

ArtsPeak calls for Government to act on Senate Inquiry recommendations

ArtsPeak (the confederation of Australian national peak arts organisations and state arts industry councils), at its meeting on Wednesday 2nd March, called on the Commonwealth Government to urgently provide a positive public response to the recommendations of the Senate Inquiry into the impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts.

At the meeting ArtsPeak reaffirmed its full endorsement of all 13 recommendations made in the Inquiry report, highlighting two in particular that need an urgent response before the upcoming election: that the government develop and articulate an evidence-based, coherent and clear arts policy in consultation with the arts sector and that the Commonwealth government restore to the Australia Council the full amount of funds diverted from it in the 2014 MYEFO and 2014 and 15 Budgets (see full set of Senate Inquiry Recommendations attached).

Co-convenor of ArtsPeak, Nicole Beyer said today, “The time to act is now. It has been three months since the Senate Inquiry report was handed down and there has been no action from the government to implement any of the recommendations. Arts companies across the country are now starting to fail, tours are being cancelled and projects abandoned. The government needs to take responsibility, and to make clear public announcements about its intended actions in response the report.”

ArtsPeak Co-convenor Tamara Winikoff OAM agreed, “What the Minister is being told loud and clear is that the Government’s funding cuts are destabilising the arts infrastructure to a major extent and this needs to be fixed urgently. Despite a token gesture by the Arts Minister, the cuts are incrementally crippling both small to medium arts organisations and major cultural institutions in Canberra.”

Winikoff continued, “In an election year the arts sector is looking to the government to act quickly and decisively to properly fix the mess it has created over the last two years. Implementing the Senate Inquiry recommendations is a vital first step. The May budget is the government’s window of opportunity to restore arts funding and regain the trust of artists, organisations and arts audiences and supporters across the country.”

The Senate Inquiry recommendations encapsulated the sentiments of almost 3000 submissions from individuals and organisations as well as hundreds of people who spoke at the public hearings conducted in 10 cities around the country.

The volume of the Inquiry response and the weight and unanimity of opinion is unprecedented in the arts in Australia. It has led to a new mood of motivation and co-operation across the whole arts community to ensure that the stability and sustainability of the arts is restored.

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Recommendations of the Senate Inquiry into the impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts

Recommendation 1

5.8 The committee recommends that the government develop and articulate, in consultation with the arts sector, a coherent and clear arts policy, including priorities for arts funding supported by evidence-based analysis, and greater clarity about the respective roles of the Ministry for the Arts and the Australia Council, as well as the other statutory arts bodies.

Recommendation 2

5.15 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government restore to the Australia Council the full amount of funds diverted from it in the 2014 MYEFO and 2015 Budget, ensuring it has the level of resourcing identified as necessary to implement in full its 2014 strategic plan over the current financial year and the four-year forward estimates.

Recommendation 3

5.21 The committee recommends that, should the Commonwealth government be unwilling or unable to identify new and additional funds for the arts portfolio to support the Catalyst Arts and Culture Fund, the Catalyst fund be disbanded, and the funds presently allocated to it be returned to the Australia Council.

Recommendation 4

5.22 The committee recommends that, should the Catalyst fund proceed, the Ministry for the Arts further develop and clarify how the Catalyst fund will:

- complement (and not duplicate) the role of the Australia Council;
- ensure small-to-medium organisations will be prioritised, whether through a quota or some similar system; and
- ensure the spread of funds across the year, given that the funding program exists on a first-in-first-served basis.

Recommendation 5

5.25 Should the Catalyst fund proceed, the committee recommends that, in order to reduce bureaucratic duplication and ensure the integrity of funding decisions, the peer review register and process presently maintained by the Australia Council also be used for assessing applications to Catalyst.

Recommendation 6

5.28 The committee recommends that the government provide emergency transition funds in 2016 to assist small-to-medium organisations and individual artists who have been immediately impacted by these changes. These funds need to come from outside the existing arts funding envelope.

Recommendation 7

5.30 The committee recommends that the Ministry for the Arts work with the Australia Council, the state and territory governments and the arts sector to develop and implement streamlined and coordinated grants processes and timelines, to the greatest extent possible, in order to minimise the administrative burden on applicants seeking funding from different bodies and programs.

Recommendation 8

5.33 The committee recommends that the Australia Council give careful consideration to how it may particularly prioritise support to individual artists in its funding programs, in recognition of their exclusion from the Catalyst fund.

Recommendation 9

5.34 The committee recommends that the Australia Council give consideration to the viability of re-launching a specific program for the development of early-career individual artists, along the lines of the highly successful ArtStart program which was abandoned following the 2015 Budget.

Recommendation 10

5.38 The committee recommends that, without compromising principles of qualitative and merit-based assessment, the Ministry for the Arts, the Australia Council and other funding bodies continue to work with the states and territories toward increased equity in arts funding between the states and territories, and between urban, regional, rural and remote communities.

Recommendation 11

5.40 The committee recommends that the government and the Council continue ensuring that support for Australia's arts takes full advantage of the spectacular diversity of our artists and audiences, and that the diversity of Australian artists and people is included and represented in decisions about arts funding, including on assessment panels.

Recommendation 12

5.42 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government reverse the funding cuts to Screen Australia imposed in the 2014 Budget, and refrain from implementing further cuts to film and television funding over the forward estimates.

Recommendation 13

5.46 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government restore a program for funding innovation and development in interactive gaming, whether through reinstating the Australian Interactive Games Fund previously managed by Screen Australia, or through another appropriate government entity.