

Media Release

Wednesday July 1, 2009

Locals have their say at Regional Arts Australia consultation

What is important to people living in regional Australia? How do the arts play a role in regional life? How can governments and other organisations help support both the arts and regional communities? People from Central West NSW are not short on answers to these questions.

Regional Arts Australia is on a national tour consulting regional communities. A very successful community consultation was held yesterday in Bathurst with over 80 people attending from all parts of the region and from a wide cross-section of interests.

Hot topics of the day were the importance of arts in education, support for artists, developing partnerships with non-arts groups, arts in health, involving young people, and links with tourism and economic development. Also discussed was the impact on the arts and on communities of things like economic downturn, shrinking rural populations and access to funding.

Ideas and issues were heard from local government, arts organisations, community interest groups, the TAFE and University sector, tourism, education, business, state agencies, health and disability services as well as artists themselves. Participants came from as far afield as Condobolin, Forbes, Grenfell, Gilgandra, Mudgee and Dubbo.

Federal Member for Macquarie Bob Debus was also able to attend part of the consultation day.

"Whilst there are huge issues faced by regional people, it was not all doom and gloom," said Arts OutWest Executive Officer Tracey Callinan. "People were very willing to share ideas, learn from each other, and to start conversations about working together to build stronger communities. Aside from the main purpose, the day was a great networking opportunity."

"The discussions were intelligent, informed and showed that there is a huge depth of both talent and drive in our region," said Ms Callinan.

"As the regional arts board, this community consultation let us hear first hand what the community needs," said Ms Callinan. "We will use the topics brought up in the consultation to inform our own work in this region."

The Bathurst consultation was one of two held in NSW and the largest so far on Regional Arts Australia's national tour. Regional Arts Australia is hoping to hear from at least 50,000 regional Australians through this consultation process.

Anyone not able to come to the Bathurst session you can still have their say. An easy online survey has been set up. Find it at: www.regionalartsnsw.com.au/news/2009/RAA_survey_0609.html

The survey results will be combined with the outcomes from the public consultations to find out what communities really want and to help regional Arts Australia determine its future directions. Much of the work of Regional Arts Australia involves advocating for regional areas to state and federal government.

You can contact your regional arts board, Arts OutWest on 02 6338 4657 or email artsoutwest@csu.edu.au