

ARTS WEST

Arts West Statement on the National Program for Excellence in Arts

Thursday 4 June 2015 – For Immediate Release

Arts West opposes the proposed funding reduction to the Australia Council of the Arts and the redistribution of funds to the Office of the Minister of the Arts.

As a network of eight small to medium arts organisations operating in Melbourne's western suburbs, one of Australia's fastest growing regions, Arts West opposes the proposed funding reduction to the Australia Council of the Arts and the redistribution of funds to the Office of the Minister of the Arts.

In the Federal government's budget announcements made on Tuesday, 15 May 2015, the Minister for the Arts, George Brandis, announced a shift of \$104.7 million from the Australia Council to a new National Programme for Excellence in the Arts, managed by the staff of the Ministry for the Arts.

In light of this announcement and proposal, Arts West has significant concerns about the following:

1. Australia's long-held and bipartisan philosophy of arms-length cultural funding is under serious threat.

The Australia Council for the Arts has well-established processes to ensure arts organisations and artists are not censored for producing work that does not align with the policies of the government of the time.

The recent proposed changes to arts funding will see a significant portion of funding moved to a Ministry for the Arts that has not articulated transparent processes and systems to prevent government agendas influencing funding decisions.

As reported by Michaela Boland in *The Australian* on 28 May 2015, under the proposed funding changes the Ministry for the Arts will have 37% of federal arts funding to distribute at the Minister's discretion, giving the Minister "a say in more than \$1 of every \$3 distributed to artists and smaller arts companies".

This new position directly contradicts previous statements made by Senator Brandis during the 2013 election campaign:

*'The arts should never be the captive of the political agenda of the day: the freedom of the artist to develop his or her creativity wherever it may take them must always be protected and defended.'*ⁱⁱ

2. If implemented, the proposed new arrangements to arts funding will jeopardise the vibrancy and innovation of our arts sector and many communities will have reduced access to the arts.

Small to medium arts organisations provide clear pathways for artists to connect with major organisations. They provide professional development for artists through employment, training and resource support and frameworks for sustainable arts practice – all of which contribute to an arts culture of excellence and a strong cultural economy.

The Australia Council's new appropriation for 2015 -16 is now \$184.5M. Of these funds, two thirds must be spent on Government directed programs. The Australia Council's remaining funds, to be distributed to the rest of the arts sector, will equal \$62M - a reduction of \$23M.

The brunt of this reduction will strongly affect the small to medium arts organisations and independent artists.

For the Arts West network, these proposed funding changes directly impact on the viability of over 4,500 arts, cultural and engagement activities. These activities are delivered locally, regionally, nationally and internationally – including festivals, workshops, performances, programmes, cultural and artistic exchanges and leadership opportunities – activities that provide arts and cultural services to over 200,000 people annually, in a region with an anticipated population growth of 32% by 2023.

The proposed funding changes will have long-lasting and drastic effects to the cultural, artistic and economic ecologies of our community and networks. Arts West urges a reversal of this decision.

Arts West consists of eight arts and cultural small to medium sized organisations, including:

- 100 Story Building
- Big West Festival
- cohealth arts generator
- Footscray Community Arts Centre
- Snuff Puppets
- The Substation
- Western Edge Youth Arts
- Women's Circus

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ⁱ Michaela Boland 'Arts sector asked for new funding model: George Brandis', The Australian, Thursday 28 May 2015
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/arts-sector-asked-for-new-funding-model-george-brandis/story-e6frg8n6-1227371892312>

ⁱⁱ Senator Brandis' speech to the Western Sydney Arts Forum 20 August 2013