

# 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

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**WITNESS** (*via videoconference*)

Jo Porter, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Arts Victoria.

**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 family. 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 just have committee members introduce themselves, starting with Richard on the screen.

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

**Tom McINTOSH:** Tom McIntosh, Member for Eastern Victoria.

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

**The CHAIR:** Georgie Purcell, Member for Northern Victoria.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Evan Mulholland, Member for Northern Metropolitan.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks so much for appearing today, Jo. 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 this hearing, and transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you please state your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

**Jo PORTER:** Yes. My full name is Jo Porter, and I am appearing on behalf of Regional Arts Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. Thank you so much. We now welcome your opening comments but ask that they are kept to around 10 to 15 minutes to ensure plenty of time for questions.

**Jo PORTER:** Oh, they will not be that long. I feel like the questions will probably support your information more, but I will fire away. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which Regional Arts Victoria meet. We acknowledge Aboriginal connection to creative practice on these lands for more than 65,000 years and extend our respect to First Nations people throughout our communities, which spread across the state.

Regional Arts Victoria, which I will refer to as RAV, is the peak body for regional creatives. We are a not-for-profit and have just over 700 members, whom we offer a public liability insurance scheme, capability development, networks and also promotional opportunities and advice. On top of that we are thoroughly regional. We all work remotely. I am usually based in central Victoria near Trentham in the northern district. Geographically my nearest colleagues are in Ballarat and my furthest colleagues are near Portland and Lake Tyers Beach, so really in the far west and far east of the state. This means that whatever our actual roles are, we are embedded in our regional Victorian communities.

RAV does have dedicated staff whose responsibilities focus on that capability development, network support and connecting regionally based creatives with opportunities to partner with local government, state

government and federal government but also the private sector in their local economies. So we have those dedicated staff, but because most of us live in regional communities, we are also acutely aware of the different challenges in day-to-day life and how the creative communities can access opportunities that are available in those places.

RAV also works closely with schools and regional presenters around the state bringing experiences into schools particularly that expand the kids' experiences and bring in the creative ways of exploring curriculum. We also tour performances to small halls and performing arts centres around the state.

Finally, we work with governments quite closely in managing devolved funding programs and advising on policy and so on. One of the ways that we were able to provide some insights into the Regional Arts Fund grants, which come via the Commonwealth government, was because we manage that program, and we provided some of that information in our submission to the inquiry.

Moving on to, I suppose, more of a position statement that sets out or addresses item 2 of the inquiry's themes, I imagine that you are all familiar, but the current Commonwealth regional funding landscape really only comes directly from the federal government's Office for the Arts. Creative Australia funds all Australian creatives but does not necessarily review its funding for an equitable spread between metro and regional or around the states. Specific grant opportunities to regional Victorians can be accessed through the Regional Arts Fund, which is managed by us in Victoria on behalf of Regional Arts Australia, or through the Office for the Arts or Festivals Australia, which is for regional festivals.

The result of that combination really is that regional Victoria continues to demonstrate significant unrealised potential across all art forms and that there is an enormous opportunity to translate further investment into impact across the Victorian economy, of which the creative ecosystem is a big part. Creative Australia's long-term investment in metropolitan centres—basically Melbourne and Geelong—and some project support is really welcome, but my concern is that that investment really masks considerable underinvestment in regional Victoria. We are not seeing the commitment of four-year funding or larger project grants going to regional Victorians. The Regional Arts Fund and Festivals Australia do specifically address regional Victoria's creatives, but unfunded excellence is significant. Those of you who work in the arts will be aware of this rather ironic term, 'unfunded excellence', which is basically what falls below the line in what can be afforded in terms of a grant pool. We are not seeing the multiyear regional organisational funding which would nurture the opportunities that I listed in my submission.

I think that I can probably leave it there, Madam Chair, and I look forward to your questions.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. Thank you so much for your opening comments. Trentham is a beautiful part of the world. I live in Kyneton and spend a lot of time in Trentham. In your submission you talk about activating regional hubs. Could you talk about how you imagine they would operate and how it would help address some of the issues that you have highlighted?

**Jo PORTER:** I think one of the concerns, I guess, around access is even so basic as internet access not being fantastic. If I am on a work call and I have to leave home and I am driving, I lose connection on my driveway. If I am working from home in a smaller community I might not even be able to apply for a grant on my one bar of 4G. So hubs I think can provide an opportunity to not duplicate access and infrastructure but piggyback on things that already exist so that individual artists or creative people have places to have meetings or use decent internet. Quite often safety is an issue. Weatherproofing can be an issue. So it is being able to actually access those sorts of things. But also I think we can underestimate how awesome it is for those of us who are in and out of foyers or art galleries and so on that we do get to build our own peer network, learn from people, develop skills and understand really basic things around governance just through those conversations. I think hubs do and can provide those, but I would not recommend adopting new initiatives. I think that libraries and existing places can be beefed up or access to those can be beefed up without replicating what already exists.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thank you. Also in your submission you spoke about the inconsistencies in regional classifications. Can you run us through that a little bit more and the impact that it is having?

**Jo PORTER:** Yes. There are a number of impacts. One of the significant impacts is that it is impossible to understand exactly where the equitable access might lie. For example, Geelong is rolled into a regional category. Back to Back is there and Platform Arts is there, and those are supported by the federal government,

either through Creative Australia or otherwise, reasonably significantly. But if you take Geelong out of the picture, the share among regional Victorians in that federal pool of support looks very, very different. So a consistent approach would allow a more transparent way of tracking who is really benefiting, how the individuals and organisations in regional Victoria are participating and whether they are getting a fair go.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thank you so much. I will pass to Tom.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Hello there.

**Jo PORTER:** Hi.

**Tom McINTOSH:** I was just wondering if you could talk through some of the employment statistics regionally. You mentioned going from one side of the state to the other. I am in Eastern Victoria, so down to Lake Tyers' edge. I was wondering if you could talk through some of the high-level employment data.

**Jo PORTER:** Do you have a slightly more specific question in terms of RAV zone employment?

**Tom McINTOSH:** Just more broadly about the industry. How do you see the impacts, whether you want to talk to regions or particular towns, through workforce and investment in the local economy and that side of things?

**Jo PORTER:** Okay. I might need to take that one on notice for really specific information.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Yes.

**Jo PORTER:** But where we see the big centres—are you from east or west?

**Tom McINTOSH:** Eastern Victoria.

**Jo PORTER:** Okay. So, for example, if I am talking—we do, rather ironically, have a little laugh when Gippsland seems to be an interchangeable term for Traralgon; the valley definitely seems to represent Gippsland.

**Tom McINTOSH:** People of the great centre, at Sale.

**Jo PORTER:** Yes, exactly. It is having a really good understanding of the role of those bigger towns west of Sale. A town like Bairnsdale actually has quite a strong creative community and a decent amount of employment, but if you move out to Orbost, Lakes Entrance, Mallacoota or Lake Tyers, the employment tends to be what we know as portfolio employment, where artists will tend to have an individual practice but then they are also teaching or just working in the local economy. We have a relatively invisible artist workforce in your electorate, until you move over to what we might think of as an arts worker or the technical workforce, who are the people who are backstage at the Wedge in Sale or the Forge in Bairnsdale or what have you. Certainly in that sector there has been a huge drift away, and it was very difficult to employ skilled workers in that area as COVID hit. It is a fairly precarious role, I guess, so people have been drifting into local government and so on as an employment place. But more specifically, I can send you some separate info about statistical employment breakdowns.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Yes, I would appreciate that. All right. Thanks very much. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Tom. I will go to Richard.

**Richard WELCH:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Jo, for coming in and for your submission. I grew up in regional Victoria, so I already have great sympathy for the work that you do. Your submission covers a range of things. I want to focus particularly on festivals. Across the festivals that you are supporting or that you are working with, what is the typical situation for them? Are they designed to be profit-making and to wipe their faces or are they designed to be structurally loss-making and supported by grants?

**Jo PORTER:** There are not enough grants for them to be reliant on grants. Usually a grant might come from the local tourist board, like Visit Victoria. My local festival is Spudfest. I think they got a very modest grant from Visit Victoria last year, but they certainly would not expect to get it every year. That was a bit of a spike

in opportunity that supported their marketing, but mostly they are highly reliant on volunteers and are really working from year to year based on what they can raise. That is slightly different for a bespoke arts festival like the Castlemaine State Festival, which is a year-round institution that receives support from Creative Victoria and then from the philanthropic sector particularly in that central Victorian region.

**Richard WELCH:** Thank you. In order to make these festivals more structurally sustainable—the impression I get is that a lot of them are really brought undone by things like insurance costs. I would like to hear what you might think are structural changes that would make them sustainable and less reliant on volunteers, funding and living on an oily rag. Would there be structural changes that could make them sustainable? Rather than them having to be subsidised from the top down, could we structure things better so that they would be more inherently sustainable from the bottom up?

**Jo PORTER:** One of the costs that is structural is insurance, and that is obviously a very big issue. I have raised whether VMIA could step in there at all. Festivals are very difficult to insure because a lot of them are outdoors, and so there are weather considerations and there are evacuation plans. All of the things that go into organising a festival are really quite significant.

I think in some ways the volunteer aspect is actually a really important part of the identity of a festival and it does have that sort of bottom-up feel and delivers for that community. I think that the pressure that they are sometimes under to demonstrate the value for their funding can skew what they exist for and that a small festival that brings people together in a smallish town maybe does not have to spike room nights or other sorts of tourism milestones or KPIs. In terms of the system, I think we need to have a thorough think about the importance of getting together and the importance of volunteers in any community—if you grew up in regional Victoria you will be aware of how reliant everything is on volunteers, from the CFA to the people handing out how-to-vote cards at elections—supporting volunteer succession and understanding the ways that volunteers can contribute in a way that does not burn out the same people all the time and then rethinking some of those insurance options might just let a bit of steam off and allow people to breathe more easily.

I mean, the insurance thing is a huge issue. And that is not only for regional festivals, it is also for regional individuals and artists, which is why we offer an insurance program that allows the benefit of a large cohort of people insuring under the same umbrella.

**Richard WELCH:** I guess it is a barrier to entry as well, isn't it, to new creations? My second question would be around the grants themselves. Are these grants all typically a one-off, or are they annual and then you have to reapply and go through that exhaustive process? In your ideal world, how would grants be structured, timewise and lengthwise and things like that?

**Jo PORTER:** I think recurring grants for established organisations that have a bit of a track record of using taxpayer funding wisely are a really great way to benefit not only that organisation but the cohort and the community that they exist in. They can afford to make forward commitments and invest in planning, strategy, branding and all the things that allow a small organisation to thrive. I think that is one of my big points in my submission, that with only three regional organisations receiving funding that is anything other than ad hoc project grants, it means that that whole regional sector is somewhat precarious, because they can never make a plan beyond what they know they are already funded for. That might be \$8000 to make a small work or run a pilot, and there is no joined-up thinking in terms of what they can then do to sustain a broader community.

**Richard WELCH:** Chair, do I have time for one more or am I done?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, time for one more.

**Richard WELCH:** There is also an almost contradictory point in that if you take money from the government or if you become the arbiter of government money, there is always a risk then that you, or an organisation, become a gatekeeper in a sense and that the allocation of funding may be prescriptive or may be deterministic in terms of 'If we're going through a series of tick boxes, only if you're doing art that meets these criteria will you get the funding' and whether that is a handbrake on true artistic freedom and expression. I hope that is not too obtuse as a question.

**Jo PORTER:** No, it is not obtuse. I was just wondering what the question was, but I think I am following it. I guess what I would propose is that in some ways that is up to you guys and your public servant advisers to

develop programs that deliver on the policies of the day. In managing a grant program, which is what we do, we put in place a really robust assessment process that addresses what the design of the program is. In a freedom-of-expression argument there are almost no grants that are designed for that. Probably the Creative Australia grants are the closest to that, because it is an arms-length funding body, but I think those interested in this sector will have observed that even that can fall apart.

In terms of being gatekeepers, we as RAV provide hours and hours and hours of advice to individual artists around what the eligibility criteria are, what the purpose of the grant is and in trying to support ways of talking about projects and expressing ideas in ways that might get that project in as robust a state as possible so that their peer assessors can look at it and go, 'Hey, that's a fantastic idea; it meets the criteria and it also embodies what that particular artist wants to do.' But that, I suppose, real, complete freedom of expression in terms of the grant is almost impossible because there is always going to be a paying of the piper even if the piper is only playing very softly.

**Richard WELCH:** And that is where I just would wonder whether something that could be popular and commercially successful may not get through because it is not meeting some predetermined artistic outcome criteria rather than artistic or commercial criteria.

**Jo PORTER:** Well, if we think of commercial as being popular and people wanting to see it, that is pretty fantastic. I think probably the biggest opportunity is to make something that people want to see, because then you earn the money and you can do what you want with it next time. I think in many settings people need a bit of a leg-up, and particularly in a regional setting, where they are a long way from markets, being able to get some money to test things out or travel to Melbourne or Sydney or Geelong or Canberra or wherever to be able to test things can require that leg-up. But I have rarely seen an assessment panel filter something out because it was too popular. Mostly they are very excited to see something that they think people will want to go and enjoy. At the end of it it is about really enjoying what you are going to see.

**Richard WELCH:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Jo. Thank you, Chair.

**Jo PORTER:** You are welcome.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Richard. I will go to Gaelle.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thanks, Jo. I just want to understand, I guess, where the money comes from. I noticed in your submission you talk about Creative Australia, and in your own analysis it is showing that regional Victorians receive \$1.06 per capita compared to \$3.79 per capita in other states. Can you just expand on that? What discrepancies are you seeing there, and is that the only pool of funding? Where else could regional Victoria be getting assistance from?

**Jo PORTER:** The analysis around that dollar figure is around what is there that is within the terms of the inquiry's framework around federal support and the impact of the federal government's arts and culture policy. That analysis looks at what a regional Victorian has spent on them per head versus what regional people around the rest of the country have spent on them in terms of grants going to artists. It is fairly crude, but it is a way of saying, 'If we're looking at what regional Victorians are participating in of the pool of money dedicated for this purpose, we're a few dollars behind what regional people in other states are accessing.'

In terms of where else support is available, that support in a federal sense is directly from the Office for the Arts, which is the federal government's department which specifically runs that Regional Arts Fund, Festivals Australia and then two funds specifically for First Peoples' outcomes. In terms of the bigger picture about where money comes from, I think, referring back to what Richard was talking about, earned income is pretty fantastic. You can sell your painting, you can sell a theatre ticket. There is that commercially generated income. A lot of local businesses provide community grants. You know, local branches of Bendigo Bank—it is a leading organisation that commits through its community banking facilities—but also local real estate agents and other businesses are committing to things. But in terms of a systemic opportunity for regional Victorian artists, the main other two sources of grants are from the state government through Creative Victoria or through their local councils, with other pockets occasionally coming through Regional Development Victoria or the multicultural commission or other bits and pieces.

**Gaëlle BROAD:** There are other pockets, yes. But as far as the terms of reference go, regional Victoria's share of national arts and culture spending you would say is severely inadequate at this point?

**Jo PORTER:** Absolutely inadequate.

**Gaëlle BROAD:** Now, you mentioned regional communities and the different challenges. I know you have talked about your phone dropping out in the driveway and challenges with the internet connection, but what other challenges do you see facing regional Victoria?

**Jo PORTER:** Look, I do not need to tell all of you where things sit with housing costs and all of the economic things; I do not think I need to rehearse all of that with you all particularly. But the specific challenges can be as simple as schoolkids not being able to stay after school if they are going to miss the only bus that gets them home, so offering an after-school program or something else in town that requires people to stick around outside school hours can be very challenging. We get offered all sorts of wonderful opportunities for workshops or other appearances and have to go through and make sure that people realise that there is football, cricket or netball practice on Thursday nights almost throughout the state. So it is all of the commitments.

Maybe one of the challenges is also an opportunity that ties back to what Richard was talking about, which is that people in the regions tend to be doing a lot—they are not only an artist; they are also teaching music in the local school, they are volunteering because the local school needs playground equipment, they are picking up someone else's kids up from school and they are volunteering at the CFA. So that challenge is around the smaller resources, but that is also a huge opportunity in terms of the strength of civil society where people do know each other and step in. I think one of the big opportunities is strengthening that so that as our regional communities change with higher population and changing housing and all of those kinds of things, those connectivity things persist. That is potentially a challenge when the cost of living is higher and families are maybe running a property but then also someone needs to go and get a job for the day-to-day cash. That juggle is getting very complicated.

**Gaëlle BROAD:** You talked about creative hubs and perhaps using libraries or existing spaces. I know Bendigo has an emporium where they bring people from different artistic backgrounds together, but how many like that exist across regional Victoria? Are there many of these creative hubs at the moment?

**Jo PORTER:** Formally, no—I would need to just check so that you have got an exact number—but informally, libraries and cafes are incredibly important in terms of where people gather. I often think that that is actually the nub of it. It is also putting some money back into the existing economies. The emporium in Bendigo does a great job because it is very outward looking and offers quite formal skill development, which I do think is a gap that always needs to be filled as people move in and out of the sector but also, as Tom raised, in terms of skills development and making sure that we are all focusing on the fact that everything changes all the time and so lifelong learning is very important in our sector.

**Gaëlle BROAD:** Yes. This is my last question, but I have heard some feedback that particularly in the tourism sector sometimes grants and when they are announced can be just before an event and there is not a whole lot of run time. Can you speak to that? Are you aware of that being an issue?

**Jo PORTER:** Yes. It is very frustrating and concerning. The load of a grant application can and really does need a certain amount of information, particularly if it is taxpayers money. Certainly there are very onerous requirements. In a short amount of time, gathering all of the data that you need but then also getting support letters and other kinds of information is extremely onerous, particularly if it is a volunteer or a part-time organisation that is putting something like that together.

I suppose—this is definitely my own two cents worth—my pet peeve is that the information does not get cut-through always, and smart organisations offering grants should have good networks so that the dog whistle gets cut-through. If the government puts out an email, it is like, 'Ugh, do they want my tax? What is it that they want from me?' So being able to work with partners that can refer opportunities as a way of furthering or building an organisation is really important. At RAV certainly I know a number of us, so long as it is not a conflict of interest, will volunteer to help people write grant applications and so on because we have jobs and experience in that, and it is often not quite as daunting once you have done a bit of it.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Gaelle. Evan.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Thank you. Thanks, Jo. Your submission talks about delineation, with ‘regional’ being inconsistent across different funding bodies. Could you provide your definition of ‘regional’ Victoria and whether other bodies would agree with your definition or not?

**Jo PORTER:** I guess I would go with the Australian Statistical Geography Standard, which sort of just pushes the boundaries outside what you would more intuitively think of as regional or urban. It is really vexed, because everyone who lives outside maybe 25 k’s of Melbourne feels like they are regional. I have had very strong conversations with people right around the Port Phillip Bay side of the Mornington Peninsula saying they feel very regional, but then I go to Nhill or Boort or somewhere and I think, ‘This is actually regional.’ So you sort of have that sense of what is eligible.

But I think the main thing is consistency, and as I said before, part of the consistency is being able to track what people are accessing and what their opportunities are. And if there is a sense of conveniently trotting out a big centre like Geelong and saying, ‘Look, regional Victorians are getting this much,’ the people who are not a 50-minute drive from Melbourne and a big library or a big art gallery or a basically urban centre I think quite justifiably feel excluded and unseen. And that is actually one of the things, as all of you who come from regional backgrounds know—that sense of it being a very long way from Melbourne to where you live rather than the other way round.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes. This is kind of an expansion on that point, but there are a lot of places that maybe 15 or 20 years ago would have been considered regional, like Melton –

**Jo PORTER:** Ballan.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes. Ballan, Donnybrook, Melton and Riddells Creek to an extent—areas that are being swallowed up by new housing estates. Not only infrastructure, as in roads and everything else, does not catch up, but there are kind of deserts now with no cultural infrastructure. I just want to get your views on that and get your views on how we support new estates and housing that is also going into the regions with the cultural infrastructure that we need.

**Jo PORTER:** I think that is a really good question, and one of the things that is, I suppose, very live for us in that outer suburban doughnut, if you like, is ‘same same but different’. A lot of the people living there are addressing similar issues of isolation and social change. What I guess the systemic approach needs to be is looking at what works and trying to replicate that. I do not know that building new infrastructure is always the answer. I think certainly the argument that I would make against myself saying that is Bunjil Place in Narre Warren, which is awesome, and I think one of the reasons why it is so awesome is that the theatre and the library sit in the same amazing complex as local government offices, which means that there is a continual surge of people in and around, using that.

I think investing in a performing arts centre and putting it in a new suburb might undervalue what is already there and that building multipurpose opportunities is potentially more useful for communities for the future. But there is a lot of cost involved in that. It is being able to, I suppose, think much more long term than sometimes is possible for politicians and government, so that the thinking is there about how that is going to work and looking at some of the ones that do not work and why and actually pulling the sector together and saying, ‘Well, how come Bendigo works really well? How come that new gallery in Shepparton works really well?’ What can we learn from the regions?’ I think often from an urban perspective it is like ‘We can take the ideas out to the country and they’ll all benefit from it,’ but there are actually some fantastic ideas that people are just getting on with. I was talking to the mayor of Mildura yesterday, and she was like, ‘Oh, we’re out there; we’re just doing our thing,’ and I was like, ‘Yes, you are.’ But some of the ideas that they are coming up with to deal with isolation could be activated in a peri-urban setting just as well.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Absolutely. I wanted to ask something else. You kind of referenced it before—you may have said it. But talking about obviously a lot of money going to Melbourne, a lot of money going to Geelong, if you took out Geelong, what would be your share of funding in the regions?

**Jo PORTER:** If I threw it back in, you mean?



**Evan MULHOLLAND:** No, if you removed it.

**Jo PORTER:** That is what I have reported. It is in that dollar per head. Whereas if Geelong was back in, it would be, I do not know, a half-dollar something more. I would have to do the maths for you. I am certainly not begrudging what gets spent in Melbourne and Geelong; I hope that is not coming off that way. It is more: where is the equity?

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes, and how do we create an environment where investing in the other regional areas that are not Geelong is more attractive? It is building up plans? Is it loan mechanisms? Is it all of the above? Is it councils getting much more involved in this space?

**Jo PORTER:** It is probably all of the above, Evan. I think there is a sense that the local governments regionally also feel very strapped. There is a sense that everyone is strapped but that there are resources that probably could be reviewed, reallocated. Also, there are some really fantastic examples. We work in the south-west of the state with five local councils, who all put in a very modest amount of money, and then the federal government tops that up, so that we have got a dedicated staff member working across those five shires and the City of Warrnambool and can actually go, 'Well, we don't all need to have the best gallery in in Victoria. We've got two amazing galleries, and we've got these historical collections. We've got individual artists. We've got an amazing couple of festivals in Port Fairy. We've got the maritime collection in Portland. What if we talk about all of this as a strength?' I think that thinking in that way is a much more sophisticated use of everybody's resources. But also, once the doors are closed, everyone almost puts away their local government boundaries and actually gets together and figures out 'Well, what's the benefit for the region? How do we talk to the South West Community Foundation and Fletcher Jones foundation and Visit Victoria and so on so that we've got that big-picture benefit for a whole region?' That works really quite well because three levels of government are investing somewhat in that kind of thing. I think if you are looking big picture, Evan, it would be actually saying, 'Well, what are the partnerships that we're going to nurture?' It is about infrastructure but it also is really about people, because there is nothing on the gallery walls, there is nothing on the stages and there are no books in the library if the people are not supported in those communities.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Fantastic. That is all for me.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Evan. Do any other members have other questions? Wonderful.

All right, that concludes the public hearing. Thanks so much for your time today, Jo. We really appreciate you coming along and speaking to us.

**Witness withdrew.**