

16 July, 2015

Submission to the Senate Inquiry on the Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts

From Tasdance

Submitted by Annie Greig, Artistic Director, on behalf of the chair, board and staff

Tasdance is deeply concerned and distressed at the unexpected changes made in the 2015 Federal Budget regarding funding for the arts in Australia, not only for our organisation but for the entire small to medium arts sector.

With a 34 year history of performing, educating and working with Tasmanian communities, we have much to lose with the cuts to arts funding of the Australia Council and its ability to continue to support the small to medium arts sector. It is this concern that has led Arts Peak to call for this inquiry for research to be undertaken by the Government into the sustainability of the small to medium arts sector and its key role in the overall arts ecology. It is felt that with the shifting of \$104.8 million from the Australia Council to the NPEA, there is now insufficient funding to support the operation of these essential small to medium arts organisations and individual artists.

The Australia Council is struggling to respond to the effect of the funding cut and therefore we as a Key Organisation face an uncertain future. Tasdance asks the federal government to return the \$104.8 million to the Australia Council and reaffirm the principle of arms-length funding to the small to medium companies and the independent sector, or find another \$104.8 million to complement the new National Programme for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA). The Australia Council has long served the arts community well, whilst the NPEA does not generate any new money for our sector, nor does it appear to offer new funding alternatives to our community.

Multi-year funding is vital to the future planning and employment security to a company like ours. We tour interstate almost every second year and in order to make these tours possible we need assurance about future funding. The recent changes, which led to the cancellation of the 6-year funding program and no June round has meant that Tasdance has been unable to apply for support to tour in 2016 and for support for our major season later in 2015. This means less employment, less exposure and less opportunity.

The fact that the Major Performing Arts companies have been excluded from the funding cuts and move to establish the NPEA seems to boldly favour the traditional major performing arts, and disadvantage the smaller scale organisations. We believe that a healthy arts ecology has many layers, including the major arts institutions, the small to medium companies and the independent sector, and that they all need to be supported.

In summary the changes due to the budget announcements have left us and most companies under threat, apprehensive about our very existence and extremely concerned for the future of arts in Australia. We wish to see long-term policy planning and broad strategic issues pertaining to the development of the cultural and creative industries in Australia, not ad hoc decisions by the Minister.

We ask for an investment in the future culture of Australia by supporting the arts, the artists and the organisations that nurture and support them, not a destructive funding cut.



Background

Tasdance is a vital force in Tasmania and is a valuable player in the national dance scene, providing an important professional development hub for dancers and choreographers and is a leader in audience development. Tasdance balances the presentation of main-stage performances with an extensive range of community and education engagement programs.

The company provides unique opportunities for a range of choreographers to develop new work by offering them a talented ensemble of dancers and administrative, technical and artistic support. It is a respected and valued presenter of highly original Australian contemporary dance; and a first-rate, acclaimed touring company.

In 2014 the company conducted 14 performances including interstate and international performances to 5,436 audience members; held 696 school workshops with 16,006 student attendances and worked with the community for 830 workshops with 18,751 attendances. These community dance workshops includes work with people with disabilities, after school student workshops, our international workshops and residencies and workshops for emerging dance artists.

Tasdance is the only professional dance company in Tasmania and one of only two regionally based professional dance companies in the country. We function on a small budget providing important employment to artists and a benchmark for dance in the state. Tasdance has been funded by the Tasmanian state government since its inception in 1981 and by the Australia Council for a significant amount of that time. We are currently a Key Organisation and as such have our funding confirmed by the Australia Council until the end of 2016, but beyond that our funding situation is unclear.

In October this year, I am standing down as the Artistic Director after over 20 years with the company and was hoping to be able to pass this precious small company on with the security of multi-year funding, and am heartbroken that this ill-considered decision by the Minister has derailed all that for Tasdance and for many others.

Annie Greig
Artistic Director