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Arts and entertainment need multi-level support to recover from coronavirus

The recovery of Australia's arts and entertainment industry from the coronavirus shutdown will require more than token government support, the Senate inquiry into the government response to COVID-19 will be told today.

Appearing before the Senate inquiry, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Allowance will advocate a multi-faceted response to get the sector back up and running.

Financial assistance will be needed to inject capital into arts organisations so they can again create jobs when restrictions are lifted, but even more urgent is income support for the thousands of freelance and casual workers in the sector who have been ruled ineligible for the JobKeeper income subsidy.

There is also a need for regulatory and tax incentives to guarantee future jobs and investment, particularly in the screen and media sectors.

MEAA chief executive Paul Murphy will give evidence to the Senate inquiry that the public health measures taken in March to prevent the spread of coronavirus brought the arts and entertainment sectors to a standstill and threw tens of thousands of people out of work virtually overnight.

The media sector has not escaped the impact of COVID-19 with more than 100 regional and community newspapers ceasing printing and significant redundancies at major media employers because of sharp declines in advertising revenue.

"The arts and entertainment sectors were among the first and hardest hit by COVID-19, and they will be among the last to get back to work as we knew it before coronavirus," Mr Murphy said. "A lack of immediate government assistance and the inadequacies of JobKeeper have placed the entire sector in a precarious position from which it may never recover without extensive support on a number of levels.

"Employment in the sectors has shrunk by at least 20% and incomes have dived, and this has been worsened by the tight criteria which have ruled many freelancers and casuals ineligible for JobKeeper.

"The devastation to the arts and entertainment could have been reduced if the Federal Government had responded to pleas from the sector for targeted assistance two months ago.

"Instead, workers in the sector feel they have been abandoned by their own government Minister."

Appearing alongside Mr Murphy today by video link will be actors Nadine Garner and Helen Dallimore, musician Ruth Hazleton, and production designer Fiona Donovan.

Mr Murphy will also seek to have tabled as evidence a petition to Arts Minister Paul Fletcher signed by almost 15,000 people requesting government support to get the sector back to work.

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