

# Culture for Climate

A preliminary study into how Australian performing arts organisations are responding to the global environmental crisis

Performance + Ecology Research Lab (P+ERL),  
Creative Arts Research Institute (CARI)

Griffith University, Australia



*Image:  
When the World Turns  
Production by Polyglot Theatre, Oily Cart & Arts Centre Melbourne  
Photo by Theresa Harrison*

## Producers and Partners

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The Performance + Ecology Research Lab (P<sup>+</sup>ERL) is an initiative dedicated to furthering climate justice across all aspects of contemporary theatre making and building sustainable futures in and beyond the performing arts. Our work is embedded in ecocritical and transdisciplinary research, and investigates ideas of performance and performativity in a climate-changed world. Further, we are interested in addressing the challenges of cultural and corporate sustainability. We collaborate with a diverse range of stakeholders — creatives, scientists, educators, activists and community groups, as well as commercial, industry and government organisations — with the aim of supporting cultural policy and creative practice that responds to the global environmental crisis.

For more information see: <https://www.griffith.edu.au/creative-arts-research-institute/our-research>

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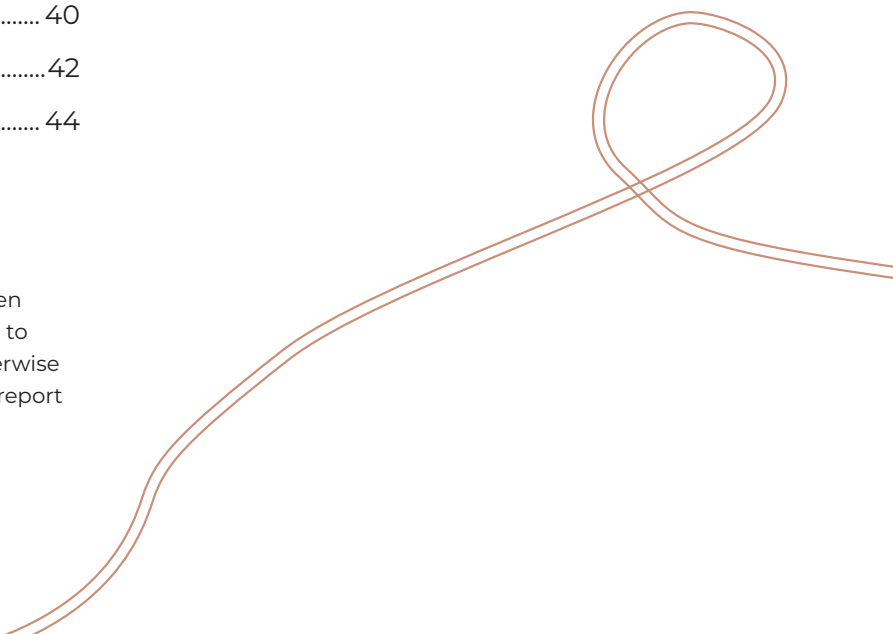
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**Please note:** The photos included in this report have been provided by the performing arts companies who agreed to be interviewed and share their work with us, unless otherwise credited. First Nations people should be aware that this report may contain photos of people who have passed away.



# Acknowledgements

We express our thanks to the Traditional Custodians of the many lands and seas that make up Australia, upon which we conduct our research. Most particularly, we are grateful to the Jagera and Turrbal peoples of Brisbane, where much of this project was completed. We recognise that all built environments and cultural activities in Australia occupy First Nations Country, with histories of over 60,000 years of custodianship. We acknowledge that Australia was founded on the violent dispossession of First Nations people, and sovereignty was never ceded. Australia always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

We believe that a core part of engaging with sustainability begins with recognising the brutal colonial actions and values that have depreciated our human connection to our environment. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodianship provides inspiration and guidance for how we can co-create new cultural practices in tune with our living lands, waters and skies. First Peoples have long shown how the ecological is cultural, and that the merging of art, land and story must be part of our collective healing.

This research would not have been possible without the support of the Creative Arts Research Institute at Griffith University, including a seed grant from the Faculty for Arts, Education and Law. The P+ERL team would also like to thank our respective Schools: Queensland College of Art, School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science and School of Education and Professional Studies for supporting our research interests.

Outside of Griffith, we would like to also acknowledge the important work of our industry peer-reviewers in offering their expertise and generous insights into this report. The work has been greatly improved by their input and generous counsel.

Finally, we are incredibly grateful to all the performing arts companies who agreed to be interviewed and share their work with us. Each of these companies are tackling the environmental crisis in their own unique ways, demonstrating what can be achieved when performance and ecology come together, and the multiple pathways to positively impact Australia's performing arts sector.





Image:  
Brisbane, Australia  
Photo by Craig Strahorn





# Clarification of Terms

In this report, we use the terms **'performance'**, **'performing arts'** and **'live performance'** interchangeably. In doing so, we refer to all aspects of performance, including (but not limited to) text-based theatre, dance, opera, music theatre, physical theatre, youth theatre and circus.

The term **'sustainability'** has been frequently redefined and contested. We use 'sustainability' to mean the continuing relationship between humans and ecological systems, where 'sustainability integrates natural systems with human patterns and celebrates continuity, uniqueness and placemaking' (Early 1993). We define working sustainably to be the same as working ecologically, from the overarching philosophy down to the selection of materials for a particular set or costume element.

Likewise, we often use the **'climate crisis'** as a catch all term for the environmental issues facing our world, and use it interchangeably with **'environmental crisis'** or **'ecological crisis'**. We recognise that the climate crisis is a particular problem, specifically, the build-up of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. However, the climate crisis is metaphorically and practically entwined with our broader environmental problems and is emblematic of them. Solving one requires solving them all, and hence, we see these issues as one and the same.

Another term requiring clarification in this report is how we've defined the size of the companies reviewed. While we have opted for **'small'**, **'medium'** and **'large'** as descriptors, this does not necessarily equate to the size of the company administration or core staff. Instead, we have aligned the size of the company with the level(s) of funding received. As such:

- Small – no/limited funding or project-specific funding
- Medium – city council or state-based funding, e.g., Arts Queensland
- Large – Australia Council for the Arts funding.

*Image to right:  
The Wider Earth  
Production by Dead Puppet Society  
Photo by Mark Douet*

*Image to left and far right:  
Bellingen, Australia  
Photo by Bobby Hendry*



# Defining the 3P's

In this project, we were interested in how performing arts organisations are exploring environmental issues, including the stories and messages that are communicated on their stages (**'programming'**), the eco-practices happening behind the scenes (**'practices'**), and their public commitment to sustainability and ethical processes (**'policies'**).

We define **environmental programming** as work that performing arts companies are doing on stage with an explicit ecological story or message, such as eco-plays, cli-fi drama or eco-critical works.

We define **environmental practices** as work that performing arts organisations are doing 'behind the scenes', including sustainable production practices and eco-conscious processes in all aspects of organisational operation, such as set construction, touring and management of venues.

We define **environmental policies** as the public-facing mission statements, action plans, strategies, or directives issued by performing arts organisations that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability. This might be a formal policy, an annual report or a sustainability statement clearly featured on the company's website or associated material.



# Foreword

In the twenty-first century, Australia increasingly engages a national narrative where the country itself plays out like a theatrical production. Dust, drought, megafires and megafloods are the lead protagonists. Australia's weather has always been volatile, but catastrophic events now happen on a regular basis. Yet Australia's lands are still largely unpolluted and underpopulated. Perhaps it is this paradox — which lulls us and feeds our lethargy — that ultimately stalls Australia's response to climate change.

Fortunately, the Australian performing arts sector is responding. Many performing arts organisations acknowledge climate science as the basis for the work they produce or the business models they develop. Each performing arts company discussed in this pilot report is responding to climate change in their own unique way. They are supporting sustainable performance ecologies and working for a greener future. As an industry, we have a responsibility to do so. We must be environmentally accountable through the ways we manage our organisations and through the stories we tell to the world. This responsibility, as our report reveals, need not be seen as just a moment of obligation. It is also one of opportunity, leadership,

and hope. Ultimately, we believe this report highlights that, far from being a limitation, to work in a sustainably ecological way is to embrace both the necessities and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

This report acknowledges *Revive*, the new national cultural policy from the Albanese Labor Government, launched in January 2023. A long-awaited and welcome plan for the Australian arts and cultural sector, *Revive* identifies five strategic pillars for policymaking,<sup>1</sup> foregrounding First Nations stories ('First Nations First') and cultural diversity ('A place for every story and a story for every place'). However, environmental sustainability is largely absent from the policy.<sup>2</sup> For a country that has been increasingly and devastatingly at the frontlines of the climate crisis, this absence is stark. *Revive* tackles a range of important issues yet fails to identify our greatest existential threat, nor the key role of the cultural sector in responding to this issue.

At the launch of *Revive*, Prime Minister Albanese said that we must lift the arts beyond the economic debate, and see it as a vital part of our Australia's identity and soul. He argued we should learn from First Nations

values of Caring for Country. He highlighted how the arts can help us ask uncomfortable questions, reflect on truths not easily told, and come together in a common purpose. If we are to truly revive our cultural and creative institutions in the decades to come, we must take on the full meaning of the term 'sustainability', going beyond its present, limited economic associations. Because the sustainability of our culture is quite literally dependent on the sustainability of our planet.

As the co-directors of the new Performance + Ecology Research Lab, we are passionate in the potential for the performing arts to take the lead in combatting the climate crisis. This preliminary report marks our first venture into exploring how the Australian performing arts sector is currently engaging with ecological issues across all aspects of programming, practice and policy. We are inspired by what we have found. While it remains largely unacknowledged, important and innovative approaches to sustainability are taking place across the sector nationally. Inspired by the UNESCO Goal 13 (to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), we have featured 13 performing arts companies that are leading the way in integrating ecological

<sup>1</sup> See National Cultural Policy: <https://www.arts.gov.au/publications/national-cultural-policy-revive-place-every-story-story-every-place>

<sup>2</sup> Julian Meyrick's Arts Hub article highlights how the National Cultural Policy fails to acknowledge the full meaning of that word sustainability. See: <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/opinions-analysis/revive-a-second-look-2611316/>



**Image:**  
**Mt Ngungun, Glass House Mountains, Australia**  
**Photo by Isaac Ibbott**

**Image to left:**  
**When the World Turns**  
**Production by Polyglot Theatre, Oily Cart & Arts Centre Melbourne**  
**Photo by Theresa Harrison**

stories, values and practices into their operations.

One might ask how the performing arts can possibly make a difference in a climate-changed world? It is true the environmental impacts of the performing arts do not match those from other industries. But that is to miss the vital point. Ecological issues are driven by cultural narratives. If we agree that the climate crisis calls for a shift as a society in the way we view the world and in our relationship to it, then the performing arts has a pivotal role to play in this transition. Put simply, how can the performing arts *not* be part of the conversation? How can we *not* grasp the opportunity to progress the most important conversation of this century?

**Dr Tanja Beer, Dr Linda Hassall  
and Dr Natalie Lazaroo**

Co-directors of The Performance  
+ Ecology Research Lab (P+ERL),  
Griffith University, Australia.



# Executive Summary

Despite the radical impact of climate change on Australian communities, there has been very little research in the Australian performing arts sector's response to the climate crisis and aspiration to do so. While cultural organisations are embracing greener strategies in other countries, we are yet to fully grasp what the definition of climate leadership means in the Australian cultural context. The environmental impacts of the Australian performing arts sector are yet to be adequately researched, documented, and disseminated. Furthermore, there have not been any systematic attempts to examine how organisations are pursuing ecological values and processes, or the policies supporting them to do so. Many companies do not have publicly accessible environmental policies or climate action plans. This makes it difficult to determine how sustainability is being addressed across programming, practice and policy structures.

This report explores how a small selection of Australian performing arts organisations are currently responding to the global ecological crisis. The study was conducted at Griffith University in 2022-2023 with the intention of highlighting leaders in the field. The research aims were:

1. To examine how the Australian performing arts sector is currently addressing environmental issues through programming, practices and policies;
2. To identify industry leaders at the intersection of live performance and environmental advocacy, and investigate examples of best practice;
3. To begin to draw from these examples strategies for artists and organisations to lead on the climate agenda, including identifying resources and support structures required to facilitate the transformation.

This report provides an overview of the research context and results, from interviews with 13 performing arts companies across Australia, and a desktop study of publicly available information and email exchanges with various companies. The snapshot detailed in this report aims to provide an impression of sustainable advocacy, implemented at small, medium and large performing arts company levels across Australia.

A summary of the key findings is as follows:

## Programming:

- Performing arts organisations are demonstrating a strong desire to tell ecological stories and embrace environmental themes, especially in a local context.
- Performing arts organisations are showing how ecological programming can be successfully integrated into seasons of performances across a range of genres and disciplines.
- The potential to positively impact communities (e.g. through site-specific creation, civic engagement, arts-science communication and educational initiatives) is a key driver in many companies to make ecologically-focused work.

## Practice:

- Performing arts organisations are grappling with a variety of ethically-focused, sustainability initiatives across a range of production processes, from embracing small scale, resourceful aesthetics, to using sustainability tools and consultancies to facilitate positive change.
- There are still many challenges to overcome in this area, including transitioning to greener



production practices and materials (some that may be at odds with conventional practices).

- There is a clear and strong desire to share resources and materials across companies but an absence of support structures enabling them to do so.

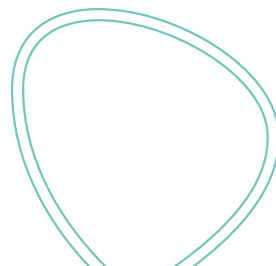
### Policy:

- Performing arts companies are requesting training, tools and resources to support them to create environmentally sustainable policies and processes across their organisations.
- Policy designs are used as a starting point to evidence an organisation's sustainability commitment with a focus on: the reduction of emissions; best practices in sustainable design and procurement; becoming an agent of change; and the sharing of knowledge.
- Companies engaged in this study believe that resources and investment in climate justice should be integrated into Australia's national cultural policy, and that this would foster sector-wide change.

Our study indicated that while an ecological focus is emerging across the Australian performing arts sector, there is a clear need to investigate policy frameworks and funding models to support the transition to sustainable practices. While the report demonstrates that the work currently being accomplished is emerging, especially in the small-to-medium sector, this information could be made more publicly visible. This is perhaps the most startling discovery of the study. While performing arts organisations all over the world are beginning to actively cite their sustainability credentials, Australian performing arts organisations appear more hesitant to showcase their eco-initiatives. This is a missed opportunity. Moreover, based

on our broader contextual review of public-facing ecological commitments, it appears that Australia's major cultural organisations are less active in pursuing formal sustainability practices and policies, and fomenting organisational change compared to other parts of the world, such as the UK or Canada. This is not surprising when one considers that most Australian companies have had little government funding or access to resources to pursue their eco-initiatives. Sustainability goals have fallen as an extra burden on organisations already stretched to the limit due to the impacts of COVID-19 in a historically underfunded industry.

It is our hope this pilot study is recognised as urgent and timely, and that its findings will act as a foundation for future research into the Australian performing arts sector's response to the existential threat of climate change. Further work is obviously needed to collectively understand the vital role the performing arts can play in advancing Australia's environmental, cultural and social prosperity. The ambition of the project is to foresee the impact the climate crisis will have on the cultural sector and to showcase not only how climate action can be enabled at individual and organisational levels, but also how it is perceived by those who are leading this transition already.



# Background

Over the last 10 years there has been a seismic shift in the way in which global performing arts institutions have engaged with environmental challenges. What was once a niche agenda is now a central topic of concern across the sector, as shown by the environmental focus of recent international conferences (International Federation of Theatre Research 2021; World Stage Design 2022; International Drama in Education Research Institute Conference 2022), publications (*Ecodramaturgies* 2020; *Ecoscenography* 2021; *Theatre Pedagogy in the Era of Climate Crisis* 2021) and sustainability initiatives (Mayor of London's Green Theatre Plan UK; Broadway Green Alliance US). An ecological focus to performing arts programming has also been evident in global initiatives such as the Climate Change Theatre Action (worldwide), Festival of Ecological Theatre for Children and Youth (Serbia), EMOS Ecodrama Festival (USA), The Green Theatre Festival (Mumbai) and ART + CLIMATE = CHANGE Festival (Australia).

This surge in the last decade has kept pace with, and been fuelled by, broader social movements that seek to change the course of human impact on our environment. The dire warnings of the Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change (IPCC), activism from Extinction Rebellion and prolific campaigning by youth climate activists such as Greta Thunberg, have brought environmental issues to the forefront of mainstream media awareness (Woynarski et al. 2020). This increased during COVID-19, with many performing arts organisations worldwide calling for a 'just and green cultural recovery... to create the sustainable foundations for the future' (Julie's Bicycle, 2020). In June 2020, hundreds of creative artists in the UK signed an open letter calling on sector for 'a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a resilient recovery plan that is fair and tackles the climate and ecological crisis with urgency' (ibid.). The transition was supported by a recent study into the UK cultural sector that found 77% of British audience members expect theatres to address the climate emergency, including 'making sustainable productions, running sustainable buildings, and operating sustainably' (Raines & Carr 2022).

The UK, Canada and many European countries have demonstrated meaningful commitment at a national level to addressing the climate emergency in the performing arts. Arts Council

England's Environmental Action Plan (formed in 2012) legislates to reduce carbon emissions and provides financial and sustainability support through Julie's Bicycle, a non-profit organisation working on sustainability in the creative industries. The Arts Council England, which funds approximately 700 organisations, expects the development and associated reporting on environmental action plans. Julie's Bicycle's Creative Industry Green Tools are used by over 3000 arts organisations. This includes the National Theatre, who have an ambitious environmental policy committed to reaching net zero carbon by 2030, including a 10% fee increase enabling freelancers to take on environmental challenges. The National Theatre is also a key contributor and supporter of the Theatre Green Book<sup>3</sup> which provides a guide for sustainable theatre in the UK and beyond.

In 2021, 46 major theatres across 25 European countries committed to reduce their carbon emissions by 2030 as part of the European Theatre Convention's plan to create a 'more conscious, mindful and just future'. Cities like Amsterdam have already helped 20 cultural organisations to achieve a BREEAM<sup>4</sup> certification,

<sup>3</sup> For more information about the Theatre Green Book see: <https://theatregreenbook.com/>

<sup>4</sup> BREEAM is arguably the world's leading science-based suite of validation and certification systems for a sustainable built environment. For more information see: <https://bregroup.com/products/breem/>

<sup>5</sup> For more information about EDEOS see: <https://ecoscenography.com/2020/11/24/opera-production-the-circular-economy-interview-with-thierry-leonardi-lyon-opera/>



while Lyon Opera in France has developed its EDEOS<sup>5</sup> eco-design tool that enables a circular framework for its design and construction processes. As a holistic sustainability calculator, the tool assesses the production of stage sets for their impact on climate, human health, ecosystems and non-renewable resources. What makes EDEOS unique is its focus on decision-making throughout the entire life-cycle of a set design, including the concept and post-production phase.

Canada has also been leading sustainability initiatives in the performing arts. In late 2022, Arts Council Quebec announced that eco-responsibility will be part of its next funding cycle, with funded organisations expected to sign up to the Creative Green Platform supported by the Quebec Council for Eco-responsible Events.

These are just a glimpse into the many policy changes occurring overseas, representing a backdrop against which the progress in Australia can be referenced.

**Image to right:**  
**When the World Turns**  
**Production by Polyglot Theatre, Oily**  
**Cart & Arts Centre Melbourne**  
**Photo by Theresa Harrison**



# The Australian Context

In 2010, in a rousing statement advocating for the Australian performance sector's commitment to sustainability, the then Artistic Director of Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre, Michael Kantor, critiqued the 'business as usual' model of theatre production. Kantor stated that we (performing arts companies and artists) know the planet is facing an environmental crisis of scale and impact unlike anything experienced in human civilisation and yet, 'we continue to develop and produce our theatre, in our energy intensive theatres, in our energy intensive ways, to our fickle and dwindling audiences, as if we didn't know of the imminent catastrophe' (Kantor, 2010, p.10).

Since 2010, it has become abundantly clear the Australian live performance sector is not exempt from the sustainability issues addressed in recent international paradigm shifts. Applying sustainable processes and production methods is one

way performing arts makers are joining this shift, with many organisations — as well as individual performance makers, designers and technicians — declaring their commitment to reducing theatre's carbon footprint in their own personal practices. There is evidence that the Australian performing arts sector is developing green(er) production philosophies and technologies, and recognising the need to promote more sustainable processes and practices. Sustainability is increasingly discussed as a topic of conversation across performing arts education, with the National Institute of Dramatic Art launching NIDA Green in 2022, with the goal to not only become a leading sustainability educator in the creative and cultural industries, but also a 'fully regenerative and climate positive organisation' by 2030. In promoting sustainable practices and processes, a snapshot of Australian performing arts highlights that artists are aware of the

global environmental problems associated with the climate crisis and are applying this knowledge to more ecologically-friendly productions. While there is a long way to go, Australian performance makers are rethinking their resource usage and the ways we make the performing arts sector put 'sustainability and its principles of resilience and strength, creative regeneration and respect for the earth at the centre of [their] artistic vision' (Tickell 2012).

In the post-millennium years, a number of initiatives that brought the sustainability agenda to the broader performing arts community were valuable. However, most of these were defunded or disappeared under the last Coalition governments. These initiatives included Tipping Point Australia, Greening Our Performances, Greener Live Performances and Greening the Arts, Greenie-in-Residence, Green Arts Project, EcoArts





Australis and CLIMARTE, who provided a space for sustainability discussions, workshops, guides and carbon calculator tools for performance production. Many of these advocacy groups and programs were part of a wave of environmental activism from 2008-2015. But an eventual lack of government support prevented the majority of these initiatives from continuing or growing.

More recently, The Arts on Tour Green Touring Toolkit and Resources (a step-by-step guide to help organisations move towards a carbon neutral touring model) and Circulate (an online emissions calculator by global design, engineering and theatre consultancy Arup) have signalled a renewed shift to a sustainability ethos in the performing arts. Live performance, acoustics and digital design consultants Charcoalblue launched their Environmental Impact Pledge in 2021. Sustainable Theatres

Australia, a collective of eco-minded performance-makers and administrators provide space for industry-wide sustainability dialogues and resources. The Sydney Opera House is also championing their commitment to the UN Sustainability Goals. While these initiatives are heartening, we are yet to see a national agenda that forefronts environmental sustainability goals. Resources to promote sustainability are limited and sporadic, forcing many arts organisations to pursue environmental initiatives with little or no additional funding or structural support. Thwarted momentum and limited achievements are the result, exacerbated by the lockdowns and restrictions caused by COVID-19.

Why is sustainability such an important goal for Australian performing arts? In enacting a green agenda, we can build an industry where 'contemporary ecological concerns bring opportunities for creative

innovation', and provide performance artists with a way to 'push intellectual and creative boundaries' at a time of escalating climate change (Beer and Hess 2017, p. 32). Ecological or sustainable management in performance production is a process of both self- and organisational assessment (Hassall, 2021, pp.105-121). Re-evaluating business-as-usual-models of production, as Michael Kantor proposed, requires a shift in sectoral values and a collaborative process of transition. We ask how the sector has moved forward since 2010, and what strategies are needed to propel the Australian performing arts to take the lead in showcasing a sustainable future for all.

*Images:*  
**When the World Turns**  
**Production by Polyglot Theatre, Oily Cart & Arts Centre Melbourne**  
**Photo by Theresa Harrison**





# Research Questions

By investigating the intersection of sustainability and live performance, this study explores the key question: **'How is the Australian performing arts sector currently responding to the climate crisis?'**

The study also examines the following questions which underpin this broader enquiry:

- How are Australian performing arts organisations currently implementing sustainability strategies in their programming, practices and policies, and how do these compare to global leaders in the field?
- What are potential strategies for the Australian performing arts sector to take the lead on the climate agenda, including access to appropriate resources, guidelines and support structures to assist this process?

*Image below:  
Sleepover Refuge 2017: Heatwave  
Production by Arts House  
Photo by Bryony Jackson*

*Image to left:  
Australian National Botanic Gardens  
ACT, Australia  
Photo by Raelle Gann-Owens*





# Research Approach

This study was informed by interviews with arts organisations conducted across 2022 and 2023 and has been complemented by publicly available information from company websites, annual reports and existing sustainability initiatives.

The study consisted of three phases: 1) surveying the national sector and identifying leaders who are addressing sustainability and environmental concerns in their programming, practices and policies; 2) conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with some of those leaders, and; 3) collating and synthesing the research data to communicate findings.

Thirteen companies who were identified as 'leaders in sustainability' then participated in semi-structured interviews, which ranged from 45 to 60 minutes in duration. The selection of the companies interviewed aimed to capture a wide representation of the sector, including but not limited to: levels of public funding; regional and metropolitan locations; First Nations focused organisations; and youth engaged companies. The interviews were compiled as individual company profiles featured in this report.

## Limitations and Scope

This project has limitations against which our findings must be considered.

We acknowledge that there are limitations to this research. Through the scoping review and through personal connections, our research team has detailed knowledge of the work of some industry participants, and this has played a part in their inclusion in the report. The results show more small and medium organisations engaging with the 3P's. Due to the constraints of time and the restricted parameters of our pilot project, we were not able to include all companies identified in the scoping review, including many major organisations. We recognise there may be companies in Australia with a commitment to sustainable values and practices that we have not identified in this study. We further recognise that there may be recent developments in the sector that fall outside the timeframe of our research. There is a clear need for a broader national investigation that encompasses the whole sector. We apologise for any significant omissions, but trust our report will act as a catalyst for further investigations into the sustainability initiatives of the organisations we may have missed.

Lastly, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profoundly damaging impact on the ability of performing arts companies to operate over the past three years. We understand this may have negatively influenced their ability to prioritise sustainability values and practices. Our ambition is to support the revival of the performing arts sector, including the green initiatives that were gaining momentum prior to the pandemic.



# Company Profiles

The following section features the environmental and/or sustainable approaches of the 13 performing arts organisations that were interviewed for this report. Each profile briefly introduces the company and their work across the 3P's of **Programming, Practice and Policy**.

The report acknowledges First Nations Country names, to forefront the interviewed organisations in Indigenous place. We have tried to attribute Country accurately, but also acknowledge the complexities involved in identifying ownership of Traditional Lands and welcome any cultural advice on the matter.



*Image:*  
*Not a Drop to Drink by Keg de Souza*  
*Refuge 2021*  
*Production by Arts House*  
*Photo by Bryony Jackson*



# Arts House

Wurundjeri Country | North Melbourne, VIC

Website: <https://www.artshouse.com.au>

Interviewee: Sarah Rowbottam (Creative Producer)

**Arts House is an initiative of the City of Melbourne that presents a year-long curated program of contemporary arts events, including performances, exhibitions, live art, installations, cultural and community events across dance, theatre, music, sound, new technologies and other interactive artforms.**

**Programming:** Arts House has a long tradition of ecological programming and advocacy work, with projects such as: 6 Degrees – Artist Residency (2010); Going Nowhere – Artist Residency (2012); Time Place Space – Nomad (2015-2019); Greening the Arts with Matt Wicking (2014) and; *Refuge* (2016-2022). *Refuge* was a successful example of a longitudinal community-led and interdisciplinary project, which saw artists collaborating with local residents, creatives, scientists, Elders, climate activists, and experts from emergency services and community organisations. The six-year project explored different climate-related disasters – floods, escalating temperatures, bushfires, extended pandemic and displacement of people and non-human species. The project explored new ways to unite communities around crisis preparedness. In 2016, Arts House transformed the North Melbourne Town Hall into a flood relief centre for 24 hours. In 2018 (well before Covid-19), the work focused on a rare pandemic event caused by a dangerous contagion. The multi-year project has led to broader opportunities for future projects at Council level,

including working more closely with the City of Melbourne to forefront access and inclusion as part of their climate emergency agenda.

**Practice:** Arts House is committed to sustainable practice and intersectional climate justice, which sits within City of Melbourne's broader sustainability mandate. Over the last 10 years, the venue has offered several sustainability training and knowledge sharing programs with an intersectional approach to including First Nations perspectives, diversity, and inclusion. For example, free intercultural and Indigenous bamboo-construction workshops led by Artist Jen Rae were offered to *Refuge* audiences as a way of building hands-on sustainability knowledge. Other initiatives include venue management and administration initiatives, such as the adoption of digital programs and paperless tickets and the installation of a new energy-conserving air conditioner. When considering sustainable production practices, Arts House uses velcro ties on power leads, recycles timber and other set elements, as well as offsetting international flights when touring. The company also fosters considerations about slow food and have a beehive at their home venue of the North Melbourne Town Hall.

**Policy:** Arts House are currently working on long arc models for climate justice by building on the work of *Refuge* and other initiatives. In their Sustainability Action Plan, authored in 2019, they state:

Arts House is committed to environmental sustainability in our strategic vision. We aim to embed sustainability in all aspects of our activities and aspire to continually improve the sustainability performance of Arts House, our partners and other stakeholders.

The plan also includes a commitment to promoting sustainable practices to stakeholders and audiences through social media, as well as a focus on sustainability training. This is reviewed and updated by a working group.

**Image:**  
*Portage: Flotilla by Jen Rae in collaboration with Giant Grass*  
*Refuge 2019: Displacement*  
*Production by Arts House*  
*Photo by Bryony Jackson*



*“Conversations about climate change or sustainability should always centre First Nations voices and prioritise intersectional perspectives. This has been one of the key principles that has come out of Refuge and collaboration with community, and I feel these experiences and learnings are central to our future”.*

*- Sarah Rowbottam, Creative Producer*



# Bell Shakespeare

Gadigal Country | Dawes Point, Sydney, NSW

Website: <https://www.bellshakespeare.com.au>

Interviewee: Gill Perkins (Executive Director)

**Bell Shakespeare is Australia's national theatre company specialising in producing and touring the works of Shakespeare and other classics. They have been in operation for over 30 years and the company is based at Sydney's Walsh Bay Arts Precinct. The company delivers mainstage productions, education and outreach programs across Australia.**

**Programming:** Although the content of Bell Shakespeare's annual season and specific remit makes it difficult to program contemporary environmental works, the company ties its artistic work to its sustainability goals through the following statement on their website:

Shakespeare's writing challenges us to reach beyond our grasp and gives us the wherewithal to imagine our future. If we can learn anything from Shakespeare and the great writers of the past, it is that we hold within ourselves the power to make choices about who we want to be. Bell Shakespeare believes that our greatest resource is our capacity to imagine and to transform: to picture a different world, to know

that it can be one of our own making – and that we can be both its creator and a character within it.

**Practice:** Bell Shakespeare has a clear commitment to incorporating sustainable practices across organisational and production operations, with the ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030. This includes regular assessment protocols, including: assessing and reducing their carbon footprint by minimising energy consumption; going green in the office; and responsibly dealing with waste. The company has engaged in auditing processes to assess and reduce their overall annual footprint, including the life cycle of their production processes and the impact of national touring. Bell Shakespeare is committed to sustainable office practices, reusing existing sets, costumes, and props to create environmentally responsible theatre productions and encourage Company-wide behavioural change. The recent opening of their new venue in Sydney has meant that the company has more opportunity and agency to address sustainability in day-to-day operations. To assist with their assessment protocols, Bell

Shakespeare has worked with the Arts on Tour Green Touring toolkit and Circulate (an online emissions calculator by Arup) and are currently investigating best practices for carbon offsetting. Other considerations include the creation of their own sustainable touring venue and exploring digital productions as one alternative to touring.

**Policy:** Bell Shakespeare has published a commitment to environmental sustainability on their website, which states:

At Bell Shakespeare, we choose sustainable work practices across all aspects of the Company's operations. As a national company constantly on the move, we are committed to assessing and reducing our carbon footprint with a firm vision for the future. At our headquarters, we ensure the best possible practices are implemented in our offices and rehearsal/production premises. This includes energy reduction, responsible waste management, and the use of green products within the office.

*“Visibility and understanding what other companies are doing and shining a light on that nationally would be really good... To bring environmental considerations to the surface as a key issue”.*

*- Gill Perkins, Executive Director*

**Image to right:  
Hamlet, 2020  
Directed by Peter Evans  
Production by Bell Shakespeare  
Photo by Brett Boardman**



*"We were supposed to tour to Lismore this year, but the theatre was under water. That kind of evidence is right in front of us now and you can't really get a better demonstration of the impact".*

*- Gill Perkins, Executive Director*





# Dancenorth Australia

Gurambilbarra Country | Townsville, QLD

Website: <https://www.dancenorth.com.au>

Interviewee: Eloise Grace (Company Producer)

**Based in regional North Queensland, Dancenorth is one of Australia's leading contemporary dance companies, having presented work in over 45 International Arts Festivals and venues around Australia and the world.**

**Programming:** Dancenorth Australia balances a dynamic regional presence with a commitment to creating compelling contemporary dance that tours the globe. Led by Artistic Director Kyle Page, Executive Director Hillary Coyne, and Associate Artistic Director Amber Haines, Dancenorth is an integral part of the Australian dance ecology making a significant contribution to the dance sector and building literacy around contemporary dance nationally. Current works in repertoire include *RED*, a work examining the suffocation of biodiversity and social ecosystems, and *awake*, a meditative experiential work where participants watch the sunrise over the Coral Sea while listening to a commissioned complemented soundscape. Dancenorth's most recent work, *WAYFINDER*, was created in collaboration with Japanese-Australian visual artist Hiromi Tango and utilised reclaimed wool in a community crafting event as the central feature of the performance.

Much of Dancenorth's work is about exploring 'location and the body' as a holistic approach to artistic creation, which connects with their commitment to sustainable practice, as articulated on their website:

Deeply connected to place, to the vastness of the sky, the richness of the land and the saline breath of the ocean, we embrace our regional home base in Townsville as a source of inspiration and creative energy. We respond to isolation as enabling, enriching and facilitating a way of making that is responsive to these people in this place at this time.

**Practice:** Deeply connected to place, Dancenorth focuses on sustainable practices across all aspects of their company operations, including production design and touring. The organisation is currently partnering with Pangolin Associates Pty Ltd in a Carbon Neutral Pilot Program, supported by the Australia Council for the Arts, to assess and reduce their carbon emissions. Dancenorth has also developed a green ticket initiative, and encourages their staff and audiences to rideshare and choose alternative transport options when visiting

their performance venues. They have initiated a company sustainability focus, resulting in the composting of organic food waste, worm farming and growing a veggie garden at their home venue.

**Policy:** Dancenorth describes themselves as a 'conscious company' that engages with sustainable practices in their strategic goals. As highlighted on their website, the company is committed to sustainably and ethically managing their 'resources for the benefit of future generations of artists and community'. They also have an Ethical donations and partnerships policy, which ensures that Dancenorth does not seek or approve any donations from companies that do not align with their core values.



*“In the Arts there is a tension between the desire (and remit) to be at the forefront of innovation and artistic rigour and enquiry, and the ever-present stresses of time, resources, capacity, budget, to realise and deliver our works and an environmentally sustainable impact”.*

*- Eloise Grace, Company Producer*

*Image:  
Wayfinder (Brisbane Festival)  
Production by Dancenorth Australia  
Pictured: Nelson Earl  
Photo by David Kelly*

# Dead Puppet Society

Jagera and Turrbal Country | Woolloongabba,  
Brisbane, QLD

Website: <https://deadpuppetsociety.com.au>

Interviewee: Helen Stephens (Head of Youth and Engagement)

**Dead Puppet Society (DPS) is an internationally-acclaimed visual theatre company and production house based in Brisbane, and funded by Arts Queensland, with a strong history of producing ecological work.**

**Programming:** Dead Puppet Society (DPS) is a leader in environmental programming in Australia, with a focus on reinforcing the diversity, beauty and wonder of the natural world while also commenting on humanity's fraught relationship with it. Some examples include: *Last Tree in the City*, which examined the lack of nature and green space in cities for children; *The Wider Earth*, which celebrated Darwin's love of the natural world, and; *Megafauna*, a work exploring changing landscapes in response to human intervention. Other recent projects include *Ishmael* (Brisbane Festival, 2021), a radical adaptation of *Moby Dick* set in a post-apocalyptic world destroyed by climate change, and; *Shoal* (2021), an interactive, robotic installation that featured a large school of fish living on a reef affected by coral bleaching.

**Practice:** Programming and sustainable practice are closely entwined in the work of DPS, and the company collaborates with external designers who are equally eco-minded. The nature of their artform allows for creative staging techniques that help mitigate excessive use of materials and waste. Further, most DPS puppets and props are made from reclaimed

materials, and the company limits the use of spray paint and plastic in their productions and administration. Reuse is also central to the company's practice; for instance, puppets created for a production of *Storm Boy* (2019) were turned into roving pelicans for the Cairns Festival. This not only generates more longevity for the labour-intensive designs, but also helps produce another income stream for the company. In 2021, DPS created their first installation powered by solar energy. *The Bee Lantern* aimed to highlight and educate the public about the plight of bees while also showcasing sustainable practices. Even though touring sustainably is still a challenge for the company, DPS offsets one percent of the total budget for each of their productions and installations as well as seeks out the most eco-conscious option whenever possible.

**Policy:** Sustainability is at the heart of DPS' internal strategic plan, with key performance indicators including a goal for 'ecological sustainability across all organisational and creative processes' and prioritising ecological narratives. Their mission statement is currently not publicly accessible.

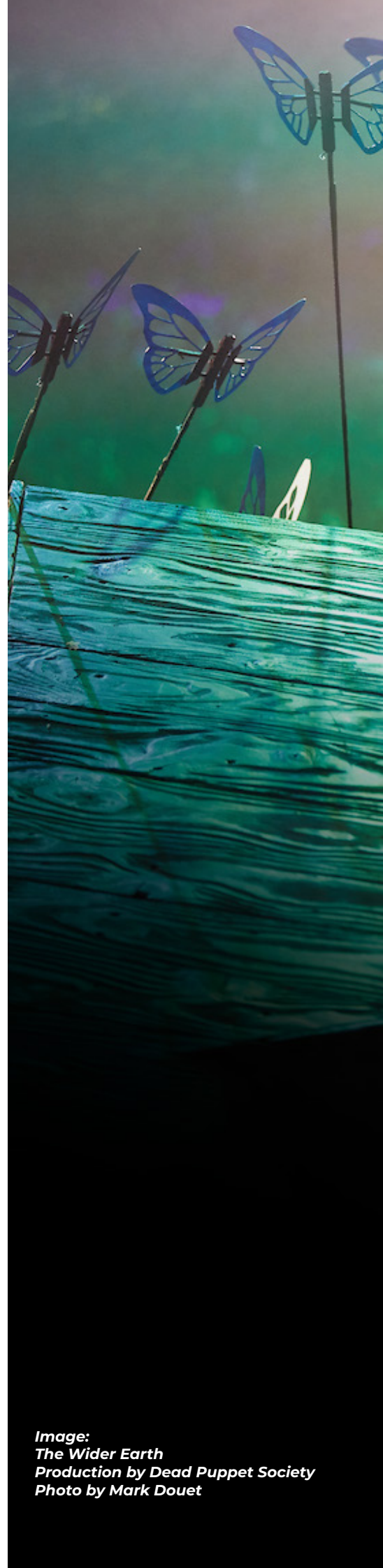


Image:  
*The Wider Earth*  
Production by Dead Puppet Society  
Photo by Mark Douet





*“DPS is nimble and responsive, and will remain focused on the hope we have for the future... I can see a really exciting future because I know how hungry we are for change and to continue to walk what we talk in innovative, creative and sustainable ways. It’s really exciting to feel like we can make a difference in not just the art and story-making that we do but also within our arts community”.*

*- Helen Stephens, Head of Youth and Engagement*

# Eaton Gorge Theatre Company

Dharawal Country | Woonona, Wollongong, NSW

Website: <https://www.egtc.com.au>  
Interviewee: Juliet Scrine (CEO)

**The Eaton Gorge Theatre Company has a long history of creating entertaining environmental educational performances for children (since 2004). Their work encompasses a range of topics and conservations, including the effects of climate change, non-human species extinction, waste management, and food cycles.**

**Programming:** Eaton Gorge Theatre Company (EGTC) is a leader in ecological programming and a member of the Australian Association for Environmental Education. EGTC often collaborates with councils, government stakeholders, scientists, and ecologists to develop their performance work, including producing support materials, teacher resources, and educational videos. For example, *Gliding into the Future* (2017), in collaboration with the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and various local landholders, explored the declining squirrel glider

population in the Murray region. Another work, *Tapstar* (2015), produced in association with Shoalhaven Water, encouraged water conservation. After *Tapstar* was first produced in 2007, Shoalhaven Water saw a significant decline in water use and directly linked this reduction to the *Tapstar* show and promotion event (Curtis et.al 2013, p. 191). Other notable productions include *No One Likes a Litter Bug* (Northern Beaches Council); *The Realm of Rubbish* (Shoalhaven Waste); *The Radical Recyclers* (Blacktown Council); and *Madame Mulch and the Great Fertilizo* (Snowy Rivers Council). EGTC has also been recognised globally for their work, and were invited to present at the IDEA 2010 conference in Brazil to discuss the power of drama in environmental education.

**Practice:** As a small independent company, EGTC largely relies on secondhand shops and reusing as part of their business model. Before

COVID-19, EGTC had a costume shop and warehouse, which enabled them to reuse materials across shows more easily. Recently a lack of storage options has limited these reuse and recycling practices. Maintaining a relationship with local designers has enabled the company to access materials from mainstage shows that would otherwise go to landfill. Since EGTC works with councils on waste information, they are well informed about how to manage their waste as effectively as possible. Much of EGTC's work takes place in outdoor environments, which also minimises excessive demand on materials and resources.

**Policy:** As a two-person company, EGTC does not have a formal policy. However, as sustainable ways of working are integral to the environmental messaging of their shows, sustainability is largely implicit in the organisational operations of the company.

*“I think it would be amazing if there was a big warehouse where all the sets from professional theatre companies could go... It would be a fantastic way of saving so many high quality, beautiful sets that get built and provide much needed resources for small theatre companies like us. It would save a lot of money and resources because much of this material is going to landfill... It is such a waste”.*

*- Juliet Scrine, CEO*

*Image to right:  
Squirrel Glider Survival  
Production by Eaton Gorge Theatre Company  
Pictured: Juliet Scrine and Ian McColm  
Photo by Jasper Millican*







# Griffin Theatre Company

Gadigal Country | Darlinghurst, Sydney, NSW

Website: <https://griffintheatre.com.au/>

Interviewee: Ang Collins (Marketing Manager & Sustainability Coordinator)

**Griffin Theatre Company has been dedicated to the development and staging of new Australian writing since 1978. Located in Sydney's historic SBW Stables Theatre, the company's motto is: 'Stories about us. Written by us. For us'.**

**Programming:** Griffin Theatre Company regularly programs environmental plays as part of its Season, including *Between Two Waves* (Ian Meadows), *Kill Climate Deniers* (David Finnigan) and *The Turquoise Elephant* (Stephen Carleton). Griffin's three-week festival for emerging and mid-career artists, Batch Festival, focused on programming climate-centric works across 2019 and 2020, including *Never Trust a Creative City* (Too Rude) and an early iteration of David Finnigan's solo work *You're Safe Till 2024*.

**Practice:** Griffin is dedicated to exploring new ways to reduce waste, consumption, and achieve their goal of becoming a carbon neutral organisation. The company maintains a low carbon emissions ethos in their theatre venue and foyer, including running a low waste bar. Likewise, they are committed to maintaining a sustainable and low waste production department. This includes recycling all set construction materials through builders and other sustainable contractors where possible; using the City of Sydney's e-waste provider to consciously discard e-waste; and participating in creating a mainstage inter-company

set and costume recycling/ shared resources program. Their sustainability initiatives are largely volunteer-run, and the company is keen to explore how a sustainability role could become a paid position in the future. They use carbon offsetting tools, such as the Green Touring toolkit and Arts on Tour, and have previously applied for carbon auditing grants from the City of Sydney. Griffin includes a sustainability clause in all their contracts, and their imminent redevelopment of the Stables Theatre provides opportunities to consider the sustainability of their venue. The company also features resources on 'Ways to Be Green at Home' on their Green Griffin page.

**Policy:** Griffin has a formal commitment to climate action, which is clearly stated on their website. The 'Green Griffin' Sustainability Action Plan includes four areas: theatre management; office management; Griffin practices; and offsets. It's a detailed document that includes the aims of the company, individual objectives, proposed actions, and offers timelines for implementation. In the introduction to their plan, Griffin states:

Griffin Theatre Company is taking action when it comes to environmental sustainability. Through the 'Green Griffin' Sustainability Action Plan, Griffin is committed to reducing our impact on the environment. The creation of the Sustainability Action Plan marks the beginning of the company's

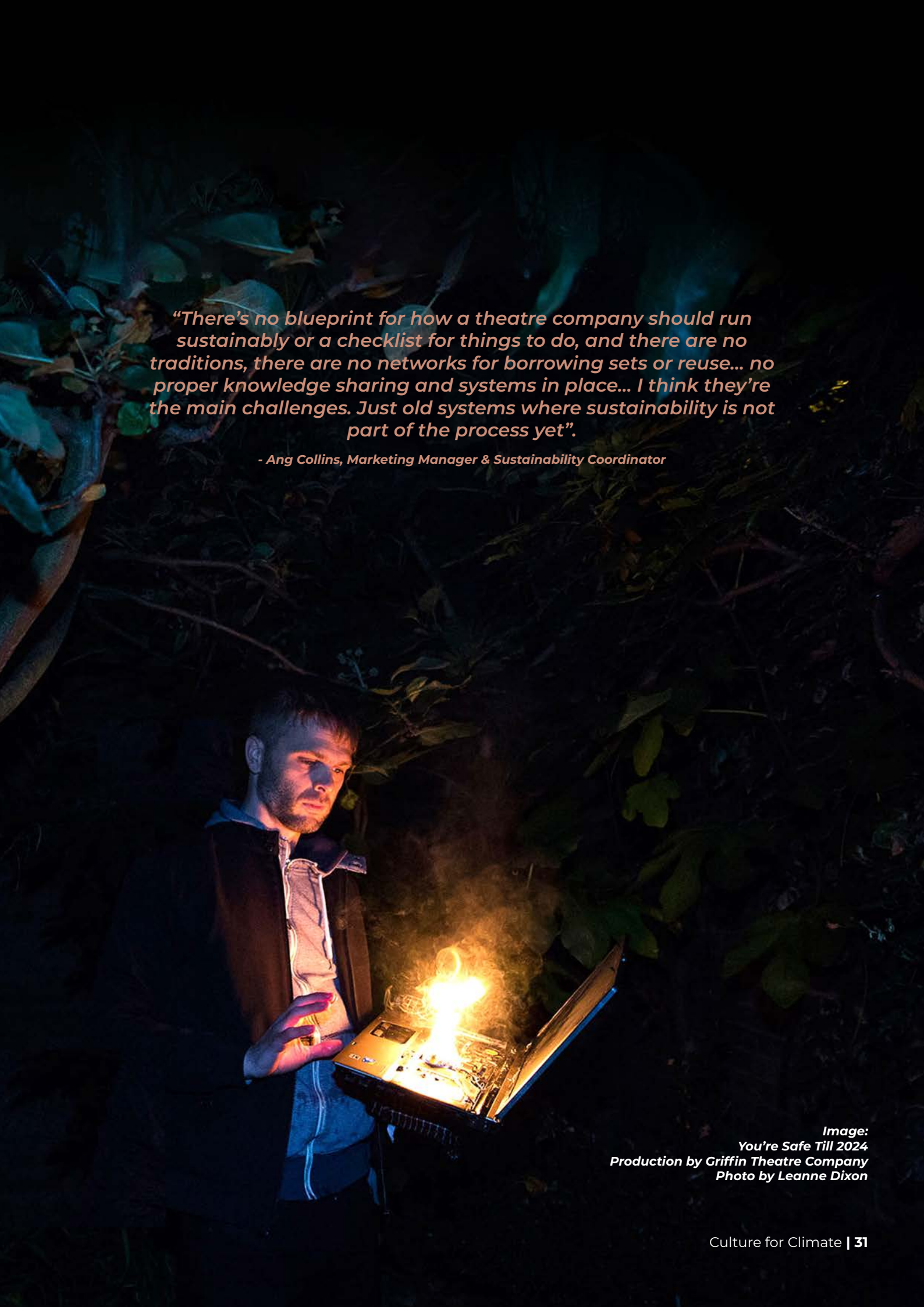
formal commitment to environmental sustainability and climate action.

Some of the actions the company is taking to reduce its footprint include: working towards carbon neutrality; ensuring legacy, e.g., current sustainable practices continue in the future regardless of leadership; endorsing social change through theatre; and implementing sustainable practices.



*“There’s no blueprint for how a theatre company should run sustainably or a checklist for things to do, and there are no traditions, there are no networks for borrowing sets or reuse... no proper knowledge sharing and systems in place... I think they’re the main challenges. Just old systems where sustainability is not part of the process yet”.*

*- Ang Collins, Marketing Manager & Sustainability Coordinator*



*Image:  
You're Safe Till 2024  
Production by Griffin Theatre Company  
Photo by Leanne Dixon*

# La Mama Theatre

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country | Carlton, Melbourne, VIC

Website: <https://lamama.com.au>

Interviewee: Caitlin Dullard (Co-CEO)

**La Mama Theatre is committed to supporting bold and ambitious independent theatre making in Melbourne. Theatre makers receive a modest production budget and the infrastructure to support the presentation of new work. La Mama produces and presents over 800 performances and engages more than 950 artists each year.**

**Programming:** La Mama has a distinct focus on programming ecological work, with an action plan that is committed to including at least one ecologically focused work each year. In recent years the company has seen an increase in theatre artists wanting to tell stories that focus on climate change. For example, in 2022, La Mama staged *Curveball*, a pre-post-apocalyptic tragic-comedy about the possible end of the Earth (directed and devised by Milly Cooper) and *#NoExemptions* (written by Angela Buckingham and presented by The Shift Theatre), a post-apocalyptic, “cli-fi” work, about family, isolation, and privilege.

**Practice:** La Mama is committed to reducing their environmental impact and setting an example in their community with their energy use and waste management practices. A sustainability artist checklist is presented to each artist programmed by the company. This includes highlighting possible sustainability initiatives, such as: recommending the use of LED lights, being conscious of energy usage to lower their building’s energy and water consumption, minimising waste disposal and being mindful of travel to and from their venues, implementing paper-free Front of House booking systems and book-keeping, offering a ‘Green Ticket’ discount incentive for audience members who choose a sustainable mode of transport within their accessibility needs, and reducing the number of printed season brochures (printed on 100% recyclable paper). Although the La Mama fire in 2018 destroyed their main theatre venue, it provided an opportunity to rebuild using the remnants and materials of the old building, whilst establishing a sustainable ethic at the

heart of the organisation. La Mama’s ‘less is more’ approach to independent theatre making ultimately celebrates a minimalist and resourceful aesthetic.

**Policy:** La Mama has an ambitious and detailed 12-page public facing action plan that evidences the company’s commitment to reducing their environmental impact and a desire for setting an example in the community, particularly with regards to energy usage and waste management practices. The plan identifies three key sustainability areas, including advocating for eco-conscious practices across office and venue operations, as well as educating audiences and advocating for environmental responsibility. The Sustainability Action Plan was initiated in 2021, in conjunction with the planned green rebuild of their venue.

*Image:*  
*Curveball*  
Production by La Mama Theatre  
Photo by Darren Gill





*“The most mind-altering ‘social changing’ theatre has happened in parts of the world in times of crisis... I think we’re becoming more conscious of bringing theatre closer to home more... to operate the way it did centuries ago. I think the future of theatre is not about big performing arts centres and people travelling a hundred kilometres to go and see a ‘big thing’ every six months. It’s more regular. It’s low-fi, it’s local, and it really is about community”.*

*- Caitlin Dullard, Co-CEO*



**Image:**  
**No Exemptions**  
**Production by La Mama Theatre**  
**Photo by Darren Gill**

# Polyglot Theatre

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country | Abbotsford, Melbourne, VIC

Website: <https://polyglot.org.au/>  
Interviewee: Sue Giles (Co-CEO)

**Polyglot Theatre is a globally renowned company based in Melbourne that creates, produces, and tours Theatre for Young Audiences all over the world. Polyglot places children at the heart of their creative process and experience, developing distinctive and playful collaborative works.**

**Programming:** Polyglot Theatre has produced several environmentally focused children works. *Paper Planet* (originally developed in 2009) is based on creating a delicate forest and imaginary world of tall trees from recyclable cardboard. *Paper Planet* marked a significant turning point in the company's programming approach, where respect, reciprocity, and custodianship became the central point of the production and consequently informed their overall ethos. Another participatory work, *Bees*, follows three giant bees creating a hive in a variety of public spaces with children. Polyglot's latest work (made

through remote collaboration with Oily Cart in the UK) *When the World Turns* (2022) combines biophilic design, sustainability, and accessibility to create an immersive space of over 10,000 living plants for young people who often have the least access to nature.

**Practice:** Polyglot was involved in the 2014 Greenie-in-Residence program and have retained their commitment to sustainability since then. As part of the initiative, Melbourne-based theatre artists and arts organisations participated in a year-long program of workshops, consultations, and networking events run by artist and sustainability expert Matt Wicking. The project saw Polyglot incorporating environmental sustainability into the making, administration, and delivery of their work. This initiative underpins the company's increasing focus on implementing sustainable practices now and into the future legacy of the company.

**Policy:** Polyglot highlights a commitment to sustainability on their website, including a 'responsibility to measure, manage and reduce' their environmental impact. Further evidencing their commitment, Polyglot practices refer to the Greenie-in-Residence publication (2015). The publication features Five Principles for Greening the arts, which include: 1) Start Somewhere; 2) Stop. Collaborate. Listen; 3) Measure Like you Mean It; 4) Be Smart First, Sexy Second; 5) Formalise it. A key area of Polyglot's approach considers the overall 'Care Plan'

of a project, which incorporates the trifecta of Wellbeing, Access and Sustainability. Polyglot is committed to the safety and wellbeing of its audiences, artists and staff. As the company states:

Polyglot operates with a comprehensive and proactive approach to risk, conduct, child safety, and sustainability. Our current policies are vital in maintaining our healthy and happy workplace culture that ensures we can create and deliver transformational arts experiences to children everywhere. These policies are regularly reviewed and updated in line with our legislative requirements.

*"I think the biggest challenge is the internal culture of an organisation ... having to constantly persuade people of the aesthetic, material, cultural and community worth of more sustainable ways of working. Sustainability is a relationship between aesthetics and good practice..."*

- Sue Giles, Co-CEO

*Image:  
Paper Planet, Darebin  
Production by Polyglot Theatre  
Photo by Sarah Walker*



*“I think sustainability is not only a missed opportunity, but a missed responsibility as well. It’s about thinking, what’s the care plan for this project? What is the well-being plan, the access plan and the sustainability plan? Those three things need to be addressed at the very beginning... And that’s about rethinking planning, sourcing and bump in time... the costs associated with good practice gets quickly taken off the table”.*

*- Sue Giles, Co-CEO*



# Shakespeare South

Kaurna Country | Springfield, Adelaide, SA

Website: <http://www.shakespearesouth.com>  
Interviewee: Alys Daroy (Artistic Director)

**Shakespeare South (formerly Shakespeare South Australia) specialises in combining classical practices with ecological initiatives. The company's values include environmental resilience, biodiversity, and intersectional justice. Productions enhance the sensory experience of living sites through integrating biophilic principles and immersive techniques. Their motto, 'All the South's a Stage', reflects connecting audiences with the Southern Hemisphere's environmental diversity.**

**Programming:** Shakespeare South produces eco-theatrical work within the internationally burgeoning genre of 'eco-Shakespeare'. The company explores how performance 'can enhance, challenge and reorient human relationships with the more-than-human world'. Significantly, eco-Shakespeare connects Shakespeare's nature-rich text with ecological advocacy. Shakespeare South joins organisations such as

Shakespeare's Globe as a member of the EarthShakes Alliance — a world-first initiative to place the environment at the heart of Shakespearean practice.

**Practice:** Shakespeare South applies ecological practice in two ways: firstly, through ecodramaturgy (the ecological interpretation of texts and performance practices) and secondly, through ecoscenography and incorporating environmentally-sensitive design. The company does not construct stages or sets; they upcycle costumes and props, use local supplies, and are plant-based and cruelty-free. As most of their productions are outdoors, designs integrate the local landscape, thereby mitigating the need for construction and reducing technological intervention. Alongside carbon offsetting, the company also donates 10% of any profits to bush regeneration programs and 100% of all booking fees to First Nations children's program 'Fresh Start' through Humanitix.

**Policy:** Shakespeare South has a clear public facing commitment to environmental and social justice as evidenced on their website, which states:

We seek to reinvigorate and enliven Shakespeare's classic texts through updated perspectives incorporating environmental and intersectional justice. We are committed to diversity and community—both human and more-than-human. Through utilising environmentally-sensitive production techniques and rigorous practice methodologies, we explore beautiful, engaging and enlivening performance celebrating the Global South's biodiversity.

*"I am not confident that there is adequate awareness of eco-theatre fitting into Australia's experimental and innovative landscape. I think that it would require a process of making apparent to policymakers that this is a timely and exciting area. We have a real opportunity now to bring eco-theatre into what's already a very dynamic and innovative cultural landscape".*

*- Alys Daroy, Artistic Director*



*Image: Shakespeare South in  
the Adelaide Botanic Garden  
Photo by Tony Lewis*





# Terrapin Puppet Theatre

Nipaluna Country | Hobart, TAS

Website: <https://www.terrapiin.org.au>

Interviewees: *Belinda Kelly (Executive Producer) and Bryony Anderson (Head of Workshop / Lead Maker)*

**Terrapin Puppet Theatre has been creating in-theatre productions and interactive installations that transport children and families to imaginative and inspiring worlds for over 40 years. They are a federally and state-funded company through the NPAPF (National Performing Arts Partnership framework) and develop works locally, nationally, and internationally.**

**Programming:** Terrapin Puppet Theatre has a number of environmentally-focused works in production or development, including: *Tip Duck*, a comical interactive roving performance featuring a rubbish-collecting Ibis, and *How We Found What We Had Lost*, which examines extinction and the decline of human beings. Their focus is on responding to urgent conversations that are important to young people without being overly didactic. While Terrapin acknowledges the importance of creating shows that entertain, there are also more serious moral and ethical themes embedded in their work.

**Practice:** Terrapin is committed to monitoring their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to transform operations and reduce impact where possible, as well as offsetting when required. This includes exploring ways of addressing touring emissions and freight impacts, assessing marketing and business operations, as well as supporting their team and audiences to follow low-carbon ways of travelling to their performances more broadly. Head of Workshop/Lead Maker and long-time

sustainability advocate Bryony Anderson leads the company's sustainability policy generation, particularly within the workshop environment. Puppets and sets are based on re-using salvaged and reclaimed materials, with low toxicity. With the help of sustainability experts and auditing company, Sustainable Living Tasmania, Terrapin has been able to develop a detailed snapshot of their emissions, discovering that the heaviest contributions to the company's impact was international flights, freighting and audience travel. This discovery has assisted in informing future practice. Terrapin also uses the Sustainable Production Toolkit, which preferences spending money on labour over materials. The company has also applied for carbon neutral certification through Climate Active (from 2022).

*“As a result of working with Sustainable Living Tasmania, who have auditing consultants, we realised that carbon neutrality is an achievable aim”.*

*- Bryony Anderson, Head of Workshop / Lead Maker*

**Policy:** Terrapin makes a clear commitment to sustainability, as evidenced on their website:

We believe our purpose is to make Tasmanian – and Australian – lives better through our work. We understand that a rapid transition to a low-carbon economy is imperative in

a changing climate. We make work in a unique and precious part of the world. All these things have combined to inform Terrapin's sustainability policy, which will become a guiding pillar for all our operations ... There's no full stop to this process: it's iterative and won't be achieved immediately. We are still learning the language and tools of decarbonisation – but we're enthusiastic and committed to the long haul.

Their statement includes four guiding principles: 1) Reduction of emissions; 2) Best practice in design with regard to environmental impact and sustainability; 3) Best practice in procurement with regard to sustainability; 4) Becoming an agent for change – sharing what we learn and building supportive networks. They are currently in the process of developing an official sustainability policy for the company, and aim to be a leader in the field of sustainable theatre practice in Australia, particularly in creating aesthetically-charged works from salvaged materials.

*“We've decided we're going to prioritise this. We know that there will be challenges, and we want to do storytelling around this, and we don't have any intention of concealing the challenges because I think it's important to show people that there are going to be bumps on the road”.*

*- Belinda Kelly, Executive Producer*





Image above: Tip Duck - a large roving puppet designed and built by Bryony, which has been seen by over 75,000 people in Tasmania and mainland Australia. Production by Terrapin Puppet Theatre. Photo by Amy Brown

Image below: The Inexplicably Convoluted Peregrination of Jessica Parrot. Terrapin Puppet Theatre. Photo by Peter Mathew

*“We work with young people. So, of course we’re future-focused. We’re also interested in urgent conversations for young people and climate is a pretty urgent conversation for young people”.*

*- Belinda Kelly, Executive Producer*





# Theatre Kimberley

Yawuru Country | Broome, WA

Website: <https://www.theatrekimberley.org.au>

Interviewee: Meredith Bell (Artistic Director) and Bernadette Trench-Thiedeman (Lead Artist and Project Coordinator, Big Country Puppets)

**Theatre Kimberley creates high-quality arts opportunities that bring local stories to life across small and remote Aboriginal communities and larger towns in the Kimberley region. The company's highly collaborative programs and productions support health and wellbeing, build social connection, develop skills, and increase employability.**

**Programming:** Much of Theatre Kimberley's programming is centred around arts opportunities inspired by cultural and ecological stories from towns and remote Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region. Big Country Puppets is a major outreach program that uses puppetry and site-specific theatre to address environmental and cultural issues. The project leader, Bernadette Trench-Thiedeman, collaborates with Indigenous rangers and scientists, to explore the ecology of local areas through community engaged puppetry, workshops and educational activities. Big Country Puppets creates large wildlife puppets (such as the critically endangered Gouldian Finch), to bring attention to local endangered species. Another Theatre Kimberley project, *The Shorebird Quest*, is inspired by threats to local migratory shorebirds, with the site-specific performance taking place in the natural amphitheatre at Town Beach, Broome, on Roebuck Bay. Theatre Kimberley also hosts wearable art events where community upcycling workshops culminate in dance, puppetry and circus performances as part of the story narrative.

**Practice:** Theatre Kimberley's outreach practice is focused on supporting Aboriginal communities across creative, ecological and educational endeavours. For example, Big Country Puppets actively engages Aboriginal Rangers, Elders and community members in its scriptwriting, puppetry design, and production process – from concept sketches to model-making, prototyping and construction. Along with cane, aluminium and fabric, puppets are also made from recycled and found objects (e.g. plastic bottles are used as substrates for smaller puppet body parts) as there are very limited opportunities for recycling in remote communities. Longevity and durability in harsh environments also contribute to design considerations, with each puppet being made to last as long as possible, as well as being easily transported. Big Country Puppets contributes to remote education for young children by providing more opportunities and techniques for rangers to work in schools and fostering the sharing of local culture, endangered languages and environments through

multisensory, interactive learning opportunities, and bilingual theatre scripts.

**Policy:** Theatre Kimberley has a strong commitment to ecological and social justice. They have an overall sustainability policy and a strategic plan that includes measures to ensure continuous improvement of their environmental practices and sustainability. Much of Theatre Kimberley's artistic and organisational practices are inherently sustainable. They prioritise First Nations stories and culture and local ecological perspectives, and encourage low-cost, re-purposed, materials for their theatre making practices.

*“The Kimberley has incredible intact ecosystems... Being able to educate people about the values of this area is an important part of the work that we do”*

- Meredith Bell, Artistic Director

*“The Big Country Puppets is about celebrating the ecological knowledge of rangers... to bring them into the theatre making process... The rangers have a very intimate knowledge of particular stories, creatures, plants and places, and that sets them up well as storytellers, puppet makers and performers. They come into schools, talking about their work on Country... Songs are created in local language with students taking part in the performances”.*

- Bernadette Trench-Thiedeman, Lead Artist and Project Coordinator, Big Country Puppets



*Image:  
Cane toad, Goanna and Sawfish  
Big Country Puppets Bayulu 2019  
Performed by the Gooniyandi Rangers  
Production by Theatre Kimberley  
Photo by Ben Houston*





# The Blue Room Theatre

Whadjuk Nyoongar Country | Northbridge, Perth, WA

Website: <https://blueroom.org.au>

Interviewee: Katt Osborne (Executive Director)

**The Blue Room Theatre has been Western Australia's home of independent theatre and performance for over 30 years. The small not-for-profit organisation based in the Perth Cultural Centre nurtures emerging artists and supports the artistic development of independent performance works.**

**Programming:** The Blue Room has a rich history of staging a variety of environmental works. Most recently, *Two Canaries* (2019) by Alexa Taylor was an experimental performance artwork using cinematic projection and live music as a means of contemplating the realities of living in a climate changed world. Another work, *Watch and Act* (2021), was a darkly comic work by radio broadcaster Katie MacAllister, which explored climate anxiety through the Black Summer and Wooroloo bushfires.

**Practice:** The Blue Room's commitment to sustainable practice first began by gaining an understanding of the company's carbon emissions, including the running cost of their heritage building, which they found to be the biggest contributor to greenhouse gasses. Since 2015/2016, they have continued to reduce emissions and venue electricity costs with the installation of solar panels and LED lights – an initiative that was achieved by several years of fundraising campaigns by the company and broader community. The Blue Room also worked with Dr Vanessa Rauland from Climate Clever to reach carbon neutral status in 2019. The company

is currently participating in a carbon auditing process with the support of the Australia Council for the Arts to help manage their progress and to find new ways to continue reducing their carbon footprint and improve waste management.

**Policy:** The Blue Room has been following an initial sustainability policy and plan developed in 2018. They are currently in a revision process to improve and adapt their policy and plans to suit their current organisational structure and program. This will include working with a new environmental sustainability working group in 2023 comprised of industry experts, board and staff members to

*“At the end of the day, you can have policies, but if you don't have actions that you're measuring, then how do you know that you've actually made any change? We need to make sure we still continue to improve through having these plans, checking, monitoring them and continuing to change”.*

- Katt Osborne, Executive Director

create a new action plan for the next three years. Within this plan, The Blue Room is keen to continue exploring ways to encourage sustainable artists and productions, as well as continue to improve and deepen their previous environmental sustainability success. The company's recent focus has been on social sustainability, with significant work invested in creating an Equity & Justice Action Plan. Additionally, The Blue Room is currently working on an ethical partnerships framework that includes a decision-making tool for transparency in partnerships across sponsorship and philanthropy.

Image:  
Bar Interior  
By The Blue Room Theatre  
Photo by Daniel Njegich



*“In 2015 we raised money for solar panels, and that brought down the electricity. And then, in 2016, we raised some money to convert, not all but some of our lighting stock to LEDs... We have done this all through targeted fundraising and donor pathways. It’s not been something that the government has paid for or that we can afford in our core operating expenses”.*

*- Katt Osborne, Executive Director*



# Vulcana Circus

Jagera and Turrbal Country | Morningside, Brisbane, QLD

Website: <https://www.vulcana.org.au>  
Interviewee: Celia White (Artistic Director)

**Vulcana Circus has been an integral part of the cultural landscape of Queensland since 1995. It is an inclusive space for circus training, performance making projects, and community engagement programs founded on feminist principles and aimed at women, trans and non-binary people and youth of all genders.**

**Programming:** Vulcana has had a long history of making bold political works and using unexpected sites for presentation. *Disappearing Acts* was a site-specific circus work exploring biodiversity loss, performed in green spaces across South-east Queensland. The work examined human relationships with nature, in collaboration with environmental scientist Ayesha Tulloch. Their most recent project, IMPACT: Conversation Series, is a community-led response to the climate crisis through the sharing of perspectives from First Nations peoples, Pasifika communities, and young people. This will lead to an outdoor performance in 2023, exploring the relationship between circus and climate change. Vulcana is also working with the Performance + Ecology Research Lab (P+ERL, Griffith University) on *Climate Scape*, a project examining how scientific discourse regarding climate change can be embedded into physical performance. This project unites climate migration experts and practice-led creative researchers from Humanities, Design, and Education fields with professional circus artists. The research explores how circus performance can narrate the

impact of human interventions on other-than-human species in the ecologically unique Moreton Bay wetlands, Queensland, Australia.

**Practice:** As an independent performance company without organisational funding support for many years until only very recently, Vulcana out of necessity works on a reuse and recycle ethos, with most props and costumes sourced sustainably from secondhand shops or recycled art supplies (such as Reverse Garbage in Brisbane). Any new items purchased are stored and reused across multiple production cycles. The company is committed to maximising usage and minimising waste. This resourcefulness assists the company in working within budget constraints as well as embedding sustainability considerations into company processes and practices. Vulcana

encourages their students to carpool and find alternative ways to travel to their venue, which has limited public transport options. Further, the company asks students, artists, audiences, and guests to rethink consumption and waste habits.

**Policy:** Although the company has no published sustainability action plan to date, Vulcana has in-house policies that cover office applications and administrative structures. They have implemented waste management procedures and practices, which they share with guests and audiences visiting their venue. Vulcana is committed to exploring more ways in which to embed sustainability into their operations, including considering a better use of their resources in regard to their venue (e.g. water, power, and materials).

*“I’ve spent my life in political theatre. I started in a community political theatre company that was out making work about the Jarrah trees being cut down in WA. That’s why I do the arts. The work that I happen to enjoy is the kind that asks us think about the change that needs to happen”.*

- Celia White, Artistic Director

Image:  
Rear Vision  
Production by Vulcana Circus  
Photo by Jacob Morrison





*“Our work is not about finding a solution... it’s about shifting that little world of people who are involved in a project, that might lead to action... It’s very tentative beginnings, but there’s a whole audience to be captured, which includes their communities. How do we set them up to embrace sustainable ways of working beyond our space?”.*

*- Celia White, Artistic Director*







# Findings

The following section discusses the findings of the report, including a review of the 13 performing arts organisations across programming, practice and policy (3P's). Each area of investigation is synthesised and summarised, with the aim of highlighting commonalities and differences across the respondents, and providing preliminary suggestions for implementing sustainability across the 3P's based on these findings.



*Image:  
The Shorebird Quest 2019, Broome,  
Benthic Fauna puppets  
Performed by Broome Cable Beach, and Roebuck Bay  
Primary School students,  
Production by Theatre Kimberley  
Photo by Ben Houston*



# Programming

Programming ecological works is an important way performing arts organisations are engaging with the environmental crisis. Of the 13 organisations interviewed, most showed a significant commitment and interest in telling environmental stories as part of their programming. These ranged from large scale community-led projects (Arts House, Vulcana Circus, Theatre Kimberley), climate plays (Griffin Theatre, The Blue Room Theatre, La Mama Theatre), works focused on biodiversity issues (Dead Puppet Society, Dancenorth), eco-performance for young people (Polyglot Theatre, Terrapin Puppet Theatre), roving eco-performance as environmental education (Eaton Gorge Theatre Company), and eco-Shakespeare (Shakespeare South, Bell Shakespeare).

## Climate Plays & Ecocritical Works

Griffin Theatre, The Blue Room Theatre, Dead Puppet Society and La Mama Theatre regularly program climate plays and eco-critical work as part of their main season, with La Mama Theatre showing a formal commitment to staging at least one work each year that engages in the discourse of environmental sustainability. Where programming opportunities are perceived to be more limited, for example, Bell Shakespeare and Shakespeare South make a clear connection between Shakespeare's nature-rich plays and the opportunity it presents for ecological advocacy. As Alys Daroy, Artistic Director of

Shakespeare South, describes:

Shakespeare's work itself is also filled with references to the natural world in both problematic and celebratory ways that are ripe for theatrical exploration... Because Shakespeare's work has such a broad reach and appeal it extends to a wide demographic. The plays therefore function as a helpful 'Trojan horse' for an ecological agenda.

## Place-based Eco-community Projects

Community-led projects are a focus of many companies engaging with ecological issues. Arts House, through projects such as *Refuge* (2016-2022), has demonstrated how ecological programming can cross cultural spaces and practices, offering new perspectives that forge inter-community relationships around the climate crisis. Over the last 10 years, Arts House has regularly set up sustainability knowledge-sharing programs with an intersectional approach to First Nations perspectives, diversity, and social inclusion. Sarah Rowbottam, Creative Producer of Arts House explains how:

*Refuge* wasn't necessarily about making art about climate change, but making work within the conditions of the climate crisis, working within a preparedness space, thinking about the collaborative space between artist, citizen emergency services and climate justice.

Remote organisations, such as Theatre Kimberley (Broome), and regional organisations, such as Dancenorth (Townsville), credit their local environment and community as a crucial part of their ecological programming. For Bernadette Trench-Thiedeman (Project Leader, Big Country Puppets, Theatre Kimberley) engaging First Nations rangers in their ecological work is crucial:

The rangers will have a very intimate knowledge of particular stories, creatures, plants and places, and that sets them up well as storytellers, [puppet] makers [and performers]... to understand the movement of those creatures, their physiology and how things should look and move.

Celia White (Artistic Director, Vulcana Circus) highlights how her company's move into green spaces as a result of COVID-19 has shifted their programming to consider eco-critical issues (such as biodiversity loss) as a regular part of the repertoire:

I think engaging with the natural spaces has an impact on the work and then probably COVID shifted things...taking work directly to small green spaces and people's front yards [created a] different level of engagement with small audiences, small spaces.

For companies such as Vulcana Circus, Eaton Gorge Theatre Company and Shakespeare South, the focus on outdoor theatre also contributes to



minimising waste and energy expenditure, with designs integrated into the local landscape, thus mitigating the need for excess construction and reducing technological intervention.

## Eco-theatre for Young People

Ecological programming and education has been an imperative for companies focused on the concerns of young people. For example, the work of Eaton Gorge Theatre Company and Theatre Kimberley is inherently ecologically focused and both organisations collaborate with government bodies or arts and science professionals to develop their educational work. For Bernadette Trench-Thiedeman (Project Leader, Big Country Puppets, Theatre Kimberley), taking a place-based approach is integral to environmental education:

Why should kids in the Kimberley know more about a polar bear than they know about their local bird life? I think that's particularly important, as well as the element of pride in their own culture. If there's no way for them to be supported in that local learning, it's obviously a detriment.

Polyglot Theatre and Terrapin Puppet Theatre both credit their engagement with children as a crucial part of steering a pathway towards an environmental focus and creating spaces for children

and their families to engage in urgent conversations about climate change. As Sue Giles (Co-CEO, Polyglot Theatre) highlights:

Our kids are really worried about the environment... Especially when we're working with children, our responsibility to our audience community is massive. We're talking about *their* planet.

*“We're a very future-focused company... We're looking to the future of humanity... So, it's unsurprising to me that we make work that takes an ecological position within it”.*

*- Helen Stephens,  
Head of Youth and Engagement, Dead  
Puppet Society*

## Conclusion

Environmental issues are a prominent concern for theatre audiences across the country, which could encourage Australian performing arts organisations to integrate eco-plays into their programming. However, the above organisations demonstrate that this is only part of the story. Eco-programming is seen as a key contribution to their communities, and helps define their civic purpose. Many showcase the potential for performing arts to have a much wider reach through site-specific creation, community engagement and educational initiatives. Our interviews suggest eco-theatre helps build place, both for the organisations themselves and the communities in which they are embedded.

### Strategies for ecological programming include:

1. **Inviting communities into ecological discussions and creative sustainability developments for production**
2. **Connecting artists and audiences with place-specific ecological themes and stories**
3. **Enabling opportunities for environmental and Indigenous knowledge of Country to be integrated into performance works**
4. **Bringing multigenerational and diverse perspectives into ecologically-focused performance works**

*“I want to know, what else is possible... to know what in our lifetime is actually achievable in this space of art making and supporting our planet and thereby our community... I want more knowledge... I want there to be a constant conversation, I want more understanding. I want to know how me doing this tiny thing (or not even a tiny thing) will help all the things that impact climate change”.*

*- Helen Stephens, Head of Youth and Engagement, Dead Puppet Society*



*Image:  
Holding Achilles Brisbane Festival 2022  
Production by Dead Puppet Society  
Photo by Dean Hanson*



# Practice

Sustainable practices are a key consideration for Australian performing arts companies engaging with environmental concerns. All 13 organisations demonstrated a commitment to multiple sustainability practices, such as celebrating sustainable and small scale approaches to theatre-making (Eaton Gorge Theatre Company, Shakespeare South, La Mama Theatre, Vulcana Circus), using sustainability tools to assess practices (The Blue Room, Griffin Theatre, Dancenorth, Bell Shakespeare) and prioritising an eco-aesthetic (Terrapin Puppet Theatre, Polyglot Theatre, Theatre Kimberley, Dead Puppet Society, Arts House).

## Embracing Resourcefulness

For many small-to-medium organisations, resourcefulness is already a valued part of their practices. Tight budgets mean that reusing materials is simply a necessity, and when new items are purchased, they are treated as a prized resource to be used again and again. The small-to-medium companies interviewed expressed a preference for investing in labour over materials; a strategy that could positively contribute to both ecological and economic concerns. However, lack of time and resources is a factor that can lead to less sustainable choices, such as buying new materials rather than having the time to find items second-hand, and using zip ties and electrical tape rather than other reusable options. Helen Stephens (Head of Youth and Engagement, Dead Puppet Society) highlights how

embracing resourcefulness is a process of ongoing learning:

We used to do these workshops in schools where each child received a new plastic bag to knot, fold and turn it into a puppet. We realised pretty quickly, that this wasn't a particularly sustainable practice. It felt really bad at the end of a workshop to know these resources weren't recyclable, so we played around with some recycled brown paper and realised we could actually make really cool puppet creatures using brown paper as our base material instead, and have made this our practice in workshops ever since.

For larger companies, more substantial production builds can make it harder to be resourceful, especially when designs are created without sustainability considerations in mind, and solutions need to be retrofitted onto existing ideas. For Gill Perkins (Executive Director, Bell Shakespeare), cost is also a major factor in engaging with sustainable practices:

Being more sustainable has a considerable cost imperative. The cheapest materials are often the least sustainable.

As a result, Perkins discusses how it is important that organisations reflect on their values and impact, and consider the potential trade-off between the artistic work and a sustainable ethos.

## A Sustainable Aesthetic

A common concern that emerged across the interviews is the sector-wide narrative that sustainability concerns limit aesthetic choices, rather than being an opportunity for creative innovation. While small-to-medium companies were typically of the opinion that sustainability does not hinder visual design, larger organisations were explicit about the pressures they face to produce 'high-quality' results which are sometimes at odds with sustainable values and practices. The tension between being resourceful and meeting aesthetic expectations is the crux of the sustainability challenge in performing arts. Sue Giles (Co-CEO, Polyglot Theatre) argues that a resourceful aesthetic should be embraced:

Sustainability is a relationship between aesthetics and good practice ... It doesn't have to reflect poorly on the outcome, it can actually enhance the outcome.

For Alys Daroy (Artistic Director, Shakespeare South), eco-aesthetics harks back to long-standing theatre traditions:

Shakespearean performance already frequently harnesses ecological theatrical strategies; for example, there's an extensive international tradition of open-air Shakespeare which, by virtue of its practices, already qualifies as 'low ecological impact'. Integrating further emerging eco-practices helps to deepen this.

## The Challenge of Shifting Practices

Our research suggests that small-to-medium companies are quicker in responding to sustainability challenges, while larger companies rely on dedicated policies to guide them through an appropriate transition. As is true in other sectors, small-to-medium organisations are inherently more agile and face fewer barriers to change. Nevertheless, with support from the executive level, several medium-to-large organisations are building sustainable practices into their production budgets and timelines. Another concern raised in our interviews is the burden of changing practices can easily be left to a few passionate individuals (often not compensated for the extra hours involved), leaving companies without sustainability leadership if they leave. For Ang Collins (Griffin Theatre, Marketing Manager & Sustainability Coordinator), valuing people's time for their sustainability commitments is crucial:

A priority of ours is to remunerate a passionate individual or individuals for the [sustainability] hours that they do, for someone to take ownership of the program and keep it in check, keep updating it, take on responsibility for the projects.

All companies were upfront that it is not always possible to use eco-friendly options and there need to be cost-effective sustainable materials and products available to assist in altering their practices. As Bernadette Trench-Thiedeman (Project Leader, Big Country Puppets, Theatre Kimberley) highlighted:

We use recycled materials, we find objects. Some of the materials we get from overseas that are not sustainable at all, like cane, are [still a useful and] beautiful to work with. There's sustainability in the fact that [communities] can [easily] use it and that we're not just making giant inflatable puppets in a factory and then bringing them out to communities.

Discussion around sustainable practices led to conversations related to shifting the culture of sustainability leadership within an organisation's workplace. As Belinda Kelly (Executive Producer, Terrapin Puppet Theatre) says:

You need a champion, and you clearly need the executive or management team to be supporting it. And you need to have a champion on the Board to convince them that this is a good business as well as ethical reasons.

## Sustainability tools

Using sustainability tools and auditing practices is more common in larger companies that receive government support, such as those funded by the Australia Council for the Arts. The Blue Room Theatre is a strong proponent of identifying carbon emissions to track sustainable practices, including the running costs of their heritage building (which has led to reduced emissions through installation of solar panels and LED lighting).

*Image below:  
Blue Mountains  
New South Wales, Australia  
Photo by Jacques Bopp*



Griffin Theatre uses carbon offsetting tools, such as the Green Touring toolkit developed by Arts on Tour, and has previously applied for carbon auditing grants from the City of Sydney. For Belinda Kelly (Executive Producer, Terrapin Puppet Theatre), by working with the Sustainable Production Toolkit and an auditing consultant, the company were able to identify that carbon neutrality was an achievable goal:

Trying to increase our capacity and having people conform to our standards around sustainability and use of sustainable materials [can be challenging]... it's never going to be perfect. I think that's why the monitoring is so important, and we'll set targets. There'll be incremental, they'll be ambitious. But you can't go from zero to hero overnight... we know that.

Overall, many performing arts companies are interested in gaining a better understanding of the national cultural carbon footprint, as well as advocating for a better understanding of the challenges, choices and opportunities connected with sustainable practices.

***“...It's an exchange, and it's about education... it's figuring things out together”.***

***- Belinda Kelly, Executive Producer, Terrapin Puppet Theatre***

## Touring

Sustainable touring is a key consideration for companies such as Dancenorth, Bell Shakespeare, Terrapin Puppet Theatre. Bell Shakespeare is interested in how digital infrastructure can offer alternatives to travel. However, there is still a strong desire and need to provide regional and remote parts of Australia with the opportunity to experience live performance. For Gill Perkins (Executive Director, Bell Shakespeare), slow touring strategies might offer a way forward:

The biggest issue for us is traversing this vast continent. In 10 years' time, is it going to be possible to tour in ways that are environmentally responsible and financially possible? ...There's been a real push for years around efficient touring... Well, that's changing now. Now it's about more considered touring, slow touring. Which is a good thing.

For Terrapin Puppet Theatre, exploring remote delivery through a license model with a reduced team of creatives (rather than sending a whole team) is another possible option. In this way, touring is still undertaken but is less resource-heavy and crucially provides professional development opportunities for young artists.

## Collaboration & Sharing of Resources

Several companies highlighted the importance of sharing resources and know-how as an important component of transitioning to more sustainable practices. Shifting from 'old ways of doing things' requires active collaboration to build new traditions, networks and sharing platforms, where sustainability can become a central part of the performance-making process. As Sue Giles (Co-CEO, Polyglot Theatre) explains:

The proof of the pudding is when theatre processes are shared and people fall in love with it... And if you can prove that it's not that difficult and it's beautiful, then I think that's really exciting too. Because that's what we always say, the work does half the battle for you... You fall in love with what the possibility is.

A number of respondents cited international eco-theatrical and 'green theatre' resources (e.g. Julie's Bicycle) as potential guidelines. Before COVID-19, Eaton Gorge Theatre Company owned a costume shop and warehouse that enabled the reuse of materials across shows. Recently, a lack of storage options has limited this recycling practice. Small companies often rely on second-hand shops and reuse as part of their business model,

maintaining relationships with local designers to access materials from other shows that would otherwise go to landfill. Moving beyond a company's own store of resources, there is a need for a less siloed, more centralised system where sets, props and costumes can be exchanged. For Katt Osborne (Executive Director, Blue Room), it is important that this sharing philosophy is also extended to questions of intellectual property:

I think intellectual property and people's fear about designs being stolen or reused [gets in the way of sustainability]. But I think there could be a way to overcome that, in terms of how you agree to reuse things.

## Practice beyond performing arts

Companies such as Arts House, Griffin Theatre, La Mama Theatre, Dancenorth and Vulcana Circus expressed strong interest in how the performing arts can celebrate and prioritise sustainable practices to motivate their audiences to rethink their own consumption and waste habits. For example, Griffin Theatre features resources on 'Ways to Be Green at Home' on their Green Griffin page. Both Dancenorth and Vulcana encourage their students to carpool and find alternative ways to travel to their venues, which have limited public transport options. La Mama Theatre believes in setting an example in their local community with their energy use and waste management practices, which are also communicated through a

sustainability artist checklist. Many organisations have worm farms and compost gardens to integrate environmental sustainability values into office and rehearsal practices —to celebrate an ecological ethos. For Caitlin Dullard (Co-CEO, La Mama), utilising tools helps to develop eco-conscious decisions among audiences:

Our sustainability approach is really about highlighting possible things that people could consider. Green ticket initiatives, the way people use lighting in the theatre, but also a kind of general request that when they're at La Mama theatre, their conscious of the energy, the way they're disposing of waste, the way they're arriving here.

area, including transitioning towards greener production practices that better support environmental outcomes. Nevertheless, performing arts organisations are thinking deeply about these issues, and deriving innovative solutions to their specific goals and needs. However, this needs to move beyond a primarily individual effort to ensure that Australia's performing arts organisations have a collective resource that facilitates collaboration on, and uptake of, solutions.

## Conclusion

Our study shows that numerous organisations are exploring the implementation of ethically-based sustainability initiatives across their production and touring processes —from embracing a resourceful aesthetic, to using sustainability tools and consultancies to facilitate change. It is clear that there are still many challenges to overcome in this

**Image to right:**  
*Jilj the Skink, Big Country Puppets Yakanarra 2022*  
*Performed by the Ngurrara Rangers and Yakanarra Community School students*  
*Production by Theatre Kimberley*  
*Photo by Sarah Duguid*

### Strategies for ecological practice include:

1. Celebrating resourceful approaches to performance making
2. Utilising sustainability tools to inform practices
3. Sharing resources between artists and organisations
4. Encouraging more mindful and slow touring practices





# Policy

Our study found that developing and integrating organisational policies is the least investigated area of sustainability across the 13 companies. There is no doubt that building policy frameworks for environmentally conscious performance making will help create the foundation for long term sustainability in the sector. Many companies are calling for more support to build an appropriate policy approach. They agree that embedding an environmental understanding of sustainability into cultural policy is as important as other priority areas which publicly-funded artists are asked to deliver on.

## Policy as a driver for change

Most of the performing arts organisations agree that a policy is an important driver for sustainability beyond the passionate individuals trying to implement change on the ground. Policies can prevent sustainability from falling between the cracks of production, employment and management strategies. Sarah Rowbottam (Creative Producer, Arts House) cited her company's Disability Action Plan as an example of how consolidating high-level intentions can help source funding opportunities:

You don't necessarily have to have a climate justice framework to be doing climate justice work. But it can be helpful from a Council perspective, such as the work that we've been able to do in establishing a rigorous Disability Action Plan. We've

been able to advocate for capital works to do huge upgrades on our building. So, there are benefits in consolidating it into an action plan, especially within the Council system, because it becomes an advocacy piece that you can then get more resources for to influence action.

For Belinda Kelly (Executive Producer, Terrapin Puppet Theatre), a formal policy in essence says 'we're going to prioritise this' despite the challenges ahead and is imperative to assist an organisation through a rapid transition to a low-carbon economy:

In terms of value alignment... our mission is to make Tasmanian lives better in arts and culture, so we clearly need to be considering our footprint, education and doing better in terms of best practice.

For some grassroots organisations, sustainability is already embedded in their practices, that a policy is less of a necessity to uphold environmental standards. Eaton Gorge Theatre Company for instance, is a two-person company. It does not have a formal policy as sustainability is implicit in its organisational operation. For Juliet Scrine (CEO, Eaton Gorge Theatre Company), demonstrating sustainability practices can be more important than making a policy about them:

Because we are tiny...We don't have a written policy on our sustainability. I guess, we try to live it and show it rather than write it down... Sometimes you just do things because you think that's the right thing to do and you're not looking for any accolades...The fact that [theatre companies] are doing it is probably more important than them talking about it on their websites.

Although Theatre Kimberley and Vulcana Circus do not yet have a publicly available formal policy framework that incorporates climate justice, these companies already embed sustainability across their waste management procedures and practices. Creating formal policies appears more of a challenge for smaller companies, especially those with project-to-project funding models.

## Policy attributes

Companies with publicly-available sustainability plans have clear actions addressing the climate agenda. Among the companies interviewed, La Mama Theatre and Griffin Theatre have the most detailed plans, with sustainability commitments across their entire operations. Terrapin Puppet Theatre and The Blue Room Theatre have transparent and well-structured policies across design practices and sustainability procedures. Arts House are working on 'long arc' models for climate justice by building on the work of *Refuge* and other environmental



initiatives. Dancenorth have an ethical donations and partnerships policy, which ensures that they do not seek or approve donations from companies that do not align with their core values. The Blue Room is working on a new Equity & Justice Action Plan to include a decision-making tool for transparency across partnerships, sponsorship and philanthropy.

A selection of organisations have used existing policy frameworks as a way of developing new policies. Sue Giles (Co-CEO, Polyglot), for example, says that the company's Greenie-in-Residence grant (2015) was a valuable starting point for future policymaking:

We got a grant from the Australia Council to have a Greenie-in-Residence... a fund that allowed us to review and reflect on sustainability and start creating a policy around it...We were really aware of all the holes in our practice and that was the first step towards being able to put a proper plan around this. And then some of the funding bodies were also saying we

needed to have sustainability built into our applications. I always believe this is true about change...that you have to have your own practice, and change has to come from the grassroots as well as from the top.

Celia White (Artistic Director, Vulcana Circus) reiterated that having an existing framework to follow is helpful in starting the policymaking process:

[For] under resourced organisations like ours, examples of previous policies that you can adapt, and tweak as opposed to starting from scratch, would be really, really helpful...It's about legacy and consistency and if it just exists in the culture of an organisation because of the people who happen to sit there, then that can [easily] disappear when that person's no longer there. I think that's the urgency of getting some kind of policy structure or the beginnings of it, even if it's not finalised... a point to communicate that to anybody who comes into the building.

***"I think that our government[s] have struggled to communicate the importance of responding to climate change and biodiversity loss and perhaps that's filtering down to the State Government and practitioner level and therefore reflected in current grant criteria. But I do think there's a lot of ground-up practitioners who are already enthusiastically making this work and dedicated to creating meaningful change. The next step is for policy to reflect that change."***

***- Alys Daroy, Artistic Director, Shakespeare South***

## Embedding Climate Justice in the National Cultural Policy

For many of our interviewees, a national, policy-led, top-down approach for incentivising, encouraging and embedding sustainability into all aspects of performance-making and company operation is the way to achieve meaningful, long-term change. As Belinda Kelly (Executive Producer, Terrapin Puppet Theatre) highlights:

There are already numerous eco-theatrical and 'green theatre' resources available... Companies have every opportunity to improve their practices but this needs to be extended to State and Federal policy.

Transitioning to sustainable practices means rethinking many of the current structures that inhibit the embracing of sustainable practices and values. For Celia White (Artistic Director, Vulcana Circus), it is not just sustainability in terms of resource use, but the holistic transition to a circular economy, that requires policy leadership. Sue Giles (Co-CEO, Polygot Theatre) advocates for funding models that align with an environmental agenda:

Sustainability is much harder to get funding for, and it's expensive in the same way that access and childcare is expensive as well. Anything that sustains the way that we work adds to that budget... and this has to be built into funding expectations... That's a rationale that anybody at Australia Council, local Council, state government should understand. I think it's not only a missed

opportunity, but a missed responsibility as well. People already expect that with access, but they don't expect it with sustainability yet. It's about thinking, what's the care plan for this project? What is the well-being plan, the access plan and the sustainability plan? Those three things need to be addressed at the very beginning... And that's about rethinking planning, sourcing and bump in time... the costs associated with good practice gets quickly taken off the table.

The national cultural policy has the potential to support performing arts companies to set their own environmental agenda. Eloise Grace (Company Producer, Dancenorth) expresses the need for policy leadership by government to inform the industry on sustainability within policy development:

Policy, advocacy, and a concerted top-down approach for incentivising, encouraging and embedding sustainability is key... can we track the nation's cultural carbon footprint? This would perhaps command a broader understanding across the industry of the challenges and opportunities connected with sustainable choices.

## Conclusion

All 13 organisations interviewed for this study support the proposal that climate justice and environmental sustainability should be integrated into Australia's national cultural policy, as this has the most potential to foster sector-wide change. Federal and state

government policies encourage organisations to embrace sustainability, can open-up funding to support organisations to make the transition, and can act as frameworks for the development of organisation-specific policies. Most companies agree that an organisation-specific policy can be effective in formalising a company's sustainability practices and values, and ensuring that these practices and values are not vulnerable to staff turnover. Nevertheless, it was also apparent that for some companies, particularly very small companies, dedicated policies may not be necessary. Where policies are developed, they can include key performance indicators such as outlining goals for ecological sustainability across all organisational and creative processes as well as prioritising programming that aligns with a climate justice framework.





### Strategies for developing ecological policy include:

1. Considering formal policies as a way of prioritising company values and fostering accountability
2. Using existing policy frameworks to inform and develop new action plans
3. Ensuring that policy is developed in collaboration with companies' sustainability initiatives and practices
4. Supporting the proposal for embedding climate justice in our national cultural policy

# Steps Forward

Our report identifies numerous environmentally-focused works being programmed in Australia across dance, circus, puppetry and text-based theatre.

However, the desire to tell ecological stories and grapple with the climate crisis does not always translate into sustainable practices and formal policies. Many sustainability leaders we identify come from the small-to-medium performing arts sector — those with the least funding and resources, but the agility to rapidly adapt their programming and practices. Our scoping review indicates that most performing arts companies do not have a publicly-available environmental action plan or a visible commitment to sustainability, even if they are addressing it in their work and in their management structures. Considering the extensive activity and debate happening in other parts of the world (e.g. Arts Council England, Arts Council Quebec, European Theatre Convention, National Theatre London, Lyon Opera), there is much potential for Australian companies to prioritise and celebrate their sustainability achievements.

Industries related to performing arts, such as architecture and fashion, have been steadily accruing environmental resources, tools and precedents over the past decades. In contrast, sustainability is still a niche, albeit growing, concern among Australian performance-makers. We must now acknowledge the

current ecological crisis as a social, cultural, political and environmental opportunity for the Australian performing arts to forge its own path to sustainability – not only through the stories we tell but also in the ways we tell them.

There is much potential to grow this preliminary study to include both a broader and deeper investigation into sustainability programming, policy and practices across the Australian performing arts section. Some of these areas include:

- Measuring the approaches companies are using to gauge the effectiveness of their efforts
- Evaluating audience attendance and responses to eco-programming
- Creating a more detailed case-study approach to examine the feasibility and accountability of sustainability efforts
- Developing actionable outcomes for sustainable practice

As the sector recovers from a decade of funding cuts and COVID disruptions, there is a clear and strong need to investigate policy settings, funding models and support structures to steer Australia's performing arts sector towards a sustainable future. Beyond mitigating deleterious environmental impacts, the

live stage can be a vibrant platform to challenge, inform and engage audiences in conversations centred around our national response to climate change. The performing arts is a rich platform for presenting stories and experiences that can strengthen our common imagination, germinating new ways of collectively thinking and being in the world. As eco-playwright Teresa J. May (2013, p.193) writes, 'stories create a matrix of belonging, a living tissue between past and present, and between human and non-human communities'. The idea of coming together to bear witness to new ecological practices is important. It strengthens community bonds and reinforces that sustainability is a value we should all cherish. This precious opportunity to change is ours to share. If 'all the world is a stage', let us show the world who we can be.

**Image to left:  
When the World Turns  
Production by Polyglot Theatre, Oily  
Cart & Arts Centre Melbourne  
Photo by Theresa Harrison**





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*Image:  
Barramundi, Big Country Puppets Mulan 2021  
Performed by the Paraku Rangers and  
John Pujajangka-Piyirn School students  
Production by Theatre Kimberley  
Photo by Sarah Duguid*







# Resources

## Sustainability Tools

### The Arts on Tour Green Touring Toolkit

The Green Touring Toolkit is a step-by-step guide to help organisations move towards a carbon neutral touring model. <https://artsontour.com.au/green-touring/>

### Circulate

Circulate is an online emissions calculator by Arup, specifically made for the creative sector. <https://circulate.arup.com>

### The Creative Climate Justice Hub

The Creative Climate Justice Hub is a dynamic library of climate justice resources curated for the arts and culture community. <https://juliesbicycle.com/creative-climate-justice/>

### EDEOS

Developed by the Lyon Opera, EDEOS is an eco-design decision making tool that provides a footprint calculator too assess the impact of stage sets in four categories: climate, human health, ecosystems and non-renewable resources. For more information about EDEOS see: <https://ecoscenography.com/2020/11/24/opera-production-the-circular-economy-interview-with-thierry-leonardi-lyon-opera/>

### Theatre Green Book

The Green Book is an initiative by the whole of theatre that supports theatre makers to work more sustainably, from making theatre productions and buildings sustainable to improving operations like catering and front of house. <https://theatregreenbook.com/>

### The Creative Green platform

Supported by the Quebec Council for Eco-responsible Events (CQEER), the Creative Green Tools are a free set of unique carbon calculators developed by Julie's Bicycle specifically for the creative industries. <https://www.quebecdrama.org/creative-green>  
To use: <https://canada.ig-tools.com/login>

### Shift It

SHIFTIT is a Norwegian digital platform for exchanging props, scenography, costumes, materials, technical equipment and instruments - from the entire cultural field. [https://www.svmil.no/shiftit?lang=en&fbclid=IwAR1u1RExN6\\_kOeretg6WJU68FEhRXHILRmq\\_V45Eh2eFAKn-IFsIJa3t9fo](https://www.svmil.no/shiftit?lang=en&fbclid=IwAR1u1RExN6_kOeretg6WJU68FEhRXHILRmq_V45Eh2eFAKn-IFsIJa3t9fo)



# Sustainability Initiatives

## **BREEAM**

BREEAM is arguably the world's leading science-based suite of validation and certification systems for creating sustainable built environments.

For more information see: <https://bregroup.com/products/breeam/>

## **Broadway Green Alliance US**

An industry-wide initiative encouraging environmentally friendly practices for American theatre.

<https://www.broadwaygreen.com/about-us>

## **Climate Change Theatre Action**

A worldwide series of readings and performances of short climate change plays presented biennially to coincide with the United Nations COP meetings.

<http://www.climatechangetheatreaction.com/about/>

## **Ellen MacArthur Foundation**

A group working to accelerate the transition to a circular economy.

<https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/>

## **Green Star by Green Building Council Australia**

A rating system that sets the standard for healthy, resilient, positive buildings and places.

<https://new.gbca.org.au/green-star/exploring-green-star/>

## **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**

United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change.

<https://www.ipcc.ch/>

## **Julie's Bicycle**

Julie's Bicycle is a non-for-profit organisation that provides environmental expertise to the creative sector through high-impact programmes and policy change.

<https://juliesbicycle.com/>

## **Sustainable Theatres Australia**

Production Disposal Directory

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1QyinFb-LyKZxvfWwAqMfvo3LEIHfzT2F7Rj2UAxPE8E/edit#gid=0>

## **WELL**

Explore a commitment to health, safety, equity and performance.

<https://www.wellcertified.com/>





## Action Plans

### **The Arts Council England's Environmental Action Plan (formed in 2012)**

The internal plan for the Arts Council England between 2022-24  
<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/environmental-responsibility-action-plan-2022-24>

### **ARUP**

Arup commits to whole lifecycle carbon assessments for all buildings work and withdrawal from fossil fuels from next year.

<https://www.arup.com/news-and-events/arup-commits-to-whole-lifecycle-carbon-assessments-for-buildings-and-withdrawal-from-fossil-fuels>

### **Charcoalblue Environmental Impact Pledge**

Charcoalblue is a global design consultancy who are committed to embedding environmental innovation and awareness across their work in the visual, performing arts and architectural community.

<https://www.charcoalblue.com/news/view/charcoalblue-introduces-environmental-impact-pledge-2021>  
<https://www.charcoalblue.com/news/view/earth-day-2022-sustainability-in-theatre>

### **Mayor of London's Green Theatre Plan UK**

A Climate action plan and analysis for theatre in London.

[https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/green\\_theatre\\_summary.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/green_theatre_summary.pdf)

### **National Cultural Policy of the Albanese Labor Government**

The five-year plan to revive the arts in Australia, recently launched in January 2023.

<https://www.arts.gov.au/publications/national-cultural-policy-revive-place-every-story-story-every-place>

### **The National Theatre Sustainability Plan**

The National Theatre Sustainability Plan is a commitment to embed environmental sustainability into all practices, reduce emissions, follow the standards of the 'Theatre Green Book' and share sustainable theatre knowledge.

<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/about-us/sustainability>

### **NIDA Green**

NIDA sharing their goal to become a leading sustainability educator in the creative and cultural industries.

<https://www.nida.edu.au/about-nida/nida-green>

### **Sydney Opera House's Environmental Action Plan (2020-23)**

<https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/content/dam/pdfs/environment/environmental-action-plan-2020.pdf>



# Conferences and Festivals

**ART + CLIMATE = CHANGE Festival (Australia)**

<https://climarte.org>

**EMOS Ecodrama Festival (USA)**

<https://www.earthmattersonstage.com>

**Festival of Ecological Theatre for Children and Youth (Serbia)**

<https://www.fep.org.rs/festival-of-ecological-theatre.html>

**The Green Theatre Festival (Mumbai)**

<https://ecofolks.com/green-theatre-festival>

**International Drama in Education Research Institute Conference 2022**

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/idieri2022>

**International Federation of Theatre Research 2021**

<https://iftr.org/conference>

**World Stage Design 2022**

<https://wsd2021.ca>

*Image below:*

*A Midsummer Night's Dream, 2021*

*Directed by Peter Evans*

*Production by Bell Shakespeare*

*Photo by Brett Boardman*

*Image to left and far right:*

*When the World Turns*

*Production by Polyglot Theatre, Oily*

*Cart & Arts Centre Melbourne*

*Photo by Theresa Harrison*



Cover Image: *When the World Turns*  
Production by Polyglot Theatre, Oily Cart & Arts Centre Melbourne  
Photo by Theresa Harrison

## Culture for Climate

A preliminary study into how Australian performing arts organisations are responding to the global environmental crisis

**PRELIMINARY REPORT**  
March 2023

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