



Submission

The Australian Parliament's Northern Australia Committee inquiry into the development of Northern Australia.

March 2014

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About the Australia Council

The Australia Council for the Arts (the Australia Council) is the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body. The Australia Council's overarching guiding principle is the support of artistic excellence. This is realised through grants to artists and arts organisations, strategic initiatives, market and audience development, capacity building programs, advocacy and research. In 2012-13 the Australia Council invested over \$174.8 million in artists and arts organisations across the country.

The Australia Council is a Commonwealth statutory authority under the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* (CAC Act 1997). The Australia Council was originally established as an independent statutory authority through the *Australia Council Act 1975*. On 1 July 2013, the *Australia Council Act 2013* commenced, updating the functions of the Australia Council.

Introduction

In June 2013, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly considered the role and impact of culture on development. The context of the debate was the post-2015/Millennium Development Goals agenda. The debate included Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, United Nations Development Program Administrator (UNDP) Helen Clark and UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova. At this meeting, UN officials highlighted the need to recognise the 'vital role of culture in poverty reduction and sustainable growth'¹. This represented an important step forward in acknowledging the importance of culture and its impact on development.

Six months later, in her welcome message to the program for the World Economic Forum, Arts and Culture in Davos 2014, Hilde Schwab, Chairwoman and Co-Founder, wrote that "artists and cultural leaders push the limits, see things differently and open up systems; in doing so, they make us more open to exploring reality. The full potential of human beings lies in creativity – and this is what artists can teach us". This statement illustrates that, by virtue of their inherent value, the arts have enormous capacity to inspire innovation and growth in our communities.

It is evident that the global dialogue on culture and development has gained significant traction in recent years. There is growing recognition that the arts have a unique but integral part to play in the cultural, economic and social infrastructure of communities worldwide. The Australia Council submits that this is particularly relevant in the context of the Inquiry into the Development of Northern Australia. Artistic activity has the capacity to enhance the development of industries by attracting new residents and visitors as well as sustaining communities. Any consideration of policies for developing the parts of Australia which lie north of the Tropic of Capricorn should take into account the wide range of artistic practice and activity that already exists across the region and how this can be galvanised to support sustainable, culturally vibrant communities.

¹ 'At General Assembly debate, UN officials stress vital role of culture in development' UN New Centre, 12 June 2013.

The Australia Council is committed to supporting the arts in regional and remote Australia. In 2012–13 we invested \$21.2 million in regional arts funding (using the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia to identify regional and remote classifications for arts projects). \$5.2 million of this funding was allocated towards the National Regional Programs which provide access to the arts in regional and remote communities. It is through delivering these programs and through our funding relationships with artists and arts organisations in the ‘Top End’ that the Australia Council has gained insight into the challenges and opportunities across the region.

While acknowledging that Northern Australia is incredibly diverse and there is already a vibrant arts sector across the region, we have been able to identify common issues that limit access to the arts and inhibit the opportunities available to local artists and arts organisations. Geographical distance and a lack of infrastructure are the two central challenges. The purpose of this submission is to demonstrate that there is enormous potential for the arts in Northern Australia which, if realised, could be an important feature of the overall development of the region.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts

Northern Australia is characterised by the rich cultural diversity and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is reflected in the holistic approach taken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to the value chain used to analyse and plan activity. Land/sea, language, law, heritage and culture all precede the conventional stages of the value chain in recognition of the inherent value of these assets.

The Australia Council acknowledges that there is already a strong and diverse Indigenous arts sector across the Top End. For example, the Northern Territory is home to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA) sponsored by Telstra and supported by the Australia Council. The Award was created in 1984 by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and is an important showcase for emerging and established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. NATSIAA has come to be regarded as one of the premier national events in the Australian Indigenous art calendar.

The Australia Council’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts (ATSIA) Division works closely with a broad range of individual artists and arts organisations in the Top End to support traditional cultural and arts practices and new forms of artistic expression. The Australia Council notes the key arts organisations with significant expertise and knowledge regarding the needs and interests of Indigenous communities in Northern Australia. It is suggested that these organisations are important stakeholders in any policy considerations regarding the development of the region.

- UMI Arts, the peak Indigenous arts and cultural organisation for Far North Queensland. Governed by an all Indigenous Board of Directors, the goal of UMI Arts is to ‘strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices, including visual arts and crafts, dance, ceremony, storytelling and music. UMI Arts also operates the Cairns Indigenous

Art Centre to support Indigenous artists living and working in Cairns.

- Association of Northern Kimberley Australian Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA) represents up to 5,000 artists from 49 art and craft centres located in the Tiwi Islands and the Darwin/Katherine, Kimberley and Arnhem Land regions. ANKAAA is also governed by an all Indigenous Board of Directors. ANKAAA is one of the key organisations in the Darwin area.
- Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC) focuses on cultural maintenance through supporting the 30 Aboriginal language groups of the Kimberley. KALACC 'encourages the participation of these groups in song, story and dance, as they keep their culture strong through sharing their knowledge with people through performance and through cultural practices'.
- Yothu Yindi Foundation, created in 1990, promotes Yolngu (Indigenous people of north eastern Arnhem Land) cultural development with community leaders and persons of authority from five regional clan groups: Gumatj; Rirratjingu; Djapu; Galpu; and Wangurri. Yothu Yindi Foundation's vision is the creation of economic opportunities for Yolngu and other Indigenous Australians that can be sustained over the long term – opportunities that will develop through the use of artistic and cultural practices and, importantly, through Yolngu ownership, drive and direction.
- Nationally and internationally renowned Warmun Art Centre located 200km south of Kununurra, Western Australia is owned and managed by the Warmun artist group, an integral part of part of Gija culture and country. Leading Aboriginal artist Lena Nyadbi is a Warmun artist whose rooftop installation *Dayiwul Lirlmim (Barramundi Scales)* was installed on the rooftop of the musée du quai Branly in Paris in June 2013. This project was supported through a partnership between the Australia Council, Musée du quai Branly and the Harold Mitchell Foundation.
- Indigenous community controlled art centre Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre is located in Yirrkala, approximately 700km east of Darwin. Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre includes: the Yirrkala Art Centre representing Yolngu artists exhibiting and selling contemporary art, and the Mulka Project which archives historical images and films and acts as a digital production studio.

Cultural and social infrastructure in Northern Australia

In its latest issue of the Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts, Experimental, 2008–2009 (10 February 2014) the ABS determined that culture and creative activity is estimated to have contributed \$86.0 billion (6.9%) to Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2008–09. Culture and creative activity includes literature, visual arts, music and performing arts. While the

contribution made by artists and arts organisations to local economies is important², culture plays a far greater role than this. Of course first and foremost, there is intrinsic value in the arts and their capacity to inspire, to underline those things that are universal, to encourage reflection and to challenge our thinking beyond the day-to-day.

There is also strong evidence of health and wellbeing outcomes linked to arts programs³ and particularly on how cultural participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is associated with positive outcomes in health, education and employment⁴. The Australia Council notes that in November 2013, Federal Health Minister Peter Dutton endorsed a National Arts Framework to support a coordinated approach to arts and health. This was in acknowledgement of the benefits that can be reaped when patients and health workers engage with the arts.

In Northern Australia, the arts are interwoven with the social fabric of communities. While all artistic practice can play a role in social cohesion and wellbeing, Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) is specifically oriented towards this end. CACD involves the collaboration of professional artists and communities engaging across any art form. What differentiates CACD practice from other art practices is a dedication to the process of art making with the community. Communities are directly involved in the artistic purpose, design, and evaluation. Through our Community Partnerships section, the Australia Council supports several organisations in Northern Australia that undertake this kind of work.

- Darwin Community Arts (DCA) focuses on grassroots arts development. DCA has partnerships with non arts organisations and engages with individuals and community groups. DCA has defined its regional scope for the last six years as including the local government jurisdictions of the City of Darwin, City of Palmerston and Litchfield Shire.
- Barkly Regional Arts (BRA) operates in a vast and remote region with a population of approximately 5,400 and 13 distinct languages and cultural groups.
- BRA was established in 1996 as a networking and resource organisation in response to community needs, bringing together individuals and organisations to facilitate and promote artistic activities. The vibrant artistic exchange across the communities of the Barkly has increased opportunity for economic development, cultural maintenance and community capital. One of the initiatives of BRA is the Winanjjikari Music Centre, which opened in 2006.
- The Winanjjikari Music Centre (WMC) operates as a music production house and training centre for Indigenous musicians and music production technicians. Music is used as a tool to engage Indigenous people in a range of music programs including:

² *Developing and revitalizing Rural Communities through Arts and Culture: Australia* Kim Dunphy, Cultural Development Network, Victoria, Australia (prepared for the Creative City Network of Canada, March 2009).

³ *Art and wellbeing* Deborah Mills and Paul Brown, published by the Australia Council 2004.

⁴ *Traditional Culture and the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: an analysis of the 2008 NATSISS*, Dr A.M. Dockery, Centre for Labour Market Research, Curtin University, May 2011.

music industry skills development, music recording, music production services for events, music education in schools, music performance and presentation and supported workplace learning.

- WMC activities promote social cohesion and community building via the generation of complementary income streams, promotion of positive lifestyle choices and demonstration of intergenerational activities that transmit and celebrate traditional and contemporary music.

Measurement

There is currently no comprehensive body of work that looks at how to measure the impact of artistic activity in regional and remote areas. The Australia Council submits that there are several dimensions involved in measuring the impact of artistic activity:

- Improving the capacity of the arts and cultural sector to reflect critically (for example, the Australia Council's Artistic Vibrancy Framework which provides tools to evaluate artistic impact).
- Assisting organisations to understand and communicate the impact and the value of their activities.
- In depth studies to understand and measure the broader cultural, (as well as economic and social) impact of arts and culture across the region.

As well as contributing to the evidence base to inform policy development, the creation of tools and resources to measure the impact of artistic activity in Northern Australia would empower artists and organisations to seek funding and expand their activity.

Venues and access

Across Northern Australia, limited availability of venues for performance and exhibition spaces for Visual Arts is an ongoing issue. For example, there are approximately five venues in Northern Australia that are suitable for performing arts: in Darwin, Broome, Townsville, Cairns and Katherine. Organisations such as Artback NT (the Northern Territory's visual and performing arts touring agency) circumvent this problem by creating their own stages but not all organisations are in a position to do this. Further incentives and resources could be considered to encourage innovative ways to work around the limited cultural infrastructure in the region.

One example is the demonstrated need for resources (such as portable stages) to support a coordinated approach to regional and remote festivals in the Top End. Northern Australia is home to important Indigenous festivals which support and promote artists as well as community cultural development and cultural maintenance. An independent report prepared by RMIT University entitled *Indigenous Cultural Festivals – Evaluating Impact on Community Health and Wellbeing* (2010) highlighted the valuable impact of Indigenous festivals on community wellbeing and development as well as local economies. The report also emphasised the importance of government supporting the growth and sustainability of Indigenous festivals.

Concomitant with limited venues is the tyranny of distance across Northern Australia. Arts organisations based in the Top End face particular challenges touring within their own states and territories. This is to the detriment of both artists and audiences. Currently, the Australia Council's funding program for performing arts tours, Playing Australia, is only able to provide support for touring outside a company's resident state. Complementary funding and support could ensure that artistic activity can be shared more widely with communities in resident states. Companies that could benefit from this support include:

- Tracks Inc produces local, site-specific dance performances that celebrate the frontier of the Northern territory.
- Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, the leading centre for contemporary visual art in the Northern Territory, brokering opportunities for artists locally, nationally and internationally as well as connecting communities of artists and audiences.
- FORM operates in Perth and the Pilbara in the North West of Western Australia. Activities include exhibitions, Aboriginal cultural maintenance, research, advocacy, social and multicultural engagement.
- Art on the Move provides touring support and management expertise for the development of touring exhibitions of contemporary art across Western Australia, interstate and internationally.
- JUTE Theatre Company based in the Cairns Centre of Contemporary Arts produces five professional theatre productions a year, featuring new Australian stories and regional artists.

Leadership and capacity building

The Australia Council is aware of the difficulties faced by organisations in Northern Australia attracting and retaining executive and artistic leadership. Capacity building opportunities for artists and arts administrators are an important investment in the communities to support sustainability and renewal. Darwin Symphony Orchestra (DSO) is a primary example. DSO is made up of amateur musicians from Darwin, with the orchestra being augmented for specific programs by professional players from other states. The DSO is currently seeking ways to support a group of professional section leaders who could also undertake regional education activity as a small ensemble.

The Australia Council has found that mechanisms to support and promote the work of artists and arts organisations from Northern Australia have been highly effective. This includes initiatives that raise the profile of artists beyond the Top End, significantly enhancing their artistic growth and development. There is already a broad spectrum of work being undertaken in this area but this also illustrates the potential for further programs.

- Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF) is the only art fair in Australia to welcome commercial art galleries and Indigenous art centres to sell and showcase art by Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.
- The Australia Council's Indigenous Creative Residencies Initiative which recently supported emerging Indigenous artist Jada Alberts to undertake a 12 month residency at Belvoir in Sydney. Ms Alberts is a well respected actor, emerging writer and director from Northern Australia who has the potential to become an important creative leader in her community and in the performing arts sector. This residency will support the long term development of Ms Alberts' career.
- The Australia Council Dance Fellowship. Dancer Gary Lang is the recipient of a two year professional and creative development fellowship to work with contemporary Indigenous dance companies in Western Australia and New Zealand. Mr Lang trained at the National Aboriginal and Islander Dance School (NAISDA) and has toured nationally and internationally with some of Australia's premier dance companies. Mr Lang actively strives to maintain a strong cultural identity, acting as an ambassador for his culture through his practice.
- Australian Theatre for Young People has worked in Northern Territory including a collaboration in 2013 with Corrugated Iron Youth Arts (Darwin) which brought a showcase of work by young Darwin theatre makers to Sydney for the first time.

Artists and arts organisations outside Northern Australia

Touring activity undertaken by artists and organisations from other parts of Australia to the Top End is an important means of addressing the geographical inequity experienced by local audiences. Artists in Northern Australia can also benefit enormously from engaging with the work of Major Performing Arts Companies (MPAs)⁵ and Key Organisations⁶. In addition to this, through their education and community programs, the MPAs and Key Organisations are well placed to support artistic capacity building and development work in Northern Australia. Some examples are as follows:

- Each year, Bangarra Dance Theatre tours its main stage productions to venues in Northern Australia. Throughout these tours, Bangarra spends time 'on country' in residencies with Indigenous communities as part of the company's return to country and cultural exchange initiatives.

⁵ Funding is provided through an agreement between the federal, state and territory governments to 28 Major Performing Arts Companies who demonstrate the highest artistic standards and a sizeable audience base.

⁶ Key Organisations are multi-year funded small to medium arts organisations, recognised for their national leadership in artistic vibrancy.

- Circus Oz regularly tours to the Top End, performing in Darwin and Alice Springs as well as remote communities including Yuendumu, Coffs Harbour to Oenpelli, Palm Island, Maningrida and Warragul.
- Music and theatre company, the Black Arm Band partners with the Fred Hollows Foundation to undertake tours and work in remote and regional Indigenous communities. The Black Arm Band uses music, full scale performances and workshop programs to promote and enhance holistic community health and wellbeing.

In 2012–13 the Australia Council allocated \$5.2 million of funding towards the National Regional Programs which provide access to the arts in regional and remote communities. These programs include:

- Playing Australia which provides financial support for performing arts tours to benefit regional and remote audiences.
- Festivals Australia which assists regional and remote festivals to present quality arts projects that enhance their regular program of activities.
- Visions of Australia which supports the development and touring of public exhibitions of Australian cultural material throughout Australia with a focus on regional and remote areas.
- Contemporary Touring Initiative which supports the development and touring of exhibitions of contemporary visual arts and crafts to regional and remote locations.
- Contemporary Music Touring which assists emerging and established musicians to take their music on tour to Australia's regional and remote areas.

Generally speaking, the MPAs and Key Organisations tour to numerous regional centres. MPAs also perform in schools across regional Australia through their education programs. However, this touring activity tends to be concentrated in more accessible areas that have strong cultural infrastructure. This is demonstrated by the funding applications for Playing Australia and Visions of Australia which focus on touring to venues on the East Coast of Australia (see [Attachments A and B](#)). The Australia Council is aware that the reason for this is not the resources required to tour to Northern Australia but the *time* it takes to travel there and back. While Playing Australia and Visions of Australia cover travel and accommodation costs, these funding programs are not resourced to compensate for the loss of time incurred through touring.

New and innovative approaches, acknowledging the particular challenges in the Top End, could incentivise and support MPAs, Key Organisations and other groups of artists to undertake touring activity in Northern Australia. The Australia Council is already considering this in the context of our National Regional Programs. For instance, we have revised our approach to the government per seat subsidy (the amount of subsidy provided for each paying individual attending a performance). Funding applicants for regional and remote touring are now able to apply a weighting on the per seat subsidy to ensure a more equitable cost/benefit ratio is applied.

Online access and engagement

The Australia Council is aware that the development of online, creative interactivity is an area of growth and great potential across Australia but particularly in regional and remote locations. Numerous arts organisations are now engaging with their audiences online. The internet is also the vehicle for considerable resources and opportunities made available through the education programs run by MPAs.

One specific example is the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra (WASO) which has built a relationship over some years with Onslow Public School in the Pilbara region during the touring of its chamber ensemble program, WASO on the Road. WASO is currently proposing an expansion of its presence at the school to include ensemble visits, professional development for teachers and regular lessons by Skype.

Musica Viva provides online resources and opportunities to engage through its education program in the Pilbara and the Kimberley in WA, Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, Longreach, Mackay, Townsville, Cairns and Rockhampton/Gladstone in Queensland. The two programs delivered by Musica Viva are:

- Live Performance Plus – digital interactive student activities, online professional development for teachers.
- Musicessentials – digital resources for teachers to use in the classroom to teach music programs in their schools. This project is currently in the ‘proof of concept phase’ in Mackay, Townsville, Cairns, Katherine and Alice Springs – initial feedback has been positive. In 2014 a further 6 schools in Longreach Qld will participate.

Conclusion

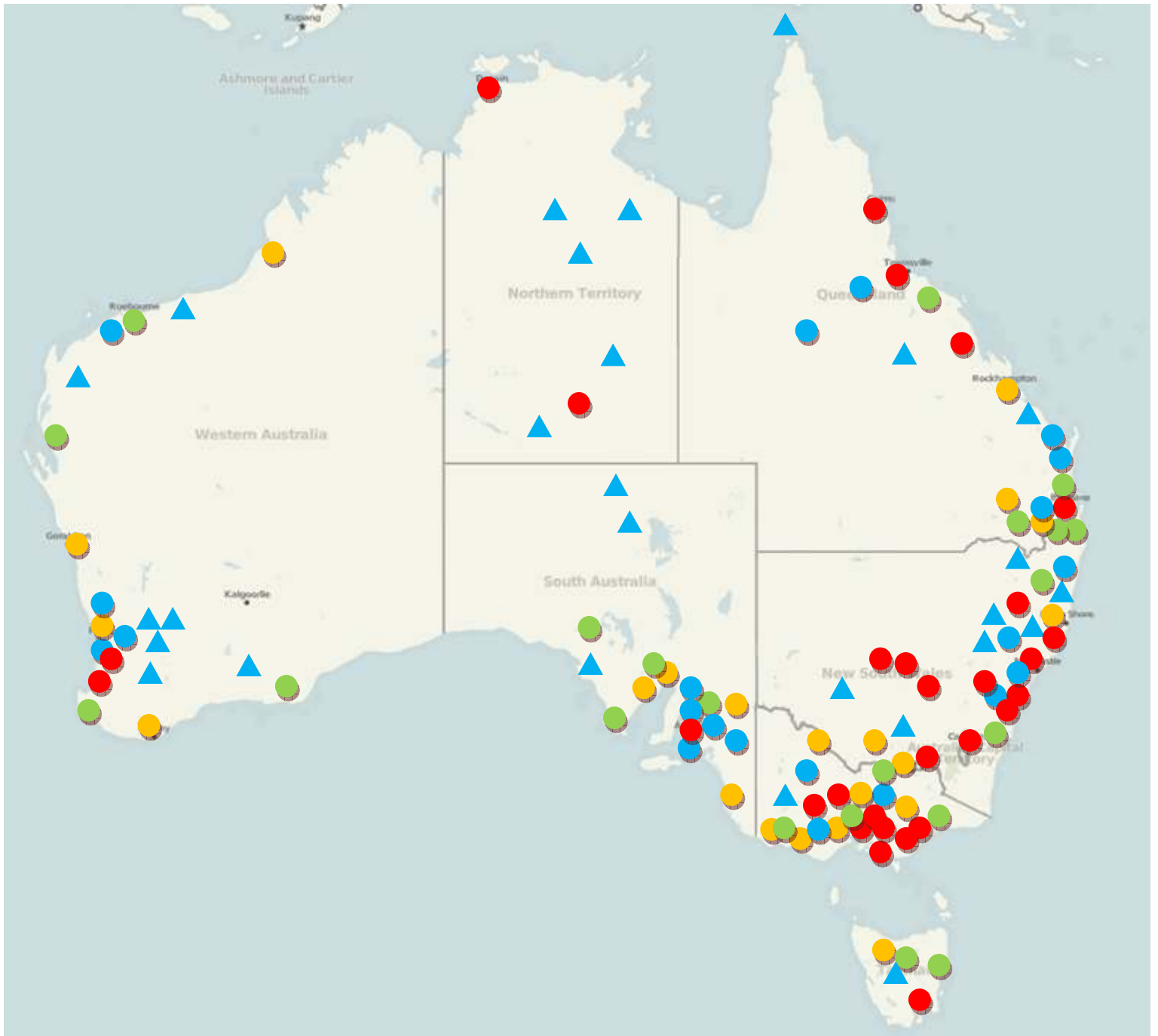
This submission is intended to provide a broad overview of the issues facing the arts sector in Northern Australia. It is clear that geography and limited capital infrastructure are the underpinning challenges. However, there is already a diverse and vibrant arts sector across the Top End. With greater coordination, targeted resources, capacity building measures and support for innovation, there is considerable scope to enhance the opportunities available to artists, arts organisations and audiences alike. In turn, the arts sector can play a unique and significant role in contributing to the development of Northern Australia. Of course the Australia Council would welcome the opportunity to provide further details on request to support the Inquiry.

Attachments

Attachment A: Heat Map, Playing Australia 2014

Attachment B: Heat Map, Visions of Australia 2014

Playing Australia: 2014 tours



Visions of Australia: 2014 tours

