



Statement to Senate Select Committee COVID 19 Public Hearing
30 June, 2020

Regional Arts NSW is the peak body and service agency for arts and cultural development in regional NSW. We provide support services to a network of 14 regional arts development organisations (RADOs) based in regional communities across the state. Our network of RADOs covers about 90% of NSW. Each RADO provides arts and cultural services across a number of LGAs in each region. They develop strategies, partnerships and arts projects across all genres that best meet the needs of their particular region. We are uniquely situated, through our close relationship with our network, to obtain first hand, grassroots information about all matters that impact on the arts and cultural sector across the state.

For artists and arts organisations in regional NSW the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic was exacerbated by the 2019/20 bushfires that started in early spring in northern NSW and raged down to the Victorian border throughout the summer destroying artists' and arts workers' property and livelihoods leaving in its wake devastation for regional economies that depend on seasonal tourist visitation. Attempts to restart were cut short as the pandemic restrictions came into force. Added to this regional NSW has been in drought for a number of years. This has particularly impacted to agricultural sector and its flow on contribution to local economies.

The arts sector in regional NSW is one of the key drivers for cultural tourism with its calendar of festivals, galleries, museums and performances. The sudden closure of all venues and gatherings not only impacted artists, but all the highly skilled support workers and goods and services suppliers that enable events to occur. All those regionally based professional workers and suppliers have built small and micro businesses around the outdoor festivals industry. Overnight they were faced with the daunting prospect of no income for the foreseeable future.

RANSW has been able to collect data from its network, initially gathering bushfire impact data which we were able to supply to Regional Arts Australia to assist them to make a case for bushfire support. We subsequently followed up with surveys about the impact of the COVID closures on professional and community organisations.

Initial survey results about the impact of COVID on professional and community organisations and artists in regional NSW indicate that:

- 10% of regional organisations will shut down permanently with a further 13% in doubt.
- From 153 respondents there have been to date 2305 cancellations
- 214 people have been stood down with 40 stood down permanently
- The primary challenge facing regional arts organisations is social distancing restrictions (61.67%), followed by access to reliable/fast internet services (27.78%)
- The largest impact has been on theatres, festivals, , workshops and projects that have an essential face to face component.

The following summary of responses that RANSW collected after the bushfires demonstrate why it is so important that we get the response right to ensure that the

Regional Arts NSW Ltd
Level 1, The Arts Exchange
10 Hickson Road
The Rocks NSW 2000

arts sector including in regional areas is recognised the economic driver that it is, and is supported in its recovery from COVID-19.

Preliminary Bushfire Impact on the Arts Survey Results from NSW Regional Arts Development Organisations

Preamble

Bushfires spread across the eastern parts of the entire state of New South Wales. The fires in Northern Tablelands and North Coast began in late August and early September spreading through October, November and peaking in the Far South Coast and Snowy Regions during late December and throughout January. A survey developed by Andrew Gray, ED South East Arts has been distributed throughout the seven Regional Arts Development Organisations and the Shoalhaven LGA where communities were impacted by this disaster. The survey aims to discover costs to the arts sector in the affected regions. This is still a work in progress and will be added to as further information and survey results come in.

Survey distribution and responses to date

Arts Northern Rivers	48
South East Arts	91
Murray Arts	7
Arts OutWest	9
Southern Tablelands Arts	27
Live Music – Shoalhaven LGA	24
TOTAL	206

It is very possible that more people will have been impacted. It is also likely, that those that haven't responded will have lost homes and business.

Impact

- Loss of Home and Studio: Potentially up to 40 - 50% in S.E. Coast areas. Insurance impact not well known. Other areas have lost some homes but not as many as south. **Value over \$500,000 and up**
- Loss of Equipment: Significant – many would appear not to be covered by insurance. **Value from several hundred dollars up to over \$50,000**
- Loss of Income: Most everyone has lost income at highest income time of year (summer). Ongoing as longer term impact is being felt and tourism numbers down. Musicians being double hit with requirement to perform for zero in fundraising. Sales down for tourism and festivals cancelled. 65 – 75% rely on this income. **Value from several hundred dollars to well over \$50K**
- Loss of Community Events/Festivals: Numeralla and Cobargo Festivals – \$240K lost performance fees, production costs, potentially over \$1.5 million in tourism dollars. Sales Blues Fest down \$2million with run on economic impact.

LOSS: Loss of income is the strongest issue as most arts/cultural workers are on minimum wage/earnings. Equally, this being summer means that most have lost their largest income with tourism season. This survey has only covered artists but has not yet, covered technicians, production crew and other closely associated staff.

Elizabeth Rogers

Regional Arts NSW Ltd
Level 1, The Arts Exchange
10 Hickson Road
The Rocks NSW 2000

Chief Executive Officer

Regional Arts NSW Ltd
Level 1, The Arts Exchange
10 Hickson Road
The Rocks NSW 2000

ABN 64 001 382 690 - ACN 001 382 690

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Web www.regionalartsnsw.com.au