

The Hon Paul Fletcher MP  
Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

31 January 2020

Dear Minister,

On Monday the 16<sup>th</sup> of December last year, a large gathering of artists and arts workers took place at Lismore City Hall to voice their concern at your government's decision to abolish a dedicated Department of Communications and the Arts and merge it into a mega Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications. The gathering included industry professionals from film, music, literature, theatre, visual arts and radio and represented citizens from the entire Northern Rivers region. At this meeting people expressed a united despair that under your watch as Arts and Communications Minister this was allowed to take place, without adequate consultation or explanation to the tens of thousands of arts and creative industries stakeholders across Australia.

No doubt you have been contacted by other concerned artists and arts workers who have voiced their frustration. Following the meeting in Lismore, the assembled gathering agreed unanimously to add our regional voices to the deep resentment that has been sparked by this decision.

The Northern Rivers is a unique region in Australia, renowned not only for its beaches, rainforests and warm sub-tropical climate – but also for the rich and diverse creative community that live and work here. Research conducted by Arts Northern Rivers for the development of a Regional Creative Industries Strategy showed that the population of the region includes more creative practitioners than any other regional area of Australia. The Northern Rivers has a high concentration of creative professionals with a growth rate that surpasses that of other regional areas. The creative industries are one of the region's top four growth industries, particularly in the fields of visual arts, design, literature, publishing, screen and digital content. The gathering in December took place at the Lismore City Hall, home to the Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA) – one of only three NSW regionally based professional performing arts companies which is highly regarded nationally for its work that celebrates our unique regional voice and experiences.

We offer you this snapshot of the arts and creative industries in our region to explain why there has been such a vocal and concerned response to your government's decision to abandon a dedicated department for the arts. At the December meeting there was a visceral

reaction to this decision – one which reflected the deep hurt and frustration that comes when your dedicated career in the arts is treated in such a diminished way. There was little comfort in the idea put forward by you and others in your government that it would be ‘business as usual’ even though the word ‘arts’ would no longer exist in the Department’s title. Beyond the symbolic ramifications of this decision there are very real and negative consequences that the gathered group identified and wished to communicate to you:

- A devaluation of a sector that generates over \$110 billion per annum.
- The devaluation of the sector more broadly – if our Federal Government can’t demonstrate the value and importance of the sector then this is reflected to the wider Australian community.
- Continuation of the disruption to the arts sector – which has endured significant tectonic shifts in funding models (Australia Council) as well as significant cuts to many grant programs mostly affecting the small to medium arts sector.
- A foreboding sense that there will be more significant changes and cuts to come, as articulated by Esther Anatolitis – CEO National Association of the Visual Arts (NAVA) - “the move has raised the question, are there more cuts to come? Because you generally don't push through these kinds of hasty measures unless you plan to introduce more cuts”.

At the conclusion of the meeting it was resolved that we voice our concern and dismay at this decision and that we ask your government to reconsider this decision. To ensure we continue to have a vibrant, innovative and valued arts and creative industries sector it is imperative that our Federal Government reflects its commitment to its growth. We believe the removal of arts from the title of this important department sends the wrong message to the sector and the nation.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Wood  
Executive Director

**For and on behalf of**

Julian Louis, Artistic Director, Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA)

Lisa Apostolides, Artistic Director, Byron Youth Theatre

Brett Adlington, Director, Lismore Regional Gallery

Anita Bellman, Executive Director, Northern Rivers Conservatorium

Ken Crouch, CEO, Screenworks

Caroline Dunphy, Associate Artist, Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA)

Ros Derrett, Lismore Friendship Festival

Barry Hill, Southern Cross University

Keith Bale, River FM

Alex Benham, Drill Hall Theatre, Mullumbimby

Greg Aikin, Drill Hall Theatre, Mullumbimby

Claudie Frock, Lismore Regional Gallery / RED Inc.

Rene Bolton, Artist

Karma Barnes, Artist

Sarah-Jane McGrath, Studio One Art Productions

Simone O'Brien, Seed Arts Australia

Mia Green, Byron Youth Theatre

Eryn Thankray, Byron Youth Theatre

Rose Eadie, Byron Youth Theatre

Kate McDowell, Artist

Frauke Huhn, Public Act Theatre

Denise Alison, Humans of Lismore

Phil Blackman, Performance artist

Mirna BB, CASE Inc.

Kristy Jones, Marketing Manager, Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA)

Sunita Bailey, Byron Gem and Lapidary Club

Paulina Heart

Jenn Lowe

Sophia Fletcher, Musician

Tony Barry

Daniel Kellie

Guinevere Rose

Virginia Guyler

Mark Alcock

Miriam Solomon