

The Hon. Tony Burke MP  
Shadow Minister for the Arts  
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21 April 2022

Dear Mr Burke MP

I am writing to you as President of the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ), a national membership association and peak advocacy body, representing artists, curators, writers and art historians from around the country. I am writing on behalf of our members to advocate for the importance of the arts and to encourage the Labor Party to develop a National Arts & Culture policy that offers tangible support to Australia's creative industries by increasing Australia Council funding to support small and medium arts organisations and by supporting arts education.

After nearly a decade under the coalition government the arts have suffered significantly to the detriment of all Australians. Expenditure on culture fell by a massive 18.9% per capita between 2008 and 2018.<sup>1</sup> This has been compounded by the COVID pandemic which disproportionately impacted the arts with 94% of businesses affected by restrictions compared to the industry average of 53%. The sector had the largest loss of employment between February and May 2020 at 35% with a corresponding loss of revenue of 50%.<sup>2</sup>

The arts are central to the liveability of places and play a vital role in community wellbeing, fostering social cohesion and building resilience. Creative expression is important to understandings of national identity and a sense of place. They build social capital and are at the heart of cultural tourism. Indeed the creative industries play an important role contributing to the economic vigour of the nation and pre-COVID injected \$111.7 billion annually into the national economy, generating \$3.2 billion in exports and employing 600,000 people with a further 263,563 workers embedded in non-creative industries.<sup>3</sup>

The public gallery sector in particular, has repeatedly demonstrated transformative economic outcomes for communities. There are 408 public galleries in Australia and they make substantial contributions to the economic revitalisation of cities and regional hubs witnessed in the prosperity of Hobart. Following the opening of the Museum of Old and New Art, there have been substantial flow on benefits to local traders sparking a buoyant property market. In another instance a single exhibition held at a regional gallery in Victoria attracted over 140,000 visitors over a four month period injecting \$13.2 million into the local economy.<sup>4</sup> In 2019 public galleries in Australia were visited by more than 16.5 million people with 44% of all visitors attending regional galleries.<sup>5</sup> In a population of 25 million, this represents 65% of the Australian population, demonstrating the important service public galleries play in our society. Many galleries have been at the forefront helping their communities heal from major natural disasters. During enforced social isolation from COVID-19 people turned to the arts for solace and connectedness, engaging with galleries through online programming. Yet federal funding of the public gallery sector is less than 1% and many galleries struggle with inadequate budgets, low wages and lack of staff.

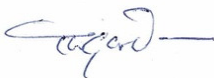
Through the leadership of past Labor governments and their support for the arts, the sector has grown into a vital contributor to Australia's social and economic wellbeing. It is fifty years since

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announced the first federal cultural policy in 1972. Whitlam's ground breaking approach profoundly transformed the cultural landscape in Australia. Declaring 'I would argue that all the other objectives of a Labor Government – social reform, justice and equity in the provision of welfare services and educational opportunities – have as their goal the creation of a society in which the arts...can flourish', he revived the sector, creating a climate that encouraged arts investment by local governments and state bodies resulting in a number of new galleries, arts organisations and art prizes set up around the country.

In the lead up to the March 1993 election, the Labor government released its Cultural Policy entitled *Distinctly Australian, the Future of Australia's Cultural Development*. Keating argued that 'good cultural policy will help us imagine ourselves as one people, will put the emphasis on taking our arts and heritage out to the people, will greatly help the process of reconciliation and would have a broad base without prejudicing longstanding commitment to excellence.' Cited as having a significant impact on the outcome of the election<sup>6</sup> it gave rise to the *Creative Nation* policy launched in 1994. This was the first time an Australian federal government had formally developed a cultural policy. An ambitious and forward thinking document, it included an additional \$250 million in funding injected into the sector. Critically the policy identified that it was not just a cultural policy but an economic policy recognising that 'culture creates wealth'. It was followed by the Gillard government's *Creative Australia* policy released in 2013 which unfortunately remained largely unimplemented.

Access to the arts is a fundamental human right and a precondition to a healthy democracy. It is vital for a healthy economy and the wellbeing of its citizens that artists and art organisations are supported at all levels from grass roots enterprises to the large state and national institutions. We urge the Labor Party to consider the legacy it will make for the sector and to develop a national policy that will ensure the financial sustainability of the arts and allow it to flourish.

Yours faithfully



Dr Wendy Garden  
PRESIDENT  
ART ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

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<sup>1</sup> A New Approach, 'Behind the Scenes: Drivers of Arts and Cultural Policy Settings in Australia and Beyond', Report Four, August 2020, Australian Academy of the Humanities, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Government, Department of Communications and the Arts, Bureau of Communications and Arts Research (BCAR), 'Cultural and creative activity in Australia 2008-09 to 2016-17.' Working Paper, 2018, p. 1 and p. 14. Refer also Creative Industries Innovation Centre, "Valuing Australia's creative industries" Final Report, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Kearney, 'Marilyn Monroe exhibition a \$13 million economic windfall for Bendigo.' *Bendigo Courier*, 20 Oct 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Museums & Galleries Queensland and Public Gallery Association of Victoria, 'Australian public galleries snapshot', 2020, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/BN/0809/ArtsPolicy#\\_Toc229456446](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/0809/ArtsPolicy#_Toc229456446)