



**Minister for Health; Culture & the Arts
Government of Western Australia**

Our Ref: 33-34984
Your Ref: Petition No. 123



Hon Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairperson
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
GPO Box A11
PERTH WA 6837

Email: council@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Mr O'Brien *Simon*

PETITION NO. 123 – PERTH FRINGE WORLD FESTIVAL

Thank you for your letter of 18 August 2016 regarding the Fringe World Festival (Fringe World) petition tabled in the Legislative Council on 21 June 2016.

Fringe World was established in Perth in 2011 and is now in its sixth year. During this time, it has grown exponentially with the 2016 program containing more than 700 acts across 150 venues. Over 3,400 artists were included in the 2016 program with 71 per cent being from Western Australia.

Fringe World is managed by an independent non-profit arts organisation, Artrage Inc (Artrage). Artrage has been producing arts events of various scales since 1983, with Fringe World being the largest and most popular program to date.

The 2016 program attracted an audience of 989,675. These audiences played an important role in contributing to the revitalisation of Northbridge and making visitors to the area feel safe. It also engaged audiences in outer metro and regional locations.

According to the 2016 Fringe World Impact Report:

- 83 per cent of the artists surveyed this year were satisfied overall with Fringe World;
- 71 per cent agreed that Fringe World presented a platform to access an audience that they may otherwise not have had access to; and
- 75 per cent agreed that participation in Fringe World was important to the development of their craft as an artist.

The Department of Culture and the Arts (DCA) provides Artrage with core funding of \$350,000 per annum, which equates to approximately 2 per cent of the overall Fringe World budget. Artrage has also received funding from Lotterywest, local government and the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority (MRA).

In response to your specific questions, I provide the following:

1. Reasons for the recent increase in artists registration fees for the Fringe.

As with all not-for-profit arts events of any scale, there are many stakeholder needs to be met while striking a balance between the requirement to produce high quality outcomes, ensuring affordable ticket prices to attract the necessary audience, and a fair opportunity for all artists to present their work within a responsible budget.

I am advised that the registration fee structure changed from a flat \$165 fee for all performances in 2014, to \$300 for ticketed performances and a decrease to \$150 for free performances in 2015. This change was a business decision of the organisation and reflects the fee structure of similar open-access festivals. Artrage plans to maintain these fees in 2017.

In addition, I understand that in 2015, Fringe World expanded its programming team to include site producers and introduced increases in artist services including the establishment of an artists' club, the provision of greater resourcing to assist artists with queries, and assistance to artists presenting in external venues. These additional services were offset by the registration fee increases for ticketed performances. I am advised that Fringe World's registration fees compare favourably to other festivals based on the available research.

2. Reasons for the increase in box office takings for the Fringe

Fringe World's retained box office increased by two per cent in 2016 to 32 per cent, and is expected to remain the same in 2017. Prior to this, an increase had not occurred since 2014. The small increase in retained box office was a business decision for the organisation, in order to responsibly manage its budget. This fee is only charged on tickets sold to events at Fringe World managed venues – approximately 17 per cent (18 venues) of the total number of venues in the 2016 Festival.

3. Claims made in the submissions of restrictive marketing initiatives that limit opportunities for artists to access audiences

I am not aware of, and the DCA does not have access to, the detail of the Fringe marketing campaign or the detail of the marketing service that the artists receive.

4. Justification for the current Open Access funding model for Fringe and whether it can be enhanced

Fringe World's open access model means that anyone can perform, ensuring the broadest possible access to the arts sector. Artists pay a once-off registration fee. Fringe World is not curated and is focused on providing a wide ranging program that

will appeal to the broadest public. It aims to provide an accessible entry point and ticketing price point to people across the State who may not have previously engaged in the arts.

The open access model is consistent with other major Fringe Festivals in Australia and internationally. Other festivals that adopt the same model include the Adelaide, Melbourne and Edinburgh Fringe Festivals.

I understand the adoption of this model for Fringe World was the result of a consultative research and planning process by Artrage in 2009 and undertaken by independent consulting firm, BOP Consulting Ltd. Artrage considered the open access model the best to achieve the broad range of outcomes it has since delivered.

5. Principal petitioner's concerns regarding the level and degree that the Fringe was engaged to open Elizabeth Quay and her concerns about why money was not put aside to support performing artists.

I understand this was a decision between Fringe World management and the MRA, with the shared goal of expanding the reach and footprint of the festival while assisting in the public activation of Elizabeth Quay.

While DCA supports the appropriate rates of pay for artists, arts workers and industry professionals in all of the projects it supports, the MRA was the primary supporter of this event and provided funding of \$150,000.

Fringe World was just one of many strategies undertaken by the MRA to ensure the ongoing activation of this new public space, including hosting the Perth International Arts Festival, a laser light show, fitness classes, food trucks and a range of other activities.

DCA offers funding for individual artists and groups through a range of grants programs. Artists planning on participating in Fringe World can apply for funding for development and presentation of the work, including artist fees.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



JOHN DAY
MINISTER FOR CULTURE AND THE ARTS

19 SEP 2016