Performing arts advocacy in Australia

John Daley
About the author

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A discussion paper commissioned by the Australian Major Performing Arts Group

This discussion paper was commissioned by the Australian Major Performing Arts Group as its last substantial project. The members of AMPAG were given the opportunity to comment on a draft of the discussion paper, but the author is responsible for its contents, and all remaining errors or omissions.

This discussion paper was written by John Daley in his personal capacity. Bel Matthews and Bethwyn Serow provided research assistance for some aspects of the discussion paper.

The author thanks for their extremely helpful contributions numerous members of Australia’s arts and culture community, in organisations, peak bodies, government agencies, universities, and their personal capacity.

The paper is based on information available in April 2021.

This discussion paper may be cited as:
ISBN: 978-0-6451833-0-6
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Overview

The performing arts in Australia have much to celebrate. Live audiences have grown 50% in 8 years. Box office revenues and philanthropy for public organisations have grown similarly. Participation levels are high. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers and works are increasingly prominent and appreciated.

But there are challenges. The public organisations are focused on artforms that are losing share of audience to contemporary music and comedy. The ethnic composition of Australia has changed, but is not yet proportionately reflected in the work of many performing arts organisations. There are calls for more engagement with diverse groups, particularly young people and the socially disadvantaged. Both public and commercial productions have been hit harder by COVID than almost any other sector in Australia.

Public performing arts organisations are losing influence with the Commonwealth Government, and its support for them is declining in real terms. Arts and culture received support through COVID later than in many other countries. Their advocacy is under-resourced and inconsistent, while political winds are unfavourable.

The performing arts in Australia will do better with government if the public, commercial, and community sectors make common cause. They rely on each other. Government regulations of festivals, live music venues, and COVID health measures have forced these sectors into the same trench, and the RISE funding shows the Commonwealth Government is already treating them collectively.

Advocacy should focus on the key benefits of the performing arts. Performers, audiences and governments all believe that arts and culture make people happy, increase their understanding of each other and the world, and connect them together. Connecting to an audience is the main reason that performers get up on stage, and COVID has reminded us all how precious it is. Voters believe that the performing arts make us happy – as they have in every known human culture, not least that of indigenous Australians. Because this is the biggest impact of the performing arts on people’s lives, it should be their central storyline for advocacy.

Of course, different stories appeal to different audiences. The performing arts also matter because they can help bring together an increasingly divided society. They can build social connections that improve both individual well-being and social outcomes. They can foster a sense of national pride.

While economic numbers can attract attention, the economic impact of the performing arts is a supporting plotline. Stories about the economic value of arts and culture are often told by people who don’t believe them to people who don’t believe them. Few perform in order to grow the economy. Economic impacts are not the main aim of government support. Governments care about a lot more than GDP. Over half of all government spending is directed to ends such as health and welfare, which primarily serve ends that the community values rather than growing the economy. That said, the performing arts do employ a wide range of people, produce valuable exports, attract tourists, and attract people who are highly skilled in other industries, and these outcomes are often important to governments, particularly for regions concerned about declining population.

The performing arts can also help those who are disadvantaged with the self-belief to do better. And they can enhance health, education, international diplomacy, and understanding of social issues.

Arts advocacy can work, as shown by campaigns for COVID support, to overhaul regulation of live music in NSW, for regional arts funding in Western Australia, in response to the diversion of Australia Council
money to the Catalyst Fund, and for long-term boosts in funding in Canada and Ireland. In each case, governments responded to a united sector, well organised for the long term.

In Australia, a broadly supported performing arts umbrella organisation – a modified Live Performance Australia, or a new body formed as an alliance of more specialised peak bodies, or some other structure – should be considered. Advocacy bodies for individual artforms, organisations from the public, commercial, and community sectors, producers both large and small, and advocates for a diversity of backgrounds that can easily be overlooked could become members and get behind it, possibly using a federated structure similar to the National Farmers Federation. The peak body would need to show it is acting for all of them. And it is only likely to be effective if it has substantial dedicated resources of its own.

This peak body could improve the advocacy ground game of the performing arts. Like every other industry, the performing arts need to explain their value, and define their ask – not always about money. The peak body needs to select and brief individual messengers who are credible with decision-makers. And they need a broad approach and consistent messages across all responsible ministers, other ministers, their advisers, and local members, on all sides of politics, and at all three levels of government.

The first ask of advocacy could be for governments to rethink their image of Australia. Australia’s public culture is overwhelmingly about sport, perhaps because a few events draw very big crowds. But the private lives of Australians are much more about arts and culture. More Australians buy tickets more often for performing arts performances than live sport, they watch twice as much drama as sport on television, and they are more likely to create arts and culture for themselves than to play sport. Australia’s leaders could be persuaded to rework Australia’s public symbols so they better reflect the actual lives of their people.

This approach to advocacy would have other policy consequences. It would reframe advocacy as about “arts and culture”. It would focus on issues where governments need to step in to promote valuable outcomes that no-one else is likely to pay for. These include training, education, industry development, and local content across a broad range of artforms, and for all parts of the sector, including commercial and community performing arts. It would document more carefully the contributions of public organisations to the community sector. It would lead to new organisations that take artforms from Asia, the Middle East and Africa much more seriously given the changing make-up of Australia’s people. And it would measure the direct impact of performances on happiness, understanding and togetherness, however imperfectly, rather than just measuring attendance and awards.

There has been little substantial change in Australian performing arts advocacy, policy, and institutions in over 30 years, despite radical shifts in artforms, community tastes, and ethnic composition. More of the same advocacy is likely to lead to more of the same outcomes. Given their importance, arts and culture in Australia deserve better advocacy.
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1 Introduction and scope

This discussion paper was commissioned by the Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG) as its last substantial contribution to Australian arts policy. It asked how advocacy with government for the performing arts in Australia might be improved. Although AMPAG’s members – the National Partnership Organisations – are an important part of performing arts in Australia, the brief was wider: to consider advocacy for the performing arts produced by public companies, commercial producers, and community organisations.

The discussion paper discusses performing arts in their context of arts and culture (particularly visual arts and screen), and also draws on the experience of artforms more broadly. While advocacy for arts and culture beyond the performing arts is outside this discussion paper’s scope, analysis of them is relevant. But these broader sectors have not been extensively consulted in its preparation, and firm conclusions about their advocacy would require further investigation.

This discussion paper reviews the current state of the performing arts in Australia – both their successes, and where they are struggling (Chapter 2). It identifies gaps in advocacy for the performing arts, and how these are often leading to ordinary outcomes with government (Chapter 3). The remainder of the discussion paper sets out how advocacy for the performing arts might be improved (Chapter 4):

- with a better rationale (Chapter 5),
- better coordination between public, commercial and community sectors (Chapter 6),
- a more clearly defined ask (Chapter 7),
- a broadly supported and well-resourced peak body (Chapter 8), and
- a more sophisticated advocacy ground game (Chapter 9).

Finally, it outlines some of the potential policy implications of these approaches (Chapter 10).

In preparing this discussion paper, the author consulted broadly across the performing arts sector, both with AMPAG members and others. Their contributions have been extremely helpful, but the discussion paper ultimately reflects the independent views of its author.
2 The performing arts in Australia

2.1 The performing arts are popular

The performing arts, and arts and culture more broadly, are popular.¹

There are almost 23 million paid attendances at performing arts events in major venues per year (Figure 2.1). Total performing arts attendances are more than double this if smaller music venues, all local council venues, and all festival events are included.² For comparison, about 19 million tickets are sold each year to sporting events.³ Pre-COVID, attendances at performing arts events had grown about 50% in 8 years. 54% of the population attend at least one live performance per year, and 20% attend more than one live music performance.⁴ For comparison, in 2010, 43% attended a live sporting event, with 16% seeing an Australian Rules football match, the highest for any individual sport.⁵

Beyond the performing arts, cultural audiences are also large and growing rapidly. In 2017, 82% of Australians attended at least one cultural venue or event (including galleries, museums, libraries and cinemas). There are over 16 million attendances at public and national venues each year.⁶

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¹ This discussion paper adopts a definition of “culture” from A New Approach (2019, p. 10). Sometimes “arts and culture” refers to a set of institutions, individuals and actions that produce and distribute texts, performances, exhibitions an events, including galleries, libraries, archives and museums, music, screen, radio, video gaming and digital arts, performance, literature, visual art, community-engaged practice, hybrid and experimental forms, language, festivals, craft, heritage, design, and live art. At other times, “culture” refers to beliefs, values, ways of living and everyday forms of creativity that we share with other members of a community. Obviously each of these affects the other: artworks can shape a community’s beliefs; a community’s beliefs shape its artworks.


³ Based on data from Austadiums (2020) for the largest codes for 2018-19 or 2019. This does not include tickets for athletics, cycling, golf, hockey, and swimming.

⁴ ABS (2019a, Table 1).

⁵ ABS (2010, Table 3).

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**Figure 2.1: Performing arts audiences have grown rapidly in the last decade**

Number of ticketed attendances to Australian performing arts at major venues (million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Classical music</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Dance</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Children's</th>
<th>Circus</th>
<th>Arts festivals</th>
<th>Special events</th>
<th>Contemp music</th>
<th>Contemp music festivals</th>
<th>Comedy</th>
<th>Music theatre</th>
<th>Commercial performing arts producers</th>
<th>Public performing arts companies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average 2008-2010</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average 2016-2018</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes: Excludes unticketed free events. Three-year averages smooth annual volatility. “Arts festivals” only includes multi-artform festivals; festivals dedicated to a particular artform (such as the Melbourne Comedy Festival) are classified with that artform.

*Source: LPA (2019a).*
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galleries per year. About half of these are attendances at the major state and national galleries, and they have increased by almost 50% over the last decade (Figure 2.3 on the next page). The programming of public galleries is increasingly contemporary, with exhibitions such as the Archibald Prize, Melbourne Now, and the Asia-Pacific Triennial some of the biggest draws. Attendance in 2017 at local council cultural activities (which includes performing arts, galleries, museums, library exhibitions and book readings) was estimated at 58 million, with another 13 million festival participants.

31% of Australians make art. 16% participate in community arts activity such as choirs or theatres. By comparison, about 28% of the population are involved in organised sporting activities.

With high and increasing levels of participation both as audiences and as artists, individuals increasingly see the arts as important to their lives, to Australia, and to their children (Figure 2.2).

First Nations performing arts are thriving. First Nations artists have an outsize presence in major Australian arts awards and international festivals and events, although there are concerns that there are still too few First Nations performing arts companies. Their work is almost

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6. Museums & Galleries Queensland and Public Galleries Association of Victoria (2020). Although this discussion paper only includes data from about half of all public galleries, it includes all of the larger institutions, particularly the big “national” galleries such as the Art Gallery of NSW that attract almost half of all attendances.


8. ABS (2019b, Table 4). An Australia Council survey found higher rates, with the proportion of the population creating art increasing from 40% to 45% between 2009 and 2019: ACA (2020b, p 15, 17) and ACA (2020b, p. 133). Care should be taken in comparing these Australia Council surveys given shifts in methodology. The proportion making art in the major categories (visual art, theatre, dance, writing, and music) has not changed materially.


11. ACA (2015, pp. 32–33); and Brix (2021).
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Figure 2.3: Attendances at major art galleries have grown steadily over the last 15 years
Number of attendances, major state and national art galleries (million)

Notes: Attendance for AGSA in 2016-17 estimated, based on previous and subsequent year. Visitor numbers for AGWA before 2007-08 not shown, as they included website visitors. Excludes TMAG and MAGNT that only provide combined numbers for gallery and museum (452,000 and 332,000 in 2018-19). Does not include private and regional galleries, the largest of which based on the last available year of attendance are MONA Tasmania (347,000), Ballarat (237,000), Bendigo (214,000), Geelong (159,000) and Newcastle (77,000).

Source: Art gallery annual reports; Report analysis.

Figure 2.4: Opera Australia has grown its audience mainly through musical co-productions
Number of attendances at Opera Australia performances

Notes: Source: Opera Australia Annual Reports; and Nugent et al. (2015).
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universally seen as an important to Australia’s culture, and audience interest and attendance is growing.12

2.2 Public performing arts companies are growing

“Public performing arts” companies are defined in this paper as the not-for-profit companies that receive significant support from government, and largely engage professional performers.13 They can be contrasted with “commercial performing arts” producers, who aim to make profits, largely employ professionals, and are sometimes supported by government (although this support is often less explicit). Both commercial and public sectors can be contrasted with “community performing arts” groups, where many of those involved (including performers) are unpaid. They are usually not-for-profit organisations, often supported by government (particularly local government). While these distinctions are questions of degree, this paper will show that advocacy has suffered because public, commercial and community sectors have often not cooperated closely.

The public performing arts organisations are primarily classical music, opera, theatre, dance and circus companies. Audiences for these artforms are growing, although some people are shifting from traditional seasons to arts festivals (Figure 2.1 on page 7).

The 30 major public performing arts companies once known as the Major Performing Arts companies (MPAs) are now described as National Partnership Organisations (NPOs).14 They sell about half the tickets to traditional performing artforms. Over the last two decades, the audiences of almost all the ensembles grew, and their collective audience more than doubled (Figure 2.5), while the population only grew by 70%.15

Audience growth largely reflects more mass open-air events, and co-productions with commercial producers: open air events and musicals are now almost half of Opera Australia’s audience (Figure 2.4 on the previous page).

12. ACA (2015, p. 32); and ACA (2020a, p. 71).
13. This is the implicit definition of “publicly funded organisations” in the work of the Arts Council, England: Arts Council England (2020, p. 33).
14. For a list, see ACA (2020c), to which the Victorian Opera was added in 2019-20. Since 1997 the only changes to this group were to add the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Circa, and the Victorian Opera, and to subtract the Australian Dance Theatre: Nugent et al. (1999). In 2019, Australian Arts and Culture ministers replaced the Major Performing Arts Framework with the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework: Cultural Ministers (2019a) and Cultural Ministers (2019b).
15. ABS (2020a).
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Total NPO revenue is growing through box office, philanthropy and sponsorship (Figure 2.6). Philanthropic funding is growing much faster and now provides more revenue than corporate sponsorship.16

2.3 Challenges before COVID-19

But the performing arts in Australia faced challenges well before COVID brought down the curtain.

2.3.1 Government support for performing arts

Government support for NPOs is effectively shrinking. Government funding for NPOs, adjusted for wage inflation, has barely moved since 1997, while the population increased by 70%, and attendances more than doubled (Figure 2.6). The pattern is the same for all major artforms (Figure 2.7 on the following page).

Support from the Commonwealth is shrinking even faster for smaller public performing arts companies. In addition to annual funding of $115 million to 30 NPOs, the Australia Council provides $32 million a year under four year funding arrangements to 95 arts organisations,17 mostly in the performing arts, and $44 million for other initiatives. While Australian Council funding for NPOs fell by 6% over the last 10 years (and a little further given minor changes in membership), its funding for other initiatives (typically for smaller organisations) fell by 20% in real terms (Figure 2.8 on the next page).

The NPOs did worse than other areas of arts and culture. Support from all levels of government for arts and culture increased by about 8%, adjusted for wage inflation, between 2011 and 2018.18 But growth in support lagged population growth, and so government spending per person fell by 5% in the decade to 2018. Commonwealth Government

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17. ACA (2020d).
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Figure 2.7: NPO revenues grew in all artforms over the last 20 years, mainly through non-government revenues
National Partnership Organisation revenue, $ million (in $2019)

Notes: 2018-19 financial year, except Queensland Ballet and Musica Viva based on 2017-18 financial year. Revenues deflated by WPI. Excludes companies not funded by the Australia Council in both 1997 and 2019 (less than 2% of total in each year).
Source: Nugent et al. (1999); Company annual reports; Report analysis.

Figure 2.8: Australia Council funding has fallen in real terms, particularly for smaller initiatives
Australia Council funding (real $2020 million)

Notes: Deflated by Wage Price Index. Four Year Funding equated with Key Organisations Program.
Source: Australia Council Annual Reports.
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funding fell by 19% per person, outweighing the lift in State and local government funding per person. In many regional areas, the local government is the largest funder of arts and culture, often predominantly for capital works.

Government support for commercial performing arts is material, although it is less transparent, and often delivered outside arts budgets, which makes it difficult to identify funding trends. As discussed in Section 6.1.3 on page 40, governments support the commercial sector indirectly by supporting public performing arts companies that contribute to training a pool of staff shared with commercial producers.

Government also provides more direct support to commercial producers. Destination NSW (the NSW Government tourism agency) described securing Hamilton as the "pinnacle" of its efforts to secure efforts for NSW in 2018-19, although it refused to disclose how much it had paid to secure the rights. Visit Victoria (the Victorian Government tourism agency) highlighted in its annual report its support for three musicals (Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, Come From Away, and Moulin Rouge), and blockbuster exhibitions at the National Gallery of Victoria.

Commonwealth and State governments support contemporary music in a variety of ways. The Commonwealth Government announced a new program in May 2019 that provided $7 million a year to support live music venues, to support Sounds Australia to raise the profile of Australian music in Asia, to provide mentoring programs for female musicians, and to provide grants to indigenous musicians. This program has been adjusted to support live music venues to become operational again in the wake of COVID. The Victorian Government’s Music Works program started in 2014, and provided $22 million over four years to support live music venues to reduce sound spill; to support industry development, to promote Victorian musicians internationally, and for professional development. This program was extended through COVID, in addition to a variety of new programs to support live music performances in outer-metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, live music venues, new recordings, and professional development. The NSW Government has supported contemporary music less: for-profit producers can receive support such as the $1 million Music Now program to support contemporary music, although the ALP promised much larger support of $35 million ahead of the 2019 State election. The NSW government announced a COVID recovery package of $23 million for contemporary music in 2021.

2.3.2 Audience artform preferences

The public performing arts companies focus on artforms that are losing audience share to contemporary music and comedy – artforms mostly produced by commercial organisations (Figure 2.9 on the next page). Audiences are also shifting from the main seasons of public performing arts companies to arts festivals. Individually these artforms reach a relatively limited audience. For example, the main classical music radio station, ABC Classic, reached 855,000 people per week in the 5 major cities in 2020, with a 3.2% share of the broadcast radio audience, its highest level since 2009. The background of Australia’s population may explain some of these changes. Australia’s culture is diversifying away from the Western backgrounds that dominate traditional artforms. The proportion of Australians born in Asia has grown from small numbers in...

19. Ibid. (p. 5).
20. Cunningham et al. (2020, p. 5).
28. Personal communication from ABC Classic.
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1976 to 11% in 2016, while European and British born have fallen from 17% to 9% (Figure 5.3 on page 31).

2.3.3 Public profile and social trends
With a declining share of audiences, public performing arts are losing public profile. When David McAllister competed in the International Ballet Competition at the Bolshoi in Moscow in 1985 Prime Minister Bob Hawke sent him a telegram to wish him luck. When he returned with Elizabeth Toohey in 1986, extended reports of their performance ran in most of the Australian newspapers. And their third visit in 1987 was covered by Channel 9 television news. A similar tour would be unlikely to lead news bulletins in the same way today.

The performing arts must also contend with adverse social trends. Many would say that the quality of school arts education is deteriorating. Streaming and electronic gaming are increasing the competition for attention. Local performing arts face increasing international competition through online and all-but-comprehensive global platforms for music and movies.

2.4 The challenges of COVID
COVID hit the arts, particularly the performing arts, hard. The Commonwealth Government took longer to help directly than governments in other countries. But its JobKeeper package was relatively generous for those who qualified, and it ultimately delivered a relatively large package specifically for arts and culture.

As COVID spread, hundreds of productions, exhibitions, and projects were cancelled. Industry output of arts and recreation (which also

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29. Australian Ballet archives
30. E.g. Music Australia (2017) and Music Trust (2017), although there has not been a comprehensive review of school music education since Seares et al. (2005).
31. Many documented by The Impossible Project (2020).
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includes museums, sports, and gambling) fell by over 25%. By December 2020 it had recovered somewhat so that output had "only" fallen by 9% from pre-COVID levels (Figure 2.10 on the following page). As a result, employment in arts and recreation also fell. Over 25% of workers in the creative and performing arts had stopped working by May 2020. This was similar to the employment fall in the accommodation and food industry (Figure 2.11 on the next page). Overall hours worked halved for the arts and recreation industry. 32

Employment in the creative and performing arts has recovered slowly, and is now a little below pre-COVID levels. It has been the worst-affected industry, along with accommodation, food and beverage. On the ground, many were left with so few opportunities, or so demotivated, that they left the sector, or are contemplating doing so, particularly in Victoria where lockdowns lasted longer and were more stringent. 33

While it is often said that Australian governments did relatively little to help arts and culture through COVID, their total support has been substantial. 34

The Commonwealth Government provided relatively large economy-wide general programs, particularly JobKeeper and Jobseeker. 35 JobKeeper ultimately provided $730 million of support to the organisations and 40,000 people who work in the performing and creative arts subsector, much more than spending on direct grants. 36 Most arts organisations qualified for JobKeeper because of significant revenue declines. And JobKeeper provided them significant support because it paid a fixed

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Box 1: Commonwealth arts support in response to COVID

Public and commercial performances were financially devastated by COVID health regulations and audience fear of infection. The sector lost more output and employees than almost any other.

The Commonwealth Government announced a limited package in April 2020 that provided an additional $10m to regional artists, $7m to indigenous artists and arts centres, and $10m to a charity that provides counselling and financial assistance to artists.

In June 2020, four months after most live performances had been cancelled, there was still no industry-specific relief. An open letter prepared by APRA AMCOS and signed by over 1000 people from across the popular and classical music industry led to a key meeting with the Prime Minister, Treasurer, and the minister responsible for the arts. It was dominated by popular musicians, commercial producers, and industry peak bodies. Prominent popular musicians, Guy Sebastian and Mark Vincent were credited with "sealing the deal" on an industry-specific support package.

The package included the $75 million RISE grant program, $35 million of grants to established public arts organisations, $90 million of concessional loans for new productions and events, and $50 million of grants for local film and television producers. In November 2020, the Commonwealth provided a further $23 million for Commonwealth galleries, museums, and archives. In March 2021, the Commonwealth increased the RISE grant program by $125 million, and counselling assistance by $10 million.

The first tranche of recipients were advised they would receive RISE funding in November 2020, 8 months after the pandemic had largely closed the sector.

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**Figure 2.10: COVID hit arts and recreation activity harder than almost any other industry**
Change in industry gross value added relative to Dec 2020 quarter

![Graph showing change in industry gross value added](image)

- Minimal impact
- Hit hard, still down
- Hit, but bounced
- Hit, still wobbly

**Notes:** Chain volume measure, seasonally adjusted.
Source: ABS (2020c, Table 6).

**Figure 2.11: COVID hit employment in creative and performing arts harder than most industries**
Number of people in payroll jobs by industry relative to 14 March 2020

![Graph showing change in employment](image)

- Financial serv
- Health
- Retail
- Construction
- Info, media, telco
- Education
- Creative & performing arts

**Notes:** Workers receiving JobKeeper, but not working are considered to be in a payroll job.
Data does not include jobs lost by the self-employed.
Source: ABS (2021, Table 6).
amount per employee, while salaries in arts organisations are relatively low. On the other hand there were many who missed out because there are a relatively high number of self-employed and casual workers in arts and culture, particularly the performing arts.\footnote{BCAR (2020) suggests the proportion of casual workers in the cultural and creative sector is not particularly different from the overall population as per ABS (2020d, Table 1c.3, Table 9.1), but performing arts is a small and atypical sub-sector of the cultural and creative sector.}

The Commonwealth Government was reluctant to introduce industry-specific support beyond the general COVID support schemes of JobKeeper and JobSeeker. After some persuasion, the creative and performing arts was one of the few industries that was specifically supported with a package, announced in late June, although little of the money flowed until 5 months later, 8 months after the industry had effectively closed. (Box 1 on page 15). The industry-specific support for creative and performing arts was more than commensurate with the loss of output, when compared with specific support provided to other hard-hit industries (Figure 2.12).

The Commonwealth significantly increased its support in late March 2021, responding to the sector’s ongoing difficulties once JobKeeper ended. Unlike almost all other industries, the sector’s revenue for the first quarter of 2021 was minimal; health restrictions were still biting in late March; and revenues for the remainder of the year were vulnerable because of the lack of advance sales. The Commonwealth provided an additional $135 million: $125 million added to the $75 million RISE fund, and $10 million more for artist counselling and financial assistance.\footnote{Fletcher and Frydenberg (2021).}

State and Territory governments added significant grants specifically for arts and culture through COVID. The NSW Government provided an additional $50 million rescue and restart package for NSW arts and cultural organisations,\footnote{Create NSW (2020).} although by January 2021 only $13 million had

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Commonwealth grants to arts and culture in response to COVID were substantial relative to other hard-hit industries}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Commonwealth grants to arts and culture in response to COVID were substantial relative to other hard-hit industries}
\end{figure}

Notes: Lost GVA calculated as difference between December 2019 quarter and the four quarters of 2020. Travel agent GVA not available, and estimated at $70,000 per employee (creative arts known to be $55,000 per employee). Travel agent lost GVA not available, and estimated at 40% of normal industry GVA. Creative arts and screen lost GVA not available, and estimated at 21% and 20% respectively, proportionate to average fall in payroll jobs 18 March 2020 to 11 Jan 2021 (for comparison, actual arts and recreation lost GVA was 13% and average fall in payroll jobs was 14%). Residential building GVA, GVA loss and employment use proportion of totals for construction sector, based on residential building work done as a proportion of all construction work done. Screen grants do not include $400m for location incentives announced in July 2020, which extends an existing scheme and does not result in additional payments until 2024-25. Travel agent employees based on industry estimate of 30,000 in January 2020, rather than unsourced industry estimate of 40,000 in August 2020.

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been allocated, including $6 million to the Sydney Theatre Company.\(^{40}\) The Victorian government provided $30 million directly to arts and culture organisations, which also shared in $142 million provided to Victoria’s “experience economy” (that also included sporting organisations, racing, tourism and creative organisations in industries such as gaming).\(^{41}\) The Queensland government provided an additional $22 million to support arts organisations and artists.\(^{42}\) The West Australian Government provided $20 million in additional funding to artists and arts organisations, alongside further money for longer term capital works, and a share (so far $7 million of $26 million allocated) from a $157 million COVID relief fund distributed from Lotterywest surpluses.\(^{43}\) It also announced a $157 million COVID relief fund from Lotterywest surpluses, and of the $19 million distributed so far, $7m has gone to arts organisations.\(^{44}\) The South Australian government provided $10 million in additional funding to fund new artistic work.\(^{45}\)

Overall, specific government funding in Australia for arts and culture in response to COVID was less than a number of other countries provided, although JobKeeper far outweighed direct support – at least for those who qualified (Figure 2.13).

Perhaps more importantly, Australian governments were relatively slow to allow performances to resume as COVID was brought under control. They seemed to put much more effort into allowing sporting events to resume, and gave the performing arts less priority than governments overseas.

For example, while all performances were still banned, the Victorian Government agreed to allow up to 1,250 people to attend the Moonee

\(^{40}\) Burke (2021).
\(^{42}\) Queensland Government (2020).
\(^{43}\) Lotterywest (2021).
\(^{44}\) WA Government (2020); and Lotterywest (2021).
\(^{45}\) South Australia Department of Premier and Cabinet (2020).
Valley Race track for the Manikato Stakes and the Cox Plate horse races in October 2020 (a decision rescinded soon after it was published due to the public backlash).\(^{46}\) The outdoor Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne was limited to an audience of 3,000 in January 2021, a quarter of its usual capacity,\(^ {47}\) when the Melbourne Cricket Ground was allowed 30,000 spectators, almost a third of its normal capacity, for the Boxing Day test, and the Australian Open tennis championship was allowed a similar number, about half of its normal capacity.\(^ {48}\) The impression of those in the arts seeking exemptions was that they were a long way down the pecking order in trying to attract the attention of public health teams that had limited resources to consider exemptions.

By contrast, governments in other countries have often provided special exemptions for the arts. In France, for example, the government specifically exempted performing arts audiences from COVID curfews, although despite earlier plans it has left galleries and museums closed while other facilities were opened; and cinemas and theatres were ultimately shut with the “second wave” of COVID, while churches remained open.\(^ {49}\)

Nevertheless, Australian venues have generally reopened long before their European counterparts because of Australia’s success in eliminating local transmission of COVID.

### 2.5 Opportunities for the performing arts

While COVID has forced people physically apart, it has also made many people more aware of how much they value live performance. While COVID overcame audience resistance to recording and watching online performances, it may well broaden the overall audience, and increase demand for live performance. That has been the experience of contemporary music, where the increased availability of music through streaming services such as Spotify has coincided with growing audiences at live performances. Contemporary musicians have long earned far more from live performance than recording.\(^ {50}\)

\(^{46}\) McIver (2020).
\(^{47}\) Baroni (2020).
\(^{48}\) ABC News (2020).
\(^{49}\) K. Brown (2020); Artforum (2021); and AAP (2021).
\(^{50}\) On the economics of popular music over time, see Connolly and Krueger (2005). An academic survey in the US in 2011 found that musicians made three times as much from performing as recording (assuming that all salaries as an ensemble member are income from performing, and all sessional musician earnings are income from recording): DiCola (2013, p. 57).
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3 Performing arts advocacy could be better

The dwindling contribution of the Commonwealth Government to the performing arts over the past 20 years, despite rapidly growing audiences and public support, has not been helped by ordinary advocacy.

Public support for government funding for the arts is not secure. Most people think that governments should support the arts, but public support for government funding dropped materially between 2009 and 2016. And the public are keener on government support for arts and culture for young people and for free and low cost performances than support for artistic innovation.

When advocating directly to those in power, advocacy for the performing arts has often been unsophisticated and sporadic, particularly for public performing arts.

More of the same is unlikely to yield better results.

3.1 The inherent contradictions of historic arts policy

Advocacy for the performing arts has been compromised as it tried to tread around the internal contradictions of “excellence” and “access”, the watchwords of Australia’s historic arts policy.

3.1.1 Popularity and excellence

Historically, governments have funded least the performing arts attended by the most Australians. More people go to see performances staged by commercial presenters than public presenters. Artforms that receive relatively little explicit public support, and are primarily staged by commercial presenters (contemporary music, comedy, and musicals), sell about twice as many tickets as artforms typically staged by public companies receiving rather more public support (theatre, dance, opera, and classical music, which also form much of the program of arts festivals) (see Figure 2.1 on page 7). And the gap is growing.

In the past, the mismatch between what governments funded and what people attended was often justified by the rhetoric of excellence. As the Chair of the Australian Council for the Arts, Nugget Coombs argued in 1970, a profit could be made from “entertainment”, but seldom from “high quality” cultural forms, because quality was rarely popular.

The belief that commercial producers did not produce excellence may have originated in the 1950s when Australian theatre was dominated by a commercial producer, J C Williamson’s. Its work was seen as beneath the best standards of London, and it was argued that standards should be raised by increasing government subsidies to the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. There are at least vestiges of these attitudes in thinking about performing arts today.

But the rhetoric is no longer defensible – if it ever was. The best of today’s popular music concerts and commercial musicals are artistically and technically sophisticated. They too contribute to “public value” or “well-being”, which are now broadly accepted as the touchstones of public policy.

51. In 2019, 63% thought that the arts should receive public funding, up from 51% in 2016: ACA (2020a, p. 48).
52. Ibid. (p. 55).
53. Rowse (1985, pp. 35–36), although it may be fairer to read Coombs (1970) as arguing that the non-commercial sectors provided “research and development” for the commercial sectors, a public good that depends on government investment.
54. Rowse (1985, pp. 7–8); Mills (2020, p. 77), citing Coombs’ memoir.
55. Ibid. (pp. 83–84).
3.1.2 Performance and access

Arts policy – or at least the bulk of the funding – has also tended to focus on the public benefits of attending rather than creating arts and culture. Arts policy has always aimed to provide “access”, but debated what that means. The term is ambiguous; as Deborah Mills pointed out, “access” can mean enabling people to:

- **Experience** art as an audience;
- **Engage** with art as a critical audience; or
- **Create** their own culture.

Arts policy in Australia from the 1950s focused on experience and engagement, rather than creation. Even today, those involved in arts policy are evenly divided when they think about what sort of public access policy is trying to provide.\(^{58}\)

There are only sporadic links between public art institutions and performers in the community. For example, the Key Performance Indicators for the NPOs set by the Australia Council have tended in practice to emphasise financial sustainability, the number of performances, the size of audiences, artist diversity, indigenous connections, and perhaps the creation of new work, rather than the links between public companies and community arts. Metrics have effectively defined mainstage excellence as the core activity, with links to community performers as merely nice to have.

In contrast the ten-year strategy of the Arts Council England puts equal weight on the value of being an audience member, and creating arts and culture.\(^{59}\)

Partly because of these tensions, many of the arguments for government support of arts and culture have been weak, and they have sometimes failed to win over the public.

3.2 Unsophisticated arts advocacy

As well as problems with content, the conduct of advocacy in the corridors of power has been relatively unsophisticated. A lot of arts advocacy has been unsustained lobbying reliant on a few well-connected friends rather than a sustained ground game that is the key to advocacy for almost every other industry in its dealings with government. As Chapter 7 to Chapter 9 will show, the ask has been unclear, and not necessarily targeted at the things that will be easiest for government to provide. There has seldom been any body responsible for coordinating campaigns, and so messages have often been contradictory. Arts companies have often cut across each other, focused on getting more of a fixed pie rather than joining up for mutually beneficial outcomes. Individual messengers have not been deliberately selected and primed with an eye to what will appeal most to the decision-maker. The ground game has been poor. It has not always been broad-based across all three levels of government, across public service and ministers, across government in power and opposition, and across responsible ministers and back-benchers. And while advocacy has reacted to emerging crises, it has seldom built long-term relationships and outcomes.

It may be that this somewhat cavalier advocacy stemmed from a belief that the inherent worthiness of the arts meant that they shouldn’t have to lobby – or worse, the belief that lobbying was a marker that the individual request was not truly worthy.\(^{60}\)

Advocacy for the commercial music sector has often been better. APRA AMCOS led a long-term campaign around the regulation of live contemporary music (Box 8 on page 68). Music Australia articulated

\(^{57}\) Mills (2020, p. 50).

\(^{58}\) Ibid. (pp. 215–216, 219–220).

\(^{59}\) Arts Council England (2020).

\(^{60}\) Rowse (1985, pp. 35–35).
a *National contemporary music plan* in 2016, and advocacy around it influenced the Commonwealth government’s music support program announced in 2019, and the ALP’s policy in the 2019 NSW election to provide much greater support for contemporary music (Section 2.3.1 on page 11). APRA AMCOS has followed up with a campaign around Australia becoming a net exporter of music.

### 3.3 The kindness of strangers

Instead the arts have tended to rely on “the kindness of strangers”, as described by Chris Puplick, a former shadow minister for the arts. Time and again, senior public servants and politicians intervened to direct government money, usually towards traditional artforms, because they were personally interested. Robert Menzies set up the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust; Nugget Coombs (then Governor of the Reserve Bank) persuaded Prime Ministers Harold Holt and John Gorton to set up the Australian Council for the Arts (and to appoint him as Chair); Gough Whitlam set up the Australia Council as a statutory body, reformed its structure; almost doubled assistance to the arts, and most famously authorised the purchase of *Blue poles*; John Gorton and then Bob Ellicott (Arts Minister to Malcolm Fraser) set up lucrative subsidies for Australian films; Paul Keating personally drove the *Creative Nation* policy (which did not survive his term as Prime Minister); Rod Kemp (Minister for the Arts) used his personal friendship with Treasurer Peter Costello to get more money for the arts; and Premiers such as Cahill, Dunstan, and Carpenter all personally drove big arts agendas in their States.

Because arts policy tended to reflect personal interest rather than public interest, interventions tended to favour the most prestigious organisations. Prime Ministers and Arts Ministers repeatedly intervened when there were suggestions that the Department or the Australia Council might reduce the share of arts funding directed to Opera Australia or the Australian Ballet. And when Arts Minister Brandis reallocated money from the Australia Council to the Catalyst fund, the funding for the Major Performing Arts Groups was quarantined so that the change did not adversely affect them (Box 5 on page 51).

While some individual politicians have been benevolent, arts policy has not been a broader political priority. In 45 Commonwealth Government elections since Federation, culture and the arts were mentioned in just 14 campaign launches. The arts are usually a bauble around a minister’s neck rather than a major political prize. Many politicians are reluctant to expend scarce political capital for the arts. The received political

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62. APRA AMCOS (2020b).
64. Macdonnell (1992, pp. 8, 15, 19–20, 93–104); Puplick (2008, pp. 7–12); Barrett (2001); and Mills (2020).
65. As Arts Minister, Peter Howson intervened to direct the Australia Council to divert $400,000 from other projects so the Australian Opera would be ready for the Opera House opening, and for the Australian Ballet to tour to the Bolshoi: Macdonnell (1992, pp. 49–53). Fraser brought in “one-line” direct funding for the Australian Ballet, Opera, and Elizabethan Theatre Trust in 1977, strongly opposed by the Australia Council: Puplick (2008, p. 17). After this funding was returned to the Australia Council, Prime Minister Hawke committed in the 1984 election to ensure that the Ballet and Opera funding was maintained in real terms: Mills (2020, pp. 130–131). In 1985, Arts Minister Barry Cohen effectively directed the Australia Council to fund them accordingly: Puplick (2008, p. 19) and Mills (2020, pp. 132–133). In 1990, funding for Opera Australia was transferred from the Australia Council to the Department, and increased by $1 million, no doubt assisted because the Secretary of the Department was also a member of the Opera Australia Board: Mills (2020, pp. 134–135). In 1994, the Major Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council was established, along with increased funding for the Opera and Ballet Orchestras, which Paul Keating argued would not have happened "without direct patronage from the Prime Minister": Mills (ibid., p. 149).
66. Ibid. (p. 16).
67. Puplick (2008, p. 28). Simon Crean may have been an exception: insiders say that he threatened to resign if Prime Minister Gillard didn’t support his *Creative Australia* policy: Eltham (2016, p. 6).
wisdom is that at best the arts can influence public perception of political leaders, but commitment to the arts does not change votes.\textsuperscript{68}

Across the political spectrum, arts and culture have lacked broad support. As one senior arts administrator put it “the left think the arts are elitists; and the right think the arts are all lefties”.

3.4 Growing political indifference

There is a danger that strangers will be less kind in future. Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott never attended a NPO performance while Prime Minister. Scott Morrison has attended just one – Opera Australia’s production of \textit{Evita}.\textsuperscript{69} Arts policy is less than bipartisan, as the Abbott Government axed the ALP’s \textit{Creative nation} policy within six months of taking office. The Morrison Government was slow to support the arts through COVID, and its earlier interventions were prompted more by concerns about commercial arts companies and the “tradies” involved in productions, rather than any wider cultural policy (Box 1 on page 15).

In part this growing indifference may reflect politicians focused on outer regional swing seats that tend to decide Australian federal elections, and the probably mistaken belief that voters in these electorates are indifferent if not hostile to the arts.\textsuperscript{70}

It may also reflect more fundamental political shifts. People with tertiary education are now more likely to vote for ALP or the Greens than the LNP,\textsuperscript{71} and this trend is intensifying.\textsuperscript{72} This is consistent with global trends as voters without tertiary education swing towards right-wing parties, while left-wing parties are increasingly high-education parties.\textsuperscript{73}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3.png}
\caption{People with a university degree are much more likely to attend performing arts events}
\end{figure}

This political shift poses challenges for arts organisations. It is easy to perceive the arts as elitist, tending to exclude people with less education. People with a tertiary degree are almost twice as likely to attend most forms of live performance as people with no formal qualifications (Figure 3.1). The divide is larger for traditional artforms that have tended to receive more government support. In contrast, attendance rates at live sporting events do not vary significantly by education.\textsuperscript{74}

In this environment, it would be unwise for the arts to keep relying on the kindness of strangers, from either side of politics.

\textsuperscript{68} Puplick (2008, p. 13); and Mills (2020, pp. 136–137).
\textsuperscript{69} Boland (2010); Westwood (2021).
\textsuperscript{70} Fielding and Trembath (2020).
\textsuperscript{71} Cameron and Mcallister (2019, p. 19).
\textsuperscript{72} Chivers (2019).
\textsuperscript{73} Piketty (2019, pp. 864, 867).
\textsuperscript{74} ABS (2010, Table 1).
4 Better advocacy for the performing arts – a summary

Public performing arts companies generally don’t have consistent political backers or broad and deep public support. It’s no surprise that over the long term their government funding is going backwards.

To summarise, future advocacy for the performing arts can get better results through a better approach:

- A common cause between public and commercial performing arts:
  - Shifting rhetoric (and activity) from “arts” to “arts and culture”, as this language is more likely to win public support;
  - Emphasising the co-dependence of public and commercial sectors, including their common reliance on training, and personnel;
  - Asking for a bigger pie for the performing arts, while accepting commercial organisations will receive a larger share of the pie than at present;
  - Backing a well-resourced peak advocate, that broadly represents both public and commercial sectors, which could be Live Performance Australia; and
  - Enlisting commercial artists and organisations as key messengers for the performing arts.

- A common cause between public and community performing arts:
  - Promoting more interactions between public performing arts groups and community performers;
  - Increasing public performing arts group activity in outer metro areas;
  - Systematically mobilising community performers as key advocates with both decision-makers and local MPs; and
  - Transparently reporting and celebrating the community activities of public performing arts groups.

- A step change in the advocacy ground game
  - Articulating compelling arguments that are both logical and appealing to the interests of the audience
  - Clearly defining “asks” from government that are less often about “more money”;
  - Centrally organising, selecting, and briefing individual messengers who are identifiable and credible with decision-makers;
  - Persisting with a long-term approach that aims to build both public profile and relationships with individual decision-makers over time;
  - Using a broad approach and consistent messages across all responsible ministers, other ministers, their advisers, local members, on all sides of politics, at all levels of government; and
  - Responding opportunistically to events – which requires both preparation beforehand, and agility to change tack with developments.

This approach is not radical. It is the approach that almost every industry takes with government. But it has not always been the approach of the performing arts while they have relied on the kindness of strangers.
5 A compelling rationale (for both public and politicians)

5.1 What sort of stories are compelling?

The most fundamental component of advocacy is a compelling story. But even though the performing arts are all about telling stories, the sector hasn’t always been good at telling its own story.75

The key elements of civic rhetoric haven’t changed in millenia – persuasion depends on logic, appeal to the emotions, and shared values.76 Good advocacy has all these features.

In a democracy, a compelling political story ultimately persuades the electorate as well as politicians. In the long run, politicians will never care about the performing arts the way they care about – and fund – health, unless they think people care.77

Different stories will appeal to different audiences. There are a wide range of social, economic, innovation, health and well-being, educational, diplomatic, and cultural reasons to support arts and culture.78 Over time, policy development has tended to focus on different reasons.79 A multiplicity of stories can be effective advocacy, so long as they aren’t contradictory and all lead to the same conclusion. But given the competition for attention, good advocacy should lead with its best story.

While some arguments have drifted into suggesting that art is innately valuable irrespective of the audience, effective advocacy in a democracy ultimately depends on demonstrating how performances improve people’s lives.

5.2 The impact of arts and culture on well-being

5.2.1 A better story

Artists, people, and government all believe that arts and culture can improve well-being directly by making audiences happier, more understanding, and more together.

There are many reasons for focusing on how arts and culture improve the well-being of Australians.

Most importantly, it is a story that fits what people already believe. Most Australians participate in live cultural activities as an audience member, and almost half make art (Section 2.1 on page 7). The importance that people put on participating in arts and culture is illustrated not just by the price of the tickets they buy; but also by the value of the scarce leisure time they spend. Focus groups of “middle Australians” identified the key reasons they value arts and culture as gaining a sense of identity, developing children, stimulating creativity, broadening your mind, having opportunities to be together and building community.80 These are also the areas where more people, and an increasing number, think that arts and creativity have a big impact. The value that people place on directly experiencing arts and culture may explain why very high numbers are keen for their children to experience arts and culture even if they are not regular audience members themselves.81 By comparison,

75. This view was widely shared across the performing arts in interviews for this discussion paper, and was recently expressed by Chris Puplick in an Australian Academy of the Humanities symposium, At the crossroad: Australia’s cultural future.
76. Aristotle (1991, I(ii)(3)).
78. Summarised in Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) and Fielding et al. (2019). Creative NZ (2019, p. 20) usefully maps the various ways that arts and culture contribute to overall well-being. For a recent survey of the rationales supported by the current LNP Commonwealth Government, see Fletcher (2021).
79. Trembath and Fielding (2020a) and Gardiner-Garden (2009).
80. Fielding and Trembath (2020, p. 29).
81. ACA (2020b, p. 48).
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fewer think that arts and culture are important to the economy or in bringing customers to local businesses. And of course most artists don’t believe that the primary reason for performing is to grow the economy: few choose a career as an artist expecting that it will maximise their income.

These values also fit modern theories of government. Governments increasingly acknowledge that they are not just trying to maximise economic outcomes; they are also trying to increase well-being more broadly. The value of arts and culture to well-being is widely accepted. A literature review for Australia’s cultural ministers in 2005 of the social impacts of arts and culture found that the evidence of the instrumental benefits of arts and culture to social outcomes such as health, social inclusion, education was often incomplete. By contrast, there was much stronger evidence that participation in arts and culture directly increases quality of life. At times, Commonwealth arts ministers from Whitlam to Fletcher have seen the enjoyment of the arts as an end in itself as the core purpose of government support.

Patrick McIntyre’s “Pie chart of happiness”, as shown in Figure 5.1, illustrates the various ways that arts and culture directly contribute to these broader aims of happiness, understanding (of ourselves, others, and the world), and togetherness. Audience surveys consistently show that people are affected by performances in these ways. Happiness through entertainment is a lot more than “meaningless consumerist desire” – it

Figure 5.1: Arts and culture directly affect well-being in a number of ways
Patrick McIntyre’s Pie Chart of Happiness

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82. ACA (2020a, p. 41); summarised in Figure 2.2 on page 8.
83. Indeed, performing arts qualifications are less likely to increase lifetime income than any almost other course of study: Norton et al. (2019, pp. 34, 40) and Norton et al. (2018, p. 82).
84. Daley et al. (2020, pp. 14–19).
85. See Fielding et al. (2019, pp. 75–81).
86. AEGIS (2005, p. 60).
89. Culture Counts (2020).
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fulfils fundamental human needs. There is also value in how arts and culture build understanding and create communities. These values of happiness, understanding and togetherness are universal. Indigenous songlines, for example, are a narrative creating personal meaning for each person that sings, a map that locates each person in the world, and a shared memory and understanding for all those that sing. COVID may have suspended live performance, but it has reinforced the importance of happiness, understanding and togetherness in our lives.

Some may be nervous that such well-being arguments won’t cut much ice with hard-nosed governments focused on the language of economics. But it is a myth that governments – left or right-wing – only care about economic growth. While a lot of political rhetoric focuses on the economy, most of the things that governments fund are unlikely to maximise economic growth (Figure 5.2). Much of the health budget is spent on older people who are unlikely to work again. The two largest components of the welfare budget (the Age Pension and the Disability Pension, almost 20% of all Commonwealth Government spending) go to people who are unlikely to work much again. Instead, they reflect widely shared public beliefs that improving health and preventing poverty are valuable ends in themselves.

5.2.2 A story about “arts and culture”

Advocacy is more likely to be effective if the story is about “arts and culture” rather than just “arts”. As revealed through focus groups conducted for the think tank, A New Approach, many middle Australians see “arts and culture” as more accessible, whereas they often consider “the

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90. O’Connor (2020).
92. Treasury (2020a) Budget Paper 1, p.6-5, 6-22.
93. Whether politicians think that these ends are objectively valuable, or valuable because voters like them doesn’t matter much in practice – all the philosophical roads lead to the same place: Daley et al. (2020, pp. 15–16).
arts” elitist. More people agree that government should support “arts and culture” than “the arts”. At least some people perceive “the arts” as a relatively narrow set of activities such as “opera and ballet”, that do not include more popular cultural arts activities such as festivals. This attitude to terminology is not just an Australian idiosyncrasy: many people in the United Kingdom have exactly the same discomfort with “the arts”, while enthusiastically supporting “arts and culture” and their contribution to well-being.

This narrow view of “the arts” may stem from the history of Australia’s arts policy, which has tended to focus on a subset of the performing arts. When government talked about “arts policy” it tended to focus on where its money was going – typically those artforms that had less mass appeal. While policies such as Creative Nation did explicitly embrace a broader range of arts and culture, the focus of funding still didn’t change much.

In the past, some have avoided the language of “arts and culture” because they thought that “cultural” policy has “vaguely totalitarian overtones” and “sounds like the Soviet Union”. But sensitivities about “reds under the beds” in the 1970s have passed. Plenty of non-totalitarian governments acknowledge the importance of shaping a society’s culture in positive directions. The United Kingdom, for example, has had a Department for Culture since 1997, and the Arts Council England now describes its mission as promoting “culture” – meaning collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre and the visual arts.

5.2.3 An inclusive story

If the primary value of arts and culture is their ability to increase our happiness, understanding, and togetherness, then popular music is a central part of the story. Voters mostly experience performing arts and culture in the forms of popular music, festivals, and activity and performances in local communities and schools. A story about the value of arts and culture to people’s well-being is most likely to be believed if it includes these experiences, and they are reflected in arts and culture policy. And recordings (of music, drama or other artforms) are similarly part of this story.

This may prompt uncomfortable questions about what government does and doesn’t subsidise (see Chapter 10). But that price must be paid so that advocacy for arts and culture can start with a story that is logical, emotional powerful, and appealing to the values of a broad political audience.

5.2.4 Challenges to the story

There are challenges to telling this story that arts and culture can improve happiness, understanding, and togetherness. Arts and culture must compete for attention, there is relatively little media space for some arts, and their values may not always align with Australia’s allegedly anti-elitist ethos. All these challenges are easier to overcome with a broader focus on “arts and culture”.

The competition for attention is increasing with ubiquitous social media and mobile devices. But people are spending more time watching live performance and recorded drama. Pre-COVID, live attendances were growing rapidly (Figure 2.1 on page 7). And there seems to be no shortage of demand to see live performances as COVID restrictions are relaxed. On screens, televised drama captures far more eyeballs than...
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televised sport.\textsuperscript{102} And the shift from live TV to streaming is increasing the preponderance of drama on screens.

The media has reduced the space for reporting on traditional artforms – partly reflecting general cut-backs in newsrooms, and partly reflecting the ability of digital platforms to track what people actually read. But news media continues to devote a lot of space to commentary on arts and culture defined more broadly – even if this is weighted towards popular music, television and streamed drama.

Focusing on the direct impact of arts and culture on people’s lives might seem to risk a race to populist low quality. But it is a myth that Australians are interested in elite sport but averse to excellence in the performing arts. Shows such as The Voice, and Dancing with the stars are framed as competitions and attract big audiences. The key to promoting excellence in performance seems to be a format that makes the artform more accessible, and helps to educate its audience about what constitutes excellence in the artform.

5.3 Australian identity and social cohesion

In a fractured world with declining trust in institutions, arts and culture can play a lead role in promoting a shared identity that helps communities to hold together. Governments are looking for ways to build social cohesion. The growing cultural distance between regions and cities is fuelling dissatisfaction with governments.\textsuperscript{103} Many politicians are worried about their ability to bring communities with them in making the tough choices needed for good government. Arts and culture can play a constructive role in helping to define what binds together a diverse community.

Many are concerned that Australian society is fragmenting. A range of factors have been identified: the rise of social media, falling membership of traditional social organisations, increasing ethnic diversity (in capital cities but not so much in regions), and increasing wealth and income inequality (after housing costs).\textsuperscript{104} Politicians are particularly concerned about declining trust in many institutions (particularly parliamentarians), declining voter allegiance, and an increasing minor party vote.\textsuperscript{105}

It is at least plausible that cultural interventions are the key to cultural problems. Governments from imperial Rome to imperial China to Medici Florence and Bolshevik Russia have used (and sometimes mis-used) art to shape cultural identity.\textsuperscript{106} Commonwealth Government concern about communal identity may lie behind the substantial government investment of energy and money in promoting Australia’s shared military heritage over the last decade, including $100 million for the Sir John Monash Centre at Villers-Bretonneux, and current plans for a $500 million extension to the Australian War Memorial.\textsuperscript{107} These dwarf the Commonwealth’s other investments in arts and culture over the last five years. The “Anzac myth” may or may not help veterans, but it is manifestly part of a government attempt to create shared cultural touchpoints.\textsuperscript{108}

Generating Australian work, that is widely consumed, can contribute much to national identity and ultimately social cohesion. In the performing arts it manifests as the creation of new Australian work – or at least substantial new Australian interpretations of works from elsewhere. The Australia Council already sets and measures targets for

\textsuperscript{102} On average, Australians watch 65 hours/month of television, and a further 26 hours of streamed video; of this 10 hours/month is televised sport: Report analysis of ThinkTV (2020), Zenith Media (2020) and Dawson (2017). On commercial television, 10% of hours watched are sport, while 23% are drama and movies, and another 13% is reality TV – arguably a form of improvised drama: Deloitte (2020, p. 20). It is likely that the ABC and streaming services are even more weighted towards drama.

\textsuperscript{103} Wood et al. (2018, pp. 56–68).

\textsuperscript{104} See Leigh (2010), Daley et al. (2017, p. 28) and Daley et al. (2019, p. 28).

\textsuperscript{105} Wood et al. (2018).

\textsuperscript{106} Daley et al. (2020, p. 19).

\textsuperscript{107} Miller (2018); and Midena and Doherty (2020).

\textsuperscript{108} J. Brown (2014); and Eltham (2016, pp. 58–60).
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ew Australian works. Australian content could potentially be increased if commemorative bodies were encouraged to commission works for official occasions (such as citizenship ceremonies, Anzac Day, and official openings).

But Australia’s art and culture is unlikely to play a bigger role in fostering social cohesion unless Australia’s senior politicians embrace them as a key part of Australia’s identity, equivalent to sport and military engagement (Section 7.2 on page 47).

The relationship between identity and culture is inherently complicated. Beliefs about the government’s role in defining national identity, and the nature and content of national identity in part depend on the precise democratic tradition. An Australian national identity would need to encompass all of the three major parts of its history: indigenous; British institutions; and broad-sourced migration.

But whatever the precise theory, arts and culture can bring a society together, because they catalyse social connection, foster a sense of communal pride, and create shared narratives. As well as bringing a society together, arts and culture that define a shared Australian identity are also important to indigenous reconciliation, to marketing Australia as a tourist destination, and to creating a sophisticated national export brand.

Creating a shared identity requires particular forms of arts and culture. They need to stress what we have in common rather than what some people lack. They need local content that connects particularly to Australia. Australian governments are increasingly funding indigenous arts and culture, partly to recognise its importance as part of the Australian story, and partly because it is so identifiably from Australia rather than elsewhere. And Australian people are increasingly recognising indigenous arts and culture as an important part of Australia’s culture.

The value of reinforcing connections to a society’s shared history may explain why European governments spend so much more on arts and culture – it fits with a history shared by more of their population. Much of the classical music canon, for example, is more deeply part of the shared history of Germany than of Australia. Correspondingly, German governments support 129 professional orchestras, dwarfing Australia’s 10 supported orchestras. As a result people in Germany are also more engaged, although the difference is not overwhelming: in Germany classical music concerts each year sell 1 ticket for every 10 residents; in Australia it is 1 for every 20.

In its current form, Australia’s public arts sector may not quite fit the bill in promoting an Australian national identity. When the Australia Council for the Arts was constituted, apart from indigenous arts and culture, Australia’s historical culture was overwhelmingly European. From its beginnings the Australia Council almost exclusively promoted European forms of arts and culture.

In the last few decades Australian governments have substantially increased their support for indigenous arts and culture: the indigenous Bangarra Dance Theatre was included in the Major Performing Arts Group; the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association Dance College became one of the Arts8 elite training organisations directly funded by the Commonwealth; and indigenous artists are well-represented both in nominations for domestic awards and in international events.

111. Fielding et al. (2019, p. 20); and ACA (2020a, pp. 88–89).
112. ACA (2020a, p. 68).
115. ACA (2015, p. 9).
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But this still misses material parts of Australia’s history today. In 1976, 17% of those living in Australia were born in Europe and the UK. Today, only 7% of Australia’s residents were born there, whereas 11% come from Asia, and another 3% from the Middle East, and Africa (Figure 5.3). But there is no dedicated major performing arts training institution or performing arts company that is focused on these cultural roots except perhaps the National Theatre of Parramatta. As Steven Wolff has put it, our public arts are now often playing 19th century content in 20th century places to 21st century people.\textsuperscript{116} Arts and culture can only promote social cohesion if they take seriously the increasing breadth of Australia’s ethnic history.

Of course, fostering social cohesion should not be the only purpose of arts and culture. Arts and culture that contribute to a shared identity as described may be less good at serving other worthwhile purposes, not least in defining individual identity (including how one is different from others) and in adding to movements for social change.

Arts and culture, particularly the community sector, can also be powerful tools for building \textit{personal and local connections}. It is increasingly recognised that these connections are the dominant driver of overall life satisfaction, alongside income. J.-F. Kelly et al. (2012, p. 4) But whereas government has many tools to affect incomes, it has fewer to promote social connections. Arts and culture can help.

### 5.4 National and civic pride

Both public and politicians can be motivated by national or civic pride. Arts and culture can provide a sense of community accomplishment, and personal legacy. This motive is stronger for some than others – illustrating how the best argument for advocacy depends on the audience (Section 9.6 on page 71). Funding for elite sport demonstrates how powerful this motivation can be.

\textsuperscript{116} Wolff (2019).
Motivations of national and civic pride can overlap with the desire to create shared identities (Section 5.3 on page 29), promote export industries, and regional development (Section 5.5.3 on the next page).

5.5 Economic impacts

Governments are right to care about economic growth. The size of the economy is a close proxy for the sum total of resources available to produce all of the things we care about – physical goods, health, education, and of course art and culture. Naturally, governments look for policies that will increase economic growth, even if economic growth is not the only thing that matters (Figure 5.2 on page 27).

5.5.1 Arts advocates have talked more about economics

Since the 1990s, arguments for arts and culture have increasingly referenced their economic impact. The introduction to the Keating Government’s cultural policy, Creative nation, concluded with the assertion that:

This cultural policy is also an economic policy. Culture creates wealth. Broadly defined, our cultural industries generate 13 billion dollars a year. Culture employs. Around 336,000 Australians are employed in culture-related industries. Culture adds value, it makes an essential contribution to innovation, marketing and design. It is a badge of our industry. The level of our creativity substantially determines our ability to adapt to new economic imperatives. It is a valuable export in itself and an essential accompaniment to the export of other commodities. It attracts tourists and students. It is essential to our economic success.

Arts advocates have been leading with economic arguments for much of the last two decades. Many have cited ABS work showed that “cultural and creative activity” amounts to 6.4% of GDP. All States and territories have produced creative industries strategies. A recent article suggested that submissions from the arts and culture sector to government should focus on “the battle for jobs”, “generation of economic success”, “backing small business,” “the budget bottom line”, and “regional economic growth”. Helping young people to make good life choices and supporting “the Australian way of life” were well down the list.

5.5.2 A weak leading argument

But while advocates for the performing arts have increased focus on their economic impacts over the last 20 years, Commonwealth government support for them has fallen. It is not obviously a winning strategy. The economic impact of the arts is a poor leading argument for many audiences. It’s often an argument made by people who don’t believe it to people who don’t believe it.

Few artists perform because it contributes to the economy. It is inherently hard to lead with economic arguments when few of the industry’s participants believe that increasing economic activity is the point of what they do.

Arts organisations obviously care about the economics of their business – the books have to balance. And they are acutely aware of their responsibilities as employers, providing jobs and income for many people. But for most – including those in the commercial sector – their primary motivation for being involved in the industry is the happiness, understanding, and togetherness that the performing arts provide to audiences.

117. Daley et al. (2020, p. 16).
118. Trembath and Fielding (2020a, p. 30).
119. Department of Communications & the Arts (Australia) (1994).
121. Trembath and Fielding (2020a, p. 48).
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The public is sceptical that the arts have much economic impact. Only 22% of Australians think that the arts have a big impact on the economy – far more think that arts and culture have a big impact on self-expression, thinking creatively, dealing with stress, and a sense of wellbeing (Figure 2.2 on page 8). Similarly the focus groups of “middle Australians” conducted by A New Approach struggled to identify economic contributions of arts and culture, even when prompted, while they were much quicker to identify their impacts on wellbeing, connection, and community.

Politicians and their public service advisors are also sceptical. Governments that want to stimulate economic activity can usually find ways to do so more effectively than supporting the performing arts. And statistics about economic contribution are now treated with suspicion in Canberra, which is awash with industry-funded consultants claiming that each client’s industry contributes so much to the economy that they add up to much more than annual GDP.

The claim that “cultural and creative activity” amounts to 6.4% of GDP requires particular care. As a number of commentators have pointed out, it is inflated by including many activities which are not core to most conceptions of “arts and culture”, including IT development, the fashion industry, advertising and marketing (including people working in other industries such as finance), book and newspaper printing and retailing. The arts industry – including broadcasting and electronic media – is just 0.8% of GDP. The connections between performing arts and “cultural and creative activity” are at best indirect: it’s a long bow to say that all the other cultural and creative activities would be proportionately affected every time government reduced support for performing arts companies.

While politicians often trumpet the number of jobs or the economic activity “created” by a policy intervention, they are usually well aware that alternative policies (including doing nothing) would often have an even bigger impact. The advertised economic impact can be just an ex-post justification for what government wanted to do for other reasons.

Nevertheless, right-wing governments often try to maintain public focus on economic issues because electorates typically perceive them as better at managing them. Consequently, right-wing often frame support for arts and culture using economic language even if this is not their primary motivation.

As a result, it is sensible advocacy to supply these economic arguments, while at the same time maintaining well-being arguments that are more likely to convince the public and build long-term support.

5.5.3 A useful supporting argument

Nonetheless, economic justifications can make good supporting arguments for government support of arts and culture.

Government strategies from Creative Nation, to the Blair Government’s Cool Britannia, to Victoria’s Creative State have linked arts and cultural activity with the growth of high value creative industries, even though the links between culture and creative industries are not always clear. Sometimes the links are seen as indirect – for example a thriving visual arts culture might lead to better fashion and architectural design. Or it may be that global creative talents and ensuing economic activity in anything from financial services to mining technology are attracted to

123. ACA (2014, p. 34). This question has not been asked in subsequent surveys, which instead asked if arts “bring customers to local businesses”.
125. O’Connor (2020); Trembath and Fielding (2020b); and Browne (2020).
cities with a thriving cultural scene as argued in Richard Florida’s theory of the creative class. While plausible, these theories are inherently hard to prove. Talent and creativity usually correlate with thriving arts and culture, but it’s at least possible that clusters of talent and creativity cause arts and culture to blossom, rather than the other way round.

Perhaps the most plausible connection is nation branding: the sophistication displayed by high-quality arts and culture may suggest sophisticated capabilities to potential buyers of other goods and services from finance to telecommunications. For example, The Australian Ballet’s performance of Graeme Murphy’s Swan Lake in Paris was seen by its major sponsor, Telstra, as a very helpful commercial calling card in changing French attitudes about Australian technical capability. But projecting this kind of national image requires consistent public messaging. It would require realigning Australia’s official symbols and tourism messaging to match the interests of individual Australians on arts and culture rather than focusing so relentlessly on sport and the outdoors (Section 7.2 on page 47).

Governments may be particularly attracted to particular kinds of jobs for political reasons. Some politicians focus on tradies and low income small businesses because they believe that their political allegiance is relatively weak, and their votes tend to swing key marginal seats in the outer suburbs. A key turning point for the Prime Minister in supporting an arts industry rescue package was seeing the impact on small-business people involved in the arts, and the announcement said that the “package is as much about supporting the tradies who build stage sets or computer specialists who create the latest special effects, as it is about supporting actors and performers”.

Positioning arts and culture as part of an “industry” can have some political benefits. Inherently it makes common cause with commercial interests, for which right-wing parties may have more intuitive sympathy. Pointing to the problems of an entire industry appears to have been an important part of the successful strategy for obtaining COVID support (Box 1 on page 15).

Of course, characterising support for arts and culture as industry support is a two-edged sword: in non-COVID times it arouses opposition from institutions such as the Productivity Commission designed to oppose industry support precisely because it typically benefits one particular industry at the expense of the public interest.

Governments care even more about additional activity in regions. Governments in Australia have tried for over a century to redistribute economic activity towards slower growing locations, particularly in the regions, even if it does not increase the size of Australia’s economy overall. While most of these attempts fail, arts and cultural investments are more plausible than most other regional development policies. The theory is that arts and cultural activity attract both employees and tourists to the region. At the very least they are invariably much lower cost than the typical alternatives of spending on regional roads, rail links and sporting stadiums.

Regional development arguments are powerful not because of the economic logic, but because regional residents are typically looking for government intervention to ensure that they get their “fair share”. Politicians tend to respond, even if they know that many interventions will not deliver. The argument is not primarily economic; instead it

responds to concerns that regions are not being treated fairly. This perception may reflect reality: fewer people attend and create performances in regional areas than in city areas.\textsuperscript{135}

There are many examples of government prioritising regional arts and culture in response to these political pressures. Governments routinely make high profile regional arts announcements, often funded from regional development rather than arts budgets. Election commitments to regional arts funding can be the largest commitments to the arts in an election (Box 2). Many of these commitments are initiated by the National Party – refuting the claim that right-of-centre parties in Australia are inherently hostile to the arts. Of course, campaign commitments can be a mixed blessing: they often fund capital infrastructure but not the additional operating costs associated with a larger facility.

Governments may be motivated to spend on arts and culture as economic stimulus. When an economy is moving slowly, spending on entertainment tends to lead to more private sector investment than government spending in any other area.\textsuperscript{136} But this is a limited argument: precisely because performing arts are a small part of the economy, government stimulus for them cannot be the centrepiece of stimulus spending. And findings about the economic flow-on of entertainment industry stimulus are drawn from the history of “normal” recessions, rather than the unusual circumstances of the COVID shock, which may have (for a time) also dampened public appetite for entertainment.

Arts and culture can attract international and domestic visitors. 43\% of international visitors to Australia engage in an arts activity – primarily visiting galleries and museums. About 9\% attend a live performance – more than attend a sporting event.\textsuperscript{137} For 1 in 5 visitors, creative experience was the primary reason for visiting Melbourne (only

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**Box 2: Regional development arts funding initiatives**

In response to the Vote Arts campaign run by Country Arts WA ahead of the 2013 Western Australia election, the National Party committed to a $16 million increase in regional arts funding, and the ALP matched this commitment. After winning the election, as part of its much larger Royalties for Regions program, the LNP coalition allocated $24 million for Creative Regions funding over 4 years. This increased annual funding by all levels of government for the arts in WA regional areas by 56\%. The campaign could have gone further: even with the additional funding, government spending in 2015-16 on arts and culture of around $41 per person in regional areas was still less than the State-wide average of $50.

In the 2016 Federal election campaign, the largest single commitment to arts and culture by any party was $10 million for the Shepparton Art Museum – funded from regional development funds.

In responding to COVID, the Commonwealth Government was quick to set up a Regional Arts Fund of $10 million in April 2020, well before it set up sector support for arts and culture more generally in June 2020 (Box 1 on page 15). Government may have responded more quickly in regions because new arts programs were already in the works to respond to the Black Summer bushfires.

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\textsuperscript{135} ACA (2020b, Tables 1, 3, 7).

\textsuperscript{136} IMF (2020, p. 43)

\textsuperscript{137} ACA (2018, p. 14); and ACA (2015, p. 25).
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behind visiting friends and outdoor experiences). International tourists that engage in cultural activities tend to stay 25% longer; spend 20% more, and their numbers were growing a little faster pre-COVID, than tourists who don’t engage in cultural activities. Globally, tourism has grown much faster to countries that feature cultural experiences in their tourism marketing policy.

But Australian tourism marketing has tended to underplay cultural experiences, with poorly collated information and marketing. The Tourism Australia homepage, for example, currently features 24 outdoor/wilderness pictures, 3 for food and wine experiences, and just 1 for arts and culture (for the red centre). With relatively low expectations, most international visitors to Melbourne are positively surprised by their arts and culture experience.

The failure to position Australia as a cultural destination for tourists, despite its assets, is probably another manifestation of the mismatch between Australia’s “official” image, and reality (Section 7.2 on page 47).

COVID creates an opportunity to reset Australia’s positioning for international tourists. Australia has managed COVID with more sophistication than almost any other country. This could be coupled in tourism marketing with an increased profile for Australia’s arts and culture experiences.

Governments can also be particularly attracted to measures that increase exports. Mercantilism appeals to powerful intuitions about the value of exports, not least because they ultimately make imports more affordable.

APRA AMCOS are pressing for industry policy to support the vision of Australia becoming a net exporter of music. This is a key justification for their calls to introduce tax offsets for live venues and recording producers, effective enforcement of Australian quotas for commercial radio stations, the retention of effective copyright rights on digital platforms, the relaxation of restrictions on live venues, and reforms to music education. They point to the successes of Sweden and South Korea in building export music industries (Box 3 on the next page).

There are no guarantees that this is a realistic option for Australia given how much the South Korean and Swedish precedents depended on local factors that are not easy to replicate. But as advocacy it has the virtue of providing a politically attractive aspirational “light on the hill”, which also appeals to a sense of national pride.

A similar campaign might be mounted around developing Australian theatre so that it provides a steadier stream of content suitable for turning into movies for export. There are a number of examples already, such as Babyteeth (Belvoir), The Daughter (originally Belvoir’s The Wild Duck), and The Boys (Griffin Theatre). Such a campaign would need to articulate, as APRA AMCOS have, the government interventions required to develop the industry.

5.6 Other instrumental arguments

Arts and culture activities can have many other benefits. They can improve health, education, social inclusion, and diplomacy. These are important rationales for government to support the performing arts, but their usefulness for advocacy has limits.

Health, education, disadvantage, and international affairs all matter a lot, and well-designed arts and culture programs can substantially improve

141. Australia (2021) as of 10 February 2021, excluding pictures related to particular accommodation providers.
143. Leng and Lemahieu (2021).
144. APRA AMCOS (2020b).
outcomes.\textsuperscript{145} Arts and culture programs can be particularly effective in changing self-belief because they open windows into other worlds. Health, education, disadvantage, and international affairs are high-profile causes, and their advocates can be powerful allies for arts and culture. The difficult for advocacy is that arts and culture programs are not going to be consistently at the top of their agenda. Making hospitals safer, rolling out a new literacy program, or international climate change negotiations are always going to outrank an arts and culture initiative for a minister of health, education, community welfare, or foreign affairs.

5.7 Social change

Some, but by no means all, arts and culture engages with difficult social issues. But it is often poor advocacy to claim these social interventions as the primary purpose of arts and culture.

Some argue that arts and culture should be supported because they can encourage attitudinal and policy change on a range of issues from refugees to family violence.\textsuperscript{146} The Australia Council for the Arts recently set a priority for at least some National Partnership Organisations to “deliver arts and cultural activities that drive social change”, although this is not an objective articulated in the Australia Council’s published strategy.\textsuperscript{147}

Arts and culture can decisively change the culture of local communities, particularly when the community is part of making the work.\textsuperscript{148} This kind of social change overlaps with the objectives of building social cohesion (Section 5.3 on page 29), improving education, and reducing disadvantage (Section 5.6 on the previous page).

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\textsuperscript{145} The literature is extensive: see e.g. Trembath and Fielding (2020a, p. 22), Creative Victoria (n.d., p. 24), Sunderland et al. (2018) and DLGSC WA (2019)
\textsuperscript{146} E.g. Lillie (2015).
\textsuperscript{147} ACA (2019).
\textsuperscript{148} For a number of examples, see Schultz (2014).
\end{flushleft}
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Arts and culture can also challenge cultural attitudes more broadly, such as the impact of Back to Back Theatre on attitudes to disability. But because each individual production reaches a relatively small proportion of the population, it can only seed shifts in cultural attitudes, which are primarily popularised through mass media, particularly television drama, news and current affairs.

Arts and culture are seldom the primary drivers of shifts of particular government policies. For example, plenty of artwork has advocated change in Australia’s policies for dealing with asylum seekers; it is not obvious that anything has changed as a result. As composer Andrew Ford wrote recently: 149

Changing society with a painting or a poem or a novel, a symphony or a song is a tall order, and it’s difficult to name an example of where it has happened.

For more abstract artforms, particularly music and dance, much of the work inherently has a more tenuous relationship with social change.

On the other hand, arts and culture often reflect social change, helping people to understand the world changing around them.

When arts and culture do help to drive social change, highlighting this as their primary rationale is often not good advocacy. Social change is invariably controversial, and encouraging change on any particular issue is likely to affront at least one side of politics in a world where successful arts policy needs to be long-lasting with the support of all major political parties.

5.8 The innate worthiness of the performing arts

Some arguments for the performing arts have appealed to the intrinsic value of the work produced, even if its audience is tiny. But it is easy to portray the rhetoric of innate worthiness as elitist, a justification for supporting work just because it has the imprimatur of insiders. As rhetoric it is unlikely to persuade the unconverted – people who haven’t already personally had these experiences.

A focus on improving the lives of professional artists can also be misconstrued as a claim to the innate worthiness of producing art. But the policy arguments for funding artists are not compelling unless their art improves the lives of Australians more broadly. After all, it is the Australia Council for the Arts, not the Australia Council for artists. To be compelling with the public, the story must be about how the art produced is going to increase the well-being of Australians.

5.9 Choosing a story

As illustrated by this discussion of the various reasons for supporting the performing arts, different stories will appeal more or less to different audiences. The best story will always need to be tailored to the interests of the particular audience.

Arguments about the ability of the performing arts to make people happy, understanding and together are most likely to win the hearts and minds of the public. In the long run this is the most important form of advocacy – as policy-makers inevitably respond to public opinion. For the same reason, it may often also be the most important issue for backbenchers.

Arguments about the economic value of the performing arts are more likely to attract the attention of ministers, although often they will be motivated to act on them because the performing arts also make people happy, understanding and together.

Arguments about the impact of the performing arts on social cohesion, education, health, or disadvantage are likely to be most important when talking to those with particular interests in these issues.

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6 A common cause – commercial and community arts and culture

Making common cause between the public, commercial, and community sectors of the performing arts is vital to effective advocacy for them all. A combined approach is the key to more logical arguments, more powerful advocates, and mass appeal to the electorate.

The stories that explain why arts and culture matter apply whether they are produced by public, commercial, or community organisations. Policy arguments about arts and culture must logically include all of them.

Commercial and community artists, producers, and audiences are potentially the most powerful advocates for arts and culture. They often have stronger political connections to right of centre governments and to local members of parliament than public arts organisations.

And commercial and community arts groups have mass appeal that could enable them to mobilise public opinion more easily, which is the surest road to favourable political decisions in the long run.

6.1 The place of commercial performing arts

6.1.1 Defining “commercial performing arts”

“Public” and “commercial” performing arts aren’t neatly defined categories, but they are useful in practice. As discussed in Section 2.2 on page 10, the categories distinguish between not-for-profit and for-profit entities, which both have a professionalised workforce. Public performing arts companies tend to receive more government support, but it is a question of degree. Governments support commercial producers directly through programs such as live music strategies, through tourism budgets, and indirectly through education and training and industry development (Section 2.3.1 on page 11). Some public performing arts companies receive relatively little government support: governments provided just 7% of the revenue of the Melbourne Theatre Company and 10% of the Sydney Theatre Company in 2019. Public companies can run particular productions at a surplus, as Opera Australia’s musicals aim to do. Some youth theatre organisations fall between these categories: they are supported by government (in part through education budgets), but legally the performers own the business entity, so that performer income and company revenues are less clearly separated. Nevertheless, the distinction between public and commercial sectors has tended to be important in practice.

6.1.2 Commercial performing arts and better advocacy

When advocacy for the performing arts focuses on how it improves well-being, commercially produced performing arts should be part of the story. Making common cause enables more powerful advocacy for both public and commercial performing arts.

First and foremost, a common cause is the logical consequence of the core argument for supporting the performing arts. The argument is that the performing arts are valuable because they promote happiness, understanding and togetherness. This is true whether the performance has a public or a commercial producer. Logical coherence always helps a powerful story.

Second, it is easier to argue for “industry” support if public and commercial producers club together. It draws attention to their very similar activities, distinct in many ways from other patterns of work.

150. Precisely because these companies were so reliant on box office revenue, they received rather more government support through COVID.
152. As Peggy Noonan, Ronald Regan’s speechwriter put it: "Nothing is more beautiful, more elevating, more important in a speech than fact and logic. People think passionate and moving oratory is the big thing, but it isn’t… Without a logical case to support rhetoric has nothing to do. It’s like icing without cake": Noonan (2003).
Third, commercial producers often make powerful political allies. They are often politically well-connected. They tend to be aligned more closely with other powerful industry sectors: commercial theatres with tourism; and live music with pubs and clubs. Because they are ultimately commercial enterprises, often small businesses, they may appeal more to the right-wing of politics.\(^\text{153}\)

And finally, commercial performing arts often have more mass appeal, and thus more support from the electorate, and in some cases the ability to open more doors.

These factors came together in 2020 when advocating for government support through COVID-19. Even though the performing arts sector was affected much more than almost any other industry, the Commonwealth Government dragged its heels in providing industry-specific support. Advocacy by Live Performance Australia and many others argued for an industry package that would help both commercial and not-for-profit producers. Popular music artists, Guy Sebastian and Mark Vincent, have been credited as crucial in its decision to do so (Box 1 on page 15).\(^\text{154}\)

6.1.3 The missing connections between public and commercial arts and culture

Public and commercial arts and culture are linked, but they could be better connected.

Public and commercial performing arts producers both rely on government support for **education and training** for their workforce, both on and behind stage (Section 10.2 on page 73). Public organisations often provide early career training for people who later work on large-scale commercial productions.

There are many **personnel** that connect public and commercial performing arts. Many of the performers, designers, backstage personnel, and individual administrators move between public and commercial companies. The capabilities required are similar: public sector producers, for example, need a strong commercial eye. And the relationships are symbiotic: for example the Melbourne Theatre Company’s Director of Casting was seconded to cast *Harry Potter and the cursed child*.\(^\text{155}\)

But **artistically** the connections between public and commercial performing arts could be stronger. In recent years Opera Australia has started to co-produce musicals with commercial producers. But Australia’s public companies do not usually graduate successful productions into commercial productions with longer runs. There is more exchange between public and commercial performing arts in the UK where productions developed by public companies often become long-running commercial productions,\(^\text{156}\) such as the National Theatre’s *Warhorse* which became an ongoing West End production, and then a major commercial international enterprise. This is part of a wider pattern in the UK of government-supported arts migrating into commercial productions.\(^\text{157}\)

In Australia, the connections between public and commercial sectors in the visual arts galleries are rather stronger. It may help that public galleries are important customers for commercial galleries, both in the value of the work they buy, and because their purchases are an implicit mark of quality for private buyers. Public galleries routinely borrow work from commercial galleries for public exhibitions. The ecology is tightly connected, with artists, curators and administrators often rubbing shoulders at the same functions. This closer artistic relationship may have translated into better lobbying networks, which may partly explain the success of public galleries in asking government to fund very substantial capital works such as the recent $491 million investment in the National Gallery of Victoria, which was prioritised over the

\(^{153}\) Turner (2020).

\(^{154}\) Ibid.

\(^{155}\) personal communication from Melbourne Theatre Company

\(^{156}\) Cogo-Fawcett (2003).

\(^{157}\) Cauldwell-French and Lydford (2019).
redevelopment of the Victorian Arts Centre.\textsuperscript{158} No doubt a mass and rapidly growing public audience helped as well (Figure 2.3 on page 9).

But historically the \textit{advocacy} of public and commercial performing arts sectors has not been particularly coordinated. Many of the lobby groups represented one sector or the other. Theatre Network Australia, for example, says that it is “the leading industry development organisation for the performing arts”.\textsuperscript{159} But it prioritises independent artists and small to medium companies, and its membership is dominated by entities that are either not for profit, or receive significant public support, while commercial theatre producers are largely absent. Although Live Performance Australia is “the peak body for Australia’s live performance industry”, only one of its 18 member Executive Council works for a public performing arts company that is not one of the 30 National Partnership Organisations. And none of its members are from the independent theatre sector. The \textit{perception} (right or wrong) amongst some public sector arts organisations is that Live Performance Australia has tended to focus on the issues of the commercial sector. For several years its budget submission has asked for more government support for public organisations, but its lead request (and the most expensive for the budget) has been for tax incentives on pre-production costs, which would primarily benefit commercial producers.\textsuperscript{160}

6.1.4 COVID connections between public and commercial sectors

In recent years, and particularly with COVID, advocacy has become more coordinated. As one company leader said in an interview for this discussion paper, “COVID forced not-for-profit and commercial companies into the same trench.” COVID forced both to close, hitting revenues hard. For both, it was a priority to get government support through COVID, and government agreement to modes of operation that were COVID-safe and financially viable. Their joint advocacy, spear-headed through Live Performance Australia, ultimately resulted in $200 million of Commonwealth Government RISE funding, and significant industry assistance relative to the packages provided to other industries (Figure 2.12 on page 17). Without the support of the commercial sector, the RISE package might have been much smaller. In practice, almost a third of RISE funding has flowed to the commercial performing arts, over half to public and community performing arts, and the remainder to other forms of arts and culture (Figure 6.1 on the next page).

State government industry support to recover from COVID has likewise tended to be distributed to both public and commercial sectors.\textsuperscript{161}

6.1.5 The consequences of closer connection

In the past, public companies may have been nervous that drawing parallels with commercial performing arts companies might have invited governments to divert support to them. Instead, they tended to focus on the rhetoric of “excellence”, with the implication that the major public companies were “excellent”, and therefore deserving of government subsidy, whereas commercial operators were not (Section 10.3 on page 75). Even if this was true in the past, it is an increasingly difficult argument to maintain today. Many commercial productions today are both technically and artistically excellent. And governments are increasingly prepared to support commercial performing arts companies, as illustrated by a variety of COVID recovery programs. There is no point trying to hold up the drawbridge against commercial companies when they are already supported by government anyway.

\textsuperscript{158} Lucas and Sakkai (2020).
\textsuperscript{159} Theatre Network Australia (2021).
\textsuperscript{160} See Section 7.4 on page 50.
\textsuperscript{161} For example, the Victorian Music Industry Recovery Program and Victorian Live Music Venues Program: Creative Victoria (2021).
Of course, if advocacy stresses the parallels between public and commercial productions, then support will have to be justified more on the basis that it deals with “externalities” – it produces goods such as innovation, training and sector infrastructure that are commercially unviable because the person producing these goods cannot capture many of their overall benefits to the community (Section 10.2 on page 73).

6.2 The place of community arts and culture

6.2.1 The importance of community arts

Like “commercial arts”, there is no precise definition of “community arts”. Typically, most of those participating in community arts groups are unpaid, and the organisations are either not-for-profit or unincorporated. Government support is typically much less than for professional public performing arts companies. Community arts include a vast array of activities, including local ballet schools, big bands, orchestras, choirs, theatre groups, community exhibitions, craft organisations, and libraries.

If the primary reason to support arts and culture is that they increase happiness, understanding and togetherness, then it is particularly important to promote community arts. They involve many more people as artists rather than just as audiences. Because there are so many community arts groups, their combined audience can be very large, but because they are highly dispersed, they tend to fly under the policy radar.

6.2.2 Community arts and advocacy

Community arts groups can make powerful allies as advocates. There are a lot of them. AusDance estimates there are around 10,000 dance studios in Australia. The population of Albury-Wodonga is less than 100,000 people, but the city hosts 2 professional, and 7 community theatre and

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162. As evidenced by attendance and use of local government facilities: CDN (2018)
163. Personal communication from AusDance.
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circus groups. The opportunity to perform – at least to an electronic audience – has increased as digital technologies have spread. TikTok has encouraged everyone to share their moves.

Community arts groups are spread across the country. People who live in outer metro areas are almost as likely to be performers as people in inner metro areas. Between them, members of these groups are bound to have personal connections to every local councillor and every State and Commonwealth member of parliament. An alliance including these groups has the the potential to be like the Australian Pharmacies Guild, named as the country’s most powerful lobby group because it can campaign through every local pharmacy.

Community arts groups also include people with the time and motivation to advocate. Their members often donate considerable time to the activity, and they need no convincing that it is worthwhile. Creators are more likely than audiences to be forceful advocates in the community.

Community campaigns have swayed key arts policy decisions in the past. A high profile example was the campaign over the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra in 2005. The Orchestras Review chaired by James Strong pointed out that box office and sponsorship contributed less than 20% of the orchestra’s revenue, and recommended that it be reduced from 47 to 38 players. The community campaign was vociferous, and within days, members of the Commonwealth Government, including the President of the Senate, were publicly opposing the recommendation. The President’s key argument was that the TSO was crucial to other musical and cultural institutions, not least the role of TSO players as teachers and mentors of other musicians in the Tasmanian community.

6.2.3 Policy focus on community arts

Commonwealth and State Government interest in community arts has waxed and waned over the last 50 years, in parallel with broader policy trends.

In the 1970s, the Whitlam Government tried to decentralise populations and economic activity, creating the Department of Urban and Regional Development, aiming to create a number of larger medium-sized cities in existing centres, such as Albury-Wodonga and Bathurst-Orange. At the same time the newly constituted Australia Council for the Arts initiated a community arts program, converted into the Community Arts Board in 1977. It supported a broad range of community arts networks through the next decade.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Hawke-Keating Governments opened up the Australian economy to international competition, and reduced government intervention in the economy, often using peak bodies to navigate the politics. Policy moved away from government support for grass-roots organisations. Government policy in the 1990s also became more focused on economic outcomes (sometimes pilloried as “economic rationalism”). Arts policy similarly started to focus more on the contribution of arts and culture to economic outcomes. This

164. These include the professional Hothouse Theatre, and the Flying fruit Fly Circus, which is now one of the Arts8 elite performance training organisations supported by the Commonwealth Government. Community theatre groups include the Albury Wodonga Theatre Company, the Other Theatre Company, Centre Stage Event Company, Revolution Theatre, BYTESized Productions (the youth wing of AWTC), and Murray Youth Performing Arts. This doesn’t include the Yackandandah Theatre Company and the Yackandandah Young Players just 25 kilometres south of Wodonga.
165. ACA (2020a, p. 62); unpublished 2014 Australia Council analysis on file with author.
172. Mills (2020, pp. 120–121).
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reduced the focus on community arts, where (by definition) most of the participants are unpaid. The Australia Council and state governments withdrew support from community arts networks through the 1990s, with the Australia Council ultimately disbanding its Community Arts Board in 2005.\textsuperscript{175}

In the past few years, the Commonwealth Government has become more involved in funding specific local community initiatives in a wide range of areas from fixing road traffic black spots to sports facilities and security cameras. This renewed Commonwealth interest in localised activity has not yet been matched in arts and culture.

Not surprisingly, local governments have always been focused on community arts. No local council in Australia has sufficient resources to be the major ongoing funder of a large professional arts group. But they are predisposed to focus on the contribution of arts and culture to creating liveable communities, and they have been at the forefront of an increased focus on participation, community, and wellbeing.\textsuperscript{176}

For example, local councils provide almost half the funding for “public galleries” in Australia.\textsuperscript{177}

Community arts are particularly visible in their own local community, and this may explain why local government funding per person for arts and culture has risen over the last 20 years, while Commonwealth funding per person has fallen.\textsuperscript{178}

COVID may have created an opportunity to refocus on local and community arts. Lockdowns and border closures have promoted hyperlocalism, deepening connections with local areas. Isolation has encouraged many to take up musical instruments, art, and craft. Once formed, many of these habits will persist even as a COVID vaccine rolls out.

6.2.4 Existing connections between public and community arts and culture

Part of connecting with communities is to perform in ways that are more accessible for audiences: more familiar forms, at lower prices, closer to home, in less formal venues, which increase the opportunities to connect with friends and family.

Many large public arts companies do so. Ballet, opera and orchestra performances in the Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne and the Domain in Sydney often select accessible repertoire, are free or low cost, and the outdoor venue can be less intimidating for new audiences. The \textit{Sydney Symphony Under the Stars} at Parramatta Park attracts 15,000 people. Opera Australia’s Handa Opera on the Sydney Harbour stage was seen by 65,000 people – comparable to the 83,000 people who visit the Archibald Prize at the Art Gallery of NSW and touring venues.\textsuperscript{179}

Audiences tend to be visibly younger and more ethnically diverse than mainstage audiences. Regional touring programs such as opera queensland’s \textit{Songs to die for} combined opera and pop classics, touring 17 venues from Windorah to Winton and playing to over 2,000 people.\textsuperscript{180}

Chamber ensembles from the Tasmania Symphony Orchestra play in non-traditional venues such as microbreweries, apple packing sheds and the Hobart Greek Club, and for some concerts almost two thirds of the audience had not attended a TSO concert previously.\textsuperscript{181}

Over the long term, performances beyond the main stage have been growing faster (Figure 2.6 on page 11), and audience demand for performances beyond the main stage may explain why festival attendances are

\textsuperscript{175} Mills (2020, p. 121).
\textsuperscript{176} Trembath and Fielding (2020a, p. 50).
\textsuperscript{177} Museums & Galleries Queensland and Public Galleries Association of Victoria (2020, p. 23), defining “public galleries” as not for profit galleries, excluding the major state galleries.
\textsuperscript{178} A New Approach (2019, p. 16).
\textsuperscript{179} Opera Australia (2019, p. 32); and Art Gallery of New South Wales (2019).
\textsuperscript{180} Opera Queensland (2019, p. 38).
\textsuperscript{181} TSO (2019, p. 10).
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growing much faster (Figure 2.1 on page 7). Building a broader audience can only help build long-term political support, as well as box office revenue, even if these new attendees never see a mainstage production.

But larger audiences for more accessible performances need to be seen in context. They are still small relative to the total population. They do not have the same mass impact as events such as Sculpture by the sea (500,000 in Sydney and 200,000 in Perth), White Nights in Melbourne (700,000 attendees in 2019), The Giants in Perth (1.4 million attendances), and Vivid in Sydney (2.4 million visitors in 2019). Some of these mass events may be “walk by” experiences that do much less to increase happiness, understanding and togetherness than a focused two-hour performance in a theatre or concert hall. But some are just as engaging – many participants at White Nights, for example, spent hours at the event.

Digital channels can reach much larger audiences, and COVID has encouraged performing arts groups to innovate further. Two “ordinary” radio and TV broadcasts increased the reach of opera queensland four times. The Australian Ballet claims a digital audience of over 1 million, with 10 million views of high quality video on digital channels such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

Although these initiatives build audiences and directly contribute to their happiness, understanding and togetherness, occasional and digital audience members may not be vociferous advocates who can sway governments. People are more likely to be campaigners if they are more deeply involved.

Performing arts organisations have designed a wide variety of school programs that go well beyond simply presenting a performance. Many of these involve professional artists working with teachers and students to devise and present their own works. Some only reach a handful of schools, but the Australian Ballet conducts workshops with almost 100 schools and 20,000 students, and Bell Shakespeare conducted student workshops at 128 schools with almost 5,000 students. Nevertheless, these contacts are far from universal: even if every major performing arts company increased its effort to this level, they would collectively reach only a fraction of Australia’s school students – there are around 300 schools in Australia for each NPO.

Public performing arts companies can reach more schools through teacher-focused and digital programs. Musica Viva has an extensive online classroom, used by over 10,000 teachers. The Sydney Symphony Orchestra provides teaching resource kits for the teachers of all students that attend their schools concerts, and provides professional development workshops for over 100 teachers a year. The Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra has written a dozen teachers’ resource kits, complemented by scores and TSO recordings.

But school students don’t vote. Some performing arts companies do run programs aimed at adults in the community, but they often have limited reach. Opera Queensland, for example, has performed with a regional chorus of 21 people from each of 6 regional locations.

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182. Sculpture by the sea (2020); White Night Melbourne (2021); Festival (2015); and Destination NSW (2019b).
183. Opera Queensland (2019, p. 6).
185. E.g. the Sydney Opera House’s Creative Leadership in Learning program; the Malthouse Theatre’s Suitcase Series in which artists work with school students to devise their own short work in response to a featured script; and Opera Australia’s Regional Children’s Chorus program that provided professional development for 22 local choir leaders to teach 330 children who then performed as part of an OA touring production: ACA (2020e), Malthouse Theatre (2019, pp. 28, 31) and Opera Australia (2019, p. 15).
186. Australian Ballet (2019, p. 34); and Bell Shakespeare (2019, p. 18).
188. SSO (2019, p. 37).
189. TSO (2020).
190. Opera Queensland (2019, p. 15).
people relative to the proportion of the community that actively make art and culture for themselves.

The most extensive interactions between public organisations and community performers are informal. The Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra Enterprise Award, for example, allocates almost 4,000 paid hours a year for its musicians to participate in a range of community work: conducting, advising, leading, and playing side-by-side rehearsals and masterclasses with community organisations such as youth orchestras, community orchestras, bands and chamber groups; visiting schools and aboriginal community centres; creating community education materials; and workshopping compositions by emerging composers.¹⁹¹ These players also tend to provide individual lessons to the next generation of high quality players and teachers.¹⁹² And they are often the lynchpins of smaller scale regional chamber music festivals such as the Festival of Four Winds in Bermagui, Music by the Springs in Hepburn Springs, and the Bendigo Chamber Music Festival. Members of the Australian Ballet are informally involved as visitors at a large number of ballet schools, and their regional tours typically incorporate public classes and visits to the local ballet schools.

There appear to be fewer of these interactions between professional theatre companies and the large number of amateur theatre companies, perhaps because unlike the orchestras and dance companies, theatre companies usually employ most of their actors as casuals for each production rather than as permanent employees. The attitude epitomised in the pejorative “am dram” may also play a part.

Unfortunately, arts companies don’t do much to tell the story of their community involvement. Few of their annual reports quantify or highlight these informal but vital interactions. They may be underplaying their most valuable advocacy asset. The contribution of a public organisation to arts and cultural activity in the wider community was precisely what politicians highlighted when the TSO’s funding was threatened in 1985 (Section 6.2.2 on page 42).

Arts and culture could learn from sport, where professional organisations make their links to community sport highly visible. AFL professional players often visit sessions of the children’s Auskick program; professional games often have Auskick sessions on field at half time; and Auskick participants are featured alongside star players in the AFL annual report.¹⁹³ And the Australian Sports Commission commissioned a major review from KPMG to document the broad benefits of community sports and its infrastructure.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹. Personal communication from Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra
¹⁹². For example of the players in the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, 75% teach school students; 20% teach in universities; and 15% tutor for the Queensland Youth Orchestra: pers. com. QSO.
¹⁹³. AFL (2019, p. 86).
¹⁹⁴. KPMG (2018).
7 A defined ask

If public, commercial and community sectors come together, their advocacy is more likely to succeed if there are clearly defined requests, aligned with unimpeachable outcomes, for things that are relatively easy for government to provide. In the past, the ask for the performing arts has not always been aligned with ends that are universally seen as valuable. And the ask has often been primarily for more financial support rather than changes in positioning, tax subsidies, regulations, and industrial relations, where the costs to government are lower, or at least less obvious. And there could be more emphasis on advocacy around training and data collection, where the rationale for government intervention is particularly strong.

7.1 Unimpeachable outcomes

Arts advocacy is more likely to succeed when it is linked to an overwhelmingly popular cause. Examples abound. Campaigns for regional arts funding have tended to succeed when they have been linked to broader aspirations for regional development in slower-growing regions (Section 5.5.3 on page 33). The substantial lift in funding and focus for indigenous arts and culture, linked to growing audiences and public interest, coincides with popular movements to increase recognition of indigenous contributions to Australia, reflected in the Stolen Generation apology, the Recognition movement, the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and moves towards indigenous treaties in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. The Victorian government provided substantial support for the arts after the Black Saturday bushfires, responding to a broad-based desire to help communities rebuild.\(^{195}\)

Defining the agenda for future performing arts advocacy is beyond the scope of this discussion paper. The breadth of potential topics is illustrated by almost 350 submissions to the current House of Representatives inquiry into Australia’s creative and cultural industries and institutions. Many of these policy issues are chestnuts that have been debated for decades.\(^{196}\) But a brief outline of the potential asks may be helpful to start defining future advocacy priorities.

7.2 Positioning and strategy

Perhaps the most important ask for arts and culture is their overall positioning, which ultimately improves the prospects of future advocacy. It also has the advantage of being relatively cheap – it requires little in the way of changed or additional funding. But it does require a change in political rhetoric.

Australia’s “official” culture – manifested in the events that the Prime Minister attends, and in tourism material – overwhelmingly focuses on sport and the outdoors. Apart from Malcolm Turnbull, an Australian Prime Minister has attended a National Partnership Organisation performance only once in the past 13 years.\(^{197}\) But Prime Ministers routinely attend sporting events: Scott Morrison regularly attends Rugby League matches, carries the drinks at cricket matches, and hosts sporting teams at Kirribilli House.\(^{198}\) This official culture may reflect historic gender roles, with politics and sport historically both male-dominated. It may also be that official culture has fallen behind the population (as it did with same sex marriage, and workplace gender culture): arts and culture have become much more “mass” activities over the last few decades.

\(^{195}\) Fisher and Talvé (2011).

\(^{196}\) For a summary, see Gardiner-Garden (2009) and Mills (2020).

\(^{197}\) See above footnote 69.

\(^{198}\) SBS (2021); and Matthey (2021).
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Table 7.1: Personal involvement in arts, culture and sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Arts &amp; culture</th>
<th>Performing arts</th>
<th>Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion people attend live</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion international tourists attend live</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tickets sold per year</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>23 million</td>
<td>19 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of commercial TV hours watched*</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion people actively participate</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Drama and movies counted as performing arts hours watched on commercial TV. Australia Council survey estimates of active participation are materially higher than those shown from the ABS survey for arts and culture (45%) and performing arts (16%).


The relative indifference of the Commonwealth Government to arts and culture is underlined by the focus of Australia’s tourism marketing, and the absence of an organisation representing Australian arts and culture abroad, unlike most OECD countries (Box 4 on the following page).

But “personal” culture – manifested in how most people spend their own time – is much more about arts and culture, not least the performing arts (Table 7.1). The importance of arts and culture relative to sport in people’s lives may be counter-intuitive because of big crowds at sporting events. A small number of high profile sporting events obscure a much larger number of moderately sized performing events – usually hundreds every night of the week in each of Australia’s major cities, each attended by hundreds of people. By contrast, “second tier” sporting matches such as Sheffield Shield often have minimal attendances.

If senior politicians attended arts and culture events more often it would shift the official symbols of Australia to better match Australians’ personal lives. Shifting tourism marketing would also help, as in part it tells stories about Australia to Australians.

Shifting the national self-image matters because it will encourage more to participate, and will change the backdrop for setting priorities in other policy areas. Arts and culture can improve social cohesion (Section 5.3 on page 29), but they are unlikely to do so unless the Commonwealth Government embraces them as key to the country’s identity. Similarly, arts and culture will do little to transform Australia’s national branding as an exporter (page 34 above) if the country’s public image continues to revolve around sport and the outdoors.

An overall arts and culture policy – or “plan” – with broad statements of intent can be helpful – Sport 2030 is often cited as an example. Another starting point might be the Australian Local Government Association’s Arts and Culture policy position, which articulates the importance of arts and culture to personal, community, economic and civic development, and the important role of local government in achieving this. But

199. See above footnote 141.

201. ALGA (2020).
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a national arts and culture plan is no guarantee of success – it would need to define objectives and commit resources to achieve them, and even Sport 2030 is pretty light on government commitments to concrete actions.

7.3 Budgetary funding

The perception amongst politicians is that advocates for the performing arts primarily ask government for money – "like Oliver Twist always asking for more". More money is often a difficult ask. It is usually easier for government to grant no less money or somebody else’s money through regulatory change.

Although the amounts involved in the performing arts are typically small, additional budget funding is still usually a hard ask. New budget allocations, particularly net additions to a department’s budget, are automatically scrutinised by the budget review committee of cabinet rather than being primarily the call of an individual minister.

It’s at least easier to preserve existing funding. Governments know that losers tend to yell louder than winners. This is manifested in their preference for policy designs that avoid “net losers” (exemplified in the compensation package for the GST, compensation package for the carbon reduction package under Rudd, and school funding reforms). It also means that governments are more likely to accede to a campaign for the status quo.

This may explain the success of the campaign against the conclusions of the Strong symphony orchestras review. Recommendations to reduce existing funding, particularly to the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra resulted in a vociferous public stoush, and government backed away quickly (Section 6.2.2 on page 42). Similarly the response to the Catalyst

202. As told by Chris Puplick at the Australian Academy of the Humanities symposium, At the crossroad: Australia’s cultural future
203. J. Strong et al. (2005).

Box 4: Externally focused national arts and culture organisations

Many governments fund an organisation to represent their country’s arts and culture abroad. These bodies are typically separate from their Australia Council equivalent. Australia is one of the few OECD countries that does not have such a body, which can also send a powerful message to domestic audiences about the importance of its own country’s arts and culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>International culture body</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Austrian Cultural Forum</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Confucius Institute</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Danish Cultural Institute</td>
<td>1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Eesti Instituut</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish Culture and Academic Institutes</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Alliance Française</td>
<td>1883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Goethe Institut</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Hellenic Foundation for Culture</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Balassi Institute</td>
<td>1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Culture Ireland</td>
<td>pre-2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Dante Alighieri Society</td>
<td>1889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Istituto Italiano di Cultura</td>
<td>1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Japan Foundation</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Adam Mickiewicz Institute</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Instituto Camões</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Institutul Cultural Roman</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Korean Cultural Centres</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Instituto Cervantes</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Swedish Institute</td>
<td>1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Yunus Emre Institute</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>British Council</td>
<td>1934</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Excludes institutions focused on bilateral cultural exchange. Unlikely to be comprehensive.
Source: Institute websites; AMPAG research.
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A fund, effectively reducing existing funding through the Australia Council for small and medium arts companies, led to a unified campaign, and a reversed decision (Box 5 on the following page). Government proposals to close the Australian National Academy of Music in 2008,204 or to shutter Carriageworks in 2020,205 rapidly abandoned, are part of the same pattern.

Although these “negative” campaigns often succeed, they don’t usually build better long-term outcomes for the arts. Strategies for positive shifts are also needed. Often that does involve government budget funding, but if other avenues can help, they may be easier asks.

### 7.4 Tax breaks

Although tax breaks impair the budget balance as much as additional spending, governments tend to be more prepared to give them away. In part this is because right wing governments ideologically prefer smaller government (typically measured by government spending as a share of the economy). In part, tax breaks are less visible. Precisely for this reason, the Charter of Budget Honesty requires Treasury to publicly review all tax breaks every year in its tax benchmarks and variations statement (previously known as the “tax expenditures statement”). Nevertheless, tax breaks generally remain easier to obtain than additional expenditure.

APRA and Live Performance Australia have been pressing for a tax offset for live performance venues and producers since 2016. This is likely to increase the number of live music venues, live performances, and opportunities for artists to develop.206 Not-for-profit organisations would only benefit indirectly from this richer ecosystem – because they do not pay company tax, they cannot utilise tax offsets themselves.207

### 7.5 Somebody else’s money

It may seem politically less painful for governments to allocate money to the arts if it is somebody else’s money. The National Lottery in the UK is often seen as a model (Box 6 on page 52). But this model may not be easy to transfer to Australia: the National Lottery was set up in the UK when many forms of gambling, from scratchies to lotto, were banned – a far cry from Australia today. The funding is not necessarily sustainable: National Lottery funding through the Arts Council of England has not increased in nominal terms over 25 years. In Australia, only Western Australia has this kind of arrangement, and historically it has regulated gambling more tightly than other States. 5% of the money wagered on Lotterywest funds is directed to the arts, and another 5% is allocated to commercial film location incentives and the Perth Festival.208 $157 million of its retained earnings were distributed to respond to COVID, with arts organisations receiving a substantial share.209

Governments may be even more reluctant to grant dedicated funding than a simple increase on budget. Treasuries usually resist “hypothe-
cated” funding precisely because it constrains the ability of future governments to allocate what is ultimately public money. The major exception in Australia is the “Medicare levy” of 2% of income. Even then, there is no legal requirement to spend this revenue on health, and the Commonwealth Treasury may be relatively relaxed about the branding

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206. APRA AMCOS and EY (2016); and LPA (2016).
207. A public organisation might benefit more if it were co-producing with a commercial investor who could then use the offset – but there are minimal examples of this kind of arrangement in Australia to date.
208. Lotteries Commission Act 1990 WA, s.22(2).
209. See footnote 43.
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Box 5: The rise and fall of the Catalyst fund

The 2014 Federal budget, which cut spending across the board, did not spare the Australia Council, which lost over $6 million a year in recurrent funding. But the May 2015 budget contained a much larger surprise: about $28 million a year was transferred from the Council to a new National Programme for Excellence in the Arts, to be administered by the Minister for the Arts, George Brandis. In addition, $5 million a year was transferred to fund the continuation of a matched funding program run by Creative Partnerships Australia, as well as an efficiency dividend of $2 million a year. These were big changes to the Council’s previous annual government income of $211 million a year. They primarily reduced the Council’s funding for small organisations. Allocations for the Major Performing Arts organisations (more than half of the Council’s expenditure (Figure 2.8 on page 12) were quarantined, possibly because they fitted the Minister’s view of excellence, and possibly because they were protected by tripartite agreements with the States that were hard to unravel quickly.

The changes appeared to undermine the “arms’s length” principle of excluding the Minister from determining arts funding allocations. Questioning by the Liberal Chair, and the Minister’s evidence to a Senate Committee, suggest that the Minister may have lost confidence in the Australia Council when it decided to cease funding the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville, which the minister had personally attended twice, and which was located in his State.

Feral Arts (an existing body representing small to medium arts companies), Theatre Network Australia, the National Association for the Visual Arts, and AusDance put their resources into a campaign under the banner of ArtsPeak, a long-standing unfunded network of many (but by no means all) of Australia’s peak arts bodies. They organised the grass-roots #Freethearts movement, convened public meetings and coordinated with the ALP, the Greens, and cross-benchers to have the changes referred to a Senate inquiry. They then encouraged people to write submissions, and prepared them to appear as witnesses. The inquiry received over 2,700 submissions, including over 370 organisations.

AMPAG, the peak group of the Major Performing Arts organisations, made a submission recommending that funds for small to medium companies be added back to the Australia Council’s budget. But most of the individual MPAs kept a low profile: only four of them made individual submissions. They may have been concerned that public advocacy could lead to government reallocating some of their funding to top up the Australia Council’s funds for small to medium arts companies.

The National Programme for Excellence in the Arts was rebranded as the “Catalyst” Program. Ultimately grants were allocated with expert assessment through a process administered by the department, apparently at arm’s length from the minister, and with far less ministerial intervention than in many grants programs for other purposes in recent years. About 90% of those who received money through Catalyst had previously been funded by the Australia Council.

In September 2015 Malcolm Turnbull replaced Tony Abbott as Prime Minister, and he appointed Mitch Fifield to replace George Brandis as minister responsible for the arts. By November 2015, Fifield announced that $8 million a year would be returned to the Australia Council. In December 2015, a majority of the Senate Inquiry recommended return of the remainder of the Catalyst funding to the Australia Council, and a further $20 million a year was returned in April 2017. But overall funding for the Australia Council in real terms remained below 2010 to 2013 levels, and well below the allocations of the Creative Australia policy (Figure 2.8 on page 12).

because it is unimaginable that government will ever spend less on health than the Medicare levy raises.\textsuperscript{210}

7.6 Regulatory changes

Regulatory changes can be an easier ask than direct subsidies. But the politics depends on the collateral impacts, who loses, and whether the losses are visible.

Any number of industries have successfully advocated for regulations that increase their revenue. For example, the Pharmacy Guild has successfully lobbied for legislation that effectively prevents supermarkets from providing pharmacy services and gives each pharmacy a monopoly over its local area, reducing competition, and increasing how much pharmacies can charge the public.\textsuperscript{211} These regulations survive because the cost to the public – in higher pharmaceutical costs – is not obvious, and the Pharmacy Guild can wage campaigns against any proposal for change direct to the public through each pharmacy.

Arts and culture have had some regulatory successes. They successfully advocated for the introduction of a visual art resale royalties scheme,\textsuperscript{212} to unwind restrictions on NSW venues playing live music,\textsuperscript{213} and to maintain restrictions on parallel imports. The last of these indicates the potential scope of regulatory advocacy – despite an unequivocal Productivity Commission review and the government prioritising the debate for over three months, the industry effectively resisted change that would have reduced its revenue.\textsuperscript{214}

\textsuperscript{210} The Medicare Levy raises $16 billion a year; Commonwealth Government spending on health is around $97 billion a year: ATO (2020, Individuals) and Treasury (2020a, Budget Paper 1, p.6-7).

\textsuperscript{211} Ross and Aedy (2019).

\textsuperscript{212} Gardiner-Garden (2009, pp. 63–64).

\textsuperscript{213} Box 8 on page 68

\textsuperscript{214} PC (2009); and J. Kelly (2015).

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**Box 6: Arts funding through the UK National Lottery**

Before 1994, lotteries were banned in the United Kingdom, one of only two countries in the European Union that did not permit some kind of lottery gambling. The United Kingdom set up a National Lottery in 1994. 28\% of the money wagered was equally divided between five public causes: the Arts Councils of the UK; heritage; the Millenium Commission; the Sports Councils; and the National Lottery Charities Board.

For the Arts Council of England, this was a big increase in funding. In the late 1990s, lottery funding added around £250 million a year to its government grants of around £180 million a year (not adjusted for inflation).

Originally lottery money was only allocated to capital works projects, under an “additionality” principle, that lottery money should not be used in place of existing government funding. But 1996 legislation allowed recurrent spending, and today there are few restrictions on the form or object of spending. The additionality principle remains, with the aim that grants should be for “specific time-limited activity that would not take place without the support of the Lottery”.

Over the long term, Lottery funding has remained static while government budgetary funding has increased: in 2018-19 the Arts Council of England received £487 million in government grants and £223 million from the lottery – less in nominal terms than when the scheme began more than 20 years previously.

*Source: Creigh-Tyte and Gallimore (2000) and Arts Council England (2019).*
Australian content can be mandated by regulation rather than just funded by government. The lack of Australian content available on electronic media is an increasing concern as streaming services globalise content. But Australian governments have often chosen not to regulate further guarantees of Australian content on many broadcast media and internet services. These regulatory outcomes aren’t surprising; advocacy for regulatory change is less likely to succeed when it comes at the cost of powerful commercial interests. Australian content quotas increase the costs of broadcasters. They tend to have much more political power given industry revenues of $5 billion a year, and their influence over the content of news bulletins. And their industry interests tend to be better aligned than inherently disparate arts and culture interests.

Of course, regulatory changes that benefit arts and culture may not necessarily benefit the public – indeed change may only benefit some arts and culture interests at the expense of others. For example, copyright that extends for 70 years after the death of the author may benefit the author’s publisher somewhat, and their children and grandchildren a little, but it reduces how much the public benefits from experiencing their work, and increases the risk that the artist will fade more rapidly into obscurity (Figure 7.1).

Regulatory changes can divide arts and culture advocates, potentially weakening their ability to present a credible united front on other issues. For example, introducing a “fair use” provision to Australian copyright law was vigorously opposed by publishers, but would have benefited many artists. Often publishers are better organised and have more aligned commercial interests, and so they have more influence on government than artists.

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7.7 **Workforce**

Government affects working conditions through the industrial relations system and other regulations. Perennial issues for the performing arts workforce include limits on foreign artists, and working conditions such as minimum call times. While changing these rules doesn’t cost government money, they are inherently controversial. As in any industry, the interests of employers (i.e. performing arts companies and producers) do not align with employees (i.e. performing artists and supporting personnel). As a result, most changes in this area are likely to divide performing arts advocates.

The incomes of performing arts graduates are typically no higher than those who don’t study past Year 12, and are lower than the graduates of any other course of study.\(^{217}\) Most professional performers earn more from other work than performing.\(^{218}\) While the performing arts workforce would doubtless prefer more secure better paid work, that implies substantially increasing total funding, the hardest ask of all.

7.8 **Education and training**

Governments play a big role in education and training in all walks of life. They are the archetypal public goods – the entity providing training can rarely capture the benefits it provides to the trainee’s future employers. Consequently it is uncontroversial that government should be responsible for training and education. Training and education for the performing arts in Australia are provided primarily through schools, universities, vocational and educational training (VET), and the Arts training institutions directly funded by the Commonwealth Government. There are significant concerns about the extent and quality of school education in the performing arts,\(^{219}\) although these are beyond the scope of this discussion paper.

Australia is not short of university places for artists: 17,000 graduate from creative arts degrees every year.\(^{220}\) By comparison, there are only about 48,000 practising artists in Australia,\(^{221}\) implying that the vast majority of creative arts graduates do not work as artists.

But there are questions about the institutional design of tertiary education in the performing arts. Many creative arts degrees have been grafted onto universities from previous specialist institutions, and there are questions about whether the emphasis on research that is core to university culture is optimal for the skills-based training important to many practising artists. Governments can shape education and training institutions, and this doesn’t always require more money, although it is usually controversial – and universities are themselves large and powerful advocates.

The performing arts industry is also concerned about sufficient vocational training for production staff such as set builders. These are consistent with much broader social concerns that not enough people are undertaking trades courses such as carpentry.

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\(^{217}\) Norton et al. (2018, p. 82).
\(^{218}\) Throsby and Petetskaya (2017, p. 74).
\(^{219}\) See footnote 30
\(^{220}\) DESE (2021).
\(^{221}\) This is the best estimate of Throsby and Petetskaya (2017, p. 24). Others do not adjust numbers from the Census which identifies 61,000 people who have “creative production roles in cultural production industries”, and a further 37,000 who have cultural production roles in other industries: Cunningham and McCutcheon (2018). Other estimates include “creative occupations” which includes architecture, design and IT, and therefore a much larger pool of graduates.
7.9 Data

Government is in a unique position to collect data, which is an inherently public good – it benefits many, but the collector captures few of the benefits.

Data on arts and culture is improving, with more available about employment and economic output.

But data on attendance and participation is patchy. While LPA documents ticketed attendance at the large venues, this probably misses many of the smaller local venues that are the heart of community performing arts. There are no regularly collected statistics of the use of local council venues comparable to the aggregated data on library usage.222

The key data gap is precisely where it matters most – assessments of the direct impact of arts and culture on happiness, understanding and togetherness. While the impact of performing arts on each attendee is hard to measure, it is not impossible. Culture Counts has made significant progress in helping organisations to collect audience reactions directly, although because it is a private-sector organisation, much of the collected data is not publicly available.223 The Measurement of Museum Social Impact project being piloted by the American Alliance of Museums is a similar approach.224 Other approaches include “willingness to pay”, “contingent valuation” and “wellbeing valuation” studies such as those being pioneered in the UK.225

Data for international comparisons of arts and culture is scarce – even on basic questions such as government spending on arts and culture.226 The Commonwealth Government could either compile these through the Australia Council, or encourage the OECD to do so. More sophisticated approaches could benchmark the efficiency of Australian arts organisations – particularly relevant when government is choosing whether to apply efficiency dividends to the sector.

7.10 Arts, culture, and other government departments

Given that arts and culture can also improve outcomes in a range of other policy areas (Section 5.6 on page 36), some advocate embedding them as a priority for education, health and social services departments. Advocacy for significant arts and culture initiatives in response to the Black Summer bushfires is a recent example of this.227

But this is often a difficult ask. Education and health ministers usually out-rank the arts minister. Their departments invariably face a broad range of pressing priorities, and arts and culture are seldom top of the list, unless it happens to be a personal passion of the minister.

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222. SGS2011
223. Culture Counts has an ongoing program in Western Australia, and has conducted substantial pilot projects in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, England, and a variety of local councils: Moore (2015).
225. Lawton et al. (N.d.); and Bakhshi et al. (2015).
226. The OECD compares combined spending on recreation, arts and religion – which makes meaningful comparisons all but impossible given the substantial contributions that some countries make to established churches, much of which they redistribute to education and social welfare causes: cf A New Approach (2019, p. 15).
8 Stronger askers

Whatever the rationale, and whatever the ask may be, a more unified approach is essential to better advocacy for the performing arts. This kind of approach, with a clearly identified and well-resourced peak body has tended to lead to better outcomes, both in Australia and overseas.

But a divided arts sector has often asked for multiple and contradictory outcomes. Advocates have often asked for benefits to particular institutions rather than a more comprehensive strategy.

More unity is possible, despite the varied interests within the performing arts sector. Other sectors have succeeded in uniting behind a single powerful peak body even though their membership covers a similarly broad variety of interests.

Given the importance of a more cohesive approach between public and commercial sectors of the performing arts, this implies that a better resourced Live Performance Australia (LPA) could take a bigger role in advocacy for the performing arts. This would require more funding for LPA from performing arts organisations, and less focus on more specialised advocacy bodies.

Alternatively, a new peak organisation could be formed, either as an alliance of existing sector bodies, or in other ways. To be effective, they would need to find substantial resources, and ensure broad buy-in across the performing arts.

While the Australia Council will continue to contribute, the kinds of advocacy it can pursue are limited by its role as a government body. Similarly, think tanks like A New Approach can be helpful, but their nature constrains them from representing the industry.

8.1 Unity matters to successful advocacy

8.1.1 Historic successes

Successful arts advocacy both in Australia and overseas has generally depended on collaboration. A broad coalition with a unified ask was key (if not always enough) to almost all of the advocacy success stories identified in this discussion paper.

The Western Australia Vote Arts campaign run by Country Arts WA created a broad coalition of arts groups across Western Australia (Box 2 on page 35), ultimately resulting in a substantial increase in overall funding for regional arts in Western Australia.

The Commonwealth reversed a move towards more direct funding through its Catalyst fund in response to a broad campaign, effectively coordinated by Theatre Network Australia, Feral Arts, Ausdance and the National Association for the Visual Arts, using the ArtsPeak banner to deliver aligned messaging from hundreds of organisations (Box 5 on page 51).

A similarly broad coalition lay behind the successful campaign to overhaul NSW regulation of live music (Box 8 on page 68).

The Commonwealth’s COVID support package ultimately delivered good outcomes for the arts sector (Section 2.4 on page 14) in response to a broad alliance across both public and commercial sectors (Box 1 on page 15). This was also the point at which LPA took on a bigger role for advocating for the performing arts across the sector.

228. As illustrated by their submissions to the Senate inquiry into the changes: Mills (2020, pp. 203–204).
Performing arts advocacy in Australia

Box 7: International advocacy campaigns for the arts

The Canadian Arts Coalition was set up in 2007 to advocate for greater government support for the Canada Council. It was supported across the Canadian arts and culture sector, and its members included many of the peak bodies for individual artforms.

For over a decade, it consistently advocated for more government support for arts and culture: organising an annual “Arts day on the Hill” with over 100 arts leaders holding dozens of meetings with Members of Parliament; identifying and training advocates to make the case; and supplying advocacy support tools such as how to get a meeting with an MP, what to say, and key statistics to use. Each year the Coalition agreed on three key messages, and one of them consistently asked to increase funding for the Canada Council.

In 2016, the first budget of the Trudeau Government committed C$1.9 billion in new spending over 5 years on gallery and museum buildings, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and to increase Canada Council funding from C$182 million in 2016 to C$362 million in 2021.

Obviously the election of a sympathetic Prime Minister helped. But if the ground had not been laid over the previous decade, it is quite possible that the funding boost would have been much less ambitious.

Advocacy by the Canadian Arts Coalition also contributed to the relatively swift announcement in April 2020 of a COVID support package that included an extra C$55 million for the Canada Council, and C$198 million for existing arts and culture institutions.

The National Campaign for the Arts was set up in Ireland in 2009 when government support for arts and culture fell in the wake of the GFC. By 2013 it was publishing substantial research reports, and making regular budget submissions. But it does not appear to have significant permanent staff, and its members do not appear to have included peak bodies for individual artforms.

Despite its efforts, funding for the Arts Council of Ireland peaked at €82 million in 2008, bottomed at €57 million in 2014, and had only recovered to €75 million in 2019 (in nominal terms). But the long-term advocacy paid off with a COVID response package that included €130 million for the Arts Council as well as a range of other funds for arts and culture.

Source: Canadian Arts Coalition (2021), Litzenberger (2013), Canadian Arts Coalition (2013a), Canadian Arts Coalition (2013b), Department of Finance Canada (2016, pp. 184–187), Canadian Heritage (2020) and Ireland Government (2020); Arts Council of Ireland Annual reports.
Internationally, substantial shifts in government arts and policy were the result of broad-based advocacy by the National Campaign for the Arts in Ireland and the Canadian Arts Coalition (Box 7 on the preceding page). These examples illustrate that progress forwards for arts and culture requires a constituted umbrella organisation, with broad membership. The case studies include all those repeatedly raised in consultations for this review. Many of them were negative campaigns, trying to undo or moderate government policy changes. For these an informal alliance of aligned interests was enough. But successful campaigns for positive change such as the Western Australia regional Vote Arts campaign, the LPA’s COVID support campaign, the National Campaign for the Arts in Ireland and the Canadian Arts Coalition were all led by a constituted peak body – rather than an informal alliance – that crossed all artforms, and that had resources dedicated to advocacy.

8.1.2 Historic disunity

Unfortunately, advocates for the performing arts are not always so united. Chris Puplick noted from his ministerial perspective how advocates for environmental, sports and social welfare causes were usually peak organisations and their leaders. By contrast, advocates on arts policy issues were usually individuals, not formally representing a peak body.229 Arts advocacy bodies have proliferated – one for each artform, and often for different segments within them, as shown in Figure 8.2 on the next page.230 There are around 70 active performing arts advocacy organisations and most made a submission to a recent Parliamentary inquiry.

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230. See also the survey of advocacy bodies in Mills (2020, pp. 100–127) and Eltham (2016, p. 38).

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As shown in Figure 8.1 there are at least ten active networks that do not have independent resources (such as the Confederation of Australian state theatre Companies (CAST)). About ten incorporated organisations have resources and are focused on advocacy, although they often provide some non-advocacy services to members. LPA is larger than all the other organisations in this category put together. About 20 organisations have funds, and engage in some advocacy, but a much greater proportion of their activities are servicing members such as venues, dance and contemporary music producers and artists. There are dozens of organisations that conduct some advocacy, but their primary focus is delivering arts
Performing arts advocacy in Australia

### Figure 8.2: There are around 70 active performing arts advocacy organisations and most made a submission to a recent Parliamentary inquiry

Significant performing arts advocacy organisations and networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National - cross artform</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Permanent venues</th>
<th>Temporary venues</th>
<th>Live producers</th>
<th>Recording producers</th>
<th>Rights holders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- by value chain</td>
<td></td>
<td>Media Arts &amp; Ent. All’ee</td>
<td>Performing Arts Connections</td>
<td>Conf Aust Int Arts Festivals Aust Festivals Assoc</td>
<td>Live Entertainment Industry Alliance</td>
<td>Aust Recording Industry Assoc</td>
<td>APRA AMCOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Musicians Union</td>
<td>CrewCare</td>
<td>Assoc of Artist Managers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aust Independent Record Labels Assoc</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Live Ent. Ind. Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aust Prod Design Guild</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CrewCare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Permanament & Temporary Venues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue Type</th>
<th>Live Performance Aust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Personnel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media Arts &amp; Ent. All’ee</td>
<td>Performing Arts Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musicians Union</td>
<td>CrewCare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Ent. Ind. Alliance</td>
<td>Assoc of Artist Managers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### State

#### Cross art form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Regional Arts Aust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Vic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music NSW</td>
<td>Multicultural Arts Vic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folk Fed NSW</td>
<td>Music Vic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Art form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Regional Arts Aust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reg’l Arts NSW</td>
<td>Arts Ind Council Vic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts mid N Coast</td>
<td>Multicultural Arts Vic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sub-State

#### Cross art form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Regional Arts Aust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reg’l Arts Vic</td>
<td>Arts West Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reg’l Arts Serv. NW</td>
<td>QMusic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Art form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Regional Arts Aust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reg’l Arts WA</td>
<td>Country Arts SA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Organisations that submitted to the House of Representatives inquiry into Australia’s creative and cultural industries and institutions shown in dark green, others in light green. Does not include organisations focused on production or service delivery, state branches of national organisations, government agencies, and local government. Unlikely to be comprehensive. Some organisations shown (such as Arts Access Australia) have a brief broader than the performing arts.

Source: HoR (2021), Report analysis.
Performing arts advocacy in Australia

Figure 8.3: Over 20 organisations actively advocate for the visual arts
Significant visual arts and museums advocacy organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National</th>
<th>GLAM peak</th>
<th>International Council of Museums (Aust chapter)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- by culture type</td>
<td>Visual art</td>
<td>National Association for the Visual Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National - institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- by institution type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National - personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- artists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- curators/academics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-national – geography</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State - institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- artists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Organisations that submitted to the House of Representatives inquiry into Australia’s creative and cultural industries and institutions shown in dark green, others in light green. Does not include state branches of national organisations, government agencies, and local government. Does not show many museums and library organisations. Unlikely to be comprehensive. Source: HoR (2021), Report analysis.
programs to regions, with annual turnover of around $25 million per year. About 10 organisations focus on particular groups, including CALD, first nations, disability and diversity. They are funded primarily to deliver programs and services, but this often also provides some resources for advocacy.

Unions and copyright agencies both have very substantial turnover, but the vast majority of their resources are focused on providing these services. But their size means that spending even a very small proportion on advocacy is large in the scheme of arts advocacy. APRA AMCOS, for example, has employee costs of over $65 million a year.

The lack of unity makes advocacy much less effective. It leads to a multiplicity of incoherent and unprioritised messages and requests. Governments are reluctant to negotiate if there is no identifiable group that can commit at least most of the sector to a compromise.

The fragmentation of advocacy bodies creates other problems. A large number of performing arts organisations lack efficient scale. Advocacy is better when an organisation is big enough that its representatives are meeting with politicians and other stakeholders, and appearing in the media so regularly that they require little introduction and can instead focus on the issue of the day. A comparison with think tank advocacy suggests that this requires at least 8 employees, and possibly more.

Lack of scale can also waste resources because every organisation needs a board, governance and staff. There is also a risk that the employees of small organisations with a limited brief will generate activity to justify their existence, even if it has limited value for their members.

8.1.3 Inherent obstacles to cooperation in the performing arts

The fragmentation of advocacy bodies is not unique to the performing arts – other artforms are similarly fragmented, as illustrated by an analysis of the visual arts sector (Figure 8.3 on the previous page).

The lack of unity amongst arts organisations is not surprising. Because government typically provides a large proportion of their income, they are hard-wired to compete for government attention. Governments often show little appetite to increase overall funding for the performing arts. In this world the bigger prize is to get a bigger share, rather than to grow the pie. Artforms compete (opera versus theatre); bigger institutions compete with the small to medium companies; and large companies in the same sector compete. Competitive rather than cooperative instincts are reinforced because major arts organisations are usually also competing for similar audiences and donors.

These environmental factors are reinforced by some aspects of the culture of the arts themselves. Creativity is about doing something different – conformists seldom make great artists.

So it is not entirely surprising that the performing arts sector, in the words of one senior arts figure interviewed for this discussion paper, “fights itself like Monty Python’s Peoples’ Liberation Front of Judea”, holding “tenderly nursed grudges”, and struggling to agree on even basic forms of cooperation such as the membership of working groups.

8.1.4 The potential of more collaboration

Nevertheless, more collaboration between performing arts organisations is possible. Performing artists can certainly work together when they try. Live performance requires exquisite coordination, both through rehearsal and performance, of those on and off-stage. It is hard to think of any other human endeavour that requires such split-second synchronisation of such a huge range of complex individual human actions.

Other industries with interests that seem as varied as those in the performing arts do better. A corporate wheat cropper has very different interests to those of a sole-trader bee keeper. But the National Farmers Federation provides a united front for both, and recently articulated an
industry-wide strategy, with a foreword from both minister and shadow minister.231

There are many other peak bodies that successfully provide clear advocacy despite a widely varied membership. The Australian Council of Social Services represents a diversity of social welfare recipients and organisations. The Australian Confederation of Sport represents both professionals and amateurs, players and organisers, across the entire range of sports.

As these examples illustrate, a clearly identified peak body can co-exist with a wide variety of more specialised bodies. But there needs to be broad support that the peak body speaks for the sector as a whole. Good long-term politics rarely arises from spontaneous collectives, or waiting for total unanimity, and a peak body can be effective even if a few prominent organisations aren’t fully behind it, provided that it has broad support from the vast bulk of the sector. An effective peak body also cannot wait for consensus amongst its members on every issue: the practicalities of advocacy mean that it needs delegated authority to choose its targets and messages. Effective advocacy usually requires focus on a limited set of asks, and a peak body needs the discipline and processes to set priorities and stick to them, even though some members will inevitably be disappointed that “their” issue isn’t on the list this time. The power of collective action requires members to at least align their advocacy with the identified priorities so that progress can be made.

For example the West Australian Chamber of Arts and Culture in its annual pre-budget submission sets out a broader strategic framework, within which it identifies just 5 or 6 key actions.232 This discipline has contributed to the Western Australia government adopting a number of these actions over time, including a cultural infrastructure plan, investment in a film studio and incentive fund, funding towards an aboriginal arts centre, and pilot funding for arts in education.

This kind of peak body does risk shutting out marginal voices. Every dollar spent resourcing a peak body is a dollar less for more focused organisations. But if all of the resulting organisations lack scale, then none of them are likely to affect the outcomes much. The fragmented approach of the last two decades has not delivered strong outcomes for arts and culture. A better structure would be a strong peak body that takes care to ensure that the interests of diverse voices are accommodated. Inevitably it will be supplemented by specialist organisations that advocate on more specialist issues, where they have sufficient scale to be effective.

This can be supplemented by networks – regular meetings of those with common interests – that meet regularly to exchange information. But such networks are only likely to play a big advocacy role if they have dedicated resources. A network should only transition to being an organisation with dedicated resources if it is clear that the advantages of increased advocacy for a focused interest outweigh the costs of fragmentation, bearing in mind that arts and culture only have limited resources for advocacy of any kind.

8.2 Live Performance Australia’s potential as the peak body for the performing arts

At present there is no clearly identified peak body that represents the performing arts in Australia (Figure 8.2 on page 59). ArtsPeak might have served this role, but it did not include many representatives of commercial organisations, it never had its own resources, and is no longer active.233

One practical strategy would be to get behind an existing body. Live Performance Australia is a plausible candidate. It already represents

232. See for example CACWAPrebudget2019
233. Watts (2017b). For a list of ArtsPeak members when it was active in 2015, see ArtsPeak (2015, p. 9).
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producers, venues and festivals of the performing arts. With membership that spans the public and commercial sectors, it already embodies the common cause between them that is needed for a more coherent argument, more voter support, and more political credibility. It already dedicates more employee resources to advocacy than any other advocacy group (Figure 8.1 on page 58).

LPA’s profile as an advocate for the entire sector increased markedly in 2020 as COVID created clear common goals for both public and commercial sectors, and government dealt with them through combined initiatives such as RISE funding. It is not a big step for it to become the peak body strongly supported across the performing arts.

There are inevitably tensions in the membership of a peak body as their interests pull in different directions. If LPA is perceived as focused only on the interests of big commercial producers, or the interests of large public companies, it will lack the broad industry support essential to a peak body. Instead it would need to focus on a portfolio of issues that cover off the main interests of each sector, as well as those key issues that affect most of them such as venue laws and ticketing codes.

While LPA does not represent those involved in recorded music, or artists, it could do so – although this might imply a changed name to “Performance Australia”. LPA already represents about 30 independent cinemas.

LPA’s structure would need to be modified for it to represent the small to medium public performing arts companies. While many of them are already members, they often value it mostly for its industrial relations services, and do not see it as their representative advocate. LPA’s 18-strong Executive Council, which ultimately sets its advocacy priorities, includes people from large commercial producers and a number of public organisations. But only one of them works for a public performing arts company that is not one of the 30 National Partnership Organisations.234

This governance reflects LPA’s constitution, which essentially allocates votes proportionate to membership fees paid. As large organisations pay much more, they dominate elections to its Executive Council.

A simple one-member-one-vote model is unlikely to work either: it would probably lead to an organisation dominated by small companies that does not effectively represent large commercial and public producers.

For LPA to represent the sector, it would need to adopt a hybrid governance model, allocating votes both to membership dollars and to each member, aiming to deliver an Executive Council that represents performing arts organisations, large and small, commercial and not for profit. The West Australian Chamber of Arts and Culture has a hybrid governance model that effectively ensures governance representation from a variety of backgrounds for exactly this reason. As an industrial relations registered organisation, changing LPA’s governance rules would not be a quick process, but the hurdles do not seem insuperable.

Although many of the public performing arts companies are members of LPA, their representative bodies (such as Theatre Network Australia) are not. To become a true peak body, LPA’s membership would also need to expand to include the major peak organisations for each artform such as Theatre Network Australia, Symphony Services Australia, Ausdance, and the Australian Live Music Business Councils. It is possible that over time these art-form organisations could become chapters of LPA itself. The structure of other industry advocacy bodies suggests that this kind of chapter structure could be desirable but is not essential.

As a true peak body, LPA would also need to promote a diversity of interests in the performing arts, alongside groups such as Diversity

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Arts Australia, Arts Access Australia, First Nations Performing Arts, and Regional Arts Australia.

A related question is how to represent the views of the large number of independent artists, who are often self-employed, moving from project to project, often self-generated.

LPA might leave industrial negotiations to others so that it could embrace a broader membership of arts employees and contractors. But this would be an unusual structure: for most industries, the peak bodies are composed of and funded by employers, as they tend to have deeper pockets than employees and audiences. And employees and audiences are also usually harder to organise as members.

Funding from government is unlikely to be a sustainable alternative. Advocacy is usually about changing government policy, and government is usually happy with the status quo. If government provides substantial funding to an advocacy body, there is a substantial risk of self-censorship, if not direct government pressure to desist from a cause that government finds difficult. Outside of the arts, avoiding advocacy is increasingly an express condition of government funding.²³⁵

Australia Council funding would also be unreliable. There is a long history of Australia Council funding being withdrawn from advocacy groups which then folded, including Arts Action Australia, the National Campaign for the Arts in Australia, and the Key Producers Network. More recently the Australia Council has defunded the National Association for the Visual Arts, Regional Arts Australia, Music Australia, and Ausdance.²³⁶ This partly reflects the difficulty of an advocacy organisation seeking funding from the Australia Council in competition with its own members.

8.3 A peak body formed as a performing arts alliance

An alternative to LPA would be to create a new performing arts alliance between a number of existing organisations.

For example, dedicated resources could be added to the informal federation of 10 performing arts peak bodies.²³⁷ This network has become more active over the past two years, meeting informally once per month, aiming to align key messages and budget submissions.

But to be an effective advocate, this new peak body would need dedicated resources of its own. These resources need to be substantial - critical mass probably requires in the order of 6 to 8 employees. Finding the money for this will be difficult in an industry that has limited resources available to spend on advocacy. And the remit of this new peak body would substantially overlap with Live Performance Australia and APRA AMCOS.

Of course, the sector may identify other ways to create a more unified advocacy body, but it too will have to find substantial resources, and ensure broad buy-in across the performing arts.

8.4 A peak body for arts and culture

LPA, or an alternative performing arts alliance, would not be a peak body for arts and culture analogous to the Canadian Arts Coalition, the UK’s Creative Industries Federation, Americans for the Arts, and the State-based Arts Industry Councils of Victoria and South Australia, and the West Australian Chamber of Arts and Culture.

There is a lot to be said for creating such an umbrella body that might encompass performing arts, visual arts, screen, writing and libraries,²³⁷ Its members are Live Performance Australia, First Nations Performing Arts, APRA AMCOS, Symphony Services International; Theatre Network Australia, AusDance, BlakDance, Performing Arts Connections Australia, Regional Arts Australia, and Diversity Arts Australia.

²³⁵ Mills (2020, p. 119).
²³⁶ Ibid. (pp. 107, 186, 265).
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and museums. Its core agenda would be to promote a shift in Australia’s official culture, and government support for arts and culture. As this discussion paper has shown, these are key agendas. There are also overlapping issues: for example, screen and performing arts have adopted mirror codes on sexual harassment that deal with the particular issues raised in acting workplaces.

But an invigorated peak performing arts body probably needs to come first: if the performing arts cannot get themselves together, it is hard to see how a broader umbrella body could unite the sector.

And a strong peak body for the performing arts would still be necessary, if nothing else because Australia’s industrial award system creates very different issues for the performing arts and other parts of arts and culture. A separate body would probably also be needed because of the federal division of responsibilities in which State, Territory and local governments are directly responsible for most of Australia’s galleries and museums, with relatively little financial or policy input from the Commonwealth.

8.5 Government bodies and advocacy

There is a long history of those in the arts seeing the Australia Council, and state government arts bodies, as advocates for the sector. This perception may have been reinforced by the now disbanded Arts Board structure of the Australia Council. Artists dominated each of the Arts Boards, and they articulated policy that was often then ratified by the Council.

The Australia Council can make substantial contributions, through the data it collects, the reports it issues, the statements of its leading personnel, and its private representations to government. But it can only pursue some kinds of advocacy. In particular, it has very little scope to make public statements at odds with current government policy. The principle of allocating grants at arm’s length from the minister does not imply arm’s length policy positions.

As a government body, the Australia Council has always had limited scope to disagree publicly with government policy. The conventional limits may have become tighter over the past few decades, as the conventions about public statements by public servants in other parts of government have also tightened. Indeed, a senior government executive has told Council members that public disagreement with government policy in their personal capacity is inconsistent with remaining part of the Council, even though Council members are appointed pursuant to statute and there may well be no power to terminate an appointment on this basis.

But this appears to have become the accepted limit to the Australia Council’s public advocacy. For example, it took no public position over the diversion of its funds to the Catalyst Fund. And while it documented the effects of COVID on the arts, it never advocated publicly for specific forms of additional government support in press releases, editorials, or submissions to a Parliamentary inquiry. Doing so would probably have impaired its ability to promote these outcomes behind closed doors with other parts of government.

Even where policy discussions are expressly part of the Council’s role, it is tempered by the ever-present threat of reduced funding. This threat is not theoretical: many have suggested that the funding of another Commonwealth agency, the Auditor-General, has been reduced in deliberate retribution for holding the government to account about controversies such as the “sports rorts” affair.

242. Australia Council Act 2013 (Cwth), s.22.
243. ACA and BYP Group (2020); ACA (2020f); Collette (2020a); and Collette (2020b).
244. Whyte (2020); and Griffiths and Wood (2020).
Nevertheless, the Australia Council’s role in providing data, reports and materials that help others to advocate publicly should not be under-estimated. Other similar organisations such as Creative NZ have even expressly framed some of their materials as an “advocacy toolkit”.

8.6 Think tanks

Think tanks (such as A New Approach) and academic centres (such as QUT’s Digital Media Research Centre) can help in advocacy by improving the evidence base, and presenting it in a way that is persuasive to the public and decision-makers. But their role in advocacy is circumscribed: a think tank needs to tread a fine line between advocating better policy, and being seen as a “player” that favours any particular interest group.

Government don’t negotiate the detail of policy changes with a think tank because a think tank doesn’t represent a constituency, and governments can’t ask it to agree to compromises which are the essence of constructive politics.

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9 Approach to government

Performing arts advocacy needs a better ground game. No industry gets a free pass from politicians. Industries that are often perceived as getting preferential access are usually those that have put in sustained effort. Highly regulated industries for whom government policies matter more tend to spend more on lobbyists, conduct more meetings with senior ministers, and donate more than would be expected given the size of their industry.²⁴⁶

The perception amongst politicians, their advisors, public servants, and the industry itself is that arts and culture advocacy has been relatively ad hoc, uncoordinated and unsophisticated.²⁴⁷ Advocacy is more likely to succeed if it builds long-term relationships and outcomes rather than reacting to an emerging crisis. It should be broad-based across all three levels of government, across public service and ministers, across government in power and opposition, and across responsible ministers and back-benchers. It should use the best messenger and message for the individual decision-maker, while ensuring there is a consistent ask and rationale across all stakeholders.

9.1 Strategic, not just tactical approach

Effective advocacy requires a long-term and sustained approach. Many arts and culture campaigns are launched just before an election.²⁴⁸ They are unlikely to succeed unless they build on extensive advocacy already in place. Just as panic practice is rarely effective preparation for a good performance, an election campaign without a lot of prior preparation is rarely effective advocacy. The successful campaigns in Ireland and Canada took over a decade to generate a significant change in outcome (Box 7 on page 57). APRA AMCOS and the Live Music Office worked on regulation of live music venues for 7 years before there was significant change in NSW (Box 8 on the following page).

Of course, there is nothing wrong with taking advantage of events, such as elections, changes in Minister, and external shocks – like a pandemic. They can open a window of opportunity, which can close all too quickly.²⁴⁹ For example, the establishment of the national Film and Sound Archive, and the resale royalty scheme for visual artists were both precipitated by the 2007 federal election.²⁵⁰ But in both cases success built on extensive advocacy over an extended period.²⁵¹ In arts and culture, as in other policy areas, “government can only go through the window because the evidence has already been assembled.”²⁵²

And there is nothing wrong with responding to unforeseen circumstances such as the transfer of funds from the Australia Council to Catalyst (Box 5 on page 51), or the problems – and opportunities – of

²⁴⁷ This was an all but unanimous view in consultations for this discussion paper, particularly strongly held by those with experience in government advocacy for other industries.
²⁴⁸ E.g. the Western Australia Vote Arts campaign (Box 2 on page 35), and the recent #ArtsMatters campaign launched by the Chamber of Arts and Culture WA in the lead up to the 2021 Western Australia State election: ArtsHub (2021).
²⁴⁹ Daley et al. (2020, pp. 29–30).
²⁵¹ When the Australian Film Commission proposed to shut the historic film archive in 2003, the Archive Forum was created, its members made numerous submissions to the Australian Film Commission, and had the matter raised regularly in Senate Estimates and parliamentary questions: Puplick (ibid., pp. 49–50). A resale royalty had been proposed by the Australian Copyright Council in a draft report for the Australia Council in 1988, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in 1999, and the Myer Report into contemporary visual arts and craft in 2002, was considered in a discussion paper issued by the Howard Government in 2004, and was evaluated in an Access Economics report in 2004: Gardiner-Garden (2009, pp. 40–41, 49–50, 63–64).
²⁵² Daley et al. (2020, p. 27).
Box 8: Overhauling live music regulation in NSW

NSW stringently regulated live music through overlapping liquor licensing, local planning, building code, environmental noise, and road use laws. The challenges for live music increased with night-time lock-out laws. The problems became worse when the NSW Government introduced regulations to require “high risk” festivals to pay for the presence of additional emergency services in response to deaths from drug overdoses at music festivals.

Contemporary music became increasingly organised to push for change. The Live Music Office was established in 2013, effectively an industry think tank, with seed funding from the Commonwealth Government, and ongoing funding from APRA AMCOS. It commissioned a research paper in 2014 to value the economic, social and cultural contribution of live music. The Capital City Lord Mayors commissioned a report into the Australian night time economy, which identified it was growing substantially faster in Victoria than NSW. Prominent festival organisers created a new association, the Australian Festivals Association (AFA). Pubs and other entertainment venues supported the push for change.

APRA AMCOS, the Live Music Office, and LPA all helped to mobilise public support, and AFA and Music NSW organised a large “Don’t kill live music” rally in Hyde Park in 2019. Music festival regulation became a live issue during the 2019 NSW State election campaign.

The upper house of the NSW Parliament became actively involved. It held three inquiries over three years into the industry, and gained further insights through broader inquiries into management of the pandemic, and management of grant programs.

These forces led the NSW Government to set up a night-time economy roundtable, and night-time economy taskforce, ultimately publishing a night-time economy strategy.

In 2020, the NSW Government introduced legislation to implement some of the regulatory changes that flowed from these strategies. The upper house introduced very substantial amendments, ultimately accepted by the government, that amounted to much more comprehensive regulatory reform. A government MP commented she had “never seen anything like this in 17 years in the Parliament”. The unusual process was facilitated by the large number of inquiries in previous years which meant that MPs were unusually familiar with the issues.

COVID, and its challenges for live music, helped create the environment for a “bonfire of live music rules”. But such comprehensive reform would not have happened without the groundwork of the previous eight years. The influence of APRA AMCOS and the Live Music Office over the legislation was explicitly acknowledged at the end of the parliamentary debate.

The NSW legislation is now being promoted as a template for other States – and internationally. The success of the long-term advocacy was underlined when the NSW Government provided a $24 million package to help live music venues recover from COVID.

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COVID (Box 1 on page 15 and Box 8 on the previous page). But these responses will be more likely to succeed if they can build on prior advocacy establishing the importance of arts and culture, and the case for government support.

9.2 A strong external evidence base

A powerful evidence base helps build long-term advocacy. A New Approach has certainly helped, as has the work of the Australia Council. A variety of academics have also contributed.

Government reviews tend to be particularly powerful. Historically they have been the strongest influences increasing Commonwealth Government funding. By convention, the government is obliged to respond to a review it has commissioned. The Nugent review of the Major Performing Arts Groups, the Nugent Opera Review, and the Strong Symphony Orchestra Review all fit the pattern – indeed the reviewed organisations tended to get increased funding even when that wasn’t the recommendation of the review.

9.3 Using all the access points

Effective advocacy uses all the access points to government: not just the responsible minister, but their advisers, departments, other powerful ministers and backbenchers. Effective advocacy groups such as the Property Council of Australia lobby at scale: its NSW Division wrote 55 submissions and conducted 230 meetings with government ministers and their offices in a single year.

Backbenchers are perhaps the most neglected targets, because this sort of advocacy is time-consuming. It tends to be most effective when each local member is contacted by someone from their electorate with the same message that is delivered to every other backbencher.

For example, when COVID hit, Darren Rudd, with a decade of experience as the head of corporate affairs for NBN and Tata Consultancy Services, became the CEO of the Australian Federation of Travel Agents. He organised a campaign that included meetings of travel agents with their local member around the country. It ultimately delivered government support of $128 million, about $4,500 per employee (Figure 2.12 on page 17). The Pharmacy Guild is also famous for its ability to coordinate its members to each lobby their local MP, and financial planners and real estate agents run campaigns of this type too.

Some arts advocates are heading in this direction. The Australia Council made its arts participation survey data available by electorate, which provides data points for others to lobby their local federal member. Theatre Network Australia has a current pilot to identify a local champion in each of 15 strategic electorates. It is training them, and will coordinate their messaging to get each MP to identify key arts and culture assets and opportunities in their electorate. The Sydney Theatre Company is providing a tailored report to local MPs about the school programs and regional touring that the STC has conducted in their electorate, and following up with those MPs who engage. The West Australian Chamber of Arts and Culture encouraged individuals to contact their local member ahead of the WA election with a form letter.

255. One example is documented in a speech by Julian Leeser, the member for Berowra in the outer northern suburbs of Sydney: Hansard, Commonwealth House of Representatives, 9 November 2020, p.9138.
257. For example, the majority of Members of the House of Representatives who spoke in debate over the Future of Financial Advice reforms referred to issues raised by individual financial planners who were their constituents: Perrett, Jones, Van Manen, Hansard, Commonwealth House of Representatives, 19 March 2012, p.3309, 3311, 3319; Gambaro, Fletcher, Christensen, Morrison, Hansard, Commonwealth House of Representatives, 21 March 2012, p.3853-3854, 3859, 3861, 3875.
258. ACA (2021).
259. personal communication from Theatre Network Australia
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But these efforts are sporadic, and fall well short of a coordinated, broad campaign targeted at every local member, conducted through local constituents, who go personally to see their local member, with a common ask, such as the campaign conducted by the Australian Federation of Travel Agents. Such coordination is much harder without a clearly identified and properly resourced national peak body to coordinate campaigns.

Local member campaigns for arts and culture have also tended to focus on Commonwealth MPs – the Australia Council data, for example, is only available at the federal level. But State and local backbenchers should be targeted as well: they are often more accessible, and State Governments provide 35% of all arts funding, and local governments another 26%.²⁶¹

Effective advocacy also needs to be directed to try to gain the support of all parties. Arts and culture policy is only sustainable if it is bipartisan. It isn’t always so. Creative Australia collapsed because the significant funding increase it provided was not supported by the LNP, and over 40% of the additional funding it provided was reversed in the first Abbott budget, a year after the policy had been launched.²⁶²

The history of Creative Australia may lie behind the common belief that left wing parties are more sympathetic towards the arts. History suggests this belief is mistaken: over the long term the level of government support has varied irrespective of the party in power. Left wing governments have often taken an instrumentalist view of arts and culture, focused on their role in improving educational, health, disadvantage, and economic outcomes, but less interested in their direct impact on audiences Most significant funding increases have followed a major independent review rather than a change in government.²⁶³

While individual advocacy is important, the surest guarantee of bipartisan support in the long run is to win public hearts and minds. A clear public consensus will reliably drive bipartisanship. For example, while the LNP was philosophically never keen on Medicare, public opinion ultimately drove bipartisan support.²⁶⁴

9.4 Long-term relationships

Good advocacy builds long-term relationships. Many people stay in government a long time, and one of the advantages of using all the access points is that today’s opposition back-bencher may ultimately be a senior minister. Arts and culture organisations are well-acustomed to building long-term relationships with philanthropists and sponsors; the same is required with politicians.

These long-term relationships mean that advocacy requires compromise and exchange. It is often better long-term advocacy to publicly applaud a new program that confers significant benefits, rather than picking holes in its defects. If governments think that the performing arts sector will criticise every new policy initiative, then next time they may be more inclined to do nothing, in order to avoid attracting unwelcome attention.

9.5 Targeted coordinated messengers

While a recognised and supported peak body will improve advocacy, it then needs to select the individual messengers most likely to influence the target on any given issue. Advocacy directed towards the government in power typically needs respected political operatives whom the government sees as friends. Like theatre, politics is all about casting. In

²⁶² Creative Australia provided $157 million in new funding over the 3 years 2014-15 to 2016-17, and the first Abbott budget reversed $67 million of these decisions: Treasury (2013) and Treasury (2014), Budget Paper 2.
²⁶³ MacNeill et al. (2013).
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many other industries this casting is institutionalised as advocacy groups hire former members of parliament and ministerial advisers.265

Board members can help with advocacy for any industry. But while the boards of a few performing arts companies are dominated by senior business figures, who are inherently well-connected to senior levels of politics, others are less so.266 Of course, former board members can also be useful messengers.

Artists can also be important advocates. They often have high profile with the community, and the pulling-power of celebrity – even for politicians. Advocacy for an arts COVID support package probably benefited because one of the key messengers, Mark Vincent, had sung at the funeral of the Prime Minister’s father When well-chosen artists open doors, they will only be helpful if they are “on message” – which usually requires selection, coordination and preparation by an advocacy body. Because they are seldom experts in policy or advocacy, artists may be most effective when they work alongside professional policy advocates from peak bodies to deliver the messages. Sports stars often have a similarly high profile to celebrity artists. When they open doors for sports advocacy, sports stars are usually accompanied by sports administrators.

Advocacy to local Members of Parliament usually works best if the messenger is a community leader in their electorate. The Pharmacy Guild is powerful partly because the local pharmacist is invariably a trusted community figure who will at least get a hearing from their local member. One of the reasons for making common cause with community

arts and culture is that inevitably some of those involved will be effective advocates with their local MP. Ideally this advocacy is coordinated so that each local member receives a very similar message.

Messengers can also be effective if they come from other powerful industries making common cause, such as tourism, or pubs and clubs. It is possible that the performing arts could have done even better in COVID if they had forged a stronger alliance with the hospitality sector that was experiencing many of the same kinds of issues.

9.6 Tailored messages

While some arguments are more likely than others to succeed (chapter 5 on page 25), the best message in the circumstances is the one most likely to appeal to the individual recipient. For example, the effects of COVID on “backstage tradies” appear to have been a crucial concern for Prime Minister Morrison.267 Other Prime Ministers might have found other arguments more important, but this was clearly the right message in the circumstances.

For many Members of Parliament, tangible experiences and personal conversations will be particularly powerful. As a result, interactions with local schools and community groups may well be more fertile than attending a mainstage performance. Getting Prime Minister John Howard to watch ex-juvenile offenders perform their brick-throwing performance art, or even better involving Premier Bob Carr as an extra in a film made by disadvantaged youth in regional NSW, resulted in substantial multi-year commitments for their producer, Big hART.268

9.7 Levels of government

The message and the ask may vary for different levels of government.

266. For example 9 out of 12 directors of the Australian Ballet are directors or senior tier executives of top 100 Australian corporates. But the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has only 4 out of 12; Opera Australian 3 out of 11, and smaller companies even fewer. This pattern has not change materially: for example, only 3 out of 13 directors of the Australian Opera (as it then was) had corporate backgrounds in 1986.
267. See footnote 131
Asks vary, if nothing else, because different levels of government have different responsibilities: local governments lead more often in supporting community organisations; State and Territory governments lead more often in contemporary music, with large galleries and museums, in supporting venues, and with festivals; and the Commonwealth Government leads more often with larger public performing arts organisations. These responsibilities result as much from history as from constitutional allocations of power. In practice, responsibilities often overlap, and many arts and culture initiatives are supported by all three levels of government.

While the most persuasive argument can often depend on the personal views of the decision maker, different levels of government tend to have slightly different philosophical approaches to government generally, and therefore arts and culture.

Because they are closer to the grass roots, local governments tend to see more clearly the direct impacts of arts and culture on happiness, understanding and togetherness across the community. They have more visibility of community arts groups and their work. They may also be more motivated by civic pride, regional tourism, and regional development.

States and Territories tend to see more clearly the role of government in the life-cycle of industry development. While the Commonwealth largely dismantled its involvement in industry development through the 1980s and 1990s, States and Territories did so less. Consequently States and Territories tend to be quicker to see the value of government intervention to promote venue development, to nurture new organisations and artists early in their career, and to market across the sector, including through arts festivals.

The Commonwealth is predisposed to focus more on tertiary education, and national identity.

But again, these differences in approaches are questions of degree, and they can shift over time. For example, the Commonwealth has started to intervene in the economy more often over the last decade.

A peak body can cover both Commonwealth and State issues, despite these nuances in approach, and LPA has done so. There is value in a single body conducting advocacy with multiple State governments because the issues (such as the regulation of live music) are often similar.

But a peak body such as LPA is unlikely to do the heavy lifting with 537 different local councils. Instead advocacy at the local government level primarily depends on local groups. This doesn’t appear to be a problem: existing advocacy arrangements have resulted in local governments significantly increasing their financial support for arts and culture over the last decade, and by more than other levels of government.\footnote{A New Approach (2019, p. 5).}
10 Policy implications

This discussion paper is focused on advocacy rather than identifying particular policy outcomes. But the implications of the recommended advocacy strategy should be understood. The advocacy approach logically leads to more emphasis on particularly policy interventions.

This chapter focuses on the policy shifts that may be implied if advocacy focuses more on the direct impact of arts and culture on peoples’ well-being, and makes common cause with commercial and community sectors. These policy interventions are outlined, rather than investigated in detail. A number of the policy shifts that the performing arts might advocate are also discussed in Chapter 7 on page 47.

10.1 Reframing arts and culture

Advocacy is likely to be more effective if it is framed as “arts and culture”, rather than just “the arts” (Section 5.2.2 on page 27). One consequence might be a “minister for culture” rather than a “minister for the arts” – a shift that occurred in the United Kingdom in 1997 with the appointment of a Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. This kind of portfolio is likely to lead to more alignment between performing and visual arts, film, broadcasting, museums, libraries and sport.

10.2 Focus on externalities

Advocacy focused on the direct impact of arts and culture, and that makes common cause with commercial and community sectors, is inherently agnostic about artform. If 3 in 5 performances that people choose to attend are comedy, music theatre and contemporary music, then these artforms are making a big difference to the happiness, understanding and togetherness that the performing arts can provide. Making common cause with these (generally) commercial sectors will tend to lead to policy outcomes that support them as well.

This implies policy that focuses more on “externalities” rather than promoting excellence in the performance of a canon of historic masterpieces in a particular set of artforms.

In policy terms, “externalities” occur when people benefit even though they don’t pay. Education is a classic example: an employer who educates an employee usually doesn’t capture all of the benefits – future employers benefit as well, and there is no way to make them pay. Without public provision, the arts and culture workforce is likely to have less education than would be ideal given the direct benefits it will provide in the long term to audiences. Consequently, around the world, governments play a substantial role in paying for education.

Externalities abound in the performing arts. There are lots of benefits that people create, but can’t capture simply by charging for tickets to their show. The most obvious externality is training, and it is no coincidence that the Commonwealth provides the bulk of the funding for university performing arts courses and the Arts8 organisations that provide elite performance arts training. Government support for the symphony orchestras is also important to training across the music world: many symphony orchestra musicians provide private lessons to more junior players,270 but without the regular employment of a symphony orchestra it is unlikely that so many senior high-quality musicians would be retained in Australia.

Similarly, the major theatre companies provide education and training. In 2019, the Melbourne Theatre Company, for example, provided school workshops for over 300 school students, professional development for over 100 school drama teachers, and professional development for 12 women in theatre.271 The Sydney Dance Company provides a full-time

270. See footnote 192.
271. MTC (2019, pp. 45, 50).
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elite training program for 26 aspiring professional dancers, as well as a variety of school student programs. To some extent the opera companies are also training organisations. The externality, however, is smaller: they train relatively few people, and they capture more of the training benefit themselves because opera singing is relatively specialised, and there are relatively few alternative employers.

These externalities often flow between the public and commercial sectors. Those trained by public institutions often subsequently work as actors, musicians, and backstage in musicals and contemporary music. The trumpet player backing a contemporary music band may well have been trained by the principal trumpet from a symphony orchestra; the dancer in a contemporary music performance may well have been trained by the Sydney Dance Company. The talent pool sloshes around as many in the performing arts move between public and commercial productions throughout their working life.

Most public arts companies also have extensive school education programs. These range from performances to school students, to school workshops, the creation of school materials, and teacher professional development. But unless the materials are available electronically, the reach of these is inherently limited: there are around 300 schools in Australia for each National Partnership Organisation.

The performing arts often rely on government to support infrastructure that is used by many producers. The problem can be that no-one is prepared to take the risk building new or upgraded infrastructure which will only earn its keep if lots of performers in fact use it. By building one stage, government can often attract audiences to the stage next door. And infrastructure can bring a community together, creating public benefits beyond the well-being of those who are there at the time.

Governments can support industry development that individual industry participants are unlikely to fund. For example, the Victorian Government’s Music Works program funded support for emerging artists, professional development, development of venues, and industry profile building. Supporting emerging artists can be particularly important to developing a strong industry as they often add vitality and new artistic approaches. But like research and development in other industries, they often need support, because existing players often benefit from their innovations even when they haven’t paid for them directly.

Festivals can serve industry development in a number of ways, and State governments often support them accordingly. Festivals often finance production development, and provide profile for emerging artists. And they can create common branding and awareness that attract audiences more efficiently than marketing for each individual production.

Governments have always supported the development of local content because of its importance to national identity and social cohesion (Section 5.3 on page 29). Those developing new work overseas may tell universal stories that engage Australians, but they are unlikely to tell specifically Australian stories. Developing new work is almost always more expensive than restaging established works. And a smaller country like Australia lacks efficiencies of scale in developing local stories. This so even in a global market: it is usually harder to export artistic work from a small country like Australia than from a larger country: Keating: the musical was always unlikely to sell in the United States, whereas Hamilton is likely to sell in Australia. Consequently governments have always supported the development of new Australian work. What counts as “new Australian work” is a question of degree: a new staging can tell stories inspired by its Australian context even if the underlying work was

273. In 2019, Opera Australia provided a week’s intensive training for 4 school-age singers, and funds a 2 year training program for 3 young artists each year: Opera Australia (2019, pp. 17, 21).
274. Section 6.2.4 on page 44.
first written overseas. The greater the local creative input, the stronger the case for supporting its development. Of course, direct funding is not the only lever for government: it can also impose quotas on broadcast and internet channels (Section 7.6 on page 52).

Government support can also improve the valuable community and social connections that arts and culture can foster (section 5.3 on page 29). Professional organisations and their personnel can train community groups to do better – benefiting both creators and audiences. Higher quality community arts and culture is often more fun for both creators and audiences, encouraging more to be involved, and more valuable community and social connections. The public arts sector creates a reservoir of those qualified to help, reducing the costs to community groups of identifying expertise. Government promotion of community arts and culture can encourage the involvement of those who would not have been motivated to set up the activity by themselves. The additional social capital this activity generates can have far-reaching impacts on governance well beyond the immediate participants.276

These externalities all affect the volume and quality of performance in Australia, and the direct benefits to happiness, understanding and togetherness that they bring.

The performing arts can also affect economic outcomes that benefit people other than the producer. Well-directed government support for the performing arts can affect employment, regional development, exports, and tourism (Section 5.5.3 on page 33).

While government can support specific activities to address each of these externalities, it is often better to support organisations that address a number of them in an integrated way. There are benefits in both running an integrated organisation, and in reducing the costs of application, assessment, and administration of support. Of course, it is still important to measure that an organisation receiving a block grant is in fact making a difference to the externalities identified.

10.3 Audience outcomes

The advocacy approach suggested implies that governments should care about both the number of people reached, and how much their performing arts experience changes their happiness, understanding and togetherness.

This implies a renewed focus on access. If mainstage productions are struggling to grow audiences, then it may be appropriate to increase the resources available for formats that are proving more accessible. It is plausible that mass outdoor performances are attracting audiences not only because they are often free or lower cost, but because an outdoor setting is less intimidating for new audiences. Concerns about COVID have already increased investment in facilities for outdoor presentation and the number of outdoor performances; these habits may well persist after the pandemic has passed.

Some performances are better than others – because they make us more happy, understanding or together. This insight lies behind the historic focus on “excellence”. But no artform has a monopoly on excellence. Commercial productions of musicals and contemporary music often have extremely high production values. It is hard to argue that the lion’s share of government funding should go to a relatively small number of established companies in a limited set of artforms on the basis that they are “excellent” (and by inference, the alternatives are not).

This kind of thinking has been close to the surface of much arts policy in Australia. For example, in 1976, the Industries Assistance Commission suggested that Federal government performing arts support should be focused on education, innovation and dissemination. The Fraser Government rejected these recommendations, and instead announced it would maintain existing funding patterns, particularly to the Opera, Ballet and

276. Participation in community choirs was the key marker for better governance in Italy identified in the classic study Putnam (2000).
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Drama Companies, because these arrangements were consistent with the objective of “the promotion of excellence in the arts”, which “is of primary importance”.277 The tendency to equate “excellence” with the major public performing arts groups has persisted.278

Some of Australia’s arts policy advocates still view “excellence” as tied to the classical western European canon. More acknowledge a wider body of creative output but remain focused on western cultural tradition. A little under half of those surveyed in 2015 thought that excellence depends on the genre and its cultural tradition.279

The Commonwealth Government’s approach to the performing arts appears to be shifting away from historic definitions of “excellence” to a broader approach. It only supported the performing arts specifically through COVID in response to an industry wide approach. And the funding distribution was similarly broad (Figure 6.1 on page 42).

Australia’s performing arts organisations can try to resist this shift, but they would be fighting against logic, broader political developments, and recent policy history. The historic rhetoric and focus on “excellence” has led to lost audience share, Commonwealth government support, and public voice. Increasing focus on the rhetoric of “excellence” is unlikely to improve these outcomes.

Today, National Partnership Organisations present relatively few works from outside the classical western European canon, and this tends to be reflected in the ethnic background of their audiences. While governments are increasingly supporting festivals such as Asia TOPA and the Sangam festival focused on South Asia performing arts, they do not provide substantial support for ongoing performance organisations focused on the traditions from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the birthplace of half of the migrants living in Australia today. An advocacy approach about the potential of arts and culture to improve social cohesion is likely to lead to broader outcomes.

In some ways this would bring the wheel full-circle. When most of Australia’s major performing arts institutions were set up in the 1970s, they reflected the ethnic diversity of Australia. Classical music, opera and dance had even stronger traditions in continental Europe than in the United Kingdom. Government support for them partly reflected the substantial number of migrants from continental Europe at the time (Figure 5.3 on page 31).

10.4 Community outcomes

Advocacy more focused on the links between public and community arts also implies more policy focus on community arts.

Governments already support community performing arts. Local governments tend to be more involved particularly through supporting rehearsal and performance venues. The Commonwealth’s involvement has tended to vary in line with policy trends around its involvement in local activity more generally (Section 6.2.3 on page 43). Although one of the functions of the Australia Council under its Act is to “promote community participation in the arts”,280 its programs for doing so are relatively small.

Large performing arts organisations often support community performing arts although the links are seldom visible. Anecdotally, the interactions between symphony orchestra players and a variety of community orchestras are extensive, as are interactions between the Australian Ballet and a range of community dance classes (Section 6.2.4 on page 44). But the links tend to be informal, and not publicly documented.

279. Ibid. (pp. 83–84).
280. Australia Council Act 2013, s.9(1)(bd)
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The advocacy approach suggested implies that funding might be more explicitly tied to these community links, which also implies more discipline in measuring and documenting these outcomes.

10.5 Shift in evaluation

More focus on the direct impact of performance on well-being implies more focus on measuring it. Whereas economic outcomes (such as employment) are relatively easy to measure, the direct impacts of arts and culture on audiences are harder.

Data on attendance could be better, particularly for smaller and local council venues (Section 7.9 on page 55). Ideally this data would be collected regularly, as part of broader data collection such as State local government grants commissions.

The core questions of the Culture Counts survey are a reasonable first approximation for measuring impact on individual audience members (Section 7.9 on page 55). No doubt there are potential issues because this approach is quantitative rather than open-ended, prone to bias in the background of the interviewers, requires the retention of trained staff, could lead to overly crude decisions based on simplistic metrics, organisations may try to use the data selectively when the results aren’t good, and (at least initially) they may simply ignore poor outcomes.281

But these issues are a classic example of the perfect being the enemy of the good, and the failure to adopt any system leaves arts and culture vulnerable when the only other available measure is ticket sales. The Australia Council, for example, measures attendances, and new Australian works, but not the impact on audiences.282 Victoria currently measures cultural impact by attendance, festivals, brand ranking and awards.283 The impact on audiences remains invisible.

281. Gilmore et al. (2017); and Glow and Johanson (2020, pp. 185–187).
282. ACA (2020g) Annual performance statements: Summary of results.
11  Coda

There has been little change in the advocacy, policy, and institutions of the performing arts in Australia over 30 years, despite big changes in artforms, community tastes, social interactions, and ethnic composition.

More of the same advocacy is likely to lead to more of the same outcomes. Arts and culture will continue to be an important part of peoples’ personal lives, largely unrecognised in Australia’s public image. They will continue to lose share of Commonwealth government spending. Traditional artforms will continue to lose share of audiences to other forms. Opportunities for arts and culture to contribute to well-being, social cohesion, and a range of other valuable outcomes will go begging.

COVID has been hard on the performing arts. But it has also given the world permission to change. Australia’s performing arts have an opportunity to work through the implications of this discussion paper, improve their advocacy, change their future, and change the future of the country.
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