

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT ESPERANCE
ON TUESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2003**

SESSION 3

Members

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

[11.12 am]

HILTON, MR RODNEY TREVOR

Executive Manager, Community Services,

Shire of Esperance,

examined:

The CHAIRMAN: The 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 a contempt of Parliament. Unless otherwise directed by the committee, witnesses' evidence is public and may be published, including on the parliamentary web site, immediately after Hansard has corrected the transcript. Have you read the notes for witnesses who appear before committees and the witness information sheet?

Mr Hilton: Yes, I have.

The CHAIRMAN: The Community Development and Justice Standing Committee is a parliamentary standing committee. We have jurisdiction over a range of portfolios. We initiated an inquiry into the arts in regional Western Australia. I understand you have seen our terms of reference. There are five key terms. Basically, the terms of reference relate to the effectiveness or otherwise of arts outcomes in regional Western Australia. We are very interested in the interface between the government departments that are charged with delivering arts outcomes, such as ArtsWA, Country Arts WA etc, and the regions. We are very keen to learn from the communities we visit about the impact of those organisations, what they access and how they access it. We have been meeting with local government representatives because, in varying degrees, local governments play a role in assisting, nurturing and encouraging arts in their communities; they support the arts to varying degrees. I open our discussion by asking what is the extent of the shire's involvement with and support for the arts?

Mr Hilton: Our main involvement is as a funding body for the arts. We do not have an arts officer. There was an arts officer five or six years ago, and it was deemed to be important at that stage. However, in intervening years that officer has been lost to the shire. We basically work on the recommendations of Esperance Community Arts, which is the peer group in Esperance for all the arts organisations. The council refers to Esperance Community Arts for its recommendations or requests for services, facility upgrades and those types of things.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the council recognise that as the peak arts body?

Mr Hilton: Yes. Our main involvement is in providing support and funding for projects. We have what it is known as a community development fund. The council allocates a pool of funds each year. In the two years since the introduction of the community development fund, we have each year had a pool of about \$300 000. Various community groups can apply to council for that, and we have a sitting in March each year to consider those submissions. A significant proportion of that funding goes to arts groups in various forms. They seem to be relatively well supported financially. They are active, and I think that is because a peak body represents them. It supports them and tries to raise issues with the council. The only other areas in which we get involved with the arts is through public facilities and in determining whether there is provision for art to be incorporated in planning development. We initiate urban art programs from time to time. One was completed this weekend. It was on a derelict delicatessen. We used the youth arts officer from the Cannery Arts Centre, Phil Shelton, who is possibly on your interview list. He worked with a number of

indigenous youth - most of them in fact - and designed and painted a wall mural on a derelict building in Nulsen. It was an attempt to defeat graffiti in that particular area. We are awaiting the outcomes of that. At our skate park we used art for the same purpose of defeating graffiti. The council is looking at a new subdivision as part of its planning for the future. Components of the plans for the development will involve the arts community through public sculptures, seating and those types of things. That is in the future and we have not really bedded that down.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you not have a public art policy as such at this stage?

Mr Hilton: No. The council has an art collection. Once again we defer to Esperance Community Arts to maintain and look after that for us.

The CHAIRMAN: Where is that stored?

Mr Hilton: The artworks in this room are part of it. The collection is housed throughout the administration building, the Esperance Civic Centre and the library. The paintings are in various locations.

The CHAIRMAN: You mentioned the use of arts projects to address social issues like vandalism and graffiti etc. Is it the case that you have not yet started to analyse the impact of that? Are you still in the early stages?

Mr Hilton: Very much so. We initially introduced the project at the skate park because of offensive graffiti on the bare concrete basin. We put in place an arts project there about three years ago. It is nice and colourful and seems to have overcome the problem of offensive graffiti there. I guess there is peer pressure from the kids to not deface it. We are hoping the same will occur at the Nulsen deli. We have encouraged the youth arts officer, Phil Shelton, to propose other locations for the urban arts program. We believe there is a need for it to defeat that graffiti. It is not only a matter of creating attractive environments; there is a purpose to it. We will monitor the Nulsen deli very closely, because it is a prime candidate for future vandalism. The phone box that sits beside it is the most vandalised phone box in Western Australia.

Mr L. GRAHAM: I bet I could find a couple of others for you!

Mr Hilton: It is prone to graffiti as it is a derelict shop. It is not open; it has been closed down.

The CHAIRMAN: You mentioned the planning aspect of some of the shire's more recent subdivisions. Has there not been a requirement for developers to incorporate in their public open space areas any public art-related projects?

Mr Hilton: No. It is not the field in which I operate, but I am not aware of that. We do not have a lot of developers. Most of the subdivision down here is done by the council. One private developer is involved in the Le Grand estate on Fisheries Road but there is no public arts component to that.

The CHAIRMAN: The council has a community development fund, which provides \$300 000 annually. That is significant. A lot of the arts groups access that fund. My understanding is that you also provide an annual grant specifically to Esperance Community Arts.

Mr Hilton: That is part of the CDF. It comes out of the pool of funding. This year we gave Esperance Community Arts \$32 000 for its operational needs. We have funded an additional \$15 000 for building maintenance at the Cannery Arts Centre. Various other groups have also applied for funding. Those grants vary from \$1 000 for the local band to buy some new uniforms for their members to \$4 500 for another arts group - I cannot recall the name - to put on a project. We also fund part of the wages for the youth arts officer at the Esperance cannery. The fund is open. It is not there exclusively for the arts community. The one fund we have for the arts community also comes out of the CDF pool. An allocated fund of \$12 000 is set aside each year. A small subcommittee of the council receives applications specifically from arts groups. It funds those groups from that \$12 000. The subcommittee meets each quarter, and groups put in submissions to receive up to \$12 000.

The CHAIRMAN: Also, you have arts infrastructure in the Esperance Civic Centre. How is that structured? Is there a manager who is a council employee or on a contract?

Mr Hilton: He is a contracted manager. He simply maintains the centre by coordinating the cleaning services and arranging for the booking of the venue. The council also contributes funds to the Esperance Showbizz coordinator, Heather Gee, who is independent of the centre. It is my understanding that Heather identifies the groups or acts to bring into the area.

The CHAIRMAN: As a ballpark figure, how much would the civic centre cost to operate each year?

Mr Hilton: I do not have a budget with me. I could not tell you off the top of my head.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there an allocation to pay for the manager and other incidentals?

Mr Hilton: It is a council facility. There is no other staff there, but the council pays for the cleaning contractors, the manager and the maintenance and upgrade of the building.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the centre utilised?

Mr Hilton: It is used regularly. Without looking at the shire budget, I could not quote figures of what the centre earns and costs to maintain.

The CHAIRMAN: I am following this line of questioning because this was the first regional centre of its kind. In the various regions we have visited there are different models of how these buildings operate. They are also a focus for community arts and the delivery of outcomes. I was interested in comparing Esperance's model with Kalgoorlie's model. We visited Kalgoorlie late last week, and it has a different type of model. My home town of Mandurah has a different model. Is there any additional information that we could get?

Mr Hilton: No, other than speaking with Neville Mulgat, the manager. He has had a long association with the civic centre. He has probably been involved the longest. He is an ex-staff member.

The CHAIRMAN: We will follow that up. You obviously provide other support, such as to the library. Is the council's support of other civic events of a cultural nature, such as the Australia Day festivities, included in that \$300 000 fund or does it come from another part of the budget?

Mr Hilton: Some are and some are not. Every second year we run the Festival of the Wind. The Festival of the Wind committee will apply to council for an allocation of funds out of that community development fund. The council generally funds \$20 000 towards that particular project. There is no funding allocation for some other functions, such as the annual Christmas pageant. The council simply provides in-kind support by way of staff and manpower to assist with the facilitation of the event. It depends on what the event is and how it is going. There is an avenue for committees running planned events to apply to council for funding and support. We are suffering the same problems as most other communities in the State with volunteer burnout and trying to get people to run these particular programs. That raised its head early this year when the existing Festival of the Wind committee threw up its hands and said that it could not run the event because it was too much for it and it did not believe it could pull off the project because of the lack of planning support available to the committee. As a result of that, public meetings were held, chaired by Ross Ainsworth, the local member. Eventually another committee was formed and it is working towards putting the festival on again. We had the same problem with the annual Christmas pageant. It was put on by a community group which has said it will not do it again. Insurance is part of the issue, of course. The shire is taking a facilitating role in trying to get that up and running.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the shire see that as very important?

Mr Hilton: The shire does not see it as important. The staff see it as important. There is a differentiation. These are the difficult issues we are up against. The councillors have a view but the community services staff have a different point of view. Although the council will condone the

actions of the staff, it may not provide the resources. That is the difficulty we have to deal with. We are in a community in which on the day of an event, such as the Australia Day event, people will come out of the woodwork to help. Volunteering is not dead, but it is getting harder to get people on board to plan, organise and accept responsibility for these events.

The CHAIRMAN: Are the experiences of the Christmas pageant and the Festival of the Wind examples of that?

Mr Hilton: Certainly.

The CHAIRMAN: We have covered the council's contribution. One of the things which we have been told and of which we were aware is that local government throughout Australia has historically delivered lots of arts outcomes, to varying degrees. The ABS statistics show that the contribution of Western Australian local government authorities is above the national average. From an overall perspective, there is a series of events in Esperance. There are various degrees of arts infrastructure; that is, buildings, community groups and organisations. You mentioned the volunteering aspect and the burnout and the threats posed by insurance. A group earlier this morning mentioned that a lot of its volunteers are getting older and that it has not been able to engage other people. Apart from those issues, is there anything else from a shire council's perspective that is an impediment to or causes concern about the ability to continue to deliver good arts outcomes in this region?

Mr Hilton: There is no impediment that I can see, but I am not actively involved in the arts. My portfolio covers a number of community services. There are six key departments, and the arts is not one of them. Our reliance is on Esperance Community Arts to come to the council. It is the initiating group; the council does not initiate a lot of these projects. The bottom line will always be money. Despite the fact that we would love to have arts as part of our public facilities development program for new estates and things like that, when you are building a subdivision or development, the pricing is all considered and if there will be a shortfall, it will be suffered by the arts and things like that.

The CHAIRMAN: That seems to be the trend.

Mr Hilton: I do not see any impediments other than the lack of funding. We have not been involved with the Community Arts Network WA cultural planning program. Once again, trying to convince your elected members of the relevance of a program like that is often very difficult. As a staff member, I find cultural planning very difficult to explain. What is it and what are the real outcomes? It is hard to see the tangible benefits of some of those programs. I think part of that is resulting in a reluctance by the council to get involved in some of those areas. That is because, once again, there is an up-front funding commitment. For the Esperance shire to get involved in cultural planning, we would have to find \$10 000 of the \$20 000 cost, and, quite frankly, at the end of the day, what would we expect to get from that that we cannot get from Esperance Community Arts? Some of the planning that some people see as very essential in developing the unique nature of each community is possibly not in place because it does not really address the issue.

The CHAIRMAN: It is not seen as a priority.

Mr Hilton: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. We have no further questions. Thank you very much for your contribution this morning. We appreciate it.

Mr Hilton: Where does this go to? What are the outcomes?

The CHAIRMAN: We are visiting all the regions because of the regional arts nature of our terms of reference. We will present a report to Parliament. Part of the requirement is for the Minister for Culture and the Arts to respond to our report, particularly to any recommendation that we highlight. Our previous inquiry was into emergency services. An outcome of that was the issuing of some

draft legislation and drafting instructions, which will hopefully be presented to Parliament next year.

Mr L. GRAHAM: By the end of this year.

The CHAIRMAN: The role of a standing committee is to make recommendations to Parliament, and the Government of the day is expected to respond. Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 11.34 am to 12.46 pm