

Legislative Council
Hansard
Tuesday 19 May 2026

[excerpt...]

The President, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

MOTION

Tasmanian Arts Funding

[5.58 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I rise to make a brief contribution to this debate because I haven't been able to give it the attention I would have liked to and that it thoroughly deserves. So, my apologies at the outset to the member for Murchison because I think this is an important motion for this chamber to be debating. It's an important matter, and I appreciate the contribution that the members made putting the motion before us, and, my goodness, member for Mersey, what a magnificent contribution that was. I really appreciate the trouble that you've gone to really outline here what underpins the value of the arts and creative sectors to our state, to our communities and to us, each of us, as Tasmanians. I think it's particularly apt that we see the member in this place who's probably the most sporty of all of us in terms of his achievements and his whole family's achievements in sport, actually, coming here and talking about not to take away from what we invest and what we value about the investment in sport, but to contrast it and to say the arts and the creative industries deserve at least equivalent consideration here, and support an investment in our state.

I particularly appreciated the points made about the fact that this isn't just about how we fund art for adults and creative sectors for adults out there in the community. It starts in childhood and it's about what we do in our schools and what we don't do in our schools, what children don't have available to them when we cut funding to creative aspects of learning in schools. Not every Tasmanian child in a public school has access to music, has access to drama, has access to a full range of art subjects, and that's tragic. It's to the detriment of our state, it's to the detriment of our community. And, when I say detriment, I don't just mean, 'What a shame, we're missing out on doing some fun stuff.' It's ultimately detrimental to our social cohesion. It's detrimental to our economic outcomes. It's detrimental to our health and well-being outcomes in this state. It's probably one of the few things that, if we think about what we could invest in that builds our state in every way, arts and creative sectors is that area, and that investment can start from babyhood through childhood into adulthood - and needs to be maintained.

It's fascinating to explicitly comment on that nexus between creative endeavours and brain development and achievement in all ways as a human. These are these are all connected. Arts are not nice-to-haves; they can and should be foundational to us thriving as individuals and as a community. That's why this is an important motion in this Chamber and why I'm particularly pleased that we're debating it today and drawing it to the attention of this place and hopefully also the broader community, but most certainly, hopefully, the government. And let's be clear at the outset too, before I get to my notes on this speech, that any announcements made today ... fantastic.

It's great that a motion of this place prompts an announcement from the government. I've

experienced that before myself. Was it 6 a.m. that it came out? It might have been like similar times in the past, and that's fine. If the government is responsive to motions we put for debate in this place, good on them, I welcome that. If that's how we have to make progress, so be it. It would be nice if we didn't have to fight tooth and nail for some of these things, but there you go it. We can do a job here, and the government, if they're responsive to that, all well and good. However, let's be clear that what was announced today is not a panacea. It's not a fix-all, it doesn't address all the aspects that are being highlighted here today in the motion and in contributions to the motion. So, we will need to see more.

The member for Mersey highlighting the centrality of investment through our public school system in arts and creative aspects of learning and development is crucial to being supported. I'm hoping that the minister and the government are listening to that contribution from the member for Mersey and I encourage them to respond to it.

In my family we have a lot of visibility around that, given that my dad, at a certain point of his teaching career after being a principal, then went back to being a drama teacher at primary school level for numerous schools for many years. And I can tell you what, kids turn up on the day their class has drama. They do. Right there, just that very fact means that kids' learning across every subject area and globally is improved through putting drama, for example an art subject, into their school learning environment for the week. They turn up that day, and the arts is the way that people find their tribe.

Sometimes kids who might not be much good at sport, who might not be particularly academic, find their tribe in creative arts subjects and creative arts endeavours, and that's incredibly important because that can provide a platform from which they thrive as people and into our community. It's important.

Ms Forrest - It's a platform for the most drama queen kids out there.

Ms WEBB - Every kid needs to find their tribe, and the creative industries in the arts are a crucial one. Adults find their tribe through these things, and I'm going to speak about a couple of those things in my contribution when I get to it, which I did promise was to be short.

It's interesting, in preparing some brief notes to speak on this motion, I did come across a couple of quotes I wanted to share with the Chamber, and here's the two quotes. First one is -

Tasmania's arts and recreation sector is a vibrant and essential part of our cultural life, adding colour, inspiration and joy to the state.

And the second one:

This is not just about entertainment. It is about improving the wellbeing of Tasmanians, by bringing enjoyment to our daily lives and helping us stay active and healthy.

Those statements were not made by artists or creative groups or those who are the traditional advocates for those areas. They are from the website of Business Tasmania. Business Tasmania, a government entity which people could be forgiven for characterising as part of the bean-counter brigade, where profits are valued to the exclusion of all else.

Lo and behold, no. Instead we see Business Tasmania place front and centre our community's capacity to generate and celebrate joy, beauty, creativity as significant contributors, not just as nice-to-haves, but as contributors to people's health, well-being, sense of community and connection, and also ultimately to the economic benefit of our state. It is exactly as it should be.

Looking further on Business Tasmania's website, I noticed further details they provided and that is the value of the Arts and Recreation Services industry in this state increased by 3.8 per cent in 2024-25 to \$442 million in gross value-added terms.

Over the past 10 years, the arts and recreation services industry has experienced a compound annual growth rate of 3 per cent. The arts and recreation services industry comprises 1.1 percent of total Tasmanian industry gross value added. This is a sector that is significant to us, but not just because of economic value.

It is clearly recognised as incredibly valuable economically but also socially, and sadly we can see it continually being devalued, or have seen that in the past. Under successive governments, devalued, undermined through ongoing investment and support funding cuts in state budgets to arts grants funding and arts expenditure over the years. And I know the member for Murchison has outlined this in the motion and in her contribution today.

It is all too easy. It is low hanging fruit to cut things that seem light and fluffy in the arts sector. We saw that, as the member for Murchison spoke about it in her contribution, when we looked to see what was going to be cut from TasTAFE - the announcements that were made last year and that have come into effect this year - of course, yes, we saw creative industry subjects at TasTAFE be cut and disappear. That is an absolute tragedy.

An absolute tragedy that closes doors for Tasmanians and particularly young Tasmanians, around pursuing areas of skill development, areas of job potential, areas of personal development as well.

In fact, it was during questioning that I put in Budget Estimates last year in our scrutiny hearings, it came to light that, in relation to those TasTAFE course cuts, neither the education minister nor the Department of Education were consulted regarding the TasTAFE subsidisation cuts to the lab tech courses or the creative industries courses. Those courses lost subsidy. They are now being scrapped entirely.

The courses in fashion design, textile, as well as music, visual arts, graphic design, screen and media, all of those now disappearing. It is a backward step; it is a regressive step. It must be profoundly disappointing and heart-wrenching for young Tasmanians who dearly wished to pursue studies in those areas, and saw themselves with opportunities in those areas, now having a door shut in their faces.

I want to briefly mention here some local artists and art groups which contribute to Tasmania's creative reputation at the macro level, as well as immediate connection and expressiveness and well-being at a community and individual level, and I know other members have spoken about some specific examples too, and I appreciate and endorse those.

One that I want to particularly mention, is the Hobart Repertory Theatre Society, as I am the proud patron of the Hobart Repertory Theatre Society, taking over from the former member for Hobart Mr Rob Valentine. In July this year, the Hobart Repertory Theatre Society will celebrate its centenary. Over the last 100 years, I believe the society has made and continues to make a consistent statewide, if not national, contribution to both the arts and, specifically, the Tasmanian theatre culture.

The Society provides a substantial contribution to the state's cultural and living heritage by its ownership and maintenance of an iconic Tasmanian heritage building, the Playhouse Theatre in Bathurst Street. The Society and the Playhouse Theatre have provided invaluable training grounds for dozens of actors, directors and playwrights who have gone on to national and international acclaim while also at the same time being a drawcard for local, for statewide and interstate visitors alike, attending the absolutely diverse range of wonderful live performances that are provided in that venue by the Hobart Repertory Society and others who utilise the venue.

This is one indicator of our rich, vibrant and diverse arts culture, and it's also an example of how entwined the efforts are of many in this sector to protect and celebrate our built heritage as well as our cultural heritage. There is certainly crossover there. I have to mention that groups like Hobart Rep are reliant on volunteers, of course, for so much of what they do; just to mention, during National Volunteer Week, here we are, the arts and culture sector is an absolutely rich sector for volunteer involvement; and while it's wonderful that volunteers underpin so much activity in this sector, we can't take that for granted. It doesn't mean we shouldn't be investing, and in fact, as we fail to invest, we undermine volunteer participation in this sector and that's going to end up being detrimental because a lot of the benefit is from the connections and the participation that people have as volunteers.

Another local group that I'm proud to advocate for here in this contribution is for Mature Artists Dance Experience, otherwise known as MADE. It's a community dance group. MADE is made up of non-professional dancers aged over 50 years working with professional artists, and has been delighting audiences here in this state for the last 20 years; but sadly, after not receiving continued state or federal funding, this unique and valuable dance group relies on donations and fundraising and is at risk. We know that the Commonwealth parliamentary 2021-22 inquiry into the value of the arts to society identified that Australia's artistic output gives enormous value to our society and enriches our lives, including improving social connection, physical and mental health and wellbeing. That's brought to my attention by MADE, the Mature Artists Dance Experience, because it has delivered value to and for Tasmania for more than 20 years. Previous government support has helped to sustain its contribution to the community.

It's a respected not-for-profit and registered charity. It's enriched lives across Lutruwita/Tasmania, and further afield across Australia and internationally through its dance, creativity and community connections. MADE provides significant health and wellbeing benefits for older Tasmanians through weekly classes open to all mature dancers of all abilities. Dance in itself as an activity supports physical health, mental wellbeing, creativity, confidence and social connection while reducing isolation and loneliness. MADE plays an important role in challenging stereotypes about ageing through public performance, by placing mature artists at the centre of high-quality artistic work. It actively confronts ageism and sexism. It celebrates older women's visibility and shows ageing as a time of creativity, strength and possibility.

For the more than 45 per cent of Tasmanians who are aged over 50, me included, seeing high-quality performances featuring mature-age dancers is an important reflection of the creative skills, knowledge and experience that older Tasmanians contribute to our society. MADE strengthens Tasmania's cultural identity and community life. Its work connects professional artists with community participants. They create authentic Tasmanian stories through movement and build partnerships that keeps arts and wellbeing visible and accessible across the state.

Without secure funding, though, these benefits to the Tasmanian community are at risk. If MADE is to continue delivering health, wellbeing, connection, and cultural value to Tasmania, ongoing government funding is essential. Securing funding for the administrative and creative functions of the organisation would ensure that MADE can continue its valuable contribution to our Tasmanian artistic landscape and importantly, to the Tasmanian community as a whole, supporting that social connection, the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our ageing population.

MADE staged its only major performance for 2026 just this last weekend, on 15 and 16 May, to sold out-audiences. Without government funding, though, the ability to secure renowned interstate choreographer, Daryl Brandwood, and stage the production was only made possible through volunteer contributions, fundraising and donations. While that's a great achievement that they were able to do that, relying on volunteers and donations is not sustainable. It's not a sustainable option for the organisation going forward, and this is an organisation that is far too valuable to abandon and condemn through defunding. There are many more worthy artistic entities and efforts that I could mention, but time constraints prevent me. To conclude, I thank the member for the motion for us to contribute to and debate today. I absolutely endorse that it is unacceptable for the government to see support for the arts plummet, that we would have some of the lowest in the country in terms of per capita investment.

There must be a reinstatement and that investment must begin at the earliest stages in the Tasmanian community and be supported all the way through, from babyhood all the way through to those mature age dance experience artists who are in their older ages. I'm very happy to support this motion and I hope the government has been listening carefully and appreciates that this is something that is central to the expression of our identity as a state.