

# LET'S GET CREATIVE

THE CASE FOR A  
COMPREHENSIVE  
CULTURAL AGENDA  
FEBRUARY 2023



“

*The arts sector, especially the small to medium companies and independent artists, have been treated appallingly over the last few years. In such a rich economy the arts should be thriving. Instead artists have to beg for crumbs.*

*Survey participant, NSW*

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## ABOUT MEAA

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) is the largest and most established union and industry advocate for workers in the creative and cultural industries, with a history going back more than 110 years.

Our members include people working in television, radio, theatre, film, entertainment venues, sporting stadia, journalists, actors, dancers, sportspeople, cartoonists, photographers, musicians,

orchestral and opera performers as well as people working in public relations, advertising, book publishing and website production -- in fact, everyone who works in the industries that inform or entertain.

Our campaigns have included the protection of public broadcasting, press freedom, reform of screen industry policy, safe working conditions, anti-racism and improved funding for the arts.

**This document has been prepared with the input of MEAA members and leaders; a network of thousands of supporters; and interviews with dozens of practitioners and experts from all parts of the cultural sector, the country and society. It represents the input from First Nations communities; migrant and non-English speaking communities; and LGBTQIA+ communities.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance acknowledges the traditional custodians and cultures of the lands and seas on which we live and work. We pay our respects to all First Nations Peoples, Elders and Ancestors. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and stand in solidarity towards a shared future.



# INTRODUCTION

It is beyond debate that when freedom of expression, independent media, cultural and artistic practice are encouraged and allowed to thrive, civil society flourishes.

From this flows economic prosperity, social cohesion and healthier communities.

By contrast, when free speech and media are suppressed and arts and culture constrained, civil society stagnates, quality of life declines, social disfunction accelerates and democracy is threatened.

Generally, governments have understood that investing in arts and culture will reap the dividends of a more harmonious, healthy and prosperous society. The benefits that flow from a vigorous artistic and civil culture are manifold.

This is why governments of all levels have historically provided public funding to arts and cultural institutions.

Over the past decade or so in Australia however we have seen the community value of arts and culture diminished as a result of good but unsustainable policy and government attitudes of, at best, antipathy and, at worst, downright hostility.

Media, arts and culture have been increasingly marginalised from mainstream Australia, some would say as an outcome and objective of the 'culture wars'.

Somewhere along the way – whether by accident or by design – the link between participation in arts and culture and societal wellbeing has been broken.

Fewer Australian children are learning music, singing, acting, painting and doing other forms of cultural and creative activity at school. This is especially pronounced in low socio-economic status communities, where participation is inhibited not only by cost, but by work constraints and poor access to transport and cultural infrastructure.

Small arts and cultural organisations struggle just to keep their doors open, depriving their communities of opportunities to express themselves through arts and cultural practice.

First Nations and CALD communities continue to bear the burden of deep-set racial bias and prejudice when it comes to how they are perceived by cultural institutions and social frameworks, and experience tokenistic, colonialised interactions with white Australia.

Cost acts as a deterrent to mainstream participation in arts, culture and civil society.

The collapse of the commercial business model for media means journalism often struggles to live up to public

interest expectations. Cuts to public broadcasters, long major benefactors of the arts and media, forces them to wind back their reach and scope, and the widespread closure of regional news outlets has diminished community access and civic participation generally.

This is not just a factor of reduced funding and disrupted business models, but of a failure to develop and maintain a cultural agenda that recognises the fundamental role of arts, media and culture in sustaining the health and wellbeing of our society.

In this environment, it is little wonder that the majority of arts and cultural workers are impoverished, stuck on the treadmill of insecure and low-paying work.

As a consequence, our understanding of ourselves and our communities – the inheritors of a unique natural environment and custodians of a culture of storytelling that is as old as humanity itself – is diminished.

With a long and proud history as the union for Australia's cultural workforce, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance has always understood the intrinsic and public interest value of the work our members do. And we have always sought to improve social, industrial and economic conditions to recognise and enable this.

Our *Let's Get Creative* platform is a continuation of this work, our articulation of what is wrong, what needs to change, and a start on our plan of how to get there.

The objective is to renew active participation in cultural and civic activity. There is ample research showing that participation and engagement in arts, culture, media and civic activity is an intrinsic good and that it will generate the demand necessary to recognise, develop and sustain good jobs.

Unconstrained by economic insecurity, workers in our cultural sectors will thrive, creating fresh storytelling and playing a vital part in strengthening our civil society.

There is a role for government to support both participation and employment in cultural and civic activity, but public funding is only part of the solution.

Whether your participation in cultural activity is as a creator, technician, arts worker, student, citizen or audience member, we invite you to join us in our campaign for a national arts and cultural agenda.

Let's get creative.

**SIMON COLLINS**  
MEAA Federal President

**ERIN MADELEY**  
MEAA Chief Executive

# AUSTRALIA NEEDS A COMPREHENSIVE CULTURAL AGENDA

As the union of Australia's cultural workforce, MEAA's history is one of organising and advocacy to improve the lives of workers, the industries they make and the society and economy they enable.

Our industries have been built by the labour, creativity, technical skill and innovation of workers, and by the active participation of communities and audiences.

The arts and entertainment sector employs around 230,000 people and generates \$117 billion or 6.4% of Australia's GDP per year, \$23.5 billion of which is attributable to live performance, music, screen productions, sales and broadcast.<sup>1</sup>

However, falling investments, technological change, new business models and managerial ideology have caused wholesale work insecurity.

The prevalence of 'gig economy' jobs, long-term rolling contracts, and a flawed bargaining system are clear evidence that new strategies are needed to reverse the trend of workforce exploitation.

Only one-quarter of arts and entertainment workers are employees. For the other three-quarters, there are no minimum rates of pay; superannuation is almost non-existent; and payment for work is often late.

Australia's media workers are also

suffering the consequences of widespread industrial change. MEAA's research indicates that around one-third of journalism jobs and over 200 local and regional newspapers have been lost in the last 10 years.<sup>2</sup>

Freelance journalists have found their pay rates and conditions steadily eroding as they operate without the safety net of workplace rights.

The fact that most work in our industries is now performed outside of the formal industrial relations system is a symptom of rampant marketisation and declining recognition of the public interest value of this work.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the

1 Bureau of Communications and Arts Research, 19 October 2018.

2 MEAA, *Rescuing Regional Journalism*, February 2022



**98% of Australians engage with the arts, and three-in-four believe the arts are an important way to get a different perspective on a topic or issue.**

**46% of us creatively participate**

**14% are involved with community arts and cultural development.**

**27% of Australians give time or money to the arts**

*Source: Australia Council for the Arts, Connecting Australians: the National Arts Participation Survey, June 2017*

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*“Artistic and cultural activity is a way of expressing yourself... It’s educational. Just because you can’t do one form of art doesn’t mean you can’t do another. It doesn’t have to be drawing, dancing, playing music or painting. It can be anything ... There are a lot of other ways that art benefits society, and it also enables diversity. It allows us to acknowledge and accept that we are different, but we are also the same.”*

*Claire, Indigenous student counsellor*

failings of this market-led model were exposed: hundreds and thousands of workers were forced out of the sector, neglected by workforce wage subsidies, and forced to rely on welfare and charity.

The failure of the Coalition Government to provide a sector-wide solution during COVID simply accelerated the need to rethink our

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approach to arts, culture and civil society in Australia.

While the workforce experiences these challenges, the consequences threaten all forms of cultural participation, undermining the principle of arts, culture and civic action as a public good.

A thriving civil society can only be sustained through cultural activity

and social participation; and for that we need a strong, confident and respected workforce.

As the pressures of work and economic survival demand more of our time, we need to question whether the cultural participation of workers, families and communities are being adequately supported.

*Let’s Get Creative* represents a basic response to this challenge, aiming to restore and build better jobs, create sustained sector investment and build respect for the workforce. How we invest and make the most of all inputs to our cultural and civic life is not something that markets alone can solve.

Australians need a new and comprehensive arts and cultural agenda, effectively and sustainably funded, to help build a better society.

And we need to harness and organise community leadership to shape and deliver it.

It is only through this leadership – through the collective voice of our members and our communities – that we can begin to broker alternatives to Australia’s current approach.

## Case study

### Dandenong Ranges Music Council

*“Almost every group that is formed through our projects stay together in some way after the project finishes. Some even become incorporated into their own organisation, program or company, and we assist them in doing this. The participation and benefits don’t just end with us, it’s a domino effect.” – Bev McAlister, DRMC*

The DRMC was established in 1979 and represents the community of the Dandenong Ranges and Yarra Valley in the Shire of the Yarra Ranges. The Council was established to provide easier access to music for communities within the Ranges, as the topography of the region, lack of public transport and a wide range of socio-economic groups indicated a greater need to foster the arts at a local level.

The DRMC provides learning and performance opportunities for musicians of all ages and abilities. Some of their projects have been focused around bushfire recovery, women’s suffrage, youth development, mental health, disability advocacy and war veterans. Their dual focus is on fostering participation at the community level while also engaging and employing creative professionals to assist in the delivery of these projects. Many children who began playing music at DRMC have gone on to become professional performing musicians, teachers, or stage management professionals.

# ARTS AND CULTURE: THE HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

Australia's artistic and cultural history is a work in progress, but for First Nations people on this continent, arts and cultural practices have been fundamental in the continuation of our identities, our resistance and our existence. The arts have always occupied a central place in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society. They are a part of our everyday way of life.

While contemporary Indigenous art, music and culture is rightly celebrated, there is still denial and distraction from the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been showing and sharing knowledge about our art and culture since the time of first contact. Art existed in what we now call Australia before European colonisation, however our current and modern perceptions of arts and cultural practices is especially embryonic. Many of the notions that governed the early European reception of First Nations art remain with us in the present day.

But the truth is we are the first storytellers, instrument makers and artists of the world with the oldest continuous living culture on planet Earth.

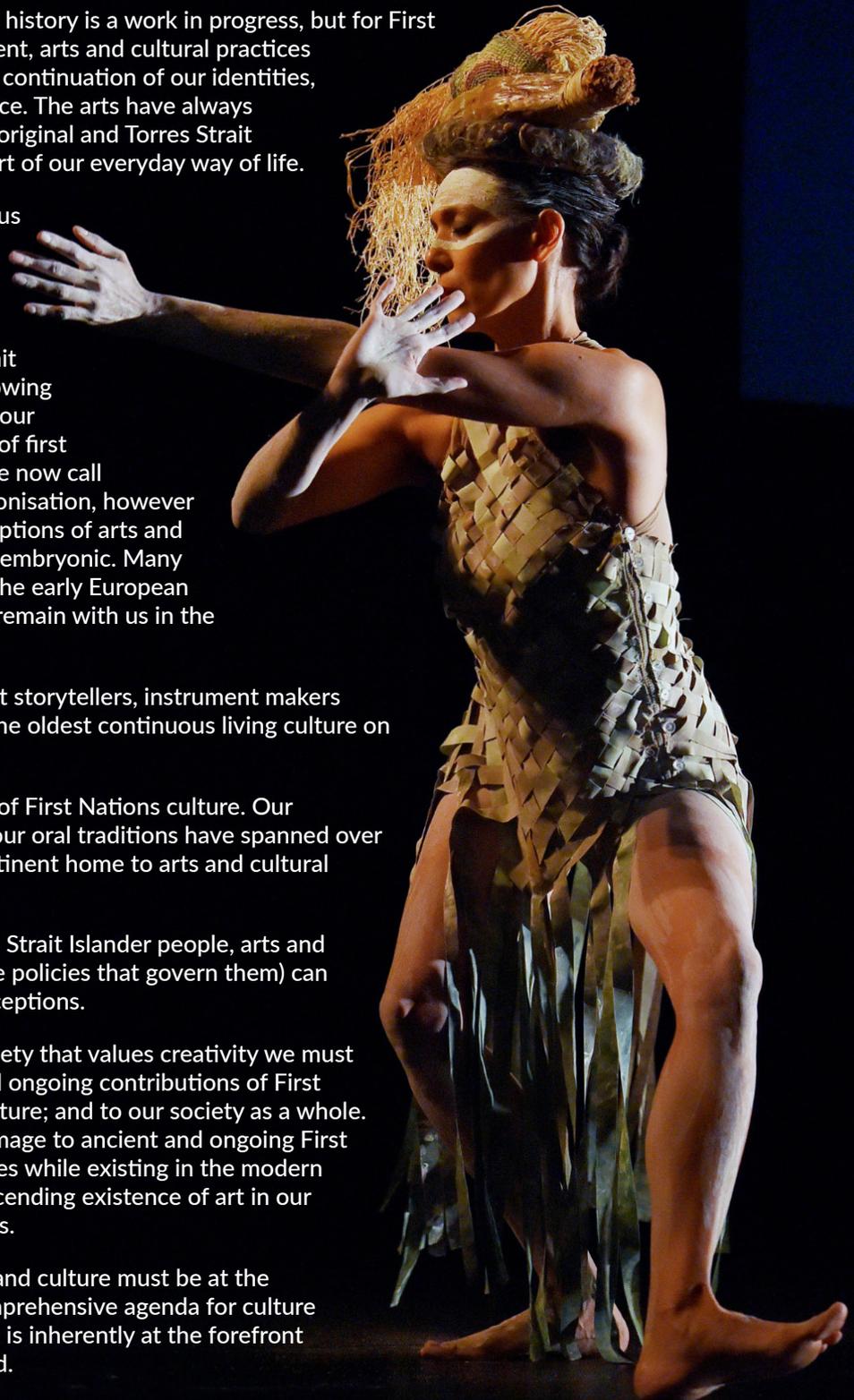
Art in all its forms is the basis of First Nations culture. Our dreaming, our languages and our oral traditions have spanned over 80,000 years, making this continent home to arts and cultural practice for centuries.

Without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, arts and culture in this country (and the policies that govern them) can only be based on modern perceptions.

For us to be a progressive society that values creativity we must first understand the larger and ongoing contributions of First Nations people to arts and culture; and to our society as a whole. When we respect and pay homage to ancient and ongoing First Nations traditions and practices while existing in the modern world, we recognise the transcending existence of art in our cultural fabric as human beings.

This is why First Nations arts and culture must be at the forefront of our plan for a comprehensive agenda for culture and civil society in Australia. It is inherently at the forefront of how we have always existed.

**Nathalie McLean, MEAA First Nations, First Peoples Organiser**



# WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE CURRENT APPROACH?

Our need for a comprehensive national framework for arts and culture has suffered from a historically inconsistent approach.

The lack of leadership which we have observed in the cultural sector over the last 50 years was accelerated by recent Coalition governments, deepening the crisis of austerity, participation and insecurity.

As a result, arts and culture have come to be viewed as remote from everyday life – as something to be sought out, paid for, accessed and utilised.

There has been little understanding or recognition of the importance of media, arts and culture in all aspects of life: infrastructure, transport, environment, education, economy, health and care services.

While the connection between arts, culture and community are sometimes recognised as themes in cultural policy, we have not seen the sustained, holistic approach needed to effectively restore investment and build participation across the sector.

Despite the critical role that media, arts and culture play in Australia's economy and society, they still suffer from systemic under-recognition.

This points to a much bigger challenge for our sector: Do we know how to define public value in cultural activity? Do we have trust in our institutions and processes to articulate the public interest value of Australian arts, media and culture?

Our agenda questions this capacity

and aims to address the problem by focusing on the building blocks of public participation.

## A CRISIS IN POLITICAL COMMITMENT

Over the past four decades, political commitment to media, arts and culture has been unpredictable and incon-

Since 1996, Australia has had nine Arts Ministers, only one of whom remained in office for a period longer than three years. Two national cultural policies created by the Australian Labor Party in 1994 and 2013, prior to their subsequent election losses – *Creative Nation* and *Creative Australia* – proved to be fleeting attempts to recognise the true value of cultural activity within Australia.

Under Prime Minister Paul Keating, *Creative Nation* (1994) put greater emphasis on the contributions of First Nations communities, while also placing the Australia Council on a system of triennial funding, delivering more sector stability.<sup>4</sup>

These developments were built upon almost two decades later by *Creative Australia* (2013), which focused on making arts and culture more accessible for all Australians. This agenda also advocated for greater recognition of First Nations arts and culture, increased investment in the Australia Council, and placed additional importance on the contribution of the cultural workforce.

In the bid to recognise arts and culture as a core part of Australian society, *Creative Australia* planned to connect the arts with other government portfolios through a 'National Arts and Culture Accord'. This was a commitment between all levels of government to invest in and develop Australia's cultural sector.

However, the election of a Liberal government six months following *Creative Australia's* announcement

“  
*In any civilised community the arts and associated amenities must occupy a central place. Their enjoyment should not be seen as something remote from everyday life.*  
”

Gough Whitlam

sistent. Australian party politics and shifting political cycles have had a corrosive effect on cultural policy and investment.<sup>3</sup>

From the late 1970s onwards, responsibility for arts and culture has been transferred across various ministries and portfolios including Home Affairs, Communications, Information Technology and Infrastructure.

3 Winkoff, T. 2020. 'Arguing Value: Attitudes and Activism', in *The Australian Art Field: Practices, Policies, Institutions*, pp. 195-206. New York: Routledge.

4 Ibid



**Across all three levels of government, per capita spending on arts and culture has declined by 4.9% between 2007 and 2018, from \$289 per person to \$275 per person.**

**In the same period, federal government spending, per capita, on arts and culture declined by 19%.**

**Source: A New Approach, The Big Picture: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia, 2019**

meant that this plan was overhauled and replaced with the National Programme for Excellence in the Arts, which came under the direct control of Arts Minister George Brandis.

The demise of both *Creative Nation* and *Creative Australia* demonstrates how election cycles, changing governments and shifting political interests can quickly thwart the development of any long-term vision for arts and culture.

While MEAA welcomes the Albanese Government's and Arts Minister Tony Burke's renewed commitment to a national cultural policy, which is restoring and building upon the vision and framework of *Creative Australia*, history shows that such efforts can only be truly productive if sustained across electoral cycles. For this, we need a movement led by the voices and interests of our cultural workforce

and communities, as represented by MEAA.

### A CRISIS IN FUNDING

This historic instability has also meant that government investment in the sector has been scattered and inconsistent.

Since its creation in 1975 under the Whitlam Government, the Australia Council for the Arts has held the crucial role of providing arms-length, peer-assessed funding to the arts and cultural sector.

Despite being established as an independent entity, the Council has always been subject to the indirect influence of a Federal Minister, through budget allocations, nominations to the Council and control over the Council's strategic plans. Between 2015 and 2016, for instance, Arts Minister George

Brandis withdrew \$25.4 million from the Council's budget and had direct control over the allocation of remaining funds.<sup>5</sup>

Recent COVID-related initiatives, including the RISE fund, continued the trend of eroding the principle of arms-length, independent decision-making. Whilst this principle remains vital to the sustainability of our sector, its effective implementation is often unclear.<sup>6</sup>

Over the last decade or so, there has also been a marked decrease in the total amount of government investment into arts and culture. Between 2007 and 2018, the Federal Government's investment in arts and culture declined by 19% per capita.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the national public broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, have suffered from funding cuts starving them of the ability to

5 Caust, J. 2016. 'The continuing saga around arts funding and the cultural wars in Australia', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 25, no. 6.

6 Ibid.

7 A New Approach. 2019. *The Big Picture: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia*.

produce programming, news and entertainment. Since 2013, when the Coalition was elected to government, \$526 million has been slashed from the ABC and 640 jobs have been lost, with much of the impact felt by the broadcaster's news division.<sup>8</sup>

Remedying the crisis in regional journalism has also been problematic. While the Public Interest News Gathering program (PING) was a welcome and necessary step, providing emergency assistance for regional journalism, the application of the program was flawed. Initial

received only \$10,000 of funding or missed out completely.<sup>9</sup>

More recently, the restoration of \$83.7 million of funding to the ABC by the new Albanese Government, and the transition from a three to five-year funding cycle for public broadcasters are steps in the right direction, however it will take years more work to rebuild these vital public institutions.

If emerging community-based networks, independent artists and small-to-medium organisations

## Market versus merit

The faltering political commitment to media, arts and culture have led some to reasonably question whether public expenditure on arts and culture is no longer determined by public value, but by profit and commercial outcomes alone.

In 2015, the three main criteria which were used to allocate funding from the Australia Council to organisations were: 'artistic merit', 'organisational competence' and 'contribution to the Strategic Goals of the Australia Council'.<sup>10</sup>

While these are laudable objectives, do they warrant pre-eminence in funding decisions?

Does this represent a scramble by the Council to manage competing demands, perceived political fiat and diminishing resources?

Over time, and in the absence of secure work and stable incomes, funding has become appropriated into a set of rules and criteria which cultural workers and organisations must fulfil in order to keep afloat.

This institutional set-up has led to greater competition for cultural funds and fragmentation across the sector, threatening the productive and creative interdependencies that are its key asset and social contribution.

In this context, arts, culture, and media are deemed 'useful' only when they produce concrete and measurable outcomes.

The pervasive influence of the market has created an environment where recognition of artistic, cultural and journalistic activity is dependent upon the direct monetary value or 'savings' it produces.

Although it is important to recognise arguments about the vast economic benefits of media, arts and culture, we must also look more broadly at the intrinsic and immeasurable value of cultural and civic activity, because

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**More than 75% of us agree that the arts are important to Australian culture and that it enhances our national reputation.**

**75% of us agree that artistic and creative practices have positive effects on social integration and community relations.**

**Well over 80% of Australians appreciate that the Arts and entertainment industry creates jobs and that arts and structured creative practice are vital to childhood development.**

**Source: Measure Theory Analytics, Polling for MEAA, March 2020**

funding of \$50 million was soon exhausted with 87% of the funds flowing to just 10 recipients.

Rather than supporting small and independent publishers and broadcasters, the main beneficiaries of the fund were large, established media owners, with four companies alone receiving just under \$30 million.

Most independent regional newspapers selected under PING

continue to receive little government investment and support, they will be forced to rely on alternative forms of income and support: on charity, private donations, volunteering and fundraising.

This will put more pressure on cultural sector work, further reducing the capacity of this workforce and undermining generational confidence in the sector.

8 MEAA, 'End of ABC funding freeze won't bring back lost jobs and programming', 7 February 2022.

9 MEAA, 'Government must invest in regional media or more outlets will close', March 23, 2022.

10 Caust, op. cit..

*“As a teacher, the student numbers for drama have declined in the last two years. Our school has only one drama class this year, compared to several classes in prior years. I have heard through colleagues that this decline is across NSW. We have been unable to put on shows, and parents may feel such a career is undesirable given the devastation of our sector from COVID and the lack of government response.”*

*Survey participant, NSW*



it is here where public interest in the sector is defined.

Where markets fail, it is the responsibility of our governments to recognise and preserve this value, rather than impose commercial and market-based measures which tend to erode rather than build the sector.

## A CRISIS IN PARTICIPATION

Not only is government and public sector leadership failing us, but major disruptions to demand and participation have created a set of challenges that the sector has not responded to well.

The ever-increasing demands of modern life — of rising costs-of-living, affordability, debt, employment and domestic work — have constructed a set of real and imagined barriers

around media, arts and culture that have significantly reduced participation.

Between July and August 2020, MEAA conducted a public survey about participation in arts and culture, and found that the three major obstacles to participation in cultural activities were ‘available time’ (69.2%), ‘cost of the activity’ (68.5%) and ‘additional costs (e.g. travel costs)’ (43.6%).<sup>11</sup>

In a similar survey conducted by MEAA on orchestras and classical music, 56% of people cited ‘cost (tickets and/or the total cost of an evening out)’ as a significant barrier to attendance, while 52.6% of people noted that they would be more likely to attend a live performance by an orchestra if tickets were less expensive.<sup>12</sup>

These findings are similar to those

from the Australia Council’s National Arts Participation Survey (2017), which found that ‘time’ (34%) and ‘cost’ (39%) were the two major obstacles to arts engagement and participation.<sup>13</sup>

Despite more than 75% of Australians agreeing that arts and culture are vital, many feel that cultural activity is too expensive and inaccessible.

In MEAA’s same survey into participation, key issues cited by respondents included the lack of flexibility when it comes to accessing community arts and culture, the limited variety of community activities, and shortages in the availability of arts and cultural programs across public schools.

Many also cited the need for greater community support and acceptance of the value of cultural activity across

11 Measure Theory Analytics, *Polling for MEAA*, March 2020.

12 Measure Theory Analytics, *Polling for MEAA*, August 2019.

13 Australia Council, *National Arts Participation Survey*, 2017.

society at large.

The news media industry is also suffering from issues of reduced access, opportunity and participation.

In a survey conducted by MEAA in the middle of 2022, 66% of respondents reported that they have 'little to no' access to local news, while 68% reported having 'little to no' access to regional news.

Large parts of regional and rural Australia and pockets of capital cities are becoming 'news deserts' with no local media at all, or at best, tokenistic coverage from distant locations.

As media outlets have closed, leaving towns without their community newspaper, radio or TV station, or smaller media outlets have simply consolidated into bigger businesses elsewhere, local content has been slashed dramatically if not abandoned altogether.

Along the way, we have seen critical areas where journalism preserves public interest — like courts coverage, local council and corporate malfeasance — be taken out of play.<sup>14</sup>

## Participation by whom?

These barriers to participation disproportionately disadvantage those from low socio-economic status communities, people with a disability, migrants, refugees, LGBTQIA+ communities and First Nations people.

First Nations people, who are one of the fastest growing segments of our population, remain at risk from a range of factors reflected in high rates of incarceration, suicide, unemployment, substance abuse and disability.

Too many First Nations people are shut out from cultural participation, due to mounting inequalities and systemic discrimination.

However, researchers at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research have found that First Nations people who participate in arts and culture are more likely to be employed and more than twice as likely to have a degree.

For First Nations Australians, arts and culture make an important contribution to their livelihoods and wellbeing. Elders must be supported to pass on cultural knowledge to younger generations before it's lost.

People with disability are also confronted with countless barriers that prevent them from accessing cultural facilities, services, resources, and activities, whether that be as artists, cultural workers or audiences.

Inaccessible booking and ticketing options, inadequate assistive technologies, poor physical access, a lack of digital and hybrid options, and the stigmatisation of disability all contribute to the systemic exclusion of people with disability in arts and culture. This is made more challenging by financial barriers such as ticket costs and the additional costs of carers, support workers and specialised transport.

The inaccessibility of arts organisations, funding bodies, cultural facilities and venues means that cultural workers with disability are less and less able to find stable opportunities for work. In 2017, the Australia Council for the Arts found that artists with disability earn on average 42% less than those without disability.<sup>15</sup>

Migrants, refugees and First Nations people with disability face additional stigma and disadvantage. In 2014-15,

14 MEAA, *Rescuing Regional Journalism*, February 2022.

15 Throsby, D., and Petetskaya, K, 2017, *Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*, Australia Council for the Arts.

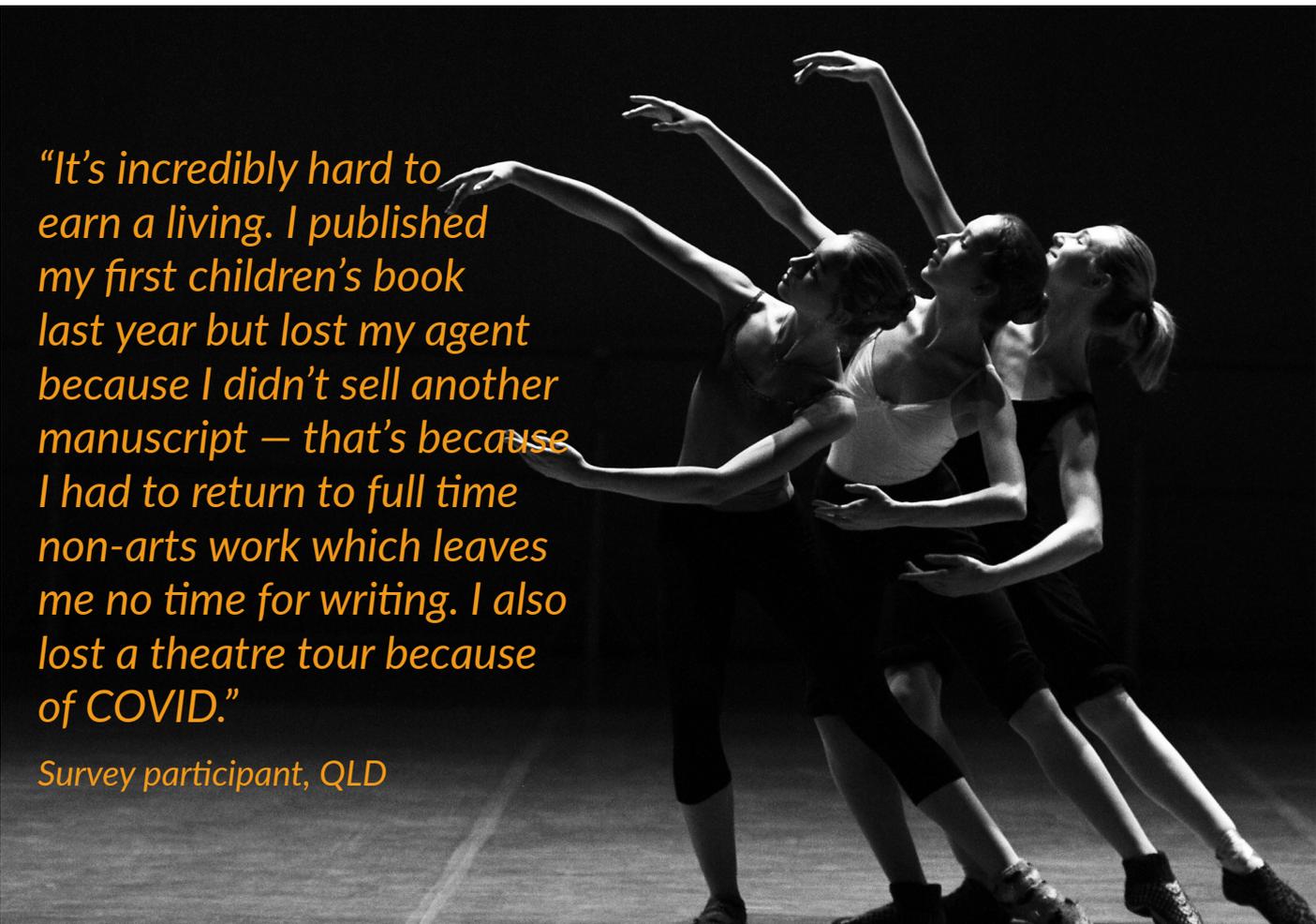
## Case study

### **Bukal (2019)**

*"I'm all about making a difference and making lives for our people and our kids better... If I can reach young people of today and tomorrow and the future (with my story and this play), I hope to inspire them to go for great heights, dream, dream, but capture those dreams and move forward with them." - Henrietta Fourmile Marrie.*

**Bukal** is a First Nations theatre work which documents the life and story of Australia's first Indigenous member of the United Nations, Henrietta Fourmile Marrie. The work follows Henrietta's journey to eradicate racism in Australia and to return her Great Grandfather Ye-i-nie's Shell Regalia from the basement of the British Museum. **Bukal** is a powerful reflection of Australia's violent colonial history and the way it continues to manifest through present-day laws, institutions and education. It also sheds light on the power of Aboriginal culture and its spiritual, Earth-centred practice.

**Bukal** was developed as part of JUTE Theatre Company's Dare to Dream program, which produced and toured new theatre works by, about and for First Nations peoples. These works have been toured throughout regional and remote schools and communities in Far North Queensland. The work aimed to engage First Nations people in all aspects of decision-making and creative practice, with Henrietta Fourmile Marrie as Executive Producer, and other First Nations collaborators in the role of director, writer, actor, sound designer and stage and tour manager.



*“It’s incredibly hard to earn a living. I published my first children’s book last year but lost my agent because I didn’t sell another manuscript – that’s because I had to return to full time non-arts work which leaves me no time for writing. I also lost a theatre tour because of COVID.”*

*Survey participant, QLD*

the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) found that 23% of First Nations people with disability participate in arts and culture, compared to 31% of First Nations people without a disability.<sup>16</sup>

These trends are also symptomatic of Australia’s media sector, which remains hampered by a lack of diversity that continues, for example, to see people from a non-Anglo-Celtic background under-represented in newsrooms across the country.

Research in 2020 found that in terms of frequency of appearance on screen, more than 75% of presenters, commentators and reporters have an Anglo-Celtic background, while only 6% have either an Indigenous or non-European background.<sup>17</sup>

The lack of diversity in our cultural sector limits the voices we are exposed to, the stories deemed “worthy” of being told, and the way news is reported.

This prevents media, arts and culture from reaching broader audiences, as people fail to see their cultures represented and reflected.

### **Cascading costs hinder participation**

When we participate in cultural activity, we don’t just pay for the activity itself, but for the additional costs of transportation, of going out, of equipment and supplies.

As it becomes more expensive to participate in cultural activity, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, who live remotely, or

who are part of marginalised groups, become increasingly unable to participate in arts and culture.

Similar barriers to accessing public interest journalism have led to fewer people paying for news, while reported ‘interest’ in news has plummeted.

MEAA’s survey from mid-2022 found that 55% of respondents did not have any paid news or current affairs subscription and that cost ran second only to lack of trust in media as the biggest barrier preventing them from reading, watching or listening to news and current affairs.

Because of these barriers, people felt most misinformed about the activities of their local government, for example.<sup>18</sup>

16 Australia Council, 2017, *Living Culture: First Nations arts participation and wellbeing*.

17 Media Diversity Australia, *Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories: Putting the Spotlight on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Television News and Current Affairs*, August 2020 ([mediadiversityaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Who-Gets-To-Tell-Australian-Stories\\_LAUNCH-VERSION.pdf](https://mediadiversityaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Who-Gets-To-Tell-Australian-Stories_LAUNCH-VERSION.pdf))

18 Let’s Get Creative Media Survey, August 2022.

Barriers in cost, time and opportunity also contribute to entrenched perceptions of arts, media and culture as 'inaccessible', 'elite' and 'not for me'.

In an Australia Council Survey, the percentage of people who believed that 'the arts tend to attract people who are somewhat elitist or pretentious' increased from 30% to 43% in the three-year period from 2013 to 2016.<sup>19</sup>

A similar trend can be seen for people who agree that 'the arts are not really for people "like me"', which increased from 13% to 22% in the same three-year period.<sup>20</sup>

If cultural activities are perceived as overly commercial, profit-driven or to not operate in the interests of wider society, average Australians are less likely to define and respect these activities as 'arts and culture', or as important elements of civil society.

In a society where cultural activity is viewed not as a public good, but as a commodity or service to be bought and sold on the market, access becomes reserved for the privileged few, while those who are excluded continue to be denied the intrinsic developmental and economic benefits of participation.

## Consumers or creators?

What begins to develop as a result of these lowering rates of participation is a culture that is increasingly defined by 'consumption' rather than 'creation'.

Through a poll conducted in 2020, MEAA found that 59.7% of participants defined themselves as 'consumers' of creative content, while only 9.5% of participants defined themselves as 'creators'.<sup>21</sup>

In recent times, Federal Governments have failed to provide sustained support for Australian stories on screen, instead relying on piecemeal funding, including the temporary location offset fund for international productions.

The lack of ongoing support and regulation of the screen sector means that we are failing to maximise the benefits we could be getting from offshore investment and failing to leverage those benefits to deliver compelling Australian stories for local and international audiences.

This jeopardises our culture at home and wastes our potential as an important player in a high-profile, high-impact global industry. Australia is becoming susceptible to 'brain drain', as highly skilled arts

and entertainment workers seek job opportunities offshore. Even worse, younger Australians are at risk of forgetting what it's like to see themselves, their experiences, values and potential portrayed on screen.

Following this corrosive trend, artistic and cultural experiences become isolated and isolating. Media, arts and culture is something that is 'done' to us and becomes disconnected from the very communities where authentic Australian culture is created, shared and enjoyed.

To counter this trend, our agenda identifies active participation as the foundation of civil society and as essential for performers, artists, writers, technicians and audiences.

## Impact of COVID

The media, arts and entertainment sectors suffered enormously from the COVID-19 pandemic, successive lockdowns and economic disruption.

As an industry reliant on public gatherings, community engagement and participation, employment declined significantly across many parts of the sector.

In the first three months of the pandemic, from February to May

19 Australia Council, *National Arts Participation Survey*, 2017.

20 Ibid.

21 Measure Theory Analytics, *Polling for MEAA*, March 2020.

## Case study

### Akolkol Dastan Gesa (2017-2018)

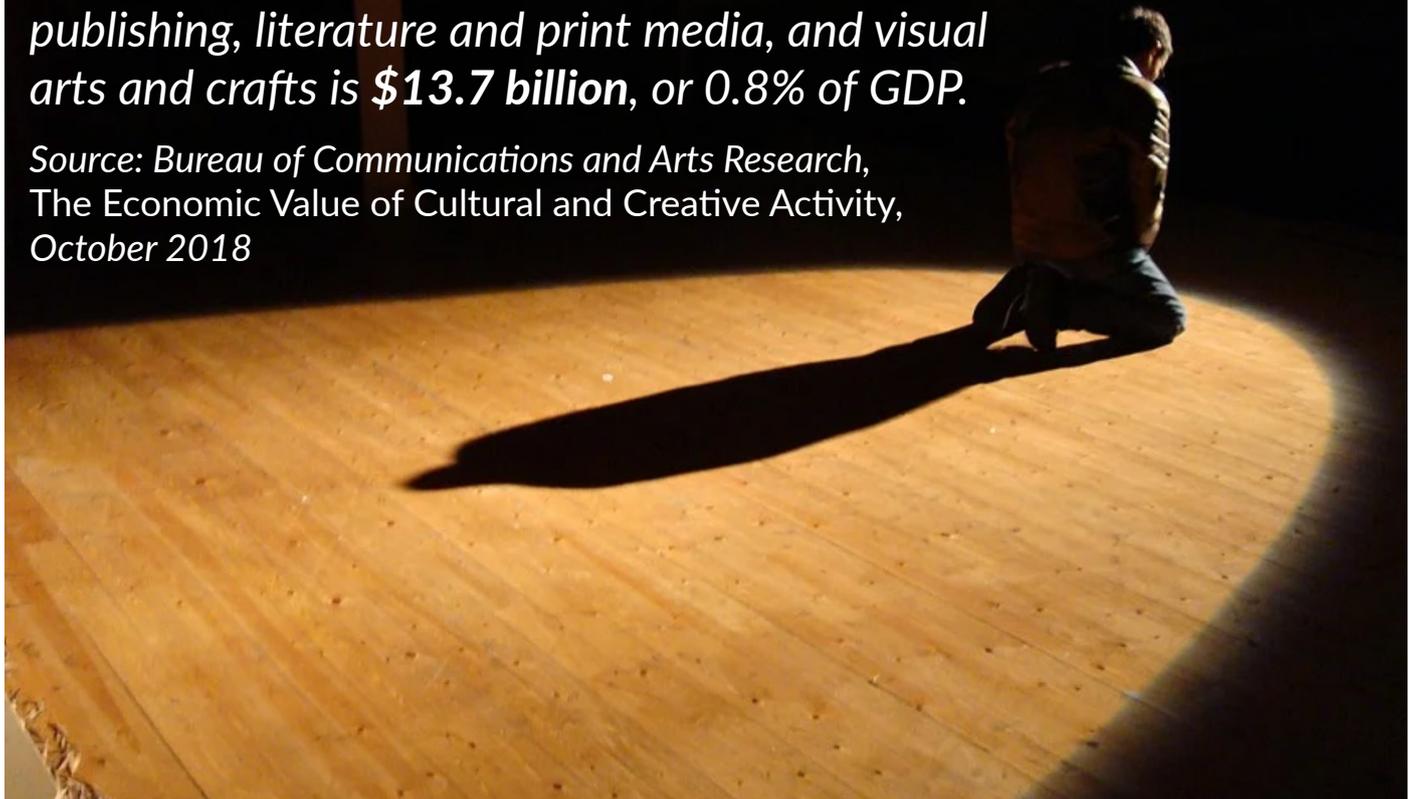
#### *Fostering Inclusion for Migrant and Refugee Communities*

Akolkol Dastan Gesa is a community arts and cultural development (CACD) project which gives young people between the ages of 12 and 29, from migrant and refugee communities, the opportunity to harness their unique voices through different forms of storytelling: song writing, poetry, beat-making, recording, dancing, filming and screening. Akolkol Dastan Gesa means 'story' in three of the many languages spoken by participants: Dinka, Dari and Arabic.

Thirty young people were able to collaborate with a team of artists (musicians, cinematographers, choreographers, directors) to create a music video called SAME DRUM. The music video was released for Harmony Week in 2018 and broadcast on national television, radio and online to over 500,000 people. Akolkol Dastan Gesa has played a critical role in empowering young people from a range of migrant and refugee backgrounds, while also increasing diversity on screen. The project was supported by project partners Beyond Empathy, Aranmore Catholic College, DADAA, Community Arts Network and the Australia Council for the Arts.

*Between 2008 and 2017, the total value of cultural and creative activity in Australia rose by 30% to **\$111.7 billion** per annum, or 6.4% of GDP. The combined economic value of the performing arts, film and broadcast media, music composition and publishing, literature and print media, and visual arts and crafts is **\$13.7 billion**, or 0.8% of GDP.*

*Source: Bureau of Communications and Arts Research, The Economic Value of Cultural and Creative Activity, October 2018*



2020, employment across creative and performing arts decreased by 32.5%, publishing decreased by 23.3% and motion pictures and sound recording decreased by 37.5%.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the JobKeeper wage subsidy being available to the sector in theory, precious few media, arts and entertainment workers received support because the reality of employment practices in the sector made them ineligible. The scheme was simply not fit for purpose in our sector.

Shifts in consumer behaviour due to unemployment, loss of income and steadily rising costs also continue to impact the sector.

From March to June 2020, household spending on culture and recreation

decreased by more than 15% and from 2022, major performing arts companies were continuing to report audience numbers over 20% less than pre-COVID levels, with many anticipating a five year recovery period.

COVID-19 has further entrenched the already-existing obstacles of time, cost, and availability which were previously stopping Australians from participating in cultural activity.

The prevailing approach to arts and culture has served to quash rather than cultivate demand, driving marginalisation and division in the process.

Currently there is no apparent framework addressing the inadvertent barriers that discourage people from

participating in media, arts and culture, while meaningful attempts to reconcile the ongoing effects of the pandemic on the sector are often viewed with scepticism.

### **A CRISIS OF WORK**

An immediate consequence of reduced investment, diminishing support for cultural activity, low rates of participation and collapsing media business models is the evisceration of stable work, good jobs and careers.

The majority of the cultural workforce is marginalised from stable work, engaged as contractors and freelancers in jobs that are unregulated and inherently insecure.

Musicians work in an industry where 90% of work is not regulated by a minimum fee, up to a quarter of gigs

<sup>22</sup> Pennington and Eltham, op. cit.

are unpaid, and undercutting is rife.

With more than a third of permanent journalism jobs lost in the past decade, the news media industry has come to rely more on outsourcing journalism to freelancers, who scramble for work with no effective minimum fees or standards.

no real understanding, training or incentive to establish physically and culturally safe workplaces.

Screen industry workers, for instance, are being pressured into jobs with work schedules of 12 hour-plus days and heightening health and safety risks.

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*“Too often arts activities in the City appear to be of stronger quality than out west, despite the fact that there is strong talent and a unique Western Sydney culture. Where I live, I need to search more to learn more about quality, local activities, particularly workshops.”*

*Survey participant, NSW*

On the sets of some of the biggest and most profitable productions, work is routinely governed by decision-makers who are remote and have

In the presence of economic insecurity and unstable employment, workers are left vulnerable to bullying, harassment and discrimination.

The *Raising Their Voices* (2022) report, which presents the findings of an independent review into sexual harm, sexual harassment and systemic discrimination in the Australian contemporary music industry, found that 72% of women survey participants and 39% of male survey participants had experienced some form of workplace sexual harassment.<sup>23</sup>

Of these participants, only 3% felt comfortable enough to make a formal report, while 71% of those who made a formal or informal report of sexual harassment stated that their career progression was impacted as a result of making a report about misconduct.<sup>24</sup>

While those in permanent jobs struggle to make the most of the collective bargaining system in an era of declining public funding and commercial disruption, freelancers simply struggle to be paid a fair fee, and on time.

If these trends continue, workers, families and communities will continue to miss out on the intrinsic, developmental and direct economic benefits of a thriving cultural sector.

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23 MAPN Consulting, *Raising Their Voices*, 2022.

24 Ibid

# OUR VISION FOR BUILDING A CULTURAL AGENDA

We envision a society where media, arts and culture are recognised as vital to everyday life.

A society where our transport systems, healthcare, education, care services, housing, utilities, and public infrastructure work together to facilitate access to media, arts and culture within our communities.

Our vision for a renewed system of arts, culture and civil society is based on tangible outcomes for the community and all parts of society.

It would recognise that arts and culture have far-reaching value stretching beyond their market price; that there is demand and need for them; that they should be accessible and available to all; and that they must be effectively and sustainably funded, for societal improvement rather than for profit alone.

A plan to rebuild our cultural sector and revitalise participation in civil society would build the civic and economic demand to create secure jobs and safe workplaces.

Decisions on public investment would be channelled through employment, the visibility and recognition of work, and respect and reward for the workforce.

The plan would be driven by the centrality of work and the values at the heart of our union: equity, respect, fairness and safety.

## A PLAN FOR CHANGE

It has become evident from the failure of past approaches that what has been missing is the sustained social and political organisation – the ‘voice’ – required to support and drive the creation of a comprehensive agenda for culture and civil society.

for decades. It must reflect our national cultural consciousness, our stories and our values.

Our objective is an agenda that moves us beyond the argument of elites versus the rest.

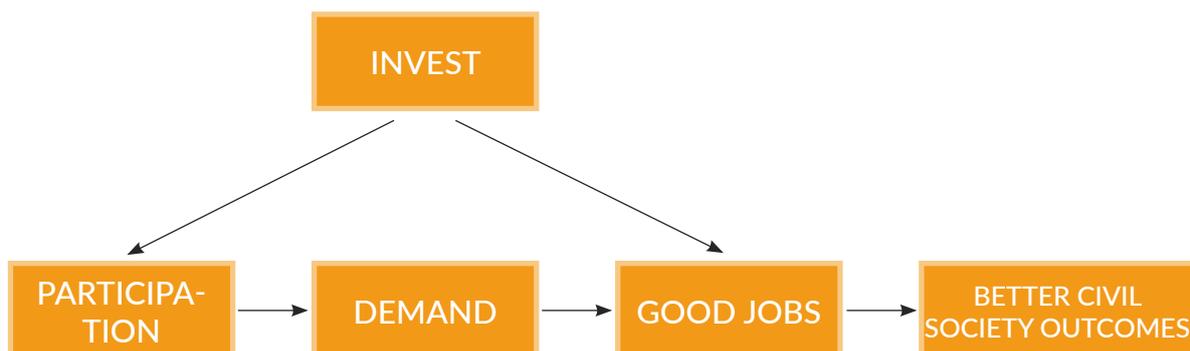
We need an agenda which reconciles

*“The abandonment of the arts in all forms by the federal and state governments in Australia is appalling. The denial of any kind of support to the hugely important arts industry during COVID is astonishingly unfair. The denial by our governments that the arts have anything to contribute to the social life and the well-being of all Australians indicates only too well that our governments don’t care about a huge part of our economy. A country without an arts industry is a country in poverty.”*

*Survey participant, NSW*

An effective agenda for culture and civil society must be led and shaped by our communities; by the people who have supported and sustained cultural and creative life in Australia

the failures of past approaches; one that is not simply the product of government or part of another political program, no matter how well intentioned.



We need an agenda that recognises, enables and expands a community consensus on culture and civil society as social practice.

### Why do we need a community-based approach?

Cultural and civic activity is the stuff of life, involving families, friends, schools, businesses and all levels of government.

It keeps us healthy, functioning, creative and productive.

There is ample opportunity for media, arts and culture to be embedded within the broad scope of policy settings, national plans and initiatives which govern and facilitate the way we live.

This agenda is not just about arts and cultural policy – it's about all policy. It is not simply about funding, but about initiatives to grow demand for media, arts and culture across all parts of society.

There are countless community-based organisations, initiatives and activities

across the country which play a crucial part in sustaining Australia's cultural life and civil society. However, they have often emerged and grown in spite of government support and exist unrecognised by any sustained and overarching plan.

We aim to create a flourishing arts and cultural sector by design, not by chance.

While the private sector, commercial interests, philanthropists, donors, and sponsors are a vital and welcome part of the media, arts and entertainment community, they cannot replace the role of governments who, on our behalf, must ensure that the interests of communities are represented in cultural policy, plans, practices and institutions.

Our agenda would not only ensure that there are ample opportunities to participate across all spheres of life – that there are enough local media outlets, art schools, dance teachers, music events and literary workshops – but also that there are adequate support systems to enable families

and communities to participate in these activities and benefit from these services.

Dominant and Eurocentric views still encompass the way we view media, arts and culture, spurring the language of efficiency, productivity and 'outcomes'.

First Nations people have a unique understanding of the importance of arts and cultural practices in everyday life, from both traditional and contemporary viewpoints.

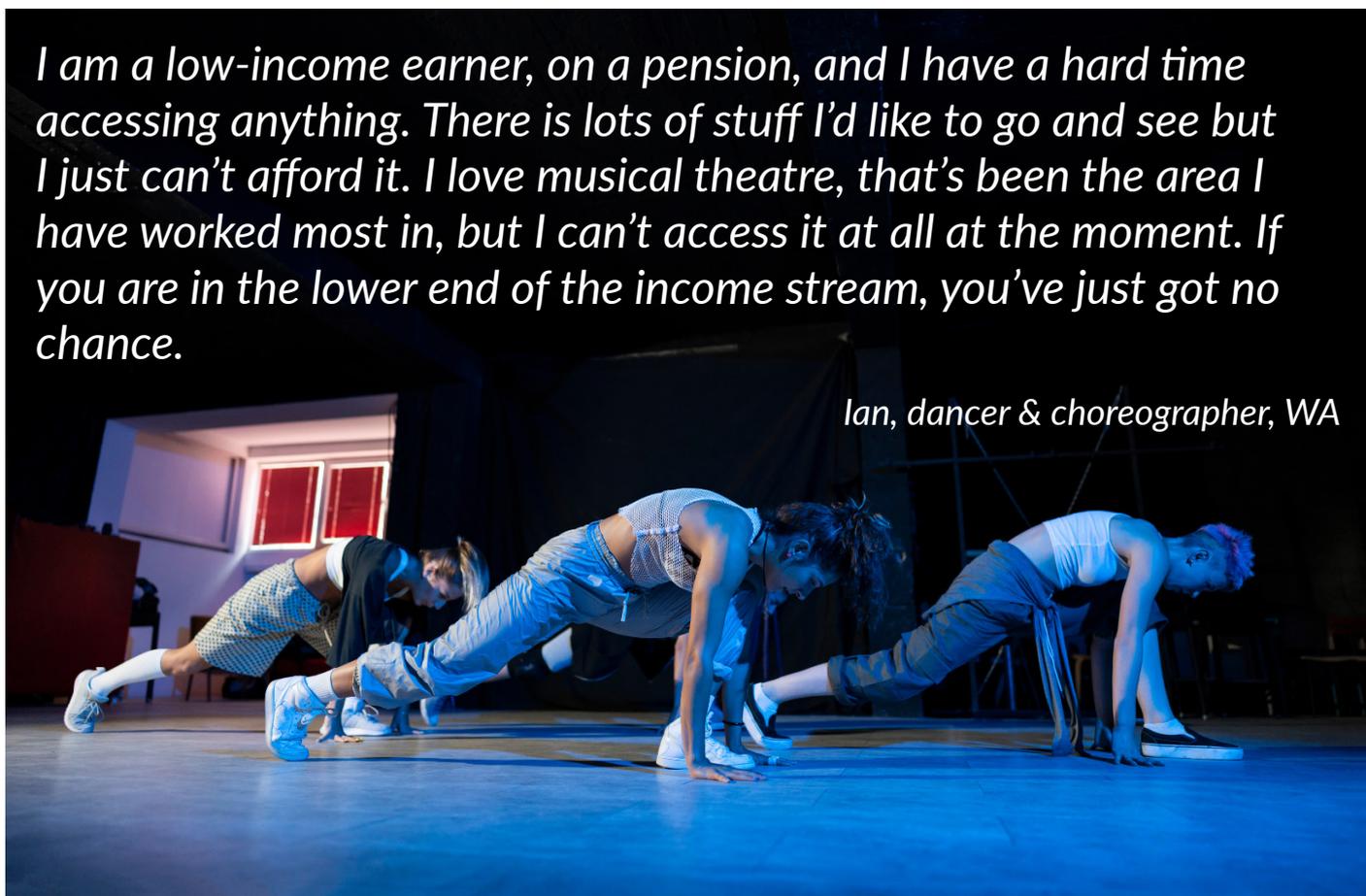
Further education and consultation with First Nations communities needs to be a priority while building a comprehensive and socially progressive agenda for culture and civil society.

An effective agenda must reconcile the failures of the past by not repeating them.

By embedding media, arts and culture in the policies which govern our work life, this agenda would ensure that we all have the time to participate.

*I am a low-income earner, on a pension, and I have a hard time accessing anything. There is lots of stuff I'd like to go and see but I just can't afford it. I love musical theatre, that's been the area I have worked most in, but I can't access it at all at the moment. If you are in the lower end of the income stream, you've just got no chance.*

*Ian, dancer & choreographer, WA*



By embedding media, arts and culture in the policies which govern our industrial and social support systems, we will ensure that families and communities are not bound by the constraints of income.

By reforming transport policies and investing in regional arts and culture, we will ensure that suburban, regional and rural communities are no longer constrained by location.

By connecting media, arts and culture with strategies for social inclusion, the most marginalised, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in our society would be given greater opportunity to participate in cultural and civic life.

By ensuring that investment, funding and facilitative policy is delivered through the creation and support of good jobs and safer workplaces, our agenda will build the country's social, cultural and economic capacity.

By ensuring that policy and regulation of our cultural industries effectively leverages investment and local skills, our agenda will build domestic cultural industries that contribute to the economic and cultural development of our communities.

By placing communities at the fore, a comprehensive agenda for culture

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*“I feel awkward joining artistic or cultural groups even if I really want to be part of them because I feel like I’m not “a professional” and that I wouldn’t fit in.”*

*Survey Participant, ACT*

*“We need affordable access, availability, and removal of social stigma. Creative and artistic activities are looked down upon once you are no longer a child. To be an adult participating in them is seen as ‘indulgent’ or a waste of time if they are not work related or about making money.”*

*Survey Participant, NSW*

and civil society will create the audiences, the workforce, and the demand which will sustain arts, culture and democratic practice into the future.

With improved community participation in media, arts and

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culture in all its forms, we will come to identify the public good, along with the institutions, policies and practices we need to sustain and develop it.

This is the foundation to creating a better society for all.

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## APPENDIX:

# A NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

*This submission was made to the National Cultural Policy Review commissioned by Federal Arts Minister Tony Burke.*

MEAA strongly supports the development of a national cultural policy and endorses the five pillars.

Government has a critical role in setting the tone and scope of our national cultural ambitions. Government must foster growing arts and media sectors and spruik their undoubted role in shaping our culture and economic future.

Notwithstanding the challenging economic environment in which this consultation is being undertaken, there ought to be an acknowledgment that federal government support for artistic and cultural endeavours has fallen by 17% over the thirteen years to 2020, with federal per capita cultural expenditure declining from \$138.71 to \$107.20. The pandemic has made the arts ecosystem more fragile still.

A new policy must strive to provide financial and policy certainty. Creative workers – whether in the arts or media sectors - require engagement and respect.

A new cultural policy must acknowledge and address the vulnerability of the cultural workforce, many of whom earn less than the national minimum wage each year for their arts-related work.

The paucity of earnings from cultural occupations has multiple impacts: it discourages long-term work in the sector; it negatively impacts the sector's overall viability; it also has a considerable impact on the welfare of the workers concerned. It is little wonder that the number of workers in the arts and entertainment sector has been static for decades. It is in this context that this submission supports:

- Government funding of artistic and related endeavours should be viewed as nation-building cultural investments rather than crude costs to government
- Ongoing targets for growth in participation in cultural activities in terms of both practitioners and audience members
- Greater financial support for First Nations and CALD creatives at both the company and individual artist levels (across arts forms)
- Democratisation and diversification of creative institutions' governance structures to reflect community diversity and ensure artist representation
- Converting STEM-related educational initiatives to STEAM, where arts and creativity are used to develop critical thinking and bolster overall academic outcomes
- Embedding artistic and cultural training in schools, as per the approach in the Creative Nation and Renewing Creative Nation policies
- Properly valuing Australian content by implementing firm rules for broadcasters and streaming services about funding and availability of domestic content
- Establishing a Code of Conduct (or statutory mechanism) that binds organisations using cultural labour to observe relevant employment and work safety standards
- Enhanced funding for major institutions such as the Australia Council and Screen Australia, with new funding directed to program diversification to attract new and emerging artists
- The imposition of a minimum \$250 payment per call for musicians where performances are part or fully supported by government funding.
- A federal inquiry into the Australian music industry to determine the equity and impact of commercial arrangements (recording contracts and streaming services) on performers
- Notwithstanding such an inquiry, Australia should move to formally adopt the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty to grant musicians economic rights for their recorded performances and "equitable remuneration" where performances are monetised

- Reversal of the damaging VET reforms that removed a range of performer-related courses from Commonwealth fee assistance and undermined the viability of training services
- Greater coordination of effort across the three tiers of government must be secured and joint work programs must be developed and subject to performance benchmarks.

### **Pillar One: First Nations**

Although strides have been made towards elevating First Nations arts and culture to its rightful place, there remains a persistent deficit in First Nations' stories. A major factor in this deficit is that cultural policy does not practically enable First Nations people to determine their own path. While galleries, museums and funding institutions have allocated space, resources and respect to First Nations' culture, many efforts have been grafted on to existing structures or made available through longstanding grants programs. Very little new money has been devoted to enabling our nation to embrace the world's oldest surviving culture, its histories and its stories.

MEAA support greater self-determination through either a separate First Nations cultural agency or through setting up autonomous structures within existing cultural institutions.

MEAA strongly support the tone and substance of Creative Australia; wherever possible, the provisions of this policy should be embraced in any new cultural policy, especially those elements that established training pathways to enable First Nations peoples to enter into creative work. Efforts must also be made to ensure places of artistic and related work are culturally safe for all First Nations employees and contributors.

MEAA also support the Government moving to realise some of its 2019 undertakings in the Renewing Creative Australia policy. Chief among these were the allocation of funding to record and preserve First Nations languages, the creation of a new Indigenous Theatre Company and dedicated grants for Indigenous musicians. These remain important objectives, the pursuit of which should not be discounted due to ongoing funding pressures.

### **Pillar Two: A Place for Every Story**

Greater diversity of artistic offerings builds audiences and support for the cultural sector. Our major cultural institutions are, however, significantly constrained in the amount of funding they can devote to supporting new cultural work efforts. MEAA strongly support funding being devoted to the development and showcasing of new works, especially those that are reflective of community diversity.

Beyond the artistic sector, the role of public interest journalism should be acknowledged as bearing important cultural dividends. Public interest journalism is a key component of Australia's story telling. So much of the nation's story telling is conveyed through news publications, yet the nation continues to bear witness to the ongoing degradation of local story-telling resources, especially in non-metropolitan areas. A considered effort must be crafted to restore and maintain the role of news production in environments where the scale of important news stories is being curtailed or eliminated.

Robust Australian content rules for the screen sector are also vital. A market the size of Australia's depends on content rules so that local stories are told and are made broadly available. However, as is well-known, Australia's content regime was undermined by the former federal government's relaxation of free-to-air broadcasters content rules and the ongoing failure to impose content obligations on SVOD providers.

MEAA support an Australian content levy of 20% of annual Australian revenues being imposed on streaming services of scale at the earliest opportunity. A portion of these funds should be devoted to the production of what, through past government misadventure, have become vulnerable art forms, such as children's live action drama.

A further important factor in building the nation's cultural portfolio is the provision of skills to produce artistic content. A renewed compact with the States and territories is needed to revive cultural training opportunities. Without cost-effective vocational training opportunities, the cultural and socio-economic diversity of Australia's artistic talent pool will be reduced. The broader cultural sector will also be denied the pool of practitioners it needs to ensure ongoing industry sustainability.

Australia's great national broadcasters are also central to commissioning and airing content. These broadcasters have unrivalled national audience reach. The ABC and SBS/NITV have however been hampered by cuts and/or stagnant funding over a decade. While MEAA acknowledge the five-year forward funding proposals now being advanced by Government, efforts must be made to increase national broadcaster funding so that its journalism

(itself a cultural dividend) and domestic content production can expand.

### **Pillar Three: Centrality of the Artist**

Creative workers face a persistent three-headed challenge: their work is almost always insecure; creative occupations are not seen as 'real'; and there are few enforceable minimum standards for their pay and conditions. The pandemic saw already high levels of precarity rise even further.

It is well-known that the creative workforce earns significantly less than average weekly earnings and that creatives are prone to fractured earnings by having to perform non-creative work to make ends meet. The lack of creative working opportunities and indifference to sustainable employment practices perpetuates an ongoing brain drain.

Creative workers, whether they be performers, crew or freelance journalists, are forever ripe for exploitation in terms of their remuneration and conditions of employment. Artistic industries in particular rank highly in terms of the incidence of sexual assault, intimidation and exploitative work practices. Although the arts and entertainment sectors are now replete with sound policies aimed at tackling misconduct, adherence to those policies is patchy. The arts sector needs a rules-based order to

guard against exploitation of creators.

MEAA note that Labor's Renewing Creative Australia policy (2019) promised to develop new policies on artist payments and undertook to explore 'a standard for industry fees'.

The union now look forward to the Government ensuring recognition and protection of gig economy workers. Whether through legislation or via an enforceable Code of Conduct, it is critical that adherence to relevant employment standards, including pay rates, superannuation and safety regulations be assured. At a minimum, artistic and cultural ventures involving receipt of government funds must adhere to credible employment and safety standards. Non-adherence to such standards should result on the return (or forfeiture of such funding).

MEAA also strongly support the investigation, with State and Territory Governments, of establishing (or augmenting) portable entitlement schemes for a range of employment rights.

### **Pillar Four: Strong Institutions**

Australia has strong cultural institutions, but they have had their operations undermined through interference and funding cuts.

*"We need more recognition at all levels of government of the vital role the arts play in Australian society: economically, socially and culturally. We also need to recognise the educational and community strength-building potential of arts and culture at a grass roots level."*

*Survey Participant, NSW*



Screen Australia's federal funding in 2013-14 was \$100 million; in 2021-22, it was \$92 million. In several intervening years, government funding was as low as \$81.8 million. The Australia Council received government funding of \$220 million for 2013-14. In 2021, total government allocations were \$215 million.

The Australia Council suffered the further ignominy of having key programs cut and redirected to damaging exercises in political vanity – the National Program for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA) and Catalyst programs.

For the Australia Council and Screen Australia – and the sectors they support – to thrive, funding enhancements are necessary.

For the Australia Council, MEAA favour new funds being directed to individual artists (via fellowships or otherwise) and strengthening small to medium cultural organisations. For Screen Australia, MEAA support enhanced funding for the Story Development and First Nations Features Productions programs.

Regardless of whether these entities are accorded higher funding levels, these agencies require certainty. In this regard, MEAA support the five-year funding window being provided to the national broadcasters

being extended to key cultural agencies.

Although MEAA broadly support the structure and leadership of our major cultural funding organisations, there is scope for reform. MEAA is concerned that governance of these bodies is largely the preserve of the top economic and business tiers of the community. The nation can do better than allocating trophies for corporate lives well-lived rather than any specific competencies in administering and growing cultural organisations.

To maintain the governance status quo will only feed the sense that the arts is an elitist enterprise. MEAA call for action to ensure that more practising artists are appointed, not only to the boards of peak cultural institutions, but to key decision-making panels that make funding recommendations. MEAA propose that bodies in receipt of public funds should be compelled to set aside a fixed number of positions for artists (or their representatives) on all governance and funding structures. We see no reason why there should not be an equality of representation between those who perform creative work and those with credentials in the business sector.

### **Pillar Five: Reaching the Audience**

Ensuring our nation's stories reach the broadest possible audience requires layers of work. Creative workers need the confidence there is an arts ecosystem that is valued and sufficiently funded; they need protection from exploitation so that their chosen field of work is safe and sustainable.

*So much talent. Not much work. Australia is full of actors, writers and performers all itching to be working in their profession. But after years of training, you still need to travel overseas for regular work and recognition. What we lose is our industry, our artists and our way of seeing the world.*

*Survey participant, NSW*



Greater efforts must be made to ensure that disability and other barriers to arts practise and consumption are addressed. In 2019, the Labor Party promised to revitalise the National Arts and Disability Strategy. This promise must be acted upon as a matter of priority.

Increasing audiences requires new and diverse works that connect with more parts of the community. Funded institutions need the capacity to grow and invite new ideas, including risky ones. Government and its agencies should provide greater development funding to give new or reoriented works a chance.

Government can also provide touring support so that performances can be more broadly viewed outside of major cities and a handful of regional centres. A renewed cultural policy should embrace the value of touring by providing substantially higher levels of financial assistance to meet the vast costs of relocating productions. Greater support for music and film festivals outside capital cities should also feature in a renewed cultural policy.

### Other Matters

**STEAM Education:** MEAA believe STEM learning should be augmented to STEAM. STEAM Education is an approach to learning that uses Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics as access points for guiding student inquiry and critical thinking. Positive effects of young people involved in arts-rich education programs include achievements in reading, language and mathematics development, increased higher order thinking skills and capacities, increased motivation to learn, and improvements in effective social behaviours. STEAM education would necessarily involve significant cross-portfolio and national collaboration. MEAA strongly support the pursuit of STEAM education being standing items on relevant ministerial council meetings and for ministers to commit to an ambitious STEAM reform program.

**Live performance insurance:** MEAA note the Government's intention to examine a live performance national insurance scheme. Live performers are especially exposed to hardship when events are cancelled, whether through health or

climatic challenges. The ongoing pandemic weighs heavily on decision-making and is diluting the range and frequency of future live productions. MEAA support a good faith analysis of the merits of a new insurance scheme to cover performers and support workers when events conspire against them delivering their work. The union is agnostic about whether such a scheme is jointly underwritten by federal and state/territory governments or operated by the federal government only. Government-backed insurance and business interruption funds have been established in Britain, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Denmark and Estonia. Australia needs to follow suit.

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*“Too often arts and entertainment workers are called on to support people when times are tough, yet they never get the same support back when they need it.”*

*Survey participant, WA*

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**Night-time economy reforms via national cultural ministers:** MEAA note the work being undertaken in New South Wales (and internationally) to revitalise night-time economies. We believe that efforts to revive and maintain night-time economies should be a standing item at all National Cultural Ministers meetings.

**Review of music industry:** MEAA is concerned that musicians / performers get a raw deal from the industry they sustain. Lopsided recording contracts, marginal earnings from streaming services and copyright challenges present immense challenges to artists and threaten ongoing engagement with the industry. MEAA seek an inquiry into the Australian music industry to allow artists and others to ventilate their issues and concerns and develop sustainable industry practices.

# BENEFITS



“

*I'm a uni student this year in first year creative arts and community well-being. I'm disturbed by the way the arts in Australia is struggling without help under COVID. What kind of Australian cultural landscape will my children inherit? I'm optimistic because I have to be, but deep down I'm gravely concerned.*

*Survey participant, Tasmania*

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# SIGN UP TO THE CAMPAIGN AT

[www.letsgetcreative.org.au](http://www.letsgetcreative.org.au)

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