

Opening statement by A New Approach to the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Today is focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the arts and cultural industries. Given the new payroll figures that came out about an hour ago from the ABS, this is really critical.

But I want us to be clear from the outset that the impact is not just on the sector; it is on the people from all the states and territories, from the country and the city, from the outer suburbs and the inner, and from all walks of life. These people right across the country think that opportunities to participate in arts and culture are essential to the Australian way of life.

How do we know this?

Earlier this year, A New Approach completed focus groups about arts and culture with Middle Australians—defined as middle-aged, middle-income swinging voters from suburban and regional Australia. These were discussions between forklift drivers, hairdressers and sports administrators, predominantly in marginal federal electorates in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales.

These people were asked: what would Australia be like without arts and culture? Here are some of their answers.

- * *'Without imagination or creativity, life would be horrible.'*
- * *'No freedom of expression.'*
- * *'People get mental health issues.'*
- * *'There would definitely be an increase in drugs here.'*
- * *'Sterile, boring, controlled. It'd be a more tense society.'*
- * *'You may as well live on Mars'*

This cohort expects governments to foster arts and culture by helping Australia tell its many stories, supporting events that bring people together and making arts and cultural opportunities accessible.

This enthusiasm is backed up by ABS data on cultural participation rates and household expenditure that shows we are keen participants in the cultural life of the nation. This broad relevance is why we are calling for the development of a national arts and culture plan, modelled on the Sport 2030 plan, and the COVID pandemic has made this even more urgent.

I'd ask that the committee members, as they are listening today, remember that this is about ensuring we have a rich and varied arts and cultural life with relevance and strength into the 21st century. Otherwise, we may as well live on Mars. Thank you.

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This statement was made by Kate Fielding, Program Director of A New Approach, to the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 hearing held on 30th June 2020.

Recordings of the committee's hearings focused on arts and culture can be [viewed here](#). The transcript is [available here](#).

ANA's recent report *A view from middle Australia: Perceptions of arts, culture and creativity* can be [accessed here](#).

[About A New Approach](#)

ANA was established in 2018 to champion effective investment and return in Australian arts and culture. It was created through a \$1.65 million commitment by The Myer Foundation, the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and the Keir Foundation, with lead delivery partner, the [Australian Academy of the Humanities](#).
