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5 February 2016

The Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP
Chair, Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: communications.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Chair,

Inquiry into broadcasting, online content and live production to rural and regional Australia

Live Performance Australia (LPA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment in support of the vital importance of public and commercial live productions to the communities of rural and regional Australia.

LPA is the peak body for Australia's live performance industry. Established in 1917 and registered as an employers' organisation under the *Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009*, LPA has over 400 Members nationally. We represent commercial producers, music promoters, major performing arts companies, small to medium companies, independent producers, major performing arts centres, metropolitan and regional venues, commercial theatres, stadiums and arenas, arts festivals, music festivals, and service providers such as ticketing companies and technical suppliers. Our membership spans from small-medium and not-for-profit organisations to large commercial entities.

LPA has a clear mandate to advocate for and support policy decisions that benefit the sustainability and growth of the live performance industry in Australia. We have provided detailed commentary on the importance of live performance to rural and regional Australia in our submission attached, including an Executive Summary (p.2).

Should you have any queries regarding our submission, or would like to discuss these issues further, please do not hesitate to contact LPA at any time.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "K Tran", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Kim Tran
Director, Policy & Programs

E ktran@liveperformance.com.au

LPA Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts

Inquiry into broadcasting, online content and live production to rural and regional Australia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Importance of live production

LPA believes live production is important for the social and economic fabric of rural and regional Australia, and there needs to be the right settings to support live productions of all art forms.

There are several reasons why access to and participation in live production are important for regional and rural Australia:

- Live productions are important for stimulating economic activity in rural and regional communities. Economic activity is generated when audiences attend live productions, whether they be locally produced or touring productions. Live productions also help attract tourists to rural and regional communities, thus spurring economic activity for local businesses (i.e. hospitality and accommodation) in these areas.
- Live productions provide career development and job opportunities for rural and regional residents. They provide opportunities for local professionals to develop and broaden their skills, particularly when touring companies engage with the local community and workforce to present the show.
- Live productions provide opportunities to bring local communities together and help alleviate feelings of isolation. Live production also provides a mechanism to engage young people, disadvantaged groups and minority groups so that they can share their experiences and take pride in their cultural background. Literature suggests that there is a positive link between community connectedness and engagement, and health, wellbeing and education outcomes.
- Live productions contribute to the livability and vibrancy of rural and regional communities, making these locations more attractive to visit or live.

Barriers to live production in regional and rural Australia

There are a number of barriers to touring and presenting live productions in rural and regional Australia. These barriers include:

- **Venue infrastructure:** The ability for live productions to tour regional and rural Australia is constrained by the capacity of venue infrastructure. While there are many areas in regional and rural Australia that are fortunate to have performing arts infrastructure, unfortunately many are unable to accommodate large scale productions. Productions that tour regional and rural Australia are often scaled back (in terms of cast and crew numbers, and set design) to work within available venue infrastructure. While regional and rural audiences would like to see live

productions of the same quality as on the mainstage, venue constraints mean this is simply not possible.

- **Cost:** The costs to tour productions in regional and rural areas are extremely high. There are costs associated with accommodation, per diems, weekly salaries, payment of more non-performing travel and rest days, freight and transportation. The vast distances that productions need to travel also compounds the problem.
- **Limited capacity for revenue generation:** The capacity of venues in regional and rural areas is generally smaller than metropolitan venues. In addition, residents in rural and regional Australia generally have lower incomes levels than those living in metropolitan areas and therefore have lower disposable income to spend on live entertainment. These factors combined make it difficult to recoup the costs associated with presenting productions in regional and rural areas.

Given these barriers, it is unviable for many organisations to bring live productions to regional and rural Australia, unless support and/or incentives are provided to address the barriers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

LPA believes that the Department of Communications and the Arts needs to lead the development of a **Regional and Rural Australia Live Productions Access and Engagement Strategy**. The strategy needs to focus on improving regional and rural Australian access to a diverse range of quality live productions, as well as participation in live productions (through employment, community engagement, volunteering or as an audience member). The strategy would provide a framework for government funding and support for live production in regional and rural Australia. The strategy needs to be informed by consultation with the live performance industry.

The development of a strategy should consider the following ideas for overcoming the barriers to producing and touring live performances for regional and rural Australia:

Improving Access

- i). Increase the level of funding available for domestic touring through the Playing Australia fund, and at the very least should be indexed annually in line with the consumer price index.
- ii). Provide funding support to venues to program more live performances.
- iii). Provide adequate funding support to both subsidised and commercial producers and promoters for touring.
- iv). Explore the option of a regional industrial award to make productions more commercially viable.
- v). Provide funding support for touring on a regular and consistent touring circuit that adequately covers all regional and rural locations.
- vi). Provide funding for live performances that tour to smaller regional and rural locations.
- vii). Explore digital options for expanding access, such as cinema screenings and live simulcasting of live performances.
- viii). Subsidise the cost of admission to live performance events in regional and rural areas to encourage attendance.

- Subsidise a bus fare scheme or bus service run by local councils that provides an affordable option for transport to the regional venues.

Improving Engagement

- i). Review the funding conditions of 'Playing Australia' to find ways that it can support local business during tours, such as funding the reconstruction of sets at its destination using local staff rather than only supporting the transport of sets.
- ii). Investment in skills development and training for local venues and presenters in programming, marketing, fundraising, and other related artistic administrator skills.
- iii). Invest in research around audience development in regional and rural areas.
- iv). Provide support for developing locally-produced and collaborative community works, as well as skills development and training for local talent, both creative and technical.
- v). Provide grant assistance for community engagement initiatives and collaboration with local arts industry that is appropriate for their genre and presentation needs.
- vi). Supporting and funding cultural exchanges by professionals in the live performance industry to regional and rural Australia to conduct workshops, create work with young people, and engage with the community live performance scene, and vice versa for regional professionals to engage audiences in major cities with their work and experiences.

Inquiry into broadcasting, online content and live production to rural and regional Australia

LPA SUBMISSION

1. INTRODUCTION

Live Performance Australia (LPA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the importance of both public and commercial live production to the communities of rural and regional Australia.

LPA's submission is informed by feedback received from a number of LPA Members, from the commercial sector and those that receive government funding, including performing arts companies, venues, producers, promoters and festivals. This includes but is not limited to all genres of the live performance industry including comedy, opera, musical theatre, theatre, contemporary music, classical music, dance and circus.

Our Members have provided feedback based on their experiences working in rural and regional areas, either as a regional organisation or having conducted tours and community engagement activities across rural and regional Australia.

2. IMPORTANCE OF LIVE PERFORMANCE TO RURAL AND REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

Rural and regional Australia experience an improved quality of life through live performance that is especially important in today's climate of economic uncertainty.

There is a wide range of evidence that shows the public value of live performance to communities and individuals. Access to and participation in the arts benefits the economy, employment, social cohesion, health, education and the cultural fabric of communities.¹

¹ For example, refer to: Australia Council for the Arts (May 2014). *Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts*. <<http://www.austliacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/research/arts-in-daily-life-australian-5432524d0f2f0.pdf>>; Deasy, R. (2002). *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*. <<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/ERIC-ED466413/pdf/ERIC-ED466413.pdf>>; Ewing, R. (2010). *The Arts and Australian Education: Realising Potential*. *Australian Education Review*, no. 58. Australian Council for Educational Research. <<http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=aer>>; Fiske, E. (1999). *Champions of Change, the Impact of the Arts on Learning*. <<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/champions/pdfs/ChampsReport.pdf>>; Live Performance Australia (24 February 2014). *Size and Scope of the Live Performance Industry in 2012*. Ernst & Young <<http://reports.liveperformance.com.au/size-scope-2012/pdf/LPA-Size-Scope-2012-Full.pdf>>; Various authors (2012). *Counting New Beans*. (C.Lord, Ed.) San Francisco: Theatre Bay Area.



More specific to this Inquiry, significant research and studies have been conducted that show how live performance supports the cultural, social and economic development of regional and rural communities.²

Access to cultural product such as live performance is especially important to regional and rural communities. They face particular challenges that stem from isolation and disconnection from cities, creating an insular and alienated environment for these communities. This tyranny of distance can have a negative impact on health, well-being, and employment outcomes for regional and rural communities.

Industries that are central to rural and regional districts such as mining and manufacturing are facing a substantial decline as our global economic landscape continues to evolve. The Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) Chief Executive, Professor the Hon. Stephen Martin, stated that their major research report for 2015 shows that it is highly likely parts of rural and regional Australia will experience job losses being over 60 per cent in the next 10-15 years.³

An economic downturn in rural and regional areas can be challenging, with negative flow on effects seeping into all aspects of individual, family, and community life. Spurring innovation and creativity, such as through providing access to diverse and vibrant live productions across Australia's rural and regional communities, is especially important in today's climate as these communities prepare for economic changes that will alter the fabric of their societies not just economically, but in health, education, employment, culture and social welfare.⁴

LPA's submission shows how access to and engagement with live performance can increase positive outcomes in various capacities in rural and regional Australia to sustain an overall quality of life.

² For example, refer to: Dunphy, K. (March 2009). *Developing and Revitalizing Rural Communities Through Arts and Creativity: Australia*. Prepared for the Creative City Network of Canada. <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/downloads/RuralCommunities_KimDunphy.pdf>; Rentschler, R. (2015). *Stats and Stories: The Impact of the Arts in Regional Australia*. <<http://regionalarts.com.au/publications>>.

³ Quote found in: Committee for Economic Development of Australia (June 2015b). Media release: *More than five million Aussie jobs gone in 10 to 15 years*. <<http://www.ceda.com.au/2015/06/16/five-million-Aussie-jobs-gone-in-10-to-15-years>>; Report referred to: Committee for Economic Development of Australia (June 2015a). *Australia's future workforce?* <http://adminpanel.ceda.com.au/FOLDERS/Service/Files/Documents/26792-Futureworkforce_June2015.pdf>.

⁴ Keller, J. W. (2000). *The Importance of Rural Development in the 21st Century - Persistence, Sustainability, and Futures*. First National Conference on the Future of Australia's Country Towns. Bendigo, Australia.

Local Economy and Small Business

Live performances boost local economies in rural and regional Australia.

Rural and regional communities can no longer rely on traditional industries, such as manufacturing and mining, to sustain their local economies as a significant number of jobs in these sectors are expected to permanently disappear.⁵ As acknowledged by the Federal Government⁶, Australia needs to be innovative and creative, relying less on the unsteady resource and manufacturing sectors. Rural and regional communities are at risk of being disadvantaged if they do not receive the necessary support to innovatively and creatively adapt to the changing economic landscape so as to sustain and revitalise their communities.⁷

The local economy is shown to be advanced by engaging the creative live performance industry across several sectors.⁸ Live productions, whether produced locally or touring from outside the locale, spur local economic activity. This includes touring companies injecting capital into local small businesses, increased use of local venue infrastructure and transport, and increased attendance at local restaurants, bars, shops and other 'sidewalk' small businesses.

Additionally, tourists are attracted to unique cultural activities that can be experienced in rural and regional areas year-round.⁹ More tourists result in more capital invested in local businesses and greater exposure both domestically and internationally of the region's unique cultural experiences, with the cyclical effect of attracting more tourists that contribute to the local economy further.

As a funded professional regional organisation, we generate 60% of our income from sources outside the local region, and we make our best efforts to work with local suppliers, with 80% of our expenditure spent locally in 2014. In short, for every dollar our theatre receives locally, we bring in another \$1.66, making a significant contribution to our local economy.

(Tahni Froudust, General Manager of HotHouse Theatre)

For the eight days of 2015 that the 'Falls Music and Arts Festival' and 'Splendour in the Grass Festival' operated the total economic output measured was \$107.8 million. Byron Shire accounted for \$28.1 million of the total economic output or 26%.

(North Byron Parklands: Economic Impact and Benefits 2015)¹⁰

⁵ Committee for Economic Development of Australia (June 2015a). *Australia's future workforce?*

<http://adminpanel.ceda.com.au/FOLDERS/Service/Files/Documents/26792-Futureworkforce_June2015.pdf>.

⁶ Commonwealth of Australia (2015). National Innovation & Science Agenda. <<http://www.innovation.gov.au/system/files/case-study/National%20Innovation%20and%20Science%20Agenda%20-%20Report.pdf>>.

⁷ Smiles, R. (December 2006). *Cultural Development in Rural and Remote Areas*. Prepared for the International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies.

<http://sic.conaculta.gob.mx/centrodoc_documentos/199.pdf>.

⁸ Dunphy, K. (March 2009). *Developing and Revitalizing Rural Communities Through Arts and Creativity: Australia*. Prepared for the Creative City Network of Canada. <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/downloads/RuralCommunities_KimDunphy.pdf>, p.3-5

⁹ Reinfrank, A. (28 January 2016). 'Music festivals put regional towns on the map, Groovin The Moo promoter says' in *ABC News*.

<<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-28/music-festivals-putting-regional-towns-on-the-map/7120518>>.

¹⁰ RPS Australia East. (2015). *North Byron Parklands: Economic Impact and Benefits 2015*. Prepared for North Byron Parklands.



Jobs and Career Opportunities

Skills development and employment opportunities are created by the production and presentation of live performances in rural and regional Australia.

The lack of skills development and employment opportunities is a consistent problem for regional and rural communities. Young people in rural and regional Australia are at risk of being at a substantial disadvantage in the quality of creative and technical skills training and jobs available. In times of economic decline, young talent and professionals feel the pressure to leave and seek employment in major cities due to minimal opportunities at home. This results in the flight of skilled and talented individuals from their communities, which in turn diminishes the development of communities and deprives individuals of the opportunity to sustain themselves in their hometowns.

Career developments and job opportunities are created both by locally-produced work and touring productions that engage a local workforce.¹¹ Employment opportunities are created in a range of areas including but not limited to creative artists, technical crew, venue staff, and arts administration. The development of skills and networking opportunities for local professionals is nurtured through increasing exposure to and collaboration with touring companies or organisations from other regions.

The creation of work opportunities through increased local and touring productions can both encourage professionals to remain and develop their careers locally, or choose to pursue options abroad and then return back to their community with the innovative skills they have developed and contribute to the further creative development of their hometowns.

Whenever we work in a rural community, the participants and audience get excited by what is possible. They get to hear people sing in a way they didn't think was possible. It can (and has) stimulated people to strive for something different. One of our leading Young Artists is a product of this sort of exposure.

(Timothy Sexton, CEO of State Opera Company of South Australia)

¹¹ Dunphy, K. (March 2009). *Developing and Revitalizing Rural Communities Through Arts and Creativity: Australia*. Prepared for the Creative City Network of Canada. <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/downloads/RuralCommunities_KimDunphy.pdf>, p.4-5.

Health and Education

Positive health and education outcomes are enhanced by engagement with diverse live performances.

People living in rural and regional communities are more susceptible to health and education issues because their geography limits access to health and education resources and services.¹² For example, young people with limited options and those working in unstable industries or harsh conditions in rural and regional areas can be susceptible to developing mental health issues¹³, due to encroaching feelings of alienation, confinement, and stress. The lack of engaging educational opportunities available in comparison to major cities means there are limited avenues for students to be emotionally and mentally stimulated, which can result in the stifling of ambition and drive amongst students.

Professional live performance groups from within the community and touring companies from outside the area engage and stimulate excitement from people within the community, which assists maintain a healthy and active community. Young people disconnected from the rest of Australia by distance discover new opportunities in life and are driven to broaden their horizons through exposure to professional live performances and their community engagement programs. For example, the Melbourne International Comedy Festival 'Class Clowns' development program for youth students involves professional comedians running comedy workshops in schools and performing arts venues that encourage self-esteem, confidence, presentation and writing skills. Phunktional, a Melbourne based arts company that creates art with and for youth communities across Australia, has released an evaluation report outlining the positive effects their long-term youth engagement project in Mildura has had, particularly in improving social and educational outcomes for the participants.¹⁴

Education and outreach programs that are often free accompany live productions in rural and regional Australia. These programs provide opportunities for social and community interaction that can help to alleviate the circumstances that make the development of mental health issues more likely such as isolation, lack of employment, or insufficient opportunities¹⁵.

¹² Commonwealth of Australia (2008). *Mental Health in Rural and Remote Communities*. <http://www.responseability.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/4796/Mental-Health-in-Rural-and-Remote-Communities.pdf>, and; Rentschler, R. (2015). *Stats and Stories: The Impact of the Arts in Regional Australia*. <<http://regionalarts.com.au/publications>>.

¹³ Commonwealth of Australia (2008). *Mental Health in Rural and Remote Communities*. <http://www.responseability.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/4796/Mental-Health-in-Rural-and-Remote-Communities.pdf>.

¹⁴ Laurie, R. (November 2014). *Calling the Shots: Evaluation Report*. Prepared for Phunktional Limited.

¹⁵ Commonwealth of Australia (2008). *Mental Health in Rural and Remote Communities*. <http://www.responseability.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/4796/Mental-Health-in-Rural-and-Remote-Communities.pdf>.

Social and Cultural Diversity

Live productions provide enriching experiences to people from diverse social groups, experiences and backgrounds.

Rural and regional communities are made up of people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Minority groups and individuals from diverse backgrounds, whether this be based on sexuality, ethnicity, religion, age or any other factor, are more likely to be affected by feelings of alienation and segregation from the wider community. The small and isolating nature of regional and rural areas means there are fewer opportunities for people to connect and share in diverse cultural and social experiences. These cultural and social experiences are important for maintaining social well-being and health for those that are feeling isolated. It is important for diverse social groups to feel included as accepted members of the community and to encourage social cohesion and avoid discrimination.

Tours of diverse live performances across regional and rural Australia provide people with social and cultural experiences that engender a sense of inclusion and identity within the community.¹⁶ Live performance is a cultural medium experienced together as a group of attendees, in which audiences are exposed to experiences and stories that relate to their own. This can range from indigenous theatre productions, traditional dance performances from specific cultures, or even comedic performances that audiences of different backgrounds can relate to. Community engagement and development programs that live performance companies deliver provide an important outlet for different groups in society to connect and flourish.

I have been touring mainly Irish acts through many venues across rural Australia for the past 35 years. The success of these was obvious in the way that the Irish community came out to support the various artists and by doing so made their own communal fabric stronger and more substantial. The understanding of how deep our Irish history and roots are, how the children, mothers and fathers in these audiences were able to see like-minded people in their communities I felt was invaluable. Their pride was obvious. I imagine this would be the same for any of the many other nationalities that make up our population. I also toured Wogs out of Work through the same network and observed the joy and cultural release from the stereotypes they had been shackled with. A real chance to laugh at themselves with the rest of their community.

For many their first time ever to their community arts centres.

(Marc Wilkinson, CEO of SHOWPRO P/L)

¹⁶ Dunphy, K. (March 2009). *Developing and Revitalizing Rural Communities Through Arts and Creativity: Australia*. Prepared for the Creative City Network of Canada. <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/downloads/RuralCommunities_KimDunphy.pdf>, p.7-8, and; Rentschler, R. (2015). *Stats and Stories: The Impact of the Arts in Regional Australia*. <<http://regionalarts.com.au/publications>>.

Community Engagement and Cohesion

Live productions inspire community engagement and harmony in rural and regional Australia.

In rural and regional settings there are limited opportunities for communities to actively experience and create cultural events together. This limits the ability for communities to build a sense of identity and pride in the character and offerings of their community. Sharing stories through live experiences are an integral means for developing empathy towards others, encouraging understanding and building strong cohesive unified communities.

Live productions involve the community in a shared and interactive experience that encourages bonding between individuals and families, inspires civic engagement, strengthens shared social values, and promotes understanding.¹⁷ Community engagement initiatives delivered as part of live performances can create new channels of communication within and between communities, breaking down the sense of isolation and bridging the divide between regional and rural communities and people in other locations, including major cities. Live productions can also provide communities with a shared outlet of escape and sense of purpose from the often harsh realities of living in regional and rural Australia.

In 2006/07 I toured throughout regional NSW with the Sydney Opera House 'Babies Proms'. In Cootamundra, the locals dragged us into an old tin shed they were converting into a theatre. I asked why a bunch of farmers would be voluntarily donating their time and resources to the construction of a performing arts venue. The response was simple: "Because it hasn't rained in 5 years and they're too scared to look outside".

(Liz Young, Production Manager of Performing Lines)

Locally-produced works tell local stories that can be shared with the community, as well as with other external communities and audiences. When local stories are valued both within and outside the community, this creates a sense of pride and belonging. There is value in collaboration between regional companies, as every community can benefit from cultural exchange and learning from the practice and experiences of others.

Touring productions from major cities take care to ensure the community is involved in their production. There are many examples of this, one being Opera Australia's regional tours which engage a local children's choir to be part of the production in each of the communities of the tour. This activates local teachers, parents and community members, and makes the show more relevant and endearing to rural and regional audiences.

¹⁷ Dunphy, K. (March 2009). *Developing and Revitalizing Rural Communities Through Arts and Creativity: Australia*. Prepared for the Creative City Network of Canada. <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/downloads/RuralCommunities_KimDunphy.pdf>.



Liveability and Leisure

Live performance provides engaging and joyful leisure and social experiences.

Rural and regional communities have limited leisure options, most of which are dominated by sporting activities or activities that are enjoyed as individuals and not requiring interaction with other members of the community, such as television and online entertainment.

The presentation of live performances in a wide range of genres and styles exposes regional and rural communities to enjoyable entertainment through a medium that they do not have everyday access to, and has to be experienced together as a group within a community audience. Access to quality family entertainment also encourages people to raise their families in regional and rural locations, which enhances the livability of communities through increased economic activity and expansion.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF A DIVERSE BREADTH OF LIVE PRODUCTIONS

Regional and rural audiences have a right to be enriched by a diverse and vibrant breadth of live productions across the various sectors, styles, and genres.

As evidenced, access to and engagement with live performance increases the positive outcomes of several elements that contribute to the quality of life. For live productions to effectively and holistically contribute to the quality of life in regional and rural Australia, it is important that a diverse and vibrant range of productions are presented.

All types of live performance have an important and unique role to play in supporting quality of life outcomes in rural and regional Australia. Each aspect of the live performance value chain should be supported with the necessary means to enrich Australia's rural and regional communities. For example, both government supported performing arts companies and commercial productions are important in providing various options for connecting to and enjoying the benefits of live performance.

In this same vein, communities should experience both their own locally-produced live performances that tell the stories of their own community, as well as be exposed to productions from outside their region that explore different genres, cultures and ideas. Regional and rural communities should have the opportunity to enjoy a wide range of styles, from high art forms to new contemporary experiences and everything in between, to provide communities with a wealth of quality experiences.

4. GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

The current level of funding support does not adequately support live performance organisations to present live productions in regional and rural Australia.

In the 2014-15 the Australia Council of the Arts provided \$28.9 million in funding to arts investment in regional Australia.¹⁸ This is equivalent to \$4.24 spent per capita for Australia's regional and rural population. In comparison, \$9.40 was spent per capita on Australia's metropolitan population.¹⁹ The regional programs funded by the Australia Council and Federal Government that support live performance include:

- *Playing Australia*, which provides grants to producers to tour regional Australia (\$6.2m in 2014-15)
- *Contemporary Music Touring* fund (\$0.4m in 2014-15), which provides grants to emerging contemporary music artists to tour regionally
- *Regional Arts Fund* (\$1.98 in 2015)
- *Festivals Australia* (\$1.5m in 2014-15), and
- the recently initiated *Catalyst* program administered by the Department of Communication and the Arts.^{20, 21}

Despite the critical role these programs play in connecting regional audiences with live performances, funding for these programs has decreased in recent years. Taking into account the increasing rise in production and touring costs, a decline in funding is counter-intuitive and represents a significant productivity constraint, causing many potential touring companies to disengage with the process. With each passing year as the costs of touring increase and level of support declines, significantly fewer tours can be funded.

Federal funding programs provide essential assistance to improve access to and engagement with the arts in rural and regional Australia. However, funding for the performing arts in regional areas has declined in real terms. Additionally, the decline in funding for small to medium performing arts companies, which do the majority of regional touring and local regional production, has inevitably led to many of these organisations descaling their regional touring programs due to budget constraints.

The current funding model does not adequately support all the diverse organisations that interdependently work within the dynamic live performance ecosystem for the purpose of providing a holistic live performance experience to regional and rural Australia. Further support is needed to

¹⁸ Australia Council for the Arts (August 2015). *Annual Report 2014-15*. <<http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/news/australia-council-annual-report-2014-15.pdf>>, p.17.

¹⁹ Calculated based on statistics from: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014). *Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2012-13*. <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/3218.0-2012-13-Main+Features-Main+Features?OpenDocument>>.

²⁰ Australia Council for the Arts (August 2015). *Annual Report 2014-15*. <<http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/news/australia-council-annual-report-2014-15.pdf>>, p.62

²¹ *Ibid*.

overcome the barriers in presenting and touring live productions to improve regional and rural access to diverse and vibrant live performances.

5. BARRIERS TO LIVE PERFORMANCE IN REGIONAL AND RURAL AUSTRALIA

Barriers to presenting live performances in regional and rural Australia have become more prohibitive in recent years.

The barriers to presenting and touring in rural and regional have increased in recent years, which has resulted in a decrease in live performance activity in these areas and have contributed to the decline in attendance. In 2013, 69% of Australians in major cities attended a music event, and 41% attended a theatre or dance event, whereas 51% of regional and rural Australians attended a music event and 36% attended a theatre or dance show.²² In 2009, 32% of regional Australians attended a theatre or dance event.²³ This decline can be explained by less live productions being presented and less disposable income available for regional and rural residents to spend on leisure and the arts.

The cost of producing, presenting, and touring live performances is a primary barrier to providing an active live performance program in rural and regional Australia. High costs make commercial tours unviable, limit the ability of subsidised companies to tour, and restrict the ability of local venues to program and present works both from within and outside their communities. Currently both local venues and producers are taking a loss on presenting live performances in regional and rural Australia that is not sustainable in the long-term.

We are faced with a number of challenges in rural and regional Australia and sadly have scaled back our operations in these areas of the past few years, to a point that we are currently only visiting major regional centres like Newcastle and Canberra. Influencing factors include:

- a) Costs of providing high quality entertainment*
- b) Distances to travel between cities*
- c) High costs of hiring performance venues*
- d) Sparsity of population*
- e) Less disposable income in the regions*
- f) Quality of our product vs ticket price*
- g) High ticketing fees at regional venues*

²² Australia Council for the Arts (2015a). *Arts Nation: An Overview of Australian Arts*. <<http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/arts-nation-final-27-feb-54f5f492882da.pdf>>, p.13.

²³ Australia Council for the Arts (2015b). *Arts Nation: An Overview of Australian Arts – Technical Appendix*. 2015 Edition. <<http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/arts-nation-final-27-feb-54f5f492882da.pdf>>, p.15.



h) Quality of local equipment and experience of local crews

Ten years ago our company toured 'Dorothy the Dinosaur's Dance Party' on behalf of The Wiggles, to more than 100 regional locations around Australia. By 2010-11 our shows had outgrown the halls and community centres, as we took shows like 'Dora the Explorer Live!' and 'Sesame Street Presents Elmo's World Tour' to professional theatres in more than 30 regional locations. Last year our 'Octonauts Live!' show toured 15 regional markets

This year, only about half of our shows will make it to the larger regional cities of Newcastle, Canberra, Gold Coast, and Geelong.

As we tour some of the world's most recognised children's brands, we feel it is important to localise content where possible. For example, in our 'Octonauts Live!' show, the storyline revolved around a mission to save the Great Barrier Reef. Although we were able to tour the show to some regional locations, it wasn't viable to tour any further north than Rockhampton, much to the disappointment of young Octonauts fans and families who lived on or near the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland.

As a company we receive more incentives to tour our shows internationally than inside Australia. Cutting back on regional touring costs Australian jobs, from cast and crew, to writer, director, choreographer and producer.

(Fred Porter, Life Like Touring)

Venues

The high cost of venue maintenance and programming has restricted the ability of local venues to present a full and diverse program of live performances.

All levels of government have supported the build of live performance venues in recent years across a number of regional and rural locations. However, currently the average utilisation rates for these regional and rural performance spaces are low. While investment has been made in building the venues, not enough investment has been made in supporting product to be presented in these venues. This has resulted in many regional and rural tax-payer funded and purpose-built performance venues being empty for significant parts of the year.

The ability of regional and rural venues to program live productions is hindered by their limited capacity to accommodate shows of a larger size with more staging requirements, such as opera and musical theatre, and as a result are limited in the types of shows they can program. Venues can enter into a range of different presentation agreements with live production companies, ranging from simply hiring out space for a fee, to paying the production company to present works in their venue, as well as agreeing to split the risk and box office. Many venues have to increasingly rely on hiring out the venue rather than curating and acquiring product, or even presenting movies rather than staging live performances as a more affordable means of operation.

Most of the programming in regional and rural venues is of productions from government supported organisations, which may become increasingly less affordable to venues, as government supported organisations are forced to increase the fees for presenting their shows due to budget constraints. It is difficult for these venues to curate or present, particularly new locally-produced shows, as many venues do not have the staffing expertise to professionally curate, present and market work.

The low capacity rate and sporadic presentation of live performances, whether locally-produced or toured from outside the region, hinder communities' access to and engagement with live performance. The consistent presentation of live productions builds a local following for live performance, without which the local public is not given an opportunity to develop consistent attendance and engagement. The lack of balance between commercial tours, locally-produced shows, and productions by government supported organisations from outside the region impacts on the diversity and vibrancy on offer for rural and regional Australians.



Producers

The unviable cost of touring and presenting live productions, compounded with a decrease in funding support has resulted in the continuing decline of live performances in regional and rural Australia.

The tyranny of distance, limited capacity of venues, and smaller population size are permanent hurdles that have always made regional and rural presenting and touring of all types of live productions a challenge. The auxiliary costs of touring across vast distances for long stretches of time are extremely high. This includes costs such as accommodation, per diems, weekly salaries, payment of more non-performing travel and rest days, freight and transportation. The impact of the extra cost of touring is further compounded by the inability to generate the same return that can be generated in major cities. Patrons in regional and rural areas have lower average income levels and hence less disposable income for arts and entertainment, and cannot afford the same ticket prices that can be charged in major cities.

The cost of touring a production far outweighs the limited capacity to generate revenue from rural and regional touring. This represents a market failure for regional and rural touring, which results in the need for government intervention through adequate funding support that incentivises regional touring. The negative effects of funding cuts to relevant programs, increased production costs, and declining disposable income available for regional and rural residents under economic hardships, have exacerbated the challenges for touring live productions in regional and rural Australia, especially to smaller regional centres.

Small to medium performing arts companies bring a large proportion of live productions to regional and rural Australia. However, due to recent government funding cuts, these companies have been forced to scale back activity in regional and rural Australia. Local regional companies are limited by the high cost of producing professional works in regional areas, both in scale and number. Regional live performance companies have limited access to corporate support and private donations, and as such are reliant on government support to operate.

Government funding for regional and rural live performance is primarily focused on touring and to a lesser extent local production. However, there is an increasing need to provide funding support for marketing, community engagement, and audience development initiatives. While funding for touring and production activities support access to live performances, this must be complemented by efforts to encourage members of local communities to attend and become involved for the value of live performance in these communities to be fully realised.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee should recommend that a Regional and Rural Australia Live Productions Access and Engagement Strategy be developed by the Department of Communications and the Arts, in consultation with the live performance industry.

There are a number of means by which the value of live performance improving quality of life and community in regional and rural Australia can be sustained. This requires a multi-faceted and holistic approach to provide funding, support and guidance that includes all the diverse and interdependent contributors to the live performance sector, and encourages collaboration and cohesion between diverse organisations and individuals in the broad sphere of live performance.

LPA recommends that the development of a Live Productions Access and Engagement Strategy for regional and rural Australia, informed by extensive consultation with the broad and dynamic spectrum of the live performance industry, should provide the framework for funding support and other initiatives that are targeted at producing outputs and outcomes that best nurture a diverse and vibrant live performance environment throughout Australia's regional and rural locations. The development of this strategy may be a component of a broader framework for encouraging access to and engagement with the arts and entertainment industry.

The development of a strategy should consider the following ideas for overcoming the barriers to producing and touring live performances for regional and rural Australia:

Improving Access

- i). Increase the level of funding available for domestic touring through the Playing Australia fund, and at the very least should be indexed annually in line with the consumer price index.
- ii). Provide funding support to venues to program more live performances.
- iii). Provide adequate funding support to both government assisted and commercial producers and promoters for touring.
- iv). Explore the option of a regional industrial award to make productions more commercially viable.
- v). Provide funding support for touring on a regular and consistent touring circuit that adequately covers all regional and rural locations.
- vi). Provide funding for live performances that tour to smaller regional and rural locations.
- vii). Explore digital options for expanding access, such as cinema screenings and live simulcasting of live performances.
- viii). Subsidise the cost of admission to live performance events in regional and rural areas to encourage attendance.
- ix). Subsidise a bus fare scheme or bus service run by local councils that provides an affordable option for transport to the regional venues.



Improving Engagement

- i). Review the funding conditions of 'Playing Australia' to find ways that it can support local business during tours, such as funding the reconstruction of sets at its destination using local staff rather than only supporting the transport of sets.
- ii). Investment in skills development and training for local venues and presenters in programming, marketing, fundraising, and other related artistic administrator skills.
- iii). Invest in research around audience development in regional and rural areas.
- iv). Provide support for developing locally-produced and collaborative community works, as well as skills development and training for local talent, both creative and technical.
- v). Provide grant assistance for community engagement initiatives and collaboration with local arts industry that is appropriate for their genre and presentation needs.
- vi). Supporting and funding cultural exchanges by professionals in the live performance industry to regional and rural Australia to conduct workshops, create work with young people, and engage with the community live performance scene, and vice versa for regional professionals to engage audiences in major cities with their work and experiences.

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