

21 June 2016

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Funding for the Australia Council

I am writing in response to comments you made about the level of funding provided to the Australia Council on Monday night's 'Q & A' program on ABC TV. It is important to correct the information you provided in your answers.

Catalyst funding

You stated that: *'It has almost entirely gone to regional companies, to smaller regional companies in Australia who had been seen to be missing out from funding from the Australia Council.'* Later, you said: *'But all I can say to you is that the money that's been spent through the Catalyst program has gone to regional arts companies.'*

This statement is incorrect. In the Catalyst funding announced to date by the Minister for the Arts, only 37 per cent has been allocated to projects in regional and remote areas. 38 per cent has been allocated to metropolitan areas, and 24 per cent has been allocated for international activities.

Furthermore, as a result of the Coalition Government's cuts to the Australia Council, a number of highly-regarded and successful regional small-to-medium arts companies have been de-funded, including performing arts companies. This includes the JUTE Theatre Company in Cairns, the Queensland Music Festival which presented events throughout regional and rural Queensland, and the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz in Victoria. Companies which took productions to regional Australia have also had their funding cut including KAGE and Snuff Puppets. Both these companies received Catalyst funding but lost their operational funding from the Australia Council.

Restoration of funding to the Australia Council

You were asked about returning funding to the Australia Council, to which you replied: *'Well Tony the issue hasn't arisen. I mean you've raised it here ..'*

Again, regrettably your statement was completely incorrect.

The Coalition Government's funding cuts to the Australia Council have been the subject of ongoing and widespread representations from across the arts sector, including peak organisations such as ours.

There was a Senate inquiry into the new funding arrangements announced by Senator Brandis which attracted more than 2,700 public submissions. The subject was canvassed at length at the national arts debate held on 8 June 2016 as part of this election campaign which was attended by Senator Fifield. Both the Labor Party and the Greens have made policy announcements about returning funding to the Australia Council. Most recently the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT) announced their arts policy which included restoration of funding. There was a National Day of Action last Friday 17 June involving artists and performers around Australia. There have been numerous stories in the national media and the topic has also been extensively canvassed on social media.

Live Performance Australia's number one policy priority for this election has been the return of \$72.8 million to the Australia Council. This has been communicated to your office as well as the Minister for the Arts who still has not been able to accommodate our repeated requests for a meeting on behalf of Australia's live performance industry which generates \$2.5 billion in economic activity and supports 34,000 Australian jobs.

It is disappointing that with just over a week remaining to the election, the Coalition is yet to announce any strategic vision or policy direction for the arts sector in Australia, an exemplar industry in creating jobs and driving economic growth through creativity and innovation.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters in more detail with you.

For reference, I have attached a copy of our election policy priorities, released on 2 June 2016 which includes our call for the return of funding to the Australia Council.

Yours sincerely,



Evelyn Richardson

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! TOP PRIORITY

Safeguard sustainability of the live performance industry

- ✓ Return the funding cut of \$72.8 million over 4 years to the Australia Council to provide long term stability for small to medium companies
- ✓ Maintain and improve transparency of the Catalyst program

OTHER PRIORITIES



Stimulate greater investment in live productions

- ✓ Provide tax incentives on pre-production costs for live productions
- ✓ Establish a major seed fund for original Australian works of scale



Raise our industry's global profile

- ✓ Increase investment in international touring of Australian productions
- ✓ Continue to fund Sounds Australia to advance Australia's live music exports



Build knowledge and data about creative industries

- ✓ Enable the ABS to regularly collect data about the creative industries
- ✓ Establish and collect economic and social metrics for the creative industries



Demonstrate government leadership for creative industries

- ✓ Develop a creative industries strategic plan
- ✓ Create a cross-cutting 21st century government agency for the creative industries
- ✓ Incorporate arts in the government's innovation and STEM agenda
- ✓ Renew funding of the Live Music Office to foster audience development and drive regulatory reform



Increase access to live productions in regional and rural Australia

- ✓ Increase the level of funding and expand the eligibility criteria of Playing Australia
- ✓ Double the number of companies with National Touring Status
- ✓ Introduce a funding mechanism to assist commercial producers to undertake tours throughout regional Australia
- ✓ Provide support for trialling digital initiatives for presenting live productions