



Speech by

Hon. M. FOLEY

MEMBER FOR YERONGA

Hansard 20 October 1998

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Arts Council School Touring Program

Hon. M. J. FOLEY (Yeronga—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for The Arts) (9.50 a.m.), by leave: Last week I had the pleasure of launching the Queensland Arts Council School Touring Program, which takes live performances of drama, music, history, dance—all key areas of the curriculum—into classrooms from Torres Strait to Goondiwindi. Next year, this program will bring the arts to life for 650,000 Queensland school students in their own towns and communities. Those 650,000 students will see 50 separate performances on each school day—that is 5,400 performances—that will enhance their learning by bringing to life everything from the works of Shakespeare to the history of their own nation and its federation.

All of these 650,000 Queensland students will get equity of access—whether they live in Annerley, Atherton, Alpha, Aramac or Aurukun. Whether their school has 15 or 1,500 pupils, they are each charged just \$3 per head. No wonder this scheme is hailed as a world leader—the best in Australia. The Australia Council's National Magazine, Lowdown, in August wrote—

"The magnitude of such a program is unequalled anywhere in Australia."

It pointed out that the closest thing to it, Victoria's School Touring Program, operates for 103,000 students, less than a sixth of Queensland's 650,000 participants—

"Equity of access"—

is—

"the cornerstone of the program, asking students for just \$3 to attend a performance, regardless of geographic location. A student on Saibai Island, 3 kilometres from the coast of Papua New Guinea pays for and receives the same standard of performance that a student in a metropolitan school does."

The Queensland Arts Council underwrites a loss on each remote and rural tour because that, realistically, is the cost of guaranteeing equity of access for all children in a State as vast and decentralised as Queensland. It costs thousands of dollars now to tour even small troupes of performers to schools in remote regions. For example, the Queensland Arts Council pays \$10,000 to \$11,000 to get a two-person team to the Torres Strait.

Those who would demand cuts to arts funding are, in effect, seeking to wind back opportunities for children in rural and remote areas. It is equally disturbing to envisage the prospect of a goods and services tax with its inevitably adverse effect upon the arts industry and the cost of touring arts programs. At every level, the GST will impact on every artist taking part. Every actor, every performer, as service providers, will face a mountain of paperwork and a 10% hike in the cost of costumes, sets, materials, accommodation and meals on tour. Such costs pose a threat to the accessibility which should characterise the arts in our society.
