



MEDIA RELEASE: Tuesday, May 3, 2016

Budget 2016: Arts and public broadcasting funding crisis continues as government maintains damaging course

Tonight's federal Budget has again left the arts community and public broadcasting shortchanged with no extra funding for the arts and the prospect of further cuts to jobs and services at the ABC, says the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance.

While base funding of the ABC has been maintained, funding for specialist news services will be cut by cut by \$18.6 million over the next three years, putting further pressure on already undermanned staff and raising the prospect of cuts to its regional news operations.

MEAA chief executive officer Paul Murphy said the new triennial funding agreement also announced tonight in the budget was a disappointment.

"The ABC's base funding may be untouched, but of course the true damage to the corporation was done in 2014 and 2015, where about \$250 million was cut," he said.

"None of that money has been restored, while the special funding allocated to expand news gathering services – like the national reporting team, regional bureaus and the Fact Check unit – has been cut and news services will be placed under extreme pressure."

Mr Murphy said ABC staff had delivered considerable improvements in productivity and efficiency in recent years.

"The cuts to the ABC have had a significant impact on its staff and operations.

"About 400 jobs have been lost, including many prominent journalists, the popular state-based 7.30 programs have been axed, television production in Adelaide has been terminated, offices in some regional centres have been closed, and most recently, there have been changes to regional radio programming."

MEAA is disturbed that the new Prime Minister and Minister for the Arts have maintained the doomed course charted by their predecessors in the 2015-16 federal budget, which slashed \$105 million from the Australia Council (since partly restored) and \$40 million from Screen Australia.

"This is disappointing budget for our sector," Mr Murphy said.

"The hopes that a new and more thoughtful approach to the arts would be embraced by the PM and Minister Fifield has all but evaporated. The \$10 million from the new Catalyst fund in no way makes up for the cuts to the Australia Council.

"The arts community is the place where we know the adage, 'from little things big things grow', is absolutely true. The lack of funding and incentive for talented young people hoping for a break means the well of Australian talent will be far drier than it ought to be.

"We can now only hope that a federal election will act as a circuit breaker and that the open hostility demonstrated towards arts funding is reversed," Mr Murphy said.

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