



PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP -
COMMONWEALTH CULTURAL POLICY LAUNCH
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This is a very great pleasure.

No government has ever delivered a national cultural policy for Australia on anything like these dimensions.

I'm not sure many national governments in other countries have delivered cultural statements.

The Americans are in the process of formulating one at the moment - for delivery towards the end of the century, I understand.

We need this statement.

As the document says, it is long overdue.

We have had a cultural debate running in this country for a very long time.

Our post-colonial status guaranteed that there would be a lot of questions asked about who we are, what level of culture we might reasonably aspire to, whether we should be transplanting European culture or fostering an indigenous one, what the worth of such a strange hybrid would be.

These arguments run right through our history in this century.

At the extremes it was "evening dress and the opera" versus the "wattle and bottle".

Anglophilia and Anglophobia.

The debate tended to lurch between the cultural cringe and cultural swagger.

It has taken us a long while to find what Robert Hughes recently called "a relaxed uprightness of carriage."

The two extremes don't make much sense.

Both are narrow, both inclined to xenophobia.

And both fatally missed the point that our development was bound to reflect the accumulation of cultures which of necessity an immigrant society creates - and that from such variety great riches flow.

The simplest truths can be the hardest to grasp.

The idea that a cosmopolitan Australia might be a worthwhile aspiration and not a nightmare was a long time coming.

To imagine a culturally diverse Australia and enjoy the idea meant overturning a lot of received wisdom.

The notion that we were a country without history, for instance.

It meant recognising that, far from lacking history and culture, we were the beneficiaries of an extraordinary heritage: that settlers in Australia, whether they arrived from Great Britain and Ireland in the nineteenth century, or Europe, or the Middle East or Asia in the twentieth century - no settlers in this country ever entirely left their culture behind.

To recognise that was to recognise the depth of our history and heritage.

And in the last twenty years we have recognised it.

Essentially, I think that is what multiculturalism means.

We have recognised that from new settlers we can derive more than raw energy, skills and ambition - there is a cultural dividend.

In recent years we have also come to the realisation that it is our great good fortune to share in the magnificent heritage of the oldest civilisation on earth.

These are watersheds in our cultural development.

It has been truly a sea change - the tide of our national consciousness has turned.

And nothing, it seems to me, has done more to free us from our insecurities.

Yet recognising the great wealth of culture we have inherited cannot obscure or deny the fact that culture is built in large part on the experience of the last two hundred years of living in this continent.

Our traditions are still firmly fixed in that experience, and they remain alive in our art and literature and film.

That is a heritage which we must preserve, a set of recognisably Australian values which must continue to inform the creative life of the nation.

That these intangible things are powerful forces in the national life might be measured by the inclination of Australians to watch Australian television shows, or read Australian books.

You might see it in the huge success of the Golden Summers exhibition a few years ago, or films like Strictly Ballroom, or - at another level - the impact which the Entombment of the Unknown Australian Soldier had on the nation last year.

Australians do still read Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson.

They do still look at Streeton and Roberts.

They still love them.

But these days they know there is so much more in the cupboard.

And what is so encouraging these days is the new confidence - the unashamed enthusiasm.

It distinguishes some of those recent films.

It was there in some of the acts I have seen yesterday and today.

It is there in the reviews the Australian Ballet just received in Washington.

I wouldn't want to pretend to argue the finer points of dance technique with Clive Barnes.

I am very pleased that he finds them technically in the forefront of the world's ballet companies.

I like that, but I love it when he says that they have "a very real spirit, an individuality that is fresh and open and quite original.

It is the sort of energy and open freshness that people associate with Australia itself."

I find myself pleased to hear Clive Barnes approving of our dancers - and absolutely delighted to think that our dancers might convey to the world the message that there is a great optimistic spirit at large in Australia.

The first is satisfying, the second is moving.

Creative Nation does not attempt to impose a cultural landscape on Australia but to respond to one which is already in bloom.

I hope that in time this statement will be seen as the day we drew a line under our post-colonial era - and said good-bye to it.

I don't think we should look back in anger to the generations who conducted the cultural debate in that era.

We've come by stages to where we are and a lot of cultural wealth has come with us.

We may even be a lot wiser for having been through the cringe, and even censorship.

Just the same, as the statement says, today I hope we are also saying a final goodbye to all those manifestations of cultural insecurity - including cultural jingoism.

And goodbye forever to the days when our best talents left Australia because there was not enough here to persuade them to stay.

The statement is not about looking back.

It is very much an attempt to lay the foundations of a new era: to pull the threads of our national life together, so that we can ride the waves of global change and create our own.

I've said elsewhere that as a government our great ambition has been to bring cultural issues into the mainstream of our national life, and national decision-making.

That's why, for instance, we brought the arts into the Cabinet, and subsequently combined the arts with the Department of Communications.

We emphatically believe that cultural issues should be at the core.

On the one hand, this is because no economic or social decision is without a cultural consequence.

The quality of our lives, the opportunities for self expression, the integrity of our heritage cannot be left to chance.

They can no longer be the last consideration.

That, it seems to me, is one of the responsibilities of a mature country - and one of the imperatives in this era of globalisation and the information revolution.

On the other hand, we are putting cultural issues at the centre because the more we succeed in encouraging a creative spirit and the flow of creative ideas, the more we will succeed as an economy and society.

There are huge economic benefits to flow from a confident and secure, innovative and imaginative culture.

And direct social benefits - direct national benefits.

There are still a few people who believe that culture belongs on the margins.

We take this opportunity to say that they are wrong.

This statement does not cover every element in our national life.

It does not go to every city and every community.

But we hope it signals our intention.

It is a national policy.

It will have a national effect - a national benefit.

The statement aims at excellence - at creating the conditions in which Australian talent can reach the highest standards and Australians can enjoy the highest standards.

No cultural policy could aim at anything less.

The statement is also concerned with access - at making our arts and heritage accessible to everyone.

We aim to do this through partnerships with State and other levels of government and through private benefaction wherever possible.

As an example of the pursuit of excellence we are creating with the Victorian Government a National Academy of Music in Melbourne.

A school of music of the highest standards for students from Australia and overseas.

With the Queensland Government we are establishing the National Indigenous Performing Arts Institute, a centre of excellence to preserve and foster Australia's unique indigenous art forms and heritage.

Here in Canberra, in association with the ACT government, the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia will be established on the Acton Peninsula on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin.

The Gallery will be co-located with new premises for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

I should here pay tribute to Rosemary Follett for her initiative and vision, and not just so far as the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia is concerned.

Here at the NGA, the ACT government will partner the Commonwealth in the construction of a purpose-built exhibition space to house major national and international exhibitions.

In the pursuit of both excellence and access to it, we will continue to develop the National Museum in ways which will enable maximum public access to the nation's cultural heritage, through a combination of touring and use of new multimedia.

New museum gateways are being developed at Old Parliament House Canberra, and Sydney Customs House.

In time I hope the National Museum will be an umbrella organisation which provides access to the holdings of all our national collecting institutions.

The National Sound and Film Archive is the repository for much of Australia's audio visual history and therefore a unique and valuable history of the evolution of 20th century Australia.

The premises which the Archives currently occupies do not provide an adequate facility from which these treasures can be viewed or heard by large numbers of visitors.

We will rectify the difficulty that the archives presently faces of a shortage of exhibition, display and laboratory space.

In Melbourne the Australian Cultural Foundation will be established to gather more effectively into the cultural development of Australia the humanities and social sciences.

To give the Foundation a firm base from which to start it will operate as part of the Australia Council, at the same time providing the Council with a Melbourne presence.

The Australia Council continues to be pivotal in the nation's artistic life and cultural development.

It has played a crucial role in our reaching the levels of excellence and wide participation in the arts we currently enjoy.

Important though it is, it cannot however continue to be merely a grant giving body.

The Commonwealth believes that the Australia Council must now spend more of its resources in audience development, creating linkages with new broadcasting technologies, market development here and abroad and in stimulating more participation in the arts from the private sector.

The Government is confident the Council is determined to take up the challenge but recognises it cannot hope to succeed without additional funds.

We want a Council which continues to do the things it presently does so well: so we are providing an increase in base Council funding of \$18 million over four years, particularly to assist individual artists.

This will also help to meet the cost of increased wage obligations caused by a recent arbitrated wage increase for actors and dancers.

But we want it to do more and that is why, among other things, we are introducing triennial funding, and a new major organisations board.

We have long recognised the need for the Council and its clients to operate in an atmosphere of stability and predictability so that they may undertake better forward planning in the same way as any other business enterprise does.

The Council has already done some preliminary work to identify organisations which will be funded through the new board, and I expect that they will be announced shortly.

The Government continues to believe adamantly in the principles of peer assessment and arms length funding so it will not be intervening in the selection process, though the Minister will be consulted.

However, it is reasonable to expect that two organisations which will become part of the MOB are the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

The ACO is an orchestra of international quality, and a world leader in its field.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra, we also believe has the potential to be one of the great international orchestras.

In keeping with other truly great orchestras, the SSO will be allowed to operate under its own local control - allowed to draw on the resources, enthusiasm and character of Sydney.

The Commonwealth will maintain its funding in real terms, but through the Major Organisations Board of the Australia Council, rather than the ABC.

The Government will also be providing additional assistance to augment the Orchestra to full international size and enable it to enhance its current touring and recording program.

By agreement, the Orchestra will also maintain facilitational and media linkages with the ABC.

We have begun with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

The way is open, however, for the other orchestras to follow if they wish.

If these initiatives are taken in the pursuit of excellence, several others announced in this policy will create access to excellence in music for many thousands of Australians.

There are extra funds provided for Musica Viva's schools program enabling it to tour Australia wide.

We are also providing extra funds for opera on tour.

In another initiative, calculated to join music to our national life, I am pleased to announce today the Commonwealth will provide a prize of \$100,000 for an original symphony to commemorate the centenary of our nationhood in the year 2001.

Film and television production constitute another great success story of our recent history.

No other medium, perhaps, offers ordinary Australians such insights and access to the national character, heritage and identity.

And no other medium carries the image of Australia so pervasively abroad.

The film and television industry is a vital resource, an essential element of the national culture.

Australians have demonstrated their desire to see more Australian product on screen, and Australian producers have amply demonstrated their capacity to deliver quality programs, provided funds are available.

Therefore, the Government will establish a special Television Production Fund providing \$20 million per annum for three years from the next financial year.

The Fund, which will be located in Melbourne, will support the production of Australian drama, children's programs, documentaries and the developing and marketing and multimedia applications.

It is aimed expressly at the quality end of the film and television market.

At least 50 per cent of the Fund will be available to independent producers, the balance will go to the networks for in-house productions.

And productions financed from this Fund will not count towards existing Australian content quota requirements.

SBS too has suffered from a shortage of production funds and has had to rely increasingly on overseas material - which does not of itself reflect the Australian multicultural community.

The Government, therefore, will provide \$13 million over four years to SBS to commission high quality Australian programs.

This will enable SBS to utilise the language skills base of contemporary Australian society and make programs for sale into Asian and European markets.

I am also pleased to announce today that after negotiations with the Commonwealth Government and subject to the settlement of some final details, The News Corporation Limited and its film production company, 20th Century Fox, have agreed to establish a movie studio in Australia to produce major international length feature films.

The establishment of the studio offers large potential benefits to Australia.

With distributional links through Fox and other world distributors, Australia can become a larger part of the world trade in entertainment, while establishing itself as a hub for content in the rapidly growing Asia-Pacific markets.

Linkages with internationally integrated multimedia companies will also help Australia become a greater participant in the burgeoning markets for content that will be carried over the world's information highways.

The planned facility will include three sophisticated sound stages equal to any in the world, with all the associated pre and post production facilities.

The studios will be available to independent Australian film makers and are expected to attract independent production companies from overseas.

The Commonwealth Government and 20th Century Fox have discussed locations for the studio in Sydney and believe the Showground site to be the most suitable - this, of course, is a matter for discussion with the NSW government.

The Commonwealth will assist with site preparation and development.

Our cultural policy directly addresses the challenges which confront Australia in realms of information technology and multimedia.

It was in recognition of these challenges that the portfolios of Communications and the Arts were combined.

The move was made to deal with the convergence of broadcasting, telecommunications, computing and creative industries and technologies.

It is true that we have in Australia one of the more advanced telecommunications networks in the world, and there has been substantial investment in our information highway.

Australians will have access to the interactive multimedia which is already changing our lives and creating extraordinary new possibilities in education, the arts and information; the way we learn; the way we do business.

In 1993 the Commonwealth established the Broadband Services Expert Group to report on the implications for Australia of developments in multimedia and broadband services.

The group nominated content as the critical issue for Australia.

Indeed Australia has the opportunity to become a world leader in the production of content.

We can, for instance, if we move rapidly, gain a significant share of the CD-ROM market.

In the longer term - though not very much longer - we can create a dynamic multimedia industry in Australia.

Our strengths in film and television, literature, music and art, in combination with our highly educated population, give us an excellent platform on which to build.

Multimedia thus creates the potential for expanding our cultural industries.

It provides new opportunities for people - especially young people - with creative talent.

So that we can take full advantage of the opportunities open to us, and guarantee that we enter the 21st century in the front rank of nations, the Government has announced in the cultural policy five specific and complementary measures costing \$84 million over a five year period.

We will establish a coordinating body known as the Australian Multimedia Enterprise; several Multimedia Development Centres; and a series of national Multimedia Forums.

We will also be commissioning CD-ROMS involving material from our major cultural institutions for Australian schools.

And we will provide specific assistance to foster our film agencies move into multimedia.

If we are to rely on talented Australians using their imagination and creativity to provide us with the content for new media, we have to ensure that they get a fair return for their efforts.

You will find in the document a range of measures that we've taken to protect the intellectual property of our content providers.

As this launch is taking place in the National Gallery, it is particularly appropriate to mention one of them - the Government will be providing \$1 million to assist with the setting up of Viscopy - a copyright collecting agency for the visual arts.

This copyright society will ensure that artists, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, whose work is particularly prone to unauthorised use, will obtain a proper financial return for the use of their work.

With the growing ability to reproduce visual images through digitised technology, an increasing source of income for our artists will be the fees collected from such reproduction.

This policy has taken some time to formulate.

That is no bad thing.

We think it will boost the quality of Australian life now and in the future.

It will boost the creative element in our national life. It will create new cultural industries.

It will mean more work and opportunities for Australian artists, writers and other creative people.

It will make us a more cohesive country.

It will enrich us for years to come.

I hope it will be seen as a landmark - a moment which we confirmed our faith in the life we have built here, and our ability to meet the challenges which the future holds.

In the preparation, many people deserve our thanks.

Not least among them was the Cultural Advisory Panel we appointed and who provided, in a sense, the kernel of the Statement.

It has grown like Topsy since but their report was an essential starting point, and I thank them for their efforts and wisdom.

I must also thank the three Ministers who preceded Michael Lee - David Simmons, Wendy Fatin and Bob McMullan.

And I must thank Michael for his contribution.

Many Australians contributed to the formulation of the policy through the submissions they made to the Government, and through their attendance at public forums.

There are many others.

Most of all I want to thank the creative artists of Australia - and I mean all of them, from the stars and the major organisations to the people in communities all over Australia who engage in works which enrich their lives and countless others.

This cultural policy of necessity has addressed some of the great questions now facing Australia.

And, by and large, that is what I have addressed in this speech today.

But you will find there is a good deal in this policy for all those engaged in the creative life of the country - a good deal I truly believe for all Australians.

With this policy we have set out to devise a better creative climate in Australia.

With it we recognise the value of creative effort and what it means to our future.

We are spending \$252 million to build the infrastructure, boost the funds, create the industries which will employ and reward creative effort.

This statement goes a long way towards bringing culture and creativity into the mainstream.

The opportunities will be there in the future. The openings will be there for talent and industry.

It will be a new environment, and one in which success will depend less on governments and more on the creative initiatives of Australians.

We will all be richer for the effort - all so much more aware of what it means to be Australian.

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