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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts
via online submissions process

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Re: Inquiry into broadcasting, online content and live productions to rural and regional Australia

Regional Arts Victoria welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry into broadcasting, online content and live production to rural and regional Australia.

Regional Arts Victoria inspires art across the state. Through creative facilitation, touring, education, specialised resources, artistic projects and advocacy, we develop and sustain creative communities and artistic practice all over Victoria. Regional Arts Victoria is an independent, not-for-profit, membership-based organisation working in long-term partnerships with every level of government, fostering contemporary and innovative regional cultural practice across five decades. For more about how our artistic program inspires Creative Communities, Creative Places and Creative Catalysts, visit www.rav.net.au.

Regional Arts Victoria's submission focuses specifically on the value of live productions to rural and regional Australia, given our extensive experience in supporting such live performances over many years. We present our submission under three sub-headings:

1. The value to rural and regional communities of having access to diverse and vibrant live performance productions
2. Challenges that currently limit the ability of the live performance industry to present live productions in rural and regional Australia
3. Opportunities or initiatives that should be pursued to address these challenges

1. The value to rural and regional communities of having access to diverse and vibrant live performance productions.

In 2014, live performances supported by Regional Arts Victoria reached over 200,000 people in regional communities. These included everything from national tours of site-specific comedy performances such *Road Trip* by Damian Callinan/Independent artists through to Victorian tours of classical music repertoire performed by the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra.

The cultural impact of diverse performances such as these in regional communities is well documented, with the Australia Council for the Arts finding that 85% of people agree that the arts makes for a richer and more meaningful life¹. Regional Arts Victoria regularly receives similar feedback from regional communities on the cultural impact of live performances, with the following example demonstrating this:

¹ Australia Council for the Arts, 2014, *Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts*, Australia Council for the Arts.

“It is always a challenge to present a dark piece of theatre, especially a one woman show. The show attracted a new audience and encouraged previous audience members back to the theatre.”

– Presenter Feedback on performance of “Mother” by IF Theatre starring Noni Hazlehurst.

The wider impact of live performances (and the arts) on the economy, education and social cohesion has also been extensively researched. The presence of diverse cultural choices has been shown to be a key driver of high economic performance² for instance, whilst Live Performance Australia reported that live performances generated \$1.51 billion in revenue in 2014, with 18.54 million tickets sold³. One in five people, according to the Australia Council for the Arts, believe the arts can have an impact on the economy.⁴

As well as the employment of local technical staff, ushers, actors and musicians, Regional Arts Victoria has witnessed this economic impact of the live performance industry on regional communities. The Small Town Transformations initiative, managed by Regional Arts Victoria, included a large live performance in the regional Victoria town of Dookie (population 240) which drew an estimated 6,000 people to the region for the event. The performance engaged 14 local businesses as well as employing over 100 people.

The arts also play a multi-faceted role in education. A 2009 joint report by Arts Victoria and DEECD⁵ showed partnerships between arts organisations and schools consistently delivered positive impacts on student engagement, social learning, improved creative skills, and increased student confidence. Findings from the Australia Council for the Arts⁶ reinforce this, with researchers finding that, through arts participation, students were better able to work cooperatively, and plan and set goals, as well as providing unique learning opportunities.

Live performances delivered by Regional Arts Victoria have delivered these education outcomes to regional schools. 100% of teachers surveyed after a performance by a Regional Arts Victoria-supported performance reported that these live performances delivered on one or more learning outcomes, whilst 100% agreed that the experience would not usually be available in mainstream learning settings.

On a social level, studies by Creative Victoria found arts and culture attracts residents (and investors) through contributing directly to a sense of place, in turn offering individuals a better quality of life⁷. Regional Arts Victoria has received feedback to this effect from venues in regional towns, with the following excerpt indicative:

“(The performance) provides an important opportunity for a local family audience to see and engage with quality product. Members of our local youth theatre group attended and this kind of exposé helps to develop positive engagement with young people in the arts.”

Presenter feedback on the performance of “Sticks, Stones and Broken Bones” by Dirty Work Comedy.

The multi-faceted value of live performances to Australian communities is clear from these examples. It is critical that rural and regional communities are able to access the same opportunities as their

² Creative Victoria, 2008, *The Role of Arts and Culture in Liveability*, Creative Victoria.

³ Live Performance Australia, 2014, *Ticket Attendance and Revenue Survey for 2014*, Live Performance Australia.

⁴ Australia Council for the Arts, 2014, *Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts*, Australia Council for the Arts.

⁵ Imms, W.; Jeanneret, N.; & Stevens-Ballenger, J., 2009, *Partnerships Between Schools and the Professional Arts Sector: Evaluation of impact on student outcomes*, Arts Victoria and DEECD.

⁶ Hunter, M., 2005, *Education and the Arts Research Overview*, Australian Council for the Arts.

⁷ Creative Victoria, 2008, *The Role of Arts and Culture in Liveability*, Creative Victoria.

metropolitan counterparts, and that governments at a local, state and federal level support initiatives to reduce any barriers regional communities might have to accessing these benefits.

2. Challenges that currently limit the ability of the live performance industry to present live productions in rural and regional Australia.

The Australia Council for the Arts⁸ found that people living in regional communities were less likely than those living in cities to agree that there are plenty of opportunities to get involved in the arts. This was also cited as a reason why they do not participate in the arts creatively, with 50% (compared to 29% in metropolitan areas) suggesting there are not enough opportunities for them to do so close to home.

Regional Arts Victoria's experience has been that presenting high quality live productions that might provide these very kinds of opportunities is a challenge for many regional communities. Finding appropriately skilled local people, particularly in the areas of technical production and marketing, is an ongoing difficulty (fed back to us most recently in the Victorian Touring Forum at Showcase Victoria in May 2015). The infrequency with which these events are presented in communities also means there are few paid roles to help foster expertise through continuity.

Many regional and rural communities thus look to outside companies and performances to provide support and content for their live productions. Regional Arts Victoria's most recent Member consultation survey found, for instance, that regional presenters and artists look to other presenters and artists not in their communities for inspiration.

In this environment, regional communities face additional funding challenges to metropolitan areas. As well as the performance fee, they will also be asked to pay for accommodation, fuel, car hire, and freight costs. These additional costs can be particularly high when presenters host artists in one-off performances outside of established touring networks (which typically benefit from economies-of-scale cost reductions).

Even a professional touring company such as Regional Arts Victoria, with a long history and extensive experience working in the sector, spent 34% of our total touring expenditure in 2015 on costs other than artist payments. These costs are before the regional community considers the cost of equipment hire or expertise, with smaller venues in particular often ill-equipped to host a professional live performance.

These challenges of scale, distance and access to expertise are those Regional Arts Victoria most often hears from the regional communities we work with in relation to live performances.

3. Opportunities or initiatives that should be pursued to address these challenges.

Regional touring is one way to address some of the above issues, as it allows artists, presenters and communities to combine their resources and expertise in delivering live performance outcomes. Obviously, federal and state funding programs such as Touring Victoria and the Guarantee Against Loss (a Creative Victoria Program) and Playing Australia, Festivals Australia and the Regional Arts Fund (Australia Council for the Arts and Ministry for the Arts programs) make regional performances and tours more accessible for many communities.

For smaller towns in particular, additional support is still required, however. Regional Arts Victoria is currently delivering the Connecting Places⁹ halls touring program in response to this challenge, with a focus on providing skills development and mentorship to active community members interested in

⁸ Australia Council for the Arts, 2014, *Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts*, Australia Council for the Arts.

⁹ <http://www.rav.net.au/performing-arts-touring/creative-communities/connecting-places/>

presenting arts events in their communities. As well as providing touring product, the program provides support in the form of higher levels of technical and marketing advice. It is this technical and marketing support which we believe would be particularly useful to more regional communities and the artists who work with them.

Other artists, communities, presenters and organisations also continuing to develop their own innovative responses to these challenges, and we anticipate that many of them will make their own submissions to this inquiry. We look forward to reading these and trust that our response contributes constructively to the mix.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission with you. Please do not hesitate to contact either of us at the below details for any further information we might provide.

Sincerely,

ESTHER ANATOLITIS
Director

JOE TOOHEY
General Manager