



## Theatre Network NSW

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TNN would like to thank keynote speaker, Julian Louis, Director of NORPA as well as our 5 panellists (Scott Howie, Lindy Hume, Stephen Champion, Lily Shearer and Sarah Parsons) for a fabulous provocation on contemporary theatre practice in regional Australia.

But we'd also like to thank our other 40 regional theatre forum attendees for their commitment and striking input. It was an epic event with feisty and engaging conversation over the three hours and some hard work from everyone to generate key actions and ideas from that conversation. These were:

- *a new paradigm of assertiveness,*
- *implementation of support structures,*
- *generating critical appraisal,*
- *celebrating quality of diversity,*
- *as well as theatre's critical and provocative role in addressing issues that face humankind.*

*Beyond the Limits – regional theatre in the national landscape* is Theatre Network NSW's (TNN) regional theatre forum: A unique event allowing makers, producers and performing arts centres to focus on the demands and unique qualities of contemporary performing arts practice that exists in regional Australia. The panel represents the breadth of performance making and producing from across NSW and beyond. This forum asked us to consider our own practices and the role we play in developing not only regional theatre but how regional theatre can transform the national performing arts industry.

The summarised notes from this facilitated conversation will be available on our website in December 2016 and sent out to all presenters and attendees. Julian's keynote speech as well as other material will also be available on our website and sent out to attendees. Keep checking in at [www.tnn.org.au](http://www.tnn.org.au) or get it in your inbox by joining TNN at <http://tnn.org.au/get-associated/>. As decided at the forum these notes will also be forwarded to our colleagues at the Australian Theatre Forum and Arts Front 2030. Please feel free to share them with your colleagues and communities.

Thank you again to ARTLANDS DUBBO 2016 for the amazing opportunity to have this important discussion.

### **New Paradigm of Assertiveness**

Goal: Assertive Ambition - to reframe contemporary 'regional theatre' in a language that speaks to our sector's ambition and distinctiveness – change national mind set and make radical shift from folksy or beige language to sharp and more contemporary. Language from community cultural development (CCD) movement feels a bit tired.



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Non-hierarchical focus. Remove the 'regional' tag that implies a junior status and focussing the language on what we do: embracing collaboration, equality, community and diversity. There is some anxiety around using language that is too hierarchical (e.g. falling into the 'language of excellence' that is placed on the arts sector instead of reflecting the excellence of what we are and what we do). The barrier to regional 'excellence' is **not** regional companies vs. the world but rather the current metro mind-set as determined by programming language coming from metro environments which sets regional theatre up different to. Barrier is not necessarily the work that is created but the language around that work and the sector.

Be proactive in proclaiming ourselves as provocative 'cultural adventurers'. Our impact is lessened by current language and the 'snobbery' this language creates against contemporary theatre makers living and working in regional Australia. The impact and pride we have in our own communities is something that metro would love – need to be assertive about our work. This is the new paradigm.

### Support Structures

Goal: To implement support structures that are based on personal connections. Ensure we open up channels to facilitate support and opportunities/knowledge/assertiveness including through established networks such as TNN and other orgs but also through our own openness to one another. Pick up the phone, make an appointment, talk to one another = Connected/partnered/strengthening of support structures.

Residencies – embedding producers in local communities. How can we think about residencies and supporting locals making work? Identify places that support local work or local creative producers (from the smallest to the larger communities) and develop residencies. This allows us to build and provide experiences of perspective.

Other Resources – Building partnerships where there is no internal infrastructure should be a focus. This could be shared administration, shared resources or programs.  
e.g. OTYP and Regional Arts Development Organisations regional partnerships to develop creative producer skills in regional locations.  
e.g. Becky Russell has a truck full of production gear that tours regionally. Similar initiatives to enable better access to production and theatre making resources would be good.

General agreement that the best funding/resources for support structures is connected through three tiers of government.

### Critical Appraisal

Goal: To generate increased critical appraisal of theatre making from regional Australia. Major paper reviewers were hardest (if not impossible) to get to see works being produced



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and programmed in regional Australia regardless of scale/quality/popularity etc. Rather than try and overcome this there needs to be a focus to generate other sources of recognised critical appraisal.

Engage with more open-minded and accessible art reviewers as much as possible e.g. Real Time

Introduce training of local writers to critique performance and other critical writing. Eastern Riverina Arts is working with Real Time on a project to do this. The Guardian offers training for writers too.

### Diversity

Advocacy and recognition of the sector's diversity – acknowledge the specificity and significance in the difference of our stories

Strong advocacy for regional/rural companies and performing arts centres for making of and funding of work through program funding not project funding.

Engage with funding bodies to ensure that funding models and policies around regional performance making would be reflective of the sector's specificity and difference rather than to put all 'regional' makers in one basket.

### 'Outside the Box'

Goal: Develop storytelling and connecting that allows for provocation and 'outside the box' opportunities and addressing issues whether they are local/national/global. The example here was of the use of corporate language and values that play down the fundamental role theatre/arts can play as 'the 13<sup>th</sup> fairy'. The voice that argues for the environment and humanity. Suggestion for those working or with interest in this area to get in touch with Eco Arts Australis <http://www.ecoartsaustralis.org.au> *n.b. This topic may sit within Diversity as well as new paradigm of Assertiveness but was added as a breakout session during the forum.*