Item 3.3

Advancing the Cultural, Creativity and Nightlife Agenda

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

In recent weeks there have been several events focussed on continuing action to maintain, support and advance Sydney's and New South Wales' culture, creativity and nightlife. People participating in these gatherings have overwhelmingly recognised the inter-relationship of arts, culture and nightlife and their crucial contribution to tourism and the broader economy.

City of Sydney Councillors and staff attended each of these events:

- The launch of the NSW Productivity and Equality Commission's report, Review of regulatory barriers impeding a vibrant 24-hour economy on 9 September 2025, which was subject of an earlier Lord Mayoral Minute.
- The Art of Tax Reform Summit, held at Sydney Opera House on 25 September 2025.
- Arts, Culture and Sydney's Future, an event co-hosted by Business Sydney and Sydney Festival on 20 October, 2025 which explored the role of arts and culture in Sydney's economic growth, global brand and liveability.
- The third annual NEON Forum, the Flagship event of the Office NSW 24-Hour Economy Commissioner. Held over 2 days (26 and 27 October 2025), the Forum brought together local and international placemaking and night-time economy experts, venue operators, arts organisations, local government representatives and others with an interest in supporting and building our nightlife. The first NSW Night Worker Action Plan 2025- 2028 was also launched at the Forum.

These gatherings were not mere talkfests. They each provided new ideas for action by all levels of Government working in partnership with the cultural and creative community and our vibrant nightlife sector.

Art of Tax Reform Summit

This Summit was informed by over 300 submissions from artists and creative workers, arts and cultural organisations, peak bodies and tax professionals resulting in over 80 ideas. These included proposals to increase philanthropic support for not-for-profit cultural organisations, investment in live theatre, music venues and other cultural activities, expansion of available affordable creative space, improving artists' incomes and sustaining and strengthening the cultural and creative sectors, many of which were further explored during the Summit. This was only the beginning of a process to improve the financing of culture and creativity in Australia.

In his speech to the Summit, Federal Arts Minister Tony Burke committed to considering tax reform in the next iteration of the national cultural policy due in 2028. Consultation for this policy will begin in early 2026. The Summit was also attended by Arts Ministers from NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. At the end of the Summit, they issued a joint communique in which they committed to making co-ordinated submissions to the National Cultural Policy highlighting the ideas emerging from the Summit.

Potential to increase tax revenue

Achieving tax reform will not be easy. A paper summarising the submissions identified challenges in designing and implementing such reform. These included the potential adverse fiscal impact of new or expanded tax concessions. Yet this impact could be positive.

A submission by Live Performance argued that a 40% tax incentive, similar to those which exist for the film industry, could return $1.26 in tax revenue for every dollar in tax foregone. Another submission quoted modelling by Oxford Economics which found that tax incentives for music venues and live music activities could add $486 million to the national economy and support 4,151 new jobs, resulting in increased tax revenues.

Yet the potential tax for arts and cultural activities to generate revenues through a range of taxes are not normally considered in the budget process. Nor are the revenues are derived from the external economic impacts of arts, cultural and creative activities, such as taxes paid by hospitality, visitor accommodation, transport/travel, merchandise and other businesses.

It is time that Governments consider both sides of the ledger– both revenue foregone and the potential to generate additional revenue, along with budget savings resulting from the positive impacts of cultural activity on health, wellbeing, education and community life.

Retaining existing cultural infrastructure

Tax reform must not be a substitute for public funding. Indeed, new approaches to cultural funding are needed in addition to the current focus on grants to organisations, projects and programs. In an increasingly competitive environment, several organisations have lost their funding or received insufficient funding to support their activities. Others have had their funding reduced. This is already threatening the potential loss of medium to long term closure of vital cultural infrastructure which these organisations manage. These potential losses highlight the need for a new funding stream to sustain existing small to medium cultural infrastructure, especially spaces that offer affordable access for creatives.

New revenue measure needed

Public funding, augmented by tax measures to increase philanthropy and investment may not be sufficient to meet the needs of the arts and cultural sector. New revenue raising measures may be needed, with these revenues specifically directed towards the arts and culture.

The City's submission to the Summit pointed out that many countries and cities impose a tourism tax to raise revenue for investment in the visitor experience – including arts and culture. These include New York, Athens, Barcelona and Edinburgh, Manchester and Liverpool in the United Kingdom. The UK Cultural Policy Unit has published a detailed paper proposing a national levy in the form of a small charge would be imposed on visitor accommodation room rates, particularly higher end visitor accommodation. The paper argues the resulting slight increase in price would not adversely impact overall tourism, but would be provide additional investment in tourist related cultural facilities and events. This would free up cultural funding which could be redirected to increase support for creatives and the small-to-medium sector. The potential increase in cultural tourism would also lead to increased tax revenues.

Greater transparency of existing cultural funding

Any discussion on cultural funding requires an understanding of existing public funding. At present this information is scattered through annual reports, Ministerial media releases, answers to questions on notice and questions asked in budget estimates committees and is often subject to a time lag. Other information, such as public funding of cultural festivals by Destination NSW, is "commercial in confidence".

This information should be brought together and made easily accessible. The reasons for insisting that information is "commercial in confidence" should be fully explained.

NEON Forum

The NEON Forum brought together policymakers, industry leaders, venue operators, creatives and local and international experts. Over its 2 days, the Forum covered issues including city planning to support nightlife, ensuring safety at night and in workplaces, particularly for women and gender diverse people, actions to unlock creative spaces and the NSW Government's vibrancy reforms. The 24-Hour Economy Commissioner, Mike Rodrigues also had conversations with the Sydney Metro CEO, Peter Regan, the NSW Productivity and Equality Commissioner, Peter Achterstraat and the new Police Commissioner, Mal Lanyon.

Mr Regan explained that the 4 obstacles to 24-hour public transport were cost, logistics, including integrating transport modes, maintenance and upgrades. He also acknowledged that New Year's Eve demonstrated it is possible. Peter Achterstraat revealed that the Commission had examined the impacts of the Enmore Road Special Entertainment Precinct (SEP), revealing that property values had increased by $1300/sqm, with a third of this attributable to the introduction of the SEP. Mal Lanyon said he supported the NSW Government's vibrancy reforms and was committed to their implementation. He subsequently met Jeff Garcia, a former New York police officer who headed the New York Mayor's Office of Nightlife. In this role, Mr Garcia had introduced new policies and procedures to improve relationships between the police and venue owners. Mr Garcia will be providing details to NSW Police.

City staff attended many of these sessions and will draw on the information they gained to build on our own work to support Sydney's nightlife.

NSW Night Worker Action Plan 2025-2028

The Forum also saw the launch of the NSW Night Worker Action Plan 2025-2028, prepared by the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner's Office (the Office). This workforce comprises 1.27 million people working between 6pm and 6am across NSW, almost 29% of the total workforce. There are 72,895 night workers within the Sydney CBD alone.

The Action Plan identifies 5 priorities to be addressed:

- economic insecurity
- physical and mental wellbeing
- access to essential services, childcare, transport and amenities
- safety and security (physical and sexual violence)
- recognition of and advocacy related to night work

The Plan contains 25 actions to address these priorities, including developing resources to support night workers, making public space safe at night and undertaking research to better understand the needs of the night workforce. Many of these actions complement work the City is already undertaking. The City already participates in the Office’s working groups which contributed to the Plan.

For example, one action requires exploring opportunities to establish "gig worker hubs". These are dedicated spaces where workers such as food delivery riders and ride share drivers can rest, charge devices, access basic amenities and connect with multicultural worker networks. Gig workers are amongst the lowest paid and have the least economic security. Many of them also work within the City of Sydney and neighbouring local government areas.

The City is able to advise on areas with the greatest need for a gig worker hub as well as facilitate engagement with food delivery companies and riders.

The Plan's transport-related actions are less ambitious. It proposes "exploring utilisation of existing infrastructure and potential public-private partnerships to expand car park access" and "Investigate tailored transport solutions that can fill service gaps where fixed-route transport is limited". The Government should go much further and implement the Productivity and Equality Commission's recommendations to improve frequency of and access to public transport at night, as well as trialling later public transport services especially on weekends and in high-activity areas, as endorsed by Council on 22 September 2025.

Notwithstanding this, Council should welcome the NSW Night Worker Action Plan and play a role in implementing it.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

(A) Council commend the NSW Government for hosting the Art of Tax Reform Summit on 25 September 2025, attended by The Commonwealth, NSW, Victorian, South Australian and Western Australian Arts Ministers, the Lord Mayor, the City of Sydney Chief Executive Officer, relevant government officials, tax experts, cultural organisation representatives and arts practitioners, noting that this Summit is the beginning of a process to improve the financing of culture and creativity in Australia;

(B) Council commend the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner for hosting the third annual NEON Forum;

(C) Council welcome the NSW Night Worker Action Plan 2025-2028, notwithstanding its less than ambitious actions relating to late night transport;

(D) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Prime Minister, the NSW Premier and relevant Commonwealth and NSW Ministers requesting they each take action on the matters which fall within their portfolios as set out in the subject Minute; and

(E) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:

  (i) work with all interested parties to ensure that the optimism and momentum for action on cultural financing arising from the Art of Tax Reform Summit is maintained;

  (ii) contribute to future consultation processes including advocating on the matters raised in the subject Minute, such as the Commonwealth Government's forthcoming consultation for the next iteration of its Cultural Policy and updating Council via the CEO Update with draft submissions for Councillor feedback prior to finalisation;

  (iii) investigate the extent to which the City is able to assist in implementing the NSW Night Worker Action Plan 2025-2028 actions, including continuing to work with the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner, and engaging with the Migrant Workers Hub, Study NSW and Transport for NSW to explore establishing a gig worker hub within or close to the Sydney CBD; and

  (iv) keep Council updated on action on all of these matters via the CEO Update.

THE RT HON CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor of Sydney