



**Professor Julian Meyrick**

BSSc, MA, PhD

Professor of Creative Arts

Centre for Creative Industries

School of Humanities, Languages and

Social Sciences

Griffith University

Queensland, Australia



Date: 23 November, 2020

To: Committee Secretariat, **Parliamentary Inquiry into Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries & Institutions, 2020**. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications & the Arts, Parliament of Australia

From: Professor Julian Meyrick, Griffith University, Centre for Creative Industries

Re: **Supplementary Submission**

Dear Committee Secretary,

Having given evidence at the above Inquiry last week, I wish to submit additional comments to clarify my views and assist the Committee in considering the points I make in my original submission (No. 16).

### **Additional comments**

It is time to curtail the entrenched antagonism that has accrued around arts and culture along partisan lines for reasons that have nothing to do with arts and culture. While recognising that people have strong feelings about Australian culture, because as people we reflect our cultural backgrounds and beliefs, nevertheless there is more to culture than a clash of irreconcilable differences. The heart of Australian culture is cultural exchange. Government cultural policy exists less to promote culture directly, than to support the processes of cultural exchange behind it – to support artists, communities, industries and technologies in their creative collaborations and shared endeavours.

It is these collaborations and endeavours that are the cultural lifeblood of Australia, more so than the final outcomes. Final outcomes pass away. But the sense of collective identity that comes from cultural exchange does not pass away. It pays a perpetual dividend to the inner cohesion of the nation. It is therefore of great importance that the partisan perceptions that have gathered around arts and culture in Australia are dispelled, and a new bipartisan chapter in cultural policymaking declared and pursued.

In my view, this will have three essential features to it which I touch on in my original submission, and which are put forward by other submissions to the Inquiry.

1. **A Cultural Plan from the current federal government that will show leadership in respect of the creative and cultural industries nationally, ensuring the cultural policy 'whole' is more than the sum of its part,** and drawing on the Coalition's tradition of

support for arts and culture going back to Prime Ministers Robert Menzies, Harold Holt and Malcolm Fraser, and Arts Ministers Tony Staley and Richard Alston.

2. **More active and bipartisan use of the Meeting of Cultural Ministers, especially its subcommittees**, creating where needed new subcommittees to promote communication across jurisdictions (federal, state and local government) and, where possible and desirable, practical cooperation to enhance the national benefit of cultural programs and initiatives.
3. **Evaluation methods and frameworks that, while supplying the aggregate data needed to make arts and culture accountable to government for the public assistance they receive, also make sense to artists and creative and cultural organisations**, and recognise the *full* value they give to Australian society and the economy.

Arts and culture provide goods and services that Australians value on an individual level. Our collective cultural life, however, is distinct from these transactions and reflects the creative possibilities of the nation as a whole. Government support for arts and cultural activities has the deeper purpose of supporting our collective cultural life, which is a major contributor, imaginatively, socially and ethically, to who we are as a people, and the different communities that resource our common way of life.

Government support for arts and culture is about more than giving them money. It is about bestowing public recognition and respect. Smaller amounts of assistance are required than governments imagine. Greater attention and care to cultural policymaking, however, is essential if Australian arts and culture are to assume their rightful place as one of the main drivers of the life of the nation.

The so-called “culture wars” have not entrenched themselves in Australia as deeply and bitterly as in other countries. The response of the Australian government to COVID-19 has shown that a bedrock of common moral regard lies at the heart of the Australian way of life: that everyone matters; that Australia is an inclusive nation in the best sense of that word. The “culture wars” have impacted in Australia rather as an indifference, a turning away from cultural policy as too hard, too contentious, destined to be conflictual not unifying, partisan not consensual.

And it *is* hard, that’s true. Disagreements in the cultural realm are real and sincerely felt. Yet so they are in politics, and we have learned to cope with these, and even value them. Australian politics is a civil politics, and a bipartisan approach to cultural policy now is a logical, beneficial and appropriate expression of that hard-earned legacy.

In a year when Australians have shown we can act like a nation, responsible for the care of all our citizens equally, it is time to carry this spirit of national unity into the cultural realm – the realm from which, in part, and not minimally, that spirit comes.

It is time to end an antagonism which has outworn its welcome, and to bury the politics of division it engenders. Let cultural differences and disagreements thrive as the natural expressions of a diverse nation, but within a common framework of generosity and respect.

These should be the key principles for Australian cultural policy going forwards, reflecting the highest qualities we aspire to as a nation, and as individuals seeking our best possible selves.

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Julian Meyrick**