

Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board Update Assistance to Organisations

13 September 2011

ASSISTANCE TO ORGANISATIONS 2012 PROGRAM

The Assistance to Organisations Panel and the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board have been faced with some very, very difficult decisions in the funding round.

It is an unfortunate reality in this challenging budget climate that this is a very competitive process and not every applicant to Arts Tasmania's funding programs is going to be successful.

The Board has adhered to the views of the sector at the funding forum held earlier in this year to fund for success, not to drip feed or apply random percentage cuts across the sector, even though this means funding fewer organisations.

Applications are assessed by a panel of mixed artform experts via a rigorous three stage process, with the highest-ranked applications being funded until the funds are exhausted.

More than \$2.2 million in funding for arts organisations was announced in this funding round - \$1 062 489 to honour existing multi-year agreements and \$1 148 374 in new funding.

Of course it is always difficult not to be able to fund some organisations and this is a decision the Panel and the Board take very seriously, recognising the impact of that decision on the cultural landscape and people's lives.

The Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board has outlined below the reasons surrounding its decisions not to fund the Tasmanian Theatre Company or Island Magazine for 2012.

TASMANIAN THEATRE COMPANY (TTC)

The Tasmanian Theatre Company has scored below the cut-off point for funding three years in a row – for 2010 and 2011, the company was just below the cut-off point and the Government was able to top up the amount of money in the funding pool to support them. This was not possible in the current budget climate and in any case, the TTC was not just below, but a long way below the line on this occasion – ranking 26th out of 29 companies who applied for funds in this round.

Defunding the TTC is not the end of professional theatre in Tasmania. The Board has provided funding of over \$900 000 in 2012 to support theatre activities in the state, including Tasmania Performs, Terrapin, Mudlark, Theatre Royal and Theatre North. Mudlark is also a professional adult theatre company; Tasmania Performs develops and tours professional theatre in Tasmania. All of these organisations also employ theatre workers. Tasmania Performs, Terrapin and Mudlark in particular support the production of local content and local writers.

Nor is this the end of development of the theatre sector in Tasmania. The Board supported the formation of the Theatre Council of Tasmania arising out of the industry's own response to the Macdonnell Theatre Review. The Board has already provided \$30 000 to the Theatre Council of Tasmania to develop sector plans and initiatives to support the development of theatre; and quarantined a further \$84 829 towards these future initiatives, for the development and benefit of the entire theatre sector in Tasmania.

The Board will work with the Theatre Council on its priorities and provide support for these from the earmarked funds as plans and projects develop.

It should be understood that the component of the state arts budget that Arts Tasmania controls decreased from \$6 435 961 in 2010-11 to \$6 251 000 in 2011-12. That's a cut of \$184 961 or just under 3%. The anticipated budget cuts were communicated to the sector in a public forum in March 2011, via email and on the TAAB Facebook page.

Arts Tasmania and the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board responded to the budget cuts by reducing Arts Tasmania operations, cancelling the industry and professional development programs, cancelling the infrastructure fund, reducing the Premier's Arts Partnership fund by \$25 000 and successfully persuading Treasury to allow us to roll over unexpended funding from 2011 for arts and disability into 2012. In so doing, the \$75 000 that would have been allocated to the infrastructure fund was instead divided proportionately between Organisations and Individuals.

Theatre received 41.83% of total funding in all grant programs for 2012. The amount awarded to theatre was \$1 003 829. This includes funding to performing arts venues, theatre organisations and projects through the Assistance to Organisations program and through the Arts & Disability program. It also includes the \$84 829 to the Theatre Council. Not including performing arts venues, total funding granted to theatre in 2012 is \$736 829 which is 30.70% of all funding.

The total funding to theatre for 2011 was \$1 143 169 in 2011 including performing arts venues and funding from all grant programs, including the \$30 000 to the Theatre Council. This was 45.95% of the total funding granted in 2011. Not including performing arts venues, total funding granted to theatre in 2011 was \$829 626 or 33.35% of all funding.

In 2010, total funding to theatre was \$1 219 112, 49.53% of all funding; without performing arts venues this is \$922 112 or 37.46% of all funding. In 2009 the figure was \$986 806, 40.85% of all funding; without performing arts venues this was \$719 806 or 29.80% of all funding.

In dollar terms, this means funding to theatre including performing arts venues has decreased from 2010 to 2012 but as a proportion of all funding granted, it has not fluctuated significantly – 45.95% down to 41.83% from 2011 to 2012. Not including performing arts venues, funding to theatre has fluctuated from 33.35% to 30.70% of total funding from 2011 to 2012. This is in line with the overall percentage reduction to arts funding.

These figures do not include funding via administered payment to Ten Days on the Island which of course also provides support for theatre in Tasmania. Nor do they include the \$25 000 invested in the theatre review in 2009-10.

While it is always a difficult decision to defund an organisation, the Board's support of the Theatre Council will ensure the theatre sector continues to grow in new directions and with it, new opportunities for talented people who have a long-standing commitment to theatre in Tasmania. The Board believes this is a positive and strategic investment in developing the future of theatre in Tasmania.

ISLAND MAGAZINE

The Assistance to Organisations Panel of the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board spent a great deal of time considering this application. The panel noted the appointment of Sarah Kanowski as the new editor of Island Magazine and recognised that she was an outstanding editor.

The Panel was concerned that hard copy literary magazines, as a model for supporting literature, are in significant international and national decline, but that was not the only reason for the decision.

The Panel was also concerned about the high per copy subsidy of the magazine to relatively few subscribers. It noted that the actual sales of the magazine were less than 1 000 per issue (an average of 672 subscribers and 108 retail copies over the past 4 editions) and that each copy was being subsidised by the State Government through Arts Tasmania funding by \$22 per copy on top of the recommended retail price of \$15.95.

The Panel and the Board noted that Island Magazine had proposed a strategy for increasing circulation and reducing dependence on government subsidy, but felt the strategy was underdeveloped and the timelines lacked urgency.

The Board is mindful of the need to support Tasmanian writing, but noted that Island is not just an outlet for Tasmanian writers. In this funding round, \$156 000 has been distributed in support of writing, through grants to the Tasmanian Writers' Centre, the Australian Script Centre and the Tasmanian Poetry Festival.

Island Magazine has been on annual program funding since 2009, having unsuccessfully applied for multi-year funding a number of times. The Board of Island Magazine Inc. has been given specific feedback on every application on each occasion and the Panel did not feel this feedback had been adequately addressed in the 2012 application.

This was a highly competitive round and the final score for the Island application was the second lowest in the round and well below the cut-off point of 69.44%.

About the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board

The Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board was established under the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board Act (1975) to provide policy and funding advice to the State Government. The Board comprises members from various sectors of the arts and the wider community, appointed by the Minister for the Arts. The Board provides advice to the Minister through recommendations for the expenditure of the annual arts grant and loan allocations.

The Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board acts as an advocate for the arts and cultural sector and provides broad policy advice on arts industry issues to Government.