



15 February, 2010

The Hon Peter Garrett, MP

Dear Minister,

Please find following Theatre Network Victoria's formal submission in response to the development of a National Cultural Policy.

We commend the government on the commitment to a comprehensive National Cultural Policy for Australia, and we are pleased to submit our response herewith.

As a body representing hundreds of small to medium performing arts organisations, independent theatre groups, and small informal groups of theatre workers and individual theatre makers, Theatre Network Victoria is well placed to offer the government the opportunity of ongoing consultation with this sector.

Please feel free to contact me for further assistance or clarification of any aspect of this submission. Nicole@tnv.net.au or 03 9329 7422.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Beyer".

Nicole Beyer
Manager

Theatre Network Victoria

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Theatre Network Victoria

Response to the Development of a National Cultural Policy

Executive Summary

Theatre Network Victoria welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a National Cultural Policy.

This submission has three main sections:

1. Background of the submitting organisation, Theatre Network Victoria (TNV);
2. Key issues for the sector TNV represents, the small to medium performing arts sector; and
3. Responses to the Discussion Framework and Minister Garrett's October 2009 speech to the National Press Club.

Section 1 includes the point that Theatre Network Victoria is a new initiative, poised to become an ongoing peak body for theatre, with a national role. It also highlights that although TNV advocates for the small to medium performing arts sector, it supports and works with the major performing arts sector to the benefit of the arts industry as a whole.

Section 2 - key issues for the sector - demonstrates that the small to medium performing arts sector is a major contributor to a vibrant arts industry in this country, producing innovative, relevant work for several millions of attendees per year, but in need of shoring up financially in order to continue to sustain this work. This section calls for the National Cultural Policy to commit to *a vibrant and financially secure small-to-medium performing arts sector*.

The third section addresses the three key themes as outlined in Minister Garrett's speech to the National Press Club, and suggests that *Powering the young* should be broadened to be called *Embracing the new*. The third section also responds directly to each of the ten statements in the Discussion Framework. In summary, Theatre Network Victoria's responses call for the National Cultural Policy to include:

- ⇒ Strategies to enhance the UN Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions;
- ⇒ Promotion of the value of the arts in everyday life for disadvantaged Australians;
- ⇒ Commitment to excellence in training for the arts equal to that afforded to sport;
- ⇒ Clarification on how the non-arts portfolios will engage with a National Cultural Policy;
- ⇒ Resources to build current Australian research and evidence in the arts;
- ⇒ A commitment to a vibrant and financially secure small to medium performing arts sector;
- ⇒ Support for contemporary Indigenous arts practice, as well as song, dance and stories;
- ⇒ A strategy to better support the international touring of small to medium performing arts organisations;
- ⇒ Support for artists to be at the table with scientists and economists in looking at Climate Change;
- ⇒ A commitment that the review of the Major Performing Arts Board in 2012 includes a new examination of the small to medium performing arts sector.
- ⇒ Extra resources for the Australia Council for the Arts to remain responsive to emerging artforms; and
- ⇒ Resources put into the implementation of the National Arts and Disability Strategy.

1. Theatre Network Victoria - Background

Theatre Network Victoria (TNV) is a major initiative seed-funded by Arts Victoria. Its aim is to strengthen the small to medium performing arts sector in Victoria, enabling it to produce more work, build new audiences and increase sustainability. Theatre Network Victoria undertakes research, delivers professional development and develops the sector broadly to build capacity and sustainability.

REPRESENTATION

Theatre Network Victoria is the only organisation of its kind in Australia, and is well placed to become an ongoing national voice for the theatre community, to solicit opinions and ideas, and to share the outcomes of this cultural policy discussion process with the wider arts community.

Nine organisations make up the inaugural Committee: Arena Theatre Company, Back to Back Theatre, ChamberMade Opera, Melbourne Workers Theatre, Next Wave Festival, Platform Youth Theatre, Polyglot Theatre, Snuff Puppets and St Martins Youth Arts. On top of this, the project has been endorsed and is supported in an ongoing way by: Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne Theatre Company, Red Stitch, Ilbjerri Indigenous Theatre, La Mama Theatre, Arts Industry Council (Vic), Drama Victoria, FortyFive Downstairs, Flying Fruit Fly Circus, Courthouse Youth Arts Centre, Australian Circus and Physical Theatre Association, Hothouse Theatre plus many other small to medium performing arts organisations.

TNV represents and advocates for hundreds of small to medium performing arts organisations, independent theatre groups, and small informal groups of theatre workers and individual theatre makers. We define the small to medium performing arts sector as the not-for-profit organisations outside of the Major Performing Arts cohort¹. For the purposes of this submission, we include the independent sector within our definition of a small to medium sector, with the observation that there is an increasing number of independent performing artists producing excellent, innovative and vibrant work, outside of the formal funding and industry systems.

It is important to note that while Theatre Network Victoria advocates for a strengthening of the small to medium and independent sectors, it is well aware that to achieve this, it must engage with, work with and support the aims of the major performing arts sector. To this end, TNV has endorsement from the major theatre companies in Victoria, TNV has a sound relationship with the Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG) and there are joint plans and strategies in some areas, such as the Australian Theatre Forum scheduled for 2011.

NATIONAL REACH

Theatre Network Victoria, after nine months of operation, now has a national mandate to scope the delivery of the 2011 Australian Theatre Forum, with support from the Australia Council for the Arts. The first Australian Theatre Forum was presented in May 2009 in Melbourne to huge acclaim and capacity attendance. The "Open Space" model of debate was used to solicit issues, ideas and inspiration for the future of the theatre sector in Australia.

¹http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/about_us/artform_boards/major_performing_arts_board/major_performing_arts_companies

Theatre Network Victoria summarised this work into key issues and deliverables and it forms a current and indeed timely basis for our response to the National Cultural Policy Discussion Framework.

THEATRE NETWORK VICTORIA ETHOS & PRINCIPLES

1. We believe a society that embraces and supports creativity is more robust, more egalitarian, more respectful of the past, and more prepared for the future.
2. We believe the arts are essential to our collective civic identity, and can simultaneously impact in social, economic and environmental arenas.
3. We believe artists – including writers, devisors, composers, designers, performers, and dramaturges - play a pivotal role in the theatre industry.
4. We believe small to medium sized theatre companies are a career destination (not simply pathways to commercial or major sectors) and are integral to invention and innovation in theatre in Australia.
5. We believe life-long learning is essential and exists both inside and outside educational institutions. We believe that participation in the arts is a dynamic form of learning.
6. We believe a diverse theatre sector provides a richness of skills, perspectives and identities that is vital. We believe theatre will benefit from increased participation at all levels by women, people with disabilities, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, indigenous Australians, children and young people, and older people.
7. We believe there are multiple ways for a society to support a thriving arts sector. We believe different artistic, business, funding, financial, and governance models can work, and that flexibility and exploration are paramount.
8. We believe theatre professionals have a right to fair pay, and conditions in line with other sectors, including annual and sick leave, superannuation, long service leave, and paid professional development.
9. We believe that theatre, like any creative enterprise, needs to be supported to take risks, and needs to be allowed to fail. Research and development are essential.
10. We believe in ongoing conversations and dialogue: open to all, overlapping, critical, challenging, morphing over time, iterative, exploratory, and always respectful.

The principles above are intended as an articulation of the theatre sector's collective beliefs, but cannot be perfectly representative. They are loosely based on issues raised during the Australian Theatre Forum convened in Melbourne in May 2009.

2. Key Issues for the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector

“The Working Party found overwhelming evidence that the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector is essential to the artistic vitality and the ongoing development of Australia’s performing arts. It is the main source of new Australian works in the subsidised performing arts. The Sector provides access to the arts, offers many employment opportunities and in particular gives young and regionally based Australians opportunities to participate in the arts. The Sector also has a considerable economic impact.”

Report to Ministers on an Examination of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector, Prepared by a Working Party of Cultural Ministers Council Standing Committee, March 2002.

THE REALITY - THE LEAN AND NIMBLE SECTOR

The small to medium performing arts sector is often defined in relation to the major performing arts companies – e.g. as a career stepping stone to the major organisations, as a ‘nursery’, as a training ground – as something to get through before you get to your real destination. While this is sometimes the case for specific artists or arts workers, it is more accurate to see this sector as an intrinsic and ultimate sector in its own right: it is a career destination for many artists; the work produced from this sector is most often what international festivals buy in, toured around Australia, put on in children’s and outdoor festivals, employs artists, and tells the most Australian stories. Small to medium organisations are now starting to work in partnership with the major arts companies – not just as individual artists commissioned for a project here and there – but as co-producing and co-creative teams developing whole new programs and new ways of working.

Minister Garrett mentioned, in his speech to the Press Club, that individual artists will benefit from greater connection with the larger arts institutions (and vice versa). In the performing arts in particular, these artists are already tapped into a vibrant and robust infrastructure that is the small to medium sector. It is here that they do creative development and professional development, that they meet and work with other artists, that they obtain the most employment, and where they get support from the service organisations and peak bodies supporting their art-form.

It is also in the small to medium sector that artists can do work that is broader than what the major performing arts organisations offer. The Cultural Ministers’ Council 2002 Report highlights that

“In addition to contemporary theatre, dance, music, opera and circus, the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector includes organisations working in:
theatre, dance and music for and by young people;
theatre for [and by] people with disabilities;
multicultural performance;
puppetry;
visual and physical theatre, such as visual ‘street theatre’;
community participation in theatre dance and music;
choirs; and experimental theatre and dance, new media and new music.”^{2a}

² Cultural Ministers Council, March 2002, Report to Ministers on an Examination of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector, Prepared by a Working Party of Cultural Ministers Council Standing Committee.

The small to medium performing arts sector is also the major source of new Australian work, and produces well over 22,000 performances, to over 7 million live attendees per year³.

To give a current illustration of the reach of these companies and to exemplify the amount of work that a company with a turnover of around \$800,000 p/a achieves, one children's theatre company, *Polyglot Puppet Theatre*, is happy to share its 2009 calendar year statistics:

- ⇒ 143 performances of 10 works;
- ⇒ 57,396 participants and audience for all performances, projects and workshops;
- ⇒ 437 workshops for 11,428 children.
- ⇒ a total of 24 tours travelled 72 days to metropolitan, regional, interstate and overseas locations, including China, Singapore and Washington.

Polyglot is a somewhat typical theatre company – most of the other small to medium performing arts organisations are achieving similar levels of productivity. The value that these organisations bring to the arts is extremely high, for a very low level of government subsidy.

Perhaps what characterizes this sector most of all is its enormous capacity to embrace new forms, new ways of working and new technologies, and its flexibility to be able to sustain administrative and funding ups and downs. The sector's 'nimbleness' is really its primary defining characteristic.

THE GOAL - A VIBRANT AND FINANCIALLY SECURE SMALL-TO-MEDIUM PERFORMING ARTS SECTOR

The future of the small to medium performing arts sector would be strengthened by a commitment in the new National Cultural Policy to a "vibrant and financially secure small to medium performing arts sector". In much the same way as the Minister has highlighted the need for continued financial security for the major performing arts organisations as the Major Performing Arts Board undergoes a review in the coming year, the small to medium sector is also in need of a commitment to greater financial security.

There is much government literature that supports the need for an urgent injection of financial support for the small to medium sector, yet the Minister's speech did not mention this sector at all.

The Australia Council's *Love your work: training, retaining and connecting artists in theatre* - Paper for the Major Performing Arts Board and the Theatre Board, by Jackie Bailey, November 2008 is worth quoting extensively (p. 4):

The future vibrancy and sustainability of the major performing arts (MPA) theatre companies depends on the ongoing health of the Australian theatre 'ecology' – independent theatre artists, small, medium and large companies, venues and festivals.

³ "Of 1,715 theatre, dance and cross-artform works presented by the surveyed organisations, over the three-year period, 1,597 or **93%**, were Australian works. Music organisations presented 6,800 works over this period of which 1,726, or **25%**, were Australian works. By comparison, data from the Major Performing Arts Inquiry (MPAI) showed that **59%** of dance and theatre works and only **8%** of music works presented in 1997 and 1998 by the Major Performing Arts organisations were Australian works." Cultural Ministers Council, March 2002, *ibid*, p. 6.

The MPA companies are in a position of relative financial strength and recently received a funding injection to address artform and artist development. It is timely, then, for the major performing arts board (MPAB) and the MPA theatre companies to consider some of the key issues which will affect the sector's future viability. The research identifies these key issues as:

- Creative workforce succession: where are the directors, artistic directors, designers and other key creatives of the future going to come from and what can the sector do to support their development now?
- Interconnections: how can the theatre sector's connections be strengthened to support and manage risk-taking, address issues of talent development and succession, and provide benefit for both the small-to-medium and large companies?

Arts Victoria's précis of research on the small to medium sector, conducted by Deloitte, September 2007, states that "the sector is currently facing significant and increasing challenges to stay afloat and is operating under increasing difficulty and duress."⁴

The Cultural Ministers' Council review in 2002 highlighted the financial insecurity of the small to medium arts sector, at best describing its status as "finely balanced" and at worst "declining financial positions...raising questions about the sustainability of organisations"- in particular for music and dance and for all mid-sized artform organisations (with an annual turnover of between \$0.5 and \$1 million)⁵.

While the Cultural Ministers' Council research is now 8 years old, Theatre Network Victoria undertook its own research in 2009 that supports a grim financial picture. Succession planning has been identified as a problem for all sectors in the arts, and low salaries are a key reason⁶. In November 2009, Theatre Network Victoria surveyed remuneration of key positions of 50 mostly small to medium sized arts organisations from across Australia.

The average organisational turnover was \$862,023 p/a. The average gross full-time wage for the CEO position (General Manager or Artistic Director) was \$60,547 p/a⁷. This is \$17,000 less than the *average* (not just CEO positions) salary of \$77,164 for Australian Media, Advertising, Arts and Entertainment jobs as analysed by My Career⁸. The salaries that key positions command do illustrate organisations' financial capacity, as supported by the written comments in the Theatre Network Victoria survey. These comments show that in many cases, boards of these organisations would like to and believe they should pay more, but just cannot afford to.

To achieve a vibrant and financially secure small to medium performing arts sector, Theatre Network Victoria calls for a new review of this sector – to update the national research done in 2002, and importantly, to take account of the closer engagement that exists now between the major performing arts sector and the small to medium performing arts sector⁹.

⁴ *Small Arts Organisations Research and Evaluation, Précis of research conducted by Deloitte for Arts Victoria*, September 2007, pp. 11-12.

⁵ Cultural Ministers Council, March 2002, *ibid*.

⁶ Jackie Bailey for the Australia Council, *Love your work: training, retaining and connecting artists in theatre* - Paper for the Major Performing Arts Board and the Theatre Board, November 2008, p. 11.

⁷ Theatre Network Victoria, 2009 Small-to-Medium Arts Organisation Remuneration Benchmarking Report, by Nicole Beyer, December 2009. www.tnv.net.au

⁸ <http://content.mycareer.com.au/salary-centre/media-advertising-arts-entertainment/-/australia> last accessed 12/2/10

⁹ The Australia Council reviewed its theatre funding structures in 2007 via a process called *Make it New*, but this cannot be considered a review of the scope that is needed for the whole sector.

3. Responding to the Key Themes in the Minister's Speech to the National Press Club and the Draft Discussion Framework.

Responding to the Key Themes in the Minister's Speech to the National Press Club

1. *Keeping culture strong;*
2. *Engaging the community; and,*
3. *Powering the young.*

TNV agrees in spirit with the three themes identified by the Minister as worth emphasizing.

Under the third theme, the Minister highlights the need for “new opportunities for experimentation and exhibition...new knowledge and ways of doing things” and the “need to build stronger connections between individual artists and the well-supported, large arts organisations and companies”. While youth is certainly helpful in achieving these aspirations, “Powering the young” is restrictive, and undervalues the immense role in research and development played by mid-career artists working at the forefront of risky, cutting edge, experimental arts. TNV proposes a new theme that values innovation by people of all ages - *Embracing the new.*

TNV commends the Rudd government for its work on creative industries and Minister Garrett's particular statement in which he calls for attention on: “Greater openness to new and emerging talent, to the pioneers and experimenters in the digital era as well as the more traditional arts forms. To incubate and encourage the risky and innovative as well as focusing on success and excellence.”

However, the Minister's speech omitted to acknowledge that much of the risk and innovation in the arts comes from the small to medium arts organisations. The Cultural Ministers' Council 2002 report found that:

“These views are shared by representatives of the Major Performing Arts Sector who acknowledge that the Small to Medium Sector offers ‘risk’ or ‘experimentation’. The Sector also provides the ground upon which new and emerging artists, including dedicated mid and late career artists, risk, innovate, refine and test their creativity. It was the view of representatives of the Major Performing Arts Sector that the artistic director of a small or medium company often has more influence in driving the direction of an organisation compared with those in larger organisations.”¹⁰

b. Responding to the Draft Discussion Framework

General comments about the process

TNV supports the broad principals and values indicated in the discussion framework, (with some comments to the detail submitted below). However, TNV strongly proposes that the open consultation must continue once a more detailed policy is drafted – the draft framework is not substantial enough for extensive input by the community. We look forward to seeing concrete goals and resourced strategies that the sector can respond to in more detail. TNV also recommends that the National Cultural Policy website lists the names and organisations

¹⁰ Cultural Ministers Council, March 2002, *ibid.*

that have submitted responses (instead of numbers alone), so that the promised 'robust, freewheeling and substantial public discussion' can more easily be achieved.

Specific Points

Discussion Framework	Theatre Network Victoria (TNV) response
<p>1. Culture is at the heart of our nation and the arts are at the heart of our culture, feeding, and in turn, being fed by it. Australian culture is unique, diverse and vital to our present and future wellbeing.</p>	<p>1.1 TNV commends the government for ratification of the UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and calls for the National Cultural Policy to detail how Australia will abide by and indeed enhance the tenets of the convention.</p>
<p>2. Culture is expressed in many ways and reflects our way of life. It encompasses our values, traditions, attitudes and expressions and is shared by us all.</p>	<p>2.1 TNV calls for strategies in the National Cultural Policy that promote the value of arts in everyday life, particularly to people disenchanting with and disenfranchised from what they see as 'elite arts'. This may include people disadvantaged by geography, socio-economic status, diverse cultural background, disability, or age related issues.</p>
<p>3. It provides the intellectual and imaginative ground for broad understanding and connections. An education rich in culture and arts provides a strong foundation for learning, social engagement and skills development.</p>	<p>3.1 TNV supports an education rich in culture and arts, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and believes that Australia needs to commit funding towards the pursuit of excellence in arts training at a similar level as that committed to the Institute of Sport and its state equivalents.</p> <p>3.2 TNV also recognises the value of arts experiences outside of formal training institutions and believes that these experiences help develop both artists and patrons of the arts.</p>
<p>4. There is a primary value in creative expression through the arts which governments actively support. Our democracy is strengthened by the diversity of cultural and artistic expression.</p>	<p>4.1 A National Cultural Policy needs to articulate who the Policy is for – is it a whole of government policy or one for the Arts portfolio alone? If it is a whole of government policy, how will the other portfolios engage with it?</p>
<p>5. Australian culture speaks to our identity, it is an important area of common interest which enriches our quality of life and defines us to ourselves and others. Its rich legacy provides knowledge of the past and hope for the future; above all it engages with the moral principles to which we jointly aspire.</p>	<p>5.1 A National Cultural Policy needs to commit resources to build Australian evidence for this statement and the others – <i>how</i> does culture enrich our quality of life? – most of the research we use is very old or is from overseas or both. We need up-to-date, local data so that we know how to move forward.</p>
<p>6. The culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is the unique backbone of Australian</p>	<p>6.1 A National Cultural Policy needs to support and include <i>contemporary</i> Indigenous arts practice, not just be limited to song, dance and stories. This may</p>

<p>identity; it brings meaning to our nation with a culture unbroken in song, dance and stories over millennia.</p>	<p>include contemporary visual arts, contemporary theatre, new media, film, physical theatre, circus, contemporary music, etc.</p>
<p>7. Culture is a powerful source of wealth for the nation, contributing significantly to the economy and employing hundreds of thousands of Australians. It adds value, attracts students and tourists, provides valuable exports and is essential to sustainable economic activity.</p>	<p>7.1 A National Cultural Policy should include resourced strategies that better support the extremely high quantity of international touring that small to medium performing arts organisations are currently undertaking. This may be through increased resourcing of an existing organisation such as the new Performing Arts Touring Alliance, or through the set up of a new international touring support body.</p> <p>7.2 The arts can also contribute to environmental sustainability. The loudest conversations about climate change at the moment are scientific and economic – there is no cultural voice. Yet the arts are inherently about re-imagining our lives, allowing us ways to explore new scenarios for dealing with uncertain futures. In corporate speak – artists are the ultimate ‘change agents’ and need to be at the table with the scientists and economists.</p>
<p>8. Australian culture is a conversation between past understandings and future vision. Culture must both preserve and innovate, ensuring that the links between the present and past remain strong, able to incorporate new and varied perspectives.</p>	<p>8.1 Most new Australian work in the performing arts is produced by small to medium sized performing arts organisations¹¹. The National Cultural Policy needs to articulate a commitment to a vibrant and financially secure small to medium performing arts sector in much the same way as the Minister articulated a broad ministerial support of the major performing arts.</p> <p>8.2 Theatre Network Victoria proposes that the review of the major performing arts board in 2012 should not be done in isolation to rest of the performing arts sector, and should include a substantial examination of the small to medium sector. As has been highlighted by the Australian Major Performing Arts Group, we are in an exciting new era wherein the major institutions are supporting and working closely with individual artists and the small to medium sector, so any review should reflect and build on this new reality.</p>

¹¹ “Of 1,715 theatre, dance and cross-artform works presented by the surveyed organisations, over the three-year period, 1,597 or **93%**, were Australian works. Music organisations presented 6,800 works over this period of which 1,726, or **25%**, were Australian works. By comparison, data from the Major Performing Arts Inquiry (MPAI) showed that **59%** of dance and theatre works and only **8%** of music works presented in 1997 and 1998 by the Major Performing Arts organisations were Australian works.” Cultural Ministers Council, March 2002, *ibid*.

<p>9. Our culture draws on the creativity found in many walks of life, in traditional forms which should be preserved and new forms yet to be imagined.</p>	<p>9.1 Theatre Network Victoria supports the work of the Australia Council for the Arts, and calls for an increase in funds to ensure that the Council remains strong and its capacity to support the arts in Australia is not diminished by a rapidly changing world, particularly as the ‘new forms yet to be imagined’ emerge.</p>
<p>10. Australian culture is produced by its people. The role of government is not to directly shape culture but to enable all Australians – whatever their background, beliefs and abilities – to explore and nurture their creativity and draw on the wealth of our culture to enrich us all.</p>	<p>10.1 TNV commends the Cultural Ministers Council on the National Arts and Disability Strategy, and TNV looks forward to seeing some resources put into the implementation of the strategy, to ensure that people with disabilities do have the same arts opportunities as all other Australians.</p> <p>10.2 As a new signatory to the UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, we have a greater responsibility to ensure that existing and new Australian art and culture is protected, supported and promoted.</p>

Conclusion

Theatre Network Victoria commends the government for the development of a new National Cultural Policy, and in particular commends Minister Garrett for his passion for and commitment to a strong arts and cultural life in Australia.

TNV looks forward to the feedback from this submission and others being considered with due process, and contributing to a National Cultural Policy that truly belongs to us all.

As discussed above, theatre plays an integral part in fostering a strong culture, imagination for new ideas and passion for the arts. From your first pantomime as a child, to a rousing monologue at the Opera House, to an experimental performance in a warehouse, theatre can touch all Australians. Theatre Network Victoria is intrinsically connected to the sector in this State, and is well placed to engage in further consultation, and disseminate outcomes and information to the theatre sector across the country.