

TO The Hon Scott Morrison MP  
Prime Minister  
  
The Hon Michael McCormack MP  
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Regional Development

Thursday 26 March 2020

Dear Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister,

At this most debilitating time in Australia's cultural life, our creative, cultural and entertainment industries require urgent support to ensure that jobs and infrastructure survive to inspire Australians through this crisis – and well beyond.

Our organisations represent the full diversity of Australia's creative, cultural and entertainment industries. Cultural and creative activity contributes in excess of \$112 billion to Australia's economy each year, employing hundreds of thousands with a high proportion of sole trader contractors, SMEs and casuals. Our audiences, here and around the world number in the millions. Every day, we entertain, educate and inspire.

In the past fortnight, we have seen our self-generated income for the year vanish. Work that has taken years to develop has been lost. Livelihoods are jeopardised. Businesses closed. Whether it's a bookshop, a gallery, a live music venue, a cinema, a theatre, or dance school, Australia's cultural life is in tatters.

As each day passes, hundreds of businesses, spaces, venues, productions, events, festivals and cultural outlets close. As each day passes, the likelihood of reopening or restarting diminishes. The scale of loss across the cultural and creative sector is unprecedented – and devastating. Culturally and economically.

There are also dire impacts on First Nations culture and a great risk to Elders as the source of cultural knowledge and storytelling. As a national priority, we must ensure our First Nations Elders' safety to prevent loss of cultural knowledge. First Nations Elders are the holders of our Nation's oldest culture and stories. Without them, we have no future.

Our work relies on gatherings, and national and international touring, both small and large, in remote locations, in regions and in cities. We were the first industry to be hit with announcements of cancellations and closures making front-page news across the country. Our venues and other programs have been closed down by government order, without any industry support. And we will be one of the last able to trade again.

We commend the work of Minister Fletcher in hosting industry-wide roundtables and bringing forward an extraordinary Meeting of Cultural Ministers. We commend the city, state and federal agencies, including the Australia Council, who have already made announcements on adjustments to their funding programs and existing relationships.

We note however that funded organisations comprise a minor segment of the creative, cultural and entertainment industries. Over 90% of our artists, creators and businesses are not in receipt of public funding and are not able to benefit from these measures. Other relief measures already announced which do not adequately address our specific industry conditions include:

- The PAYG and NFP cashflow relief for businesses requires submitting March activity statements and then awaiting a late April refund, thereby impacting perilously on cashflow at this most critical time. It's right now that companies are facing closure, and this payment alone will close many businesses permanently;

- Artists and artworkers with disabilities, Australians stranded overseas, and those whose partner's or parents' income exceed too low a threshold, are not eligible to receive extra income support payments, with no extra payments for those eligible available prior to late April;
- Income support payments to job seekers separates arts workers from organisations in ways that wage subsidies would not, dispersing creative teams and imperilling business viability.

Both individually and together, we have taken immediate action to support our industries at this perilous time:

- We have channelled urgent government information across our networks
- We have supported people who've lost jobs and whose companies are on the brink
- We have surveyed our industries and quantified COVID-19 impacts on jobs and revenue, and have provided these details to the Office for the Arts and the Australia Council for the Arts for coordination on immediate action.

At this time, every single day counts. Each passing day means the permanent closure of another bookshop, regional theatre, gallery, live music venue, production or festival, and with them the knowledge and infrastructures that have been built over many years. The risk for all Australians is that they will never open again. Whole centres, towns and suburbs risk losing any cultural fabric that remains.

A legacy like this will take a generation to repair.

Targeted stimulus to a value of 2% of the \$111.7 billion industry is required, including:

- The protection of First Peoples cultural knowledge with targeted support for all impacted First Nations artists and organisations, who employ the most COVID-19-vulnerable people in our country
- \$1.5bn in cash injection payments to affected businesses across all sectors so that they can retain staff, adapt programs including through the use of technologies, and redevelop audiences – ensuring that businesses do not lose permanently; importantly, these stimulus payments will allow professional membership bodies to pay affected artists directly and efficiently
- \$180m for the Australia Council to boost capacity by supporting organisations who are funded specifically for their industry development work
- Rent relief and security for lease holders in both government-owned and private tenancies
- Wage subsidies that retain people in their workplace, better positioning organisations to successfully rebuild, and in turn ensuring livelihoods aren't permanently lost
- Review and broaden the eligibility requirements for income support payments to ensure that, where wage subsidies are not available, support can be accessed by all sole traders and SMEs
- Enhanced tax incentives to motivate private giving and investment in artworks and industry development
- Permanently remove the Efficiency Dividend, which is punitively compounding the damage to national and state cultural organisations
- \$30m towards the Regional Arts Fund to ensure long-term recovery that inspires regional culture and drives regional livelihoods
- \$40m investment in Support Act and the Artists' Benevolent Fund to urgently redress the mental health crisis, noting that tragedies have already occurred
- On industry advice, creating well-designed long-term stimulus measures to avoid industry collapse and inspire innovation – including an impactful public campaign to rebuild confidence.

As an immediate step towards strengthening industry confidence, we encourage you to issue a public statement recognising the value of our industry to all Australians, and the debilitating impacts of COVID-19 on the arts, cultural and entertainment industries and the creative sector as a whole. This message would affirm your commitment to the livelihoods and the infrastructure that inspires the nation. It would also be welcomed by the many industries whose work is dependent on our success, including hospitality and tourism – especially regionally, given all of these interdependent industries are yet to recover from the impacts of summer's fires, floods and storms.

Australia needs our creative, cultural and entertainment industries to be ready for reactivation as the nation emerges from COVID-19. We urge you to act now to secure the future of Australia's cultural life.

Sincerely,

Aboriginal Art Centre Hub of Western Australia	Australian Library and Information Association	JamFactory Contemporary Craft and Design
All Conference	Australian Museums & Galleries Association	Live Music Office
APRA AMCOS	Australian Music Industry Network	Moogahlin
Art on the Move	Australian Network for Art and Technology	Music Australia
artisan	Australian Society of Authors	National Association for the Visual Arts
Artists' Benevolent Fund	BlakDance	National Writers Centre Network
Arts Industry Council of SA	Canberra Glassworks	Performing Arts Connections Australia
Arts Industry Council of Victoria	Central Craft	Public Galleries Queensland
Association of Artist Managers	The Childers Group	Regional Arts Australia
Ausdance National	Craft Victoria	Screen Producers Australia
Australian Craft and Design Centres	CrewCare	SupportAct
Australian Design Centre	Design Tasmania	Theatre Network Australia
Australian Festivals Association	Diversity Arts Australia	Writers SA
Australian Independent Record Labels Association	GalleriesWest	Writing NSW
	Guildhouse	Writing WA
	Ilbijerri	Yirra Yaakin

CC The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, Treasurer  
Senator the Hon Mathias Cormann, Minister for Finance  
The Hon Paul Fletcher MP, Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts

The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Leader of the Opposition  
The Hon Jim Chalmers MP, Shadow Treasurer  
Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher MP, Shadow Minister for Finance  
The Hon Tony Burke MP, Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations and the Arts

Mr Gordon Ramsay MLA, Minister for the Arts, ACT  
The Hon Leeanne Enoch MP, Minister for the Arts, QLD  
The Hon Don Harwin MLC, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, NSW  
The Hon Lauren Moss, Minister for the Arts, NT  
The Hon Steven Marshall MP, Premier, Minister for the Arts, SA  
The Hon Elise Archer MP, Minister for the Arts, TAS  
Mr Martin Foley MP, Minister for Creative Industries, VIC  
The Hon David Templeman MLA, Minister for Local Government, Heritage, Culture and Arts, WA

The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Adelaide, Sandy Verschoor  
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Adrian Schrinner  
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Darwin, Kon Vatsakalis  
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Hobart, Anna Reynolds  
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Sally Capp  
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Nuatali Nelmes  
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Parramatta, Bob Dwyer  
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Perth, Lisa Scaffidi  
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore  
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Wollongong, Gordon Bradbery