



MEDIA RELEASE

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Cultural policy review must address poverty wages of arts workers

A new national cultural policy must aim to lift the wages of arts workers above poverty levels and reinvest in the sector after years of federal government neglect.

It should do so by acknowledging that the cultural workforce is among the most insecure and low paid in Australia and by providing financial and policy certainty, says the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

MEAA welcomes the fresh commitment to a national cultural policy by new Arts Minister Tony Burke and endorses the five pillars that will underpin it.

In a submission to the national cultural review commissioned by Mr Burke soon after the federal election, MEAA has suggested more than a dozen policy proposals that are achievable and inexpensive.

MEAA Chief Executive Erin Madeley said Australia's arts and culture sectors had been adrift for almost a decade as a result of poor policy, neglect, and in some cases downright hostility, from the previous Coalition Government.

"The proposed new national cultural policy is an opportunity to press the reset button after a wasted decade," she said.

"The federal government has a critical role in fostering the arts and media sectors and promoting their undoubted role in shaping our culture and economic future.

"Federal government support for artistic and cultural endeavours has fallen by 17% over the 13 years to 2020, with federal per capita cultural expenditure declining from \$138.71 to \$107.20. The pandemic has made the arts ecosystem more fragile still.

"It is little wonder that the number of workers in the arts and entertainment sector has been static for decades.

"A new policy must strive to provide financial and policy certainty. Creative workers – whether in the arts or media sectors – require engagement and respect.

"A new cultural policy must acknowledge and address the vulnerability of the cultural workforce, many of whom earn less than the national minimum wage each year for their arts-related work."

Ms Madeley said low incomes from cultural occupations discouraged long-term work in the sector and negatively impacted the sector's overall viability. There is also a considerable impact on the welfare of the workers concerned.

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Among the proposals put forward by MEAA in its submission are:

- Establishing a Code of Conduct (or statutory mechanism) that binds organisations using cultural labour to observe relevant employment and work safety standards.
- Ongoing targets for growth in participation in cultural activities in terms of both practitioners and audience members.
- Greater financial support for First Nations and CALD creatives at both the company and individual artist levels (across arts forms).
- Converting STEM-related educational initiatives to STEAM, where arts and creativity are used to develop critical thinking and bolster overall academic outcomes.
- Embedding artistic and cultural training in schools, as was the approach in the Creative Nation and Renewing Creative Nation policies.
- Properly valuing Australian content by implementing firm rules for broadcasters and streaming services about funding and availability of domestic content.
- Enhanced funding for major institutions such as the Australia Council and Screen Australia, with new funding directed to program diversification to attract new and emerging artists.
- A federal inquiry into the Australian music industry to determine the equity and impact of commercial arrangements (recording contracts and streaming services) on performers.

“In Tony Burke, the Australian arts and cultural workers have someone who is prepared to genuinely engage with the sector,” Ms Madeley said.

“Already he has restored the status of the Department for the Arts and the national cultural policy review is another important step forward.

“We look forward to working further with the federal government to ensure arts workers get the support they deserve.”

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