

26 APRIL 2024

The House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts
Australia Government
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Phone: [+61 2 6277 4386](tel:+61262774386)
communications.reps@aph.gov.au

Submission to the House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Communication and the Arts

Dear Mr Brian Mitchell MP, Chair of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this House of Representatives inquiry into the Australian sustainability and growth in the Australian music industry.
Regional Arts Australia (RAA) is pleased to present this submission to the Australian Government.

Arts and culture are a crucial element in the make-up of future liveable regions and are central to thriving and healthy communities and sustainable growth across regional, rural and remote Australia.

As the national voice for arts and culture in regional Australia, Regional Arts Australia's role is one of a connector, joining the dots and facilitating the exchange:

- Encouraging and supporting best practice across regional Australia;
- Raising the profile of the Australian regional, rural and remote arts and creative sector;
- Build partnerships that nurture a foundation for connection between practitioners and organisations;
- Build cross-industry partnerships across the health and education sectors;
- Demonstrate capacity building within local communities and communities of creative practice; and
- Present high level of return on investment, including employment growth

We believe in strong partnership between governments, industry, not-for-profits and commercial business and advocate to work more effectively across industry and policy sectors to build a diverse, robust and more sustainable regional, remote and rural Australia.

We encourage programs that support a creative ecosystem that is interconnected and integrated across art forms, across communities and across landscapes.

The Australian music industry is a critical part of regional creative landscape, as artists, audiences and communities. From July 2021 – April 2024, the Regional Arts Fund invested more than \$850,000 into music projects across more than 100 towns in regional Australia. These projects reached a combined audience of more than 3.4 million people across live and digital channels, employed more than 2,500 people, and provided more than 1,000 professional development opportunities.

ABOUT REGIONAL ARTS AUSTRALIA

Regional Arts Australia (RAA) is a not for profit organisation that is the national voice for arts in regional Australia. For over 80 years, RAA has been facilitating opportunities, increasing access, maintaining collaborative relationships and providing timely support to celebrate Australian stories across art forms and landscapes.

Through a national approach, Regional Arts Australia (RAA) ensures arts and creativity across regional, rural and remote Australia. RAA is committed to maintaining strategic, collaborative relationships for the benefit of arts and creative practice across the country. Our priorities are to strengthen artistic and creative practice and to improve opportunities for the access and participation of regional artists, organisations, communities and audiences. We aim to work across industry and policy sectors to build a stronger, more diverse and sustainable arts and creative industries sector.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RAA's guiding principle is that people and place are central to creative practice. Place informed approaches provide profound practical and emotional links between the economies and synergies of artistic and cultural practice. The cultural and creative industries play a critical role in contributing to the creativity, diversity and prosperity of Australia's regional and rural economy.

Partnerships are critical and are key in leveraging cross industry support and championing regional arts beyond the regional arts sector. Investment in valuable, regionally-led and industry-led programs provide timely support for regions, industries and communities. We advocate for a change in the structural framework and a reset of program models.

We recommend:

1. **Place informed Programs, such as the Regional Arts Fund & Cultural Tourism Accelerator**
2. **New models of Touring**
3. **Whole of life access to creative experiences through pathways & training**
4. **Changing the Narrative through a Whole of Ecology approach**

CHALLENGES OF THE LIVE MUSIC AND FESTIVAL SECTOR

An important characteristic is to emphasize that connections are not just between employer and employee, but also between individuals, audiences, and other institutions, there is a broad cultural ecology. In a regional context the arts and cultural ecology tends to be embedded throughout the community, business and education sectors.

1. **Reliance on live performance/ audience attendance, which have disappeared or significantly reduced for most of the arts and creative industries.**

2. Cost of living increases has meant reduced disposable house hold incomes and therefore market tightening
 3. Audience buying habits have changed which has affected market demand
 4. Incredibly tight financial margins that the sector works on as a matter of course.
 5. Increases cost of production and labour
 6. Increase costs of Artist services
 7. Huge expansion of the Festival market over the past 10-15 years – growth not sustainable
 8. Grants programs during covid that supported community, not for profit and commercial sector created a swell of content and programming that is now coming to an end – a false market essentially
 9. Interdependent and co-dependent nature of the sector— even in good times, need one part of that sector to be particularly suffering for that to have a flow-on impact
 10. Now seeing an adjustment to market demands
-

BACKGROUND - CONNECTING INDUSTRIES

The cultural and creative industries play a critical role in contributing to the creativity, diversity and prosperity of Australia's regional and rural economy. The arts are vital enablers helping us to explore vibrancy, diversity, accessibility and inclusiveness and are fundamental to nation-building, and to the continual advancement of the economy and environment. Across all art forms, the creative industries allow for individuals and communities to create and engage, to connect experiences, to develop skills, to tell stories, to respond and recover. Through live music, festivals, exhibitions, film, dance and performance we can generate stories, connection and narratives of place, community and identity.

There is a strong relationship between positive impact on the success of commercial creative businesses and other businesses. Compared with other industries, the cultural and creative industries also have higher spillover effects into other industries in terms of total output, value-added and employment multipliers.

Cultural Tourism

The arts and cultural sector actively support and enhance Cultural tourism. Arts and culture can inform and reflect Place Making and Place Branding. They can attract tourists and visitors, both national and international.

Arts and culture create a product – the products attract visitors enabling interaction and exchange allowing the place to flourish which in turn equates to Place Making and Place Branding. Place branding is more than the creation and promotion of place and often an extension to the physical and social environment of place.

Arts and culture tourism initiatives include:

- Festivals and events
- Visual arts & Heritage – galleries, artists open studios, public art, art trails
- First Nations – On Country, cultural experiences both traditional and contemporary
- Performance based events – music gigs, concerts, theatre etc

These interconnect with:

- Natural Environment

- Cultural Landscapes
- Local produce – food and beverage
- Hospitality
- Retail

Regional Festivals play a significant part in the cultural tourism destination and visitor experience. The tourism influx generated is especially welcome when it occurs in a medium or low-tourism season since it reduces seasonal ebbs.

Regional Festivals;

- Help to capture attention and promote attractions and infrastructures
- They make it possible to maximize and rationalize the use of certain spaces. Preservation of these spaces may result in financial benefits and dissemination of artistic and cultural heritage.
- Through cultural events, places may attract not only tourists but also investments that generate employment and economic diversification.

The relationship between the social and cultural, the ideological and political, the environmental and geographical is paramount. The relationship between the social and physical environment is dynamic. This interrelation between people and place is a deeply felt, multi-faceted experience that acquires and generates multiple layers of meaning. Arts and culture generate the layers of meaning.

GRANT AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS

REGIONAL ARTS FUND (RAF)

RAA has demonstrated a 25-year history of responsibly managing the Regional Arts Fund (RAF) on behalf of the Australian Government. We inherently understand the importance of the funding being public money and how to use partnerships to leverage support, how to create programs that have specific outcomes that support the sector in a cost-effective way.

Having both national coordination and devolved funding, the RAF model is highly regarded as an effective way to distribute investment to where it's needed by communities. The model demonstrates capacity building within local communities and communities of creative practice and connects and builds partnerships with creative institutions while building cross industry partnerships, in health, education, tourism, jobs and growth contributing to regional communities, wellbeing and livability.

Between 2016 -2021 \$17.643M was invested in RAF via 1716 grants across 700 locations, attracting audiences over 8.3M and leveraging \$27.1 income

From July 2021 – April 2024, the Regional Arts Fund invested more than \$850,000 into music projects across more than 100 towns in regional Australia. These projects reached a combined audience of more than 3.4 million people across live and digital channels, employed more than 2,500 people, and provided more than 1,000 professional development opportunities.

“Our region is a hot bed of creative and technically proficient musicians, but there are very few opportunities for these musicians to perform, and even less opportunities for these artists to be paid for their skills. It was such a privilege to share 10 hours of back-to-back performances from the region's finest musicians, seeing the joy it

brought the artists and watching more than 2000 people respecting, valuing and passionately revelling in the joy live music brings, some realising for the first time the value that these local musicians can bring to our broader community.” – Pearl Park Music Festival Foster, VIC (recipient of a 2022 RAF Project Grant)

<https://regionalarts.com.au/regional-arts-fund/impact-and-reach>

CULTURAL TOURISM ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

The [Cultural Tourism Accelerator Program](#) was an Australian Government initiative delivered through the [Regional Arts Fund](#) to help strengthen local visitor economies during 2021-22. The Program sought to increase tourism visitation in regional, rural, and remote communities across Australia, by providing financial support for the promotion of arts and cultural activities. It was designed to support capacity building in facilitation and promotion of events and festivals.

Grants through the Program ranged from \$2,500 to \$15,000 and assisted artists and arts and cultural organisations to deliver targeted marketing campaigns, develop industry partnerships, create new visitor experiences and work with tourism sector mentors.

With our partners [Culture Counts](#) we have released research findings on cultural tourism demonstrating the major influence that arts and cultural events have in driving tourism to regional and remote Australia.

Key findings show:

- 70% of visitors indicated that the supported event influenced their decision to travel to the local area, with 29% indicating this was their first visit to the area.
- The direct economic impact generated by attendees surveyed was over \$304.8 million, 60 times the total investment in the Cultural Tourism Accelerator Program.
- 91% of survey respondents said they would come an event like this again
-

<https://regionalarts.com.au/resources/cta-research>

CASE STUDIES

2022 Desert Song Festival from Central Australia, Singing Inc, NT

Central Australia Singing received a \$15,000 Cultural Tourism Partnership Initiative Grant to develop collaborative marketing campaigns to promote the signature events of the Desert Song Festival.

The 2022 Desert Song Festival (DSF) was themed 'Our Climate, Our Planet, Our Future and the festival program comprised 40 discrete events, a 5-day program for alienated youth in Alice Springs, a Schools Program resourced by visiting Festival Artists, plus a 5-day Climate and Land Symposium, resourced by some of Australia's leading Climate Scientists, Indigenous Knowledge keepers, and representatives of the Uluru Youth Dialogue (a component of the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart).

The Partnership Initiative focussed on promoting visitation to signature events of the 2022 Desert Song Festival: 'The Climate Caravan', 'Remote Community Visits', and 'From the Desert to the Arafura Sea'.

The project had a strong event identity and partnered with a range of tourism, transport and event partners in

Mparntwe (Alice Springs). They worked with accommodation providers, restaurants, car hire and tour companies offering generous incentives to increase tourism to Arrernte Country Central Australia. The event showcased the diverse voices of the desert community, and generated strong national collaborations with musicians and companies.

Outcomes

- Outside visitation of 6,900 people across the festival.
- Established partnerships developed packages and incentives for visitation.
- 4 interstate choirs attended and participated
- Significant economic impact by interstate visitors who attended on average four festival events
- 200 attendees from interstate extend visit to remote community

2023 Pearl Park Music Festival - Foster, Victoria

The Pearl Park Music Festival received a \$22,000 Project Grant from the Regional Arts Fund in 2022 to assist in delivering the second Pearl Park Music festival.

The Pearl Park Music Festival transforms the small rural town of Forster in regional Victoria for a day. The festival takes as its proposition to promote musicians from the region. It is an unashamedly community festival designed to provide paid opportunities and professional development for local musicians.

Pearl Park Music Festival provided a wonderful opportunity for the further advancement of a cohesive, supportive, vibrant and inclusive community. It provided a safe and welcoming space for people of all ages and backgrounds to come together to talk, laugh, dance and sing. The connections forged and consolidated on the day have had a lasting effect on people's sense of place and belonging. The more opportunities rural towns have, to bring the wider community together, the more empathetic, caring and thoughtful we all become. The benefits are long-standing and immeasurable.

Invaluable relationships were forged between institutions, businesses (including Foster Chamber of Commerce), community organisations, local First Nation's artists/authors, and festival organisers. A special relationship has been forged between musicians. Bands have been in regular contact with each other since, more musicians have been attending local open mics, the district's 2 vocal groups are collaborating with Low Rez choir, more students are enrolling in Instrumental Music at Foster Secondary College, young musicians have been taking more risks performing. New bands are appearing and expressing great interest in playing at the next festival for exposure. Musicians have expressed greater connectedness to fellow artists and have been encouraged by this to collaborate, write original material, and are heartened by the possibility of gigs.

Outcomes

- Audience of over 1500 people including
- 71 local musicians received payment for playing
- Leveraged an additional \$37,000
- Council has relaxing local busking laws

2023 Festival of Voices – Tasmania

The Festival of Voices received Cultural Tourism Generator funding of \$15,000 plus additional mentoring to increase interstate choir visitation to their 2023 festival. The festival team ran a targeted advertising campaign and built new relationships with interstate choirs through phone and email communication, as well as travelling to meet with choirs in person.

Festival of Voices is Australia's leading celebration of singing and the first winter festival in Tasmania, attracting audiences in early July to be enriched by voices raised together in song. The festival strives to be a warm and welcoming meeting place for singers to spend concentrated time doing what they love and creating unforgettable memories together.

Choirs travel to Festival of Voices from across the country and the world to participate and perform. Every year the festival attracts people who want to learn new repertoire, improve their singing or just revel in the joy of group singing.

As a festival modelled around the concept of a winter training school for choirs across the country, we are designed with travel in mind. The aims of the project very specifically focused on targeting choirs who have never attended the festival previously, and converting conversation into registration, which has a substantial increase on visitation to the state.

Targeted marketing was sector driven with a focus on relationships, and reaching out to our networks of choir festivals and organisations to facilitate ongoing engagement in a community driven way.

The impacts of the project are spanning far into the coming years of the annual Festival. The festival organisers exceeded their target of attracting new choristers to the festival,

Outcomes

- 177 new choristers registered for 2023 festival
- An additional 455 choristers aim to register in 2024
- Significant economic impact by interstate visitors

'The Meeting Place at Cygnet Folk Festival – Tasmania

The Cygnet Folk Festival received Cultural Tourism Generator funding of \$15,000 plus additional mentoring to grow event attendance by creating a new discrete event during the festival weekend to appeal to a family demographic with one-day ticket sales.

The Festival is one of Australia's most iconic folk music festivals. It has been delivering the event for 40 years and tickets regularly sell out. The tourism impact is significant with accommodation sold out in the region months in advance.

"The Meeting Place" was a discrete space within the Cygnet Folk Festival, with a fully fenced safe space for families to enjoy with roving performers and child-friendly activities, including face-painting, circus activities, stilt-walkers and food and drink stalls. The festival contracted Tin Camp Studios, an Indigenous-led project

developed by Warren Mason, to deliver storytelling, workshops and music performances within a tin shed constructed from salvaged materials and modelled on typical 1950s Aboriginal housing.

This new venue allowed patrons to experience a part of the festival, meet with friends in a safe and relaxed environment and the opportunity to listen and learn from presenters at Tin Camp. It allowed patrons to experience a part of the festival for a substantially reduced financial commitment in addition to entry for regular ticket holders.

With the aim of the project to give families a 'taster' of the festival and grow audiences for future years, the impacts of this project will continue to be felt over the coming years. The lower price-point to this venue allowed for consumers to "trial" a day at the festival without the investment of a full (whole festival) day or weekend ticket, the intention being to increase visitation over coming years.

Outcomes

- An additional 280 new attendees to this discrete event within festival including 200 visitors from outside the region.
- 62 employment and volunteer opportunities (musicians, artists, story tellers, crew)
- 6 professional development opportunities
- Generated \$20,000 income in ticket sales and catering sales

RECOMMENDATIONS

Investment in valuable, regionally-led and industry-led programs provide timely support for regions, industries and communities. We advocate for a change in the structural framework and a reset of program models.

Building sustainability in the industry, domestically and internationally through; 'Place Informed Programs'

Programming that positions community participation and the distinctive assets of their regional localities at the heart of reactivation. Designed to unlock the cultural ambition and potential of regional Australia.

Place-informed programs, such as the Regional Arts Fund and the Cultural Tourism accelerator seed longer-term cultural and economic sustainability, boosting local capacity, diversifying audience engagement, increasing accessibility and connection. Investment in innovative approaches and new types of programming within existing areas of strength such as festivals and cultural infrastructure would make arts, cultural and creative activities more accessible to all Australians.

Supporting Cultural Tourism and cultural experiences has benefits for local audiences and visitors. Arts and culture can be a leading tool in cross-sector partnerships, particularly tourism, trade, education and health. This dynamic interrelation needs to be understood across all policy agendas and investment targeted to build consumer confidence and activate engagement and in turn to grow jobs and local businesses.

'New Touring Models'

Support for the development of new models of developing, producing and touring new Australian live music and performance, locally and nationally. Inter-regional production and touring models should be explored.

We recommend exploring new models of co-commissioning, co-producing, and investing working within and across regional communities to build a network of arts and cultural experiences that are high quality and create employment and consumer activity across the regions.

Support for cultural participants 'on both sides of the stage', with a commitment to live music as an expression of local identity. In doing so we move beyond the limitations of conventional import touring models, instead building local cultural investment through people: their businesses, their social networks, their ethnicities, their collective values and aspirations. In this model, potential audiences will be inclusive of First Nations people, young people, culturally diverse people, people with disability and first-timers.

Artistic development and career pathways through; 'Whole of life access to creative experiences'

Connect regional pathways providing whole of life education and training opportunities and ensuring equity of access whilst addressing the skills shortage in the creative sector

The centrality of the artist requires multi-dimensional connections and includes the supporting; educational programs, career pathways, professional development opportunities, commissioning of new work, presentation, audience development, capacity building and investment in practice. This means supporting the artists and practitioners. It also means supporting the institutions, service agencies, venues, colleagues and collaborators that work alongside and champion artistic endeavours

We understand the need for

- Career pathways for artists/ arts workers
- PD opportunities for artists/ arts workers
- Sector development

Whole of life education and training opportunities in regional Australia are essential.

Increased education and training opportunities for the creative industries in regional Australia will ensure equity of access and address skills shortages in the creative sector. Regional Australia requires access to specialised arts teachers and fit for purpose rooms and equipment in primary and secondary education and access to creative industry tertiary courses at TAFE and regional universities. Creating opportunities to access training and education without relocating is vital to ensuring the next generations of regional creatives.

Artistic Sustainability and growth of the industry through; 'Changing the Narrative '

The arts are essential within regional and remote communities to maintain dynamic and resilient communities – economically, socially, for mental wellbeing and community cohesion.

To strengthen the fabric of the creative ecosystem across regional Australia we call for sustainable, long-term support that can support a robust creative sector. A creative ecosystem that is interconnected and integrated across art forms, across communities and across landscapes. A creative ecosystem that is constructed, contested and reimaged. One that is part of a continuum of economic and cultural politics and practices.

IN CONCLUSION

We note that there are many and varied ways in which the arts and creativity continue to shape regional Australia beyond those provided here. The overall health of the arts and creative ecology relies on the interconnection of advocacy, brokerage, presenting and producing elements

Support and investment that ensure our regional communities have access to culture, ideas and knowledge must be included in any planning considerations. This improves the lives of those who live regionally and improves the likelihood that people will continue to work and live in our regions.

The thriving national regional arts sector demands a crucial dialogue on the impact created by regional arts and artists. Partnerships are critical in this model and are key in leveraging cross industry support and championing regional arts beyond the regional arts sector. With support, the creative industries have the potential to lead the wider social, economic and community renewal.

Regional Arts Australia (RAA) is pleased to present this submission to the Australian Government. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these in more detail, and can be reached at any of the details below.

SUBMISSION CONTACT

Ros Abercrombie
Executive Director
Regional Arts Australia

