



14<sup>th</sup> October 2015

The Honorable Teresa Gambaro  
Member for Brisbane  
GPO Box 228  
Brisbane 4001

cc Prime Minister the Honourable Malcolm Turnbull  
cc Minister for Communication and the Arts the Honoural

Dear Ms Gambaro

As our local federal member we are writing to seek your urgent assistance in communicating with newly appointed Arts Minister Senator Fifield regarding the impact of cuts to the Australia Council in the 2014 and 2015 Federal budgets.

Feral Arts is recognised as one of Australia's leading community arts and cultural development companies. We are Queensland's only representative on Artspeak - the national confederation of peak arts organisations. Feral Arts is also a founding member of the newly established Queensland Arts Sector Advocacy Group, QAAG. Along with many of our Brisbane-based colleagues our future viability is under direct threat as a result of funding cuts to the Australia Council to establish the National Program for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA). At stake are many hundreds of jobs across Australia – many of them are in your electorate of Brisbane.

Despite sustained media coverage<sup>1</sup>, the overwhelming body of evidence in more than 2000 submissions to the arts funding Senate Inquiry<sup>2</sup> and the concerns recently raised by state and territory arts ministers<sup>3</sup>, Senator Fifield is yet to make a public commitment to return the \$110m in funds that were cut from the budget of the Australia Council in May this year. We are concerned that key messages regarding the drastic impact of these cuts may still not getting through to Senator Fifield. In a welcome change Prime Minister Turnbull has signaled that his government will be more consultative and Senator Fifield has echoed that commitment. However requests to meet with the Minister and discuss our concerns through our role on Artspeak have to this point not been successful. As such, we request that you organise an urgent meeting with Senator Fifield on our behalf at the earliest opportunity and before he announces any decision regarding the future of NPEA.

Federal arts funding is an issue around which voters in the Brisbane electorate will be mobilising at the upcoming Federal election. Whilst the experience of the last six-months underscores the need to grow the overall level of government investment in the arts, the immediate damage and threats to jobs and livelihoods in Brisbane can still be avoided by simply returning the \$110m in funds that have been cut from the Australia Council. It is a decision that would cost the federal government nothing and Minister Fifield has the power to make that simple change today. Conversely, not reversing the decision would leave the government open to significant claims for transitional costs for the unintended impacts of a change process that has poorly planned and announced without consultation. Labor and the Greens have both publicly committed to fixing this problem by returning the funding to the Australia Council.

<sup>1</sup> <http://placestories.com/project/160311#!v=links>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal\\_and\\_Constitutional\\_Affairs/Arts\\_Funding/](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Arts_Funding/)

<sup>3</sup> <http://mcm.arts.gov.au/communique-meeting-cultural-ministers-2-october-2015>

The key message we want you to help us take to Senator Fifield is about the jobs and livelihoods that have been put at risk in your electorate of Brisbane. Up to half of the current cohort of 147 Australia Council funded key organisations are set to lose their federal operational funding as a result of the cuts to the Australia Council's budget. That could easily mean the loss of any five of the ten leading arts companies in your electorate:

- Circa
- Craft Queensland
- Expressions Dance
- Eyeline Publishing
- Feral Arts
- Institute of Modern Art
- La Boite Theatre
- Museum and Gallery Services Queensland
- Queensland Music Festival
- Topology

Add to this list a host of other Brisbane-based companies who were amongst the 418 companies from across the country who had applied for the six-year funding program that has been cancelled as a result of the funding cut from the Australia Council and you start to get some sense the catastrophic impact on the arts community in Brisbane if the cuts are not reversed. Stable operational support is the critical ingredient for small to medium arts companies to leverage other partnerships and investment. The NPEA will not provide operational funding for small to medium arts organisations because that would be a direct duplication of the programs delivered by the Australia Council.

The arts funding Senate Inquiry hearing in Brisbane last month heard firsthand evidence of the depth of concern in the community. The transcript from the hearing is now available from the Inquiry website<sup>4</sup> as are the submissions made by scores of Brisbane artists. We strongly urge that you read the transcript and submissions. The focus for many of the witnesses to the Senate Inquiry was on employment and the livelihoods of artists living and working in the Brisbane electorate.

Todd MacDonald, General Manager of La Boite said:

“The cuts to the Australia Council with no consultation constitute a direct threat to Australia's cultural vibrancy. It threatens jobs and jobs creation. It represents a very real silencing of the most vulnerable, non-institutionalised entrepreneurial artists and collectives that provide us with ideas that challenge, expose and inspire the creative force that is innovation, the future of the sector and the arts that will allow us to imagine a better world that we live in and a better way to be in that world”.

Charlie Cush, General Manager of CIRCA said:

“The Commonwealth government's budget decisions in 2014 and 2015 have a significant impact on this company....The artists that we develop and the audiences that we engage with are also impacted by these decisions. Specifically for Circa, our operational funding is now capped going forward. What this affects is our ability to support, develop and employ artists. We employ and maintain an ensemble of 30

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal\\_and\\_Constitutional\\_Affairs/Arts\\_Funding/Public\\_Hearings](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Arts_Funding/Public_Hearings)

full-time acrobats, 26 of whom are Australian. In 2015 we will also employ a further 21 guest artists as part of our company. This year we will turn over \$6.8 million, of which 15 per cent is federal government funding and \$1.8 million of that this export earnings. To generate that, we toured to 15 countries this year and also to 30 towns across Australia delivering over 350 performances”.

In our evidence to the Senate Inquiry Feral Arts explained:

“No arts company is fully funded to deliver its programs. We stand as successful small businesses, using the investments that we get from government in the most effective ways that we can to make our companies viable, employ more artists and deliver better arts and cultural services in our communities. The new six-year funding that the council has had to axe was specifically designed to provide stability and security to the small to medium sector and to improve its capacity to leverage investment. That program was based on a successful trial, in which every dollar invested by the Australia Council generated an additional eight dollars from other sources. With a planned investment of \$30 million a year there was potential for the small to medium sector to leverage a staggering \$1.4 billion over the next six years, supporting thousands of jobs in communities across the country. Those plans now lie in ruins”.

As evidenced through the Senate Inquiry support in the arts sector for Senator Brandis’ NPEA is virtually non-existent. Even the major performing arts organisations with the most to gain from the changes have said the program should not come at the cost of the existing programs. In their submission to the Senate Inquiry the Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG) said:

“additional funding is needed rather than the source of the NPEA funds being directly linked to a reduction in the Australia Council’s discretionary grants program targeted towards small and medium arts organisations and individual artists”.

With the change of Arts Minister the Federal Government has an opportunity to rethink its position and fix the problems created by stripping funding from the Australia Council. In the process the government can limit the damage to the arts sector and go some way to rebuilding relationships across a wide cross-section of the community that have been badly damaged over the last six months.

We urge you to do everything in your power to support the efforts of the many people in your electorate and we look forward to a meeting with yourself and Senator Fifield at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Moynihan and Norm Horton  
Feral Arts