



## Media Release

18<sup>th</sup> March 2017

### **ArtsPeak welcomes return of money to Australia Council**

ArtsPeak is pleased to see the announcement over the weekend by Arts Minister Mitch Fifield that most of the funds taken from the Australia Council to establish the National Program for Excellence in the Arts in 2015 (now called the Catalyst Fund) will now be returned.

This welcome change will address sector concerns regarding a funding program that has been shown to duplicate the role of the Australia Council without the same transparency of assessment. Ninety percent of Catalyst grantees have also been funded by the Australia Council.

"After nearly two years of instability good sense has finally prevailed," said Nicole Beyer, co-convenor of Artspeak. "It's reassuring to see that Minister Fifield has acknowledged the advice of the sector and has recognised the vital importance of arms length funding and robust peer assessment. It's a resounding endorsement of recommendations from the 2015 Senate Inquiry and the #freethearts campaign more broadly".

Tamara Winikoff OAM, Artspeak's other co-convenor, says there is more work to be done to fully understand the financial details and implications of the transfer. "The Minister's release mentions the need for the Australia Council to consider increased funding for opera, ballet and the Brandenburg Orchestra. It is unclear whether this decision will result in the restoration of funding for the small to medium organisations and individual artists to 2013 levels."

"What is clear is that the Australia Council now has an increased set of responsibilities at a time when the latest round of efficiency dividend cuts will mean reduced staffing levels. Artspeak hopes that this does not impact adversely on the ability of the Council to carry out its core purpose of supporting a vibrant and highly productive arts and cultural sector," Winikoff continued.

"We hope that this decision signals a more consultative and strategic ongoing approach to arts funding," said Beyer. "This will assist the sector to increase its already substantial contribution to the creative and economic development of this country."

#### **For media comment:**

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