

29 January 2021

The Hon Michael Sukkar MP
Minister for Housing and Assistant Treasurer
C/- The Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

2021-22 Pre-Budget Submission

This submission by the First Nations Performing Arts sector incorporates sector wide feedback to the Pre-Budget Submission. As a collective of self-determined First Nations Small to Medium Performing Arts Organisations, Peak Bodies and Training Institutions we are: ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company, Marrugeku, Moogahlin Performing Arts, BlakDance, and National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA).

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this and encourage the implementation of a set of principles that embed First Nations cultural leadership within the frameworks that ambitiously develops more broadly Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions ethically and strategically.

FIRST NATIONS PERFORMING ARTS SECTOR

The First Nations small-to-medium performing arts sector is made up of self-determined arts companies nationally that are supported through Australia Council multi-year federal funding and include, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company, Moogahlin Performing Arts, Marrugeku, and BlakDance. As First Nations arts leaders we have a responsibility to play a key role in the Australian Cultural Arts landscape. Our communities are the custodians of the most exciting and compelling stories globally. As a sector, we achieve a diverse array of objectives across dance, theatre and performing arts practice areas, we provide fundamental infrastructure and services over vast distances, with remits at local, regional/remote, national, and international levels.

Our outputs and outcomes include productions; employment; training and professional pathways for young people; economic development; international, inter-cultural, and inter-tribal collaboration; strengthened capacity in governance and leadership; audience development; intergenerational cultural transmission; performance and festivals; skills development; cultural enterprise; mentoring; engaging youth; keeping First Nations culture STRONG; and sharing First Nations culture with other Australians and on a global stage.

FIRST NATIONS PERFORMING ARTS SECTOR RESPONSE TO COVID-19

As the spread of COVID-19 gathered pace around the world and the first cases began to appear in Australia, despite limited capacity and minimal government response we drew on our collective experience and resources to respond in the following ways:

1. Identifying key priorities in our sector and communities through sector wide consultation (completed 20 March 2020)
2. Advocating at every level of government for our key priorities (ongoing)
3. Identifying the needs of independent artists in our networks by undertaking a First Nations led research and data collection
4. Hosting regular independent, company to company, local and international online Gatherings to stay connected, supported and collegiate during COVID19 (ongoing)
5. Employing Elders to open and close online Gatherings to ensure intergenerational transference of knowledge during COVID19 (ongoing)
6. Providing intensive grant writing support for artists (ongoing)
7. Providing crisis support and employment to artists and arts workers such as;
 1. *Moogahl Live* and *Baiame's Ngunnhu Festival: BNLive*, maintaining community connections through creativity
 2. ILBIJERRI Theatre Company dispersed \$65,000 generously donated by an Anonymous Philanthropist to 25 artists for Professional Development or Project Development, sought out through an open EOI process.
 3. Yirra Yaakin also instigated an EOI process, calling for artists to provide an outline of a project that would be funded via re-purposed funds. Nearly \$25,000 has been allocated to 6 different projects, involving 15 independent artists (ongoing)
 4. BlakDance has written and submitted \$790,000 worth of grants on behalf of artists
 5. Marrugeku produced a together/apart live streamed 'Reconnect and Refresh' dance development process employing 10 dancers, 4 cultural dramaturgs, and 4 technicians in remote and urban areas across 4 states
8. Paying out wages to artists and production teams on cancelled national and international tours: (Marrugeku has paid out 100% of wages on three cancelled international tours totaling \$110,000 funded by re-purposed funds)
9. Pivoting project outcomes from national or international to local community audiences and digital platforms, collectively investing an estimated \$467,000 of redirected funds to our local arts communities

Given these challenges and restrictions, our submission focuses on supporting the First Nations performance industry to build and recover from COVID-19. However, our collective also recognises the need for a comprehensive national First Nations led creative and cultural industries plan that includes a bold vision and framework for investment in creativity and culture.

SUMMARY OF BUDGET REQUESTS

First Nations performing arts urges the Government to support the performance industry with the following initiatives:

1. The establishment of a national indigenous arts and cultural authority (NIACA) - \$4.5 million over four years during the establishment phase plus \$20 million per annum for ongoing investment in First Nations arts and culture.
2. Provide an additional \$100 million (or \$25 million per annum over four years) over four years to the Australia Council, specifically to support strategic priorities that drive economic and social recovery post COVID-19.
3. We call for an additional \$20mil per annum to be directed to First Nations performing arts organisations and independent artists through a dedicated investment through the Australia Council for the Arts.
4. Extend JobKeeper or introduce some other form of targeted wage subsidy for workers in the First Nations performance industry who continue to be significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. Establish, in partnership with industry, a First Nations Performance Fund to increase industry confidence to reactivate events.
6. Significantly expand the RISE grant funding program.

We also note submissions made by key peak bodies, such as APRA AMCOS, LPA, Performing Arts Connections, Regional Arts Australia, Symphony Services and Theatre Network Australia, and support the proposals canvassed in those submissions.

A vibrant First Nations performance industry is critical to Australia's identity, economic, social and cultural wellbeing and we encourage Government to continue to support and promote investment in our industry.

Once again, we thank you for the opportunity to present this submission for consideration in the Budget process. Should you have any queries regarding the information provided, please do not hesitate to contact Merindah Donnelly (merindah.donnelly@blakdance.org.au) or Alison Murphy Oates (managingdirector@moogahlin.org) via email or telephone.

Yours sincerely,

ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company, Marrugeku, Moogahlin Performing Arts, BlakDance, and National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA).