



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

**INAUGURAL COMEDY FESTIVAL &
DARWIN ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE**

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This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

It is important for the CLP government to be reminded of honouring the commitments to water quality, security and regulations as part of the inquiry by Justice Pepper. Working with the Commonwealth will also enable the Territory to have a comprehensive understanding of the Commonwealth water trigger and what it means, how it can be enacted and any consequential flow-on effects that has on the Territory.

It is important that we get this right. There are many pieces to the water puzzle. I have highlighted a number of areas that I believe are a step in the right direction. There will always need to be work done in this space because the landscape will change. As we try to respond and adapt to and address climate change, we will have to deal with the consequences of that; we will also have to deal with consequences of inaction on climate change.

I thank honourable members for indulging me in this motion tonight. I understand that there are several members who wish to speak. I am interested in hearing from members of the CLP government as to whether they will accept this motion and bring a safe drinking water Act before parliament in this term of government. I am interested in hearing whether they will agree to a moratorium on new water licences and whether they will support an independent review in partnership with the Commonwealth.

This is an opportunity for the CLP to demonstrate that it has learnt from the history of its party, when the CLP focused only on giving water allocations to their mates and political candidates. It is an opportunity to learn from that and move forward.

As I said at the start of my speech I cannot change the past, but I can be involved in shaping the future. As a parliament we can shape the future together and develop a series of comprehensive water security and water quality reforms because it is the right thing to do. Every one of us depends on access to water and to good-quality drinking water. Without it we do not exist, and our country and landscapes do not exist. Without it we are not healthy; we are deprived. We cannot survive without water. As many of our environmental groups rightly put it, water is life, and without it we are nothing.

I am mindful of the time, and I acknowledge that this will appear as an order of the day. I very much look forward to working with the parliament to bring back this motion. Many members should have a say on this because our constituents expect us to have a clear position on a number of elements that are in this motion.

I look forward to speaking about this further. I urge government members to consider the motion, as we will bring it back shortly. I am happy to meet with any member of parliament to talk about the motion and any additional amendments that may be required to get it over the line and have this comprehensive work undertaken.

Debate suspended.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I am privileged to report that I represented my colleague, Hon Jinson Charls, Minister for Arts, to launch the inaugural Darwin Comedy Festival recently. I thought we could all use a bit of levity and that it was worth reflecting on what a great event it was.

The minister and I are frequently confused for being one another, and it was nice for a change to go to an event and be confused for being Nazeem Hussain. I suspect that was the primary reason I got subbed in at the last minute for the event, but I was delighted to attend, nevertheless.

The festival was held over three days from 6 to 8 March at the Darwin Entertainment Centre. By all measures the event was a raging success and brought in large crowds with dozens of fantastic sold-out shows. Darwin and our visitors deserve the best live performance experiences that Australia has to offer, and this festival delivered some of that. Some of the best comedians in the country flew to the Top End for our audiences to enjoy. In total 57 comedians performed at the festival, bringing our community together and sharing some much-needed laughter and joy with all of us.

The stellar line-up of headline comedians included luminaries like Celeste Barber; Reuben Kaye; Sammy J; Luke McGregor; Geraldine Hickey; the Aboriginal Comedy Allstars; and, of course, Nazeem Hussain. These headliners were supported by a show for families, including Children are Stinky—which I can report was more pleasant to attend than it sounds—and, importantly, an amazing line-up of local comedians thanks to Sarah Reuben, Brent Watkinson and the team at Top Floor Comedy who coordinated the Laugh Lounge shows.

A shout-out goes to some of my constituents in that regard for supporting local comedy, notably Briant and Monica from The Last Supper Pizzeria, who regularly put on comedy outside of the festival to support people, and likewise Bardy and Stu at the One Mile Brewing Company who bring up comedians periodically as well. Those guys are providing the feeder for events like RAW Comedy for emerging comedians. For those of you who are uninitiated, the Melbourne International Comedy Festival's annual RAW Comedy event is Australia's largest and most celebrated open-mic competition.

It is super important we provide our constituents with the opportunity to be part of that. That is a segue to talking about opportunity, which is the serious part of the speech, if you like. The Darwin Entertainment Centre provides a pathway for artists of all types, not just professionals but also amateurs and community groups, with an opportunity and spaces for self-expression, which is just so important.

The Entertainment Centre is deeply committed to bringing vibrancy to our city year-round, and it is worth highlighting because the Darwin Entertainment Centre is yet another fixture of our landscape, but it is so easy to take for granted. Why? Because at its core, through art, culture, storytelling, theatre and music, the DEC plays its part to ensure that Darwin is indeed a great place to live, work and play.

DEC's programs are extremely diverse and inclusive and seek to bring in a plethora of options for our audiences to enjoy, ranging from music to circus and from dance to comedy. It is so much more than just a hall for hire; it is a place that boasts a music program, a family program, a creative learning program for schools to enrich the curriculum and inspire young people, plus a First Nations program featuring things like the Garrmalang Festival. Likewise, it supports our arts sector through partnerships with the Darwin Festival, Darwin Fringe Festival and artists in residence, including SLIDE Youth Dance Theatre, Gary Lang NT Dance Company and, of course, the Darwin Symphony Orchestra.

To quantify that contribution, just consider the following numbers. The Darwin Entertainment Centre welcomes over 78,000 attendees every year; employs over 9,000 artists and performers; educates more than 9,000 students and children through its programs; and supports some 23 community groups with access to stages and subsidies worth more than \$250,000. What then of those numbers is the return on investment?

A recent Darwin Entertainment Centre impact and evaluation study will tell you that 94% of the attendees at shows feel welcome, which is a great thing; that 95% of those attendees report having a really positive experience when they go; and that 82% of those respondents—this is an important one—would not have visited the area if the event they attended had not been held.

Think about that as a little footnote. We all bemoan the state of the CBD and the fact that it and the numbers are not what they used to be and that it is tough for small businesses to stay afloat in this climate. The Entertainment Centre is one of the drawcards that bring people into the city. Take note of this statistic: 87% of attendees spend money in the CBD when they come to attend a Darwin Entertainment Centre production. Those visits are extremely important. Some 41% of respondents in that same evaluation study noted that they would like to see more cultural events in Darwin.

We often talk in this place about competitive and strategic advantages and leveraging our opportunities. I reckon two of the ones that we could really make a lot more use of in terms of bang for buck, return on investment and what they contribute to not just our economy but also our society—the rich tapestry of everything, art, and dare I say it, food. If you want bang for buck the greatest return on investment and economic endeavour that this town runs is the Laksa Festival. It costs nothing to put on, everyone attends it and we all enjoy it. Obviously, my tummy is grumbling a bit and that is probably a bit of bias, but I think that we could do more to leverage our competitive advantage by thinking about what we can do in the arts space as well as in the food space.

A member: Hear, hear!

Dr RAHMAN: Thank you.

The sum total of that recent impact and evaluation study pointed out that every dollar of funding we spend in the Entertainment Centre space has a return on investment of \$9.83. That is a remarkable statistic. I freely admit that it is its own evaluation study, so it could be on the rosier side of things. Even so, the return on investment is undoubtedly high for what we do at the Entertainment Centre. It is an important institution to support to make sure it can continue to provide support to our wider community. Can you imagine what our city landscape would be like if we did not have an entertainment centre to host events?

I will be doing my part in my side hustle as a musician to make sure that we put on things at the Entertainment Centre when we can—and things that kids can access. The Entertainment Centre recently worked with community theatre groups that put on enormous productions like the *Mary Poppins* production, which I will come back to talk about at length because I have another 10 minutes to go on how excellent *Mary Poppins* was. I will hold off on that one for tonight. The point is that the Entertainment Centre is providing space and a suite of opportunities that are difficult to come by.

I thank the DEC board and the DEC team who worked incredibly hard to bring this festival to light and to activate our city in a new and exciting way. We talk about words like 'activation'. What does it take to activate a city? It takes the goodwill, hard work, cooperation and collaboration of people in our arts communities as well. They have been to some extent overlooked over a period of time. We have a thriving arts sector in the Northern Territory. It has always had a disproportionately high number of people involved for a place that has only 250,000 people across the entire Northern Territory.

I specifically thank Georgia Hendy, the recently appointed DEC CEO, who hails from Sydney and who has brought her family here to make a valuable contribution. She personally curated a lot of the Comedy Festival artists. I sat next to her at the Reuben Kaye show. The whole audience was clinging on desperately, waiting to see who would be offended and leave first. She had the right judgement to pick the right sort of comedian who would push the envelope and make it a spicy and entertaining event for everyone in every regard.

I also shout out to a special Fong Lim constituent, the DEC Chair, Hon Clare Martin AO, who graciously hosted and roasted me at a number of shows that I was able to attend.

I applaud the strategic planning of the CEO and the board. It is smart timing to put on a festival now as part of the festival circuit, allowing us to capitalise on the momentum elsewhere.

In closing, I wish the Darwin Comedy Festival and the Darwin Entertainment Centre every success. I look forward to this becoming a regular fixture in the Northern Territory arts calendar.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I will talk about a charity event that part of our CLP team is participating in at the moment: the March On Challenge. The dynamic team members who have gone in this event are the Members for Drysdale, Wanguri, Port Darwin and yours truly. We are doing a virtual walk of the Kokoda Track to raise money.

What is March On with Soldier On? I quote:

March On with Soldier On is a virtual walking challenge to raise funds to help prevent veteran suicide. It pays tribute to the sacrifices made by our brave soldiers in Kokoda in World War II, and highlighting the importance of needing to help our soldiers of today.

It is a worthy cause. The way it works is you sign up, try to get donors and then log your steps. You can choose to do either the 96 kilometres to Kokoda or, for my sins, I have tried to do the return one, which is about 196 kilometres. That is done within the month.

We are doing it as a team; we set a goal. We all put in a goal of what we would raise which was \$2,270. Collectively we have raised \$1,733 so far. I am happy to approach any member who wants to donate. It is open to everyone. I can send you the link. I am more than happy for the opposition and the Independents to come and join us, as well as any of our colleagues.

It is a good cause. It is challenging, particularly being the F-grade athlete that I am. I have clocked up 101 of the 192 kilometres I am supposed to do by the end of March. How the hell have I done that? You have to ask yourself, 'How can Brian do that?' I will tell you how. I cheat because I log my steps when I deliver my newsletter. Over the last couple of weeks I have visited over 1,000 houses in the Karama electorate. That is a lot of kilometres.

One action serves many purposes. I get out and connect with my constituents and residents. At the same time I am clocking kilometres to raise money. The wonderful constituents of Karama have also volunteered to donate money. I will relay the case of when I walked out of the Karama Shopping Plaza the other day. A guy, Tony, came up and said, 'Brian, are you walking the Kokoda Track?' I said, 'I'm not quite walking it. It is a virtual walk. We just log it.' I explained it to him. He said, 'I want to give you \$100'. I was about to go, and I said, 'The office is shut. I can send you a link and you can email it.' He said, 'No, I want to give it to you'.