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**MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS**  
**MINISTER FOR THE ARTS**  
**LEADER OF THE HOUSE**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT**  
**SPEECH**  
**WOODFORD FOLK FESTIVAL**  
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**SUBJECT:** *National Cultural Policy.*

**TONY BURKE MP, MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS,  
MINISTER FOR THE ARTS:**

Thanks so much and a real pleasure to be able to be addressing you here this morning and to be joining you on Jinibara land and want to acknowledge Elders past and present and a reminder of what always was and always will be, and very pleased to be the third of the members of Cabinet to address you as part of a Government committed to delivering the Uluru Statement from the Heart. It also means a lot to be delivering the speech from this stage. I know that a bit later today, the Archie Roach tribute is going to be held on this stage and this stage was the last time I saw Archie Roach perform. I was sitting about three rows from the back. Paul Grabowsky was over there on keys and Archie was centre stage and I'll never forget when he was explaining and giving the stories of different songs, because he had a new song based on an ex-foster family. And one of them was a description of one of the women who cared for him, who said to him; you're going to need to be able to deal with culture as an adult. And therefore, once a week would show him how to make a cup of tea and to drink a cup of tea in the fancy cups. And the song was called 'One For Each Person And One For The Pot'. And Archie, in telling that story, was able to, in one melody, combine someone's naive and ignorant attempt at generosity with the patronising nature of the entire interaction. And did so with a generosity as a storyteller that for any of us who are here in that audience, we knew we'd be forever affected by it. There was no malice, there was no anger. It was everything that we remember Archie Roach has been.

But it's exactly what our storytellers can do, exactly what our artists can facilitate, which gets to the heart of why we need cultural policy in Australia. Now, a few people who are involved in the process in different ways here. I want to pay particular acknowledgment to Blanche d'Alpuget who's here, today and it was through Woodford that Skye and I became friends with both Blanche and with Bob. A festival that gets that cultural expression isn't just about one performance. It's about building an entire village, an entire society, which is what Woodfordia does every year. I should also mention, just in passing, and she doesn't want me to, it's Skye's birthday today and Skye does not want me to mention to anyone that it's her birthday today. I will pay.

But cultural policy is something that very much began in Australia with the Whitlam government in 1975, with the establishment of the Australia Council. When the Fraser government came in, they didn't change it or vary it. They abolished the concept of there

being a cultural policy. Then it started to move again in the Hawke/Keating years, ultimately, in the formal policy of Creative Nation. When the Howard government came in, Creative Nation wasn't varied, it was abolished and replaced with nothing. Then, in the final months of the Rudd/Gillard years, when Simon Crean was Arts Minister, Creative Australia was established as our cultural policy. And when Tony Abbott came in, Creative Australia wasn't modified, it was abolished and replaced with nothing.

Now, if I go through a whole lot of the decisions that were made during the last decade, a whole lot of them would have been unthinkable if there had been a cultural policy in place. For example, when George Brandis took a whole lot of money from the Australia Council and put it into a personal fund so that judgments about artistic merit would be made not by peers – not at arm's length – but by the Minister himself. You wouldn't have made that sort of decision if you had a cultural policy in place.

Similarly, when the lockdown period of the pandemic began, it should not have been the case that, as an Opposition spokesperson, I had to run a passionate argument saying artists are also workers. As though it was a case that needed to be made, that arts businesses are also businesses. As though it was something that people needed to be won over on. And yet that case needed to be made because Australia was without cultural policy.

Today is the 30<sup>th</sup> of December. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of January next year, one month from today, Australia will have a national cultural policy again.

Now, I'm not allowed to tell you all the details today, but what I can explain is the problems that need to be fixed and hopefully on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, we then fix a whole lot of these problems.

There could not be a worse time to be going through the Government right now and trying to get money. There couldn't be a worse time. But what I'm really conscious of is what Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said to us, for those of you who joined us up at the Amphigrande the other day, which is for change to last it has to be made early and last through a long-term Government.

And that was the experience of Hawke and Keating. It wasn't what happened when we lost so many of the reforms that happened in the Rudd/Gillard years. Some of them survived, but a lot were lost. And so, I wanted to make sure – and Anthony wanted to make sure – that we made our decisions about cultural policy early in the term to start to change the trajectory and to lock in the place of culture in Australia, because when you get cultural policy right, this is not just a arts policy. Cultural policy, when you get it right, affects how you run your health policy. It affects how you run your veterans affairs policy, it affects your industrial relations policy, it affects how you conduct your trade and your foreign affairs.

Cultural policy, when you get it right, changes the trajectory and the place of cultural in Australia so that we truly again become a country where there is a place for every story and a story for every place. To be able to deliver cultural policy early, we have had a huge consultation process which has been undertaken personally by myself and by Susan Templeman, who's the arts envoy who also joins us here today. Can you welcome Susan Temple please.

*\*Applause\**

And so, to be able to do it quickly, what we decided was we would take Creative Australia which had been a great document, but it only lived for six months and be able to say let's take the five pillars and do the consultation around the same five pillars of Creative Australia.

Now, those five pillars - we changed the order, first of all. It used to be in the original list, second or third. You cannot have cultural policy in Australia without the first pillar being First Nations first. The second pillar of cultural policy is a place for every story, a story for every place, making sure that we have the full representation of modern Australia and of our stories coming through in the stories that are supported, the stories that are told. Thirdly, the centrality of the artist, but this time, because previously we only dealt with the artist as a creator, this time we're also dealing with the artist as a worker. Fourth pillar, our institutions, our strong cultural infrastructure and we're opening that up more broadly than we did last time. And finally making sure that we're engaging with the audience and across those five pillars, that gives us together the bones of the announcement that will come on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January next year.

Let me go through some of the problems that we're confronting with each of those five. But we need to remember, first of all, the problems for the sector did not begin with the shutdown period of the pandemic. The shutdown period of the pandemic did knock a whole lot of artists around and arts workers in a terrible way. When you've heard – you've heard a whole lot of artists when they performed at different gigs during the festival thank the sound technicians and acknowledge them. We lost so many sound technicians, so many people, if they weren't set up as their own small business, but worked as casuals on an itinerant basis, were simply ineligible for JobKeeper. Now, I supported there being wage subsidies, I argued for there being wage subsidies but if you wanted to have a wage subsidy that excluded as many arts workers as possible you would design JobKeeper exactly as it was. And so, people came through the shutdown period of the pandemic going through a really tough period. But before that, it was already more vulnerable than it should have been. Now, not all of those vulnerabilities will get dealt with in cultural policy and I just want to explain two that won't, simply because they either go to the direct basic functions of Government that need to be dealt with or they, while important from an employment perspective, aren't of themselves Australian culture.

The first, then that's not included – you would have seen a lot of outcry at the moment and justified outcry about the cultural institutions in collecting institutions we have; the National Museum, the National Gallery, the Archives, Trove, you would have seen a lot of problems here with systematic underfunding that has happened for a long period of time. There will be major decisions that the Government will take in dealing with those challenges. They of themselves are not part of the cultural policy announcement on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January. The other area that's coming up against pressure at the moment is the funding model that we use for the major Hollywood films to be able to be filmed in different parts of Australia. There's a lot of jobs that come from that, there's a lot of work that comes from that but those stories are not necessarily Australian stories. They're certainly rarely set in Australia. They're sometimes not set on our planet and in terms of Australian culture, they form more of a trade policy than a cultural policy. So those two areas won't be part of the announcement.

But let me go through the five pillars. So, First Nations first, allow me to explain one of the key problems, or two of the key problems, that we have. First of all, you will have seen a series of magnificent performances already by First Nations artists here on the different stages of Woodford. You'll listen to a whole lot of the music, you'll watch a whole lot on screen. What you won't know, or unlikely to know is the shortfall we have in technically trained First Nations technicians, lighting technicians, sound technicians, set designers, producers – in a whole lot of these areas. What that means is if someone wants a First Nations production to be entirely a First Nations production, the workforce has not been sufficiently trained to be able to deliver that to the extent that our First Nations artists need. Similarly, at the moment, across states and territories, there are some fantastic projects happening for new galleries, First Nations galleries, First Nations museums. But we had very, very few people at the moment who are First Nations being trained to be curators. And

we run the risk that we end up with these magnificent collections where the entire institution is in fact being run by people who are not of themselves First Nations. So, a workforce plan needs to be made and the training needs to start now. But the other thing that needs to happen with First Nations work is financial power. Now, there'll be a lot of work that's performed on country, performed through an independent artist, and they have no intention or desire for the project to grow in scale. It belongs where it is performed, and they want to keep it there and that is completely, obviously, the right and the entitlement of the artist who owns the work. But it is also the case that if someone wants their work to expand, for example, a small play wants to go on to a bigger scale, to reach a bigger audience. At that point, you are more often than not starting to negotiate with a major theatre company, which, unless it's Bangara or unless it's one of the First Nations companies, unless you're dealing with a Rachel Maza or someone like that, you're very likely to not be dealing with a First Nations company and the company you're dealing with often will hold the financial power. There have been too many occasions where playwrights have felt that the decision about the director of their play, the set design of their play, is not consistent with what they wrote. And so, I want to be able to change the financial power relationship so that if a work is growing, it grows in the way that the First Nations artist has not simply self-determination of what they wrote, but self-determination over the finished work.

A place for every story. I want to give one quick example of how things often go wrong and one magnificent example of how Woodford does something right, something beautifully right. One of the challenges that often happens and Ministers often fall into this trap where we say, we need to do more regional work, and then the whole project becomes 'let's get a capital city company and get them to just visit and do as many dots on the map of different regions as possible'. Having two impacts: one, ticking a whole lot of boxes and making the Minister feel that they've done great regional work, and secondly, completely ignoring every regional company and artist who was already there and has not simply missed out on the opportunity, but has now going for ticket sales, competing against what was meant to be doing regional work a favour. We can't say we're helping the regions if we're going over the top and hurting them.

*\*Applause\**

It's one of the reasons I love the Small Halls project that happens here at Woodford. Absolutely love it. They take an international artist, a national artist and a local artist and work together so that the full promotional capacity that is being built and that Woodford has behind it with the Small Halls project then provides a bigger audience for the local artist as well. Some of those Small Halls are now saying, we don't want you to come back because we're now fully booked, because the capacity and the local capacity has been built. We have great artists in our regions telling their stories, and them having work right where they live has to be objective number one, not an afterthought.

I want to say a couple of things on the centrality of the artists about the – first of all, the artist. As a creator, I have really strong views about artwork that I love. I don't believe I have a right as Minister to inflict those on the taxpayer dollar. Don't get me wrong, part of me wishes I did. There'd be a lot more Gang of Youths in the world and anyone who saw Jaguar Jonze last night, she'd be on a stage every day. There's a lot of work that I really love, but I think Gough got it right, that peers arm's length, you get the decision making separate. Because what happens when the decision-making is made by the Minister and different pressures come on a Minister? I'll tell you this, at the end of every act, you will hear Woodford do what they're contractually obliged to do, which is to thank the Commonwealth Government and the RISE Grants. Now, the RISE Grants, it was great that money was made available and no matter which method you'd chosen to do those grants, I'm pretty sure Woodford would have made it to the top of the pile. Under Ministerial decision, the previous Minister made a

decision that Woodford would get money, great. But a whole lot of artists didn't get money. But Guns N' Roses did.

Now, I look around here at the number of independent artists, I look at all the different works and tours that happen, I look at all the Australian stories that need to be told and Guns N' Roses don't come to mind for me. And yet every time I hear the RISE Grants, I think two things: I'm glad Woodford got funded. I will never understand why Guns N' Roses got funded twice. Twice.

So, to make sure that the work is done for Australian creatives, arm's length funding will be a centrepiece of how we deal with cultural policy. But I also want to make sure we are looking at the artist as a worker. I never again want a situation which we saw with the former Prime Minister, where he was making a good announcement of money for artists and the only way he could justify it was by saying there were also tradies working there, building the stage. It's great that they were there working the stage as well. But artists are workers too, artists have often been training from the age of children all the way through, working on their craft. They have a right to fair remuneration, and they have a right to safe workplaces.

Let me give you a quick example on fair remuneration and one of the issues that we're going to have to come to terms with. There's a great legacy of Gough Whitlam, where he established what are known as lenders rights, its royalties, that every time you borrow a book from the library, some money goes to the author. Every time you borrow a book. It's a great legacy of Gough Whitlam. But if you go to the library and borrow an ebook and read the exact same novel, work of nonfiction, the Australian author doesn't get a cent. The law has not kept up to date with what our authors need. We have a situation now where the average authors – something like 18, \$19,000 a year, is what is what our authors are surviving on. So, we need to bring our laws up to date with new technology. But the other issue, and I mentioned Jaguar Jonze deliberately, all our artists, all our arts workers have a right to safe workplaces and when I say safe workplaces, that's not just simply physically safe workplaces, in terms of technically safe, in terms of making sure you don't have trip hazards, in terms of making sure that you've got a physically safe environment. It also means you don't have a safe work environment until you have workplaces. For our artists that are free from harassment, that are free from bullying, where people can go to work and simply be allowed to do their job.

Jaguar Jonze is her title as a performer. Deena Lynch is her name and if you go through her Instagram pages, you also see Spectator Jones and other visual arts tags. She's an extraordinary artist. Deena was one of the people who I had on the panels to work through the policies that we would have. She was responsible and a lot of you will have watched a Four Corners episode about a year ago about experiences of some of the workers at Sony. Deena led that and what I'd suggest is, if you catch the gig, I think it's 6:20pm or thereabouts up at the Amphigrande again tonight. But when you go home, stream and watch the lyrics, because you will see all the fury – of what I remember growing up with reading Midnight Oil lyrics – about the right to safety for women in Australia. An extraordinary artist, but we will be addressing this in cultural policy as well.

The fourth pillar is making sure that we have strong institutions, making sure that our cultural infrastructure is robust. There's one thing that really hit me during the lockdown period of the pandemic, which was the infrastructure that we traditionally talked about from Government was the museums, the galleries, the opera houses, the things that Government owns. That clearly wasn't enough. Cultural infrastructure also goes to the businesses, it goes to the venues, it goes to the festivals. And I want to – and what we'll be announcing in a month is to re-gear the Australia Council so that the Australia Council is not only a body dealing with the so-called funded sector. Because very few artists themselves live entirely within the so-

called funded sector. People will go – sometimes they'll be in what's viewed as purely commercial, sometimes they'll be working in an area that's philanthropic, sometimes it will be Government funded. It's the same artists and we need to give the Australia Council policy capacity it hasn't had because as a result of only dealing with the areas that are easier to isolate in terms of Government funding. It's meant areas like contemporary music and areas like writers have always been consistently underfunded. And so, we're going to be regearing how the Australia Council works to be able to open up to those new areas.

The final of the five pillars that I want to touch on, though, is reaching the audience. Now, there's one thing that so many of us did when we were locked at home over those last couple of years and that was stream a whole lot of entertainment. And when the box office was briefly opened, we had this wonderful moment because Hollywood couldn't make it in. Hollywood was saving all of their big shows until lockdowns were over again. And so, we had this one period in summer where the top three films at the Australian box office were all Australian films. It was great. It was Penguin Bloom, The Dry and High Ground, all three Australian films.

It should not take a global pandemic for that to be the case, but we'll never be able to make sure we get the full support for Australian film in this country unless we tackle the automatic structural disadvantage we have, which is we are a relatively small population and we are predominantly an English speaking country. So, the competition from overseas will always be cheaper per minute to produce for the available audience. That puts us on a disadvantage. And the only way you fix that disadvantage is with Australian content quotas. It's the only way.

When you were streaming at home, you were streaming on services that are, for example, there are some great Australian – there is some great Australian content that's coming through on Stan and Netflix, if you go out there and look at there's some really highly produced – like I watched The Twelve the other day, great Australian drama. Foxtel, similarly, is producing great Australian drama. They have a content quota. But Stan don't, Netflix don't, none of the streamers have an Australian content quota. Over the next couple of times we meet during this term, they will have Australian content quotas.

And so, when you put all of that together, you change the place of culture in Australia and get it back to where it should be. Something that interacts with everything, something that affects everything, but also something that we recognise for its proper place.

Australian culture, our artists, our creators are not a decoration. They are required, they are essential.

There's a lovely story that Paul Keating often tells me where before Cabinet he had a place at Red Hill and a few of the Cabinet Ministers would meet with him sometimes and they'd chat about the agenda. And one night halfway through the conversation, Paul said to them, 'I need you all to stop'. And he got out a vinyl. It wasn't the Ramrods, the band in his early years that he said he took from nowhere to oblivion, it was a classical recording. A classical recording of Mahler, Symphony Number Two, The Resurrection. And he put it on and made everyone be completely silent. John Button and John Dawkins, a few of them were there. Played it, got to the end, lifted the needle, put it back and turned to them and said, 'so what does it mean?' And they're not quite sure how to answer. And they said, 'yeah, good recording.' 'Yeah, but what does it mean?' One said 'classical music'. 'No, what does it mean? It means we have to do better.' You can't experience something uplifting and then walk out with the easiest compromise.

The arts, our artists, our creators allow us to imagine better. Woodford allows us to imagine better. It allows us, through true representation, to see ourselves to know each other, and to invite the rest of the world to get to know us.

We've had ten years where, from government, a culture war was waged. Leave Woodford on the first or second of the new year, knowing that in 2023 the culture war is over and cultural policy is ready to begin.

**[ENDS]**