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## **A NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY**

Submission to the Federal Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Peter Garrett MP, by Sandra Kirkwood, Director, Music Health Australia.

### **Music and Social Inclusion**

The Australian Government's vision of a socially inclusive society is one in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society. Achieving this vision means that all Australians will have the resources, opportunities and capability to:

- Learn by participating in education and training
- Work by participating in employment, in voluntary work and in family and caring
- Engage by connecting with people and using their local community's resources and
- Have a voice so that they can influence decisions that affect them.

The outworking of this vision has implications for National Cultural Policy that relates to participation in music and health and well-being. People interested in music and health, have formed a support group through Music Health Australia. I have made responses to each point raised by the Hon. Peter Garrett MP for discussion, with a view to promoting music health practice in Australia.

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.

**§ *What other issues do you think are important?***

The arts are part of culture and culture has relationship to the arts, but music, particularly music health and well-being, extends beyond the arts into many others fields including science, communication, technology, architecture, organisational and systems design and planning. Music has ramifications across every portfolio and is a part of everyday life for most citizens.

**§ *What do you think should be priorities for a national cultural policy?***

We need to recognise that music is not a separate category within the arts, but can be applied potentially to any field. Confirmation that music is vital to our present and future well-being is evident in cases where people report that their health has been affected through denial of access to their music language, heritage and culture. There are instances of musical deprivation today through poverty, social and geographical isolation, lack of physical access to cultural facilities. Sometimes people are required to live, work or play in auditory environments that are damaging to their health. People are affected psychologically by their sonic environment. Musicians have capacity to assess, design and manipulate people's sonic environments to make them more pleasing.

**§ *What positive steps would you like to see advance Australian Culture?***

Australian Government can promote people's ability to make choices about their own involvement in music through providing opportunities for equitable access for all people – regardless of their location, ability and financial means. There is a need to regionalise music services to improve equity of access to music education, music health, music technology and engineering, music communication science, design and protection of natural and built sonic environments (just to mention a few possible areas). Cross-modal relationships between various fields are essential, not limited to arts alone.

Government should respect the privacy of individuals if they decide to restrict access to government funded music making projects and creative products. It can be worthwhile to fund projects that benefit individuals and communities personally – without the need to put every product on the web and show short-term financial gains. The gains may be in terms of personal growth or community social health and well-being that is cumulative over long periods of time, even generations.

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.

**§ *What other issues do you think are important?***

Spirituality and religious beliefs, emotions and psycho-social health are important. Musical expression is closely related to personal factors and is influenced by the physical and social environment in which it occurs. Culture is not necessarily shared by us all. It can be unique to individuals, sub-groups, particular places, and time periods. We all have a hand to play in enacting and interpreting our cultural beliefs.

**§ *What do you think should be priorities for a national cultural policy?***

Place is important to cultural expression because there are spiritual connections between music and the land, not only in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, but also associated with other Australian's beliefs, emotions, and legacy that we pass on to future generations. Local knowledge is co-constructed by all the people who live, work and play in a particular place.

Australians need support to express themselves musically in relation to the Stolen Generations and the health crisis that has resulted from government policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We need private and public spaces to enjoy expression of culture through music. Interaction between people of diverse backgrounds can be beneficial to developing shared narratives on topics of interest that are relevant to local communities.

**§ *What positive steps would you like to see advance Australian Culture?***

Australia government could support local cultural leadership and musical expression that occurs in natural environments that are outside of cultural institutions such as schools, museums, libraries, galleries and concert halls.

Supporting the community music sector through provision of local community cultural centre facilities, infrastructure and funding to churches and community groups assists with cultural development.

Supporting research into associations between participation in community life and health and well-being is important because there are hallmarks of success and positive outcomes from programs that encourage people's creative collaboration in community arts and music.

Government can resource community-based development initiatives by citizens working alongside artists and health professionals. Ensure that community organisations can have dialogue on equal terms with government and not be dominated by the strategies devised by government as national remedies. A tailored approach is important to sustaining vitality of local heritage and culture. Government can show they value local initiatives through reward and recognition to participants.

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.

**§ *What other issues do you think are important?***

Rather than 'intellectual/imaginative ground,' 'holistic' would be a better term to describe the foundation of understanding through the arts and community cultural development. There are intellectual, but also physical, social, emotional, psycho-spiritual and socio-cultural facets that build understanding between people that can be forged through creative collaboration and development of formal and informal memorandums of understanding. The creative collaboration can stimulate dissonance as well as understanding, but this can be part of the negotiation and moderation process that leads to separate or communal endeavours and varying degrees of harmony.

Rather than 'education' we could speak of 'life long learning, participation in meaningful activities and cultural engagement' which has potential for all kinds of advancement.

The advances are multi-faceted and are only partly described by the terms 'foundation for learning, social engagement and skills development.' Some programs use people's current performance level and seek to build capability through changing the environment (not only skills). Sometimes social attitudes and habitual practices need to be challenged and new ways of doing things considered. Creative innovations are possible at the societal level if infrastructure is available and people decide to devote their time and energy into getting involved in worthwhile projects.

**§ *What do you think should be priorities for a national cultural policy?***

There need to be tangible rewards for people's community service and facilitating place-based planning with stakeholders from various backgrounds. Community-led initiatives should be promoted in the media and supported by government policy.

**§ *What positive steps would you like to see advance Australian Culture?***

Selection for training opportunities, reward and recognition can be based on service to community as well as excellence in performance. Government employers can recognise service to the community by employees and provide them with incentives to continue successful programs.

Government can support health professionals who have capacity to work in community cultural development and health promotion through creative activities, such as music. Governments can publicly recognise the value of community participation and that 'health for all' is every one's responsibility. Encourage health promoting schools, health promoting health services, health promoting welfare agencies, health promoting cultural organisations, and health promoting community agencies. Promoting culture goes hand in hand with promoting health and well-being.

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.

**§ *What other issues do you think are important?***

It is commendable that governments actively support creative expression through the arts and recognise that diversity of expression strengthens democracy. I question where this sits in relation to other government supported priorities because it is difficult/impossible to find viable employment in community cultural arts and building capacity for community groups to organise their own music heritage and culture.

If this is an area that is supported by government, then we need to see validation of these programs in real terms, with real jobs and real infrastructure. Otherwise, the words circulate in a virtual vacuum and volunteers burn out in community arts and cultural development programs.

**§ *What do you think should be priorities for a national cultural policy?***

The priority should be for community-led action rather than promotion of ideology.

**§ *What positive steps would you like to see advance Australian Culture?***

Government could allocate resources on a long-term basis to community cultural development through arts and other modalities that support community-led action and achieve place-based objectives. Evaluation of programs can be against set by communities. Measurement of community satisfaction is just as important as measurement of other performance criteria.

There are too many sources of grant funding. Artists and community cultural workers spend too much time trying to appeal for and write grant submissions. This is exhausting. A more effective and efficient way of obtaining funding and real long-term jobs are needed. Professionals in other sectors are not required to survive through endless grant submissions. If there is inherent value in this arts, music and community cultural development, then government financial support should reflect the long-term benefits.

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.

**§ *What other issues do you think are important?***

Each person's active engagement with music heritage and culture forms a basis for strategic planning and aspirations for the future. In order for everyone to be involved we need outdoor venues for musical performance that are accessible and low cost. Facilities are important: as places for stakeholders to gather; material resources; access to professional advice and mentoring.

We need to map what is happening in each neighbourhood, with respect to community arts and music, and to share this information nationally. Where are the gaps in the availability of facilities and resources for music? Where are the geographical areas that need to be better resourced, and the people with unmet needs? How do we locate music and health professionals who can be subsidised by government to assist with community-based rehabilitation initiatives? Organisations such as Music Health Australia need support to publicise information on service providers.

**§ *What do you think should be priorities for a national cultural policy?***

We need to create useable spaces within people's neighbourhoods for creative endeavours that have availability of technological facilities for communication and production of resources (eg. Telephone, web access). Libraries need to extend into music hubs with appropriately qualified music specialist staff. Literacy extends beyond language, and music can be a vital part of communication for people of all ages.

**§ *What positive steps would you like to see advance Australian Culture?***

Government could provide facilities in our outdoor recreation areas for cultural exchange through music. What is a BBQ without a band? Why do current performance venues box us in away from interaction with the natural environment?

- It is important to have well-equipped neighbourhood community cultural centres, and churches so that people have places to gather to express their culture and heritage through creative modalities.
- If these centres are rent-free then stakeholders can gather and contribute to the vibrancy of life in the suburbs, towns, cities, regions, states.
- Through taking part in the life of communities, culture in Australia develops through tangible and intangible expressions of what is meaningful and relevant to people living in these times and places.
- We need unrestricted access to venues that are safe and well-resourced, such as facilities provided for National Parks and WildLife environmental heritage.

- There needs to be better equity between facilities provided for sports, literary arts (libraries), visual arts (art galleries), and those for musical participation for all people – situated in neighbourhoods. Parks need to be equipped with performance spaces such as concert stages with electricity and covered by a roof – for all weather conditions to support public performing arts, including concerts and festivals.

6. The culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is the unique backbone of Australian identity; it brings meaning to our nation with a culture unbroken in song, dance and stories over millennia.

This is written in agreement with the above statement.

**§ *What other issues do you think are important?***

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance traditions are in jeopardy. Adequate funding and resources are required for their survival and development. AIATSIS has a large volume of material that needs to be digitised. There are communities who do not have resources to safeguard their own music heritage and culture and require professional assistance.

**§ *What do you think should be priorities for a national cultural policy?***

Safeguarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions and supporting innovation, training, research and development – is an important priority. Supporting community-led initiatives and leadership by Indigenous people is also important. Community collaboration and place-based planning is essential for future development.

**§ *What positive steps would you like to see advance Australian Culture?***

Specifically we ask the policy to:

1. Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance traditions are part of educational curricula at primary, secondary and tertiary levels across all Australia.
2. Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in music teaching at all levels.
3. Provide platforms and venues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance traditions, such as festivals, concerts, tours and residencies.
4. Support capacity building and nurture leadership for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance artists by:
  - a) Broaden access routes for higher education in music for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
  - b) Fund post-graduate scholarships in music for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
  - c) Fund immersion programs for students to learn Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance traditions;
  - d) Provide funding for collaborative documentation and recording of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance traditions;
  - e) Provide adequate financial support for organisations that are supporting and promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance arts

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.

**§ *What other issues do you think are important?***

There has been a lot of attention given to arts and culture within education, but less investment has been made in public health and social gains that can be achieved through community cultural development. *Social Impacts of Participation in the Arts and Cultural Activity* (Cultural Minister's Council, 2004) indicates that "In terms of the research, there remain areas where research has so far been less intensive, at least in Australia. These relate notably to improvements in health status and crime prevention. In most countries the focus has been rather on educational attainment and community development." The work of Music Health professionals is not well understood even though there is a growing evidence base that attests to the benefits of training and supporting people to work across health professions and the arts.

**§ *What do you think should be priorities for a national cultural policy?***

Inter-professional research and development is essential for dealing with complex issues of social harmony, environmental sustainability, safeguarding cultural heritage of minority groups, stimulating innovative development in health care and arts practice, ensuring equitable access to training and participation in arts and music for people with unmet needs (eg. Disadvantaged by remote geographical location, poverty, social isolation, substance abuse, chronic health conditions...).

**§ *What positive steps would you like to see advance Australian Culture?***

The health concerns that tend to lead to preventable chronic health conditions are: physical activity, substance abuse (smoking, alcohol), and nutrition. Preventative health education can be delivered through the arts in culturally relevant ways. We need to move outside health clinics and hospitals into places where people normally conduct their daily lives – work, play, study – to have an impact on the social determinants of health.

Programs can be provided through incidental activities in community locations, featuring issues that are relevant and meaningful to people who live there. We all need to 'get real,' 'get involved in community,' and realise that we can all contribute to the international "health for all" goal of this millennium.

People can influence their own health and well-being through participation in community-based rehabilitation activities that can be integrated into everyday living activities. This can produce cost savings through prevention, and health promotion -- particularly in regards to mental health, stress management, community harmony, health education, literacy, and reduction of chronic health conditions (eg. diabetes, cardiac conditions). We have a wonderful climate for promoting health in natural settings, so government can support community-led initiatives in health care through providing professional support. The outcomes are measurable as long-term community social capital.

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.

**§ *What other issues do you think are important?***

The temporal connections between past memories, present experience, and future aspirations are very important for helping people to grasp an overview of the meaning and significance of culture and heritage to their lives.

**§ *What do you think should be priorities for a national cultural policy?***

When people are involved in community cultural programs across their life span, there is potential for knowledge, skills and cultural heritage to be passed from one generation to another. Sharing in this way opens possibilities for building support networks in neighbourhoods, towns, cities, regions, states, nationally and globally. People can also enjoy meaningful occupation with one another. The active participation is more likely to produce health outcomes than passive media consumption, because communication can be rewarded through human contact.

The internet supports digital sharing of information, but we need governments to support the local hands-on connections between people at the local level. So far, government support has been mainly limited to target populations and minority groups, educational programs in schools (age limited), and support of cultural institutions that are normally located in metropolitan centres. While we recognise that there are social health benefits to participation, the reality is that we are under-resourced to provide music health programs to communities who request our assistance – especially in rural and remote locations.

**§ *What positive steps would you like to see advance Australian Culture?***

Governments need to support people and community groups to self-manage their health and well being through community participation in activities that are meaningful and relevant to people's lives. We can encourage conversations across age groups through the internet, and also through participatory community arts experiences that help to engage people with music heritage and culture. This helps to sustain our music traditions, rather than preserving them in digital forms. Preserving in digital form is of some benefit, but can also ossify a tradition – if it is no longer performed in the real life setting. Our music culture and heritage is dynamic – always changing – influencing and being influenced by people and the environment.

People like to create their own interpretations rather than being swamped by mediation through mass communication modalities. I encourage government to raise the profile of local community arts and heritage interpretation, participation and recordings – for sharing with future generations. Increase air play and community radio stations. Provide incentives for local conversations to occur on matters of importance to local people.

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.

**§ *What other issues do you think are important?***

This statement is valid and underlines the importance of diversity, skill sharing and general involvement of people in arts, heritage and cultural activities. There are many traditions and trade practices that are in jeopardy, even though we have the technological capacity to make digital recordings of existing practices and conserve oral accounts of past experiences.

It is important that government supports diverse ways of sustaining interest in music heritage and culture – with guidance from music health and other professionals on how best to involve people and record in formats that can be easily accessible and retrieved by members of the general public. Collaboration of partners from various sectors is essential.

Our diversity means that we need to record and provide information in languages other than English, and in a variety of formats that are accessible to people with a disability. There needs to be development of shared terminology and storage systems – across disciplinary fields to increase people's capacity to understand. Ideally, diversity can be represented by encouraging all people to 'have a voice' and to record their perceptions whenever a commentary can be given on cultural activities.

**§ *What do you think should be priorities for a national cultural policy?***

People can assist in many creative ways to safeguard their music heritage and culture, and can also explore new innovative forms of creativity that may benefit their health and well-being. The health agenda is important because it is a national research priority, and as such, is important to interface with national cultural policy.

**§ *What positive steps would you like to see advance Australian Culture?***

Museums and other local keeping places, community cultural centres, libraries and outdoor recreational facilities could be resourced by government to assist with enacting a national strategic plan for helping people to participate and engage with music heritage and culture – which would be likely to have benefits for health and well-being.

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.

**§ *What other issues do you think are important?***

A person-centred or community-centred approach is indeed important. People currently have access to more information than they ever had in the history of the world. Communities and people at the local level can participate in place-based planning and contribute to social health and environmental impact assessment studies. This can raise awareness within communities of significant changes to lifestyle before they occur and allow people to plan ahead for how they will adapt to change. Creative solutions are part of building resilience and coping strategies within communities. This is a largely untapped resource that is of inestimable national value. We build on the past to influence the future. People require government support to be involved.

**§ *What do you think should be priorities for a national cultural policy?***

The priority is for involvement of people from diverse backgrounds at every level of planning: in local neighbourhoods, towns, cities, regions, state, national, and inter-national levels. This includes people of all ages, cultural backgrounds, and of any ability level.

An inter-sectorial approach appears to be necessary to deal with complex issues that affect people's quality of life, such as globalisation, industrialisation, social change and environmental degradation.

People can express themselves through creative arts/music and respond to issues of local and national importance through co-operative social action with guidance and support from government. Cultural policy needs to support people who choose to become actively involved in all manner of cultural activities in communities, in real-life, and virtual applications of music technology.

**§ *What positive steps would you like to see advance Australian Culture?***

It is vitally important to include music health professionals in place-based planning – across sectors and regions. Health professionals need to be up-skilled so they can use music and arts more effectively in community-based rehabilitation. People in the music industry need to be up-skilled to be more aware of their potential to use music in service to communities groups, and people with unmet needs. Training is required for artists to be more involved in the health industry. Government can support the merging and inter-dependence of culturally engaged music and health.