

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committee on Rural
and Regional Affairs and Transport

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Dear Senators,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the *Australia Council Bill 2013*. The Australian Dance Council – Ausdance is a body in receipt of funding support through the Australia Council since 1985, and we represent a wide selection of professional and community based dance practitioners who have also engaged with the Council over many years. We welcome efforts as evidenced by the proposed legislation to ensure the Council can freely and readily work to achieve its founding aims of promotion of excellence in the arts, fostering the expression of national identity through the arts, as well as providing and encouraging the opportunities for the community to engage with and practice the arts.

Ausdance National is Australia's peak body for dance: educating, inspiring and supporting the dance community in reaching its potential as a dynamic force within local, national and international communities. As part of a network of Ausdance organisations working across Australia we design and deliver accessible and sustainable services and integrated programs to support Australian dance professionals. Ausdance, as part of the World Dance Alliance, also facilitates a range of international connections and opportunities for local dance professionals.

Functions of the Australia Council

There has been much attention given to the Council's functions. Ausdance, like many within the arts sector, is keen to see key principles of arts in the community, and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders given the prominence they deserve through inclusion in the functions of the Council.

Ausdance is particularly keen to see community arts engagement enshrined as a key function for the Council. More than one third of children aged 5 to 14 years across Australia participate in at least one organised cultural activity (playing a musical instrument, singing, dancing, drama or organised art and craft) outside of school hours.¹ During the 12 months prior to April 2007, an estimated 3.5 million (22%) of Australians aged 15 years and over were involved in some form of paid or unpaid work relating to select culture and leisure activities.²

Opportunities for engagement, development and linkages need to be better harnessed due to the beneficial outcomes they can produce for arts practitioners and the community more broadly. The addition of a function from the current (1975) legislation: *(iv) to promote the general application of the arts in the community*; would be welcome in enabling the Australia Council to continue to address these aims.

¹ ABS, 4901.0 - Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, Apr 2012

² ABS, 6281.0 - Work in Selected Culture and Leisure Activities, Australia, Apr 2007

Goal One of *Creative Australia* released in March 2013 aims to recognise the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and states:

Recognise, respect and celebrate the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity.

The Australia Council currently states on its website:

The Australia Council acknowledges the vibrancy and vitality of Indigenous Australian artists as a key element in the defining and celebrating of Australia.

These important sentiments could readily be added to the functions of the Council in recognition of the significant place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures in the Australian artistic and cultural landscape.

Committees of the Council

The Bill proposes at section 31:

(1) The Board may establish committees to advise or assist in the performance of the Council's functions or the Board's functions.

Note: For example, the Board may establish an expert committee of persons with appropriate experience for the purposes of peer assessment.

The associated Explanatory Memorandum goes on to state:

The note in this subclause is intended to clarify that the principle of peer assessment of grant applications is provided for in this section, and that this will be ensured through the establishment of expert committees comprised of persons with appropriate experience, that is, arts experience or artform specific knowledge and expertise.

Ausdance suggests amendments be made to this section to clearly enshrine the principle of peer assessment in assisting the Council deliver on their grant making functions **within** the legislation. We strongly support the centrality of peer assessment and expert artform committees are fundamental to maintaining and growing each art form. An addition to section 31 requiring (*shall*) the establishment of peer committees to assist in the grant allocations by the Board will ensure this important principle is retained in the legislation, while allowing the establishment of a clear governance Board as proposed in part 3. Proposed amendment for inclusion at section 31:

(1A) The Board shall establish committees to advise or assist in the performance of the Council's functions relating to the provision of support. Such committees will include persons with appropriate experience for the purposes of peer assessment.

Note: Appropriate experience is taken to mean arts experience or artform specific knowledge and expertise.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission on the proposed enabling legislation for the Australia Council.

Kind regards,

Roslyn Dundas
CEO

11 April 2013