

ArtsPeak

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ArtsPeak Response to OzCo Review

The release yesterday of the Review of the Australia Council was greeted generally positively by ArtsPeak, the confederation of peak national artform organisations.

However, ArtsPeak co-convenors Tamara Winikoff and Julie Dyson said that the group will need time to think through and discuss the implications of the recommendations before taking a position, although there were some general comments they were prepared to make immediately.

The two spokespeople said that ArtsPeak members warmly welcomed the recommendation for an increase in devolved funding of \$21.25 million per annum to the Australia Council and getting rid of the imposition of the efficiency dividend. They also welcomed the recommendation for a stronger research and advocacy role for the Council.

They were more reserved about the proposed governance and decision-making structure. The report recommends that the purpose of the Council should be narrowed to focus on 'excellence' in Australian creative arts practice, with the 'access' component of its current responsibilities being passed over to the Government's Office for the Arts.

"We are discussing what could be the criteria used to determine excellence and how to ensure that experimentation and risk taking will be fostered", said Tamara Winikoff.

Arm's length decision-making is a key principle which the arts sector holds dear, they said. ArtsPeak will look closely at the programs proposed to be managed by the Office for the Arts and would want assurance that adherence to the principle of peer assessment and arm's length decision making would continue. Freedom of expression is a cherished right in a democracy and the arts sector is particularly sensitive about the potential for censorship or politically based decision-making.

More detailed information will be sought about the criteria for selecting the nine members of the new governing board. Julie Dyson commented, "The strength of the existing artform boards is that decisions are debated between people who are respected by their peers, have a depth of relevant experience and hold a variety of views".

Both spokespeople expressed their support for any moves to deal better with the needs of the small to medium arts organisations, but hoped their case would be able to be heard when competing with much larger and better-resourced organisations. They welcomed the proposal that the Major Performing Arts organisations would be peer assessed.

The report comes ahead of the release of the National Cultural Policy and is expected to help underpin the major propositions the sector assumes will be made in supporting and strengthening Australian culture.

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