

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO THE ARTS IN REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SESSION 1

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT ALBANY
FRIDAY, 30 APRIL 2004**

Members

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

Committee met at 9.03 am

DACK, MR TREVOR

President, Light Opera and Theatre Company, examined:

HOLDEN, MR CHRISTOPHER

President, Spectrum Theatre, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: I welcome our first witnesses this morning. I need to read to you some preliminary statements. This committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings of 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?

Mr Holden: Yes.

Mr Dack: Yes.

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

Mr Holden: Yes, I do.

Mr Dack: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read an information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

Mr Holden: Yes I did.

Mr Dack: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you, gentlemen, again, for attending today. As you may be aware, we are conducting an inquiry into the arts in regional Western Australia. Part of the scope of the inquiry involves visiting regional Western Australia. We have been to almost all the regions as part of our proceedings. Our terms of reference, which I understand you have had an opportunity to read, cover the importance of arts in regional Western Australia, and the impact arts has on communities through the economic and social benefits that arts bring to our regional communities. We have also framed in our terms of reference elements that include the impact and importance of festivals. We are keen to hear from you this morning about your perspectives and the regional perspective in Albany. We would like to explore our terms of reference, and to give you an opportunity to highlight to the committee any issues relating to the terms of reference about which you feel we should be aware. Also, please raise any issues you feel are pertinent to arts and how they grow in regional areas. I will give you both an opportunity to give a brief overview of your organisation. After that, we will go into a series of questions.

Mr Dack: The Albany Light Opera and Theatre Company is a not-for-profit volunteer organisation that leases its own theatre. We do not use any other theatre. We have developed an old shed owned by the port authority. Our main aim is to produce up to two major musicals a year, and to support that with at least one or two other types of performing arts projects each year. We have a strong influence on the youth of the area. We tend to aim at least one show a year towards the youth of Albany. I refer to young children through to teenagers and young adults. We feel that they are quite often left out of this sort of arena. To that end, we believe we are very successful. Us oldies

must look to young people to be the next Pavarotti. We are musically based, and we aim to do 10 shows of each production. We sit in our theatre anywhere from 120 at tables to about 200 in seating. We are able to manipulate that as required. That is a very quick overview.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have a voluntary committee that oversees the day-to-day operation of the company?

Mr Dack: Absolutely. We have an executive committee with committee members who run the theatre. It is a monthly meeting type of arrangement, and the day-to-day running is usually left to the president.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have a membership base? Do people join the Albany Light Opera and Theatre Company as members?

Mr Dack: That is correct. We have a paid membership and people have voting rights according to the registered constitution. We are an incorporated company.

The CHAIRMAN: How many members do you have?

Mr Dack: I currently have 83 paid-up members on the books. We go from 80 to about 120 depending on the size of the show.

The CHAIRMAN: Do people join if there is a show they are particularly interested in? On the youth element, you mention you try to do one show a year that involves young people. Is that on stage or behind the stage supporting a production?

Mr Dack: It is primarily on stage. Many young people are not physically capable of doing the behind-stage work. We include young people in areas such as lighting and operating spots. We have a young fellow who does that quite regularly now.

The CHAIRMAN: How do you get them involved? Do you advertise or are they part of the membership family?

Mr Dack: Basically, it is through two ways: they are part of the membership family and we advertise. We send letters to the local schools inviting them to all our productions and to get involved.

Mr J.N. HYDE: One of the reasons for undertaking this inquiry, which has ended up the biggest inquiry into regional arts ever undertaken in Australia, is to see how government is helping or hindering arts in regional WA. I am particularly interested in feedback from you on your interactions or any funding that may come to you from Lotterywest, Healthway, Country Arts or the Department of Culture and the Arts.

Mr Dack: Thank you, John. That is a good question! Do we have enough time? Funding is always a difficult issue for a not-for-profit organisation such as ours. At the moment, we gain 70 to 80 per cent of our funding from ticket sales. I have gone back into it, and we have received about \$16 000 in grants since 1995. Most, or about two-thirds, of them is from Lotterywest and the remainder is from the City of Albany. We are unable to access, or have been unsuccessful in accessing, any other money. I say unsuccessful because accessing a lot of the grants requires a lot of work. Unless you have people who have the time and the wherewithal to research where the money is, and how to get hold of it, you just do not get a show in.

Mr J.N. HYDE: An interesting theme coming through is that Lotterywest seems to be one of the more accessible sources. I assume it is through the equipment grants that \$3 000 or \$3 500 can be accessed over three years. It seems that the lotterywest system is more accessible and easier for community groups to understand, to fill in the form, to get money, to do acquittals and to feel like their work is being valued.

Mr Dack: Yes, you are probably right. It is probably the case because people are aware of the lottery grant, rather than that source being easier to apply for than other means. We are often not

aware of the pools of money available to community groups. We did a little homework and found that one group in town has accessed so much money that it is almost ridiculous. I do not want to say who it is, but it was \$200 000 in one year because it had people who could access the money.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Was that an arts group?

Mr Dack: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: The inquiry has been exploring the structures that exist and should exist in regional communities to assist groups like theatre companies. Have you had any approaches from Country Arts and Healthway in the past?

Mr Dack: I am not aware of any approaches. I am also not aware of any organisation in town that would help us to approach them.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for that overview. We will come back to more questions as we explore these matters further. Chris.

Mr Holden: I represent Spectrum Theatre, which has been active in Albany for 24 or 25 years. I have become really involved fairly recently; in the past three years. Its present premises, property leased from the council, is in the basement of what was the original post office, and now the University of Western Australia building, in Albany. UWA is the only other tenant of the building. The company has been there for about 21 years. On average, we put on three to four plays a year. That is the intention, but sometimes it is only two productions a year. Our seating capacity is 69. We try to put on 10 shows of each production. We feel it is good to do so because it means that people involved who put in a lot of work have 10 goes at the production. A small theatre is quite good for this type of thing.

Over the years, we have been reasonably independent financially. We have received grants from time to time. The council has helped us, but we have managed to accumulate a bit of money. Our lease runs out next year. We hope it will be renewed. In preparation, we will make some changes to the theatre itself, such as maybe putting in a revolve. If we do not get the lease renewed - we have a horrible feeling that the university has its eye on the theatre - we have money to use to go somewhere else. The council has indicated so far that we should be able to stay where we are.

We also make our theatre available to other users. The university used it recently, which we felt was a good move: if it knew it could use the theatre with our permission, it would not necessarily want to take it from us. We have used the theatre with schools. A school recently asked whether it could put on one of its productions at our theatre. We agreed because we felt it would bring in a lot of students and make them aware of Spectrum Theatre. As a means of promoting the theatre, we have given tickets to various schools for drama students to see our shows. It works well for us and works well for them. We have a youth group called STAG, the Spectrum Theatre Activities Group, that we hope to work with on an annual basis. We failed to get it going last year, but it is about to start this year. That brings in young people who are interested in theatre, and it teaches them all about theatre. We encourage young people to take part in lighting and sound. Following the successful staging of the production by the grammar school, some students from there came and have helped us since, which has been good for us. The Spectrum Theatre is run by a voluntary committee, which is elected every year; and, as is general with these sorts of things, it is successful sometimes, and sometimes it is a little bit of a problem, but it has been going for a long time and we have worked fairly well. Currently we have a membership list of about 60, which goes up and down. When memberships become due, numbers are very low until members pay their subs, and then they go back up. We are an incorporated organisation with a registered constitution. We normally charge about \$13.50 for a ticket and \$11 for concessions.

[9.20 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Are your tickets, Trevor, approximately the same price?

Mr Dack: They are \$15 and \$12.

The CHAIRMAN: They are very affordable for people on lower incomes.

Mr Holden: Yes, and we manage to make reasonable profits out of that. We are a non-profit making organisation, but obviously we need money to buy new lights and new fabric for the building. The profit is after we have paid royalties, which are very expensive these days and cause us a lot of problems at times. Recently we applied for the rights to a play from Hal Leonard and Associates. They granted us the rights and demanded immediate payment even though we had not had the auditions. They said they had to have the money, so we found the money. We held auditions but were not able to cast the play. We had to say that we were not going to do it. Hal Leonard and Associates have refused to return the \$1 400 they took off us.

Mr J.N. HYDE: That is something we might like to chase up. Is that through their Australian office or overseas?

Mr Holden: The office in Sydney.

Mr J.N. HYDE: We would really appreciate some details on that. Certainly for consumer affairs in this State, it is a very important issue.

The CHAIRMAN: How valued are both your theatre companies in the general community in Albany?

Mr Holden: Very much. We have a strong following, particularly among the older people in the town. Albany has a population that tends to be in the older age groups. They love to come to the theatre. We always include one or two matinees for the even older people who prefer not to drive at night so they come out during the day. We are trying to get more young people to come to the theatre, but that is a problem. Foreseeing the future, I do not know how it will go, but as people get older they seem to be more interested in coming down to live theatre. You can get them interested. I find it a fascinating experience when people of 40 or 50 come down to the theatre and they have never been to a live show. They are just amazed. It is just wonderful. You get this wonderful feeling. They think, "Oh, my God. I never knew. We were sitting there and they were right in front of us."

The CHAIRMAN: Are you well supported by the local Press? Does it report on your shows?

Mr Holden: It is an interesting thing. It depends who your publicity officer is and what techniques they employ. My background has been with the ABC for 16 years. I was public relations officer with the prisons, which might seem an odd thing to be. That has been my area. I find that you have got to approach the newspapers and keep going to them. I find out who the journalist is who deals with our particular area - that is, the arts and theatre - and I approach them directly. I get to know them by first name. I submit to them what they like, give them photographs if they ask for them, hit the community service announcements, go to all the radio stations and offer myself generally as an interviewee. Of course, with the background and experience that I have it makes it easy for me to get on air. That works well. If you only rely on a publicity officer, they seem to think that marketing means printing a poster and sticking it up in the street. You might ring up the newspaper and invite people to come down. I find that if you send a press release and try to find an interested facet of your show that will intrigue them, you get more results. I think the best one I remember was when we did *Camelot* in Theatre '8' in Geraldton. I was directing it. We gave the Press a release in which we stated that we had knitted seven miles of string to make the chain-mail.

The CHAIRMAN: What about you, Trevor?

Mr Dack: I think we struggle a little bit with our local newspapers. We do send them articles and photographs, but for some reason they are very reticent when it comes to publishing that information. We are going through that at the moment. As you can see from my rough-looking fact, we are preparing for a show to start next week. We are getting very little press even though we

are delivering a lot of information to it. Again, as Chris has mentioned, we try to get on the radio circuit. It depends on the radio station and whether we can get it involved. We pay for a lot of advertising. It is very expensive. At the moment our budget for this show is over \$3 000.

The CHAIRMAN: Are both your organisations involved in local community events? For example, if festivals are being organised locally, whether by your local council or other organisations, do any partnerships take place between your organisation and the organisers of those festivals?

Mr Holden: It did not happen this year, but last year we tried to get involved with the festival around Anzac week. We approached the council at that time. It was quite happy to have us doing our bit, but it really did not get involved in it. Basically, we fed the information to the council. That was fine.

The CHAIRMAN: In what other major festivals in Albany and the surrounding district have you been involved?

Mr Holden: There was the Perth festival in Albany, which involved Mr Vervest. I think you might be talking to him. We also used Spectrum one year for one event, which we are happy to do again. Anybody who comes in we want to come in because it shows them where the theatre is. We were asked to do street theatre for the classic car long weekend in June. Unfortunately, we were asked a bit too late this year and we are too involved in other things so we cannot oblige. Trevor, you have been involved in street parades for various festivals and pageants.

Mr Dack: Yes, we attend the Christmas pageant every year. We always put a float in to advertise the fact that we exist. It is a very difficult call. Quite often a group will ring us up and want people to perform for them the following week. With a volunteer organisation that is generally throughout the year either in rehearsal or putting a show on, it is difficult to get people to step outside of that. Having said that, a lot of our singers and guitar players attend the retirement villages. The senior citizens have a monthly meeting, and quite often our people are invited along to sing to them, which we generally support.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Chris, thank you very much for the tour yesterday for the committee to look at your venue. Accept our apologies. The Chairman and I had an urgent meeting with the local member last night. We were intending to pop into your rehearsal last night, but unfortunately we did not make it.

Mr Dack: It would have been an experience.

Mr J.N. HYDE: I am sure.

The CHAIRMAN: You were not looking for any spare yeoman? You are not doing *Yeoman of the Guard*, are you?

Mr Dack: No, *HMS Pinafore*.

Mr J.N. HYDE: I do declare, Chairman, I have trodden the boards with Mr Holden in Geraldton and also Perth. We are open and transparent in this committee.

The CHAIRMAN: I hope you did a successful show.

Mr J.N. HYDE: It was very successful. Chris, you have a lot of experience in WA, certainly in dealing with government and regional arts groups. One of several models has been proposed to us. When we visited New South Wales, we saw that they had decentralised a lot of regional arts, so there are now 13 regional arts officers. The regional arts officer is the repository of knowledge about when a grant is due and on what date; what sort of form Alcoa or the ANZ want for their community arts grants; and how to gee up sponsorship for local community groups. Usually the people who get involved in community arts groups are movers and shakers in town anyway, and they have about 17 other hats. Having the knowledge localised rather than it sitting in Sydney has proved to be more successful in New South Wales. I would be interested in getting a view from

both of you on that model. I have picked up already from our discussions that you do have a lot of liaison with the City of Albany. We found in New South Wales that regional arts officers are attached to a group of regional councils, so three or four regional councils would share one of the State's regional arts officers. We have seen the development commission in some areas in the north of the State as being quite arts focused or have seen that the arts are looked upon as equivalent to the development or the health of a local community. We could look at appointing an officer similar to a regional sports officer, with the community sporting and recreation facilities fund helping with funding that way through a development commission model. I am just throwing that to you. We have not yet predetermined any recommendations. Obviously, trying to decentralise and getting the knowledge about money and assistance that is available is one solution that is being floated.

[9.30 am]

Mr Holden: I would like to talk to that point if I may. I had experience with the Swan shire when I was with Garrick and I was a member of the Community Leisure Activities Committee, which involves sports and the arts. The council also sponsored an arts officer. It was useful but it did not help that much with the funding except if you wanted funding by the council because you had a direct line in. I think the idea of a regional officer who knows of all these places to which you can go to apply for grants would be very useful; that is, an individual arts officer with a council. In Albany, for instance, we have a recreation officer on the council whom I approached and to whom I said "I am from Spectrum Theatre" and he said "Theatre?" and I said "Yes", and he then said, "Well, that is not recreation; sport is recreation". I then had to explain to him that theatre is also recreation.

Mr J.N. HYDE: It is amazing the differences. In the Kimberley, the recreation officer was totally arts and sports focused and their needs were one. Up there you thought, "This is marvellous", but you go to others of the 144 shire, councils and towns in this State and there is not a similar reaction.

Mr Holden: Also, one area I would like to mention that I have experienced over the years is that it was always very difficult to get money for bricks and mortar. It was fine if they wanted to fund a production, fund a visiting director, fund anything like that - but it is difficult to get funds for bricks and mortar. Spectrum is pretty right at the moment with its fabric, and so all we want is things like that for which we have just applied - that is money towards our one act play writing competition which we got. Port Theatre, which is fairly new, has spent enormous sums of money - I do not want to trespass here - in building it up, doing it up, setting it up and that is where they desperately need money, but it is hard to get.

Mr Dack: I have not researched how much we have spent on the building. Basically we have been given a hull and everything has been built by the theatre with, as I mentioned before, some small grants from Lotteries. Not a lot of money has come in and it has all been funded locally and by people who buy their tickets at the door. So, funding is an issue and will continue to be an issue while we build the theatre.

The CHAIRMAN: How long have you been at the Port?

Mr Dack: I knew you would ask that. Why did I not get that information? I cannot answer that honestly because I do not know. I know the company has been around for 40-plus years. It started very small, doing productions out of the Town Hall and other venues that it could get hold of.

Mr Holden: I think it could have been there for as many as 10 years. When we did *Pearls* we did it at the Town Hall.

Mr J.N. HYDE: I will give you some thinking time on that. In Geraldton, we came across the same thing. Theatre Aid actually owned its own premises and again the funding models seemed to exclude direct grants that way. However, this committee had some success working with the local member up there, Shane Hill and Lotterywest came up to Geraldton to examine the situation and has just issued the theatre with a capital grant for the reasonably major building improvement. I

guess that we should suggest that you contact the local member here, Peter Watson, and work with him to get Lotterywest to fund you, because clearly the usual is that theatre companies are on a peppercorn rent or a small lease, but there are examples, such as yourselves, and Theatre Aid in Geraldton that need money for capital works.

Mr Holden: Could I back that up. Harking back to Geraldton, I was the president of the arts society there and John Tonkin, who was minister and premier at the time, was very sympathetic and we got sufficient money to actually buy an old church, which became the Geraldton Arts Council, for all the arts groups to use it if they wanted to. That was very useful.

The CHAIRMAN: Can I ask both of you about an issue that has been raised with the committee during our deliberations and that is the insurance issue. I would like to get some feedback on what changes if any there has been to your insurance costs and whether the current problems with insurance which community organisations have experienced have impeded your capacity to operate.

Mr Holden: I hate to say it but, with Spectrum Theatre, we have not noticed any difference in our insurance premiums in the past two years and it still remains the same in the public liability amount and the general value.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you give us a figure for how much it costs approximately per year? Could you provide that to us?

Mr Holden: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: It is just that we were in Denmark yesterday and it was raised as an issue for the arts organisation and some of the news and information we are getting from community groups is quite disturbing. Therefore, I would like you to provide us with an approximate cost.

Mr Holden: I think that would cover only what happens within the theatre. If we went outside into street theatre, for example, I doubt that we would be covered by the current policy.

Mr Dack: Our current insurance has not really risen over the past few years. In 2002 we paid about \$1 500 and in 2003, \$1 600.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Is that through a local broker?

Mr Dack: We go through a local broker, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: I would be interested to know how that compares with the 11 September date, for example.

Mr Dack: It has not gone up.

The CHAIRMAN: So you have been paying about \$1 500 a year for the past five or so years, have you?

Mr Dack: Yes. We have noticed that a number of groups have gone through a five-year hiatus, and suddenly the five years is up and whoever it is insured through offshore - the moment it goes through all the companies, it suddenly has a big rise.

Mr Holden: And it has not happened yet, touch wood.

The CHAIRMAN: In our terms of reference, we are interested in the economic issue of employment. I am not sure whether you employ anybody or whether at various stages you may for production purposes pay somebody for the services he or she provides. Can you comment on the issue of employment in the arts, either by past experience or just your thoughts about that particular issue?

Mr Dack: I will go first. We do not directly employ anybody, but we believe that, because we use the local box office through the town theatre as our ticket selling agent, and because we get involved with other organisations and, primarily because we spend money in the town, we are in fact helping with employment in the region. Apart from that, I cannot comment on anything else.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you ever had any artists in residence or a director, who has been part of a grant or as part of a project, paid to come down or be involved -

Mr Dack: Not in my memory through our theatre, no. As I said, the upgrading of our theatre is continuing. A lot of that is done by professionals. We need engineers to come in and ensure that we are doing it correctly, etc, etc. It all costs money and we are keeping them employed.

[9.40 am]

Mr Holden: We are much the same. We do not employ anybody through the theatre, but we recently had lights installed and we used the local electrician. We have had local plumbers come in. Goods and services - we supply our customers with tea and coffee and that sort of thing, which we buy locally. We are putting some input into the local economy. You ask about artists in residence. We have had a visiting director come down. It was not through -

Mr J.N. HYDE: STARS - short-term artist in residence scheme?

Mr Holden: No, I do not think so. I think it was a private arrangement, which turned out very costly for us in terms of accommodation and in terms of an unsatisfactory organisation of the event. I have seen it from the other way when I was employed by what was then STARS to go down to Esperance and direct a show down there. That was fairly well organised and worked fairly well.

Mr J.N. HYDE: I am in the same boat as you. Under the previous Labor Government STARS was very effective. The minister has now brought it back. It seems to be a really good scheme through the Department of Culture and the Arts. They should be letting you know about it, because it pays for you to get someone for six weeks, including their accommodation and everything like that. Chris mentioned to us yesterday that there is currently a shortage of directors. It is possibly a way of government really assisting.

Mr Holden: I regret to say that I have never heard of STARS before.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Okay. Short-term artist in residence scheme. Country Arts and the department should be publicising its existence.

The CHAIRMAN: I will pose a question. I think you will agree that in an economically rationalist world it is easier to measure an input in dollar terms and an output in dollar terms. In the arts it is much harder to have a dollar value placed on what you do as a social contribution. Do you have any evidence - we are very keen to gather some as part of our report - that can demonstrate to the wider community how valuable it is to have in a social context, in this case, two theatre companies in Albany? For example, during some of our meetings in the north west we received evidence that young people at risk were actively involved in the arts. I am referring to the visual arts in Derby. The impact on those young people at risk was that, by being actively engaged in an arts-based program, there was less truancy and they were gaining skills through their arts activities that meant they were more literate and numerate. There was also a direct correlation to the number of break-ins, for example, in the town. Have you anything that can be added as an example, but not necessarily to that, that you can hold up as an example and say, because you are here, these sorts of things have occurred and you can claim credit for them?

Mr J.N. HYDE: The other area that has been brought to us is Kalgoorlie and other places that are far from Perth. Because there is a theatre group here, higher paid employees are more prone to live in the town rather than leave their families in Perth, work here for four nights, and drive back to Perth. If there are theatre groups and culture, people coming down are more prone to bring their families. Do you have evidence of that?

Mr Holden: I think it is a bit of a tricky one at the moment because the town hall theatre seats only 300 people. We do not get a lot of professional shows coming here that go to Mandurah, Bunbury or Kalgoorlie. Consequently, we fill a void, even more than other towns. We give the opportunity for people to have a wider variety of social activity by going to our theatres. There are plans to

build a bigger theatre here, a 600 seater, which will be good. We will get the bigger shows down here and I do not think it will affect us; it will just be a complement to the two theatres we have already got. I think it is important that, with the demographics of the local population, live theatre be available. It is very worthwhile entertainment for local people and I think if we were not here, there would be an awful lot of people who just did not get out much, particularly some of the older people. We give them the inspiration to get up and go. I think that is one important area that we can say we have had success with.

Mr Dack: I think I would agree with that, Chris. A lot of feedback I get from our community comes in the form of, "When is your next show? We love your shows; keep putting them on." That is from the wider community; certainly from the elders rather than the younger community. Having said that, we are an older population down here. We struggle to maintain our youth in the town; most of them go to Perth for the universities and stay. The work is not here in Albany for the youth to stick around. Generally, our demographic is in the aged population. Having said that, our contribution to the community is quite large. It is probably immeasurable. How do you go about saying that what you do is good?

The CHAIRMAN: I will give an example in Mandurah, which is my city of residence and the city I represent. We have a major performing arts site that has been there since 1997.

Mr Holden: I have played that.

The CHAIRMAN: Before that, of course, it was not there. We had the little Mandurah theatre and the Murray music and drama company as the premier amateur theatre companies. Over a period of time, a number of people have passed through those organisations and used the skills developed in amateur theatre and applied them to their careers. Those careers can be quite diverse. We perhaps need to remind ourselves that the people coming through theatre companies such as yours are gaining invaluable skills that they carry into their adult careers. That does not mean that they will all become actors and actresses or performers. For example, in Mandurah we can highlight a number of young people who went through the local theatre companies and are now articulate young men and women who are making contributions in a whole range of career choices and making very positive contributions to their communities wherever they are. I suppose that is where I was coming from.

Mr Dack: That brought to mind - thank you for reminding me - that we have a young lady who is currently at WAAPA. She started as a very young lady in our theatre and she is quite successful. I believe one of our young gentlemen is heading that way. We also have a young lady who performed at the theatre who has been asked to do her honours in the theatre. She is currently one of the entertainment officers with the Eagles. Yes, you are quite right, there has been some success from our youth developing into careers.

Mr Holden: I would back that up, not with any specific examples, but throughout my years working with theatre a number of times I have seen very shy people come into the theatre and work backstage then, because so-and-so was not there, they are asked to go on as the maid and say, "Dinner is served." They go on in fear and trepidation and say, "Dinner is served." The next thing you know is that they have applied for the lead part in the next show! It builds confidence and makes them articulate. Self-confidence is wonderful; you see it happen time and again.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Perth indicated that he was that example.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Once shy!

The CHAIRMAN: The other thing in which I am interested is the whole issue of how we continue to create connections for people in their communities, particularly those mentioned earlier by Chris, such as more senior members of the community who may find themselves isolated for whatever reason, be it the loss of a partner or the deterioration of their health etc. The arts is a great vehicle of connection and being able to ensure that those people who perhaps find themselves isolated can

be reconnected to their communities. We have also asked various people in our hearings about how we can start to build up a body of evidence that links the health of a community - mental, physical or cultural - to the level of arts and cultural activity that is occurring in a community. We have not been able to get any definitive evidence of that. However, I understand there are some studies that have been conducted in the past. We all have the gut feeling that we know there is a link and that it is strong, but there is a need to present matters as a body of work. As we are almost out of time, are there any other issues that either of you would like to raise with the committee concerning our terms of reference or the contribution of arts to your local community in general?

[9.50 am]

Mr Dack: No. I think we have been given a good hearing. We appreciate your time. Probably the biggest issue that any amateur organisation will have is funding and getting the message out to the community as to what we are actually doing. Having said that, you have asked how do we get feedback. I really think that one of the biggest feedbacks we get is participation. If we have got audiences, we are making it; we are out there and touching people. Whether they are coming along because they are supporting somebody in the theatre or because they generally enjoy the arts is probably irrelevant. They are getting out of their homes and coming to the theatre and participating. That is a very good indication that it is working in the community.

Mr Holden: I would like to add one other thing to that. Theatre is a wonderful leveller. I can remember years ago at Plantagenet Players in Mt Barker that we had a show in which one of the actors was the local doctor, and the director was a postman. It was wonderful to see the director getting cross and saying, "No, I told you to come in from the right", and the doctor saying, "I am sorry."

The CHAIRMAN: I have one last question. It is about the history of both of your organisations. You have an over 40-year history.

Mr Dack: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: And you have an over 20-year history.

Mr Holden: It is 24 or 25.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you documented your histories in any way?

Mr Dack: We have an archive of published items, so we have books with all our published items in them. We also have quite an archive of past shows information.

Mr Holden: I do not know that we have an archival officer. We have mounds of books and things from over the years. We have all the posters up in the theatre, as you saw. There are people who are very much aware of the history of the theatre. I do not think it has actually been written in a book form.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you once again on behalf of the committee for your contribution this morning. It is very valuable, and it will help the committee to formulate its report and recommendations, and ultimately its findings. The process is that we are expected to report to the Parliament of Western Australia in August this year. The report will also go to the Minister for Culture and the Arts. One of the requirements is that the minister shall respond to our report as well. The transcript of our hearing this morning will be available to you through Hansard. You will be able to review that transcript. We wish both of you, and the companies that you represent, ongoing and long-lasting success. Thanks for your attendance this morning.