

Submission  
No 59

INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND  
CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY  
CBD

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# HotHouse

• T H E A T R E •

28 August 2008

The Committee Manager  
Public Works Committee  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

RECEIVED  
02/09/08

Dear Ms Watson

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Public Works Committee on the development of arts and cultural infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD.

HotHouse Theatre is the leading regional theatre company in Australia and is uniquely located in Albury-Wodonga to make comment and comparison on NSW and Victorian cultural infrastructure issues.

In response to your call for submissions we'd ask the committee to note the following points:

## 1. Issues of public and private funding and allocation of resources

- Access to state government small capital grants has not been readily accessible within the regional volunteer performing arts circuit, especially when volunteer groups need to find local matching funds to deliver the outcomes.
- Taking into account the economic impact of drought in regional areas, local councils are struggling to upkeep their community halls (often used for arts and cultural purposes) and councils require assistance from state government to support facility upgrades. As a corollary, competition for financial support in drought affected areas means that arts and culture are not priorities. We are finding people cannot be seen to support the arts when there are farmers in need.
- Guidelines for philanthropic support often do not provide access to money for capital upgrades – many halls rely on volunteer support and in kind sponsorship to facilitate upkeep.

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## **2. Suitability of public infrastructure for arts and cultural life**

- HotHouse Theatre is currently required to tour with more equipment in NSW than in Victoria due to the standard of the volunteer halls in NSW. Many halls in remote areas do not have basic requirements (e.g. access to 3 phase power and backstage toilets and running water). This has a major impact on sustaining a viable touring circuit for performing arts producers.
- The increased requirement for OH&S compliance and insurance has left many producers with no option but to only tour to professional venues with regular upkeep. This means smaller townships are missing out. Providing volunteer committees with support to maintain OH&S standards would assist in encouraging producers to regularly tour to smaller regional centres.
- Improved broadband and mobile phone access would assist producers in presenting in remote communities. It would also assist in offering satellite programming (e.g. live cross from the Sydney Opera House to Bathurst) as an alternative, making arts and culture accessible and affordable to all.

## **3. The desirability of locating cultural facilities in close proximity to create hubs**

- As a general principle it is a good idea to locate cultural facilities in regional centres in close proximity to one another. However, careful planning needs to underpin this process. Too often we see existing non-purpose built facilities co-opted for arts use that are not entirely suited to the intended purposes.
- The notion of hubs should also be extended to encompass the idea of a host town sharing resources with satellite/neighbour communities. Together they could develop audiences in the region through cooperative marketing and technical training initiatives. For example, the host town could purchase a show for a week and provide the technical equipment and staffing to the volunteer towns in the region (thus creating a mini touring circuit). This model is currently successfully deployed in Victoria.

## **4. Accessibility of cultural and arts education**

- This is a particular problem in regional NSW. Without the presence of sustained professional arts practice and/or a dynamic touring circuit in regional areas it is very difficult for educational institutions to provide a cultural and arts education grounded in practical example. A better infrastructure for touring the performing arts would increase student access to the arts, assist teachers, and enhance the opportunity for lifelong learning within regional communities.

- A better touring infrastructure could also assist in the offer of competency-based training initiatives for young people interested in careers in arts and events and could be run by either volunteer committees, nearby performing arts centres or local councils in partnership with TAFE. This would also address a skills shortage in regional areas and assist performing arts centres to retain staff.

## **5. Economic impacts on communities**

Interestingly, the Federal Government is currently looking at issues of drought and climate change through economic, scientific and social lenses. While we note the committee's request for comment on the economic impact here we strongly believe this cannot and should not be divorced from consideration of the social impact. At a time of drought we know a primary value of arts and culture is to provide a crucial social structure for connection among communities experiencing heightened isolation, the fragmentation of social services and increased financial hardship. This connection cannot happen without a viable arts and cultural infrastructure in place.

## **6. The adequacy of the NSW State Plan and desirability of a cultural plan for the state to maximise diversity of access, with reference to the Tourism Masterplan and other relevant planning strategies**

The emphasis on participation (E8) in the NSW State Plan as the primary way to measure and interpret arts development and activity in NSW is not an adequate reflection of the way arts and culture impacts on the social and economic fabric of NSW. In our view NSW urgently needs to develop a cultural plan and is lagging behind most other states and territories in this regard.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to comment. We wish you well with your deliberations and look forward to hearing the outcome in due course.

Yours sincerely



Bernadette Haldane  
General Manager