

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

May 27, 2020

QUEENSLAND THEATRE URGES THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO CARE FOR AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS LEFT STRANDED BY THEIR INELIGIBILITY FOR THE JOBKEEPER PAYMENT SCHEME

Queensland Theatre is not receiving JobKeeper benefits: as a statutory body it is not eligible. However, seeing the benefit of JobKeeper for sustaining businesses, imagine what the scheme could do if it *was* extended to include the individual artists who work under casual contracts? This is the call of Queensland Theatre's Artistic Director Lee Lewis, as a message to the Federal Government.

"Nearly 80% of every theatre company's workforce is employed under casual contracts. All the artists, designers, directors, stage managers, technicians and specialty makers who create our productions are necessarily freelance so that they can work across many companies in their career. And therefore, 80% of our industry cannot be allowed to 'fall through the cracks' created by politics."

"I refuse to believe that our Federal Government wants to abandon artists, but that is what they are doing by refusing to extend the scheme," said Lewis.

"JobKeeper will be the difference between freelance artworkers surviving to create in years to come, or deciding to quit an industry which is obviously not valued by the Federal Government despite delivering more employment than coal mining. I don't want to say that the Federal Government is insulting Australian artists deliberately but there is no doubt that it is a blow that will have generational consequences if it is not redressed."

"Since learning that Queensland Theatre was not eligible for the federal scheme, the Board has been forced to make difficult decisions. We have not been able to retain some staff and most of our team are working reduced hours.

She said the company had cancelled five shows, had limited ability to keep working in the shutdown and was drawing heavily on reserves to function.

"Now imagine the same brutal decisions happening around the kitchen table of every freelance artist in the country. What do they cut from their family budgets all the while hearing how they should come up with 'creative solutions' to this crisis? We applaud the work being done by people around the country to try and provide assistance to artists. We encourage everyone to consider contributing to organisations like the Actors' Benevolent Fund knowing that assistance is made necessary by the Federal Government's refusal to reconsider their 'line in the sand'."

Queensland Theatre welcomes the Palaszczuk Government's announcement today of stART, a new grant program to support Queensland's independent creative artists producers, designer, technicians and arts workers. stART represents a further \$500,000 to its more than \$10.5 million initial response to COVID-19 for the arts sector.

"It's literally a stART", says Lewis. "But this is a national crisis that needs a genuine federal response of scale if we are to prevent a talent haemorrhage the likes of which this country has never seen.