

Submission: *First Nations First*

A submission to Creative Australia compiled by Ausdance QLD advocating for the interests of Cultural Dance Groups and Dancers across Queensland following in-person & online consultations in February 2024.

This consultation reflects the voices of 38 Cultural dancers/dance groups from 21 Tribes and Clans from across several Communities in Queensland:

Yuggera/Turrbul, Nunukul and Kombumeri of Yugembeh Nation with connections to the Gubbi Gubbi Nation. Wiradjuri. Muninjarli and Birri Gubba. Gureng Gureng. Githabul, Migunberri-Yugumbeh. Guugu Yimithirr. Kulkalgal/Kawrereg. Kulkalgal. Kuku Yalanji. Yidinydji/Djabugay. Yidinydji, Wagadagam and Badulgal. Babarum with connection to Kuku Yalanji and Yidinji. Wulgurukaba. Guda Maluilgal/Dhoebaw.

This consultation was made possible by Pryce Centre for Culture and Arts based in Gimuy/Cairns.

The community of Ausdance QLD acknowledges the Traditional Owners of all Lands and Countries on this continent. We recognise the continuous Culture that has existed here for over 60,000 years, ownership of and relationship with all land, sea, constellations and living beings, and the 250+ distinct languages and many tribal groups. We acknowledge the true history, the stories of the Peoples and the need to preserve and nourish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures. We pay particular respect to Elders, Cultural and Community Leaders, and emerging leaders. With this appreciation of the country's First Peoples, we are grateful for our place in learning and serving dance, Arts and Culture in Queensland.

Ausdance QLD is a non-Indigenous, non-profit association representing 1,700+ members in Queensland, with 67% in regional and remote Queensland.

Attributions for this submission should always read **"Ausdance QLD, advocating for the interests of Cultural Dance Groups and Dancers across Queensland"**. No attributions should only reflect Ausdance QLD as the originator of this feedback. This continues to be a preliminary submission; a placeholder document created to meet the advertised deadline of 29 February and subsequently a revised deadline of 15 March 2024.

We note that Creative Australia released its 172-page report from Purrumpa gathering (Oct/Nov 2022) on 13 March 2024. This report, which presumably informs current conversations, should also have been released as part of the initial consultation process.

Summary

The Traditional Owners and Individuals with Cultural Authority who participated in these forums facilitated by Ausdance QLD, were not initially invited or engaged by Creative Australia to provide input on the 'First Nations First' policy. These meetings were initiated by Ausdance QLD based on advice from its Cultural Guide, Rita Pryce (Pryce Centre for Culture and Arts), who, along with Ausdance QLD, observed that key local groups were not informed about Creative Australia's forums or their documents. Upon becoming aware of Creative Australia's forums, these groups expressed reluctance to participate due to distrust in the process. Furthermore, participants who reviewed the discussion paper before our sessions found it challenging to comprehend, despite multiple attempts to interpret it.

Ausdance QLD facilitated three conversations about the First Nations First policy. Thirty-eight people including Traditional Owners and practitioners with Cultural authority from 21 tribal groups and clans across South East, north and Far North Queensland participated in person or via online in these forums. These people represented a practicing arts/dance community of over 400 people of all ages, abilities and career stages. It included members of the deaf dance community and dancers with disabilities. An independent First Nations facilitator with no industry or family ties to participants supported free flowing conversations. These sessions were conducted in days prior to the initial February 29, 2024 deadline.

The First Nations Peoples, Cultural leaders and those with Cultural authority appointed by their Ancestors and respective Communities, are deeply concerned that Culture, Customs and Stories will be damaged or lost. They believe that the authority - Creative Australia/Australia Council for the Arts - has not adequately preserved Culture because the right Peoples have not been consulted or involved in the entire process. The preservation of First Nations Culture has not been adequately addressed and prioritised over many decades by Creative Australia/Australia Council for the Arts, despite the clear instruction at the inception of this strategy and structure.

Without proper, planned and self-determined preservation of Culture, there can be no contemporary development of First Nations works because it would not be a development based on strong Cultural foundations.

The Traditional Owners, Cultural leaders and Community have advised Ausdance QLD that they require an engaged, Culturally-appropriate consultation process which will take 1-2 years. The outcome of this process will be a fully informed, First Nations led series of recommendations for structures and processes in and out of government which comply with Cultural protocols restoring Cultural Authority to the Traditional Owners and C

"We now await Creative Australia to talk to us, in our Communities with our Traditional Owners, Cultural People and Elders on our own Countries. We urge Creative Australia to listen to those with endorsed Cultural authority above all others when co-designing new processes and structures."

Discussion Points

<p>SELF-DETERMINATION + CREATIVE AUTONOMY</p>	<p>The people who make the decisions must be the people who are leading Community IN Community.</p> <p>A central First Nations Board goes against self-determination and creative freedom. Only Traditional Owners, Elders and those with Cultural authority can truly lead self-determination. Self-governance means no one nation, person, or group has power over others.</p> <p>Traditional Owners or groups of them (in a region) should make decisions for their own Tribes, Clan groups and Countries. Self-determination means First Nations People with Cultural authority and/or Communities choose the structures, processes, who leads and how decisions are made.</p>
<p>SELF-GOVERNANCE & COMMUNITY LED</p>	<p>Whoever makes decisions and however decisions are made should be determined by the First Nations People with Cultural authority and/or Communities, not by a centralised national board appointed by a Government Minister.</p> <p>Creative Australia has an international obligation to uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples. To fulfil this obligation, Traditional Owners, Elders, and those with Cultural authority must lead self-governance in their Communities. First Nations Peoples devoted to creating, delivering, teaching, and 'showcasing First Nations works and Cultural productions' have a long history of adapting over thousands of years. They are adapting now, with minimal support, to navigate non-Indigenous bureaucratic systems. With additional funding and Culturally appropriate support, they can advance to the next stage.</p>
<p>OUR STORIES, OUR PLACES, OUR CULTURE</p>	<p>"First Nations First" means our Traditions, Lores/laws, and practices/processes come first. Right now, saving Traditional Culture should be the main focus for funding. Without strong authentic/proper Traditional Culture, contemporary arts and culture will be gammon.</p> <p>To keep our Cultures alive, we need to support Elders, people with Cultural authority, and Traditional Owners so they can pass on knowledge, dance, music, and Cultural practices to younger generations. Even contemporary re-telling of stories, or any element of Culture (eg: specific dance movement) presented through the performing arts must be endorsed by those with Cultural authority. Cultural values and stories are unique to each country.</p> <p>We need access to archives, documentation of Elders, the filming of traditions for Community to preserve and protect Culture. This will ensure the next generations of young people can continue to feel connected to Culture and who they are. Many First Nations Cultural groups lack support and resources for things like funding, performances, and managing their groups. These are important services they need. Culture connects health, music, dance, visual arts, education, theatre, science and wellbeing. Culture is a lifestyle of knowledge and understanding and should only be presented by those who live it every day. The use of Culture in the arts, must be undertaken with total Cultural integrity.</p>

Discussion Points

OPPORTUNITY AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Culturally accessible processes of funding, business training, grant-writing support is desperately needed for First Nations Cultural groups and businesses. Funding programs for the creative sector focused on social impact should promote cross-departmental collaboration, connecting health, wellbeing, child safety, employment, and training outcomes for Cultural activities.

First Nations workers in non-Indigenous businesses feel like they're helping others achieve their dreams instead of pursuing their own. They're often focused on meeting other people's goals and KPIs. We need targeted support that aligns with the requests of First Nations arts workers. Short-term, outcome-focused funding isn't effective. Instead, there should be long-term coaching and business development programs, lasting five years rather than just a few weeks.

Accessibility should work both ways. Just as First Nations people are expected to adapt to non-Indigenous ways, there should also be efforts for non-Indigenous people to adapt to First Nations ways. For example, providing translations into Indigenous languages for English language events.

Unfortunately, the government isn't effectively connecting with or listening to grassroots, Traditional Owners, Cultural, and Community Leaders. These individuals play a crucial role in shaping the futures, education, and career paths of young people. This represents a significant opportunity for Creative Australia, but there's been a failure in their consultation efforts.

In general, non-Indigenous peoples - and First Nations People who are not connected to Community - in creative workplaces often lack understanding of First Nations People, Culture, and proper respect for Community Protocols.

There's an unrealistic expectation that all First Nations individuals should be experts in their own culture or can speak for *all* First Nations People. However, due to over 250 years of colonisation and cultural destruction, this isn't possible.

Education and understanding of Culture, led and guided by those with Cultural authority, is essential across all levels and areas. This will ensure that First Nations people with strong Cultural knowledge are actively engaged and consulted.



Ausdance QLD-hosted forum,
Bulmba-ja, Cairns/Gimuy
26 February 2024

Discussion Points

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGES AND ICIP</p>	<p>“We don’t understand your protocol document. We know our own Cultural protocols. Our Countries are too diverse to articulate Cultural protocols in a single document. If we were supported in strengthening Culture, including communication of Cultural protocol requirements, there would be no issues with ICIP because people would KNOW what they could and couldn’t do.</p> <p>Those with Cultural authority in Community are the guardians of all intellectual property, including Cultural dance moves. Ensuring Traditional Owners are empowered to assert their authority and claim a breach (breaking Cultural protocol) and enforce consequence. Non-Indigenous organisations and government institutions must support this. This ensures strength and continuity/preservation of Culture.</p> <p>If there is investment and focus on strengthening ICIP at the source (as above) there will be fewer issues for both First Nations and non-Indigenous dancers/performers as they’ll understand their legal and Cultural obligations.</p> <p>None of the participants knew of Creative Australia’s protocols or ICIP documents. Protocol documents must be created by those with Cultural knowledge and authority. They must be accessible to Community (in language and Auslan). Protocols differ across the diverse Nations and this should be taken into consideration when any documents are produced.</p> <p>Accessibility means in-person conversation/yarn, led by Cultural leaders. It can’t be reliant on the internet, or assume people speak or read English. People in remote and isolated Communities often have no internet or computer access. Community will ensure accessibility to deaf and disabled people in the way that works for them.”</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">MEANINGFUL REFLECTION AND IMPACT</p>	<p>“Our measurement of meaningful impact is Cultural strength and empowered Community. It is not about numbers and dollars. We want to see our kids being proud of who they are because of who they are. Impact means our Culture and Traditions are safe, respected, celebrated and valued.</p> <p>When reflecting, we talk about reconciliation, about being properly respected and our kids being proud of who they are. We talk about the small companies, organisations and individuals who don’t have the capacity to take advantage of opportunities.</p> <p>We talk about building audiences for First Nations works which begins with greater understanding and proper ongoing community engagement with local First Nations Community.</p> <p>If Traditional Culture was funded to be properly maintained by the right people and understood by broader community, the existing Culturally unsafe processes of funding bodies and government - including bureaucracy - would be eliminated and reconciliation is possible.</p> <p>In five years - we expect, at the very least, equity. Current funding and investment is focused on quality. Equity to us means supporting Traditional Culture and grassroots arts workers to be at the same ‘starting line’ as recently established contemporary organisations (eg: strong financial support, business development, promotion and access to opportunities). If we all work to achieve equity, we may eventually ‘close the gap’. There is no equity for First Nations Peoples in 2024.”</p>

Hearing directly from those with Cultural Authority

<p>MARUN CARL FOURMILE GIMUY WALUBARA YIDINJI</p>	<p><i>“True self-determination recognises that authority, systems, and processes are the sole responsibility of the Traditional Owners, those with Cultural Authority and Elders.</i></p> <p><i>These are the only people in this country who should be making decisions about how First Nations People live, practice, teach, and perform Culture. These People are the only people with true Cultural Authority and the only people who can take responsibility for us living our Cultural values. These People are the only people with the authority to enforce customary lores in our own nations.</i></p> <p><i>To dismiss the Traditional Owners through government decision-making will result in the collapse of this continent and islands’ First Nations. With Cultural Authority restored, accountability reinstated and informed government support of Traditional Owners, we will be able to ensure Cultural protocols are upheld (this includes the western definition of ‘intellectual property’) and our People, especially our young people reconnect and respect strong Culture.</i></p> <p><i>With this authority, Traditional Owners can work with neighbouring nations or regions to appropriately determine the local needs, priorities and strategies for arts and Culture.”</i></p>
<p>SHAUN CREEK KUKU YALANJI</p>	<p><i>“As Traditional Owners, it is our absolute obligation to uphold Cultural protocols.</i></p> <p><i>We do this to ensure the preservation and continuation of our Cultures and Communities. Cultural Protocols apply to all our People, at all times past, present and future. We must have a system and structure which recognises and reinforces this authority and obligation. When the Aboriginal Arts Board was created in 1973, its purpose was to ‘stimulate Indigenous Australia arts and lead to the preservation of many art forms almost lost since the settlement of Australia by Europeans’ The first step in preserving art forms (Culture encompasses all art forms) is to preserve Cultural authority.”</i></p>

Hearing directly from those with Cultural Authority

<p>PATRICK (NAGAI) THAIDAY KULKALGAL</p>	<p><i>“You talk about what we need. About funding. What is that? For us, up in Torres Strait, this is like the last place for everything... We are the last mob to hear about all this.</i></p> <p>Culture, like brother [Carl] mentioned, it’s a very important part of our life. Everyone got a long story. I can’t describe the star up above the way that you [Carl] describe the star, the same star. That’s what Bala would say. Only em can explain what the star is and what the star do. I can explain the same star, but with my own interpretation and that’s how our stories and stuff are told to the young people. When the island people express things we just proper yarn...</p> <p>Old People. When they yarn their stories, they yarn their stories from inside. With feelings and with the story that comes out of their mouth, you can feel the touch of the spirit. To pass that on, you need the young ones to feel the same like you do when you pass that story on. But we all, all the older ones, feel strongly on this.</p> <p>Our children now today, some of them don’t know the name of the fish or animals. Culture slowly dying away inside. The questions is, what can we do? How can we fix this? What do we need? Who do we need?”</p>
<p>GAJA ROSLYN WATSON</p>	<p><i>“My experience of participating in a children’s Community dance class in Redfern last week with a respected Aboriginal colleague reminded me - in my heart - why we all do this work and why it MUST work now.</i></p> <p>I was able to glimpse the bright future we can create for our children, to give them hope, to give them breath for their imagination - as wide as the ocean and as high as the sky, so they are not left in darkness and despair without hope because we need to listen to those tiny little voices as they’re calling out to us:</p> <p><i>‘help, help, help!’.</i></p> <p>Just like 80% of the Indigenous voices that are not being heard due to egos. We must answer and respond to their cries for help. Otherwise, there will be no future. There will only be egos, untruths and emptiness in their hearts and souls and minds.”</p>

Submitted 15 March 2024