

Creative REGIONS

Regional communities thriving through creativity...

☎ 07 4153 1218
✉ contact@creativeregions.com.au
📍 2/67 Perry Street | PO Box 44 | Bundaberg North Qld 4670
🌐 creativeregions.com.au
ABN 48 130 604 732

1 February 2016

Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP

Chair

Inquiry into broadcasting, online content and live production to rural and regional Australia

PO Box 6021

Parliament House

CANBERRA

Canberra ACT 2600

RE: Creative Regions Submission to the Inquiry

Dear Committee

Creative Regions is a not-for-profit arts production company based in Bundaberg in regional Queensland. This company was formed in 2008 by four people determined to make a difference in our region in terms of making new work (across all artforms) that better engages and reflects the diversity of regional cultures. We aim to look at the big ideas affecting our broader region (Wide Bay Burnett and Central Queensland) and make exciting and ambitious work (theatre performances, films and exhibitions, for example) to reflect these ideas.

Most recently, we have been involved in the creative recovery of our community from the devastating 2013 floods. This work continues through place activation projects which engage parts of the community in using the arts to enhance the look and feel of particular places and suburbs. See <http://www.creativeregions.com.au/portfolio-item/place-activation-bundaberg-region/> for more.

We have also produced a new theatre work (over four years) that toured Queensland last year. Called IT ALL BEGINS WITH LOVE, the production presented real stories about domestic and family violence through theatre as a way of demonstrating the effects of violence from a first person point of view. Audiences raved about the work and we are about to present at a conference in Prague in May this year as part of an international discussion about abuse and violence and ways to address the issue. See <http://www.creativeregions.com.au/portfolio-item/it-all-begins-with-love/> for more.

We are also about to embark on our most ambitious project yet, the production of a new opera called THE CRUSHING which has been five years in development. The production will be placed at the centre of a regional marketing initiative which presents the work in conjunction with a high quality degustation menu designed using some of the amazing food and beverage products grown and manufactured in our region. The purpose of the project is to draw national and, hopefully, international attention to the creative, culinary and tourism offerings in our region. See <http://www.creativeregions.com.au/portfolio-item/the-crushing/> for more.

Importance of producing new work in regional Australia

Most communities are very familiar with the well-established touring model which brings artistic performances into communities (more on this later), but having new work made in and of regional communities is just as, if not more, important in engaging the imaginations of regional people. Though audience numbers are often lower – a function of demographics – and the higher cost of production – due to additional travel, freight and production costs – the benefits of making work in the regions are many. For instance, the social and cultural importance – the pride established and the contribution to national culture – in having a new work reflect regional stories; the economic development potential in terms of flow-on benefits to local businesses from making creative work (our company has a net benefit of \$8 for every \$1 of government investment); the value to schools in having professional artists working in their communities; benefits to volunteer and amateur artists' networks in accessing professional artists in their own communities; the benefit of increased participation in the arts. There are so many reasons to consider a greater investment in making new work in the regions to balance work touring to the regions. There is a big difference.

EXAMPLE:

Creative Regions was involved in a three year pilot project from 2010-2012, funded by all levels of government, called "Regional Stages". This project invested \$100,000 per year in program funds which enabled new commissions, workshops, residencies, touring and the production of new work. Over the three years, 146 artists were engaged professionally, 536 people participated in workshop activities, over 300 volunteers assisted, more than 40 community partnerships were established and over 4,500 people attended funded events. A similar amount of funding would conservatively fund half of one very small touring production.

The importance of time and longer-term funding

Creative Regions has participated in a number of longer-term projects such as *Regional Stages* and if we've learned one thing it's that producing quality work takes time. Funding over three years is great, but it realistically takes a minimum of two years to develop a new work to the point where it is ready to be produced in front of an audience.

We are one of a small number of regional production companies across the country and we all have at least one thing in common – the lack of consistency in funding over a longer period of time which enables long term artistic planning.

While we appreciate that there are a number of opportunities for organisations to be funded by the Federal Government, it is clear that the previous funding from the Australia Council for the Arts has not served the regional network of highly professional producers well – especially in Queensland where only 9.2% of Australia Council funding has made its way over the border and most of that to the capital city (and at least half to the major companies)¹.

Longer-term, targeted strategic initiatives, supported by three levels of government are vital to shore up the capacity of regional production companies.

The value of national broadcasters

Finally, we would like to highlight the value of national broadcasters to companies like ours. We have been fortunate to have a terrific relationship with the ABC Local Radio stations in various regions where we have worked. ABC television, radio (local, state and national) and online have been essential in connecting us with audiences.

¹ Australia Council Annual Report 2014-2015

EXAMPLE:

For our recent tour of IT ALL BEGINS WITH LOVE, 36% of media coverage (in terms of numbers of articles alone) were broadcast by ABC outlets. But in terms of reach, ABC provided connection to at least 60% of the audience reached.

It is a reality that commercial media outlets do not often run arts content, but the national broadcasters (in our case, especially the ABC) have been invaluable in us finding audiences.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this Parliamentary Inquiry. It is such a vital issue pertaining to the diverse cultures of regional Australia and looking strategically at how the regions may be best serviced.

In terms of arts production, while we respect and support the value of regional venues and their ability to attract touring arts product, we are particularly interested in Government's thinking about more strategic approaches of supporting the production of new art work in regional Australia by and with regional artists. And in saying that, there will not be a one-size-fits-all approach. Programs that support the diversity of structures and opportunities in the regions is essential.

Regional arts production companies provide very real social, cultural and economic benefits to their communities. These companies provide jobs, they enable new art work to be commissioned that is relevant to their audiences, they create new opportunities for participation and volunteerism, they provide outlets and opportunities for young people through and outside of schools – the list goes on. Regional arts production companies are relevant, dynamic and vital to their communities and to the future of arts and cultural development in this country.

Tracey Callinan sums our submission up in her article on *theconversation.com*² last year:

“It is vital that regional areas aren't only seen as “receivers” of art, waiting to consume metropolitan arts practice, but are recognised as centres of arts creation in their own right with potential markets in metropolitan and international areas.”

Creative Regions looks forward to continuing to participate in the debate and to further engage with the Committee as and when appropriate.

Yours sincerely

Rod Ainsworth
Creative Producer/Executive Officer

² <https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-are-regional-arts-and-why-do-they-matter-34862>