

## Platforming: Incubator for current + potential RAB Members

### Introduction

by IAN GZELL, QC

This session is entitled *Platforming* and is directed to current and potential Regional Arts Board members. Its purpose is to act as an information session for current and potential board members and also to assist in developing the content for a project sponsored by the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts for next year which is a training programme for Regional Arts Boards including the development of a kit to assist Regional Arts Board members with their roles and responsibilities.

What we propose is that I should speak for no more than 20 minutes on the structure of Regional Arts New South Wales and how it works from a State perspective.

John Wearne who is the chair of the Regional Arts Board, Arts North West Inc will speak for a similar period on the roles and responsibilities of Regional Arts Boards and how the boards function in undertaking a regional role.

Then Victoria Keighery, the Chief Executive Officer of Regional Arts New South Wales and Kyrin Vea Vea, our Business and Finance Manager, will facilitate a SWOT analysis with you ladies and gentlemen for about 40 minutes to identify current and future issues facing Regional Arts Boards to help us in developing the Regional Arts Board training programme. That should leave us a short period for questions and answers at the end of our allotted time.

Many of you will recall that The Arts Council of New South Wales Limited elected its board of directors annually at an annual general meeting at which each affiliated local arts council was entitled to two voting representatives. The organisation took the opportunity to combine the annual general meeting with a State conference giving delegates the sort of advantages of communication, networking and presentations by experts that you have enjoyed yesterday and today at this Conference combining Regional Arts New South Wales with Museums and Galleries Foundation of New South Wales and Community Cultural Development New South Wales in conjunction with the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales.

One of the disadvantages of our annual general meeting model, as you will recall, was the fairly intense lobbying for board representation which resulted more often than not in strong representation from some areas in the State and none from other areas.

The New South Wales Government published a *Review of Regional Arts Development in New South Wales* by Justin Macdonnell in December 1996. It recommended that The Arts Council of New South Wales be scaled down to deal with community cultural development, local government advocacy and management of an increased CASP programme and that it take steps to reconfigure along these lines and either merge or synchronise its activities with Community Cultural Development New South Wales.

In 1998 the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts adopted the recommendations. It increased CASP and RADO funding to levels requested in our grant application for that year but it decreased our operating funding by \$82,659 from 1997 levels. At the Annual General Meeting in May 1998 the proposition was put that the Arts Council of New South Wales had no choice but to change.

The proposal for change was that the organisation become the representative of Regional Arts Boards throughout New South Wales. That proposal was put to the Local Government and Shires Associations resulting in a co-operation agreement between those associations and our organisation. The Arts Council of New South Wales had commenced to affiliate Regional Arts Boards and each of them was approached for their approval and support for the initiative as were all our affiliated Local Arts Councils.

At an extraordinary general meeting in November 1998 the articles of association of the company were changed to devolve control of the organisation to each of the regions throughout New South Wales.

Under the amendments the annual general meeting was replaced by a mechanism providing that each affiliated Regional Arts Board was entitled to nominate a representative as a member of and director of the company.

A Regional Arts Board is defined in the Articles of Association as a company incorporated in New South Wales or an association incorporated under the *Associations Incorporation Act* having objects or purposes or rules or regulations similar to those of The Arts Council of New South Wales which operates in any geographical region

comprising at least two contiguous local government areas in New South Wales which is affiliated by resolution of the board and which is recognised as a Regional Arts Board by the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts.

When the constitution was amended the policy of the board was that a Regional Arts Board would be affiliated if its constitution required its committee of management by whatever name called to include at least two representatives of Local Arts Councils in its region affiliated to The Arts Council of New South Wales.

We have since relaxed that requirement. Our current policy is that provided as a matter of fact there are two such representatives on the committee of management we no longer require the rather authoritarian provision in the Regional Arts Board's constitution.

The Articles of Association of The Arts Council of New South Wales Limited do not require a Local Arts Council to have a name which includes any of those words. As time has gone on many local community organisations have been affiliated which do not contain the words *Arts Council* in their official names. In time I think our requirement of two representatives of local affiliates will change and we will leave it to the good sense of the Regional Arts Board to ensure that there is a reasonably equal representation of local councils and local community organisations on the boards. Such a policy will recognise the nature of a Regional Arts Board as a co-operative effort of Regional Arts New South Wales, the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts and local government and will fall within the terms of the co-operation agreement with the Local Government and Shires Associations.

In recognition of the devolution of control of our organisation to Regional New South Wales the company adopted the trading name Regional Arts New South Wales.

An advantage of the new structure is that there is equality of access to policy development in Regional Arts New South Wales.

There are eight affiliated Regional Arts Boards, each with a director on Regional Arts NSW. They are:

- Arts OutWest Incorporated
- Arts North West Inc
- Arts Mid North Coast Inc
- Southern Tablelands Regional Arts Incorporated
- Regional Arts Board Albury Wodonga
- Eastern Riverina Arts Program Incorporated
- Outback Arts Inc; and
- South West Arts Inc

In addition, Regional Arts Boards are in the process of being established in the South East, in the Upper Hunter and West of the Darling. All of rural and remote New South Wales is represented on the Regional Arts New South Wales board except for the far north coast and Illawarra Shoalhaven and mid west Orana. In time we hope that Regional Arts Boards will be established in those areas. In addition, some of the larger Regional Arts Board areas may be modified to make them more workable.

From a State perspective Regional Arts New South Wales can justifiably claim to be the peak organisation representing cultural development in remote, rural and regional New South Wales. It functions directly with the Regional Arts Boards and the RADOs.

The appointment of a RADO and the establishment of a Regional Arts Board go hand in hand and require the co-operative effort of local government, Regional Arts New South Wales and the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts.

We understand the needs of our local affiliates. Sixty percent of the time of our reduced Sydney Secretariat, now numbering four and a half, in comparison with a core of seven between 1993 and 1998, is spent in servicing the needs of our affiliated organisations. As more and more sophisticated demands are made of fewer and fewer members of staff this level of servicing must reduce unless additional funding is obtained. Wherever possible our local affiliates are encouraged first to seek the assistance of their Regional Arts Board, recognising the decentralisation that has driven the changes to our organisation.

Regional Arts New South Wales in co-operation with the Regional Arts Boards affiliated and the in course of affiliation and the RADO in each of those areas establish, service and co-ordinate RADO programmes, establish and service Regional Arts Boards, run grant programmes funded both by the State and the Commonwealth, conduct projects both at the State and at the Commonwealth level, advocate, promote and market regional arts and carry on a much over-taxed and much needed administration for this purpose.

I believe wholeheartedly in the restructure of the organisation. We are only now beginning to function as a new organisation. We have a long way to go but the path ahead will be stimulating and rewarding. ■

## Notes on a presentation from Arts North West RAB

by JOHN WEARNE

Regional Arts Boards are empowering of the regions and the local community. Their strengths are that they holistically plan and integrate cultural activities.

There are a number of reasons for the success of the Arts North West RAB:

- The composition of the Board, which has twelve members: five local government (including some senior executives); three arts councils; three arts professionals and one Indigenous representative.
- Collectively, the RAB has representation on Arts on Tour, Railway Street Theatre, and the Capital Infrastructure Advisory Committee.
- The care of, diligence and solid work that went in to the constitution.
- Strategic planning and management planning mechanisms work very well.
- Board agendas set and based on strategic plan.
- Quarterly meetings focussed through that set of responsibilities and accountabilities.
- Global budgeting with autonomy to reflect people's priorities in the region. Funding can go direct to RABs. Assists shoring up local government support.
- Representation on regional economic development agenda. Arts as fundamental regional economic development partner.
- Cultural tourism. Partnerships with tourism and economic organisations in the area.
- Strong theory - promotion and participation of the arts at community level brings about social and economic rebuilding, for example BIG hART tackling juvenile delinquency and unemployment, using the arts to give a purpose in life; the 'Machismo' project, too, enormous potential to address self-esteem problems of young men - community re-building tool, not just performing arts.
- Local Government Accord. Now to include not just state and local government but also RANSW.

Key issues driving agenda: cultural planning coming more to the front. Councils acknowledge the need to do it. Cultural mapping being adopted – a register/tool for communities. Local government is the key - councils see the need to provide community leadership role at the heart of opportunities.

Infrastructure and support Arts Councils. Two issues:

1. Resourcing. As structures bear fruit, there is a need for funding to develop better programs. However, you need to demonstrate efficient use of that money.
2. The question of standardisation of the position descriptions for RADOs - employment contracts, salary packages - need standardisation. Performance agreements need portability. RADOs are grossly underpaid.

Arts North West is fortunate in that we have got all local councils on board. A suggestion is that, if you have trouble getting all the local councils on board, try the approach of starting from scratch and getting all the mayors together and discussing it.

The opportunities are for the continued development of the RABs, their links with RANSW and the greater support and representation on regional issues gained through that.

The potential for the arts in the regions is only just starting to be realised. Of course the *nirvana* is widespread support for arts activity everywhere.

## Regional Arts Boards SWOT Session

### Strengths

- Umbrella organisation for arts groups in the whole region - bringing together stakeholders.
- A conduit for information about the region
- Provision of services for the whole region
- Bring together people with commitment and passion - pool a lot of talent, expertise and commitment.
- Regional planning of arts and cultural activity – pooling of resources.
- Contribution to state-wide policy.
- Promotion of individuals and groups.
- Connecting local government with cultural development in the areas.
- Linking community groups with professionals.
- Unifying - networks of support.
- Share information - find out what people in the next village are doing - share and develop a sense of pride (where previously did not care so much what was happening down the road).
- Prioritise needs, not compete, within the region.
- Generating a positive image for state and federal governments.
- Opportunities for smaller organisations to participate.

- Empowering individuals - e.g. active community members become RAB members and then become elected councilors as a result - building knowledge within council.
- Links between RABs and RADOs.
- Support for volunteers, auspicing grants
- Co-ordination of activities in the local area.
- Regional decision making: CASP devolved to RABs - equality of access - use local knowledge to prioritise spending dollars.
- Central information repository for region: known resource for contracts, information.
- Promotion of the arts through RABs.
- Facilitate skills development - develop professional skills
- Provide employment opportunities.
- Access to state and federal departments: An RAB can attract leaders and other government people to come and address the Board - being representative of the region is politically appealing - access to state and government departments.
- Systematic approach to strategic planning.
- Encourage local government cultural planning and mapping.
- Comprehensive talent pool with the capacity to co-opt specialist skills where necessary.
- Promotes a sense of place.
- Can accommodate local distinctiveness.

### **Weaknesses**

- From an Arts Council perspective, some implication that the emergence of RABs resulted in less funds being available for Arts Councils - CASP funds have decreased in real terms.
- Most regions are too big, particularly for 1 RADO to service, e.g., Arts Out West.
- Communication across such large areas about e.g. grants etc.
- Hard to get an arts focus in such large areas where there is a lack of definition.
- RADO can't do enough for local governments. Local apathy because can't cover the geographic area.
- Lack of promotion.
- Challenge to communicate in isolate areas. People miss out because they don't hear about things in time.
- RADO overload.
- Profile issue - local councils say, 'What can we get for our money?' - Their expectations. Lots don't know there's an RAB. It's a real weakness if council delegates to the RAB are not proactive and reporting back to the council - need to make sure it gets reported.
- If there's only one councilor on the RAB, what about the rest of the councils? It's up to the RAB to report.
- Sustainable delivery. Need to focus on what you can sustainably deliver - but what is done needs to be better promoted.
- Cross sector representation: Neglect of other constituencies: Perpetuation of the idea that the RAB is really representative - can be a blindness to groups not represented.
- Devolution issues
- Lack of clarity regarding who the RADO works to - the network, or the RAB. Lines of reporting.
- Increased number of state and interstate program providers being encouraged to access the network and form strategic alliances - increased work loads because of this
- RAB members are volunteers.

### **Opportunities**

- RANSW's role in forming strategic alliances with other state wide organisations.
- Capacity to secure additional funding.
- Regional economic driver: Using the arts as a key economic development tool.
- Using the arts to address social decline in the regions.
- State regional development boards - Department of State and Regional Development and Tourism.
- Volunteer training program.
- A national model for regional decisions and delivery: 'Sell' the model more vigorously.
- Larger state-wide strategic planning and projects
- Stimulate creative industry
- A strategic planning template built on what is working well.
- Share information.
- *ArtReach* and the internet - opportunities for improved communication and profile of network including templates available on the website.
- For every weakness identified, there's an opportunity.
- Take advantage of the work done in Newcastle - their standard policy and procedures available online.

### **Threats**

- Change of Government
- Lack of funding
- Turnover of volunteers on RABs - all areas. ■