

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
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Parliament House
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15 July 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts

As the house for independent dance, with a 25 year history of serving, promoting and advocating for the contemporary dance and performance community, we write to convey our utmost concern at the recent, completely unexpected changes made in the 2015 Federal Budget regarding funding for the arts in Australia.

We consider the establishment of the National Program for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA) to be an unprecedented attack on the sacrosanct principle of arms-length and peer-reviewed funding, the funding system that has been at the core of Australian arts practice for the last 40 years. The establishment of the NPEA completely decimates the principal funding pool that has formerly supported the independent sector. There is no doubt that this will negatively affect the arts ecology in Australia for decades to come.

The recently released guidelines indicate that the NPEA will neither fund individual artists nor provide operational funding for small to medium arts organisations. As evidenced by arts projects previously funded by the Ministry for the Arts (Melba Records, Australian School of Ballet, Townsville Chamber Music Festival etc.), the NPEA funding frame is governed by individual allocations preferred by the Minister, with no peer assessment and little public accountability. The Endowment Incentive stream, conditional on leveraging support from other private funding sources, offers little option to independent artists and smaller organisations, as they usually lack the administrative resources to foster such partnerships. The Cultural Diplomacy and Strategic Initiatives streams are evident duplicates of opportunities already funded by Australia Council in extremely competitive rounds.

The NPEA will oblige small to medium organisations and individuals to apply to the Australia Council for the only grants they are still eligible for. The pool of money supporting these applications is now significantly smaller. Far from creating new funding alternatives, NPEA is a truly drastic funding cut for the independent sector.

No healthy arts ecology can exist without an independent arts sector. The major arts organisations rely on the vitality, efficiency and creativity of the independent sector. It is from the independent sector that new talent emerges and new artistic territory is charted. Australian culture at large is enriched by the creativity and dedication of independent artists and the organisations that support them.

Dancehouse, as the only venue solely dedicated to independent contemporary dance in Australia, plays an integral and irreplaceable role in this landscape. We owe our existence, our sustained excellence, the development of our considerable expertise in the field of dance and our undeniable success, both here and overseas, to the operational funds and project grants received from the Australia Council over the past 25 years.

Through this support Dancehouse has invested in and nurtured outstanding choreographic talent, sustainable career paths for dance artists and appreciative, sophisticated audiences. The recent arts funding changes have left us, along with the entire independent dance sector deeply apprehensive about our very existence and profoundly concerned for the future vision of arts in Australia.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our views.

Yours sincerely,

Angela Conquet,
Artistic Director/CEO

DANCEHOUSE INC

www.dancehouse.com.au