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## **Live theatre devastated by Australia Council cuts**

Australian theatre audiences, performers and stage crews are facing a bleak future as the Federal Government's drastic arts funding cuts start to bite, says the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

Following the loss of \$60 million from its budget, the Australia Council has been forced to defund dozens of small to medium theatre companies, leaving many without funding or facing reduced budgets.

According to some reports, more than one third of the 147 organisations who previously received organisational funding now have no operational funding from the Federal Government.

Sydney-based dance group Force Majeure has lost all its federal funding, along with 76-year-old literary journal *Meanjin*, Adelaide's Slingsby Theatre, the Canberra Contemporary Artspace, Melbourne's Red Stitch Actors' Theatre, Phillip Adams Ballet Lab and Theatre Works.

MEAA is concerned that without government support, some of these companies could be forced to go to the wall.

MEAA CEO Paul Murphy said many of the small to medium companies who lost their funding this week play a crucial role in nurturing and developing local talent.

"The impact of these cuts will be felt by our performers, crew and other creatives for many years to come," said Murphy.

"This is exactly the dire outcome we warned about when the cuts to the Australia Council were announced in the 2015 federal Budget."

MEAA was a driving force behind last year's Free the Arts campaign, following the Federal Government's announcement that the Australia Council will lose \$60 million over four years.

"In the lead up to the federal election MEAA member will campaign vigorously to see the restoration of the Australia Council's funding.

"Adequate arts funding that is administered at arm's length from Government interference is absolutely vital. The Australian arts community won't settle for anything less, nor should they," said Murphy.

Murphy said the Turnbull Government's new Catalyst program would not fill the gap left by the cuts to the Australia Council's budget.

"Catalyst does not provide operational funding – instead it funds projects selected by the Ministry of the Arts.

"The Australia Council's ability to provide sustainable support for arts programs in future years has been compromised," said Murphy.

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