

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong concerns about, and objections to, the impending changes to the structure of Commonwealth Arts funding proposed by Senator Brandis.

At the outset - I will state that I am an artist who has not yet been fortunate enough to receive Ozco funding - and thus I'm not arguing here to protect my personal financial interests.

However, I take my lack of success in applying for Ozco funding as a measure of the fact that there are too many worthy projects to fund, and not enough \$ to fund them. An address to this problem would surely be an increase in Ozco funding, not a reduction!

As an artist, I have spent quite some time overseas - especially in Berlin, where I was lucky enough to study with the esteemed artist Olafur Eliasson. The culture surrounding support for the arts in Berlin (and Europe in general) is vastly different to that in Australia. Truth be told, Brandis' recent actions have put Australia on the international cultural radar, in that Australia has now become an object of scorn/pity amongst my European artist peers. I'm currently at a residency space in Paris - the Cité Internationale des Arts- an amazing artist residency in the heart of Paris, running since 1965, and with artists from across the globe in attendance. With the news that the Australia Council will likely be forced to sell their atelier at the Cité des Arts - there was shock amongst the other artists here. 'Well, it will probably be snapped up by Germany in a heartbeat' - commented one artist: a reflection of Germany's well-known support and encouragement of its artist community.

I'm in the unique position of having worked as a policy analyst prior to becoming an artist- and was largely responsible for coordinating a substantial grants program at NSW Health many years' ago. As such, I understand too well the administrative and logistical complexities to establishing and maintaining funding programs - from the scheduling and drawing up of criteria, to the legal and financial contractual processes, the organisation of peer reviewers and advisory councils, etc.... It takes a great deal of time, money and expertise to make grant programs happen. While Brandis is branding his new excellency scheme as not a reduction in arts funding but an alternate funding model, this claim expresses an ignorance of the money and time required to establish a fair, robust and relevant funding process. Setting up a secondary funding structure will inevitably steer money away from grants and toward administration.

I also have grave doubts about

- the impartiality of this scheme, as it appears that the recipients of large chunks of the funding have already been identified by Brandis;

- the intended direction of this scheme (why 'excellence'? Excellence can fund itself, surely!

If you're interested in growing a sector - then the support needs to be aimed at those whom are doing the growing : small to medium enterprises, independent and emerging artists);

- the manner in which the decision was made - given that its consequences are huge and far-reaching, it is shocking to think that it was made without adequate consultation of the very sector it is said to serve. This smacks of (dare I say) arrogance and a disregard for democratic process.

Given all of the above, I would urge the Government to reconsider the proposed restructure by Brandis. I know not a single artist who supports Brandis' restructure. This is not an exaggeration, and I know a great many artists. Given the the wide and uniformly negative response by the artist community to the proposed restructure, it would appear that Brandis' reforms are not in the best interest of the Australian arts community.

Please, do not allow this Budget reform measure to pass.

With sincere regards,  
Ally Bisshop