



Time running out for the government to save the arts sector

PAC Australia says government funding must come now to save the arts sector. The call comes further to the Meeting of Cultural Ministers yesterday which failed to make an assistance package available.

PAC Australia Executive Director Katherine Connor said, “Arts organisations are major employers and drivers of their local economies. Many performing arts centres across the country are now considering whether they will be forced to close permanently, which will have devastating impacts not only on the sector, but also for the communities they serve. Companies are having to make difficult decisions about their ongoing viability right now and the government needs to respond accordingly. Time is simply running out.”

“We urge the government to follow the lead of other countries like New Zealand, Canada and the UK who have swiftly implemented financial support to protect the arts sector. We ask the government to adopt the comprehensive emergency industry support plan presented by Live Performance Australia at the meeting of Cultural Ministers yesterday.”

PAC Australia’s call, alongside Live Performance Australia and other industry groups, is for a range of immediate emergency support and ongoing recovery assistance measures including:

- Provide greater national clarity around the projected timeframe for the public health response to coronavirus, including when venues and companies can anticipate preparing to resume operations
- Expedite immediate access to income support for industry participants who have lost employment or income due to venue or event closures, including casual workers and sole traders
- Funding to assist in the continued support for casual and contract staff in the form of wages or financial assistance
- Extend all current government funding arrangements for the next 12 months to minimise disruption to existing companies
- Provide a cash injection to the performing arts sector to enable them to meet cash and reserve shortfalls that will confront them in the next three months
- Provide additional funding to the Australia Council to fund all organisations that were assessed as worthy of funding in the four-year funding review process
- Repurpose and bring forward the allocated \$22 million Live Music package to be spent over the next 12 months
- Direct budget support for the duration of this financial year for all live performance businesses impacted by event and venue closures to enable continuity of their operations and employment levels throughout the shutdown period and to ensure viability for recovery in future
- Provide additional funding to Support Act to provide crisis support to the sector
- New funding to enable performances to be delivered through innovative online or digital platforms

Over 26 million tickets were sold to a live performance in Australia last year – more than the combined attendance at all of Australia’s major sporting codes including the AFL, NRL, cricket and basketball. These 26 million attendances provide significant impact to local economies by supporting the hospitality sector, event suppliers, and many other service providers.

In 2019, PAC Australia’s membership of 130+ venues presented over 64,000 arts events in regions throughout the country and spent over \$313 million in labour costs alone. These organisations directly contribute to local economies through a further \$21.6 million in expenditure to local suppliers and over \$32 million in direct expenditure on food and beverage.

Arts centres also rely on income from non-arts events, which represent an additional 16,000 events every year just for PAC Australia members. This loss in revenue will have dire impact on the future capacity for these performing arts centres to re-open their doors, employ their local workforce and present the arts in the future.

“Just as importantly, performing arts centres expend over \$44 million each year in programming local and touring work. For the many producing companies who benefit from this expenditure, touring is the lifeblood of their company, allowing them to continue to operate, and employ artists, crew and support staff. Without immediate financial support, even if venues can stay open, there is a real risk they won’t be able to pay for these performances into the future, effectively shutting down performing arts touring in Australia,” Ms Connor said.

PAC Australia acknowledges and congratulates the ACT, Queensland and Victorian governments who have already activated to support the arts industry.

Performing Arts Connections Australia is the national peak body representing and supporting performing arts presenters and creators in Australia by providing leadership, building capacity and facilitating relationships that strengthen the connection between the art and the audience. Our 220+ members include arts centres, independent producers and producing companies with representation from remote and regional towns, to major capital cities across Australia.