



Australian
Music Centre

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SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY ON THE IMPACT OF THE IMPACT OF THE COMMONWEALTH BUDGET DECISIONS ON THE ARTS July 2015

AUSTRALIAN REPRESENTATIVE
TO THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY
FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSIC



MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL
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The Australian Music Centre (AMC) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Senate inquiry.

1. Background to AMC

The AMC is a national, not-for-profit service organisation for Australian art music composers and sound artists, across the diversity of contemporary classical composition, contemporary jazz and improvisatory musics, and across the rich spectrum of experimental music and sound, including multimedia and screen composition.

The AMC was founded in 1974 as one of the first items on the agenda of the inaugural Music Board of the Australia Council. This reflected a similar commitment internationally to Music Information Centres, and a recognition of the crucial role that they play in conserving, curating, promoting, and sustaining innovation and development.

Over 40 years AMC has documented, promoted and championed activity by Australian artists in our sector, at the local level, the regional, the State, nationally, and internationally. AMC represents Australia internationally through the International Association of Music Information Centres (IAMIC); and the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM).

Core funding for the AMC comes from the Australia Council, from APRA (Australasian Performing Right Association), and support from ArtsNSW, with project funding from a variety of public and private sources. Earned income from sales of products and membership fees contribute significantly to our budget.

The AMC maintains the largest, most comprehensive single collection of materials and information relating to Australian art music creators and performers, which in recent years has become available online, through significant infrastructure investment from the Australian Research Council (2008-2009); digitisation funding from the Federal Department of Education (2013-2015) supporting the implementation of the National Curriculum; and recently announced, a significant ARC Linkage Grant in partnership with University of Western Sydney, Waikato University (New Zealand), and APRA.

AMC is a central node for a broad range of intersecting networks of music-making and activity. It is a constantly evolving testament to the richness, diversity and vitality of Australian art music, both within Australia, and around the world. It advocates for creators, and provides a single hub of information and resources about composers and artists, new Australian art music, performances of Australian art music, and the rich history of art music created by Australians.

Who we represent

It is from this context that this submission is prepared, representing:

- our 663 Represented Composers and Sound Artists, who include Australia's most outstanding composers and performers;
- over 4,200 AMC financial and non-financial members;
- educators and students in the Secondary and Tertiary education sectors around Australia, and those involved in instrumental teaching and learning, who access Australian art music content to fulfil curriculum requirements;
- performers of Australian art music repertoire, be they amateur, community, or professional; as individuals, chamber ensembles, orchestras, or choirs, all of whom rely heavily on the AMC, its resources and networks;
- researchers, who draw on the AMC's collection as an archive for study, and the most comprehensive collection of Australian art music in the world; and,
- larger audiences of music lovers, nationally and internationally, who consume, appreciate, and value Australian musical expression.

2. The impact of the Commonwealth Budget decisions on the arts.

AMC is deeply concerned about the impact of recent budget decisions relating to removal of funding from the Australia Council, in particular, in relation to:

- the lack of consultation with the sector, and the lack of any research undertaken or evidence referred to in relation to the decisions;
- the timing of the decision, given the implementation of the Australia Council's new Strategic Plan, and the implementation of the new funding structure for the small to medium (S2M) sector, with a new multi-year organisational funding application process already underway; and,
- the delay in detailed information being provided relating to the operating of the NPEA, raising questions in the sector and more broadly about its rationale and intent, and its relevance and credibility.
- The impact of the decisions across the S2M cultural sector, outlined in more detail below.

The budget decisions targeting the small to medium sector place much of the sector in critical jeopardy.

AMC's particular concerns regarding the cuts to S2M organisations and individual artists include:

- (a) The potentially catastrophic impact on S2M organisations, which financially are the most fragile, which generally operate on small grants, which provide an excellent return on the funding investment made, and which rely on survival to a large extent on the passion and goodwill of those working for them, and the strong support of the audiences and other constituents they cater to;
- (b) These organisations form part of a complexly layered and interdependent industry, from the major organisations in metropolitan Australia, medium organisations connecting with diverse memberships and audiences, to grassroots community organisations serving local communities. Impacting on any part of this ecosystem without assessing potential consequences causes damage that cannot be undone;
- (c) In music, such organisations provide access to diverse audiences, locally, in regional areas, and around the country. Collectively across the sector, they cater to larger and more diverse audiences than the major organisations do (sourced from Australia Council data). If the unintended impact of the decisions impacted on the number, diversity, and capacity of such organisations, the cultural sector would be less diverse, and less reflective of contemporary Australia;
- (d) The negative impact on individual artists, the threat of less new work being supported, and less capacity for artists to forge sustainable career pathways;
- (e) Cultural activities in regional areas are heavily dependent on the S2M sector, with active and vibrant organisations across Australia serving diverse regional audiences. The occasional engagement in regional areas by the major organisations via touring forms only a very small part of cultural activity in the regions.
- (f) Australian content: the telling of Australian stories; seeing the Australian perspective; hearing the Australian voice. The S2M sector is where the most Australian content is generated, and presented, and where audiences are most likely to hear the Australian

voice. And indeed, the Australian female composer voice, whose presence has been sadly lacking from the main stage programs, and for whom opportunities exist primarily in the S2M sector. These areas are significantly impacted with the budget decisions, and from the Australian Music Centre's perspective, is of great concern.

- (g) Artistic vibrancy. The S2M sector is where most innovation and experimentation occurs, and where most of the artform development takes place. With the budget decisions the capacity for organisations to be innovative in their programming, and individual artists to be exploring the new, is severely restricted.
- (h) Finally, it is important to note that individual artists and S2M sector organisations are among the most agile, the most highly lauded, and the most consistently present voices in international arenas. With this presence, the branding of the Australia Council is ubiquitous, either directly, or indirectly.

The funding cuts proposed not only stand to do longterm damage to our national ecosystem, they will also impact significantly on the international mobility of Australian artists, and slash the opportunities for Australian work to have a presence overseas. This will impact on the way that the world understands Australia.

3. The suitability and appropriateness of the establishment of the National Programme for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA)

AMC welcomes any additional funding stream that supports excellence (in particular) in creative cultural practice, whilst also acknowledging that excellence has always been a part of Australia Council funding criteria.

However more clarity is necessary as to the intent of NPEA, and how the benefits of those supported by it might meaningfully contribute to furthering Australian cultural practice.

Specific concerns relating to the establishment of the NPEA include (as per Inquiry Terms of Reference):

- (i) The impact on Australia Council funding arrangements for S2M organisations and individual artists, as seen by the AMC, is outlined above
- (ii) *The protection of freedom of artistic expression and prevention of political influence.*
The concept of arms-length, peer-assessed public funding was developed to protect these values, and the model represented in the procedures exercised by the Australia Council over more than 40 years presents a mechanism to ensure this. Peer assessment ensures an appropriate assessment of quality creative practice, and whilst the system does have its faults, it represents a truly democratic process undertaken by appropriately qualified experts in the field. Whilst the recently released NPEA guidelines outline procedures that may (at best) only partly address these matters, more information and more clarity is required to reassure the sector that the assessment process for NPEA remains immune from political influence. In addition the process for selecting and appointing "independent advisors" needs to be more transparent.
- (iii) *Access to a diversity of quality arts and cultural experiences*
AMC reflects again on the diversity of organisations and individuals in the S2M sector, in metropolitan and regional areas around the country. If this sector is to diminish through funding cuts, the result is a less diverse sector, presenting less diverse content, less locally produced content, and more content touring from other parts of Australia. This diversity is an essential part of contemporary Australia.

(iv) The funding criteria and implementation process to be applied to the NPEA

In addition to the comments outlined in (ii) above, AMC notes that the NPEA Guidelines have been distributed for comment, and AMC looks forward to more clarity being provided as a result of this process.

(v) Implications of any duplication of administration and resourcing.

The duplication of mechanisms distributing public subsidies to the cultural sector is not efficient or effective. And the duplication that smaller organisations may face in accountability to differing streams of public subsidy creates an additional and unnecessary burden.

As is evident through the membership of IFFACA – the International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies – the models of distributing public subsidies are either through an Arts Council model (which Australia, Canada, and England have been the exemplars), or through a Ministry of Culture model (as in some European countries). With the budget decisions, the outcome we currently have is somewhere between each of these models, without possessing the benefits of either.

AMC thanks the Senate Inquiry for considering this submission.

Please contact me if you require further information.

Sincerely,



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