

Touring Strategy Consultation Report

Policy Drivers informed by *Mapping Out*
Information Paper Responses

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Introduction

This paper communicates key findings from the consultation process undertaken by Arts Queensland to develop a strategy for Queensland performing arts touring. The strategy will be the guiding framework for touring for the next 5 years, and its development will be informed by the key themes arising from this report.

The performing arts Touring Strategy is an action of the Queensland Arts Industry Sector Development Plan 2007-09 goals for the performing arts. These seek to ensure that people throughout Queensland have the opportunity to experience diverse and high quality performing arts.

This report is preceded by the *Mapping Out* Touring Strategy Information paper which was released in May 2008. The *Mapping Out* paper provided an overview of touring issues and challenges for Queensland performing arts, inviting sector responses to some key questions about why, how and what we tour.

Access to touring processes and products is a significant expectation of audiences, presenters and producers of the performing arts. All who participated in the consultation believe that the touring of live performing arts product is necessary to the cultural health of communities and the performing arts sector.

Arts Queensland (AQ) has analysed and interpreted the data provided through the consultation process and has drafted recommendations, principles and strategies that address the key messages arising from the sector consultation which are that:

- delivery of touring product must be seen to be independent of the production and curation processes for touring.
- delivery mechanism should be an independent and discrete operation that can plug in to or out of a host organisation
- open up decision making about what why and how we tour to a larger and more diverse group of stakeholders
- touring circuits and programs should include non traditional performance and presentation spaces such as outdoor public spaces, school halls and libraries
- producers of product must be able to demonstrate audience demand within the markets that their product is intended to service.
- both commercial and subsidised product should be available for selection by communities.
- communities are not passive consumers of content, but can also be active participants in presenting, publicising and selecting product.
- tour coordination should provide professional development for both presenters and producers.
- touring product should reflect the diversity of Queensland communities
- action research be built into the touring strategy to ensure delivery remains responsive to changing audience needs.

Executive Summary – Directions for Touring Strategy Development

The data provided by consultation participants tells a compelling story about future directions for touring in Queensland. It's a narrative that parallels recent cultural trends such as the rise of online collaboration in determining value and making choices about cultural products and cultural experiences. Renowned cultural researcher Charles Leadbeater is at the forefront of exploring this movement as it develops on line:

....the language of supply and demand, consumer and producer does not make sense for a world in which Wikipedia and Linux are built by the people who use them. These collaboratives are not just the by-product of cheaper technology and easier communications. They have responded to a yearning people have to become contributors, participants and players. They do not want to be well-served but dependent and passive. They want a voice and some tools to allow them to self-provide. The more participants can do this together, peer-to-peer, drawing on one another's expertise and ideas, the more shared ideas and innovation there will be.

(From Leadbeater, C. 2006. 'We Think: why mass creativity is the next big thing', www.wethinkthebook.com)

Participation in decision making, enabling more people to have a say and the perceived consequences of these processes for touring emerged as an important theme within the first two phases of research. There seems to be a strong desire within the performing arts sector (both professional and amateur) to democratise decisions about touring, and for decision making to be better informed by the interests of increasingly diverse Queensland communities.

Towards the end of the last millennium, Australian public relations expert Noel Turnbull predicted that those who best understood and connected with the diversity of their potential clientele, would be those who gained a competitive edge:

Whilst this political - and academic – debate has proceeded, the world has been changing. It is more diverse and that makes markets more diverse. That means that companies which want to succeed in those markets must understand that diversity. We must never forget that the real need for diversity within the company stems from the reality of the marketplace. Day after day we tell each other that companies must strive to be closer to customers and more responsive to their needs. To do that it is essential to understand the customer, who is less and less likely to look much like the image in your morning mirror.

Turnbull, N. 1996 'The Millenium Edge', Allen & Unwin, Australia

It becomes clear upon reading the data themes that the Touring Strategy will need to include objectives that enable diverse users with access to diverse product using diverse communication channels including community and family networks. It also becomes apparent that once we enable diverse users to have a say, there are new challenges in meeting expectations and demand.

But first we need to explore demand.

And that's why the strategy should place a strong focus on connecting with audiences and potential audiences. The strategy would need to envisage beyond just encouraging or allowing communities to engage with art, but also enabling understanding and connection with the arts. We could take further inspiration from the Irish Arts Council, which so clearly articulated the difference between exposure and enablement:

Merely allowing the public to juxtapose themselves with an artwork, by letting them in to see a picture in a gallery for instance, is not genuine access. Granting someone this kind of access may amount to little more than allowing them to look at it. Genuine access would work towards enabling them to see it.

From: Art and the Ordinary - An Chomhairle Ealaíón – the Arts Council of Ireland (1987)

This is a powerful argument for innovative engagement and learning activity – the building of links between art, meaning and value. Some organisations in Queensland are well equipped to deliver engagement activity, and deliver high quality learning projects for and with the public. These tend to be the larger companies who have an ongoing commitment to regional communities. Small to medium organisations who are perhaps most likely to produce tour-able product, lack trained educators or teacher-artists who are skilled at identifying and creating meaningful learning opportunities.

The Touring Strategy has the potential to stimulate more support for engagement projects that enable true access to diverse performing arts experiences. The rise of participation, new content and new forms are opportunities for diversifying current touring programs, menus and decision makers. Giving more people a say will mean a growth in expertise, advocacy and demand.

Finally, the data supports a focus on Queensland in the first phases of the strategy implementation. Within consultation participants' ideas, attention seemed to be focused upon improving Queensland performing arts touring first and then looking further to find new markets elsewhere. This notion is supported by the development of touring funds and initiatives at a national level that have provided interstate and overseas touring assistance to Queensland artists.

Within the ensuing discussion of the consultation data, there are a number of areas identified for action research. Several recommendations are attached to this part of the discussion. These are:

1. That the Touring Strategy support a partnership between the media, governments and the performing arts sector to ask the broader Queensland community what they would like performing arts touring to provide
2. That the Touring Strategy considers promoting touring products and processes that support community engagement
3. That the Touring Strategy include continuous sector development and professional development objectives
4. That Arts Queensland's funding agreements for performing arts touring are redeveloped to reflect the key policy drivers of the Touring Strategy
5. That the Touring Strategy support the inclusion of a range of tour-able products and people who can provide rich partnerships and cultural development

These recommendations and their associated discussions informed the proposed policy drivers and action plan directions offered in this report. The following principles are draft philosophical guidelines for touring policy. They represent many of the rich ideas provided by consultation participants and are further unpacked within the body of this report.

Draft Touring Strategy Principles:

The Touring Strategy could be underpinned by the following principles:

- Consult – Consultative programming mechanisms can support the public to determine the value and nature of their experiences of touring product
- Enable – Queensland audiences deserve access to touring performances as well as the means to learn more about the arts through touring
- Simple – The most effective way of coordinating Queensland's performing arts touring landscape is with diverse representation informing simple, clear and transparent delivery
- Develop – The entire performing arts touring ecology benefits from the professional support and development of its stakeholders
- Respond – A good way to achieve diverse quality touring experiences is to respond to what we learn about the cultural landscape

Draft Policy Drivers and related objectives:

The Touring Strategy could be driven by the following themes or goals:

- Community Informed Programming
- Access
- Simplicity and transparency
- Professional support and development
- Quality and Diversity

These five drivers are summarised in this report in two ways: as further research priorities, and as action plan areas for the next five years. Like the principles, they represent common themes arising from the consultation data, and will be refined in this final phase of Touring Strategy consultation.

Methodology

The research and consultation methodology for the development of the performing arts Touring Strategy has three distinct phases:

Phase 1 (February – April 2008)

- Literature survey and meeting consultations with performing arts touring stakeholders in Queensland and interstate (participant list attached)
- Develop key consultation questions for strategy development
- Publish Touring Strategy Information Paper and invite written responses to key questions

Phase 2 (May – August 2008)

- Collate and analyse Information Paper responses
- Publish Consultation Report and invite responses to draft principles and policy drivers identified in the data themes
- Refine analysis and strategy directions

Phase 3 (August – October 2008)

- Collate and analyse responses to Consultation Report
- Draft Strategy
- Refine Strategy

As described in the Touring Strategy Information Paper, strategy development will be assisted by the Touring Strategy Advisory Committee, a team of experts who bring a wide range of touring experiences to the discussion. Strategy development will also be assisted by the Critical Friends listed in the Information paper.

The consultation protocol established for this process determines that only written data received by Arts Queensland will be quoted in this report. Data collected through meeting and conversation notes was used to determine key consultation questions and themes for the Touring Strategy Information Paper and will be represented here in the discussion of trends and themes without particular reference to source.

Performing arts sector consultation prior to the release of the Information paper resulted in the development of four Questions for formal consultation:

1. Is there enough quality and diversity being produced in Queensland performing arts touring product?
2. Are the distribution channels for performing arts touring products working well?
3. How could performing arts touring develop a better fit between demand and supply?
4. Are there some other ways that we could tour Queensland performing arts in and out of the state?

The consultation process has included conversations with over 60 organisations and written responses from 34 individuals and organisations. The conversations centring on the key questions were an invaluable source of performing arts touring experience and expertise. The process highlighted the need for collaboration between the arts sector, government and communities in developing solutions for a range of touring challenges.

General Approaches and Responses to the Process

For the purposes of developing information and appraising the current touring systems, the consultation and data analysis process used the following definitions:

Touring – travelling performing arts work including shows, presentations, concerts, lectures, forums, participative activities such as workshops and community projects and artistic residencies

Strategy – Policy + Action Plan (a set of guiding principles and actions)

The Touring Strategy is important because touring is a significant issue for the Queensland performing arts sector. This was highlighted in the Queensland Arts Industry Sector Development Plans (QAISDP) in 2007 and has been demonstrated again in the 2008 Touring Strategy consultation data.

A comparison of the 2008 Touring Strategy data with the 2006 QAISDP consultation themes indicates that while some aspects of Queensland performing arts touring haven't changed, there has been some movement regarding national and international touring. For instance, the consultation report for the QAISDP in 2006 reported:

An increased focus on support for international touring and showcasing opportunities and the promotion of two-way international exchanges for Queensland artists was advocated.

Queensland Government, Arts Queensland, Queensland Arts Industry Sector Development Planning Consultation Report (2006)

Since Arts Queensland's release of the QAISDP consultation report, Queensland artists and companies have participated in national and international arts markets that promote theatre, dance, music and their related genres. Some have managed independent or 'by invitation' touring around Australia and overseas.

The Australia Council (*Playing the World – Theatre, Track Record Music Export Development Program*) and the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) are undertaking their own reviews of national and international touring models. While other approaches are being considered at a national level, it is a good time to appraise and refine our state policy and mechanisms for delivering performing arts touring in Queensland.

Arts Queensland's *Mapping Out* Touring Strategy Information Paper privileged the building of knowledge and solutions for Queensland touring challenges. This approach was built on the idea that by responding appropriately to local changes, we're better positioned to support interstate and overseas exchanges, partnerships and tours. This approach seems well supported in the Touring strategy consultation data:

Strong export starts with a sound domestic presence in the market.

NARPACA Committee (2008)

The Touring Strategy consultation data indicates that the professional performing arts sector welcomes the opportunity to consider other ways of touring in Queensland. The sector engaged with the touring conversation with optimism and generosity – there is goodwill towards current systems as well as a strong commitment to improvement:

A performing arts touring strategy in Queensland is timely. There are significant population shifts, a vibrant touring infrastructure at a federal level, and a wide variety of producing companies and creative teams eager to share their work on a broader platform.

Libby Anstis, General Manager, Queensland Theatre Company (2008)

Strategy consultation was conducted with a view to identifying common themes as well as future action research areas. Taking inspiration from the Irish 'Touring Experiment' model mentioned in the *Mapping Out* Information Paper, the Touring Strategy will build in research priorities that will be identified in the next phase of consultation. Touring issues already identified and important action research areas include:

- Knowing the audience
- Community participation
- Sector and professional development
- Adapting to change
- Enabling innovation

It is anticipated that action research priorities will be refined through this next stage of response and analysis. Community and industry consultation participants have already contributed a range of critiques, solutions, ideas and provocations. The participants demonstrated a willingness to collaborate and share in the learning about successful touring in Queensland:

We have given the document lengthy and serious consideration and make this submission in a spirit of positive cooperation. We appreciate the invitation and the opportunity to participate in the TSIP process. We look forward to your further communications and assure you of our continued willingness to provide input to the study as required.

Maryborough Regional Arts Council (2008)

This collaborative approach to the Touring Strategy is indicative of the majority of responses to the Information Paper's key questions. The strategy development approach will continue to be inclusive, flexible and research driven with the aim of ensuring that the resulting touring processes are continually responsive to cultural change, diversity and public engagement with the arts.

Data themes for ongoing research and development

Within the context of this state, the consultation data indicates that there is room for change, expansion and redefinition regarding performing arts touring in and for Queensland. The Touring Strategy consultation process has stimulated new conversations about touring in Queensland, and more importantly, opened the conversation to a wide range of stakeholders and potential stakeholders.

The following themes represent commonalities across the data. They have informed the recommendations, draft principles and goals being offered in this report. They also present sound directions for further research and development. As already demonstrated in the Irish Arts Council's Touring Experiment, action research built in to government and sector partnerships can be an effective way of understanding and building demand. The following themes could be considered for annual action research within the Queensland strategy.

Knowing the Audience

Related Key Question: *How could performing arts touring develop a better fit between demand and supply? Are the distribution channels for performing arts touring products working well?*

Perhaps one of the most significant themes within the data was that of the need for audience and community consultation regarding touring programs. The following response represents a common position in relation to the *Mapping Out* Information Paper's query about what Queensland audiences want and need:

We cannot speak for others. Suggest audiences and potential audiences be asked the question. It may be possible to work with local councils throughout the state to organise surveys. It would be desirable for residents to have the opportunity to express their preferences prior to any touring programs being arranged.

Ipswich Arts Council (2008)

Despite strong support within the data for communities to have more of a say in touring, there was also some wariness within the professional arts sector regarding public opinion and public taste. Some producers and presenters felt that if the public had a say in what toured, the result would be 100% commercial and popular. There is no evidence to support this assumption. Until the public are invited in to the conversation, we won't know.

Defining Queensland touring circuits requires consideration of the very different geographic and social circumstances that Queenslanders inhabit around the state.

Queensland's particular geographies and populations present unique opportunities to develop regionally specific or niche tours.

It seems that Queensland is made up of three key performing arts touring circuits: South East Queensland, Coastal Queensland and Western Queensland. These areas are distinctive in their population distribution, venues, local governments and professional arts support. It is Western Queensland that requires particular consideration within the strategy because as some of the data highlights, communities in these parts of the state have significantly less access to diverse and quality touring product.

Since communities are subsidising touring systems and arts product development through their tax paying and fund raising, it's timely to develop new partnerships that enable broad and deep communications between the public and arts touring. The young public deserve a say in what they'd like to experience through touring since so many students are paying for performances in their schools and arts centres. The general public also deserve a say in determining the value of performing arts touring. The strategy could support further research that invites the public in to the touring conversation.

Recommendation 1:

That the Touring Strategy support a partnership between the media, governments and the performing arts sector to research and consult with Queensland communities regarding performing arts touring.

Community Participation

Related Key Questions: Is there enough quality and diversity being produced in Queensland performing arts touring product? How could performing arts touring develop a better fit between demand and supply?

A focus and support for the development of 'local' product development would also contribute to improving the quality and diversity of available product within the state.....A priority (of RPAC) is to offer local performing arts groups, schools and the general community the opportunity to participate in workshops, master classes and to be involved in performances where possible.

Lisa Trelvellick, Manager, Redland Performing Arts Centre (2008)

The rise of TV talent competition shows in forms such as choirs, dance and karaoke, reflects the popularity of these forms as participative activity within Queensland communities. Queenslanders are participating in amateur arts activity, in particular, choirs and music theatre, in significant numbers. In turn, the audiences for these community groups' presentations are loyal, engaged and numerous. The consultation data indicated a clear need for subsidised touring programs to include people and processes that can support and extend community arts participation.

We support the idea of community or school residencies or cultural development projects..... We suggest 8-10 visits throughout a 12 month period would give opportunities to develop some of the following skills in the Central Highlands community: String instruments, Percussion, Choral groups, Brass Band groups..

Emerald Arts Council (2008)

The need to support participation was identified across a number of areas to include workshops, residencies and other creative processes. As indicated above, engagement processes can't be token or fleeting. As with sport, communities can participate in the arts for a lifetime, which can deepen their appreciation and connoisseurship as audiences and consumers of the arts. Within school communities, amateur networks and professional contexts, touring projects have the capacity to support participation and deepen engagement.

Committee participation such as Local Arts Councils and advisory groups were also identified as needing recognition and support from touring programs and government.

I do feel there needs to be more promotion and more variety for the product that does reach us and more than that – some sort of workshop training for local arts groups like ours – to discover just exactly what is expected of us as host of the tour.....a workshop element for local communities – similar to the Irish or English models – could show us what's involved in touring a show.....Why should it be left to cash-strapped State schools and small community groups to run chook raffles to finance workshops and networking events to improve the cultural life of our community? We're happy to do the work – just help us with some expertise and make it affordable.

Myann Burrows, President, Redlands Arts Council Inc. (2008)

Another important challenge is to ensure that more connections are made between amateur participants, their networks, young people, Indigenous peoples and school communities to ensure that touring programs are informed by diverse needs, tastes and situations. Perhaps the research mentioned with the last recommendation would also be useful in gathering knowledge about Queensland arts participation.

Recommendation 2:

That the Touring Strategy includes consideration of ways in which communities can participate in the arts by promoting touring products and processes that support engagement.

Sector and Professional Development

Related Key Questions: How could performing arts touring develop a better fit between demand and supply? Is there enough quality and diversity being produced in Queensland performing arts touring product?

There is much we can learn from the commercial sector regarding good strategies for connecting with and responding to the public and with audiences. Partnerships between the commercial and subsidised sectors including co-presentations, are making the touring of diverse product achievable and sometimes, profitable.

Some community groups such as Local Arts Councils seem to be already developing entrepreneurial skills eg film nights, from which they raise funds that are reinvested in community cultural activity. The most successful are those who have developed partnerships with local councils and businesses. Policy and action need to engage more broadly with community presenters and volunteers, as well as supporting the professional development of producers, venue managers and tour managers.

There are a wide range of competencies amongst venue managers, and indeed producers, nation-wide. While there are an increasing number of professional development initiatives in place for those running the subsidised performing arts, more needs to be done to further the development of senior venue staff....we need to improve the expertise of smaller venues so they can play a more viable part in remote and regional touring.

Chris J. Mangin, Chief Executive/Artistic Director, Opera Queensland (2008)

This report highlights a number of sector and professional development initiatives for touring that have come from the sector. Many of these ideas are simple, practical and sensitive to the needs of a broad range of touring stakeholders including the professional producers and presenters as well as community and volunteer participants.

Whilst there is support from many of the 60 Local Arts Councils for current touring arrangements, some of the LACs have indicated that touring arrangements could be improved from a consultation and community participation point of view. It is also clear that knowledge building and sharing between presenters, producers and communities would further develop the sector and its stakeholders.

Recommendation 3:

That the Touring Strategy includes sector development and professional development objectives.

Adapting to Change

Related Key Questions: Are the distribution channels for performing arts touring products working well? Are there some other ways that we could tour Queensland performing arts in and out of the state?

The ARTS agreement established by the Queensland Government in 1994 and managed by the Queensland Arts Council since then, was set up to support the touring of diverse, quality performing arts experiences for Queenslanders around the state. The performing arts sector, and indeed many Queensland communities have changed significantly in the last 15 years, and the Arts Queensland touring agreement could be redefined to reflect some of these community and industry changes.

Current funding only allows QAC to tour the 'Majors' plus three other groups. Clearly there is little scope for regional people to have a say.....QAC use their membership base, people who have an interest in the arts and pay to be involved. This membership provides a direct mailing base and locals who promote the product to friends.....There is a good working touring model in Queensland.

Rollo Nicholson, Maryborough Regional Arts Council (2008)

There is no doubt that the QAC has delivered quality touring experiences to Queenslanders through the ARTS Agreement. However, within the Touring Strategy appraisal of the Queensland performing arts touring landscape the desire for change is clear. Whilst the performing arts sector appreciates the importance of the QAC and its services, it also perceives that the ARTS Agreement and QAC could have more transparent curatorial processes, deeper community engagement, and higher levels of discourse development regarding touring and touring product.

Originally, the Queensland Arts Council and its affiliated branches were set up out of necessity to coordinate arts delivery to communities in regional Queensland and has been the major delivery method since the 1970s. In many respects the organisation has served this purpose very well. Notwithstanding this and the continued vigour of QAC staff and branches, I believe that the present touring landscape needs to be completely re-evaluated.

Sean Mee, Artistic Director, La Boite Theatre (2008)

The current model is clearly broken – concentrating touring funding, divorcing it from public policy directions, placing costly infrastructure between producer and presenter. I would encourage the new strategy to address these issues vigorously and on a whole of sector level..... Rather than add another grant round, simply add a box that says 'Tour Funding' and make this accessible to everyone – s2m, statutory authorities, independent artists.... my recommendations are for a complete overhaul of the current funding and delivery mechanisms.....

Yaron Litschitz, Artistic Director and CEO, CIRCA (2008)

There is a discrepancy between the Arts Queensland criteria, which new works created in Queensland fulfil, and the product that tours through the presenter driven model and Arts Queensland's ARTS.

deBASE Theatre (2008)

Recommendation 4:

That Arts Queensland's funding agreements for performing arts touring are redeveloped to reflect the key policy drivers of the Touring Strategy.

Enabling Innovation

Related Key Questions: Is there enough quality and diversity being produced in Queensland performing arts touring product? How can we develop a better fit between demand and supply? Are there some other ways that we could tour Queensland performing arts in and out of the state?

The push for diversification of curatorial decision making, supply, circuits and partnerships being suggested in the data indicates that the potential for innovation within touring programs is high. The majority of the consultation participants, who identified the need for change and innovation within touring, also suggested a variety of creative solutions both practical and philosophical.

By responding in more tailored ways to the distinct differences between Queensland regions, the Touring Strategy could encourage delivery that enables diverse communities to influence the touring agenda. Activities that invite both existing and potential touring audiences in to ongoing communication about the arts would be a significant innovation.

Queensland does not end at Toowoomba or Townsville – there are many small communities with all the hopes and aspirations of the eastern seaboard who actively contribute to both the economic and cultural viability of the state of Queensland.

Jan Hamilton, President, Mungindi Arts Council (2008)

Queensland's diverse communities, especially those communities that aren't a part of the mainstream, could offer innovative partnerships in the arts and touring. Along with the potential for Queensland communities to more directly influence performing arts touring, the strategy could also consider the touring of innovative engagement concepts such as Canadian arts company Mammalian Diving Reflex's 'Haircuts by Children'.

This project was first produced in Toronto in 2006 and toured recently to the Sydney Festival. Billed as 'a whimsical performance that playfully engages with the enfranchisement of children (and) pits our trust in the younger generation against the thrills and chills of vanity', the project involves primary school aged children being trained by local hair stylists and then supported to provide free haircuts. Perhaps surprisingly adults queue up to have their hair cut – the Sydney Festival performances completely sold out.

The project has been extremely popular wherever it has toured because it works with community members, it challenges perceptions of children, and its marketing campaign is also a visually attractive cultural change campaign. The work is conceptually and artistically innovative, tours easily with just one producer and artist, and involves private businesses, schools communities and family networks.

By diversifying our touring programs to include performances as well as community partnership projects (including school partnerships), the Queensland public stands a better chance of receiving innovative, popular and high quality touring product presented in a range of contexts.

The opportunity in regional Queensland is to broaden the number of players in presenting the performing arts – schools, libraries, local festivals and community events, public organisations, recreational clubs – so that the curatorial decision making, and risk taking is undertaken by a broader cross section of the regional communities.

Libby Anstis, General Manager, Queensland Theatre Company (2008)

The development of a marketplace in which all of these stakeholders can buy and trade, exchange ideas and knowledge and receive expert advice could be an innovation. There is a lot of support within the data for a 'one stop shop' approach – a rethink of the ways in which producers, presenters, artists and audiences engage with touring coordination.

Recommendation 5:

That the Touring Strategy support the inclusion of a range of tour-able concepts and people that/who encourage rich community partnerships and cultural development.

These recommendations will be refined and built in to the Touring Strategy following their further analysis by Arts Queensland, the performing arts sector, critical friends and the Touring Strategy Advisory Committee.

Data Themes for Policy and Action

Touring Strategy consultation data analysis resulted in the identification of five themes that are common across the strategy consultation participant group. These themes emerged within face to face conversations with a range of participants and were then refined in analysis of the written responses to the Touring Strategy Information paper. They will be further refined in the next phase of strategy development along with the action research priorities.

The following themes underpin a narrative that describes the further democratisation of the performing arts touring processes in Queensland – broader participation in decision making about what tours where as well as greater access to product and touring networks using simpler systems. The following discussion seeks to unpack the themes with a view to utilising their detail for strategy principles and action.

1. Audience and community driven tour programming

If we were a sector concerned with gaming or product making that we wanted to 'sell' to children and young people, we would have a very clear market research phase. Internationally some companies engage over 500 young people in the development of their game. How would the quality of our work improve if this occurred?

Lenine Bourke, Executive Director, Young People and the Arts Australia (YPAA) (2008)

Both digital and broadcasting forms have enabled the audience and the participants to determine meaning and value. It's time to let the public determine the value and nature of live touring arts experiences. The Information Paper response data indicated that few groups or organisations had the capacity to engage with communities beyond box office data but many desired broader understanding of their potential audiences.

We suspect that what Longreach wants may be very different from other areas of Queensland, and even within central and western Queensland there are very different needs.... We feel that most of the community probably is not that interested in having a say about these issues. In the past, local community meetings have not had good attendance..... Local community groups need to be nurtured by government.

Longreach Arts Council (2008)

Who any where in Queensland gets to choose the product that is touring? You can only tour what the production companies have available to tour, with many unavailable.

Teena Wilcock OAM, Granite Belt Arts Council, Board Member, Queensland Arts Council

The data also indicated that in some parts of the performing arts sector, there is a distinct mistrust of public taste and opinion. Some qualified their support with a reminder about the constraints faced by producers and presenters:

While I think the concept of broadening communities' involvement in programs decisions is very worthy of consideration and development, I think we need to be sure we are prepared for the answers, response, as well as have strategies to deal with requests that don't consider the many limitations that skilled presenters balance when making programming decisions.

Lisa Trelvellick, Manager, Redland Performing Arts Centre (2008)

The involvement of more individuals in tour decision-making and their subsequent empowerment should, I would contend, only come about by widening the number of possible performing arts venues perhaps to include non traditional venues such as libraries, RSL's and other clubs provided they are both viable and sufficiently equipped in order to do the job. Here the stakeholder, provided they are going at risk, should have a say.

Chris J.Mangin, Chief Executive/Artistic Director, Opera Queensland (2008)

Other respondents are already starting to practice consultation methods to inform the purchase of touring products:

The Empire makes its selection of products based on community consultation, working through local networks to maximise engagement and linking with local media to promote performances....The Empire Theatre has regular consultations systems implemented to advise about programming options through both an Education Reference Group and an Ambassadors Group.....The Empire believes it is important that the community receives productions that they are interested in attending. In building audiences, systems that ask for their input tend to provide the community with ownership of the process.

Ann-Marie Ryan, General Manager, Empire Theatre, Toowoomba (2008)

Venues in the regions should consult with community groups such as schools (the teachers and young people) and indigenous elders. In other words, formal processes should be adopted to inform programming decisions.

deBASE Theatre (2008)

A key area for touring policy is ongoing community research and consultation. A guiding principle for this area could be:

- Consult - Consultative programming mechanisms can support the public to determine the value and nature of their experiences of touring product

A strategy action plan could include a goal to support community informed programming such as:

- Goal – To stimulate market led programming for performing arts touring

2. Access

There are two core access issues in the consultation data. They are:

- the issue of exposure vs enablement and,
- the issue of geographical isolation from major cultural infrastructure including venues, professional support, business and government networks

Engagement enables individuals and communities to connect and make meaning of art which is arguably the most effective form of audience development. Engagement is the process that connects creative practice, ideas and products with the minds of individuals and the cultures of communities. A number of consultation participants discussed the need for the performing arts touring sector to consider engagement in more sophisticated ways.

Building audiences is not just about having the venues full.

Jill Smith, General Manager, Geelong Performing Arts Centre (2008)

The research indicates that models that are 'one off' have little lasting impact because of the reduced aesthetics and the context in which they are taught. Primary school children need to have a greater spectrum on offer in schools, e.g. artist in residency programs, more interactive models, workshops that culminate in active participation for students.

Kite Arts Education Program (2008)

The other access issue, that of geographical isolation, reflects the wide and sparse population distribution of those regions of Queensland that aren't a part of the eastern coast or the great south east of the state. These communities face greater logistical challenges in terms of communications, travel, venues and smaller economies:

The coastal towns are well catered for with their NARPACA centres – it is regional Queensland that falls in to the 'difficult' basket. It is not feasible to expect people to travel to 'hub centres' mid week to attend performances.....

Goondiwindi Arts Council (2008)

How many rural communities have the luxury of venue managers?

Teena Wilcock OAM, Granite Belt Arts Council, Board Member – Queensland Arts Council (2008)

The consultation data indicated that the Great South East of Queensland and the Eastern Coast are communities that are relatively well resourced to access touring arts experiences. Local Arts Councils in regional communities that are west of the Great Dividing Range communicated the difficulties of accessing and presenting touring product, though many had solutions to these problems. For instance, the ideas of diversifying venues and opening schools performances to the general public were very popular:

The schools touring program of the Queensland Arts Council is very effective and travels everywhere it is requested, however remote. It might be a good idea to make schools tours available to the community as well. Not publicised as being open to others.....Longreach Arts Council Inc committee does not receive any information about the touring schools program.

Longreach Arts Council (2008)

It often seems to me that the On Tour in Schools program from QAC is more attractive – albeit in the form of briefer events pitched to school students rather than adult or mixed audiences in a theatre/community hall environment. I would love to see Bell Shakespeare Company in workshop format at our local community hall or our new RPAC – what I have seen presented in Cleveland High and Victoria Point High is great – couldn't we have something similar for the rest of the community?

Myann Burrows, President, Redlands Arts Council Inc. (2008)

Many community presenters and professional presenters supported the broadening of the definition of venues and touring to include outdoor spaces, recreational spaces, local festivals, libraries, museums, art galleries, clubs and halls.

Link in with local festivals. For instance, Central Highlands has two annual festivals – Multicultural Festival and Gemfest – that attract audiences of up to 5000 people.

Emerald Arts Council (2008)

.....touring arts performances in open places is a cost effective way of developing the appreciation of arts to the uninitiated.....As a regional arts council we struggle financially to provide one quality local performance per month in the park, recognising and respecting the performers financially through funds raised by our hard working and dedicated committee. In doing this we have found an increased number of people attending touring arts to our areas. This is also a platform to encourage and promote love of the arts.

Hervey Bay Arts Council (2008)

We support initiatives to more thoroughly utilise alternate outdoor venues such as Botanical Gardens, Showgrounds, libraries and art galleries etc.

Maryborough Regional Arts Council (2008)

Professional presenters and producers who participated in the consultation were sympathetic to the needs of those communities with least access to resources and professional support:

There needs to be special programs for small or remote communities including indigenous communities.

Sean Mee, Artistic Director, La Boite Theatre

Generally I feel remote and regional areas should get priority to ensure product does get to the areas that most need funding support to present any type of product at their venues.

Lisa Trelvellick, Manager, Redland Performing Arts Centre (2008)

The theme of access can be supported within touring policy through a guiding principle that serves the dual meaning of the theme:

- Enable – Queensland audiences deserve access to touring performances as well as the means to learn more about the arts through touring

This could underpin an access related goal such as:

- Goal – Ensure access for all Queenslanders to performing arts touring products and programs

3. Better alignment and coordination of touring systems

Touring Queensland has to be a logistical nightmare – in a perfect world there would be one coordinating body to ensure the flow of touring product throughout the state. There are very few similar venue spaces – and so many variances within communities, and so many dates that are deemed ‘unsuitable’ for local reasons.

Teena Wilcock OAM, Granite Belt Arts Council, Board Member, Queensland Arts Council

As highlighted in the Touring Strategy Information Paper, current touring funds and mechanisms for Queensland performing arts are complex, and at times difficult to understand regardless of where one sits in the touring ecology. Consistent advice within meetings and written responses to the Information Paper was that the system needs to be simpler – it simply needs to coordinate diverse tours for diverse circuits really well. It needs to be easier for producers to tour work, for presenters to find the work their communities want, and for anyone to find the sort of touring work or artist they need to engage regardless of where they live.

Particular attention was given within the data to the smaller venues and ‘b’ circuits. Many consultation participants perceived council amalgamations as a good opportunity to explore the simplifying of regional touring:

It is interesting to note the mention of council amalgamations on page 10 and the impact this may have on streamlining the processes with using council-owned venues. This may make rural areas more attractive in that organisers deal with one council for the opportunity to perform at several venues.

Emerald Arts Council (2008)

Consideration needs to be given to a coordinated mechanism for smaller venues, with less technical capabilities to be part of a touring circuit. As the local government goes through the amalgamation process, there is opportunity to establish a new touring circuit of smaller halls and centres that can take more flexible touring product. A showcase market (similar to NARPACA showcase but with more presenters) would provide an excellent platform for a broader base of touring product matching the smaller venues.

Libby Anstis, General Manager, Queensland Theatre Company (2008)

There seems to be a good opportunity here to explore the touring of new work from the small to medium and independent sectors. These areas of the industry are more likely to produce quality works of suitable scale for the smaller venues. ‘a’ venues are more likely to have the budgets to negotiate with commercial producers whilst the subsidised small to medium sector provides a more affordable product for ‘b’ venue circuits. The need for coordination of small to medium company touring was highlighted in the data:

Additional mechanisms to support small to medium companies in Queensland to develop their product with support of professional tour coordination could increase regional touring opportunities. Less reliance on one large mechanism would be a positive step for the health of touring.

Ann-Marie Ryan, General Manager, Empire Theatre, Toowoomba (2008)

We believe there needs to be a system or network that allows companies who have produced work locally and are ready to embark on touring to progressively experience and learn how to tour regionally and interstate.

Markwell Presents (2008)

As previously discussed time and resources need to be focussed upon providing better services to Queensland's western communities. However, there are opportunities for other networks that could operate within other regions.

There are some venues, eg Mackay, who have diversified and take risks to present both Qld and interstate as well as international performers as 'one offs' or as part of a niche tour..... The creation of an additional touring office/co-ordinator, specialising in touring a diverse range of genres in a small tour format to anywhere between 3 and 6 interested venues could work. It would enable venues to expand what they present and how they present it, to experiment with new genre and to develop new audiences.

Cheryl Jorgenson, General Manager, Mackay Entertainment Centre (2008)

Many consultation participants identified the huge potential for a South East Queensland touring circuit.

A local/regional touring circuit to key regional centres in close proximity to Brisbane Metro area would therefore be highly suitable for Independent arts and schools/youth arts touring. A touring circuit within 100-200 km of Brisbane would expose artists to wider audiences, diversify product available to regional audiences, and provide vital performance opportunities to continue development of new work in front of smaller audiences before exposure to wider audiences.

Saffron Benner, Brisbane (2008)

The overriding issue for me is the potential for shows either programmed by QPAC or touring in to QPAC that could then have the potential to tour into regional centres. Could consideration be given to some sort of SEQ touring circuit being created and managed as a point of contact for commercial and non-commercial promoters? This could involve changing the nature of operations by NARPACA. Whilst I appreciate that different issues are at play for regional centres, there is the possibility that especially some of the small to medium shows touring into QPAC could work in the regions.....QPAC could then act as an intermediary pointing promoters and producers to other regions that may be interesting to discuss potential tours with.

Deborah Murphy, Executive Manager – Programming, QPAC (2008)

Over the past two years and without additional touring funding, TQO has viably increased 'run outs' of Brisbane performances to satellite metropolitan centres e.g. Gold Coast, Toowoomba and Caloundra. Based on this success, and given an appropriate funding base, self management of a significantly expanded annual touring program could generate administrative and practical efficiencies across all touring activities.

The Queensland Orchestra (2008)

Despite the support for niche and region specific touring circuits, the data continued to present the need for simplification, efficiency and transparency in coordination and curation:

There should be a single-desk secretariat for both presenters and producers. This entity should articulate with the broadest range of activity, including schools touring.....

Sean Mee, Artistic Director, La Boite Theatre (2008)

The Long Paddock system is not ideal. In 2008, 130 productions were offered in its first round with only 30 of these given the opportunity to pitch at the Forum in Melbourne. Tour development continued for 18 of those and the decision process of Playing Australia

will reduce the touring productions on the road in 2009 to approximately 10 funded productions.....the process is increasingly time-consuming with long waiting times before the results of applications are known. Make the wrong selections and a venue can find themselves without critical elements of an annual season program with few avenues to remedy the situation.....Regional venue dependency on the Long Paddock process for product each round has led venues to take on a strategy to be a part of more tours than they need to be sure to have enough products to sustain their subscription series.

Ann-Marie Ryan, General Manager, Empire Theatre, Toowoomba (2008)

A significant number of respondents took the 'make it simple' idea further and expressed strong support for the 'one stop shop' idea offered in the Touring Strategy Information Paper:

The idea of an on-line marketplace is an excellent one, allowing presenters, schools and audiences to access a greater diversity of product, and have a more direct say in what they want.....The 'one stop shop' and the creation of 'other small touring mechanisms' are of particular interest to a company like Zen Zen Zo.....

Lynne Bradley, Artistic Director, Zen Zen Zo (2008)

It would be wonderful to have a clearing house for all arts events – at present we operate on a somewhat ad-hoc basis using volunteers. A website might help but maintenance could be an issue.

Longreach Local Arts Council (2008)

Developing a register (on line would be useful) of Qld performers interested in touring, broken down in to a genre.....Artists such as the wonderful Lipman Harp Duo and Julian Byzantine organize mini tours themselves direct with venues willing to take risks to present them. There are some venues, eg Mackay, who have diversified and take risks to present both Qld and interstate as well as international performers as 'one offs' or as part of a niche tour.....The creation of an additional touring office/co-ordinator, specialising in touring a diverse range of genre in a small tour format to anywhere between 3 and 6 interested venues could work. It would enable venues to expand what they present and how they present it, to experiment with new genre and to develop new audiences.

Cheryl Jorgenson, General Manager, Mackay Entertainment Centre (2008)

The 'one stop shop' approach the Touring Strategy Information Paper puts forward seems the most logical and potentially successful proposal utilising as it does the established QAC platform with a broadening of the Council's roles. These new roles would include the provision and dissemination of comprehensive information, liaison and contact in respect of venues, facilities, artists, production personnel as well as producers and presenters of touring product.

Maryborough Regional Arts Council (2008)

The one stop shop model sounds the best out of the suggested possible models. With information given to all citizens they can not only engage in the decision making they will also make a larger investment in attending the event/workshop/exhibition, as they have been involved in the selection of the activity for their community.

Lenine Bourke, Young People and the Arts Australia (YPAA) (2008)

We particularly liked the suggestion of 'creation of a one stop shop'.....

Emerald Arts Council (2008)

The Touring Strategy could support the further development and simplification of current state touring processes through the following principle:

- Simple – The most effective way of coordinating Queensland's performing arts touring landscape is with diverse representation informing simple, clear and transparent delivery

A relevant goal might be:

- Goal – Coordination and alignment with other structures

4. Professional Support and Development

How many of the venues actually have a fully developed artistic policy and audience development policy?

Jill Smith, Geelong Performing Arts Centre

While it is important to invest in artists' development, the investment in developing curatorial skills in community collectives is also desirable.

Ann-Marie Ryan, General Manager, Empire Theatre, Toowoomba (2008)

We (Longreach Arts Council) are happy with the diversity and quality here in Longreach – but we don't really know what the whole community may want/need.....Being more proactive about better communication and networking within the community.....could give a better all round idea of what Longreach audiences would like to see. We note here, that it is probably volunteers that would be driving this networking and communication.

Longreach Arts Council (2008)

Community groups and committees, venues and producers highlighted the need for professional support and development within the performing arts touring sector. Most common areas of need were identified as: producer/presenter relationships, community engagement strategies, development of new tour ready work, audience development, participative projects, partnerships and collaborations. In particular, the areas of programming and curation were identified as being of particular importance, particularly given the lack of grounded knowledge about Queensland communities' cultural taste and interests.

The Touring Strategy provides an opportunity to stimulate collaborative learning and development spaces in the marketplace. These spaces could be online as well as in traditional forum styles. The performing arts sector suggested a range of initiatives during consultation including:

.....some sort of state arts touring product forum where developing work is listed at all stages of planning and development.

Lisa Trelvelick, Manager, Redland Performing Arts Centre (2008)

....interested venues make a financial commitment to the development of product of interest to tour regional Qld

Cheryl Jorgenson, General Manager, Mackay Entertainment Centre (2008)

....encourage venues to become stakeholders beyond the presenter driven model in order to harness their expertise and commitment. There needs to be a proper risk/reward protocol in place to support this.

Chris J.Mangin, Chief Executive/Artistic Director, Opera Queensland (2008)

In particular, NARPACA would welcome greater dialogue with producers in forward planning – perhaps through a regular forum.

NARPACA (2008)

New South Wales' tour coordination organisation Arts on Tour has over the past few years demonstrated leadership within the performing arts touring sector by engaging in continuing research and consultation with its clientele. Last year, Arts on Tour initiated 'The Showroom', a pitching event designed for new concepts and creative development. Attending presenters could invest in the development of new touring work at its

conceptual stages and ensure their participation in its touring once developed. It seems that a model not unlike this would be useful in Queensland as a professional and sector development platform, along with a range of other professional development services including the provision of learning opportunities for producers.

The Queensland Touring Strategy could support sector and professional development through policy with a principle like:

- Develop -The entire performing arts touring ecology benefits from the professional support and development of its stakeholders

A related goal could be:

- Provide learning and development for participants in performing arts touring

5. Quality and diversity

Selecting and presenting product is not for the faint hearted.

Lisa Trelvelick, Manager, Redland Performing Arts Centre (2008)

The data presented mixed responses to the issues of quality and diversity. Some community presenters and professional presenters were satisfied that they had access to high quality and diverse touring products through current Queensland touring arrangements. Many perceive that the current subsidised system provides only a standard diet and have found other ways of accessing diverse, quality product through alternative mechanisms such as Mobile States or by creating mini circuits through deals direct with producers.

Most consultation participants recognised the highly subsidised nature of the current performing arts touring systems and the economic realities constraining quality and diversity in touring programs. Both community and professional presenters expressed a desire to present a greater variety of quality work but recognised their inability to take financial risks when considering the purchasing of product that didn't promise a sound box office return. Of course, imported product that does guarantee good box office relies on a number of venues being able to invest entrepreneurial funds in its development and distribution. This requires the ability to risk take. A number of consultation participants expressed interest in collaborating with Arts Queensland to build solutions:

The economic reality for regional venues is largely dependent upon local funding – leaves limited room for entrepreneurial and therefore artistic risk. There is an opportunity for NARPACA and Arts Queensland to investigate new funding models to support local government curatorial investment. NARPACA member venues represent a substantial infrastructure and skills resource through the state and would be keen to participate in exploring new mechanisms for enhancing the distribution of quality product.

NARPACA (2008)

Consultation responses were mixed on the topic of whether it was important to promote Queensland product to Queenslanders. Many perceive that it doesn't matter where the work comes from as long as it's good. However some presenters hold a commitment to supporting Queensland touring work.

We believe regular presentation of the work of leading Queensland companies in a regional area will help build their brand recognition, increase demand from the community, and in the long term, assist the sustainability of touring productions....it matters that Queensland people have the opportunity to see work produced in Queensland. This position recognises that a healthy Queensland industry grows only through supporting locally based artists and support workers with the development of stories that are relevant to Queensland people.

Ann-Marie Ryan, General Manager, Empire Theatre, Toowoomba (2008)

Whilst the work of the major Queensland companies is valued as providing high quality artistic experience, these companies offer particular kinds of scale and because of their traditions tend to program upon European canons. As demonstrated in classical music, this doesn't necessarily impede communication with non European audiences. However, as already highlighted by the Australia Council's research, it is more likely to be the work of smaller companies that is agile enough to cater for non European tastes, languages, stories and forms:

...I believe the discussion needs to be more strongly informed by the key issues raised by the Australia Council's report on Anticipating Change in the Major Performing Arts.....How will Arts Queensland's touring strategy account for rising costs of touring and select the kinds of companies/work/artists most suitable for interstate, intrastate, and overseas export?..... Currently, the small to medium arts sector primarily relies on the Queensland Arts Council (QAC) for intra and interstate touring. However QAC is poorly funded and still operates, at least ideologically, on an outdated model of instrumental values that influence the selection, development, and presentation of touring product.

Saffron Benner, School of Arts, Griffith University, Brisbane (2008)

As already highlighted, some of the most significant access points for communities to the arts are participative groups such as community choirs and musicals, dance schools and music groups. Local Arts Councils indicated that amateur practice and community participation are desirable in a range of Queensland communities. Are there ways in which the major companies and/or a tour coordination mechanism could support the work of amateur or community participant groups through partnerships and residencies?

Participation is an important new area for performing arts touring. Festivals in particular have demonstrated an ability to develop and present innovative projects that invite communities to participate in the arts. Contemporary music festivals including country music events, invite the audience to a play space where to a large degree, they are able to maintain control of their cultural experience.

Arts festivals also provide exposure to performances that otherwise couldn't be accessed which is perhaps one of the key reasons for supporting performing arts touring. When the exclusivity of the access matches the engagement of the potential audience i.e. when supply meets demand, the touring product will most likely experience commercial success. The consultation data suggests that the major companies and the festivals could be more innovative sources of touring product and process, and that a diversity of smaller Queensland companies could be better supported to tour.

This is certainly true of schools touring. Because venue costs are minimal in schools touring circuits, and audiences are already captured, schools communities are a potential site of profit for performing arts touring. Some commercial touring companies have been utilising school venues outside of school hours for many years because children and often, families, are prepared to sit on the floor. For what these performances might lack in terms of physical comfort for audiences or highly technical production values, they can be an important source of quality intimate performance if well made and presented.

There does need to be more variety and quality of product in Queensland. Teachers and principals should be the 'screeners' of artists and companies who seek to work in schools, as they are with other resources. Teachers have many networks in which to source quality products.

Kite Arts Education Program (2008)

If school communities can have access to diverse menus of touring products, their potential as community venues could be better realised. It may well be possible to open day time school performances up to public ticket buyers if these performances are of interest to other community members. At the same time, the Touring Strategy could

explore ways of making day time touring performances in arts venues more accessible for school communities including parents, teachers and carers. There is much to be explored in relation to schools touring and the implications of change in this area.

There is also much to be explored in relation to touring and Queensland's Indigenous peoples, their communities, country and cultures. Some Queensland Indigenous performances and companies have experienced successful interstate and international tours. The cultural complexities of touring Indigenous artists' and communities' work require particular expertise that is yet to be developed within the performing arts touring sector in Queensland. The Touring Strategy provides an important opportunity to support and develop this expertise.

Knowledge sharing regarding successful touring of quality and diverse work for diverse communities and audiences will depend upon a diversification of the decision making, producing and presenting participants within Queensland's touring networks and programming. Success will be built upon a touring culture of continuous learning and responding.

The final principle guiding touring within the strategy could be:

- Respond – A good way to achieve diverse quality touring experiences is to respond to what we learn about the cultural landscape

The corresponding goal could be:

- Increase quality and diversity of performing arts work for touring

Where to from here?

This report offers a form of communication to stakeholders and interested public, about conversations and written responses that have been developed in and around the process of creating a strategy for performing arts touring in Queensland.

For the strategy to continue to develop in an informed and responsive way, further feedback and critique from a range of sources is important.

What do you think? You are invited to respond to the themes, principles and policy drivers offered in this report.

Respond by emailing: Touring.strategy@arts.qld.gov.au or

Fax: Arts Queensland, Attention: Susan Richer, (07) 3224 4077

Phone: Susan Richer, Arts Queensland on 3224 ----

Post: Susan Richer, Arts Queensland, GPO Box 1436, Brisbane, Q, 4001.

A strategy will be drafted and offered for comment in the next few weeks once feedback relating to this report is collated.

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Cairns City Council
Circa*
Crossroad Arts
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