



18 May 2022

Paul Murphy  
Chief Executive  
Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance

Dear Paul

Thank you for writing to the Australian Labor Party about the Media Entertainment and Art Alliance's 2022 election priorities. Please find enclosed attached our response to the issues you have raised.

Yours sincerely  
Labor HQ 22

### **Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance's (MEAA's) 2022 Election Priorities**

#### **PING Program**

Regional, local and community media are facing challenges and uncertainty because of Scott Morrison's failure to provide policy coherence or a stable set of support measures to help sustain the local news media that millions of Australians rely on. The Morrison Government has failed to implement properly a suite of measures to support public interest journalism, as recommended by multiple reviews and inquiries, including the Final Report of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Digital Platforms Inquiry.

As part of a transition package, Labor has committed to provide a \$15 million fund for eligible regional and local newspaper publishers to help absorb newsprint price increases, which threaten to wipe out some local newspaper titles for good. This fund comprises \$10 million for eligible regional newspaper publishers and \$5 million for eligible local newspaper publishers, including independent suburban, First Nations and multicultural newspaper publishers. Labor will consult to finalise the guidelines and ensure an incoming Albanese Labor Government is ready to activate a response early in the new financial year.

Labor has also committed to develop a News Media Assistance Program to secure the evidence base needed to inform news media policy intervention in Australia and formulate measures to support public interest journalism and media diversity. Labor will support local news, community media and jobs while working to formulate a principles-based, evidence-informed and sustainable framework of measures to support public interest journalism and media diversity in Australia – which has been sorely lacking under Scott Morrison.

## **ABC and SBS Funding**

Labor has committed to better fund the national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, granting five-year funding terms (instead of the current three-year terms) to improve the stability of the national broadcasters as well as enhance their capacity to innovate and plan ahead. Stable funding bolsters the independence of the national broadcasters and recognises their role in supporting diverse ecosystems, including across education, screen production and international broadcasting. Labor will also review options for delivering a greater level of financial stability and certainty to safeguard against arbitrary cuts and political interference.

The Liberals simply can't be trusted to properly resource the ABC and SBS. After promising "No cuts to the ABC or SBS" they slashed the ABC and SBS budgets and launched repeated attacks on their independence and operations. An Albanese Labor Government will reverse Scott Morrison's cut of \$83.7 million to the ABC, which is the cut the ABC said could not be met by efficiencies alone.

Labor has also committed to increase funding to ABC International by \$32 million over four years from 2022-23 to expand ABC regional transmission, content production and capacity building in the Indo-Pacific. This additional \$8m per annum takes the ABC International budget up to \$19 million per annum. As part of Labor's Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy, an Albanese Labor Government will review:

- The potential restoration of Australian shortwave radio broadcasting capacity in the Pacific.
- How to best continue PacificAus TV, as informed by evidence of the program's effectiveness which includes PacificAus TV performance and research reports.
- How to maximise the impact of Australian taxpayer investment in the SBS, screen content production and co-production (including with co-production treaties) and regional media development initiatives and direct grants.

Labor led calls for the ABC and SBS to be included in the News Media Bargaining Code, which has assisted the ABC in striking deals with Facebook and Google that have funded an additional 55 journalists to cover regional issues. We note that Facebook/Meta still has not done a deal with the SBS, our national multicultural broadcaster, which is very disappointing and a matter Labor has raised repeatedly at Senate Estimates and directly with Minister for Communications, Paul Fletcher.

Shadow Minister for Communications Michelle Rowland wrote to the Minister on 7 October 2021 about the lack of a deal between Facebook and SBS and this matter will be considered through the review process now on foot.

## **Media Merger Protection**

Labor will be principled, evidence-based and consultative when it comes to policy and regulation for Australia's media sector, including in relation to competition issues. Labor has committed to develop a News Media Assistance Program to secure the evidence base needed to inform news media policy intervention in Australia and formulate measures to support public interest journalism and media diversity.

Labor has long called out the fact that Australia has one of the most concentrated media markets in the world and understand the need to foster media diversity, for the sake of our democracy, society, and economy. Labor voiced principled opposition to the Liberal Government's moves to make media concentration worse, with the repeal of the 2 out of 3 cross-media control rule, and has fought repeated Liberal Government attacks on public broadcasting and community broadcasting which undermine media diversity. Labor has also supported moves to foster the health of the media sector, such as the ACCC's news media bargaining code which has seen much needed funds flow from Google and Facebook to a range of media outlets.

Labor has repeatedly called on the Liberal Government to reform Australia's outdated media laws, yet they have failed to do so, despite broad-ranging acknowledgement of the need for reform, as well as ongoing threats to the health of our print, digital and broadcast media sectors. Labor has called for concrete, workable proposals to support Australia's media to be put on the table, but mainly there have been just piecemeal proposals to cut Australian screen content or reduce broadcasting services in the bush, while taxpayer funded consultants' reports to government remain unavailable for public review. There is widespread support for a harmonised media regulatory framework, but the fundamental work to realise this remains outstanding after a decade of the Liberal-National Government.

Over the past decade or so there have been numerous reviews, inquiries, studies and reports into media law and regulation that still haven't properly been acted upon. The Final Report of the ACCC's Digital Platforms Inquiry, delivered in June 2019, devotes an entire appendix to "Recent reviews of media industry laws and regulations", and since then there've been many more. Report after report make similar recommendations because the Liberal-National Government has underdelivered on measures to support Australia's media sector. But for all the reviews and inquiries, we still don't have a meaningful framework in place to measure diversity and localism – the levels of news diversity and the availability of local news throughout Australia – needed to inform policymaking and government support for the media and the communities they serve. Labor considers that the ACMA's *News in Australia: diversity and localism - News measurement framework* and the newsroom mapping work undertaken by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI) will be important inputs to Labor's News Media Assistance Program.

### **Tax Reforms**

The Morrison Government has failed to implement properly a suite of measures to support public interest journalism, as recommended by multiple reviews and inquiries, including the Final Report of the ACCC Digital Platforms Inquiry. The Morrison Government did not support the ACCC's recommendations on tax settings because it said it was focused on implementing previously announced DGR reforms to simplify administrative processes and increase transparency.

Labor has committed to develop a News Media Assistance Program to secure the evidence base needed to inform news media policy intervention in Australia and formulate measures to support public interest journalism and media diversity. Labor will support local news, community media and jobs while working to formulate a principles-based, evidence-informed and sustainable framework of measures to support public interest journalism and media diversity in Australia – which has been sorely lacking under Scott Morrison.

### **Streaming Services Content Rules**

Labor considers the principles of localism and diversity to be enduring. We want Australian kids to grow up hearing Australian accents and seeing Australian places, including in the streaming environment.

The Liberal Government has not just neglected Australian stories – it has actively undermined them and gone out of its way to reduce the amount of Australian content on our screens. It is extremely disappointing that under the cover of COVID, the Morrison Government has been actively removing supports and incentives for Australian stories on screens.

The Liberals have also been far too slow to move on screen content obligations for streamers. Labor will work with all stakeholders to determine ways Australian content can be boosted for both Australian music and screen content on streaming platforms. We consider that a decision on any precise mechanism should be principles-based, evidence-informed and consultative.

### **Arts Funding Generally**

An Albanese Labor Government will bring new drive, direction and vision to Australia’s arts sector through the development of a landmark cultural policy.

Labor has a proud history of support for the arts. In government, Labor established two landmark cultural policies – Creative Nation under Paul Keating and Michael Lee, and Creative Australia under Julia Gillard and Simon Crean.

This is a legacy Labor intends to honour in government. The arts sector is currently in an extreme state of flux as States and Territories reopen. A new direction is needed from an Albanese Labor Government that will give the arts the support it needs. A cultural policy is a broad, comprehensive roadmap for Australia’s arts and culture that touches all areas of government, from cultural diplomacy in foreign affairs to health to education. You can read more about Labor policy [here](#).

### **Pandemic Support – Income Support**

From the time the COVID pandemic started, and it became clear the Morrison Government didn’t even consider artists to be workers, Labor advocated relentlessly for the arts and entertainment sector to be included in income support schemes such as JobKeeper.

JobKeeper was deliberately designed to exclude around 1.1 million casual workers, many of them in the arts and entertainment industry. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg had the legislated authority to include additional workers in the scheme but refused to do so.

JobKeeper was indispensable to the people it reached but it failed to capture the patterns of employment that are most common in the arts and entertainment industry: multiple short-term contracts with different employers, casual and seasonal work.

Labor’s Secure Australian Jobs Plan explicitly recognises and addresses the issues faced by workers in non-standard forms of work. The measures include extending the powers of the Fair Work Commission to include “employee-like” forms of work, allowing it to better protect gig workers; legislating a fair and objective test of casual work; and working with State and Territory governments, unions and industry to work out whether there are areas where portable entitlement schemes for Australians in insecure work could be introduced.

### **Pandemic Support – Industry Assistance**

Labor has advocated relentlessly on behalf of the industry throughout the entire period of the pandemic.

For more than three months the Morrison Government stubbornly insisted there was no problem and that a sector completely shut down by restrictions was somehow doing okay. Only after more than 100 days of Labor lobbying for industry support did the Morrison Government finally relent and announce a support package on June 25.

Labor is extremely mindful of the need to support performers and support crew as workers as well as artists, and that will always be a major consideration in any support we provide to the industry.

### **Live Performance Insurance**

Throughout the course of the pandemic, Labor called on the Morrison Government to establish a national COVID-19 insurance scheme for the arts, entertainment, and events industry – similar to the Temporary Interruption Fund for the film industry. Unfortunately, the Morrison Government refused to act.

Commercial insurance that covers COVID-related risk is no longer available for promoters and organisers, putting a major dent in confidence.

In the absence of action from the Morrison Government, several States and Territories introduced their own schemes, all covering different risks and with different levels of eligibility.

Labor believes it is important we listen to the sector, and work with the States and Territories, about where and how a national scheme is useful.

An Albanese Labor Government is committed to examining the potential for a national insurance scheme for live events and entertainment.

### **Fair Payment for Musicians**

As workers, musicians should be appropriately paid for their work. For too long, musicians have been expected to work for free or nominal amounts to support causes and charities and other events.

Governments have a responsibility to ensure that workers engaged through funded programs are properly paid for their services. Under Labor's Secure Australian Jobs Plan, an Albanese Labor Government will be a model employer and use its procurement power to promote good government practices.

### **Screen Australia**

One of Labor's guiding principles in arts policy is Australian stories first. Screen Australia plays a key role in this as one of the key enablers of this principle.

The Liberal Government has not just neglected Australian stories – it has actively undermined them. It is extremely disappointing that under the cover of COVID, the Morrison Government has been actively removing supports and incentives for Australian stories on screen.

There is a lot of work to do in this space to rebuild the damage done by nearly a decade of Liberal government. An Albanese Government will honour the legacy Labor holds in government when it

comes to the arts, and most importantly, ensuring Australian stories first. Screen Australia will continue to play an important role in ensuring that continues.

### **Australia Council**

In the years to 2020, the arts sector had already endured years of cuts and interference from the Liberal Government – the worst example being the \$100 million cut inflicted on the Australia Council by former minister Senator Brandis. The Australia Council’s funding had not recovered from these cuts before COVID hit. In fact, in the last pre-COVID budget, Australia Council funding was still 5 per cent lower than the Labor Government’s last budget.

The number of arts organisations granted four-year funding – a lifeline particularly for small to medium organisations – had fallen by one quarter when the most recent round was announced in early April 2020.

As was stated above Labor has a proud history of support for the arts. The arts sector is currently in an extreme state of flux, and a new direction is needed, from an Albanese Labor Government that will give the arts the support it needs.

### **Other Arts Sector Matters – Sculpting a National Cultural Plan**

As the Labor members who participated in the Report, *Sculpting a National Cultural Plan - Igniting a post-COVID economy for the arts*, stated in their additional comments, the Report rightly acknowledges the importance of the creative sector, and the disastrous effect of COVID on the industry.

There are many useful recommendations in the Report, including the restoration of the word Arts in the department’s title. But the report lacks one important thing – the need for a cultural policy. Recommendation 1 states the need for a “national cultural plan”. But a plan is not a policy. Labor has been the architect of Australia’s two cultural policies: Creative Nation under Paul Keating, and Creative Australia under Julia Gillard. Labor believes in cultural policies because cultural policies give us a framework in which to develop arts and culture in Australia. They give us direction and momentum, and they are a statement of Australian identity.

It is nearly a decade since the Abbott Liberal government abolished Creative Australia, with nothing to replace it. The lack of a cultural policy has given the Liberal Government licence either to ignore the arts or to be actively destructive. Post-COVID it’s clear that now, more than ever, we need a cultural policy to give us the framework we need to rebuild, and the momentum to carry us forward. And that is what an Albanese Labor Government will deliver if elected.