

STATEMENT ON THE ARTS

THE PRIME MINISTER

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE J. M. FRASER, M.P.

3 JUNE 1976

I should like to inform the House on measures the Government is taking in the area of the arts.

The Government will be providing next year, \$33.8 million exclusive of Australia Council administrative costs, for support for the arts.

This continued high level of support emphasises the Government's firm commitment to support and encourage the development of the arts throughout the Australian community.

In line with economies elsewhere we have aimed at eliminating unnecessary expenditure, but equally we have sought to ensure that no important or worthwhile programmes suffer.

Providing a national stimulus to the arts is in accordance with our philosophy of freedom of individual expression. We believe in freedom for artist and patron alike.

For this reason we do not see the Government as the only or necessarily the major source of art patronage.

Ideally, the arts through individual and community patronage should be self-supporting, but there are few if any places where this happens.

Even in the United States, the Federal Government has in recent years had to play a part, and Government support for the arts is an accepted fact in the cultural life of Western Europe.

It is one of the Commonwealth Government's tasks to see how best the arts programmes of all levels of Government in Australia might complement and support each other, to minimize duplication and overlap and to provide the greatest measure of fulfilment for artists and audiences.

We believe a genuinely vigorous and stimulating artistic climate will emerge only when Governments, individuals and private enterprises and corporations are actively and co-operatively offering decentralised and diversified patronage for the arts in our community. A diversity and plurality of support can only strengthen the arts to the general common good.

Let me emphasise that our aim is to broaden support for the arts, to have more funds flowing from different sources. We are not seeking to find substitutes for Government assistance, but to expand on that necessary base.

In this connection, the Government is having examined the possibility of taxation concessions or other incentives for the arts, and ways and means of encouraging individual and private enterprise and corporate patronage.

Internationally, the Government will continue to foster cultural exchanges. We will support programmes to bring arts and artists from abroad. We will also support the promotion of Australian arts and artists overseas. Of the latter, one example among many is our programme of activities in connection with the American Bicentennial Celebrations which includes the forthcoming tour of the Australian Ballet.

Turning to specific issues, in December last year we established the Administrative Review Committee to review Government expenditure and recommend on ways of eliminating waste and duplication within and between Government departments and agencies, and between Commonwealth and State Government bodies.

As one of its first tasks the Committee undertook an examination of the operations of the Australia Council, the Film and Television School, and the Australian Film Commission.

The Australia Council had itself recognised management and other organisational difficulties. It had separately commissioned an inquiry into its operations, by McKinsey and Company Inc.

Both this report and the Council's views on it were available to the Committee.

The Government has reached a number of decisions on the structure and future of its arts organisations.

Australia Council

The operations of the Australia Council and its expenditure on the arts have been reported on by the Auditor-General and the Public Accounts Committee. They have been the subject of questions in Parliament and debate in the media.

The Council has attracted criticism, particularly from artists and the arts' community, concerning extravagance and excessive administrative expenses.

The Administrative Review Committee, in its examination of the Council noted, among other things: unsatisfactory arrangements between the Council and Boards; high turn-over of members; excessive attention to the making of small grants - and at considerable cost; insufficient account was taken of blossoming State cultural authorities and their possible use as agents for the Council; enthusiastic arts amateurs and the dilettante seemed to receive more attention than was probably deserved.

The changes to be made are designed to correct identified problems and deficiencies, to make administrative and financial arrangements more efficient, to reduce administrative costs so that more funds will be available for the arts themselves, to enter on new and improved arrangements which might lead to greater involvement of State and local governments and other enterprises.

The Australia Council Act is to be amended to formally give the Council the role of the Government's advisory agency on all matters falling within the area of its responsibilities. The Council was not previously charged with this specific responsibility.

Council control of the activities of the Boards will be increased for reasons of administrative effectiveness, but not so as to interfere with essential flexibility for running day-to-day affairs.

In future, Boards will be responsible to the Council and function under its direction and guidelines. They will have clearly defined advisory and recommendatory roles, and such executive powers as the Council may delegate to them.

Changes are proposed to the structure and size of the Council and Boards to increase effectiveness, generally reduce costs but at the same time, ensure continuity and diversity of advice.

The Council will be reduced in size from a range of 18-24 members to a range of 15-19 members. Public Service members will be reduced from 3 to 2.

Two new positions will be created: one of Deputy Chairman of the Council (a part-time office) to assist the Chairman and generally facilitate the Council's operations; one of General-Manager (a full-time office) to be the chief executive of the Council. This will give greater weight to the chief executive office, and generally provide a better scheme of administrative responsibility. The office of General-Manager will be a statutory one. The General-Manager will be an ex-officio member of the Council.

To reduce excessive turnover, the terms of appointment of Council and Board members will be extended from 3 to 4 years. Members' appointments may be renewed for a further term of 2 years. After this reappointment would not be considered until 2 more years expired.

The Australia Council's film, radio and television responsibilities will be transferred to the Australian Film Commission. The Film, Radio and Television Board will be abolished.

This change is being made on the basis of drawing all film and television activities together as a step in rationalization, and so that creative film-makers might now link up with the mainstream of commercial film-making.

The number and responsibilities of the other Boards will remain the same.

Membership of the Boards will be reduced from a range of 7-10, excepting Aboriginal Arts which is 9-14 plus Chairman, to a range of 5-7. Aboriginal Arts will be 7-9 plus Chairman.

As a further step to rationalise and reduce administration, the Council will assume responsibility for and administer: the Australian Authors' Fund and the Historic Memorials Committee, activities presently with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; the Aboriginal arts activities presently with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

To increase the involvement of State, Territory and local governments, and other appropriate regional organisations, the Council will consult with appropriate authorities to begin a programme of devolution of grant-giving activities.

Community arts activities and small grants to individuals or groups are areas where the programme of devolution might begin.

In line with the Government's view that the Council should retain overall responsibility for Commonwealth programmes for the arts, funds will remain part of the Council's budget and be channelled through it to the States and other bodies.

In any programmes of devolution the Council may specify the broad purposes for which the funds might be used. It may also expect reports from the grant-giving agencies on how moneys have been spend and on the operation of the programmes. The

pace and scope of the programmes and transitional and other arrangements necessary will be matters for determination by the Council.

The costs of many small individual grants programmes have been out of proportion to the assistance offered. Accordingly, while I would expect the Council to continue to offer individual grants, I would hope that in future the emphasis would be on assisting the most talented with the highest promise of excellence.

The Council aims to widen involvement in the arts, and encourage more support from other areas. In line with this object the Council will be asked to seek to establish arrangements whereby support for national organisations (e.g. the Arts Council of Australia, the Crafts Council of Australia), and performing arts companies in the States would be on a matching basis with either the organisations or the States.

Matching arrangements should be a Council objective.

It is not our intention, however, that it should be an inflexible rule which might impede the development of any arts activities. Precise matching arrangements would be a matter for determination by the Council.

Training in the arts is essentially an educational matter. In future the Council will not engage in this activity. I have in mind in particular the National Institute of Dramatic Art, and the Australian Ballet School.

It is proposed that in the future the appropriate Commonwealth and State education authorities should be responsible for these institutions.

After due consideration of all the issues, it has been decided that the Commonwealth Government will not provide direct or indirect assistance for capital arts projects outside of its responsibilities in Commonwealth Territories. The Government regards this as essentially a State function.

There are other matters largely internal to the Council aimed at establishing improved criteria for grants, guidelines and controls, better administrative and financial arrangements, and reduced costs. I shall be taking these up with the Council.

The changes that are proposed should not be allowed to reflect on the greater part of the Council's very fine work and its many excellent initiatives.

The arts by their very nature are an area for controversy and differences of judgement and opinion. Criticisms need, therefore, to be kept in perspective.

Among the many very worthy projects the Council has currently in hand is the proposed Chinese Archaeological Exhibition scheduled for early next year. This is almost certainly the most important exhibition ever to come to Australia, and is a landmark of its kind.

After the completion of all the essential
 work for the year, the Government has
 not provided any special facilities for capital
 and projects outside of the normal facilities for
 Governmental financing. The Government regards
 essentially a similar situation.

There are other factors which have led to
 the present situation. The Government has
 been unable to secure the necessary funds
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Film and Television

The Government will continue to encourage film and television in partnership with the industry, the ultimate aim being self-sufficiency.

Recent experience has made us all aware of the potential of our film and television industry and of the ready interest of Australian audiences.

Once again the changes to be made are intended to rationalise and draw like activities together to make for more effective operation and the best use of available resources.

In this area, the Government has taken the following decisions -

- The Australian Film Commission will take over responsibility for independent radio and audio-visual production activities - areas largely neglected in the past.
- The film, radio and television functions of the Australia Council will go to the Commission. A joint working party will be set up to effect the most satisfactory transfer and to ensure that proper account is taken of the interests of the staff involved.
- The Commission will also take over the staff and resources of the Audio-Visual Branch of the Postal and Telecommunications Department - these resources will complement and expand those of the Commission's Film Australia Branch.
- The Film and Television School will assume responsibility for training in radio and audio-visual communications - again, areas previously neglected.'

Changes in both the Australia Council and the Australian Film Commission will involve amendments to legislation and these will be introduced as soon as practicable.

Australian National Gallery

The Government is committed to the concept of the National Gallery, and the broad objectives of the National Gallery Act passed by Parliament last year.

The Act has been proclaimed with effect from 3 June 1976, and I am pleased to announce the appointment of the following members of the first permanent Council, each of whom will hold office for a term of 3 years:

Mr Richard Crebbin (Chairman)

Mr Fred Williams

Mr James T. Gleeson, A.M.

Mr Murray Bail

Professor Patrick McCaughey

Miss Pamela Bell

Mr James O. Fairfax

Mr David Wynn

Mr John D. Davies

Mr Donald J. Munro, O.B.E.

The Council will assume immediate responsibility for on-going arrangements and advice to the Government on all Gallery affairs.

As I have stated elsewhere, we believe that the Gallery should hold the very finest work of Australian artists of all periods and we shall support the policy of giving priority to the acquisition of Australian art.

This will not preclude the Gallery acquiring important works of art in other areas, and continuing to develop a National Collection taking in the arts of other countries and cultures. In addition, we shall through the Australia Council seek to encourage more high quality exhibitions from abroad so that as many Australians as possible may see a greater number of the finest works of art from other regions and periods.

I believe that the active pursuit of my Government's aims towards the arts will be, ultimately, to the greater benefit of the whole Australian community.