



The Committee for Perth's Revitalising Working Group is charged with catalysing activity and developing initiatives to progress the recommendations contained in our key report *A Cultural Compact for Western Australia – the 10 year challenge – Phase 1: Perth (Compact)* with the aim of incorporating arts and culture into our everyday lives to increase the vibrancy of Perth.

Revitalisation of Committee for Perth Working Group

At the end of 2013, Julian Donaldson, General Manager of the Perth International Arts Festival (PIAF) was appointed to the position of Chair of the working group, following the retirement of Margaret Seares AO who has held the position since the group was established in 2009.

Julian has been a member of the working group since establishment and was involved from the very beginning in the visioning and realisation of the Compact. Five years on from its publication, Julian reflects on the impact that the Compact has had on the community to date and the challenges that lie ahead for the working group.

"The Compact originally came to be through the work of a small group of people who shared a strong belief that an opportunity existed to gather together the arts sector stakeholders and to agree a vision to inspire new reflection and orientation for actions that would speak to the important place the arts have in our community.

This idea was to create a vision of an arts sector that contributes to making a better West Australian community.

"Thanks to funding from LotteryWest, the project began with a series of well managed and wide ranging consultation forums and out of those forums came the 5 key theme areas that were then developed into the Compact and its resulting recommendations.

"What grew from identifying the need for the arts sector to create a vision for its future resulted in a quite remarkable document which, upon re reading, is as relevant today as to when it was conceived.

"I think it's timely that we go back and remind ourselves of the very good thinking that went into it from all contributors and find ways of elevating those ideas into public debate.

"The vision of the Compact was, over 10 years, to realise a vibrant state where arts and cultural appreciation and activity is part of everyday life for all: Perth would be a dynamic capital city that we are all proud of that is characterised by bold and courageous art and is recognised on the international stage. But it also had other goals that would see acknowledgement of the importance of Aboriginal culture and the arts and the engagement of young artists who choose to stay, return to, or visit because they are encouraged and supported within an incubator environment.

"With these goals in mind it is encouraging to see that just five years on the arts and cultural sector in Perth has definitely changed and we are on the way to realising the Compact's vision.

"Participation in arts and cultural activities are at an all-time high across the state with more access to more varied arts experiences available. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this, such as the opening of Perth Arena, the State Theatre, the introduction of Fringe World, the growth of PIAF and success of the major companies. Even the growth in the small bar sector has helped. There seems to be a sense of confidence with people getting out and about more than ever before.

"This is then combined with a growing population which includes many people who have moved here from overseas who are accustomed to participating in the arts.

"As a result, the 2014 season of both the PIAF and Fringe World have been hugely successful and the biggest ever. Far from competing with each other, we have seen the ideal scenario – migration of audiences from one to another and both festivals have sold more tickets than ever before.

"Some of the other Compact goals such as the acknowledgement of Indigenous culture and the creation of an incubator environment for young artists are harder to measure but I believe that overall levels of community respect for acknowledging traditional custodians of the land is increasing.

"Similarly, there have been inroads made to engaging and retaining our young artists with two trials of a temporary youth arts hub but there is still a lot of ambition in this area and work to be done.

"I think the key to realising the vision of the Compact is to continue to develop our audiences by growing their cultural appetite through offering a diverse and accessible year round program of events across all parts of the sector.

"When the Revitalising working group reconvenes, we will establish our focus for 2014 and onwards. While the emphasis will still be very much on driving the key areas of the Compact, it is also important to review where we are in terms of progress against the document's specific recommendations, not just its overall vision. In some areas we have seen wins, such as the welcome establishment of the Chamber of Arts and Culture, and in other areas we can reflect on what has nearly been achieved, and there will no doubt be some areas that need to be reconsidered as either new for inclusion or for exclusion moving forward.

"While it is always daunting following in the footsteps of someone as capable as Margaret Seares, I am excited about the opportunities that lie ahead for the Revitalising Working Group and the advocacy that we can champion."