

Dear Committee Secretary:

I am writing this letter to you to bring to your attention my utter dismay and horror at the destructive and arrogant policy change recently announced by Federal Arts Minister Brandis. But first some self-disclosure: I am a proud member of the Australian arts sector, whose career in music began in the late 1970's as a teenager. For the last fifteen years or so, I have worked as a composer to the Dance Sector, and EVERY PROJECT I have worked on has received funding on some level or other from the Australia Council for the Arts.

And this has been the supportive and creative environment that has enabled me to develop my craft, on a multitude of small independent projects (all funded by successfully applying for PEER REVIEWED Australia Council grants) to the level whereby in recent years I have been commissioned to write musical scores for **The Australian Dance Theatre** (a modern dance company from Adelaide, and Australia's greatest modern dance export), **The Sydney Dance Company** (one of Australia's premier arts companies), **The Australian Ballet** (also one of Australia's premier arts companies), **Bangarra Dance Theatre** (our Indigenous dance flagship company), **The West Australian Ballet Company** (W.A's largest dance company), **Narelle Benjamin's** independent shows (yes my wife, who is a prominent and multi award winning choreographer whose shows feature at the Sydney Opera House during festival times, and was awarded an **Australia Council Fellowship in 2014/15**), as well as works for **The Royal Birmingham Ballet Company** at Sadler's Wells in London's West End, **The Royal Flanders Ballet Company** in Belgium, and the **Ballet Du Rhin** in France.

There are several extremely important consequences of Senator Brandis' unilateral decision to rip money from the general revenue of the Australia Council, (a move that was made WITHOUT ANY CONSULTATION with the Arts Sector whatsoever!!).

- The first is that this immediately puts the smallest and independent arts sector at peril, with all future funding application rounds under a cloud (the June round being withdrawn immediately) across all artistic disciplines. These are all artists who are either working on their own, or on small non-company projects etc. It is this part of the industry where practitioners get to pursue their craft and hone their artistic practice, and is regarded as the hothouse of Australian creative endeavour!
- Secondly, all the small to medium companies that previously had tri-annual, or were on six year funding cycles have had their funding suspended post 2016. This sector represents over one hundred and sixty companies, needless to say employing thousands of arts sector workers including performers, directors, technicians, administrators, writers etc. If Senator Brandis had bothered to consult with the industry, rather than treat it with the contempt he has shown, *he would have been made aware that for many of these companies, the fact that they have any State funding is contingent on their continued Federal funding!!! This means implicitly that they are in danger of potentially losing the viable means to continue. Let me make this clear: this policy change threatens the existence of the largest employing sector in the arts!*
- The third point is that Minister Brandis is misinformed when he comments that the flagship companies or AMPAG organisations are the major employers and play to the biggest audiences. By percentage this is untrue, it is the independent, and small to medium sector that outperforms the majors in this regard.
- Finally it is the small to medium sector that contribute by far the most to reaching audiences in the regions, to culturally diverse performance, exhibitions etc, and for the most part perform ORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN WORKS!! By comparison the AMPAG companies perform as little as 8-9% of original Australian work each year.

Yours truly,

Huey Benjamin