



Hon. Ian Walker MP
Minister for Science, Information Technology, Innovation
and the Arts

Ref: AF/2013/802 – ACT13/762

19 APR 2013

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Dear Mr Palethorpe

Thank you for your email of 26 March 2013 regarding an invitation to provide a submission to the *Australia Council Bill 2013* and a related Bill.

The Department of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts supports the changes to the governance structure of the Australia Council outlined in the Bills.

However, the proposed functions of the Australia Council do not adequately reflect current artistic and cultural practice or communities expectations. In particular, the functions should be enhanced to take into account the following issues:

- The wording entrenches a 'top down' supply driven model based on 'excellence' which is not defined, with no mandate for engendering meaningful community engagement in the arts and culture.
- Promotion of the arts is limited to 'appreciation, knowledge and understanding' which are all passive terms.
- The fact that the term 'culture' is not used embeds the sense that the Australia Council's primary role is to fund the elite arts with the absence of any reference to 'community' supporting this perception.
- There is no reference to supporting alternative funding or business models to improve sector sustainability and deliver value for money.
- It is a missed opportunity for the Australia Council to take on a leadership/champion role engaging different parts of the arts and cultural ecology (including the education, training, health sectors and the community) to develop holistic strategies and advocacy tools.

- There is no acknowledgement of telling all stories including those from diverse backgrounds, regional Australia, people with disabilities and other marginalised Australians.
- A lack of acknowledgement that current artistic and cultural practice blurs the lines between artists and audiences and professional artists and enthusiastic amateurs.
- There are no references to the changes in organisational structures and delivery of work resulting from digitalisation.

Significantly, the Bill contains no acknowledgement of Indigenous Australians and their culture and its importance to Australia's identity.

Of particular concern to the department is a missed opportunity to address entrenched inequality in arts funding. In recent years, Queensland artists and arts organisations have received approximately 10 per cent of Australia Council funding even though Queensland represents 20 per cent of the Australian population. A requirement for the Australia Council to take into account the distribution of funds equitably across Australia in its decision making would address this imbalance and would serve as an acknowledgement that all Australians are entitled to quality arts experiences wherever they live.

The addition of functions that encourage participation in arts and cultural activities as well as providing resources, services and facilities to enable Australians to pursue and achieve excellence in arts and culture would enhance the role of the Australia Council.

Yours sincerely

The Honourable John-Paul Langbroek MP

Acting Minister for Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts