



MEDIA RELEASE

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Jobs Summit must address wages in the creative industries

This week's Jobs and Skills Summit must address the low pay and job insecurity of workers in the arts, entertainment and media industries, who enrich our lives and inform our democracy, all the while contributing tens of billions of dollars to the national economy each year.

Lack of access to the bargaining system, the uncertainty of freelance and gig employment, lack of minimum pay and entitlements means the sustainability of these industries is threatened, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance will tell the summit.

MEAA Chief Executive, Erin Madeley, who will represent the union's 15,000-plus members at the summit, said low wages and job insecurity, combined with poor health and safety (in its psychological and social forms as well physical) caused by long working hours and a culture of "the show must go on", are cutting short careers and leading to skills shortages across the cultural industries.

She said creative workers were often trapped by a system that fails to recognise them as employees and which shuts them out of the industrial relations system.

The situation has worsened since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed the frailty of earnings in the arts sector when tens of thousands of workers were unable to claim JobKeeper and had no other source of income.

"Our members aren't the same as platform-dependent Uber and Deliveroo workers, but they face the same uncertainties," she said. "There is a persistent pressure to perform work at rates that undermine their ability to dedicate themselves to creative and media work.

"We know that over 60% of workers in the performing arts earn less than the minimum wage from their creative practice.

"And despite the flow of hundreds of millions of dollars from Google and Facebook into Australian media companies, the practice of shedding permanent jobs and replacing them with freelancers continues.

"Our industries need access to a system where workers can secure a sustainable and viable income and be freed of the risk of being shunted into lower-paid jobs where leave and superannuation rights are ignored.

"Governments have a critical role to play in setting standards and ensuring wage justice.

"MEAA now looks to the new Federal Government to reverse the chronic undervaluation and neglect of our media and arts sectors."

Australia needs a strong media to produce public interest journalism and to maintain a healthy democracy. Our nation also needs a strong cultural sector and cultural economy to showcase our talents and tell unique stories. We cannot achieve these outcomes where those in the media and entertainment engine rooms are displaced and under-valued.

A 2017 report by the Australia Council found that the average income for artists from all of their jobs – both creative and non-creative – was \$48,000, 21% below the workforce average.

Creative income made up just over a third of that amount, totalling just \$18,800.

The reason for this is the current bargaining system rules do not work for a sector where workers move from gig to gig and employer to employer. In many cases workers are not even recognised as employees, shutting them out of collective bargaining all together.

In the media, where journalism work is steadily moving away from traditional employment models, freelancers do not benefit from the gains won by journalists over decades through bargaining and do not even have a minimum rate of pay.

“We need a system of bargaining that recognises how our industries work and ensures all workers are remunerated to a level that allows them to sustain a career,” Ms Madeley said.

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