



The Hon Michael Sukkar MP  
Assistant Treasurer  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

17 January 2020

Dear Assistant Treasurer,

**Symphony Services Australia pre-Budget submission on priorities for the 2020-21 Federal Budget**

Symphony Services Australia (“SSA”) provides services to Australia’s six symphony orchestras (the Adelaide, Melbourne, Queensland, Sydney, Tasmanian and West Australian Symphony Orchestras), on whose behalf we make this submission. The symphony orchestras are also members of the Australian Major Performing Arts Group (“AMPAG”) which has made a separate pre-budget submission. SSA supports the key data and recommendations contained in that submission.

In particular, we request consideration of the following recommendations:

1. \$40m per year for four years to address the **Australia Council for the Arts’** capacity to invest in four-year funded organisations, project initiatives including major new works and to facilitate the establishment of new entrants into the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework. Of this amount, \$100m over four years would be required to strengthen the performing arts sector.
2. Provide **stability of funding** by ceasing to apply the Government’s annual efficiency dividend to the Australia Council for the Arts.
3. \$4.5m over four years to champion Indigenous performing arts by establishing a **National Indigenous Arts and Cultural Authority**.
4. \$20m over four years to support creative opportunities in **regional Australia**.
5. Develop **cross-portfolio collaborations** drawing on the potential of the arts to stimulate economic activity through arts tourism and to address complex social and wellbeing challenges (cost offset by savings in other non-arts programs over the mid to long term).
6. 2021-24 forward planning to ensure Government can respond to the outcomes of the **national touring sector scan** being undertaken by the Australia Council for the Arts, backing initiatives through cross-portfolio collaboration. We note that stagnant funding combined with inflation mean that the Playing Australia fund has decreased in real terms by 37% or \$2.7M since 2004.

AMPAG's submission draws attention to the significant public value of the performing and creative arts industries, including ticket sales of \$2.2b in 2018 and a workforce of more than half a million Australians.<sup>1</sup> The arts sector tells important stories, engages with Australians wherever they are and leads to greater education and wellbeing outcomes for those who participate.

For their part, the six Australian symphony orchestras performed to nearly one million people in 2018 across nearly 3000 events, over 300 of which were in regional centres. Nearly 140,000 Australians attended free concerts by the symphony orchestras, and there were over 2,000 workshops, concerts or events dedicated to education. The orchestras provided over 2,000 jobs (1,629 of them to artists) and performed 139 works by Australian composers. All this activity provided impact and our reach was increased 20-fold through radio broadcast and streaming. The benefit provided to the community by the orchestras extended far beyond what can be measured in dollars alone.<sup>2</sup>

SSA noted with dismay the recent announcement that the Department of Communications and the Arts would be subsumed into a larger public service department, and that "Arts" would be removed from the title of the portfolio. This decision appears to minimise the importance of the arts in our society and indicates a reduced priority within Government. The loss of a Secretary for the Arts who was highly responsive and able to dedicate time to the Minister and the sector will be noticed. We call on the Government to restore "Arts" to the title of the portfolio and reinstate a dedicated Secretary role.

While all our recommendations are important, we draw your urgent attention to the issue of Australia Council four-year funding. It is anticipated that decisions announced in April 2020 will lead to the defunding of a further 30-40 previously funded arts organisations, due entirely to lack of funds. This unfunded excellence will result in a lack of diversity and further weakening of the already fragile arts ecology. **Recommendation 1 calls for \$40m per year over four years to address this issue, which is urgent as the Australia Council's funding commitment for 2021-24 is expected to be announced one month prior to the federal budget.**

As outlined by AMPAG, Government policy that seeks to strengthen and grow both the intrinsic and instrumental value of the arts will unlock jobs, growth and social wellbeing in its many forms.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information or elaboration.

Yours sincerely,



Kate Lidbetter  
Chief Executive Officer

---

<sup>1</sup> Live Performance Industry in Australia 2018, © Live Performance Australia, <https://liveperformance.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Live-Performance-Industry-in-Australia-2018-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Data provided by the Australia Council for the Arts for the six state symphony orchestras, 2018