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'A NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY TO 2020'

I want to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of this land, the Ngunnawal people; their elders past and present.

Welcome to artists, participants from the Creative Australia Advisory Group, officials from my department, sponsors and distinguished guests.

To members of CHASS, led by its President Professor Linda Rosenman, here for the annual 'HASS on the Hill' event, followed by an intense day of lobbying Members and Senators, a warm welcome too.

I wish you well in that task.

It's a great pleasure to speak at the National Press Club about the arts, to record the substantial and enduring contribution they have made to the life of our nation.

And in particular to reprise the government's record of almost two years – in what has been a period of intense, focused activity – and to sketch some important challenges ahead, in particular my ambition for the development of a national cultural policy.

We have an artistic tradition in this country to be proud of and to celebrate in all the diverse forms of artistic expression.

In literature and visual art in particular, but across all creative art forms there is much to draw on, to celebrate and enjoy.

We have the extraordinary fact of the oldest, continuous tradition of story-telling, dance and song by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Most of us have a reference point of creativity which touches a chord for us, gives us meaning, connects us to our place: some lines of verse by Judith Wright we learned at school, a scene from *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, a *Namatjira* or a *Nolan*, a *Paul Kelly* song.

But the fact is there are numerous reasons to support and celebrate the arts; to paraphrase an 80's pop song lyric, to say "That's what I like about the arts."

So here's my top ten:

1. The arts are fun – from the mosh-pit to the Opera House;
2. The arts are good for you – they keep the mind alert and the body active;
3. The arts help you understand yourself, describe your identity and fulfil your potential;
4. The arts bind communities – creating groups and networks in shared experiences;
5. The arts contribute to the economy – creating jobs, exports, tourism, new goods and services;
6. The arts drive innovation – in new technology and new applications of old technology and in thinking up new ways to express and entertain;
7. The arts nourish learning – boosting literacy and numeracy levels, preserving our great collections and making them accessible;
8. The arts are local - they help you understand your country, a Yirrkala bark painting or The Man from Snowy River or a movie like Lantana;
9. The arts are universal - they speak a common language to every man, woman and child; and,
10. The arts express the zenith of human experience and capacity – they're a source of boundless inspiration.

A country without libraries or galleries, without poetry or music, sculpture or dance, without our stories, without reflection, is simply unimaginable.

One of the opportunities of being in Opposition was having the time to examine Australia's cultural sector in some detail, to hear the views of artists and arts organisations relatively free from expectation and bureaucracy.

So we came to government with the benefit of having thought through issues carefully, and we fashioned an ambitious agenda.

Its central tenet: Labor's unshakeable belief that government does have an important role to play in this sector, that the arts and creativity deserve our recognition and support, that education and providing opportunities for innovation are critical to enlarging and expanding the artistic endeavour.

Achievements

In less than two years the Rudd Government has achieved a great deal.

We have significantly increased funding for Aboriginal Art Centres, which provide critical social and economic infrastructure for many Indigenous communities and facilitate the creation, sale and distribution of Indigenous art and craft.

Just over two weeks ago Arts Ministers across the country endorsed an Indigenous Australian Art Commercial Code of Conduct, an important step to support ethical practice in the sector.

We have introduced stand alone legislation into Parliament to implement a resale royalty scheme for Australia's visual artists that will recognise an artist's ongoing economic interest in the resale of their work.

And again Indigenous artists and their communities stand to benefit from this.

We also moved beyond the pale rhetoric surrounding creative industries by investing \$17 million in the Creative Industries Innovation Centre.

In seven months the Centre has received 300 enquiries from creative firms, collected 54 business review applications across a range of platforms and expanded its reach to creative enterprises with turnover of between \$1 million and \$100 million.

Recognising the critical intersection between the arts and innovation, the Chair of the Review of Australia's National Innovation System, Dr Terry Cutler, has said, "In the harsh language of innovation and research, we talk a lot now about rapid prototyping. Modelling, simulation and prototyping are the ways we test and experiment with solutions. And this is precisely what the arts do, and develop tools for."

In the film and television industry, the Budget provided a real boost by allocating an additional \$136 million over the next triennium to establish a digital children's channel and significantly increase the production of local drama on the national broadcaster.

As part of our deliberations in Opposition, we identified the anomaly of successful mid-career artists who oftentimes found themselves out of commercial favour, faced with mortgage repayments and the costs of raising families.

We have now introduced the artist-in-residence program, 'AIR', to allow student access to the wealth of skills our experienced artists have to offer.

And for those about to launch their creative careers there is the new ArtStart program.

ArtStart offers small grants of up to \$10,000 each to young and emerging artists to help them get started in their career.

We are producing numerous graduates with great potential.

ArtStart, by providing access to business skills and advice, will allow them to take the first steps in building sustainable arts careers and businesses.

Especially important was the decision by this Government, after many years of inaction at the national level, to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Of note, the Convention reaffirms the sovereign right of States to develop cultural policies and recognises the value of cultural goods and services as vehicles of identity, values and meaning.

As Professor David Throsby put it, ratification was “. . . as significant for the arts and culture as our accession to the Kyoto Protocol in 2007 was for the environment.”

I am also pleased that following a concerted campaign from the sector, arts education has been placed in the second phase of the development of the national curriculum.

We know that learning is boosted when it includes the arts and when opportunities are provided for children to express themselves through art and music, so I was pleased to take the case to the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs and I was delighted with their positive response.

The Australia Council has also made significant progress, and I want to commend its chair, CEO and staff, for their thorough work.

The Council undertook a business process review which identified a number of areas for improvement, but importantly quarantined grants to artists.

A popular outcome has been the streamlining of grant application and acquittal processes, and a move to online applications and reporting - another election commitment fulfilled.

Also central to the work of the Australia Council, the recent meeting of State and Federal Cultural Ministers in Adelaide discussed the Major Performing Arts funding model, which has been in place over the last ten years.

The Ministers recognised the current model had delivered significant benefits to the sector, and for the certainty of the companies involved, it was agreed the current model would remain in place until 2012.

But there are a number of questions around the durability of the model.

All Ministers emphasised the importance of providing a sustainable way of delivering government funding to companies while recognising the objective of ensuring a vibrant and financially secure major performing arts sector.

So the crucial decision was made to revise the model over the next twelve months, to achieve this objective while rewarding success, financial stability and good governance.

In the broader arts sector, too, our funding models must continue to evolve.

However, one key trend requires attention.

Over recent years Australia Council funding for individual artists has fallen relative to the significant institutions.

There's nothing wrong with that at one level.

The big companies employ significant numbers of artists and over recent years they've improved their businesses, increased their funding from philanthropy and developed ways to collaborate and support new work.

And the results are promising with more artists, more audiences, and new markets emerging both here and overseas.

But there has been a relative skewing away from individual support and activity as a consequence.

We need to build on the Australia Council's efforts and identify and advance the next stage of evolution of our funding models, which just to complete this particular picture, is accompanied by a reframing of how we view the role of the arts and the artists who produce work.

As a starting point the pivotal role of artists must be at the centre of the model.

Reviewing funding models is not a simple task.

Nor is it an exercise in cost-saving, as some claimed when we examined the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM).

The ANAM experience is instructive as it is clearly a better organisation now than it was 12 months ago and, thanks to a revitalised Board and the support of key staff, artistic vibrancy has shifted up an octave.

More generally, and with a fair amount of the preliminary work completed across the sector, I am expecting that the next twelve months will see significant progress.

I want to see particular attention in three areas:

- Work to build broader partnerships and collaborations with funders from the private sector, philanthropists, and local communities;
- Greater openness to new and emerging talent, to the pioneers and experimenters in the digital era as well as the more traditional art forms. To incubate and encourage the risky and the innovative as well as focusing on success and excellence; and,
- At the same time, to support our artists throughout their careers.

And in all of this we must now recognise that our audiences are changing, and changing fast.

I believe we are in the midst of a great sea change in the involvement of Australians with the arts.

It's palpable in the extraordinary range and growth of festivals; discernible in the increasing participation in community arts events; visible in the new horizons being explored in the digital economy where the on-line generation picks up their own instruments and the audience is part of the gig.

The economic value of the sector is also increasingly recognised; the cultural industries are worth approximately \$32 billion or 3.5% of Australia's GDP, supporting around 474,000 jobs in 102,000 enterprises – a constantly vital component of Australia's small business sector.

To understand our changing attitudes to the arts, the Australia Council has commissioned a comprehensive market research exercise.

And the preliminary results show that as well as a rising tide in the numbers of Australians viewing and valuing the arts, audiences are changing, participation rates are growing and flexibility of programming and diversity of content are increasingly expected, particularly by younger audiences.

We need to take account of these changes as we prioritise the use of public money and encourage greater community and corporate support.

It's a political reality that I expect no Minister ever has the amount of funding available to do everything they would like, but it is critical that public funding in the arts is used wisely, and that we focus on building platforms of additional support to grow the field over the longer term.

To my mind it's also critical we approach these challenges in a bipartisan fashion.

In this respect there is no room for a return to the culture wars of the past, evident in the last speech given here by a coalition arts minister.

We should move beyond ideological fixation presented as policy, life's too short and the need too great.

So the challenge I put to the Opposition is to come up with some policy suggestions and join the Government in moving beyond the politicisation of the arts.

Add value, don't remain stranded in the faux debates of the past.

The recent overseas experience provides a timely lesson.

The reality of less money flowing through US arts institutions, historically reliant on a high level of private support through the esteemed American philanthropic tradition, has left many exposed in a global economic downturn.

The Australian model, engaging general bipartisan support, delivers secure, ongoing government funding with additional increasing philanthropic support.

It is a model that works, producing a wider and more stable funding base.

Where to now

In 2008 the Rudd Government included the arts and culture for consideration during the 2020 Summit.

One of the key ideas from that Summit which the Government agreed to consider further was the need for a broader policy framework, growing out all of the arts, to embrace and include culture.

I've been pleased to take advice on this and a range of other issues from the Creative Australia Advisory Group.

Now the definition of culture can be so broad as to lose clear meaning.

But the purpose of a fruitful discussion about culture - how we see, understand and support it - is, I'd hope, self evident.

While we increasingly share culture with others - it remains the mainstay of the Australian way of life – its creative expression and diversity is unique.

And while the arts are a core component of culture, culture is more than just the arts.

It is the embodiment of values, traditions, expressions and, ultimately, hopes, and it manifests in and through many different mediums and across a very wide landscape.

So we begin with an essential principle, namely, affirming the right that all Australians, whatever their background, have to the benefits of cultural activity.

And I have identified three key themes to be emphasised as we sketch out a cultural policy framework:

1. Keeping culture strong;
2. Engaging the community; and,
3. Powering the young.

'Keeping culture strong' includes maintaining and developing the key institutions of our culture; our galleries, museums, libraries and major performing arts companies.

Additionally, given the foundation position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and expression occupies in Australia's cultural life, providing specific support and focus to Indigenous culture.

'Engaging the community' means producing work which is not only relevant but also attracts new audiences.

The presentation of this work should aim to reflect and respond to evolving community expectations.

But, of course, it should also test and challenge us.

So a key role for government is to ensure public funding is linked to specific public priorities.

For example, an early initiative of this government was to require the national collecting institutions to develop Charters of Operations.

These Charters identify a set of national responsibilities and priorities for each collecting institution, and ensure they are relevant to Australia's changing population.

The theme of 'powering the young' demands attention, given the immense reservoir of creative vitality and enthusiasm that resides in young people.

It's here that much that is dynamic and new is conceived.

In order to unleash and promote this creativity for wider consumption we need to examine new opportunities for experimentation and exhibition.

For example, we should explore direct funding for individuals whose creative activity pushes the boundaries to new knowledge and ways of doing things – analogous to the public funding provided to scientists and academics for their research.

And we need to build stronger connections between individual artists and the well-supported, large arts organisations and companies.

For this reason the Government provided new funding to encourage the major performing arts companies to increase opportunities for new and emerging artists.

An excellent example of this is the funding to Opera Queensland for the emerging composer Jonathan Henderson to assist in the creation of Opera Queensland's new opera *Dirty Apple* that premiered earlier this year.

The importance of new work is critical to a fertile, evolving Australian character and culture.

Alongside these three is what I describe as the partner role, namely private sector support.

Over the past decade, our nation has seen considerable growth of private sector support through business sponsorships and private giving.

We are a generous nation and we are increasingly recognising the role that the arts play in developing our communities, shaping our culture and supporting our economy.

Whether through the human equity of volunteering, workplace giving or private trusts and larger foundations, there is great potential to enlarge the pie and broaden the reach of the arts through increased private sector connections.

To facilitate a national dialogue on these complex and important issues I'm keen to hear people's view on the priorities for a national cultural policy.

On my Department's website we have launched a new web forum which includes a discussion framework to help begin this dialogue.

However we view and understand culture, and the relationship of arts to culture, the role of governments and the myriad of critical issues that flow around this subject, the opportunity is now there for a robust, freewheeling and substantial public discussion.

I look forward to hearing your views.

Conclusion and pledge

As federal Minister for the Arts I want to conclude with a personal reflection, in the form of a pledge.

I value the arts and those who create.

I recognise the arts as a teacher, illuminator and stimulator of life, a reference point of understanding, an exemplar of all that is possible as people strive to

understand themselves, their place, to imagine, as the poet said, “truth and beauty”.

I also recognise the arts contribute to our community in many ways; that an arts-rich education benefits our children, that citizens in a community rich in art lead happier lives, and that a culture rich in art leads to a richer society.

It’s my job as Minister to bring on a substantial reform agenda for the arts – to get the priorities right.

But I’m also a passionate audience member.

So I pledge that in the coming month I will buy an Australian book, watch an Australian film, visit a gallery or museum and share with my neighbours and children my favourite examples of achievements in the arts.

I hope everyone listening and all of you at this National Press Club address will join me.