

**ITEM 3.2. I STAND WITH THE ARTS****FILE NO: S051491****MINUTE BY THE LORD MAYOR**To Council:

A National Day of Action on Friday 20 June kick-started the beginning of a two week campaign in support of Australia's arts and cultural life.

The campaign enjoys the strong support of artists, performers, arts philanthropists, audiences and our arts and cultural organisations who have publicly declared "I stand with the arts". Over the past week, it has succeeded in raising awareness through media articles, social media, an online petition, curtain call speeches at the end of live theatre performances and an "Art changes lives" postcard distributed through galleries and other cultural venues.

I strongly support the campaign and have asked that the "Art changes lives" postcard be made available through the City's libraries and cultural centres.

The "I stand with the arts" campaign has been a necessary response to the capricious, damaging and disruptive treatment of the arts and Australian cultural life by the current Federal Government, despite frequently professing its support.

In August 2014, the Australia Council launched its 2014-2019 Strategic Plan, *A Culturally Ambitious Nation*. The plan included a commitment "to make longer term funding available to arts organisations to give them the security to plan ahead." At the Plan's launch, the then Minister for the Arts, Senator George Brandis, said it had "an emphatic endorsement by the Australian Government".

The Australia Council proceeded to implement its plan, inviting arts organisations to submit expressions of interest for new six year funding by 31 March 2015. Many arts organisations across Australia devoted considerable time and resources to respond to this invitation.

***In May 2015, the Australia Council received only a few hours' notice before major cuts to its budget were announced in the 2015-2016 Commonwealth budget. These cuts included transferring \$107.4 million from the Australia Council to the Arts Ministry over four years. The Australia Council's budget for 2015-2016 was reduced to \$187.3M from \$227M in 2013-14, the last budget of the previous government.***

The funds transferred to the Ministry of the Arts were to be directed to the yet to be established "National Program for Excellence in the Arts" (NPEA), with the Minister making the funding decisions, rather than the independent arms-length Australia Council. There was little detail explaining what NPEA would fund, how funding decisions would be made or whether they would be made public.

The Minister directed that "there will be no reduction in the Australia Council's funding to the 28 major performing arts companies as a result of this initiative". This directive meant that 57.5 percent of the Australia Council's budget was quarantined to support organisations such as Opera Australia and the Australian Ballet. It also meant that \$79.6 million was available to fund individual artists, compared to \$123.9 million in 2013-2014.

The Australia Council responded by cancelling its planned June 2015 funding round and suspending the six year funding program, subsequently replacing it with four year funding. Organisations had to then reapply for the new four year program.

In forcing these decisions on the Australia Council, the government failed to recognise the vital role of the small-to-medium sector in developing new talent, providing opportunities for new work, in being willing to take the arts to regional centres and ensuring our cultural life is constantly replenished.

In its submission to the Senate inquiry set up to examine arts funding, one arts organisation wrote:

*“This single government decision [the cut to the Australia Council budget] has introduced a climate of confusion, instability, frustration, anger and conflict within the sector at a time when the Australia Council was introducing plans for a long term solution for Australian arts organizations stability and long term planning.”*

Following the change of Arts Minister in September 2015, NPEA was renamed “Catalyst” and \$32 million would be returned to the Australia Council over four years.

The full impact of the Government’s arts funding decisions was revealed in May 2016 when the recipients of the four year Australia Council funding was announced. Of the 262 small-to-medium arts organisations who applied, 128 were successful. The 128 unsuccessful applicants included over 60 well-established organisations. While no competitive funding program is able to fund every application, the Australia Council has never previously defunded existing organisations at this scale.

Three organisations based in the City of Sydney were among those who lost their funding: the Australian Design Centre, based in City-owned premises in William Street and anchor of the William Street creative hub; Force Majeure, an award winning contemporary dance company based at Carriageworks, and PACT Centre for Contemporary Artists based in City-owned premises in Erskineville.

Five artform peak bodies have also lost their funding: Ausdance, Music Australia, Regional Arts Australia, the Australian Society of Authors and the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA). These organisations represent, advocate for and provide services to represent and campaign on behalf ordinary artists such as dancers and choreographers, musicians and composers, writers and authors, visual artists and curators working at the grassroots. Several had also been critical of the changes to arts funding.

Forty-three new organisations received Australia Council funding, including the Hayes Theatre based in City-owned premises in Potts Point.

In May, the ArtsHub website reported that the Government had quietly announced \$23 million in Catalyst funding, \$11 million more than had been forecast for 2016-2017. This included grants to seven of the 28 major performing arts organisations quarantined from the Australia Council cuts.

The impact of budget cuts and efficiency dividends extends to other areas of Australia’s cultural and intellectual life. For example, the National Library of Australia has been forced to stop development of Trove, Australia’s internationally recognised online archive, launched in 2009. Described as a collection of collections, Trove has digitised close to 374.5 million books, articles, images, historic newspapers, maps and music held by other libraries and archives, making them publicly available on line.

The reduction on Commonwealth arts funding will inevitably result in the small- to-medium arts sector looking to the City.

***The City already supports numerous small-to-medium contemporary arts organisations, as well as individual artists through its Accommodation Grants, Creative Spaces and Live/Work programs.***

In 2014/15, the City made a value-in-kind contribution estimated at \$1,560,808 in the provision of access to affordable space, and \$5,377,434 in grants and sponsorships. On 20 June, Council's Cultural and Community Committee agreed to provide 100 per cent rental subsidy to PACT Theatre and cash sponsorship of \$15,000 to NAVA to undertake research into the small-to-medium Visual Arts Sector. Apart from providing valuable information to the City, this research will help NAVA demonstrate the cultural and economic value of this sector to other levels of government.

The uncertainty and disruption caused by these decisions has had one positive outcome. It has brought Australia's often fragmented arts and cultural sector together and created a greater sense of unity. This is being seen in larger arts organisations being willing to help smaller groups, arts organisations joining together in advocacy and new alliances being formed. Arts workers have also come together to develop a National Charter for the Arts with a set of draft principles for further discussion. The seven draft principles are:

1. *The arts provide both economic and social benefits to society.*
2. *All Australians have the right to access and participate in the arts.*
3. *Ongoing financial support is fundamental to sustaining the arts into future generations.*
4. *A vibrant arts sector is the responsibility of individual artists, organisations and communities. Without sufficient public funding for individual artists, small-to-medium arts organisations and regional and community arts organisations, the vitality and wellbeing of the whole sector is impacted.*
5. *The arts must be guaranteed public funding, that is distributed at arm's length from the government of the day. This funding model best enables new ideas, practices and fields to emerge.*
6. *The arts should serve and be responsive to the specific cultural needs of local, regional and remote communities while existing within national and international contexts.*
7. *The arts sector plays an indispensable role in nurturing a wider democratic and humane society. The arts offer a voice to the marginalised and disenfranchised, allowing for creativity, reflection and critique by all participants.*

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) affirm that the City of Sydney stands with the arts;
- (B) request the incoming government to:

- (i) restore Australia Council funding to at least the pre-2015-2016 budget level, so as to ensure it can fully implement its 2014-2019 Strategic Plan, *A Culturally Ambitious Nation*, as emphatically endorsed by the former Minister for the Arts on behalf of the government in August 2014; and
  - (ii) reverse the cuts and efficiency dividends imposed on Australia's cultural institutions so that their vital contribution to Australia's cultural and intellectual life is not further damaged;
- (C) commend the Australian arts community on holding a National Day of Action for the Arts and its "I stand with the arts" campaign; and
- (D) endorse the seven draft principles of the proposed Australian Charter for the Arts for further discussion and development.

**COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE**

Lord Mayor