

Public Accountability Committee

NSW Government's Management of the COVID-19 pandemic

Questions On Notice – 7 October 2020

QUESTION – Support for live music venues

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Point of order: I am not trying to quibble at the important questions, and I think they should be asked. I am just trying to clarify what the question actually is. Are you looking for the Minister to undertake to provide clarification on those venues?

The CHAIR: We are coming to that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

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Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes. I encourage you—because I am on the Committee to open up the economy as much as I can, so I am on your side. There is a constant tension between us and Health. I encourage you to raise this with Minister Hazzard and I wish you all the best, because I want to open up the economy—

The CHAIR: You are not allowed to disclose what goes on in Cabinet, Minister.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I wish you all the best, because I want to open up the economy—but in a COVID-safe way.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think, to defend Minister Hazzard's role, there is no way Health would be experts in this licensing. It is so complex. It is that interaction that is really providing this problem.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Mr Graham, with respect, they might not be licensing experts but they are health experts.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Public health experts.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Public health experts. Every decision is actually a public health decision. The difference between, say, the City Recital Hall and some of the venues—there is a qualitative difference. That is why I believe the public health order was formed in the way it was. I accept, therefore, that that is going to be a problem for those people who perform in those venues. It is important that they, as far as they can, prepare a COVID safe operating plan and take it to Health—just like Live Performance Australia did for venues such as the City Recital Hall, Belvoir Theatre et cetera. That is the process. Would you like to comment at all on that or have we got it covered, Ms Foy?

Ms FOY: Only to say that there is a corollary with some of the work that we have been doing with the live performances. It is a coordinated effort to understand and try and help those companies in the event of reopening. We are not in the space of licensed venues but are happy to take any information and provide it back to the Ministers.

ANSWER:

I am advised that pubs and clubs fall under different NSW Health and NSW Government guidelines to the Entertainment Venues that were the subject of the change to the PHO allowing for 50% seated capacity. This decision is enacted by NSW Health.

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QUESTION – Arts funding rounds during COVID pandemic

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The evidence that I have heard—there was evidence in particular from the audiovisual people in terms of artists that many freelancers are falling through the cracks, and they do not have those ABNs. I assume that Create NSW would be lobbied by artists who are falling through the cracks during this pandemic?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: We are certainly well aware that there are some people who do not have ABNs. To the extent that they—obviously, that is a problem in terms of JobKeeper. I would say that all of our existing arts and culture funding programs are still being operated right now. In fact, we are and have been looking at beefing up the project rounds, which are exactly what those sorts of performers, musicians and artists that you are talking about access. They are their bread and butter in years outside of COVID.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Can I just get some clarity around what "beefing up" means? When you say "beefing up"—because this is in the context of thousands of people.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I do not have the figures, but I am happy to provide them to you on notice.

ANSWER:

In March 2020 Create NSW provided a support package of over \$6 million for the sector in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included \$650,000 in small grants that went to individuals, small groups and arts organisations across the State. In the competitive rounds that were announced in June 2020, \$1.9 million was announced in Project funding including \$570k to 29 individual artists.

QUESTION – Extended opening hours for Cultural Institutions

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister Harwin, we have heard about the efforts of the outdoor dining task force to really open up the city, particularly coming into summer in the evenings so that people can enjoy it. I wanted to ask you about the efforts that you may be making as the arts Minister to open up our cultural institutions. The Art Gallery of New South Wales closes at five o'clock. The refurbished Hyde Park Barracks is only open a couple of days a week and it closes at five o'clock as well. Even the State Library of NSW is only open until eight o'clock. Have you got plans to maybe start the Art After Hours program again at the Art Gallery? What are we doing to bring people into the city to those major cultural institutions?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I think I might take the question on notice, because I am not happy with the detail I have in front of me. I would rather give you a complete answer than a partial one. We will get back to you as quickly as we can.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is it something that you are looking at?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Absolutely, but I do not feel confident I can give you a complete answer and I would rather do that.

ANSWER:

The NSW Government is working to explore extended opening hours with the NSW Cultural Institutions during the summer months.