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Arts package must not leave out support for workers

The rumoured release of a specific rescue package for the arts and cultural sector impacted by COVID-19 must include income support for workers in the sector.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance says any package for the sector will be welcome after months of neglect by the Federal Government, but if it is limited to subsidies for arts companies and funding for marketing, there will only be limited benefit for the tens of thousands of Australians who work in the sector.

MEAA Chief Executive Paul Murphy said the tight eligibility criteria for JobKeeper had left thousands of workers in the arts and entertainment sectors on the verge of poverty.

“Since the extent of the impact of COVID-19 on the arts and entertainment sectors became apparent, a plethora of organisations have been calling for targeted assistance, but the government has sat on its hands,” Mr Murphy said.

“These were among the first and hardest hit sectors, and will be one of the last to emerge from lockdowns, and they contribute more than \$20 billion to the economy each year.

“Employment in the sectors has shrunk by at least 20% and incomes have dived, and this has been worsened by the tight criteria which have ruled most freelancers and casuals ineligible for JobKeeper.

“We welcome any belated support for the sector and urge the government to adopt Live Performance Australia’s \$345 million plan to restart and rebuild that sector of the industry. But equally, the screen sector will also need targeted support.

“However, if all the government does is provide subsidies and funding to major arts companies and venues, this will have limited benefit for freelance and casual arts and entertainment workers.

“According to media reports, state and territory arts ministers urged the federal minister, Paul Fletcher, to broaden the scope of JobKeeper so these workers were not left behind, but Mr Fletcher rejected their call.

“If all the rumoured arts package does is support businesses without providing any extra assistance to arts workers, it will fail to address the issues which have been clearly identified and articulated to the Federal Government.”

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