



Arts Industry Council (Victoria)

08 April 2021

Mr Enver Erdogan, Committee Chair
C/O Committee Secretary
Economy and Infrastructure Committee
tourisminquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au

Re: Arts Industry Council of Victoria (AICV) Submission to the Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors

Dear Mr Erdogan,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission for the Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors. This document is a collaborative effort by members of the Arts Industry Council of Victoria (AICV). A number of our Member peak body organisations will also make their own submissions to this Inquiry, which we endorse.

The AICV is the State's independent voice for the arts. Convened by various arts industry peak bodies in Victoria from across different art forms and focus areas, AICV represents individual practitioners and arts organisations ranging from small independent companies to large state cultural institutions. This correlates to approximately 7,000 Victorian creative organisations, artists and arts workers who support and engage with hundreds of thousands of audiences and participants each year. AICV advocates on behalf of our constituency and contributes to public debate by providing leadership and forums for discussion within the sector.

You can read more about AICV at <http://aicv.org.au/>.

Our submission is divided into two parts, in keeping with the focus of this inquiry:

- the impact of the pandemic on our sector; and,
- recommendations for State Government measures that will support our sector and restore lost jobs.

A summary response to each precedes our more detailed notes.



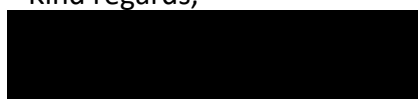
Also consistent with the terms of the inquiry, the focus of this submission will be on events and/or tourism impacts. A more general response on the impact of the pandemic on the arts and creative industries can be found in our previous responses to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, available at:

- [https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/COVID-19 Inquiry/Transcripts/AICV 14 May verified transcript.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/COVID-19%20Inquiry/Transcripts/AICV%2014%20May%20verified%20transcript.pdf);
- [https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/COVID-19 Inquiry/Presentations Round 2/AICV 13 August verified transcript.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/COVID-19%20Inquiry/Presentations%20Round%202/AICV%2013%20August%20verified%20transcript.pdf);
- [https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/COVID-19 Inquiry/Questions on Notice Round 2/AICV - Questions on Notice.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/COVID-19%20Inquiry/Questions%20on%20Notice%20Round%202/AICV%20-%20Questions%20on%20Notice.pdf); and,
- [https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/COVID-19 Inquiry/Submissions/43a. Arts Industry Council Victoria Redacted.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/COVID-19%20Inquiry/Submissions/43a.%20Arts%20Industry%20Council%20Victoria%20Redacted.pdf)

Finally, we note that in this submission we have focused as much as possible on lingering or emerging impacts and recommendations to resolve them in 2021, and not those we have previously identified through other forums (including those in the above mentioned inquiry). This is to ensure our contribution adds additional constructive information to aid State Government decision-making, rather than repeating what we have already noted. Where relevant, we have provided links to quoted sources of information.

Should you require further information, please contact us at any of the details below.

Kind regards,



Simone Schinkel
Co-convenor



Joe Toohey
Co-convenor



AICV Convening Organisations: Arts Access Victoria; Ausdance Victoria; Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria; Express Media; Multicultural Arts Victoria; Music Victoria; National Exhibitions Touring Support Victoria; Public Galleries Association Victoria; Regional Arts Victoria; Songlines; Theatre Network Australia; The Push; Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC); Writers Victoria.

1. SUMMARY RESPONSE

Impacts of the pandemic See Section 2 for further detail.

Economic and financial

The economic and financial impact of the pandemic continues to be felt, and will be tested in months following the end of JobKeeper.

Mental health

Insecure work, uncertainty about the future and unsustainable work practices are interrelated with poor mental health outcomes for those in the sector.

Social and cultural equity

The impacts of the pandemic are not evenly felt, with First Nations, young people, Deaf/disabled communities, and communities of colour all facing additional challenges in emerging from the pandemic.

Digital delivery

Across the sector, the capacity to meet new demand for live and digital event offerings is growing but may struggle to be met. There is also a need to continue 'hybrid' delivery models in order to maintain accessibility of events for both Disabled and non-Disabled community members.

Staffing

Facing uncertain prospects about future employment, some have been forced to leave their organisation or the arts entirely.

Risk mitigation

In the absence of adequate business interruption or event cancellation insurance, event producers and artists may deem the risk of running events too great.

Priority of arts and culture

Arts institutions based within non-arts specific bodies such as local government or universities have struggled to be prioritised for support.

Capacity restraints vs density limits

Whilst density limits remain in place, venues may not be able to reach breakeven audience numbers – even with the lifting of % capacity restraints.



Recommendations for Support See Section 3 for further detail.

Creative State 2021+

The State Government's Creative State strategy renewal, due to be launched in mid-2021, is a well-timed opportunity to assist the sector to rebound in 2021 and beyond with significant support measures.

Secure work and Working for Victoria

The State Government's announcement of the pilot Secure Working scheme, to commence in 2022, has the potential to provide significant support to the arts and creative sectors and could be expanded to our sector. Additionally, programs such as Working for Victoria and Jobs Victoria Fund offer new ways of supporting work for artists.

Digital delivery support

Programs which resource, training or coordinate digital delivery programs across the sector would be a welcome addition to the current support available.

Mental health support

Initiatives such as the Arts Wellbeing Collective and Support Act that support the performing arts could be further expanded across the arts and entertainment sector, including creating more culturally specific mental health support options.

Long-term recovery

Recovery programs that allow for the middle- and longer-term cultural and financial recovery of the sector need be considered.

Targeted initiatives

Based on early learnings from emergency relief measures for the creative industries here in Victoria, we recommend that all future programs continue to include targeted initiatives that 'ringfence' financial support for underrepresented communities including: First Nations, young people, Deaf / Disabled communities, communities of colour and regional / remote communities.

Risk mitigation initiatives

To mitigate the risk of delivering events in the creative sector, the government has a role to play in underwriting some risk.

Consistency

Guidelines that are consistent across sectors, settings, and that align nationally would provide a more predictable operating environment, conducive to recovery.



2. IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC

Some of the lingering impacts of the pandemic across the arts are outlined below.

2.1 Economic and financial

The financial impact of the pandemic on the events and tourism sectors has been well documented, and was a focus of our previous submissions to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic (see cover pages).

As an update (at April 2021), we summarise here the following:

- Total employment in arts and recreation services at February 2021 in Victoria has begun to recover, from a low of 52,000 in August 2020 back up to 69,400 in February 2021 (compared to 71,300 in February 2020)¹;
- Total number of hours worked nationally in arts and recreation services at February 2021 is 6,708,200, up from a low of 3,599,700 in May 2020 but still below the 7,525,900 worked in February 2020²;
- The number of underemployed persons in the arts and recreation sector nationally was 44,600 in February 2021, up from 41,600 in both May and February 2020.³

It is noteworthy that all of these figures are taken from a period in which the national JobKeeper program was in place. Data released later in 2021 will assist in gathering an accurate picture of how the sector might be placed without this temporary support.

2.2 Mental health

The *Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry* report (2016)⁴ commissioned by Entertainment Assist noted that the entertainment industry struggled with mental health challenges over and above that experience in the general population even before the pandemic hit, with 15.2% of workers already experiencing moderate to severe depression (compared to 3% in the general population) and 44% experiencing moderate to severe anxiety (compared to 3.7% in the general population).

¹<https://public.tableau.com/profile/occupation.and.industry.analysis#!/vizhome/IndustryOccupationquarterlyemploymentupdate/CoverPage>

²<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/feb-2021/6291011.xls>

³<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/feb-2021/6291019.xls>

⁴ <https://musictrust.com.au/loudmouth/working-in-the-australian-entertainment-industry-final-report/>



Unsurprisingly, AICV Members continue to report ongoing mental health challenges within the sector, though the issues are complex. RMIT⁵ have explored the interrelations between work, mental health and sense of self many artists derive from their practice, whilst Theatre Network Australia⁶ somberly recognised that “...some artists were ‘relieved’ when the shut-down began (which) is also evidence of the financially precarious, unhealthy and unsustainable work and life commitments of many independent artists,” as the lockdown period forced them to slow down.

Creatives of Colour had similar findings, with many artists of colour already struggling with financial exploitation and unpaid labour prior to the pandemic, which was exacerbated with unrealistic expectations for productivity and creative outcomes during lockdowns. Many of these impacts were made worse through isolation, with an inability to connect with peers and/or access culturally relevant support services.⁷

Initiatives such as the Support Act⁸ program and Arts Wellbeing Collective⁹ are invaluable for our sector. However, it is important to recognise that in addition to treating the symptoms of poor mental health when it arises, the insecurity, uncertainty and unsustainable work practices that too often characterise arts and events work need also be addressed.

2.3 Social and cultural equity

As for the community more generally, the impacts of the pandemic have not been evenly felt across the community, and this is now playing out in complex choices about how to re-open.

Creatives of Colour¹⁰ point to over 400 reports of COVID-19 related racism against people of Asian backgrounds, of which 65% of respondents identified as female; 40% of these incidents happened in public spaces. Another example is the overrepresentation of South Sudanese backgrounds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people amongst those receiving fines during the first lockdown period.¹¹ The public safety of these communities, as well as international tourists when borders are re-opened, will be of critical importance as events are delivered again in 2021.

⁵ <https://www.ausleisure.com.au/news/research-shows-impact-of-covid-19-on-arts-and-creative-sector-workers-mental-health/>

⁶ https://www.tna.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TNA_2020_Report_This-Is-How-We-Do-It.pdf

⁷ <https://creativesofcolour.com/research>

⁸ <https://supportact.org.au/>

⁹ <https://www.artswellbeingcollective.com.au/>

¹⁰ <http://diversityarts.org.au/app/uploads/COVID19-racism-incident-report-Preliminary-Official.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/sep/28/sudanese-and-aboriginal-people-overrepresented-in-fines-from-victoria-police-during-first-lockdown>



For Deaf/disabled people, the increasing access offered by both smaller events with health restrictions in place and more modes of delivery (such as digital) have been welcome positive changes since the pandemic took hold. The willingness and capacity for event managers to continue delivering these kinds of services once restrictions are lifted is yet to be fully tested, but a number of AICV Members have commented that their networks are finding it difficult to find this balance.

What may result without a strategic approach is what one AICV Member referred to as the “collective impact of individual decisions.” Rather than a sector-wide, coordinated response to tackling these issues, they will be met by individuals and organisations on a case-by-case basis, and we will lose the opportunity to bed down important access gains made during the pandemic.

2.4 Digital delivery

In response to the pandemic, many event providers were required to ‘pivot’ their work online. A number of AICV Member organisations have reported some of the positives of this shift, allowing new audiences to be reached in new ways. Recent data from the Audience Outlook Monitor¹² confirms this; 80% of audiences Deaf/disabled audiences are participating in online arts and culture, and 72% expect to attend the same or more than before, long-term.

Two challenges are emerging, however:

- The limited capacity and resources of organisations to deliver both online and live events and service these two audience groups; and,
- The limited expertise within the sector to continue to deliver online offerings.

The impact of the first challenge is that important gains in new audiences and new audience experiences, in particular for those groups who may not otherwise be able to access in person events, will be lost as choices need to be made. Compared to the earlier noted figure of 80% participation in online arts and culture activity from disability audiences, the same figure for the general population fell from 70% in September 2020 to only 47% in March 2021¹³, bringing this splintering of audience into stark relief.

There are two drivers of the second challenge:

- Existing personnel have limited experiences in creating online events and/or new equipment is too expensive to purchase; and,

¹² <https://www.thepatternmakers.com.au/blog/2019/4/5/audience-outlook-monitor-phase-3-fact-sheet-disability>

¹³ <https://www.thepatternmakers.com.au/blog/2019/4/5/audience-outlook-monitor-march2021-key-findings>



- Those who do have the experience are in high demand, and have limited scope to meet the expectations of a growing market.

Additionally, the ability for ticketing systems to align with contract tracing software has been limited, and continues to pose a technology integration challenges for many venues.

In combination, this discourages the continuation of digital event offerings for most arts and creative event providers in the long-term.

2.5 Staffing

As we have noted in previous submissions, the nature of much of the arts and event sectors is that relationships are built not just between employer and employee, but between sole traders, contractors, casuals, government, and businesses.

AICV Members have reported individuals that were not able to weather the storm presented by the pandemic may now be lost to their organisation or to the sector. Organisations working with young artists such as Express Media and The Push found the issue particularly acute for those still trying to find their place in the sector, with limited job mobility for those already employed coupled with reduced opportunities for new work or programs.

2.6 Risk mitigation

Following the onset of the pandemic, event cancellation and/or business interruption insurance providers have explicitly excluded COVID-19 from all policies. This means that the risks of delivering any event falls back on presenters, promoters or artists entirely. At a time when the likelihood of last minute event cancellations remains high due to COVID-19, and following an extended period where many of these stakeholders have received no income for their work, a number of our Members are reporting that this is a risk they are not able to bear. The experience of Bluesfest Byron Bay¹⁴, which was required to cancel only hours before delivery, will only decrease risk appetites.

AICV Members have also observed complications in drafting event contracts that can adequately deal with such cancellations or postponement in the absence of external underwriters. When dealing with touring artists, for example, several scenarios present that have direct impact on the ability of an event to be delivered, even in locations which themselves are not currently facing restrictions:

- Sudden state border closures when an artist is travelling;
- Forced quarantine periods when returning from 'hotspots';
- Localised outbreaks interrupting touring schedules;

¹⁴ <https://musicfeeds.com.au/news/bluesfest-calls-cancelled-event-the-festival-that-could-have-happened/>



- At-risk groups (both audiences and artists) not able to participate;
- Decision-making and responsibility/liability for decisions when government advice uses terminology such as 'recommended' rather than enforcing restrictions; and,
- Variations in expectations and expertise in delivering COVIDSafe events.

Whilst some degree of uncertainty is inevitable, artists and venues (particularly those with more limited resources) may deem this level of risk insurmountable, or may not discover until too late the extent of the risk apportioned to them until something goes wrong.

2.7 Priority of arts and culture

It is an operational reality for many arts and cultural institutions that deliver events and support tourism, that they are owned and operated by multi-service providers such as universities or local government. These backers are critical, and their investment and support over multiple years has ensured millions of visitors and local residents have access to arts and cultural experiences.

The pandemic required trade-offs to be made, however, and arts and culture units within these providers often found themselves low on the priority list of services. Members of the Public Galleries Association of Victoria (PGAV) and the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC) reported staff of these spaces being redeployed away from their core arts functions, or stood down altogether through 2020.

With many economic and creative industry support packages also explicitly excluding local councils as well as universities or local government-owned venues, it will likely be some time before these spaces reach full capacity again, with some facing shortage of skilled operators to support reopening programming, particularly in regional areas.

2.8 Capacity restraints vs density limits

Music Victoria and Live Performance Australia¹⁵ have both noted that many live performance venues cannot reconcile current provisional capacity limits with density requirements restrictions. This means that, even with a nominal 100% capacity allowance for these spaces, density quotients of 2sqm per person will restrict them from reaching anywhere near this mark, and as such will prevent them from delivering profitable events. For some small venues, this creates a strange inconsistency whereby private events might host 100 people at their home but a small venue, with additional guidelines, risk mitigation strategies and expectations, cannot.

¹⁵<https://liveperformance.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/LPA-MR-LPA-calls-on-all-states-and-territories-to-move-to-100-capacity-in-live-entertainment-venues-and-keep-borders-open-as-industry-marks-one-year-since-shut-down-19March-2021.pdf>



Whilst the need for decision-makers to prioritise health outcomes is understood, the reality for many event spaces is that without the further easing of restrictions urgently (*noting that at the time of writing Victoria has been COVID-Free for over 28 days*) or significant additional investment and support, their ability to deliver viable events will remain constricted. This will be further stretched with the recent conclusion of JobKeeper subsidies which had played a significant role in keeping many of these organisations afloat through the pandemic.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORT

Based on some of the impacts noted in the previous recommendations, the following recommendations are made.

3.1 Creative State 2021+

The State Government's Creative State strategy renewal, due to be launched in mid-2021, is a well-timed opportunity to assist the sector to rebound in 2021 and beyond with significant support measures. Though a multi-year strategy such as this should not be defined by the pandemic, the context in which it is launching is inescapable.

Opportunities that might address immediate COVID impacts as well as address some longer-term issues in the sector included all of those listed in this report, including:

- The insecurity of work for too many in the sector;
- The development of targeted support and funding programs for communities underserved by standard programs (such as those trialled for First Nations, regional and Deaf/Disabled applicants during the lockdown period);
- Support for digital events staff, alongside training of those who may already be responsible for it within their organisation; and,
- Continued mental health support initiatives for the entire sector.

3.2 Secure work and Working for Victoria

The State Government's announcement of the pilot Secure Working scheme, to commence in 2022, has the potential to provide significant support to the arts and creative sectors and could be expanded to our sector. Whilst we understand the need for these programs to be trialled and tested, the arts and creative industries have high levels of casual and contract staff and would benefit from their inclusion with the pilot program.

Additionally, programs such as Working for Victoria and the Jobs Victoria Fund, offer new ways of supporting work for artists. The Creative Workers in Schools¹⁶ and Museums and

¹⁶ <http://www.rav.net.au/creative-workers-in-schools/>



Galleries¹⁷ projects supported through this program have been extremely positively received, as they engage artists as employees rather than contractors or casuals, and thus provide a more supported work environment. As pilots, these programs could offer new models employing artists across the sector and create more stable jobs.

3.3 Digital delivery support

The value of continuing to offer accessible/hybrid events is generally understood across the sector, but the capacity and coordination to do so is currently lacking. Programs which resource, train or coordinate digital delivery programs across the sector would be a welcome addition to the current support available.

Funding programs such as Business Victoria's Technology Adoption and Innovation Program might be adapted or expanded as avenues for sector-wide or co-designed responses that allow for coordinated response to be developed (in addition to those targeting individual businesses).

3.4 Mental health support

Initiatives such as the Arts Wellbeing Collective and Support Act that support the performing arts could be further expanded across the arts and entertainment sector. This should be more extensive than simply expanding the art forms supported; it should also include relevant tailored and cultural specific support for communities who may not currently access these programs.

3.5 Long-term recovery

We know from previous work in disaster impacted communities in Victoria that recovery is a long term proposition. Recovery programs that allow for the middle- and longer-term cultural and financial recovery of the sector need be considered, and may include funding programs alongside training and support teams.

The national Regional Arts Fund 'BOOST' program¹⁸, for example, offered three streams of support from the outset: Relief (for immediate support); Recovery (for mid-term support); and Renewal (for longer-term responses), allowing for a staged shift through the necessary support post-COVID.

3.6 Targeted initiatives

Based on early learnings from emergency relief measures for the creative industries here in Victoria, we recommend that all future programs continue to include targeted initiatives that 'ringfence' financial support for underrepresented communities, including First Nations,

¹⁷ <https://amagavic.org.au/employment>

¹⁸ <https://regionalarts.com.au/regional-arts-fund/about-the-raf-recovery-boost>



young people, Deaf / Disabled communities, communities of colour and regional / remote communities and Low Socio-economic status groups that typically do not receive necessary support through untargeted or open funding programs; and which results in under representation and low participation rates of these groups.

3.7 Risk mitigation initiatives

To mitigate the risk of delivering events in the creative sector, the government has a role to play in underwriting some risk. We have seen the Federal Government offer risk support for the Film Sector through a Temporary Interruption Fund,¹⁹ and this kind of scheme would assist many event providers to begin delivering again.

3.8 Consistency

The sheer volume of information regarding covid compliance, and the constantly changing guidelines are over whelming for an already under-resourced and severely impacted sector. We would encourage the use of our Members to be briefed on changes and used as an additional conduit for getting this health information to those we represent. We would also welcome opportunities for the sector to provide feedback on the unforeseen implications of some of these restrictions. It must be acknowledged that our events and workers often cross borders and contexts, and consistency is an operating necessity.

4. CONCLUSION

The issues facing our sector reinforce the need to continue 'addressing the gaps' as they emerge and acknowledging the new world in which we are now operating. Our recommendations are offered in this spirit, and we look forward to working with the State Government on their implementation.

¹⁹ <https://www.if.com.au/temporary-interruption-fund-will-cover-covid-19-risk/>