



Hon Simon O'Brien MLC  
Chairperson  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
PERTH WA 6000

26 JUL 2016

Dear Chairperson

**Petition No. 123 – Perth Fringe World Festival**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the above petition. Below is a summary of issues that have been raised with me and I trust will be of interest to your Committee for further investigation. The issues have not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

The Fringe World Festival (the Fringe) is a multi-arts festival that operates annually immediately prior to the Perth International Arts Festival (PIAF). There is no doubt the Fringe is well loved and supported by audiences and that it makes a significant contribution to the WA economy. However, the petition raises several concerns regarding the sustainability and financial viability for artists and for the festival.

The PIAF is a curated festival and artists are paid at or above according to the *Live Performance Award 2010*. However, the Fringe operates a performer risk model called *Open Access*. The Fringe "... does not buy any shows, employ any artists directly or invest in the development of the works".<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Fringe receives 32% of ticket sales of all shows and a \$300 registration fee from artist. In 2016, \$9.3 million was spent at the box office, \$8.3 million "was delivered to artist in gross box office returns".<sup>2</sup> The State Government funded the Fringe, \$1,245,071<sup>3</sup> in 2016, which the Fringe details as 6.8% of operating expenditure, making it an influential stakeholder in the operation of the Fringe.

Under the Open Access model, Fringe Artists "... take the risk in developing and bringing their show to Fringe and staging it."<sup>4</sup> However, the satisfaction level of artists' experience at the Fringe however has declined over time. In 2016, 83% of artist were "satisfied overall"<sup>5</sup> and in 2015, 85.5% were reported as "satisfied or extremely satisfied".<sup>6</sup>

*Advocacy for Perth Fringe Artists*, (AFPFA) a public campaign established by Ms Tiffany Barton, a long-term, well respected and award winning Fringe performer, argues that the current registration fee and box office takings by the Fringe is getting too high for artists to be sustainable. AFPFA advocates that, while respecting the work of the Fringe directors and staff, some artists are concerned that the pressure on the festival to expand financially will take precedence over artists' financial welfare. In turn, it is argued, artists will be exploited in the process. These concerns could be investigated more fully, particularly regarding the costs and returns on Fringe productions which were so marginal and the need for a sustainable model which properly recompensed artists.

Further, despite the success of the Fringe in 2016, now recognised as the third largest fringe festival in the world,<sup>7</sup> 749 artists and supporters signed a change.org petition Support a Fair Deal for Fringe Artists.<sup>8</sup> Included in the concerns regarding the Fringe were:

- 100% increase in the registration fees from \$150 in 2014 to \$300 in 2015;
- Increase from 30-32% box office take for Fringe;
- Fringe guide advertising costs too expensive for artists;

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- Request for a 20% discount to Fringe World Partners;
- Lack of poster distribution and brochure hard to navigate;
- Ticketing services inadequate, high ticketing fees and ticketing information unavailable to artists with a view to building audiences throughout the year.

Furthermore, concerns raised regarding the current model include that all staff engaged as part of the Fringe program (eg cleaners, security and bar staff and ancillary staff) are paid according to the rate required by the relevant industrial award (and this is welcomed). However, artists are cajoled by exposure, fun, networking opportunities (non-measurable) and profit share and some may not even receive back door takings sufficient to meet basic living expenses. As one young man commented "...he spent five weeks on fantastic Blue Room Theatre plays that are completely sold out and made \$300—if he was lucky".<sup>9</sup> It is argued that while this may work where there is the demand; it is questionable whether this is a sustainable way to deliver an iconic event, especially given the current economic climate. It is also questionable whether this is a sustainable way for artists to be recompensed for their work. Related to this are concerns regarding the impact of low or no income on performers' health and well-being.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to sustainability issues (for both performers and the sector) there may be ways in which the model can be enhanced in order to provide other support to assist with meeting financial costs in development stages. For example, whether transport and related costs could be subsidised for performing artists, or the provision of other incentives to support local artists. This is an area which could be explored further.

Another area of concern that has been raised is the way in which the returns for artists are conceptualised and the subsequent lack of clarity around the financial outcomes for artists. In response to an estimates question in May 2016, the Director General of the Department of Culture and the Arts, Mr Duncan Ord stated, "we have agreed with it [the Fringe] that as part of the impact reports, it will undertake some elements around how performers have fared in their net takes, which is in a sense returns on the investment of the time they put in as performers."<sup>11</sup> While the 2016 Impact Report asserts that Fringe "delivered significant box office returns to artists", the documentation of this is not clear as the report confuses the information through use of the term "stimulated" "...gross box office payments to 365 different performance companies"... ". This does not meet the undertaking given to the Director General of Culture and Arts as outlined about the detail "net takes" and "return on investment" for artists. Therefore, clear details on the returns to local artists in performing at the Fringe are needed.

I trust this information is of value to the Committee in its deliberations. Please do not hesitate to contact me should further information be required.

Yours sincerely



Alanna Clohesy MLC

<sup>1</sup> (2016) *Fringe World Festival 2016 Impact Report*, Artrage, Perth WA, pg 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Extract from Hansard [Assembly Estimates Committees A and B] *Supplementary Information*, 26 May 2016, Division 31: Culture and the Arts, Supplementary Information No. A51, pp 655b-657a. Question: Ms J.M. Freeman asked for a breakdown of contributions made to the Fringe World Festival 2016 by Lotterywest, the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority and the Department of Culture and the Arts. Answer: Artrage received State Government funding of \$1,245,071 for the 2016 FRINGE WORLD Festival. This comprised: Department of Culture and the Arts - \$345,071, Lotterywest - \$700,000, Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority - \$200,000. An additional \$300,000 of in-kind support was provided by the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority.

<sup>4</sup> (2014) *Fringe World Festival 2014 Impact Report*, Artrage, Perth WA, pg 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Fringe World Festival 2016 Impact Report*, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> *Fringe World Festival 2015 Impact Report*, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Fringe World Festival 2016 Impact Report*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.change.org/p/support-a-fair-deal-for-fringe-artists>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, <http://www.equityfoundation.org.au/equity-news/the-australian-actors-wellbeing-study.html>

<sup>11</sup> Extract from Hansard [ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A]— Wednesday, 25 May 2016] p274b-280a