



MEDIA RELEASE

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Arts workers left stranded in NSW without work and unable to return home

Victorian and South Australian arts workers who travelled to New South Wales for various productions before lockdown have lost their jobs and are now unable to return to their home state.

MEAA, Australia's largest union for creative professionals, has begun sharing the stories of affected members on social media and is urging the public to sign a petition calling on the Victorian and South Australian Governments to bring the workers home safely.

The petition states: "Their applications to return home have been ignored or rejected without reason. They are now facing many more months of separation from their loved ones, with no job, income, or guaranteed accommodation."

Performer Jasmine Vaughns travelled from Victoria to Sydney in May to be in the cast of *Come From Away* but shortly after the show opened she was stood down.

"I applied for an exemption to return to my home in Victoria three and a half weeks ago," she said. "My application was denied and I am now going through the taxing process of re-applying all over again. My only reason for being here was for work, and now I have no work here."

Performer Zelia Kitoko travelled from Victoria to Sydney in January 2021 to commence a contract with *Hamilton*.

"I was stood down on June 26," she said. "My mother in Melbourne has been unwell and I am her only child and carer. I have not been able to return to her after many attempts and six weeks of waiting with minimal communication or clarity. It's been a very invalidating and incredibly stressful experience."

Performer Deirdre Khoo travelled from Victoria to Sydney in early May to be in the cast of Darlinghurst Theatre Company's *Once*.

"A few weeks after the NSW stay-at-home orders, I was stood down," she said. "By this time the Victorian borders had shut to anyone in NSW. I have not only lost my capacity to generate income, but also the ability to get back home to Victoria, where I am a resident. I have moved into a colleague's nan's place but am still paying rent and bills in Melbourne."

Andrew Coshan travelled to Sydney in May to begin rehearsals for *Merrily We Roll Along* at the Hayes Theatre.

"We were officially stood down on July 27," he said. "Because we were now out of contract, we could try get back to our home state, but by this point the Victorian border was closed. I have tried, and am still trying to get back to Victoria, but have so far only been denied entry to the state that I call home. I have never lived in Sydney before. I don't have family in Sydney. And I now feel like a burden on the associates that I'm staying with, but I have nowhere else I can go."

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Nick Curnow travelled from South Australia to Sydney to work as a voice and accent coach on the Sydney Theatre Company's production of *Triple X* on June 20.

"Just over three weeks later the show was put on hold indefinitely," he said. "Since the bureaucratic requirements to enter SA have changed, requiring not simply approval from the SA Police, but an exemption from SA Health, I have been waiting for over five weeks with absolutely no way to check on the progress of that application and no one to contact who has any further information or ability to help me."

Kathleen Moore travelled from Victoria to Sydney to work on *Come from Away*.

"Due to the lockdown, I was stood down from my employment without pay," she said.

"My work did not end until after lockdown and Victoria closed its border, therefore stranding me in the Sydney. Now in the eighth week of lockdown I have no work, no ability to earn a living and no knowledge or hope of when I may be able to see my husband again. That is not what I originally signed up for when I took this job. I have been rejected four times by the Victorian Border Control, after meeting with all of their requirements for travel to Victoria. The Victorian Government can no longer ignore their stranded workers."

"These are just some of the many stories we are hearing every day" said MEAA Equity Director Michelle Rae.

The union convened a virtual town hall meeting last week to hear from stranded performers and crew.

"We were absolutely inundated with stories of mothers separated from their children indefinitely, performers experiencing serious mental health issues, and many more facing severe financial hardship," Ms Rae said.

"By the time our members were officially stood down from their work the borders were already shut. The Victorian and South Australian Governments can no longer ignore their stranded workers. They are willing to quarantine or do whatever it takes. Bring them home."

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