

Australian Cultural Policy

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1. Introduction

When the then prime minister, Mr Paul Keating, launched the Commonwealth Cultural Policy on Tuesday 18 October 1994, he stated, “Our post-colonial status guaranteed that there would be a lot of questions about who we are, what level of culture we might reasonably aspire to. . . .” The genesis of governmental support for culture in Australia might have been trying to identify “who we are”.

2. Commonwealth government and cultural policies.

The thirteen years 1983 to 1996 of the Hawke and Keating Labor governments was a time when Australia and Australians were very active in discussing issues about Australia’s cultural and artistic activities. The “Creative Nation”, Keating’s cultural policy, was born under this umbrella. The Australian government’s support for culture, however, dates back to the establishment of the ABC in 1932 or even further to the Commonwealth Literature Fund in 1908. But main stream support for the art and culture had been mainly private in nature. Official involvement by the Commonwealth Government in wider arts funding commenced with the announcement by the Prime Minister Harold Holt of the establishment of the Australian Council for the Arts (ACFTA) in 1967. This developed into the Australia Council, an independent statutory authority, that was established in 1975 by an Act of Parliament. The current Howard Liberal Government cultural policy “For Art’s Sake-A Fair Go” is derived from its 1996 election paper and “Arts for Australia’s Sake” in 1998.

3. Australia Council

The Australia Council is a Commonwealth statutory authority, created under the Australia Council Act 1975, and responsible for determining priorities and providing a policy and budgetary framework for the arts. It features the “arm’s length” principle and “peer assessment” model, playing a vital role in developing new audiences for the arts and promoting the greater appreciation of the value and role of the arts in the community.

4. Conclusion

The Government support for the arts and culture, including financial support, is imperative for country with Australia’s sparse demographics. Australia regards the arts and other cultural activities as worthy industries in their own right. Cultural tourism is now often discussed. It would appear that in the Australian context, Australia’s cultural policies are practical and realistic. This paper focuses on the role and function of Australia Council as a mechanism for introducing government policy to society.