

Tobiah Booth-Remmers

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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To Whom It May Concern,

Please accept this letter as further information to be considered at the Inquiry into the recent changes in the Australian arts funding, particularly in regards to the \$105 million that will be transferred from the 'Australia Council of the Arts' to the 'National Programme for Excellence in the Arts' (NPEA).

I am an independent artist based in Adelaide and have been working freelance since graduating in 2009 from training. I have worked with multiple independent artists on a national and international scale and have produced and choreographed many of my own works. I engage with the arts community on all levels and am particularly interested in opening up contemporary dance to a wider audience range.

As an independent artist I am particularly concerned about the changes that have been announced in regards to arts funding in the 2015 Budget. This shift in funding will directly affect the small to medium arts sectors, which I, along with hundreds of my colleagues, work in. Along with the up to 400 arts organisations and companies that will be affected by the suspension of the Australia Council 6-year funding program, there will be a whole section of independent artists who will no longer be able to access the same level of funding as previously available.

This will cause a huge gulf in the artistic culture of Australia. We will be looking at a whole industry which will be negatively affected. These organisations, companies and artists cannot survive or produce high quality work without continued financial support. The small to medium sector includes some of the most vibrant and exciting arts companies and artists in the entire industry. These companies and artists create work that is seen by thousands upon thousands of audience members, both nationally and internationally. It is within the small to medium sector where artists are able to grow and experiment with their practices, pushing their work to new places, engaging and entertaining new audiences. The major performing arts companies are continuously employing and engaging artists from these sectors because their experience and diversity is in demand. In fact I recently spent a week with 'Sydney Dance Company', teaching repertoire and classes to their 'Pre-Professional Year' along with Lisa Griffiths (another independent artist). The management acknowledged that we, as independent artists, were able to provide the expertise and knowledge that their students needed. We would not have been able to offer this, or had the opportunity to develop these skills, had we not been supported throughout our careers in the small to medium

sector. As such, the shift of funding away from this sector will be a detriment not only to the sector directly, but also to the major performing arts companies, who rely on and utilise the sector continuously.

Further to this I am particularly concerned about the lack of information around the assessment process that will be employed by the NPEA. I admit that I have had a whinge about funding decisions with colleagues in the past, questioning the recommendations handed down by the panel, suggesting that they may be biased. However, having recently sat on an 'Arts SA Peer Assessment Panel' for 'Project Grants' and 'Professional Development Grants', I now have a much greater insight into the arms length, peer-assessment funding model. I can genuinely say that I was very impressed by the rigour, consideration and discussion that went into assessing each application and making each funding recommendation. I now look at the peer-assessment process as an excellent system; a system that ensures that the applicant with the strongest plan, team and artistic idea is funded. Recommendations by the panel are not arbitrary decisions, or decisions designed to push certain agendas; they are honest and reflective of government policy and funding criteria, both of which push for high quality, accessible and exciting arts projects. The peer-assessment process is in place to ensure that every artist's application gets equal and fair consideration, and having been on both sides of the process now, I can honestly say that this is the best system for making the unbiased and informed decisions needed to allocate taxpayers money to the arts.

The 'Australia Council for the Arts' uses this system in making its funding decisions, and I see no reason why this should be considered a detraction of its operational model. If certain parties are not receiving funding, it is because they do not meet the eligibility criteria; its that simple, and that honest.

It should also be understood that the arts are part of a country's cultural identity. The arts are expressive of its people and the country they live in. Culture is in term about community; communities are where culture is practiced and developed. And communities are made up of individuals. If funding and support is shifted away from individuals and communities the whole arts culture of Australia will suffer, and this will be translated into the cultural identity of the country. The cultural identity of a country is one of the main factors in its standing internationally and directly reflects its society. Threatening and dismantling the arts ecology will have far reaching and unforeseeable consequences by damaging Australia's cultural identity abroad and at home, creating a more closed and conservative society. The arts is about facilitating and encouraging expressiveness, tolerance, understanding, critical thinking, creativity, experimentation and wellbeing. These are all qualities that should be nurtured in every individual, every community, every culture and every country.

As an independent artist I am asking that the 2015 Budget decision to create the NPEA be reconsidered. As an industry that forms part of Australia's cultural identity and economy, we deserve to be consulted with in regards to decisions such as this and we deserve to be able to access sufficient and unbiased financial support in order to maintain and develop a high quality, vibrant and diverse arts scene in Australia.

Yours Sincerely,
Tobiah Booth-Remmers