

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE ARTS
IN REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT BUNBURY
ON THURSDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2004**

SESSION 4

Members

**Mr D.A. Templeman (Chairman)
Mr L. Graham (Deputy Chairman)
Mr J.N. Hyde
Mr A.P. O’Gorman
Ms S.E. Walker**

[2.45 pm]

O'DEA, MS JOANNE (JO) MARIE

Arts Events Coordinator,

PO Box 6153,

South Bunbury, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: We will reconvene our meeting of the committee. I would like to welcome you, Jo, to this hearing in Bunbury. We have held a series of hearings throughout regional areas of Western Australia. This committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the House itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

Ms O'Dea: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you understand the notes attached to it?

Ms O'Dea: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read an "Information for Witnesses" briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before committees?

Ms O'Dea: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Please state the capacity in which you appear before the committee this afternoon.

Ms O'Dea: I am here as an independent arts worker.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. This committee is a committee of Parliament. Our current inquiry is looking at arts in regional Western Australia. I understand that you have had a chance to look at our terms of reference, which cover some key focus areas. We are very interested in making recommendations to the Parliament on the economic, cultural and social impact that the arts is having in regional areas of the State. We are paying particular attention to five areas including, obviously, the benefits that arts can play in regional communities. We would like to hear about that from your perspective. We are also looking at employment opportunities and the effectiveness and impact of government funding. What we would like to do this afternoon, in the brief time we have, is to canvass your perspective of arts in regional WA. I note from the information you gave us that you have had experience in various areas of the arts. I am very keen to hear a bit more about the vision of your new business, which you describe as marrying regional artists and organisations with events and activities. The committee is interested in hearing about that. Maybe you would like to start with a brief overview of where you are at now with the arts in this community.

Ms O'Dea: Okay. In regard to the greater Bunbury region?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Ms O'Dea: We have a very active arts community. I guess one of the main things that I discovered when I was at the Bunbury Regional Entertainment Centre was that a lot of arts organisations were working independently. They do not necessarily communicate enough with each other to understand what they are doing and, more specifically, when they are doing it. I certainly had a focus then in trying to get, for instance, the organisation I worked with to communicate with other arts organisations and to work together, so that we were not clashing.

There is no point in there being competition. It is about supporting each other's projects and interests and making sure we all find a niche that enhances our and each other's projects. For example, if a group has a production or an event, it should look at what other arts organisations are doing at the same time. It could join with those groups or ask them to work with it on those events, to tailor projects for those events. A lot of arts organisations do their own thing. People are witnessing the same performances or shows over and over again. We have wonderful talent amongst our kids. They might be booked for every activity that happens in Bunbury. It is a chance to perform, but the audience is not growing because it is the same audience or, if not, people have seen them a dozen times. I guess it is trying to encourage those arts organisations to suit events at the time, to run with themes, to develop new ideas and concepts, and to bring in more outsiders, not necessarily from our region but further afield, who have more experience and ideas to further what we are already doing.

The CHAIRMAN: You mentioned that you felt there is a need to make sure that the left hand knows what the right hand is doing - that each group is aware so that they can almost pool their resources. Is that right?

Ms O'Dea: Yes. I had a phone call from a lady yesterday whom I know from when I was working at the entertainment centre. She rang up to have a small whinge about the fact that she has been running a drama competition for a number of years with a club and somebody else in town is now running some workshops that are directed at the same audience. Her event is happening in October or September and theirs happens in October. She is concerned that they are approaching the same people to do the same thing. She asked, "Why didn't they ring me and talk about how we could do that together?" That makes sense to me. Something else is happening in town. A competition for short films has been running for about four years. Somebody else has now come up with an idea to run a short film competition and has approached the same people who supported the other one. For some reason he did not ring the original organisers. They have funding for a coordinator but decided not to go ahead with it because one competition is running in March and the other starts in April. Why pick it up?

The CHAIRMAN: Whose role is it, in your view, to ensure better coordination? You have a business, which I assume would be part of that from a consultancy and coordinating aspect, but who should provide the overall coordination and education of what exists?

Ms O'Dea: The first thing we need to do is to not duplicate. Also, lots of people can do and do similar things. A number of organisations run events calendars at the moment. They are not necessarily working together. They send them out to different areas; some are overlapping. Why do we need three when everyone could get one comprehensive one? Let us see who is already out there rather than create a new position. That is what always seems to happen.

The CHAIRMAN: You were on a steering committee for the establishment of a regional arts development officer. Can you give us some more background on what that involved and its status now?

Ms O'Dea: I was working at the entertainment centre at the time and worked closely with the Bunbury Regional Art Galleries and regional venues. It all came about because we were constantly inundated with requests from people who were looking for performers. They wanted to get in touch with artists or wanted activities to work in with their events. It was obvious to us that someone needed to be there to cover the bigger picture and be a conduit for all arts organisations. They needed someone from whom they could get advice, support and professional development, and who could promote activities. It was specifically for the arts community. That went through the process of funding applications etc, and the original idea was to have an arts development officer for the greater Bunbury region. That did not happen because of varied things relating to funding. Ultimately, the people who came forward with the funding stated it was to be a regional position and not just for Bunbury. There are a lot of successful examples of regional arts officers over east,

but it is not recognised as an important part of the arts community in WA. Regional arts development officers do a brilliant job. It is hardly known at all here. People do not know they exist. There are a lot of artists.

The CHAIRMAN: I believe there is a position for a RADO here but it is not filled.

Ms O'Dea: The position is here.

The CHAIRMAN: Who funds that?

Ms O'Dea: Regional Solutions funding, Country Arts WA and a number of shires, including Bunbury and Harvey. I think there are four shires.

The CHAIRMAN: Where is the position based?

Ms O'Dea: It is based at the Bunbury Regional Art Galleries.

The CHAIRMAN: What is the time line? Is it funded for three or four years?

Ms O'Dea: The position was left vacant in November. The funding was going through until August this year. I resigned from the committee prior to that. Bunbury Regional Art Galleries has gone through some major changes and that has unfortunately put everything to do with a RADO on hold. It has been without a director for three months. The new director is now on board. She has a lot to deal with at the moment and the RADO position is continuing to be put on the backburner. The steering committee wants to crank it up. She is getting her head around the current position. The RADO would answer to her. The board auspices the funds, the director supervises the RADO and then they are all housed in the art galleries. What has happened is that with the chair of the art galleries leaving and it not having a director for three months, the RADO position is not a priority at the moment. The director has promised that it will be a priority after the South Western Times Survey, which occurred on Friday night. I was on the committee for four years. I have gone through the process of employing two officers. I am starting a new business, so I resigned. I have not been proactive in physically doing things. I contacted her a few times.

The CHAIRMAN: You support that position?

Ms O'Dea: I will be devastated if that position goes. It is built up, it has momentum and it is ready to fly. It is about people who will hopefully pull the community together in regard to communicating. That is what RADOs do. It is about communicating and professional development for artists.

The CHAIRMAN: Currently the model in Bunbury falls under the art galleries group?

Ms O'Dea: The Bunbury Regional Arts Management Board.

The CHAIRMAN: We have looked at the Victorian and New South Wales model of having regional arts officers out in the regions. We have canvassed the communities we have met with about the same model. It has been suggested that the position should come under the auspices of a community-based organisation like the one that exists here. It has also been suggested that it could go under the development commission. Officers could be attached to the development commissions for each region or, where there is a regional council structure within a region - that is, the local governments form a regional council - the position could fit there. In your experience, does it sit best within a community-based organisation?

Ms O'Dea: That is how it has happened. The people who were driving it were involved with community-based organisations. I believe that there are possibilities with regional councils. Unfortunately, I do not think Bunbury is a member of one, which creates problems in the south west. The South West Development Commission is an option too. The main thing would be to make sure that it does not become a position that is stuck in an office. I guess the situation now is that people ask why we applied for all this funding for the RADO. It came about because originally it was focused on the greater Bunbury region. Now it is a matter of getting people on board and

supporting it and seeing what a RADO can do. That was the job of the past couple of years. That is why council funding has grown over the past couple of years. It is about professional development. We have had steering committee meetings in different shires. The shires have slowly started to come on board and have seen the value there, but it is still at an early stage, even though it is a four-year project, because the region is so big. The south west region stretches from Walpole to Harvey. It is just massive. They are spending so much time on the road and not enough time communicating with people. That is a challenge in itself. Something like the commission or a group of councils might be able to offer some additional support that could alleviate some of those problems. The RADO is autonomous. The two women who held the position did a fantastic job and were very different in how they did it. It now needs someone to pick it up and carry it further.

[3.15 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: What is your experience of the interface between the community and the agencies associated with government, such as Healthway, Lotterywest and Country Arts? Do community groups or individuals have any problems accessing funding or attempting to fill out submissions or anything of that nature? Have you got any comments on that?

Ms O'Dea: The funds are very accessible. There is still a helluva lot of people in arts organisations who are terrified of applying for funding and do not know how to go about it.

The CHAIRMAN: Would having a RADO help them?

Ms O'Dea: Absolutely. One of a RADO's roles is to provide advice on funding. A RADO regularly puts out a newsletter - every two months - that contains deadlines for applications and lists of web sites to go to. RADOs make a commitment that they will not fill out funding applications. Their role is not to do it for people but to empower people to do it for themselves. Healthway and Lotterywest funding is accessible for people, and a RADO could make those people utilise it more.

The CHAIRMAN: What about the role of local government in delivering arts outcomes?

Ms O'Dea: Obviously it is incredibly important. I am going back to the RADO example, but it is a good example. From day one we had to get local government on side. There was no point working independently, so we insisted that a City of Bunbury staff member be on board. That person is the cultural development officer. That is beneficial and has meant that the city and RADO have been able to work together on events and activities. For instance, if a RADO wanted to do a launch or something like that and the city had organised something else, one would invite the other to come along. One announcement might take 15 minutes, but it can be made in front of the other's crowd. They can share knowledge and go from there. Those sorts of things are great. For instance, I know that the City of Bunbury has approached the RADO to source performers and things like that and to get some ideas. It is all about working together. We do not all know everything, as much as we like to think we do, so it is about these organisations and individuals working together to make sure we have a huge pool of knowledge to pluck from.

The CHAIRMAN: Your business is newly established. Our terms of reference include the issue of local content and the level of employment that can be generated through arts activity. Have you got any comments about the problems you see or what you think is an impediment to someone like yourself, who is in business or attempting to make a business from the arts?

Ms O'Dea: It is no secret that there is no money in the arts for wages. I loved my position at the entertainment centre. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I had a great relationship with the staff and the board. I left for two reasons. One of them was that financially I would have been better off doing casual work in a shoe shop, but I had a job of responsibility. I was managing large projects, and I asked myself where I could take that. Once I decided to go independent, I thought about how I could expect to make any more money if I intended to work in the arts industry. I have not given myself a name. I call what I do "arts events". It is not my business but it is what I do. I have kept the "arts" in there because I want to keep a focus on the arts. I want to try to balance that with

corporate work, and bring the arts into that in some way. There is scope, but it is hard. I have had quite a few approaches in the short time that I have been doing this. I have not done advertising, but I am quite busy. However, most of those people who have rung and asked me to help them out do not have a budget. This is how I make my living, so how am I going to work with that? I have done it in a number of ways. I am helping Stark Raven Theatre Company with its play. It wanted me to come on board, but it had no money. I have suggested that it pay me a commission of \$1 a ticket. I will not make a fortune out of it, but I hope that I can help the company attract audience numbers. I am helping it get sponsorship to pay for the promotion to get bums on seats to get some money. That is how I am working. In another instance, some people wanted sponsorship, and I said that they should pay me only if I succeeded. I am taking a risk. Not a lot of people are prepared to do that.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the difficulty with the various funding bodies and programs that people are not funded?

Ms O'Dea: It is wages. With the RADO role, we had - I cannot remember exactly - \$250 000 of project funding but we could not get funding to pay for an officer to carry out the work. It was a big challenge.

The CHAIRMAN: Was it part of the criteria?

Ms O'Dea: We could use only the original funding for the project. I want to make sure I have this right. We had a lot of project money but we still needed to find someone to provide money for the wages. I remember that was really hard. There were a lot of places. I did not do a lot of the funding applications. That work was done by a lady called Sonia Dye, who did a great job. She did the research, but it was difficult to find an organisation that would give us money for wages. Even if we did, we could pay a RADO only \$32 000. As far as I am concerned, it is an autonomous position with a huge responsibility. The first person had to do it from scratch. As there are not a lot of bucks, we cannot pull in an experienced person. In both instances we have called in people who have just graduated from university or been out of uni for only a couple of years. One, Sarah Norton, has been plucked from the sky and employed by the Department of Culture and the Arts as a project officer, and the other has also gone back to Perth to do bigger and better things. We cannot keep them here.

The CHAIRMAN: There are two issues. One is gaining access to a fund that allows for the payment of a coordinator or whatever position. Therefore, the first issue is the payment of a person for wages, and the other is the amount of money that that person is paid. As you have demonstrated through your example, the amount of money you can pay through the funding agreement or the application limits -

Ms O'Dea: The calibre of person who can be employed.

The CHAIRMAN: That is a real and important point, which has been made in other places. One example is the Esperance region's Festival of the Wind, which is quite famous. It has struck a rock because of that particular reason. There is difficulty in funding a coordinator - somebody to do the on-the-ground putting together of the festival. Could the agencies that hang off government - that is, Healthway, Lotterywest and Country Arts WA - do anything, apart from having a fund for that purpose? Maybe such a fund could be set up. Is there anything else that you think those agencies could do better or impose on community groups or individuals who are accessing funding to make it easier? Does anything spring to mind?

Ms O'Dea: I know a lot of individuals who get daunted by filling out applications - although, to be honest, I do not think the applications are really that complicated. They are fairly specific and specific questions are asked. I think it is more the fact that people are nervous about asking for money in the first place and not getting it. Many people's projects hang on whether that money comes through. A lot of workshops have been held down here. Lotterywest has been here. I

cannot recall Healthway being here. They fund a lot of projects, and that is great. Sometimes I feel that the Healthway funding has been diluted. It is funding so many projects that the money is not having a huge impact. People are getting only a few hundred dollars, which does not pay. People who apply for \$500 or \$600 get only \$100 or \$200, and they must go through the process of getting more from somewhere else. That takes up a lot of energy. It could be improved by -

The CHAIRMAN: Making more funds available.

Ms O'Dea: I am realistic. I hate to think that some smaller individuals or organisations are going to miss out because someone else is getting the bulk of money.

The CHAIRMAN: A good example is the Ravensthorpe Regional Arts Council. Its arts person demonstrated that smaller communities and organisations can grow a relatively small grant into something quite large. That needs to be recognised by the funding bodies. She gave an example. When in-kind support was considered, the council grew a \$1 000 grant into something worth \$5 000. Can you talk about the importance you think the arts has? What sort of benefits do you believe the arts can deliver to older people, younger people, isolated people etc?

Ms O'Dea: I start from the very beginning. I think it is absolutely essential in schools. It is one of the few things that can work positively for the emotional development of our kids. Drama, music, visual arts and now film are so essential but do not always get the appropriate focus. They are considered an "extra". A primary school must decide whether it wants an arts specialist, drama specialist or music specialist. It is never given the full scope. Many kids with wonderful ability and talent go through school on the outer because they have never had those opportunities. From a community point of view, I believe the arts is great for the social development of our children. It is about pulling the community together. There are very few ways in which we can pull the community together to enjoy an activity or event and to take the experience away with it. Sport, such as Aussie Rules football, is one way. I heard that last year more people in Australia attended an arts event than a sports event. I think that is a wonderful statistic. We need to work on it because I do not think a lot of people realise that. I believe it is about pulling the community together and going back to what a community is about. Somebody could work and function independently; however, it is the arts events, alongside the scope of activities, that pull the community together and make that community strong.

[3.15 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Have you experienced any specific arts programs that are targeted at dealing with youth-related issues or social problems?

Ms O'Dea: There is the Kids Helping Kids concert, which won community event of the year in the same year that our project won an award. There have been things at the Bunbury Regional Entertainment Centre. We had a play called *Ecstasy*, which was about the rave scene and drug taking. We worked with the local Nyoongah drug organisation and the schools to get kids there to give them information and that sort of thing. I am trying to think of any others.

The CHAIRMAN: You have mentioned schools being critical. Perhaps art in its various forms and arts activities and events have a real capacity to allow people to connect.

Ms O'Dea: Absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN: And they can participate and grow.

Ms O'Dea: It is a wonderful form of education. It is a great way of teaching people about social issues. We did one on breast cancer. It automatically opens doors to new audiences. People came to the theatre who had never been before. The wonderful thing about theatre - I am talking more about this than visual arts - is that it is immediate; it is right there in front of you. That is something we need to maintain in our community. We are a screen culture. TV has taken over. We need to make sure that that is not permanent. There are a helluva lot of kids who will never attend a theatre.

If people do not go to the theatre as children, they will never go as adults. We need to make sure that people go as kids. The theatre is a great way of communicating and learning about social issues.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: I was going to ask about performing and visual arts. You seem to be concentrating on performing arts. Are you involved with music as well?

Ms O'Dea: I did some work with one of the schools in Bunbury. Newton Moore Senior High School has a fantastic music program. I helped that school in applying for sponsorship and that sort of thing on a voluntary basis a couple of years ago. Something I have noticed about that group is that the teachers who are doing it are beginning to become burnt out. They are paid, but they come to school at 7.30 am and organise concerts after school and on weekends. They are getting tired. I have noticed that the kids are getting sick of it. My daughter goes to this school. She was in the band but quit this year. I was involved with the band before she started through my involvement with the Bunbury Regional Entertainment Centre. I worked with groups. I know the regional schools very well, all the way down to Manjimup. I noticed that program. All of the teachers do a brilliant job, but they are getting tired and that is coming through to the kids. The support is not there. Everyone recognises that it is great, but no-one can offer physical assistance, and they are getting tired. The kids are leaving. They have lost so many kids this year going from year 9 to year 10. The senior band is starting to diminish. It is still a very successful band, but if that continues, what will happen in a couple of years? That is the music side. I have done other things with music as well. I always go to art exhibitions at the galleries.

The CHAIRMAN: Before we close this part of the hearing are there any other key points or issues that you would like to raise that you have not had an opportunity to let us know about?

Ms O'Dea: Nothing new. I guess in the short time that I have been working independently what I have recognised is that volunteer burnout is really serious now. I am helping the Bunbury Show with a small project and am pulling my hair out. I did not want to do it, but I felt sorry for them and am doing it. It is a disorganised situation. It is nobody's fault. They all work full-time. They struggle to put a show together each year. They do not have the expertise or skills. They could employ a coordinator if the finances were managed properly, but they are all volunteers. Some organisations have the money but do not necessarily have the skills to structure it so that they can pay somebody. That could be done in different ways. A lot of people need to get somebody on board to whom they can give some money and say, "Help us." Again, what I have noticed about this situation is communication. It is almost not there. They are constantly falling in a hole. They need someone there who can make sure that everybody gets the information and knows exactly what is happening and who can pull something together in some sort of order. Organisation is one of the biggest problems.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your contribution this afternoon. We do appreciate it. The committee will be formulating a report, which will include recommendations and findings. Our role is to report to the Parliament. We are expecting to do that in August. Your contribution is certainly valuable because it is evidence that we can utilise for our final report. A copy of the transcript from this afternoon's session will be available to you if you want to read it. On behalf of the committee I thank you for your contribution and wish you well with your business.