportunities. Acting like a 'universal basic income', the JobKeeper and



NEIS schemes trusted the recipient to make the best use of the financial opportunity available to them, without 'jumping through hoops' of mutual-obligation. They were excellent schemes that I would love to see expanded and offered to broader segments of the population.

The JobKeeper program afforded me the time for thinking, planning, and creation that I used to create my longform comic *The Town Without Television*, which spans over 200 pages. I have since self-published part of this project, and have subsequently been offered a publishing contract that will see this project adapted into my debut book and published to an international audience in Australia as well as in the United States and Canada. **This outcome directly follows the creative period that I was afforded by my participation in JobKeeper.**

Artists: a low-paid segment of society, deserving of financial support

Despite these numerous public financial opportunities that I have received, I remain a low-income individual. Working as a full-time artist since 2011, **my income over the last decade has been a mere fraction of the average Australian's income.**

Despite the possible perception of me receiving a 'gravy train' of public resources from arts grants, my income is actually financially modest. Rather than being 'lazy welfare bludgers', artists are actually one of the most entrepreneurial groups of society, who squeeze the maximum value out of every dollar while creating their work.

No one become an artist with the expectation that they will grow rich: they do it because **they know that art is culturally valuable**, and that **they feel that their artistic voice is relevant to an audience.**

Being an artist is culturally valuable work that deserves financial support, including support from public funding.

Public funding of my art has laid the foundation for me to pursue privately-funded arts opportunities

Across my career, I have leveraged my public funding to create artistic works that have been financially valuable. As a whole, **the financial value of the artworks that I have created has more than offset the public investment in my artworks.**

For example, during the corresponding time period where I received **\$57,825** of Australian arts grants between 2014 and 2022, I held five crowdfunding drives designed to amplify the impact of these government grants. These five campaigns raised a total of **\$125,938** of funding from my readers. This total came from the support of over 500 individual donors, with roughly half of the sum coming from international donors.

I was therefore able to amplify the government's funding at a ratio so that for every **\$1.00** of arts grants I received, I raised over **\$2.17** from my readers.

Many of my readers come from countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Their investment in my art results in foreign income entering Australia's economy. I am therefore effectively a knowledge worker who serves as an **'exporter' of culture**, in exchange for an **'import' of financial wealth** from overseas customers who value my art. **This is a net benefit for Australia's economy.**



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What if these publicly-funded arts grants had not been available to me as an artist?

If these publicly-funded 'stepping stone' programs had not been available for me during my early career, **it is likely that my artistic career would have stalled for financial reasons.** My valuable artistic output would never have been created, and I would probably be working as a parking inspector, traffic controller, supermarket cashier, gravedigger, or some other mundane job. **The world would be a less vibrant place without my decade of cultural and artistic output.**

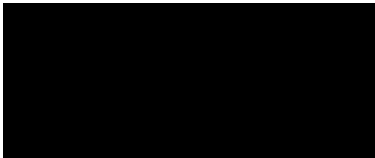
By contrast, I **am thrilled that Australia has a strong culture of providing funding opportunities for artistic projects.** This is a critical enabler, and I hope that the Australian government can expand the level of financial support available to artists and arts organisations.

Conclusion: increase the funding, increase the opportunities for artists

I encourage the Australian government to introduce policies that will increase the financial assistance available to Australia's artists. **The more of it that goes to individual artists, rather than arts bureaucracies, the better.**

As outlined above, my experience is that the public investment in the arts will be repaid through the increased economic activity that follows the art that will be created on the back of this public investment.

Sincerely,



Stuart McMillen
Canberra