

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



To: Committee Secretary

Submission to the Senate Inquiry on the Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts

From Peril Magazine Inc

Submitted by Eleanor Jackson, Editor in Chief
On behalf of the Chair, Board and Editorial Team

16 July 2015

Background

- Peril is an online magazine that focuses on issues of Asian Australian arts and culture.
- Since 2006, Peril has been an active multimedia platform for Asian-Australian voices that empowers the creativity, agency and representation of Asian-Australian people in arts, society and culture. With the support of the Australia Council for the Arts, Peril has published new work from hundreds of writers and creative producers from diverse Australian backgrounds at all stages of professional practice, from emerging to established.
- Peril is also an active contributor to the Australian literary and creative arts communities, hosting and participating in a range of workshops, panels, seminars and events that look to engage the community in cultural production that is representative of the diversity of the Australian community and relevance in a globally interconnected world.

Response to recent budget decisions

- Peril believes that the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts will have a meaningful impact across the entire cultural sector in Australia.
- Peril echoes the submissions of organisations such as Writers Victoria, which have highlighted the negative implications of the decision to redirect \$104.8 million from The Australia Council to the new National Programme for Excellence (NPEA) for Australian readers, writers and literary organisations, and the sector as a whole.
- Peril asserts that efficiency savings and funding redirections at the proposed magnitude risk the overall viability of the sector, places pressure on smaller organisations and independent practitioners, with a disproportionate burden placed on those arts producers who work most closely and immediately with communities - namely individual artists and small-to-medium and community-based organisations.
- Peril notes with concern that while many of the cuts and funding redirections will come from small to medium organisations and individuals, the NPEA's draft guidelines state it will not fund individuals and makes no mention of literature, while continuing to support established performing arts entities with more stable funding and fundraising bases.

Access to a diversity of quality arts and cultural experiences

As a small organisation that operates on year-to-year grant funding, Peril is particularly concerned about the impact of the budget announcement on artists, organisations and communities from diverse cultural backgrounds.

- Despite boasting the oldest living cultural history in the world, Australia has often been depicted as a cultural desert where cultural and creative practice are seen as only marginal aspects of national identity and nation building. Even less developed is the understanding that cultural practice is broader than remunerated, “professionalised” artistic endeavour and that - in its widest sense - culture matters to people and communities. Without that understanding, Australians risk turning away from the “big picture” to become inward looking, isolated, prejudiced, selfish and less tolerant.
- In practical terms, the architecture of these changes is an additional industry barrier to entry and access for culturally diverse practitioners and organisations - as funding moves to major organisations that are already under criticism for a lack of diversity (of form, story and involved participants); moves away from communities and individuals to institutions and businesses; adds administrative complexity and opacity for smaller organisations and individuals; and will undoubtedly raise the administrative burden/risk beyond the capabilities of many smaller organisations.
- Put simply, organisations such as Peril may simply cease to exist. Consider for a moment, the Australian cultural landscape without the likes of Adam Aitken, Alice Pung, Annette Shun Wah, Bella Li, Benjamin Law, Gary Paramanathan, Hoa Pham, Ivy Alvarez, Lian Low, Maxine Beneba Clarke, Michelle Cahill, Merlinda Bobis, Omar Musa, OuYang Yu, Owen Leong, Quan Yeomans, Su Dharmapala, Tom Cho and William Yang - just some of Peril’s featured artists, contributors, editors and volunteers.
- In terms of cultural policy, in its focus on “excellence” the NPEA uses this term as a seemingly neutral proxy for a conception of “the arts” that is deeply commodified - that which is tourable, saleable and therefore valuable. Yet the value of the arts and culture goes beyond the immediate employment benefits and the realised “products” of people’s artistic labour.
- A sustainable Australia requires not just material prosperity, social equity and environmental responsibility, but also a sense of well-being, creativity, diversity and innovation. These are all by-products of the cultural vitality that small organisations like Peril bring to the Australian cultural landscape. While these might initially appear less tangible than the “number of audience members” at a touring/performing arts event, literature is a way of creating and knowing the world in which we live and Australia as a whole benefits from a diverse understanding of itself.
- By narrowing the diversity of the cultural products and producers in Australia, Peril believes that the NPEA and associated budget cuts will narrow the concept of Australian arts and culture and preclude us from many of the acknowledged benefits of creative community development and best practice cultural planning, such as: integration of local customs, arts and crafts into education; as a tool for community sustainability; contribution to resilience; improvement in human capital, skills and creative abilities; and support for multiculturalism, diverse cultural identities and community pride.