



Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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15 July 2015

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

1. Thank you for this opportunity to provide our perspective on the impact of the proposed funding reduction to the Australia Council of the Arts and the redistribution of funds to the new National Program for Excellence (NPEA).
2. We are writing as an established member of the small to medium performing arts sector in Melbourne. We are deeply concerned that the recent decision to reduce funding to the Australia Council in order to create the NPEA will diminish KAGE's capacity to grow internationally and diminish the extraordinary Australian arts community generally.

KAGE BACKGROUND

3. Kate Denborough and Gerard Van Dyck founded KAGE in 1997. KAGE is now a multi award-winning company recognised for creating critically acclaimed work across dance and theatre that:
 - explores risky, relevant and challenging social justice issues;
 - features collaborations with leading artists from diverse creative disciplines and with targeted communities;
 - is accessible, emotionally resonant and engages audiences and participants in an honest and meaningful way; and
 - is technically rigorous, imaginative, visually stunning, provocative, humorous and humane.

KAGE's WORK

4. One of KAGE's most significant achievements has been proving that live performance can tackle confronting subject matter gracefully. Examples include:
 - **SUNDOWNER** - exploring younger onset dementia
 - **HEADLOCK** - reflecting the experiences of young people in detention

- **FLESH AND BONE** and **FORKLIFT** - challenging perceptions around gender stereotypes in our society
 - **TEAM OF LIFE** - using sport (soccer and AFL) as a metaphor and theatre to tell the stories of refugee and indigenous youth (recently premiered at Melbourne Festival, 2014)
5. **SUNDOWNER** was a major success and raised the issue of younger onset dementia nationally by generating significant community engagement, discussion and debate.
 6. Created in partnership with Alzheimer's Australia in 2009, **SUNDOWNER** premiered at Castlemaine State Festival in 2011 and went on to tour nationally to 32 venues reaching over 40,000 people. ABC TV's Artscape made a documentary *Memory Play* on the development of **SUNDOWNER** which aired to an audience of 300,000 in August 2011. ABC TV's Big Ideas broadcast a **SUNDOWNER** Q&A held at Arts Centre Melbourne to an audience of 200,000 in September 2012. **SUNDOWNER** was included on the 2012 VCE drama playlist (as was **HEADLOCK** in 2004 and **TEAM OF LIFE** in 2014). National education resources were created, the show was documented on DVD and is available at almost 100 locations across Australia including all Alzheimer's Australia offices and nursing homes (through Domain Principal Group).
 7. We are now able to draw on successes such as **SUNDOWNER** to show the impact, and relevance of the arts in different contexts. We are also proud that KAGE's work is a part of the growing body of local and international education and research reinforcing the positive role of the arts in our culture and communities.

KAGE THE COMPANY

8. KAGE employs one full time and 3 part time staff members. In 2014, we were able to engage 42 artists and collaborators to work on our shows, including the premiere seasons of **FORKLIFT** at the Sydney Festival and **TEAM OF LIFE** at the Melbourne Festival. Across 2014-15, KAGE has so far performed to over 10,000 people and reached many more through workshops and community projects.
9. KAGE became an established company over its first 15 years of operation with the assistance of project funding from federal, state and local funding bodies. In 2011 KAGE secured Australia Council Emerging Organisational funding (2012-14 – extended to 2016) which provided the structural support needed for KAGE's recent and unprecedented creative and organisational expansion.
10. Organisational funding has allowed us to plan for the future with confidence, become more strategic, and start to put in place initiatives to leverage our works more (increased touring, etc) and generally put the company on a path to long term sustainability. These initiatives have led to increased impact, broader audiences, and a greater ability to employ more professional artists

for longer. Government funding has also provided us with a springboard from which to seek additional necessary support from private donors and philanthropists who are often encouraged to invest if a project has Government support. With the security of Organisational funding, KAGE has a greater capacity than ever before to build our company profile both in Australia and internationally.

IMPACT OF THE ARTS BUDGET ON KAGE

11. In March 2015, we submitted an Expression of Interest for 6-year Organisational funding from the Australia Council, a program now suspended due to the recent budget decision.
12. Prior to the suspension decision, we had also devoted significant resources to writing an application for the June grant round to support our international market development strategy. In May 2015, we had a very successful season of FORKLIFT at the Cirko Festival in Helsinki, Finland and we intended to capitalise on the interest generated by this European season. Project funding (from the June round) would have provided us with the opportunity to make a return visit to Scandinavia to meet with presenters interested in programming the company in 2016 and beyond. It would have enabled us to attend a number of international arts markets to reach a wider selection of programmers and assist with travelling to perform at international festivals. We are also developing a new work with Aboriginal artists from Australia Sami (Indigenous) artists from Norway and it is critical that Kate spends time in Norway, working with artists and building relationships with Scandinavian and European Festival presenters to make this international collaboration a success. It is crucial to KAGE's development as a part of the global arts community that we are able to secure venue/presenter investment in both the creative development and presentation of new work. Commonwealth support in this venture would also allow us to benchmark ourselves against international standards as well as encourage further artistic development through contact with international peers.
13. Previously we were able to confidently seek Commonwealth support for these company-building activities. However, we are now uncertain as to whether the market development necessary for KAGE's continued expansion will fit into the International and Cultural Diplomacy stream of the NPEA. We are concerned that without Organisation or project funding to support our international market development, the exciting opportunities that have emerged from our recent European season in Finland will be lost.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SMALL TO MEDIUM ARTS ORGANISATIONS

14. The small to medium performing arts sector plays a critical part in the overall arts ecology. We can be innovative, push boundaries and take risks, all the while creating a bridge between independent artists and major performing arts Organisations. The proposed funding changes puts small to medium arts Organisations at risk, which ultimately will have a negative impact on the

whole sector from independent artists through to larger performing arts companies.

15. We support the Australia Council as an independent arm's length statutory body free from political influence. The Australia Council has provided a mechanism for independent arts funding for more than 40 years, with grants being fully accountable and applicants being assessed by a panel of their peers. The NPEA's draft guidelines state that that not all recipients of the new funding will be announced and this feature of the alternate system raises a significant concern that Commonwealth funding of the arts will be neither transparent nor accountable going forward.
16. We hope that the Senate enquiry will recognise the positive contribution that the small-to-medium arts sector makes and the destabilising impact the funding cuts to the Australia Council will have. We are regrettably confident that these changes will reduce KAGE's ability to reach audiences, develop new works, employ artists, make an impact to the communities we work with and otherwise make the best contribution we can to the arts sector in Australia. We hope that the Federal Government can find a way to create a more sustainable solution to arts funding.
17. Thank you for the opportunity to express our views and if you would like further information on KAGE please do not hesitate to contact Clare McKenzie (Executive Producer)

Warm Regards,

Kate Denborough
Artistic Director

Gerard Van Dyck
Creative Director

Clare McKenzie
Executive Producer

Ruth Blythman
Company Manager