

Committee Secretariat

My name is Michelle Leonard – I am the founder and Artistic director of two nationally recognised Arts organisations – The multidisciplinary regionally based Moorambilla Voices (moorambilla.com) and the adult community choir Leichhardt Espresso Chorus (Espressochorus.com.au). In 2017 I received my OAM for services to the community and the Arts sector. I grew up in rural Australia and have committed my organisations to a journey of excellence, equity of opportunity and cultural competency since inception.

In light of this enquiry, and after much thought I now feel that it is time the framework and cultural significance that sport holds in the national consciousness is rigorously applied to the Arts ecology framework in Australia moving forward.

Acknowledging that this is a national framework of excellence that encompasses all aspects of government, community engagement from grass roots participation to Olympic elite, the maintenance and creation of venues, educational contexts, income streams, detailed journalism that supports and amplifies, acknowledges associated support specialists and associated industries for an incredible variety of “codes” then we have a model of best practice that grafted onto our pre-existing structures will create the “hybrid vigour” for a thriving Arts ecology. Moreover, the Arts sector is uniquely placed to counteract the growing effects of the loneliness pandemic our society exponentially experiencing across all demographics. Meaningful connection to people and place is what the arts ecology does best.

During COVID 19 we have nationally consumed Arts not just for cultural identity, but for health and wellbeing, selfconcept and search for human connection. Its importance to our lives as we navigate this extraordinary time in history has never been more apparent. We are an unleveraged asset, our resilience, creative problem solving and unique ability to support thriving communities should be utilised to greater effect for national benefit. Meaningful connection to a rich arts ecology is key to a thriving community and country both economically and from a mental health perspective.

When we remove even the word Arts from public documentation and seek to systematically reduce funding to platforms that support its existence we diminish our sense of self, our connection to each other and our capacity to connect as a country. It is not about sport versus culture it MUST be sport AND culture – the framework exists, it is highly successful and has every capacity to be used in the Arts to better long term effect.

I would be more than happy to make myself available to discuss this framework in greater detail if required.

Thankyou for the opportunity to make this submission

Michelle Leonard OAM