

C/- 1 Janga Place
Aranda, ACT 2614
Mob: 041 2211 513

3 June 2015

Senator The Hon. George Brandis QC
Attorney-General and Minister for the Arts
PO Box 6100
Senate, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Brandis,

We, the undersigned honorary life members of the Australian Dance Council – Ausdance, write to add our voices to the many letters and statements made in support of the Australia Council. The Australian arts profession has fought hard over many years for the independence and peer review principles embedded in the Australia Council's charter, and we are now concerned that a commitment to excellence through the peer review process will be compromised as further cuts and conditions are imposed on the smaller organisations by a reduced Australia Council. This decision has the potential to dismantle much of the Australian dance ecology, and dissipate the constantly growing audience it has developed over the last decade.

After extensive consultation, the Australia Council had adopted a very welcome six-year funding program to which the smaller companies could apply. While their audiences are, by definition, smaller than those of MPA companies, their innovative impact is disproportionately influential, nationally and internationally. Their creativity often stems from the need to make the most of scarce resources in order to present cutting edge work – the research and development so necessary in arts development. This very factor makes a huge contribution to the wider dance network, especially that of the larger companies whose own output is dependent on the experimentation of younger choreographers.

Our history makes this very clear, yet these smaller companies are now facing enormous dislocation because the Australia Council will now be deprived of much of its decision-making and funding of these companies. We also note the threat to substantial employment opportunities offered by the smaller companies. We highlight their need for stability and sustainability in order for them to function at the level of excellence and accountability required by current funding guidelines and by their peers as part of the peer assessment process.

As Ausdance honorary life members, we remind the Minister that the Ausdance network was formed in 1977 by some of Australia's leading dance directors, choreographers, educators and advocates who had a vision for a more productive, united and prominent dance voice in the Australian arts ecology. Founders included Dame Peggy van Praagh DBE, then artistic director of The Australian Ballet, Keith Bain OAM, then Movement Director at NIDA, and prominent dance choreographers and educators Professor Shirley McKechnie AO and Emeritus Professor Warren Lett.

Supported by Australia Council funding, Ausdance National has flourished since as a leading voice for dance and the arts generally, as has the Ausdance network, funded by state and territory arts ministries. The Ausdance network offers an integrated service of international, national and state/territory activities for the dance profession that includes companies, tertiary courses, individual artists and teachers. Furthermore, Ausdance works closely with educators, researchers, university lecturers and advocates through the (unfunded) National Advocates for Arts Education and the Tertiary Dance Council of Australia.

In order to give the dance profession a credible and respected voice at the highest levels, Ausdance National has provided advice to the federal departments of Education and the Arts, the Australia Council, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the National Library of Australia, the Australian Institute of Sport, The Australian Ballet School, NAISDA, the Vocational Education & Training authority, dance company education programs, touring networks, and international organisations such as the World Dance Alliance, the World Alliance for Arts Education, Dance UK and Dance USA.

Ausdance initiatives have been central to improving the health, education, employment opportunities, career transitions, research, teaching standards, dialogue and sector communication across all forms of dance in Australia. It has been especially influential in promoting dialogue between the larger MPA companies, the small to medium companies, independent artists and the tertiary sector. Excellence and innovation across this whole ecology have propelled Australian dance to international recognition.

We cannot emphasise strongly enough that the decision to transfer funds from the Australia Council to a largely unknown program is causing extreme disruption right across the arts sector, and we are particularly concerned about the depth of uncertainty being felt by the professional dance sector. We therefore request that funding be immediately restored to the Australia Council to enable some level of certainty for companies, artists and service organisations, including Ausdance. We think the Council's loss of funds is unjustified and that the consequences across the arts sector may be irretrievable without an immediate reversal of this decision.

We look forward to your positive response to our concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Ausdance Honorary Life Members:

Associate Professor Ralph Buck
Lee Christofis
Hilary Trotter Chuck
Shane Colquhoun
Valda Craig
Julie Dyson AM
Annie Greig
Emeritus Professor Warren Lett
Professor Shirley McKechnie AO
Sandra Macarthur-Onslow
Professor Cheryl Stock AM
Professor Susan Street AO