

EXTRACT



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS

Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions

FRIDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2021

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

INTERNET

Hansard transcripts of public hearings are made available on the internet when authorised by the committee.

To search the parliamentary database, go to:

<http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au>

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS

Friday, 19 February 2021

Members in attendance: Dr Allen, Ms Bell, Mr Burns, Dr Gillespie, Mr Gorman, Ms McBride, Mr Zimmerman.

Terms of Reference for the Inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The Committee will inquire into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions including, but not limited to, Indigenous, regional, rural and community based organisations.

The Committee will consider:

- The direct and indirect economic benefits and employment opportunities of creative and cultural industries and how to recognise, measure and grow them
- The non-economic benefits that enhance community, social wellbeing and promoting Australia's national identity, and how to recognise, measure and grow them
- The best mechanism for ensuring cooperation and delivery of policy between layers of government
- The impact of COVID-19 on the creative and cultural industries; and
- Avenues for increasing access and opportunities for Australia's creative and cultural industries through innovation and the digital environment.

FIELDING, Ms Kate, Chief Executive Officer, A New Approach**MYER, Mr Rupert, Chair, Reference Group, A New Approach [via video link]**

[15:25]

CHAIR: Welcome. Although the committee doesn't require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and therefore has the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The evidence given today will be recorded by Hansard and attracts parliamentary privilege. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement before we proceed to discussion.

Mr Myer: I begin by acknowledging that I am joining the hearing from the lands of the Kulin nation and pay respects to elders past, current and emerging. I'm really delighted that A New Approach has the opportunity again to speak with the committee, and thank you for the invitation. As my colleagues and I have been listening to hearings and reading the submissions that you've been receiving, we've been struck by the wide expanse of contributions from individuals describing the role arts and culture play in their health and the development of their children through to industries describing economic impacts and opportunities for jobs growth. The direct impact of arts and culture on people's happiness, understanding and togetherness has also been made abundantly clear.

We've been really excited by the constructive dialogue during these hearings between committee members and people from across the country with different perspectives, with experts from both government and universities, with producers and consumers. It's clear that there is space and appetite for national non-partisan leadership. It's our hope that all this translates into greater recognition and public policy platforms with a relevance and significance for creative and cultural industries and infrastructure.

We'd like today to offer to speak about one practical way forward to achieve that hope—the development of a national arts culture and creativity plan. We've been reviewing several of the current national 2030 plans for different public policy areas, including sport, agriculture and defence technology, and we'd love to share what we've learnt about the contents of these plans with the committee and, of course, answer any other questions that you may have.

CHAIR: Thanks very much for that. We are very impressed with the complexity and breadth of your submission. It's really quite professional. We deal in a federation with state governments who also contribute to a lot of policy and financial support for their creative and cultural industries, and we have lots of local governments that have a lot of play in performance space, exhibition space and support for programs. And then we have all of these other allied entities like the education system and universities and TAFE. So there are many layers of government involved. I must declare that I am a big believer in the Federation, but I am also a big believer that the federal government can't do everything and that all levels of government have responsibility in this space. If you put it down to a simple plan, I am worried that if we do get a national plan, it is limiting. Viva la difference! We want many arms of culture to develop, and we have many cultures and we have many Indigenous cultures. It's really hard to get a single national plan. Wouldn't it be better to say we should be developing national plans plural?

Ms Fielding: That's a great question, thank you. Firstly, as someone who has spent most of their life living and working in regional and remote Australia, I too am always a little nervous when I hear about national plans, because I'm concerned about what happens to those parts of the country. But what I've been really impressed by as we've reviewed the existing national plans that the current government have is that they have managed to take those situations where there are quite complex stakeholder environments and complex relationships between governments and find a sensible way through that, which doesn't become overly prescriptive but means that all those different stakeholders that you are talking about can work more effectively in concert. So those are private interests, business, communities and different levels of government all working together for a shared purpose, but not having to do exactly the same thing.

Mr Myer: If I might add to what Kate has said: I think there is a difference between having a national plan, which is the development of some key ideas, as distinguished from a single national policy. We enthusiastically support you in saying that this is not about the development of a single one-size-fits-all policy. It is about having a view of what is important from a national perspective and gathering all the parts together into a single set of ideas.

Ms Fielding: If I could add to that, some of the analysis that we've done of cultural funding by government shows that there has been a real shift over the last decade in terms of becoming a much more equal relationship between local government, state and territory governments, and federal government. Because there has been that

shift, there really does, I think, need to be a refresh of considering how those different levels of government work together to really get the kinds of outcomes that you're talking about.

CHAIR: You're familiar with COAG. There is a cultural ministers' equivalent—they don't call it COAG, but it does happen—

Ms Fielding: It actually was disbanded recently.

CHAIR: I didn't realise. The committee has now learnt something. I'll throw to Katie Allen, who may be your local member of parliament, for one of you.

Mr Myer: Very nearby.

Dr ALLEN: Thank you for your submission and thank you also for all the work you've done to provide quite a huge body of strategic intent, actually. I appreciate that submission and the work that New Approach has been doing. I suppose my question goes to trying to explain to us as a committee what some pragmatic examples of championing a national arts culture and creativity plan might be? For instance, I understand the National Sport Plan; to me, that is probably the most similar. Could you describe to me what the National Sport Plan has done with regard to enabling the three levels of government to work together, and give examples and some meat around the bone about how that worked, why you think that has been efficient and effective, and therefore why it might work at the creative and cultural industries level?

Ms Fielding: Absolutely. I will do two things there. I will talk a little bit about what we've observed in those plans that do exist and what their common elements are. But I will begin by saying that what I understand from the implementation of Sport 2030 is that one of its major outcomes, one of its major impacts, has been a common cause—a common cause amongst the many different sport forms that exist in Australia, a common cause amongst the professional and community sports groups, and a common cause amongst the different roles that government plays. One of the major impacts of that plan has been getting a really contemporary, forward-looking, evidence based understanding of what role sport plays in Australia's community, and how all those different stakeholders work together to make it happen and make sure it's available to all Australians across the country.

When we reviewed the Sport 2030 plan, the agriculture 2030 plan, the Defence Science and Technology Strategy 2030 and, indeed, the innovation 2030 plan, the common elements—and, forgive me, I will just read a list here—are a set of principles to underpin and guide policy and decision-making; a vision for the future if the plan is implemented, which goes to that aspiration of bringing all those stakeholders together; an alternative vision if action is not taken—what the impact of no action would be; a stated role for governments in partnership with each other—so those different levels of governments that you're talking about, Chair—as well as with other stakeholders in the space; multiple focus areas of change; and goals or targets to aspire to—I think that's quite an important one. None of us want a set of motherhood statements. I think you will have heard through these hearings that there's a real appetite for quite tactical applied action in this space to get this changing and huge diverse area working effectively. I might see if Rupert would like to add anything to that.

Mr Myer: Only to say that, actually, within the arts and cultural space, two of the most successful frameworks over the last 20 years have been the Major Performing Arts Framework, part of the national portfolio, and the Visual Arts And Crafts Strategy that arose from the contemporary visual arts and crafts inquiry about 20 years ago that I chaired. Both of those frameworks were absolutely dependent upon the states and territories and the Commonwealth government working collaboratively on the implementation of a number of key ideas to develop those respective sectors. The collaboration around having a key framework and a plan has worked in specific instances. I think what we've learnt—certainly, through my days in the Australia Council—about both of those strategies is a great deal about how dynamic it becomes when you've got broad agreement around sets of principles, and about the benefit that that passes through to the individual companies and the performers and producers and the entire sector—the energy that it gives and so forth. So there are some very good precedents in this area.

Dr ALLEN: Could I ask a follow-up question to get down to the pragmatics of funding investment. It sounds like, as you said, the three layers of government almost become partners from a funding point of view. Firstly, is that true for the sports sector? Secondly, how do you see the principles of funding across the three different jurisdictions partnering together? Obviously, having a vision and having a framework is important, and then having goals, but can you see that there might end up being a way to navigate through that? An example is roads. It's easy to say that major highways are likely to be federal and local roads are likely to be council. With the performing arts, it's possibly easier to see because you've got the Australian national institutions and performing companies. Can you see a way through with regard to all the other aspects of the creative and cultural industries, and how to actually support them, from a funding point of view, in a strategic way?

Ms Fielding: Certainly. I'll take on notice the question about sport. In terms of what the different levels of government do, as we've referred to a few times, the cultural funding by government is the most current and comprehensive picture that we have of the three levels of government and how they work together. When we did some analysis of that, what we found really interesting was that federal government and state and territory governments definitely play different roles, and I've got to say it's a simple thing to say, 'Look, with state and territory governments, the majority of their investment goes into galleries, libraries and museums, and into arts; federal government plays a lot bigger role in screen because of its broadcasting responsibilities.' That simple statement, reflecting back to people within the sector and within the different levels of government where the investment is going and how it is different at different levels of government, is for many people a surprise.

Dr ALLEN: Kate, I've sat through a lot of things and suddenly I'm surprised—

Ms Fielding: Exactly.

Dr ALLEN: because JobKeeper goes across all of those sectors. I hadn't really thought about it that way.

CHAIR: I did mention our Federation. I'm a big federationist. I wrote a paper many years ago about fixing our Federation, because it has all been muddled up, incrementally, ever since it started. Basically the heads of power for federal government and state government to do stuff—it all comes back to the Federation. It even influences what you just said—where the funding goes. State governments ran, leased or sold ports. When they were colonies, states ran railways, schools, land titles, courts, police and hospitals. When they became states, they kept those roles and this overarching body called the Commonwealth took over foreign policy, trade between states and all that. That's manifest in this policy mix. But incrementally a good idea sneaks in, and then all of a sudden you've got snakes and ladders and spaghetti overlaid, with a structured responsibility for every portfolio, not just arts.

Dr ALLEN: It does sound very interesting when you put it that way.

CHAIR: That's why a lot of the Australia Council money goes to peak national entities rather than granular, small, local community entities. Local and state governments fill that void. But, in terms of your analysis, I was interested in your observation—

Dr ALLEN: She was nearly finished.

CHAIR: Sorry.

Ms Fielding: I agree. There are some really interesting responsibilities that different levels of government fulfil, and actually one of the very useful things that I think a plan could do would be to articulate those responsibilities so there's a common understanding of exactly what you're saying. What I find is that a local community theatre can be quite confused about where they should go to get support, and that confusion creates frustration and lack of confidence across a really broad set of opportunities. Articulating and making clear what those roles are would be very helpful.

Dr ALLEN: I also think that sometimes people can't navigate who is responsible for what and they therefore get frustrated. They apply to one and don't hear back. Even just articulating who funds what sounds like it would be a very simple first step for the sector to feel like it is actually being supported by the appropriate level of government. Is that possibly what you're saying?

Ms Fielding: Definitely. Chair, I'm sure you hear this all the time in your regional development world. It's a similar set of frustrations, with different groups at different levels being confused about where they're meant to go. Articulating this and making it more transparent would be a very simple action, and it wouldn't cost anything.

Mr Myer: One of the reasons we're so encouraging of there being a plan is the fact that we do have a federation. I'll give a quick example, if I may. Back in 2008, when the National Gallery of Australia was offered the opportunity to host the *Masterpieces from Paris* exhibition, we had no sponsorship, no funding and no indemnity, and we were going to have to charge the highest price and bring a record number of people to Canberra for that event. As soon as the gallery signed the document and everything started falling into place, government support came in, the first of which was from the ACT government. It was the first time the ACT had supported one of the national cultural institutions, and it was a nice example of the leadership of one institution bringing another level of government into a particular funding role. It all tumbled out because of the very strong conviction of the cultural institution. It's our view, in the context of a broader plan, that there would perhaps be many other opportunities where that type of leverage could be brought to bear. We could learn a great deal about the ways in which you could mix and match different levels of funding for different sorts of cultural and arts events around the nation.

Dr ALLEN: Can I have a qualifying question, Chair?

CHAIR: Yes.

Dr ALLEN: Just to clarify on that, there are different types of funding for different levels of government but there are also opportunities for partnering. It seems to me that often those sorts of partnering not just between federal and state, but also philanthropy and business or commercial outcomes—and so having that clarity where 'this is likely to be a partnered approach, because it's above a certain threshold or it has a certain jurisdiction' verses 'this is likely to be in this particular pot' would be very helpful to clarify for the sector, to feel supported and have some sort of a way of navigating this complexity.

Ms Fielding: Absolutely in terms of the sector, but I would say also for philanthropy and for private investment to have some clarity around this and around the intention of governments in this space, around the priorities, around the purpose of investment, from a government view. That would also help unlock private investment, philanthropic investment, who are uncertain about the direction of where this is going.

Dr ALLEN: The only comment I would make is that unlike, say, sports where the purpose—I don't know what the purpose of the sports plan is because I haven't read it in detail, but I would imagine it is having every child participate in sport, having grassroots community sports and then having elite sport with the potential to operate at that international level. That seems pretty straightforward, but when you get to culture, as the Chair said, our concept of our own cultural identity is also multicultural, tolerant, diverse. Our very essence is that we're so different and there are so many cultures here. Do you have a view, as A New Approach, about what some of those elements might be with regard to, at a very broad level, what would be something to aim for from a cultural strategic plan point of view or is that something that you think needs a full process?

Ms Fielding: I think that's something that needs a full process, but off the cuff I would say that I think that people across Australia having the opportunities to participate in creative and cultural experiences that are meaningful and significant to them and also do things that widen their horizons and their understanding of the world would be a really good place to start.

Dr ALLEN: So it's engagement of the Australian people in their cultural community institutions?

Ms Fielding: Absolutely.

Dr ALLEN: Rupert, did you want to add to that?

Mr Myer: We Australians have a shared cultural inheritance and there is an Australianness about that proposition. There is also a sense in which members of different states and different communities have shared cultural inheritance within a different set of terms as well. To come back to the chair's opening comments about Federation, part of that is a product of Federation where the intensity of different cultural inheritances actually are different across communities, and that's something that is well worth honouring at every opportunity. Through the work of A New Approach, and in a number of the conversations that we've had through the focus groups, it becomes very evident that at a very local level what's happening in a school and around a particular education program can be critically important for the way in which that community engages in arts and culture. In other communities it is opportunities to attend major exhibitions, major productions and so forth, which is another aspect of [inaudible] cultural identity experience.

CHAIR: I might ask Patrick Gorman, member for Perth, for his observations or questions.

Mr GORMAN: Thank you, Chair. I want to start by going to the comments you made about the need to increase the opportunities for Australian children to experience arts and culture through school. One of the phenomenon that has concerned me that we've seen across Australia is the trend towards one-line budgeting where so much of the power is left with the individual school principal. If they don't value the arts then all of a sudden you find that school's arts program gets dialled down significantly, increasingly in the independent public schools. I would be interested in your thoughts about what the best levers are? What are the best programs that you've seen to give children that well-rounded arts learning area education? How would you see that fitting into any sort of federal policy in this area?

Ms Fielding: One of the things that I think is really striking in the ABS statistics around participation is that in the most recent set of arts and cultural participation stats they collected information about people aged 15 and under for the first time, I think. I may have remembered that figure incorrectly. But, from memory, they found that 96 per cent of children participated in arts and cultural activities outside of school. So, there's a really high participation rate of out-of-school arts and cultural activities, which I think is very important. I think the opportunities within school are critical. There's a huge body of evidence of the positive impact that arts and cultural participation within a schooling environment can have. But I think it's also very important that we remember those dance schools that are filled with children on the weekends, that we remember the music classes that happen, that we remember those private providers as well as those community theatre providers and that we

remember the many programs that are targeted at regional students, regional teenagers right across the country and who make sure that there are opportunities outside of school as well as inside. Today we've heard different people talk about finding your tribe, being part of a community, learning and appreciating. All those opportunities need to happen, both in school and outside of school.

Mr GORMAN: I think that's all very useful. Thank you. The other area you highlight is around cultural infrastructure and this shift we've seen from Infrastructure Australia to funding cultural institutions and recognising that infrastructure extends beyond roads and rail—which is great. What do you think is the best way for Australia to develop cultural infrastructure? Is it through Infrastructure Australia? Or is it through the infrastructure department, taking care of the arts? Or do we need some sort of infrastructure fund for the Australia Council? What's the best way to do those big infrastructure projects that we do need in the arts and cultural space? And I'll have a follow-up question after that.

Ms Fielding: One of the key things to understand is that many of those key pieces of cultural infrastructure are owned and operated at a local government or a state and territory government level but there is significant federal investment obviously in those national institutions or precincts but also into those state and territory or local-level pieces of cultural infrastructure through dedicated funds—for example, the Building Better Regions Fund, which is one of the significant federal government programs. A significant proportion of the infrastructure investment there goes towards infrastructure projects that are, broadly defined, arts, culture and creativity. If we include tourism focused cultural attractions in that, there's significant investment through that.

What this highlights for me—and I'm sorry; I'm going to say it again!—is the need for a plan. These are long-term, multi-decade investments. We need an intentionality about the opportunities for Australians across the country to be able to guide the kind of infrastructure investment you're describing.

Mr GORMAN: Thank you for that. And I'm going to ask a question that I know doesn't fit with what you just said about the need for that long-term plan. Are there any immediate pieces of cultural infrastructure, or cultural infrastructure bottlenecks, that A New Approach or you personally would identify that need to be a higher priority in Australia? Are there any pieces of cultural infrastructure that you think are urgent? Is there anything we need to be starting to plan or build now while we wait for that big long-term plan?

Ms Fielding: I think that there are a range of cultural infrastructure needs across the country and that most state and territory or local governments have identified priorities and Infrastructure Australia has identified some priorities in this area, and I defer to those studies.

CHAIR: Rupert Myer, did you have a comment?

Mr Myer: I think Infrastructure Australia does a really good job in strategically understanding the country's infrastructure needs and anticipating what those needs are and what the schedules need to be to maintain existing infrastructure and so forth. There are elements of the Infrastructure Australia brief that I think would be very well applied in a very broad sense to Australia's cultural infrastructure—galleries, museums, concert halls, theatres, libraries and so forth.

Dr ALLEN: With regard to your other recommendations, the first one was a national plan. I have to say that I'm a big supporter of that and I think we've heard from right across the sector so far with this inquiry that something like that would give great strategic direction for the sector. The third one is obviously about COVID recovery which, I think, many in the sector will be watching avidly. The second point that you make, though, is about the Productivity Commission. Could you speak to that? Firstly, have any of the other plans had Productivity Commission involvement before the plan? Secondly, in my view, the economic and non-economic value of the creative and cultural industries and institutions has been stated over and over again, and I don't think that's in contention whatsoever. So what would the Productivity Commission add to what we are already doing here today and what is already well acknowledged by the sector?

Ms Fielding: I agree with everything that you've said, but I would also say that, throughout these hearings, I think it has been clear that the definitions and the data and the understanding of the impact of these industries and what that looks like in the 21st century are not well understood, that there is some great work that's done in that space, but it's ad hoc, that there is an opportunity to take a substantial data led look at the broad cultural and creative industries—the broad cultural and creative economy, indeed—and that the scope of that would probably be broader than that of a national arts, culture and creativity plan. So I think there's a broad piece of work that the Productivity Commission could do looking at the role of creativity in Australia in the 21st century in the ways that we know that employment and jobs are changing, and that would probably be a distinct and broader piece than what a plan would cover.

Dr ALLEN: So what you're saying is that it could also provide an opportunity for the plan to report into that framework, because you would see what the federal, state and council investment is and what the impact on the industries are, and it would be linked to the ATO and ABS data in a more meaningful way?

Ms Fielding: Yes, exactly.

Dr ALLEN: Thank you.

Mr Myer: I might add to that, Katie. With a Productivity Commission report, you would expect there to be a really sharp focus on jobs and job creation within the creative industries. I think you'd expect to have great clarity around what strategic government investment looked like and what is most effective, and also what most leads to leverage private sector support and inherent value creation lines between those factors, to have an unambiguous view as to what the role of government funding means in terms of the multiplier effect and impact across the whole economy.

Dr ALLEN: Thank you.

CHAIR: How well do you think philanthropy is accessed at a local community level? I'm not necessarily talking about national institutions philanthropy, like donating paintings and things to galleries, but, in terms of DGR status at a local level—for example, the Port Macquarie internationally renowned Glasshouse entertainment and convention centre, which is like the Opera House up in Port Macquarie, or the Manning Entertainment Centre in Taree, another hub of cultural performing arts. How well do people and local entities in local government et cetera—like the people who presented, as you might have seen today, regarding the Gold Coast Home of the Arts—access philanthropy, in your experience, or is it just ad hoc individual people?

Businesses want to be part of this too, not just individuals. If DGR status would make a favourable impression, why isn't everyone applying for DGR status in this public performing arts space?

Ms Fielding: I might answer that in two parts: Firstly, broadly, there is a wide range of philanthropy, of both time and money, that happens across the country in many different ways and in many different contexts. In terms of DGR status specifically, the process, of course, of getting DGR status is relatively drawn out. In recognition of this, Cultural Partnerships Australia operates a cultural fund which provides the function of DGR status for organisations that don't have that status.

CHAIR: What was that fund called?

Ms Fielding: Cultural Partnerships Australia.

CHAIR: It's sort of like a central—

Mr Myer: Creative Partnerships Australia. It's the Australian Cultural Fund.

Ms Fielding: Sorry, it's the end of the day. My brain's mixing up the two words.

CHAIR: Is that a central repository that an institution that doesn't have a DGR status can nominate so that funds go to that and, through that fund, back to it?

Ms Fielding: In essence.

CHAIR: There was a similar fund set up, I think, in 2012 for sporting bodies.

Ms Fielding: Yes, I think it is similar to that.

CHAIR: We might get that on the record. Mr Myer, do you have the exact name of that fund?

Mr Myer: Yes. The organisation, which is a Commonwealth government organisation, Creative Partnerships Australia, has as one of its activities the Australian Cultural Fund, which is a fund that was set up—in fact, I think the sporting one was based on the ACF. It predated the sporting one. That now has passed through—I don't know what it was last year—something less than \$10 million, I think, of donations finding their way directly to support artists and other individuals and organisations that didn't themselves have DGR status.

The other process is the Register of Cultural Organisations, ROCO, which was set up to fast-track DGR status for a number of cultural organisations. I don't know what the current figure is, but at one point there were 1,000 organisations on that register.

CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Fielding: Would you like us to provide further information on CPA and on that topic?

CHAIR: That would be wonderful, yes.

Ms Fielding: Excellent.

CHAIR: In your investigations and observations, how willing do you find that companies, besides the very big one, are to engage in this sort of philanthropy? Is it just that small and medium businesses don't have the luxury?

Ms Fielding: I'm going to take that on notice and give you some data on that question.

CHAIR: Great. Okay.

Mr Myer: I should say Creative Partnerships Australia has a lot of encyclopaedic, very detailed information on who gives to what. I know that in other places the discussion is around time, treasure and talent, reflecting the fact that there's a huge amount of volunteering that occurs within the cultural sector as well.

CHAIR: Okay. Thanks very much again to A New Approach for a very well-researched presentation and for your observations. Yes, having a plan sounds like a good idea. With that, we might just call today's hearings to a close. Please forward that information to the secretary by 5 March 2021. You will be sent a copy of the transcript of your evidence and will have an opportunity to request corrections to transcription errors. Thanks to Patrick and Katie and to all my other colleagues who attended earlier in the day, and thanks to the secretariat.

Committee adjourned at 16:04