



MEDIA RELEASE: Sunday, March 22, 2020

Arts and entertainment sectors ignored by coronavirus stimulus package

The economic stimulus package announced by the federal government today is a missed opportunity to provide targeted and specific relief to the arts and entertainment sectors that have been heavily impacted by coronavirus related shutdowns.

Despite mounting evidence that the coronavirus will have a devastating impact on jobs in the arts and entertainment, the Morrison government has failed to provide any financial support to the sector, says the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

On the plus side, income support measures for sole traders, casuals and other workers who have been stood down may prevent a worst-case scenario of widespread poverty in the sector, said MEAA Chief Executive Paul Murphy.

“We are pleased to see that the needs of freelancers and casuals, who have no paid leave provisions to fall back on, have been acknowledged with the extension of income support to them, although it will still be inadequate to make up for the financial losses many face,” Mr Murphy said.

“The provision of tax-free payments of up to \$100,000 to small and medium sized businesses and not for profit organisations may help to keep some smaller arts companies afloat, although there is no requirement that the money be used to continue to pay workers.

“But overall, this was a disappointing statement for the arts and entertainment sector.

“There is ample evidence that the closures of venues has had a tsunami effect on the jobs of tens of thousands of workers in these sectors.

“Most of these workers are freelance or casual, so they don’t have paid leave entitlements, and are low paid at the best of times.

“Everyone in the arts and entertainment sectors needs to keep up the pressure on the government to come up with a rescue package for the industry, which it is estimated would cost \$850 million.

“Some of the money is already there. MEAA has identified \$160 million in funds already allocated to major and smaller arts companies this year that should be brought forward.

“Meanwhile, MEAA continues to call on companies in the arts and entertainment sectors to show some compassion for their workforces and to avoid mass stand downs if at all possible.

“It has been disappointing to see some employers in the sector move directly to standing down their permanent and casual workforces at the first instance. This began in live performance and is now taking place in screen.

“We urge companies in the arts and entertainment to use the support measures announced today to retain their staff.”

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