

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Sir / Madam,

Thank you for launching a Senate Inquiry into views on the establishment of a National Program for Excellence in the Arts and its impact on the Australia Council for the Arts and the Arts sector.

I am the Grants and Funding Officer for Ausglass, one of the many not for profit entities that support Australian artists. We collectively share concerns regarding the impacts about the funding cuts and changes for medium and small sectors. We question the independence of any funding body that is directed from the Arts Ministry, where pressure may be directed from the minister of the day to support pet Arts organisations to the detriment of smaller arts groups.

Firstly, I am having trouble finding any written guidelines (even at a dot point level) about the proposed structure and mission statement/purpose set for this new funding body program that shows any depth or dot points at all about what this new National Program for Excellence in the Arts will target or who it will reach. What is its point of difference? Is there any evidence to show that it will/how it will supersede the so called "mediocrity" that it aims to replace? How many years will it take to implement and will there be double up of services/admin costs?

We share concerns that an independent body as longstanding and reputable as the Australia Council is being held in disrepute by government. The Australia Council by independent professional panel has supported our many conference programs and artists projects that makes up 20% of our annual Ausglass funding and has supported the promotion and education of thousands of glass artists over several decades. The Australia Council has always provided clear outlines of the funding structure, clear processes for the panels and guidelines on how we can access the funding. Their annual reports seem also to be in line. Whilst I find it troubling that the visual arts receives significantly lower funding from the Australia Council than other others sectors, this is also mirrored across our national GDP expenditure.

If there was ever a limitation within the past structure it was that there was never enough funding for the 44,000 artists that exist in Australia even prior to the recent budget cuts. The Administration and Service Sectors are growing disproportionately over time in comparison to the Arts. The problem of artists worldwide being underfunded/underpaid is the more likely issue that underlies any perceived problem that the government might have with the Australia Council. Many within this industry know the great community and health related benefits that this sector can provide. Will the new Program for Excellence assist in uplifting the profits and income for artists and their projects and give significant benefits to community? The median income that an artist draws from their Art is approx. \$7000 and their average total income from all of their job sources have a median of \$39,500.

To further cut funding from the Australia Council likely exasperates the problems and the question on many tongues around the Arts Sector at the moment is: "will bureaucracy and administrators within the service sector end up with a larger percentage of the funding than will land in artists pockets." This is also coupled with the knowledge that many Education bodies that teach Fine Arts/Arts related courses at university level are simultaneously losing government funding.

Please consider two reports within your review.

The first is an Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia by David Throsby and Anita Zednik that results from a survey conducted in 2009.<sup>1</sup> This report was supported with the funding support of the Australia Council and is a pertinent document to read in relation to budgets. The title of this report is “Do you really expect to get Paid?” 65% of artists hold tertiary qualifications. Around 75% of artists have formal training of some sort. The biggest factor preventing artists from undertaking more work in the arts and their overall careers are overwhelmingly related to economic circumstances and this limitation has been this way for several decades. There is an inequality in the economics of this industry sector as compared to the other industries that make up the GDP. Australia Council has been integral in highlighting objectively this deficiency to the wider public and hold a heartfelt aim of helping artists and Arts organisations to address this issue.

I also refer your attention to “The 2015 Koda Capital Non-Profit Sector Review” by Chris Wilson.<sup>2</sup> This review clearly shows the competitive financial environment for the not-for-profit sector, totals \$57.7 billion (3.8% of GDP). Arts & Recreation make up 13% of that sector even though the number of NPIs make up 20%. The amount of funding from Government is quoted as being expected to drop. An organisation like the Australia Council makes up a fair percentage of our Arts funding for distribution, even though tiny within the GDP. To dissipate its funding is likely to be detrimental to Arts in general, let alone to the Visual Arts that misses out on so much in comparison to Music and Performing Arts already. The perception that Visual Arts and the contemporary artists that Ausglass and other organisations like us support, deserves any less than its Arts peers should be squashed. Will this new “National Program for Excellence in the Arts” fix this imbalance?

When the 2015 government budget cuts were made, the Australia Council published a clear summary of the immediate impacts on its website.<sup>3</sup> To date, I cannot see anything yet published by the government either in dot point or detail about the mission or structure of this new program that might support Excellence in the Arts. So how are we to judge the integrity of this new system and how do our artists access the budget that has been shuffled. At least Australia Council offered clear guidelines about what it could and couldn't do even in these difficult times where the Arts funding to support artists from Governments is being lessened.

Best wishes

Dr Elaine Miles

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/research/do\\_you\\_really\\_expect\\_to\\_get\\_pa-54325a3748d81.pdf](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/research/do_you_really_expect_to_get_pa-54325a3748d81.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.slideshare.net/DavidKnowles8/the-2015-koda-capital-nonprofit-sector-review>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/news/media-centre/media-releases/australia-council-outlines-2015-16-budget-impact/>