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To: Senator the Hon. Mitch Fifield

Minister for the Arts

42 Florence Street

Mentone VIC 3194

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you because I am deeply concerned about the government’s cuts to the funding of the Australia Council for the Arts and their long-term impact across the country, but most particularly here in South Australia.

The Friday 13 May 2016 announcement of Australia Council‘s 4-year funding recipients saw 62 small to medium arts organisations lose their on-going federal funding. This included six SA companies;
a number of which are now under threat of closure. These include Brink Productions, Slingsby, Australian Experimental Art Foundation, the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia (CACSA), and Vitalstatistix. While it is true that there were some new organisations funded nationally, there has been a significant net decrease and, in South Australia’s case, *there have been no new organisations funded.* This means that the number of arts organisations with multi-year support in SA has been slashed by 40%.

You have argued that the new *Catalyst* program will provide significant relief from these savage cuts but, with the first announcements of *Catalyst* support now public, there is very little evidence that this will be the case. Very few of those companies that have lost their funding have received *Catalyst* funding and it appears that they are unlikely to, given both the forward commitment of *Catalyst* funds and the priorities evident in the decisions taken (eg. to support land purchase in the case of the Heysen Family Trust or building upgrades in the case of the Australian Ballet).

It is also clear that project funding is of no significant assistance in making it possible for our diverse creative sector to continue to operate. If an arts organisation is not funded to exist, how is it to undertake projects? Organisations can leverage their core funding to far greater effect than a one-off project team.

I am deeply concerned that the Government’s new funding policy is creating irreparable damage to our arts sector, with a consequent loss of jobs and the creative infrastructure of our country. I am also concerned that the creation and execution of the *Catalyst* program has been ill-conceived and lacks transparency. It is no replacement for the Australia Council’s tried and tested, systematic process of peer review supported by expert staff and analysis.

It is not just the arts community that is deeply disturbed by these developments. This also impacts on audiences, philanthropic and corporate supporters, other tiers of government, venues and the whole supply chain of the arts. Your new policies will almost certainly see a mid to long term contraction in output, employment and economic activity generated by the arts sector. They run counter to your own Government’s agenda for supporting jobs, growth, innovation and the development of the creative economy.

These federal cuts are to be made in a pre-existing environment of scarcity. Overall appropriations for the arts on a federal level have historically been very low relative to most other developed nations that value a sophisticated and rich cultural life. In SA, the creative arts receive only 1.5% of the South Australian Government’s annual budget; and independent artists and the small to medium sector receive less than 2% of this amount. The latter sector delivers plenty with these limited resources: almost 500 jobs, more than 1500 performances/events and $6.4 million in box office. A number of these organisations also fly the flag for us around the country and internationally, both representing us as a culturally sophisticated state, and also earning export income.

Historically, the creative arts sector has been a significant force for Adelaide and South Australia.
It is integral to SA’s sense of identity, to building well-being and community, and as a driver of growth in regard to providing jobs through direct and indirect spend.

Therefore it is very important to me as a voter that you, as Minister for the Arts, take steps to ensure the viability of the arts sectors both nationally and locally. The three key steps that I support are:

1. To maintain a healthy arts ecology by returning Australia Council budgets to 2013 levels;
2. The continuation of the new *Catalyst* program - but with new funds and its funding processes to be kept in line with best practice in regard to adherence to guidelines, peer assessment, transparency and an even-handed distribution of funds across rounds and years;
3. The development of a tri-partisan arts policy within a positive framework based on the arts’ intrinsic value and the role it plays in contributing to the creative economy and significant impact on jobs and growth.

I urge you to take such policies to the forthcoming election in order to advance the role of the arts in the creative economy and to enrich the lives of all Australians.

Yours faithfully,

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