

By Email : legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

17 July 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts

Western Melbourne Tourism Inc (WMT) is an association incorporated for the purposes of promoting and developing the tourism sector within the western metropolitan region, embracing the municipal boundaries of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham councils. WMT is overseen by an independent board comprising representation from five of the above six western metropolitan partner councils (excl Maribyrnong) as well as the local arts sector, Parks Victoria, Victoria University and other sector representation from the tourism industry in the region.

Currently approximately 4 million people visit Melbourne's west annually and the outlook for future growth of the visitor sector for the region is very positive.

WMT has a strong strategic interest in the profile and supporting the development of a stronger visitor economy for Melbourne's west, including its arts and cultural attractions. The WMT board is committed to working together with its key stakeholders to enable an increase in recognition and greater contribution of such attractions to the region's economy.

It is also seeking to ensure potential visitors are aware of the unique aspects of the region that make Melbourne's west a compelling place to visit, and this interest converts to visitation growth.

The emergence of the vibrant arts sector and other associated creative industries in the west is one of the beacons of opportunity for this part of Melbourne. The visitor benefits are very strong, but at the same time, the arts and culture sector also represents a major source of energy, vitality and community cohesion within the region itself.

We wish to voice our strong concerns about the impacts of the proposed reappropriation of funds from the Australia Council and the revised model of funding proposed.

Terms of Reference

We understand the following matters have been referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report:

- (a) *the impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts; and*
- (b) *the suitability and appropriateness of the establishment of a National Programme for Excellence in the Arts, to be administered by the Ministry for the Arts, with particular reference to:*
- i. the effect on funding arrangements for:*
 - A. small to medium arts organisations,*
 - B. individual artists,*
 - C. young and emerging artists,*
 - D. the Australia Council,*
 - E. private sector funding of the arts, and*
 - F. state and territory programs of support to the arts,*
 - ii. protection of freedom of artistic expression and prevention of political influence,*
 - iii. access to a diversity of quality arts and cultural experiences,*
 - iv. the funding criteria and implementation processes to be applied to the program,*
 - v. implications of any duplication of administration and resourcing, and*
 - vii. any related matter.*

We have had limited notice to assemble a response to this review and will not seek to respond to each of the specific terms of reference in detail. Notwithstanding, in broader terms the following submissions are offered for this inquiry:

The scope of impact on the arts and cultural sector in Melbourne's west will be significant

The arts and cultural sector in this region is comprised of small to medium sized arts organisations, independent artists, artist run initiatives and local government program delivery. There are no major performing arts organisations in Melbourne's west.

Organisations most negatively impacted by the funding changes announced include:

- 100 Story Building
- Big West Festival
- Footscray Community Arts Centre
- cohealth arts generator
- Snuff Puppets
- The Substation
- Western Edge Youth Arts
- Womens Circus
- Incinerator Gallery
- Woods Street Arts Space

Beyond this list there are a range of other arts and cultural programming (eg apart from the list above organised by Councils or other community based organisations) that engages a range of other arts organisations of similar role and purpose based *outside* the region to audiences *within* the region itself likely to be similarly affected.

For Melbourne's west these proposed arts funding changes will threaten the viability of over 4,500 arts, cultural and engagement activities, including festivals, workshops, performances, programmes, cultural and artistic exchanges and leadership opportunities in the region. These individuals and organisations provide arts and cultural services to over 200,000 people annually.

Many of these are small organisations or independent artists, in some cases experimental, representing essence of innovation and fostering of new artistic talent - leading the development of the innovation and a fresh new expression of the arts for this region. Isn't it the role of government to support the ecology of such emerging talent?

The proposed funding changes will undermine an emerging strength of the region

This artistic/ cultural development has been integral to the reframing of Melbourne's west and the positive positioning it offers for its further development.

The region would be severely penalised if the focus of arts funding was treated more conservatively and redirected to larger established institutions. These types of venues are not located in the region and there would be a significant misalignment with the large community of productive local artists and performers based in Melbourne west.

The arts sector offers a significantly engaging urban experience, and Melbourne's west is nationally recognised as one of Australia's leading urban arts development hubs.

This urban culture is providing very significant economic benefits in bringing visitors to region experiencing a rich calendar of arts events and city activations, exhibitions, public sculpture art installations and performance.

Our local arts and cultural organisations are also a significant source of development and opportunity for the less advantaged. Not just providing an important outlet for expression, these entities also offer associated new employment, innovation and skill development. The local creative sector is growing and contributing significant social and community benefit. It is doing this at a time when the region faces substantial employment challenges, such as with the closure of the automotive sector and other traditional manufacturing. The development of the arts as part of the visitor economy is a key element in the positive transition of the local economy. It is offering the local region a very positive growth story. This trend is expected to be heavily undermined by the proposed Commonwealth Arts funding changes.

The arts and cultural development is allied to the shifting population dynamics of the city, particularly the geo-cultural landscape across metropolitan areas. While once the inner and central region of Melbourne was a focus of multi-cultural diversity, much of this diversity is now focused in the west, such as the large ethnic concentrations of Vietnamese in St Albans or Sunshine, or Horn of Africa communities in Flemington and Footscray. The region's population is forecast to grow by 32% in the next ten years and there are 130 different cultural groups and 150 languages represented in the region. The local arts and cultural programs are a vital outlet for expression of the multi-cultural character of the community of the region.

We ask the Inquiry to listen and understand how the current regime of funding provided by the Australia Council has worked and brought significant benefit to the development of the arts and cultural sector in Melbourne's west, and how it is also making a major contribution to arts and cultural story both at the State and National level. The proposed cuts will significantly inhibit the positive trajectory of growth many have worked so hard to achieve.

If you would like to contact me to elaborate further on these submissions I am available on 0417 545141 or email richard@melbourneswest.com.au. We also welcome the opportunity to present directly to the inquiry, or invite you to inspect our region and witness first hand the strength of the local arts / cultural sector.

WMT greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide input to this inquiry. We look forward to receiving further information as the inquiry progresses.

Yours sincerely

Richard Ponsford
Executive Officer
Western Melbourne Tourism Inc

cc.

Hon Mark Dreyfus QC, MP, Shadow Minister for the Arts
Hon Bill Shorten MP, Member for Maribyrnong
Mr Tim Watts MP, Member for Gellibrand
Ms Joanne Ryan MP, Member for Lalor
Hon Brendan O' Connor, Member for Gorton
Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP, Member for Calwell
Mr Adam Bandt MP, Member for Melbourne

WMT Chair & Board Members