

27 April 2012

The Hon Andrew Stoner MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services
Level 30 Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Minister

Re: NSW Trade and Investment changes

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors of Arts Northern Rivers to raise our concerns regarding the decision to substantially reduce the activity of NSW Trade and Investment in the Northern Rivers region of NSW.

These changes, including the closure of the Tweed Heads office will have a significant impact on the work carried out by Arts Northern Rivers with the creative industries sector of our region.

Arts Northern Rivers is the peak body for the arts and cultural sector in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales, Australia. We are part of a statewide network of regional arts boards, dedicated to building positive futures for regional, rural and remote communities in New South Wales through the arts and cultural development. Since our establishment in 2003 we have included creative industries as one of our key priority areas.

We have played a lead role in the formation of the Northern Rivers Creative Industries Consortium, a group of 14 partner agencies representing the arts, regional development, industry and education, with the specific goal of collaborating to support creative industry development.

In 2008 we worked with the Consortium to develop the state's first regional Arts and Creative Industries Strategy, identifying broad goals and strategies, and priority actions for the period 2010-12.

Last year Arts Northern Rivers secured funding to implement the Northern Rivers Creative Industries Brokers Project (CIBP), a nine-month pilot project addressing several of these priority actions, most notably, the development of market linkage opportunities for local practitioners in the fields of fashion, Music and Digital /Screen.

NSW Trade and Investment was a key partner in the development and delivery of the Creative Industries Brokers Project which resulted in some significant outcomes including:

- **727** creative industries practitioners/businesses in the fashion, music and screen/digital sectors registered on the Arts Northern Rivers database;- **416** practitioners took part in sector specific professional development and networking events;

- **20 businesses** were selected for intensive one-on-one business development support including business analysis, consultation, mentoring, pitch training, opportunities to present to market, market linkage and brokerage activity;

- **60 market linkages** success stories have been noted to date, and expected to continue to rise as newly formed industry relationships strengthen;- **The Hive** - Northern Rivers Creative Industries website established.

The support from NSW Trade and Investment allowed us to leverage similar financial investment from other partners that allowed this highly successful project to proceed.

Arts Northern Rivers has a long association with the business development staff of NSW Trade and Investment in the North Coast - with numerous creative industries projects relying on the support and partnership approach developed with this department. Arts Northern Rivers is alarmed that a cut to this partnership activity and closure of the Tweed office will have an adverse effect on the creative industries businesses that we have supported through the Northern Rivers Creative Industries Strategy and associated projects.

The Arts Northern River Board of Directors is concerned that the shift in focus to provide business support through a predominately online channel means a large number of emerging and established creative industries will be disadvantaged. The recently announced 'Small Business Connect' initiative, which will replace the Business Advisory Service will be difficult for small businesses to access - operating as they do in a region that has very poor telecommunication facilities - the recently updated rollout of the NBN indicated the Northern Rivers region will see no activity in this area for at least three years.

The Arts Northern Rivers Board of Directors would like to encourage you to reinstate the more flexible business development programs in our region that are responsive to the needs of the creative industry sector in the Northern Rivers and have been proven to deliver significant results for these small businesses.

Yours Sincerely

Peter Wood

CEO / Regional Arts Development Officer Arts Northern Rivers

CC The Hon. Don Page
Minister for Local Government
Minister for the North Coast