



**Theatre Network Australia Submission  
Major Performing Arts Framework – Consultation Paper  
26 November 2018**

Dear Ministers,

Thank-you for the opportunity to feed into the MPA Framework consultation process. Thank you also for your commitment to strengthening the arts in Australia and in each of your jurisdictions, and this non-partisan policy development approach that allows artists and arts organisations to continue to make Australia the culturally rich nation that it is.

*A further opportunity to respond to the proposed model*

Theatre Network Australia calls for a longer consultation process. We urge you to approve a further stage in which a proposed model/s is made public for further input. We suggest that the affiliate of Australian performing arts peak bodies [Theatre Network Australia, AMPAG, Performing Arts Connections Australia, BlakDance, Ausdance, Live Performance Australia, Symphony Services International, Regional Arts Australia, and Music Australia] - as a representative, cross artform and high level stakeholder group - could provide strategic and useful feedback.

*A Vision for the Performing Arts in Australia*

We urge you to take the opportunity afforded by this process to support and promote an ambitious 20-year vision for the performing arts in Australia.

Over the last 20 years, the wider performing arts sector has boomed - including the 28 MPA orgs, the 60 performing arts Four-Year Funded Orgs (FYFOs), and the hundreds of smaller state-funded, project funded or non-funded companies and independents. Audiences have increased many fold, touring has increased dramatically, and internationally our performing arts companies and artists are attracting huge audiences [between 2010 – 2014, international audiences exceeded 2.5million: around 2.1million for small to medium companies' work and 450,000 for the MPA companies]. Australian work headlines most of the European festivals, as well as festivals in the US and Canada, and increasingly in South East Asia and China. The world can't get enough, and the demand is growing exponentially.

An additional investment in the areas of need and priority would capitalise on this growth: areas such as First Nations work; new Australian work; an increase in national and regional touring funding; as well as circus, youth theatre and work for families. An increase in these areas is easily achievable, and would build on our successful past and the current government investment in the performing arts and would ensure future prosperity and capacity to meet demand. We call for an investment of \$20million p/a to meet this demand.

TNA proposes a vision of a larger Portfolio of organisations – such as the current 28 MPAs plus the current 60 Four-Year Funded performing arts organisations – a cohort of around 90 significant Australian performing arts organisations. This single Portfolio approach to funding cultural organisations of different scope and size has successfully been implemented by Arts Council England as the National Portfolio Organisations. We believe that Australia could adopt this approach. In answering the questions below, we have used the word Portfolio below instead of Framework to indicate our ambition to see a broader cohort within any new model.



#### QUESTION BOX 1:

Would the combination of a formal assessment process with a long-term contractual period offered by the model described above (four year contract + four year extension, subject to KPIs being met) provide an appropriate balance between flexibility, accountability and funding certainty? Alternatively, would this balance be better provided by another model (e.g. full assessment process every four years but with a four-year notice period for any changes to funding levels. Eight-year contract with mid-point review)? Should governments consider funding companies from other artforms on a multi-partite basis through the same enhanced framework? If so, which artforms should be considered?

We agree with the introduction of a rolling four year contract + four year extension funding model, and suggest that a rolling 6 plus 6 year model may also be considered. We believe that this should apply to the full Portfolio of performing arts organisations, not just the MPAs. In any model, we believe that it should be a rolling contract period, with at least 2 staggered cycles.

We do not think other artforms should be considered within this consultation.

#### QUESTION BOX 2:

What modifications, if any, should be made to the current Framework's definition of an MPA company (at Appendix 2) when determining the eligibility criteria for being asked to make a submission for multi-partite funding under the enhanced model?

For example, should any other financial, artistic, audience, leadership and diversity criteria be incorporated, or should any of the existing criteria be changed? How could periodic sector-specific scans inform eligibility decisions? Should individual Australian jurisdictions' demographics (including population) and arts ecologies be taken into account in eligibility decisions? If so, how?

Criteria for eligibility into the Portfolio must include a consideration of the whole arts ecology – this includes diversity of artform and of artistic practice, diversity of audiences, and diversity of artistic enquiry. Longer-term overall program objectives are needed. Collectively, the Portfolio must cover the breadth and depth of the leading performing arts companies in Australia. We believe new Australian work should be one of the assessment criteria; along with leadership within the broader sector. We believe that a key KPI for determining sector leadership by MPAs is employment numbers of artists and arts workers who also work in the Small to Medium and Independent sector.

We believe the \$1.6m earned income criterion is arbitrary and should be removed. Other criteria could include diversity of income sources, attendances and participation, and addressing diversity gaps.

While individual Australian jurisdictions' demographics and arts ecologies should be taken into account, the varying goals of each organisation must be considered, recognising that not all companies should be addressing all issues.

#### QUESTION BOX 3:

Do you agree that the assessment process should comprise the three tiers listed above? If not, what do you think should be considered in the assessment process? How should assessment of these (or other) aspects of a company's submitted strategic intent and proposition inform governments' decisions on funding levels? How, if at all, should peer advice be incorporated into the assessment process?

Yes we agree that the assessment process should include the three tiers suggested (artistic, financial, contribution to ecology).

TNA believes that attendee numbers should also be considered when determining levels of funding. We note that the current MPA theatre and circus companies are punching well above their weight – bringing in 39% of the total attendees, with only 11% of the Commonwealth funding and 15% of Commonwealth and State funding. Any new algorithm to determine funding levels must address this historical under-investment. On the dollars alone, the theatre and circus companies should be receiving an additional \$30million per year.

We believe that there needs to be a deep consideration of the balance of heritage artforms and contemporary artforms, and that this should be a factor for governments when determining levels of funding. Funding for contemporary work has been under-funded.

We think that RELEVANT EXTERNAL VIEWPOINTS should be included in the assessment process, and that might include peers, however, we note that peer review alone would be difficult with iconic and unique performing arts organisations.

**QUESTION BOX 4:**

How long a notice period should companies receive before funding levels are adjusted if KPIs are consistently not met? Should this differ from company to company depending on individual artistic and business models? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of different companies being funded to deliver on different priorities such as regional touring? Should reporting on companies' performance be made public in aggregate on an annual basis to increase public understanding of outcomes?

We believe that a notice period should be up to 3 years for some companies, but vary according to scale and role of company, with consideration for length of their planning and contracting. For example, companies which tour significantly will need longer notice periods.

We agree that publishing aggregate performance figures would be a useful way to increase public understanding of outcomes.

**QUESTION BOX 5:**

How should governments balance the benefits of flexibility (increasing the ability to respond to opportunity and ensure accountability) and certainty of funding (giving companies the confidence to plan for the future and take artistic risks)?

We believe that an investment to support new entrants to the Portfolio along with adjustment of levels to the contemporary sector would allow a balance between flexibility and security.

We note that current Four Year Funded Organisations across all artforms have a funding cap of \$300,000 per annum, brought in only in 2015 due to funding changes. This cap artificially and unintentionally creates a gulf between the small to medium sector and the Major Performing Arts companies, inhibiting growth and creating an unnecessary divide.

We support the proposal for a structured mechanism by which the Australian Government and relevant State or Territory Governments can review funding levels for individual companies without the agreement of all jurisdictions.

#### QUESTION BOX 6:

How should governments' multi-partite contracts with companies reflect expectations in relation to diversity, access and creative leadership (including with regard to the development and presentation of Australian works)

We believe in applying mechanisms to increase diversity (gender, First Nations, CaLD, disability), and these can include hard levers such as KPIs and quotas. We believe that achieving such KPIs is made possible with dedicated strategic programs that need support and additional funding.

Successful programs such as the **CAAP Directors Initiative** should be further supported. Run by Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (CAAP), in partnership with Melbourne Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre and Sydney Theatre Company the initiative is aimed at unearthing, nurturing and developing Asian Australian directors for the stage.

Making, commissioning and presenting new Australian stories that reflect a contemporary Australia should be a key objective for the new model. Not all organisations will meet this, but there should be consideration made when looking at the portfolio. New work takes additional time and resource to make – writers, choreographers, devisors, composers, dramaturges require supported time and space for creative development and creation of work. Investing in and prioritising new work by performing arts organisations will boost companies' capacity to take the time needed.

#### QUESTION BOX 7:

In undertaking a sector scan of touring activity and considering funding mechanisms, what should governments consider?

We believe a full-scale, separate touring review is needed and that it should centre on the Playing Australia funding program.

Theatre Network Australia has joined with other performing arts peak bodies [AMPAG, Performing Arts Connections Australia, BlakDance, Ausdance, Live Performance Australia, Regional Arts Australia, Music Australia] to call for urgent changes to the Playing Australia program. Stagnant funding levels and inflation mean that the fund has decreased in real terms by 37% since 2004, leading to an urgent need to increase the fund. We estimate a minimum increase to the fund of a 40% (\$2.7M) is required to address the structural and operational issues associated with the program and increase impact exponentially.

#### QUESTION BOX 8:

If a competitive Enhancement Fund were introduced, what should it be used to support? Is there anything that it should not be used to support? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of redirecting a small portion of core funding for an Enhancement Fund?

We believe an Enhancement Fund is welcome but NOT at the expense of indexation for all companies, nor by taking other existing funding for such purpose. Enhancement is needed in areas such as implementing diversity strategies and providing substantive access services for marginalized communities including people with disabilities – services such as discount tickets, Auslan-interpreted performances, Audio described performances, relaxed performances, Audio loop for hard of hearing people, captioned performances for Deaf, hard of hearing people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

**QUESTION BOX 9:**

How, if at all, should venue-related interdependencies be accounted for under the Framework?

TNA supports AMPAG's response to this question as follows:

- a. Regular availability of mainstage venues is critical to MPAs' operations and their capacity to meet a broad range of performance expectations.
- b. Venue terms and conditions should be fair and stable and where appropriate an MOU or similar agreement should set out the special cultural relationship between resident MPAs and major state venues.
- c. The Framework would be strengthened if a formal recognition of the impact a lack of venue access can have MPAs' capacity to deliver on their strategic plans and that it can undermine the entire organisation were included.
- d. The situation could also be assisted by a state government commitment to minimum levels of major venue access negotiated individually, and the inclusion of a business interruption remediation clause in funding contracts. This would assist in addressing issues arising in the event venue access becomes an issue for the individual MPA's performance and stability.

Thank you for the opportunity to feed into this consultation.

Yours sincerely,

**Nicole Beyer**

Executive Director

Theatre Network Australia

On behalf of the Board:

Annette Vieusseux (Chair)

Jill Smith (Deputy Chair)

Lou Oppenheim (Treasurer)

Ben Graetz

Catherine Jones

Erica McCalman

Sam Routledge

Brad Spolding

Lyn Wallis

Cassie McGannon (Observer)