

Labor

MEDIA RELEASE

WALT SECORD MLC

LABOR SHADOW MINISTER FOR THE ARTS

**SECORD CALLS FOR EMERGENCY ARTS RESCUE PACKAGE AS
CARRIAGEWORKS CALLS IN ADMINISTRATORS**

NSW Labor today accused Premier Gladys Berejiklian of ignoring the arts and entertainment sectors in her various COVID packages – putting thousands of jobs at risk.

This followed the announcement last night (May 4) that Carriageworks has become the first major arts company to be forced to call in administrators –after the State Government refused to provide assistance. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/carriageworks-enters-voluntary-administration-20200504-p54pr5.html>

(The Premier is Arts Minister after Don Harwin resigned over breaching social distancing rules.)

Carriageworks is Australia's largest contemporary arts centre to go into voluntary administration. Since opening in 2007, it has become one of NSW's cultural scene hubs, drawing some one million visitors annually.

NSW Arts Minister Walt Secord said it was time for “emergency” arts package to support organisations and artists who have been without income or a revenue stream for weeks.

In a series of meetings in the last week, Mr Secord said he had been told that many artists may never recover. “Sadly, the arts were the first hit and they will be the last to recover. They also do not have large cash reserves to fall back on.”

“Industry officials say that it may take up to five years to recover and many organisations may not survive with thousands of artists without any source of income.”

Mr Secord said he was “disgusted” by the State Government’s priorities, pointing to their decision to waste \$1.5 billion on the Powerhouse Museum move from Ultimo to Parramatta. “They can spend \$1.5 billion forcing the move of the Powerhouse Museum, but they refuse to artists and arts organisations survive this crisis.”

Artists and arts workers have been severely impacted by restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 global pandemic, but the contract nature of their work means that they have fallen through the cracks of the Federal Government’s JobKeeper program.

Mr Secord called on the Federal Government to improve eligibility arrangements for the JobKeeper program to address the exclusion of many arts sector workers from the program.

“Carriageworks is the tip of the iceberg; there are so many other arts groups and organisations as well as individuals who are in absolute strife and at risk of going the same way as Carriageworks.”

“This entire sector of the community has been ignored by the State Government. They have been completely left out in the cold, without the government offering a single cent of support,” Mr Secord said.

“Put simply, NSW had provided nothing to support artists and entertainers, who have found themselves in Centrelink queues for the first time in their lives.

Other major arts companies from small independent theatres to the Sydney Opera House to Opera Australia to the Sydney Writers Festival to cinemas and art galleries as well as major theatrical productions have all had to cancel performances after public health orders.

“We cannot allow our arts and culture sector collapse – and it is time the Berejiklian Government stopped ignoring the arts,” Mr Secord said.

“While NSW stands by and watches its arts and culture sector struggle; Victoria and Queensland have rushed to help save arts organisations,” Mr Secord said.

Mr Secord pointed to a \$13 million Strategic Investment Fund in Victoria shared by almost 100 non-government arts and cultural organisations including festivals, performing arts companies, museums and galleries, to help organisations to stabilise, continue their operations and keep people employed; commission local artists to develop new works; and deliver programs for their communities.

He also said Victoria had a \$2.2 million for a Sustaining Creative Workers program to offer quick response grants of for Victorian-based independent creatives and micro-organisations with at least five years of professional experience with grants of \$5,000 for individuals, and \$10,000 for micro-organisations and businesses, with an additional \$2,500 in access funding for creatives with a disability, and disability-led organisations.

Meanwhile in Queensland, the State Government had provided \$10.5 million including \$8 million to guarantee a further 12 months' funding at current levels to December 2021 for current recipients of the 2017-2020 Organisations Fund. They also suspended applications for the next four-year funding round, in order to take pressure off organisations to do long-term planning.

However, the NSW Government has completely ignored the arts. "The Berejiklian and Morrison governments have completely overlooked the unique circumstances of arts, event and entertainment workers, who largely comprise freelance artists.

"Both governments failed to acknowledge artists need to put food on the table and a roof over their heads like everyone else. Furthermore, freelancers have fallen through the cracks of the JobKeeper income subsidy payment."

"Due to the nature of their work, many Australian artists do not have savings' buffers. In fact, many young artists were in the unfortunate situation of supporting their performance work with casual hospitality work– and then both sources evaporated immediately. They got a double whammy of losing both income streams in a single week.

"Furthermore, internationally recognised and established creators found themselves with no work at all – with major screen work and live performances all cancelled."

DATE: 5/05/2020

MEDIA CONTACT: 0418 625 276

Copyright © 2020 NSW Labor SPLP Media, All rights reserved..