



MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, September 27, 2021

Don't be misled on Federal Government COVID support for arts sector

Federal Arts Minister Paul Fletcher is misleading the community about the level of assistance provided to the creative and performing arts sector during the COVID pandemic by misusing data provided by his department.

Mr Fletcher has exaggerated the amount of support provided by the government by as much as 50 times by including industry sectors such as clothing manufacturing and libraries in his interpretation of "the arts sector".

This is the second time the Minister has been caught out attempting to pull the wool over the art's sector's eyes, says the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

Last week, Mr Fletcher used data from the Bureau of Communications Arts and Regional Research to assert that he has fulfilled his May 2020 promise to provide COVID assistance of between \$4 and \$10 billion to "the arts sector" (his words).

But a close analysis reveals the government is using data from Australia's entire cultural and creative sector – a sector valued at about \$117 billion – which includes architectural services, advertising, clothing and footwear wholesaling and retailing, clothing manufacturing and jewellery wholesaling and retailing sectors.

Mr Fletcher is counting COVID assistance to a part of the economy 50 times larger than the performing arts sector to say he has honoured his promise to provide between \$4 and \$10 billion to the arts sector.

"This is a terrible misrepresentation by the Minister," said MEAA Chief Executive Paul Murphy.

"The performing arts sector represents about 2% of all cultural and creative sector gross value add (GVA), that is \$1.75 billion of \$85.67 billion).

The fashion and retail sectors, as defined by the ABS, represent two-thirds of all sector GVA, totalling \$57 billion out of \$85.67 billion, yet the Minister is counting COVID payments to these industries to say he has looked after the arts.

"The government is continuously shifting the goalposts to back-in Minister Fletcher's unrealised promise in May 2020 that *'the combined impact of JobKeeper and JobSeeker coming into the arts sector we estimate will be between four and ten billion dollars ...'*

"Based on FOI data provided to MEAA in 2021, the Federal Government made less than \$1 billion in COVID assistance payments to the creative and performing arts workforce since the pandemic took hold. This is less than one-tenth of the level of support the Minister foreshadowed last year.

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“Ultimately, MEAA members know that the government has utterly failed to provide credible levels of support to the creative and performing arts sector during the pandemic.

“Their lived experience is that they have been effectively abandoned by the government with little support or assistance. No amount of data subterfuge will erase this fact.”

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