

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER,  
THE RT. HON. HAROLD HOLT, C.H., M.P.,  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.



1st November, 1967.

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CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

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I wish to inform the House of two decisions by the Government and a number of other developments in the field of cultural activities.

The Government, for some time, has been actively considering ways to increase, at national level, Commonwealth patronage of the Arts without creating a monolithic structure which could inhibit the free play of our cultural interests and enthusiasms at all levels.

For some years now Government encouragement for the arts in general has been increasing and we feel that financial aid properly directed on the best advice is one significant area where the Commonwealth Government can provide material assistance.

We need to ensure that we have a system for giving financial assistance which takes full account of the important role played, not only by State Governments, but by municipal governments and a host of professional and amateur organisations throughout the country.

With this in mind the Government, in its first decision on cultural activities, has decided to establish an Australian Council for the Arts to be its financial agent and adviser on the performing arts and other activities connected with the Arts in general.

The Council will co-operate closely with the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and with existing Commonwealth Government agencies responsible for music, painting and literature.

At this stage the Council will be concerned primarily with the performing arts but it should not be assumed that the concept of an all-embracing Council, which I know has some advocates in this country, has been rejected.

The Council we propose to set up could conveniently be enlarged to perform such a function if experience showed the need.

This decision means that Government financial assistance for the arts in general will in future be given through two main channels: -

1. The new Council, which will be concerned with the theatre arts (drama, opera and ballet) and film making for television with an educational and cultural emphasis.
2. Existing agencies i.e. the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the recently formed Music Board, the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board and the Commonwealth Literary Fund.

The Council will also advise the Government on special requests for aid in cultural activities not already covered by Government agencies and which, in the past, have been dealt with on an ad hoc basis.

I should add here that the inclusion of film-making for television in the activities to be covered by the new Council is not a substitute for full

consideration by the Government of submissions it has received for the establishment of a Film Corporation to assist the film industry at large.

The intention to give further aid to film-making for television is part of the Government's continuing effort to help in increasing the Australian content of television programmes in this country. The question of a Film Corporation, or some similar organisation, is a separate proposition which needs more study.

The new Council will not, as a normal practice finance capital works for the arts in the States because this is not considered to be within the sphere of Commonwealth responsibility.

The Elizabethan Theatre Trust will remain as a servicing organisation and entrepreneur and will continue its fund raising activities in the States.

The Council will distribute financial aid for the performing arts primarily, but not exclusively, through the Trust. Both the Council and the Trust will be supported by advisory committees in all States.

Before deciding to establish this two-channel system of aid for the arts a close study was made of the foundations and councils for the arts in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada.

The names of the Chairman, members of the Council and the Director will be announced in due course. The Council will be associated with the Prime Minister's Department.

The Commonwealth Government has also studied the work of its existing agencies and as I have already indicated they will continue to function broadly in the same way as they have in the past, and the level of any increase in financial assistance will be considered in the Budget context, as will the grant to be made available to the new Council. There will be, of course, a close liaison between the new Council and the existing agencies.

I might mention here that the Government already has under consideration increased assistance to writers in Australia as a result of recent discussions between the Advisory Board of the Commonwealth Literary Fund and the Fund's Parliamentary Committee.

The House will also recall that we recently set up a Music Board specifically for the purpose of advising the Commonwealth Government on assistance to Australian composers. This Board has been active since its inception and has just had approval for a new project designed to promote the work of Australian composers, nationally and internationally, and attempt to remedy the lack of knowledge of our own music. The details of this project are the subject of a statement by me to the press today.

I turn now to the second important decision the Government has taken to encourage the arts in Australia.

The House will recall that my predecessor Sir Robert Menzies, and his administration decided that a national art gallery should be established in Canberra and in 1960 appointed a committee of enquiry to consider what form it should take, what its function should be and how it should be controlled.

This Committee, under the distinguished Chairmanship of Sir Daryl Lindsay, completed its work last year and I would like to acknowledge here how comprehensive the report is and how valuable it has been to the Government. It has contributed significantly to the Government's

latest decision on the art gallery and is tabled in this Parliament for the information of Honourable Members.

The Government has decided that work on the establishment of this national gallery will begin immediately.

The National Capital Development Commission expects the planning, design and costing stage to take about two years. A site for the gallery is being considered.

The Gallery will house the National Collection which at present consists of nearly 2,000 works of art. Future acquisitions will include Australian art past and present, art of the Asian and Pacific areas and art on a world-wide basis, beginning with the 20th century.

The Government believes the new gallery will add significantly to the cultural life of Australia and the national capital.

It is hoped that this will be an added incentive to owners of art collections to consider bequeathing their collections to the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth has been active in recent years in acquiring new works for the national collection. It is also developing an exchange of art exhibitions with other countries.

The existence of an art gallery in Canberra will add materially to the display opportunities for visiting exhibitions and also for exhibitions from the galleries in the various States.

The Gallery will be named "The Australian National Gallery" and will be controlled by a Council, with a full-time director. The Council itself will be associated with the Prime Minister's Department. The Council members and the Director will be appointed in due course.

These decisions will, I am sure give encouragement to those who have for so long given their time and energy to advancing our own distinctive cultural activities. I also hope that the growing public recognition of what our actors, our artists, our writers, our musicians and others in a varied field of cultural interest are seeking to do will add much to what the Government is doing.

In the leaner years of the past, in the face of hardship and little encouragement young Australians have risen to fame and brought distinction to their country over a wide range of cultural activity. Given the support of Governments, Federal and State, and the backing of the people, I am sure the talent is there for us to rise to new heights and give our people a growing pleasure and satisfaction.

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