

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria

Melbourne—Thursday 27 February 2025

MEMBERS

Georgie Purcell—Chair

John Berger

Katherine Copsey

Moira Deeming

Bev McArthur

Tom McIntosh

Evan Mulholland

Sonja Terpstra

Richard Welch

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Gaelle Broad

Georgie Crozier

David Davis

David Ettershank

Michael Galea

Renee Heath

Sarah Mansfield

Rachel Payne

WITNESSES

Vicky Guglielmo, Manager, Libraries, Arts and Events, and
Ariel Blum, Arts Engagement Lead, Yarra City Council.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I also welcome any other members of the public watching via the live broadcast.

To kick off, I will have committee members introduce themselves. I will start on the screen with Tom.

Tom McINTOSH: Tom McIntosh, Member for Eastern Victoria.

Richard WELCH: Richard Welch, Member for North-East Metro.

Gaelle BROAD: Hi. I am Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

The CHAIR: I am Georgie Purcell, the Chair and a Member for Northern Victoria as well. Thanks very much for appearing today.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and then transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. For the Hansard record, can I get you both to please state your full names and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Vicky GUGLIELMO: Thank you. My name is Vicky Guglielmo, and I am at the City of Yarra.

Ariel BLUM: My name is Ariel Blum, and I am also from the City of Yarra.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. We now welcome your opening comments but ask they are kept to around 10 to 15 minutes to ensure plenty of time for discussion and questions.

Vicky GUGLIELMO: Great. We will be much more brief than that. We are really keen for some questions from the floor. Thanks for the opportunity. I too welcome the opportunity to be here today. It is a real privilege to be able to share some of our experience at the City of Yarra, but as two creative professionals in our own right we probably have some perspectives as practitioners as well.

I want to acknowledge I work and live on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung country, and I want to pay my deepest respects for the gift of country and to traditional owners.

We provided a quite extensive submission and we addressed a number of the key pillars. I will not summarise them in whole, but there are some touchpoints there that all relate to increased investment or maintaining investment and strategies that were committed to earlier on that I would like to draw attention on today. Mostly in my opening remarks I do want to talk about the best role that can be played by federal government and by other tiers of government, including our own as a local government provider in Melbourne's inner north.

The key point I would like to make is the role of government in leadership, and that is the role that government can play to create the necessary structures and systems to support investment across government and across other industries. The creative industries are a major contributor to local economies and to our national economy. We have opportunities, I think, in export that are not being maximised as a result of leadership—and leadership in all of its glory. What role can our governments, including our own—all three tiers—how do we come together and lead? Models that may be risky, models that may be unique, particularly with a sector that has a high appetite for risk and a high appetite for new products and new innovations—how do we create those structures?

What leads on to the second role for me is collaboration, across government departments and other tiers of government but also with the industry. That brings me to my third point: the role that government can play in making our sector actually visible. Who are the creative sector? Who are people who drive an ecosystem? We talk a lot about artists in the creative sector, but the creative sector is a mammoth machine. People who make products, people who make technology, people who are working in innovative forms, new forms and forms yet known, working in places like Collingwood, creating products that actually have export value overseas—so what are the like structures for industry development that happen with many other industries in this country that can make visible who these individuals are that are driving quite a thriving, healthy ecosystem?

The other role that I think government can play is as an intermediary in brokerage, of not just money but relationships between people who have money and people who do not have money, people who need structures around them to develop a pipeline—what I would call a cycle of local cultural production. Creators who can do stuff here locally, develop it here locally with collaborators here locally—how do they take that outside of their own backyard or their garage or their company here and to other national or international markets? I think the creative sector has missed out on that sort of investment and support.

I am going to let Ariel take the next two points around the role, if you do not mind.

Ariel BLUM: Thanks, Vicky. Just for some context, just like Vicky said earlier, I personally come from an artist background as a musician. What I would like to speak to today in particular is around some of the infrastructure challenges that are taking place within our local government area and for that to basically illustrate where things are at in relation to how artists can be continually sustained.

As a starting point, City of Yarra is home to a huge amount of live music venues which really, really stimulate an incredibly active night-time economy. What we have seen post COVID in particular is an increasing amount of venues closing due to a series of pressures—cost of living, obviously, and changes to behaviour in the way that audiences engage in arts and culture. What we are seeing is a part of our sector that is really, really crying out to be seen, to be heard, to be visible. To put that into perspective, spaces in general are the tip point that really funnel down to all the workers, all the staff, everyone involved in cultural production. Without venues and spaces there is a much larger shortage of income that artists can earn and subsequently live off, which then will regenerate our arts sector. So that is something that we are really keen to be putting forward. We have some great examples of some of the work that we are doing at local government level to assist in spaces and places, which we put in our submission.

Then I guess the second, just to piggyback off something Vicky said before, is about the visibility of the artist and the artist as a worker. I guess just from a personal point of view—I was walking in the city on my way here with my earbuds in, and I clocked that nine out of 10 people have earbuds. I started to think to myself, ‘Okay, that’s nine out of 10 people who are all consuming creative content right now, and we have no mechanism to capture that data of actually how many people are consuming media, music, culture, content, in our world right now.’ As a result of not being able to capture that, often the arts are considered a ‘nice to have’ as opposed to a critical point in what is important for people’s wellbeing.

Vicky GUGLIELMO: I think we will leave it at that, because the submission did have quite a lot of opportunities and ideas for action. We are here to address questions if the panel are keen for us to do that.

The CHAIR: Yes. Wonderful. Thank you so much. I actually saw just a few days ago that the Gaso is closing down, so your comments are very relevant. I know so many people that were going there for live music that are devastated about it.

Ariel BLUM: Yes. That has a cascading effect that goes beyond a venue closing. That is affecting everyone from the musicians to the tech crews to the rehearsal studios. These are foundational pieces of our sector.

The CHAIR: Yes. Sorry, I was going to pass to someone else, but I might just start, if that is okay with members. Could you just talk a little bit about the changes in behaviour that you have seen with cost of living and post COVID and what you think are some of the many solutions that exist that the government could implement?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: City of Yarra has a lot of free programming. We have lots of street-based festivals that are community-led, volunteer-led. They attract tens of thousands of people who come out to see dance or music and to engage in what I think is the cultural life of our city.

I think there is an appetite to engage. I think the key barrier could be around paying for a ticket to see a show, and sometimes the ticket price and the promise of what it can deliver for someone is a really key barrier. What we do know is people will go to programming they are keen to engage with and people will go to great lengths for that. So from my perspective I would talk about us really understanding local content, local artists and local production. How do we create those platforms so that local artists can continue to engage with local audiences? That is where music is cultivated. I think Ariel's point was around venues then becoming another avenue to practise, diversify your audience and potentially create something that might be exportable or sustain your practice. Audiences are, in our perspective, keen to engage in the arts, want to engage in the arts, but the barrier I think is money. It is ticket prices. I am sorry to be so simple about it, but I think if there were cheaper tickets or low-cost tickets, people would go to more shows.

Ariel BLUM: Just to add to what Vicky has mentioned, in our submission we cited the audience atlas, which is put together by Creative Victoria, which really shows the numbers of what is going on post COVID. I am happy to list some of those numbers if that is of interest.

The CHAIR: Okay.

Ariel BLUM: 2.1 million fewer people have attended fewer events in the last five years, with 47 per cent citing the ticket prices and 38 per cent citing the cost of living as a cause. So the numbers are there. We are talking probably more at that grassroots level, because obviously there are some really popular events that happen, particularly international events that come to town; however, they are not actually going back into the local ecosystem. There have been some really great initiatives that have been put forward, which again we spoke to in our submission—things that are happening overseas or being trialled overseas that are looking to best maximise the opportunities that are created by large-scale events being able to support grassroots activity.

The CHAIR: I saw in your submission you spoke about the need for support for under-represented groups. Do you think that the impacts of what is going on right now are affecting certain communities more than others?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: That is complex. For City of Yarra, we have a disparity of wealth in our community, and I think there are some universal pressures around space provision that just do not facilitate art making or art practice. I think for young people there is the changing nature of engaging but also education pathways—so they are opting out of the courses that might be creative pathways to the industry; I think they are also reducing. Looking at vocational opportunities is often top of mind for young people. So the under-represented communities for me are, one, to do with socio-economic status, but it is also around future hope for a future career. I think the hope factor for young people in terms of pursuing a musical career or pursuing an artist career is a very big challenge—not to say young people are under-represented; young people are thriving. Some of the young people are probably the greatest opportunity for our industry, and I wonder how we can create structures for those sorts of pathways but also for pathways that we can recreate that are not necessarily traditional pathways.

I think mentoring and assisting—for under-represented communities to be linked in with professional or established practitioners or artists or people who are succeeding in the industry through mentorships or internships can really create a different trajectory for many. And this idea that you are welcome to be a part of the industry—I think the industry can be somewhat frightening for under-represented communities because they do not find a sense of belonging in it. Again, it is structures and systems that encourage people to feel welcomed. These are people who are practising their art form—they are writing, they are singing, they are

dancing. But there are some structures or barriers that are in the way for them to be identifiable and visible on the main stages. Even on the grassroots stages I think there are significant barriers for particular communities in Yarra.

The CHAIR: Do you think the impacts of what is going on right now and how it has reached this point with the cost of living and COVID are also playing into this? I guess for me and for people in the arts it is almost seen as a hobby or a thing you do on the side, and you accept that there is this insecure nature of the work. It is turning people away coupled with the current experience. I guess it feels like it has been a slow burn of under-appreciation of the people who do this work that has reached this point that we are at now.

Vicky GUGLIELMO: Yes. I sadly have to say that in all my time—I am now 53; I have been a creative professional since I was 11—the dial has not shifted on that.

The CHAIR: Yes. I have friends who are comedians, and they do it on the side of their full-time jobs. It is not seen as –

Vicky GUGLIELMO: And there is a hidden poverty there. I will throw some lines to stimulate the conversation. When we talk about artists, they are intrinsic in our community—they are community—yet probably their wages would equate to them being some of the most economically disadvantaged according to wage. Yet their working hours and contribution are very high. We noticed when it was taken away during lockdown what that impact was on our community—closing our venues, stopping the pipeline—and we found different ways to keep engaging audiences and to keep making work. I think there are some learnings in that that we should really lean into. We cannot keep tapping into the resilience of practitioners and of the sector to just wing it, to just get by.

I do want to bring in the next layer. Housing affordability is directly linked to your creative sector and how thriving it is. So housing affordability, fit-for-purpose, affordable cultural infrastructure and places to make and present work to audiences all need to be aligned for it to thrive. I think we probably need to revisit some of the structures of my youth and investment models of my youth, because some of it is investing in bricks and mortar—it is getting back to really good, high-quality fit-for-purpose infrastructure—and some of it is about new forms, like technology and virtual ways of engaging. There is probably some technology that I think my children might be engaged in at the moment. They are making their own worlds, they are making their own communities and they are practising a whole lot of creative practice that I am unaware of. How do we tap into that?

As a local government authority, I have got to say the federal government has been amazing over decades in funding great infrastructure, but we have a challenge always in that infrastructure: how does it become, long-term, sustainable to operate? We build things, but the operating model does not get the same sort of look-in. These structures are here for many, many generations beyond ours, so how do we sustain them? I hear words like ‘entrepreneurship’—you know, ‘Be more entrepreneurial.’ Again, I come back to my first point: that takes leadership of government. You cannot just ask a sector to be more entrepreneurial. In fact they are entrepreneurial already; they have tapped into all of their resources that they can, and in my lived experience they are hitting that, despite numerous government investments from a range of tiers of government. So we need to think in new ways, but I do think housing affordability and fit-for-purpose cultural infrastructure for making, not just presenting, are probably by design.

Ariel BLUM: Just to go back to your anecdote about your friends as comedians –

The CHAIR: Getting paid in exposure.

Ariel BLUM: Yes, and just having a side hustle, I guess language has been created that sort of celebrates a side hustle as being a positive, but fundamentally it is an incredibly systemically challenging situation where you have people who have to work multiple, multiple jobs—it is not just one, two or three jobs; it is like five, six or seven jobs—and the end point of not having a sustainable model for artists to earn a living wage is you have less artists, and less artists means less cultural production, which has a major effect on the local community’s enjoyment, wellbeing and health, as well as economically.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. I will pass to someone else now. I will go to Richard on the screen.

Richard WELCH: Yes, thanks, Chair and Ariel and Vicky. I have got three questions. I will go through them quickly in the time. Regarding live performance in particular, we have had a shrinking of venues that actually provide outlets for live performance. That is partly people's change in tastes and how they like to consume culture and live music, but it is also partly because the economic model for those venues has become such that it is not viable for them to put it on for one reason or another. From a local government point of view, to what extent are your own local regulations hindering live performance venues, whether it is sound, hours or other things, and what can you do about it?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: Great question. I will try and tackle it. I wish I had my strategic planning team here, because we are also leaning into that in a big way. Particularly around the City of Yarra and inner Melbourne's north the density of population is all very much around vertical apartment living, and I think we would like to align with our peak body, Music Victoria, in these challenges.

One of the things that local government can do around regulation is to think about ways in which venues can do noise abatement. I think there have been some good examples of where that has worked, but there have been some examples of where that still does not work depending on where sound travels particularly. In some apartments, sound will travel north to the sky particularly and be read quite high. I think that is a big challenge for local government to work with state government and to work with our regulators, particularly our Environment Protection Authority, around how we create great indoor spaces that actually do satisfy noise abatement and dense living.

There is probably the idea that outdoor venues in the inner city are probably at risk in that you can see some limitations around music not being able to be amplified at certain times of the day or night. And I think there is a discussion to be had with the community and with venue owners but also with our place-making teams and our city designers around how we strike that balance and how we facilitate music to happen inside live music venues well. But also we know that in other cities around the world music is enjoyed in all places—in the public realm and in outdoor places—and there seems to be an ability to do that well.

I have got to say that the City of Yarra has just recently had three street-based outdoor festivals taking over main activity centres. They are not without challenge, but it has been quite incredible to see the community response, with tens of thousands of people walking the pavement and walking what would normally be asphalt, where cars and trams happen, to enjoy music and to enjoy dancing. I think we can be thinking about the role of festivals as well as live music venues, but it is a challenge. I suppose what I would like to say is that the regulation is something that councils have to abide by, and we need to work within those parameters. Whether those parameters can be tuned differently, I cannot confidently speak to that today.

Richard WELCH: That sort of goes on to my next question, which is a standalone question but also a response to that. You have used the phrase 'fit-for-purpose cultural infrastructure', so I would like you to unpack that a little bit. But isn't providing the ability for people to be able to play music part of that fit-for-purpose cultural infrastructure anyway?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: Yes, I think you would say that if we could see some good design guides that would help people who are converting spaces or converting venues to be fit for purpose. From an artist's perspective, 'fit for purpose' would be that there would be state-of-the-art technical assets, great PA and sound systems with equally great soundproofing that would be appropriate to the sort of programming that would be happening within that venue.

Some of the issues that councils have faced have been around patronage, so not so much about the venue itself but people moving to and from venues—the outdoor zones and patrons leaving or a door opening. Sometimes 'fit for purpose' could be making sure there is an airlock between doors. I think at the moment I would say venues are struggling to invest in the venue itself in terms of rising costs for insurance, and so the things that go are the replacement of PAs or audio desks or lighting that would keep that venue being a quality venue. I think Music Victoria would say our music venues struggle because of the changing nature of the revenue streams, to which I would say alcohol sales will have driven a lot of revenue in venues and the nature of the changing habits of audiences where there is a decline in that means venues will be thinking about ways in which they could attract different audiences at different times of the day and night. So I think 'fit for purpose' for me is one of technical assets that drive quality programming, so local stages that have great systems for young and emerging through to professional acts to be practising but also structures that support the sort of programming

that happens there, whether it is live music, theatre or dance. Fit for purpose, for example, for dance venues would be a sprung floor with wooden flooring. They are the things that I would say would be critical for a fit-for-purpose venue, and that is to not think about which location in terms of accessible transport and DDA compliance, so ensuring artists and audiences of all ability are able to perform. The other thing we know is that great green rooms and accessible facilities that are both physically and socially inclusive also drive a fit-for-purpose agenda for local government.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. Chair, do I have time for another one?

The CHAIR: Yes, you both have one more. Thanks, Richard.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Another bit of phraseology in your submission here is, under support for under-represented groups, increased funding for training programs that support emerging arts leaders. What is an arts leader?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: Well, it is anyone who has done it tough and still managed to survive. I think there are artists and there are cultural leaders: those who have, despite a whole lot of barriers, got through some of the barriers that exist, people who are determined for change and to create work despite some of those challenges, that find their audiences, find funding, find investment streams to continue to practise and continue to present work and take that work, with great challenge sometimes, overseas and bring it back for local audiences. I will give it to Ariel, because Ariel is probably well placed for this.

Richard WELCH: Just to narrow that a little bit, I guess I am wondering: is there a blurring of the line between art on its merits or art because someone has worked diligently? And I am not making a judgement either way; I am just trying to clarify what you are saying.

Ariel BLUM: Well, to speak to the concept of leaders and the terminology we have used in the submission, to elaborate on that, leaders in our sector include not just necessarily the trade people of making art. They are also the community galvanisers. The people who can drive audiences would be considered leaders. People who can understand or think in high-level theoretical and conceptual, as opposed to just being on the tools—I think we would classify those as leaders as well, if that helps answer the question.

Richard WELCH: Yes, that is helpful. Thank you. And thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. I will go to Tom.

Tom McINTOSH: Hi. Thanks for being here today. I just want to come back to the point by Ariel, was it, in the initial comments you made about everyone having their buds in their ears and listening to content. You talked about consumption data. Do you want to just expand on that a little bit?

Ariel BLUM: I guess what I did say was I do not think there are any that we can actually—it is not getting logged. There might be numbers of how many hours people are listening to certain things, but in so much as understanding broad engagement levels by the community in arts and culture content and then breaking that down to Australian-made arts and culture content, breaking it down to a local level—right now there is no ability to capture that. So it is really hard to advocate to the broader community to say, ‘Hey, this is a critical part of everyone’s everyday life and should be considered in the same light as we do other things that people see as critical functions in society.’

Tom McINTOSH: And are you thinking mainly music or including podcast creation and –

Vicky GUGLIELMO: Everything.

Ariel BLUM: Well, everything. Using the earbuds analogy, with anything that is going into your earbuds, there has been an audio technician who has been involved. If they are journalists and it is a journalistic podcast—maybe it is not necessarily arts and culture—there is someone that is the podcast producer in there, and those people typically are trained, starting from the arts space. The sector is not just the shiny product, it is everything underneath it, and that is what we want to see being acknowledged more broadly.

Vicky GUGLIELMO: And practice—I think the federal government has had a fairly clear definition of art-form practice, but maybe that also needs to be interrogated in terms of new, emerging practice. The role of

platforms such as podcasting is changing the nature of what is being made. The roles of speaking, truth-telling, storytelling, audio platforms and visual-audio platforms and the structures have—you know, you can podcast from your bedroom if you want to and you have found your audience; you do not need all those other structures to create it.

Again, it comes back to my point: what is the role of government in content and in local content? What is the role of government in bringing these sectors together and making visible those who are making this work? I keep going on about structures; the structures need to be there, and people need to know they are for those pillars to be confidently supporting long-term practice. I think there is a short-term nature to practice—you know, ‘If you haven’t made it by your mid-20s, maybe give it up.’ I am in my 50s and I am still going. I have not made it per se, but I keep my practice alive. I think it is age and stage, and I think it is across all ages. I do think in terms of local content—again this sense of hope for young people. Where do they aspire to? I aspired as a young person to be signed, to get gigs in my local venues, to hopefully get gigs at local festivals and then to get national festival exposure—touring. I wonder what younger people are experiencing and feeling when the world around those opportunities is shrinking. As Ariel talked about, it is not the big shiny things. How do we ensure that we have actually got practitioners in two or three generations beyond me? Because that is what is at risk. I really think that is a significant risk around local production.

Tom McINTOSH: It seems, rather than, say, the number of plays or the number of listens or whatever it might be—that sort of data might be available more easily—you are more interested in what plays need from a workforce perspective, if I am hearing correctly. Have you got any thoughts or ideas about how that may be collected? I am mindful of not wanting to see reporting requirements put upon artists, because—not to be too clichéd—they probably do not want to spend their time filling in documentation when they want to be doing other things. Can you speak to that and how you might see it?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: I hate to say it, but the census is a great opportunity to ask the right questions, particularly around this idea of seeing a creative practitioner as maybe being a hobbyist; it is just not true. Again, I think there are other players better than Ariel and me around this, but my crude answer is the census data every four years, on who is actually practising, and I think pathways and data with our educational institutions—in terms of first-year enrolments in creative sector specific courses, what the enrolments are like in year 1 and how many are completed in year 3—and maybe the vocational opportunities after that. I speak to internships, mentorships, traineeships, cadetships—these are all pathways out of those institutions into real jobs.

I also think the role of artists in the creative sector on professional boards is a missed opportunity for diverse perspectives, and good governance around many industries would tell us that creative professionals could have such an important part to play. The data on representation on boards is also another avenue for us to think about. Again it is about inspiring hope in younger generations that they can actually make a career and make a living. The call to action for us as a nation is: if we are not inspiring younger writers, younger musicians, younger filmmakers and younger storytellers to see that as a career, it just will not be here. I think we can focus on data, but my suspicion is that we are in decline on all those fronts. So how do we turn that around? Because it is an industry that can definitely be an economic force globally. I think we are potentially falling behind in that opportunity just because our local creators will not be here.

Tom McINTOSH: Okay. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Tom. We will go to Gaelle.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you very much for coming in today. I am sure the people with the earbuds are tuning into this. I am sure that it is one of the must-listens. I am interested: just at a high level, when you look at federal government funding and state government funding, what part does local council play in that mix?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: I think vertical planning, in terms of high level. You know, these are the structures. How do we compel all tiers of government to co-invest? What brings us to the table to come together with mutual benefit to co-invest in models? But also it is not just money investment; it is actually relationship investment. So how are we all identifiable to each other as tiers of government and across government departments?

I think in local government my experience is we struggle to think about—we are funding grassroots projects, and like most state government and federal government, our funding is annual. It is project-based. It is a

challenge when we are talking about long-term viability or long-term sustainability, particularly of companies or organisations which need recurrent funding and some baseline investment to just keep operating, before you have even talked about the outputs or the products or shows or performances that could definitely have an audience here but have an audience across Australia and outside of Australia.

I think at a high level there have been some great opportunities in the past where federal government and local governments have got together. In Victoria there are 79 local governments, all of them investing in creative industries and all of them investing in cultural infrastructure in various ways for local communities. I think the conversation between the federal government and local government could be reinforced through forums or strategy and policy discussions around where there is mutual synergy of our strategy. Local government are at the grassroots. We have got artists who we know, so come and talk to us, federal government, about who is in our community, who is working, who is ready and who is wanting. The local offer sometimes can be behind a studio in an artist-run initiative, and that artist could be working internationally, yet there is a disconnect with federal government investment or with export value. So how do we as bureaucrats, as policymakers and as grant makers start thinking about our relationship and our policy having some alignment through not just co-investment but relationships? I could easily say, 'Feds, fund local government more,' and I will say that. Yes, please fund us more for cultural infrastructure. Fund us more to develop those fit-for-purpose venues that have all the bells and whistles of great technology and of great infrastructure.

I think some of our international partners—Singapore and other places, Taipei—look to Melbourne for the sort of cultural infrastructure that is fit for purpose to drive that offer. My experience in that is they would love the audience appetite that we have here in Australia for engagement in performing arts, in circus, in music and in dance. They could only dream of having the audience appetite that we have here. So how do we as government really co-invest in some of the pressure points—sustainability of companies that drive that programming across all art forms and youth pathways, which I have talked about. But also there is a workforce within those companies that drives the work and drives the ecosystem.

We have not really touched on products and startup products as well. The federal government does a lot in this space around export and trade shows and diplomacy between countries. Local government cannot get a look-in there. We do not know how to do that, so that is the conversation: how do we know what products or startup products are happening in our local places like Collingwood or Fitzroy or Richmond? They are happening. People are making great products. We have got a startup innovator in Collingwood who just came back from Los Angeles, a massive arts market, and thousands and thousands of people are interested in this integration product with technology. It is happening in Collingwood. So how do we introduce that crew to our counterparts in federal government? How do we be a part of that conversation rather than it being a referral or 'Go and see what can happen'? I think there is a coordination or vertical planning opportunity that I would really encourage. I would be desperate to look at how our federal colleagues and we come into the same room to look at individual stories—structurally, yes, policy, but individual makers and industry that is happening on the ground that we know of. How do we broker that with you?

Gaelle BROAD: Just in your response you talked about federal and local. Do you see the state having –

Vicky GUGLIELMO: I absolutely see the state in that. Again, the three tiers of government all being aligned is a challenge, so again it is leadership. I think I have talked about vertical planning with colleagues in other capital cities. We were part of a national cultural forum in 2015 where all the local governments and capital cities across Australia came together. I think that was my first experience and a great experience of cultural leaders and local government and federal government leaders and the ministry coming together to talk about what this nation needs and what the experience is like for all of our cities.

Gaelle BROAD: So I guess you feel that there are locally stories there of people that could be exporting things, but they are not tapped into. There is no access point they have got.

Vicky GUGLIELMO: It is the system of government. How does government play the role of collaborator and be at the table with local government and state government and themselves and the industry? We see this happening in some pockets, but I am talking really grassroots product development or what might be the innovation sector—products that are being developed, shows that are being developed. Melbourne is a city of small to medium companies, so its challenge is that there are a lot. There is work and the creation of work being made every day, every moment, every hour, every night, and the diversity of that ecology is it is small scale and

large scale. So I think the challenge for federal government is: you might tap into the big, shiny stuff, as Ariel talked about, but there is actually the fine-grained stuff—more behind someone's studio, the development of a new dance work, the development of a new theatre show, the development of a new writers forum—that might actually have a market outside of a locality. How do we have that conversation and how do we invest in that?

Ariel BLUM: If I could just add one more point to that: on a day-to-day level what our team is doing is we are on the ground, so we have the relationships with what is going on. To Vicky's point, it can stop there, but where can we help take that higher up to the different branches of government? We play a critical role in that part of actually seeing what is going on and supporting it as much as we can, but there is that ceiling. How do you then get it to that international level or national level?

Gaelle BROAD: I am assuming some artists would want to do their own thing or make their own connections rather than government getting involved, but are you hearing from people that they are needing any extra support?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: I think the role of broker can be about relationships. If you parallel the creative sector with any other industry, there is value in government playing a leadership role in networking and brokerage. Sometimes in our own sector we are not identifiable to each other, let alone to government. So again, what are those platforms through which networking and brokerage can make the sector identifiable to other players, other industries and each other and government?

Gaelle BROAD: Just on that, I am interested in Yarra's Room to Create program. How does that work? I know in Bendigo there is an emporium where they have a hub and they bring people together. But can you talk a bit about the Yarra Room to Create program. How does it work? Is it about funding or is it about community and connection?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: It is about funding. We have a gift fund. Many years ago, the City of Yarra worked with the Lord Mayor's charitable fund to create a gift fund. The interest off that—it is very modest interest—gets drawn from that fund every year. I will give the example of last year. Last year it was about \$22,000, a very small pocket of money, but we were able to fund two infrastructure-related projects. For example, in the past there has been money that was given to Dancehouse, which is a local, very much-loved, grassroots but very high-hitting dance company where dance is practised, dance is made, shows are premiered and shows go off touring in the whole dance sector. We were able to support them to transition their lighting to be more energy-efficient and more environmentally friendly through that fund. That has made a huge difference on a whole range of levels. But for a company like that to upgrade their lighting, those challenges are financial, and when they are working on year-to-year, project-based funding or base organisational funding it has made a huge difference.

Another one is a great example that was spoken about only last night, so it is fresh in my mind, where a studio was able to use money to create a rehearsal space as part of their administrative base. That rehearsal space continues to be used for dance and meetings. The sector is using it in a way that would have been unable to be used without our investment—a small investment in creating some walls that would have designated that space to be community use. That fund now has a cycle. The fund generates small amounts of interest, so for the City of Yarra we provide expressions of interest to that. We cannot meet demand. It is a very small pool of money, but it allows adaptation to be done around infrastructure for organisations that are residing within our municipality.

Gaelle BROAD: You just mentioned housing affordability and the impact that has on the sector. Can you expand on that?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: Live/work spaces is probably my big message to you today. I think there are some planning controls, and when we are looking at new developments, think about models; they are there now. We have got models that are happening all over Melbourne where housing affordability is being tackled. Artists are no different in terms of being able to afford to live, work and present in proximity to each other. My feeling is that when we are thinking about new builds or when we are thinking about building a new arts hub, building a new community centre or building some new housing projects we talk about priority communities and artists should be considered in that. But the live/work space is a planning control, so how do we create places where maybe one level is where artists live and the ground floor is where artists can make and produce? Those

live/work models are able to be tested through planning controls. There is a zone 3 creative zone in Victoria that enables some of that, but how do we in new developments ensure that there is space provision and affordable homes for artists to reside in as we would think about for all communities—a diverse community? A socio-economically diverse community is a thriving, vibrant community, so pricing artists out of community is probably something that Melbourne is very familiar with. Once they go, they are gone. They might be in Bendigo, but it is only a point in time when Bendigo becomes unaffordable to someone on an income that is less than \$20,000 a year. Again, we need to be thinking about those sorts of systems and structures in housing. Housing is a big challenge. I again would say it is probably one of the most complex problems we have right now, and it is a national debate. But I would really like to champion that artists are part of our community and part of potentially our vulnerable community.

Gaëlle BROAD: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Gaëlle. We do not have much time left, but I just have a really quick question that popped into my mind. It does not relate to us as state MPs, it is a federal issue, but just out of interest, on the proposed cuts to music and arts therapy for the NDIS, is that something that in your opinion could further impact the industry?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: I have been part of a divestment agenda for decades now, and I think we are probably here because of the hundreds of millions of dollars of divestment in arts and culture. In terms of NDIS, I think the data is there. I urge you to get VicHealth in the room and key leading health professionals—you have health departments too. We know the benefit of singing and music. There is so much research that we know of. For myself, as a musician, when I am eligible for some sort of aged care package, I would want an art therapist; I would want someone to help me continue to sing and listen to music and stimulate that part of my brain. The benefits of that are numerous. I express a lot of sadness and remorse that that is something that people have not got the choice to switch on. NDIS as a package should have been self-determined through collaboration, and I wonder why something like that would be excluded from someone's choice.

Ariel BLUM: If I could just add, that is the fundamental symptom of how arts are seen, which is when people start going, 'We need to make cuts,' that is the first thing to go. Our sector is just kind of used to that. But as Vicky said, from the get-go around resilience, there is only so much resilience that is able to be mined in order to continue doing the work.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you so much for your time today. Richard, we have got time for one really quick one if you would like.

Richard WELCH: Yes, I will quickly sneak one in, so thank you, Chair, for your indulgence. As that conversation unfolded, the question that was occurring to me was: if we have more government involvement in supporting and creating programs, it does always create the risk then that those organisations themselves become gatekeepers as to what art or what purpose of the art is promoted and which are locked out. Even in your own submissions there are a lot of things that imply that art should be directed to this purpose or that purpose. How do you prevent the government support, which I agree the artists need, then tipping over to also being deterministic in terms of what art gets made?

Vicky GUGLIELMO: It is a big question, but I will tackle it from a need-and-demand lens. The shrinking divestment in arts and culture in the country has been a reality for a long time. It is highly competitive, and when it is highly competitive, you might be not investing in the broad ecosystem that needs to be invested in. I really encourage the idea of investment rather than granting, and it is a conversation with the sector about investing in an ecosystem, and a diverse ecosystem, of scale. I think that probably answers the question—because if you keep only investing in one end of the ecosystem, it falls apart, and I think that is where we are at the moment.

Richard WELCH: Good answer. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for your time today. That concludes the public hearing.

Witnesses withdrew.