

26 January 2022

The Hon Michael Sukkar MP
Minister for Housing and Assistant Treasurer
C/- The Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

2022-23 Pre-Budget Submission

This submission is made on behalf of a national group of First Nations performing arts organisations, industry peak bodies, and training institutions.

We are: National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA), Bangarra Dance Theatre, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, Marrugeku, Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company, Moogahlin Performing Arts, BlakDance Australia Ltd.

Our communities are the custodians of the most exciting and compelling stories globally. Our outputs include large scale cultural productions; employment, training and professional pathways for First Nations young people; regional economic development; international, intercultural, and inter-tribal collaboration; strengthened capacity in governance and leadership; audience development; intergenerational cultural transmission; cultural enterprise; keeping First Nations culture STRONG; and sharing First Nations culture with other Australians and on a global stage.

SUMMARY OF BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

1. First Nations Performing Arts Employment & Skills Strategy - feasibility study - \$500,000

A 12 month initiative to develop and pilot a 10 year workforce capacity development plan to address the critical skills shortage in the First Nations Performing Arts Sector, and identify integral training institutes equipped to deliver training to First Nations arts workers.

2. First Nations Performing Arts Fund - \$20M x 3 years

A dedicated fund for First Nations led performing arts organisations and artists to address the imbalance in investment to our sector, which currently represents just 8% of Australia Council grants and initiatives by area of practice (2020-21).

3. Live entertainment events insurance scheme

Establish, in partnership with states and territories, a temporary Live Entertainment Events Insurance Scheme to rebuild industry confidence to invest in live events (\$130m-\$200m to May 2023).

OVERVIEW

First Nations arts and culture is essential to Closing the Gap

- For decades, First Nations peoples have emphasised the critical role of culture in addressing First Nations disadvantage, for wellbeing (especially mental health) and for the healing and strengthening of individuals and communities.
- The refreshed National Agreement on Closing the Gap includes a priority for culture (*Priority 16: Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourish*) but only targets and measures language revitalisation and does not address the significant national industry of First Nations performing arts.
- The new Agreement has overlooked the nexus between culture and the arts industry and the opportunity to Close the Gap on employment, health and wellbeing, and economic participation through the First Nations led arts and cultural industries in Australia.
- To address Indigenous disadvantage, we need a bold vision and comprehensive national plan that prioritises investment in First Nations arts, creativity and culture.

Investment in the First Nations arts and creative industries workforce

- In accordance with their right to self-determination, First Nations arts organisations seek to employ First Nations staff and support the establishment and growth of First Nations creative businesses.
- Existing skills and jobs initiatives are insufficiently targeted to support the growth of our industry, particularly training and employment pathways for First Nations producers, technical and production managers, designers and management and executive roles and the appropriate training institutes to deliver this.
- Employment services do not have knowledge or even awareness of the arts sector when placing clients and lack supported programs to connect First Nations jobseekers with career opportunities in the performing arts.
- A national long-term employment and skills strategy, all the way from school leavers up to leadership roles, is needed to grow performing arts careers and small business opportunities for First Nations people.

RECOMMENDATION:

\$500,000 to develop a First Nations Arts Skills & Workforce Capacity Building Strategy for the next decade.

This investment will support, over the next 12 months, the consultation and modelling needed with stakeholders in diverse industries including arts, employment, skills & training, education, small business and regional development, as well as the development of a comprehensive national workforce strategy.

Investment in the creation, touring and export of First Nations arts and cultural productions

- For decades, national inquiries and reports have provided extensive evidence for the role of culture and in First Nations advancement, from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) to Elders' report into preventing Indigenous self-harm and youth suicide (2014). The ABS report *Living Culture: First Nations arts participation and wellbeing* presents data on the critical role of our industry in First Nations health, wellbeing and economic empowerment.
- **Yet First Nations arts organisations remain underfunded as a percentage of Commonwealth arts investment.** In 2018, the Australia Council estimated unmet demand for First Nations-led arts funding was over 70% in dollar terms. The Council's Submission to the Closing the Gap Refresh (2018) recommended "consolidated, targeted investment in First Nations arts, culture and cultural maintenance outcomes as a strategic priority area within the Closing the Gap framework." First Nations arts organisations receive only 8% of Australia Council organisations funding, and project grants even less.

- To maximise economic and cultural opportunities from First Nations performing arts, First Nations artists and companies need creative control over the commissioning and development of works, particularly the intellectual property and licensing opportunities for Australian and international markets. This is not possible without dedicated investment in First Nations-led projects.

RECOMMENDATION:

\$20M per annum over three years for a First Nations Performing Arts Fund

This investment, which we recommend be administered by the Australia Council for the Arts, would be open to First Nations-led arts organisations, collectives, or individuals for the creation and production of First Nations work in Australia and international markets, supporting increased First Nations employment, export, and First Nations-controlled intellectual property.

CONCLUSION

A vibrant First Nations performance industry is critical to Australia's identity, economic, social and cultural wellbeing and we encourage the Government to continue to support and promote investment in our industry.

We note submissions made by key peak bodies, such as Diversity Arts Australia, APRA AMCOS, Live Performance Australia, Performing Arts Connections, Regional Arts Australia, Symphony Services, and Theatre Network Australia, and we fully support the proposals made in those submissions.

Once again, we thank you for the opportunity to present this submission for consideration in the Budget process. Should you have any queries regarding the information provided, please do not hesitate to contact Merindah Donnelly (merindah.donnelly@blakdance.org.au) or Alison Murphy Oates (ali@moogahlin.org) via email or telephone.

Yours sincerely,

National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) (NSW)
 Bangarra Dance Theatre (NSW)
 ILBIJERRI Theatre Company (VIC)
 Marrugeku (WA / NSW)
 Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company (WA)
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