



Media Release

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Budget lacks cultural ambition

The Federal Budget released last night is disappointing and offers no new strategic developments for the arts sector or for strengthening the links between the arts and innovation, education, health, soft diplomacy or tourism.

For the equivalent of a rounding error, great gains could be made. Instead the Australia Council's funding has dropped, with \$1.5 million less available for grants, and no new cultural vision promised.

'It is a missed opportunity in a sector that has demonstrated significant capacity to effectively leverage public investment', Bethwyn Serow, AMPAG's executive director, said.

For example, the major performing arts companies leveraged a further \$2.19 for each \$1 of government funding in 2016.

The government has failed to advance its own vision of the arts 'contributing to the broader Government agenda of encouraging productivity, growth and innovation, including supporting the links between innovation, arts and creativity and strengthening the role of our creative industries in contributing to economic prosperity'.

Performing arts have long been shown to stimulate local economies, cultural engagement and educational outcomes.

The live performance industry generates \$1.4 billion¹ in revenue a year and supports 34,000 jobs in metropolitan and regional areas, 10,000 of which are generated by the major performing arts companies.

According to Professor Stuart Cunningham from Queensland University of Technology, across the whole cultural sector, 600,000 people work in Australia's creative economy, which combines cultural production (film and broadcasting, music and performing arts, publishing and visual arts) with creative services

¹ LPA

(advertising and marketing, architecture and design, creative software and digital content).

'It is a vibrant and growing sector that sits at the very heart of our nation's creativity and innovation,' Ms Serow said.

'Without a national strategy linking the arts and innovation in this new digitised world, all sectors of the economy miss out.

'When the government placed the arts side by the side with the Communications portfolio, it was an opportunity to cross-fertilise these two important and intrinsically linked sectors. But no advantage has been taken of this pairing.

'We would do well to take a leaf out of the UK's cultural vision and funding where the links between the performing arts and new technology are becoming embedded in the funding cycle. In October last year, for example, it launched a new fund to encourage arts organisations to experiment with immersive technology.

AMPAG will continue to urge government to adopt a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, maths) not STEM approach, incorporating the arts into the national digital economic strategy and the innovation strategies in education and health.

AMPAG will work with government to strengthen the MPA framework and maintain pressure for an increase in government investment to seed fund innovation and support regional engagement and to stimulate philanthropy through the introduction of a tax mechanism modelled on the UK Gift Aid tax measure.

These measures combined with ending the erosion of Australian Council grants program would go a substantial way to assuring the performing arts sector of the government's interest in a vibrant performing arts sector.

'We will also continue to drive for an end to the erosion of the real value of arts funding caused by inflation and efficiency dividends; and for new investment in performing arts,' Ms Serow said.

AMPAG's pre-Budget submission called on the Federal Government to:

- resource the expansion of the STEM agenda to a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, maths) approach in the formation of its digital strategy, to generate better outcomes for its citizens and to strengthen school education outcomes [Cost: n/a]
- maintain and strengthen governments' commitments to MPA Framework to ensure sustainability and vibrancy [Cost: no additional cost]
- apply full Indexation to all Australia Council program funding and the efficiency dividend be removed for the next four years [Cost: >\$2 million per year]
- stimulate development of original IP through a \$20 million over 4 years seed fund for new works of scale and innovation [Cost: \$5 million per year]

- increase the Playing Australia Program by \$8 million allocated evenly over four years from 2018–19 to 2021–22 to support additional strategic performing arts access and engagement in regional Australia [Cost: \$2 million per year]
- increase the number of performing arts companies operating with National Touring Status OR include support for touring for those MPAs expected to tour regional Australia annually [Cost: negligible cost]
- provide an additional \$5 million over four years for international touring, and aligned strategic engagement, of Australian productions and artists [Cost: \$1.25 million per year]
- establish a 4-year pilot program with the ATO and ROCA listed organisations modelled on the Gift Aid Tax in the UK [Cost: n/a]
- support and build on the rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Total cost of these measures would amount to around \$10 million a year—a negligible amount in the light of \$4.5 billion earmarked for roads or \$35 billion a year for Defence.

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