

January 7, 2022

SECORD CALLS ON ARTS MINISTER TO CONSIDER ANTI-BDS LAWS

NSW Shadow Arts Minister Walt Secord has called on the new NSW Arts Minister Ben Franklin to consider introducing American-style anti-BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) legislation.

This was in response to the attempted boycott this month of a Sydney Dance Company performance at the Sydney Festival called "Decadance" by lauded Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin of the internationally-renowned Batsheva Dance Company.

Mr Secord said the Sydney Festival has been subjected to disgraceful and intolerable pressure for accepting a \$20,000 partnership with the Israeli Embassy in Canberra to stage the dance piece, despite contributions from foreign embassies to the Sydney Festival being entirely routine.

Last month (December 21, 2021) Mr Secord wrote to the Sydney Festival and the Sydney Dance Company expressing his support for them and calling on them not to bow to the extreme BDS movement.

But it also coincided with the publication of an open letter featuring the names of more than 120 international entertainment industry professionals arguing against the boycott. Released by an American organisation called [Creative Community For Peace](#), with the signatories largely American industry figures, but including Australian producer Emile Sherman, singer Deborah Conway, musician Willy Zygiel and director Stephan Elliott.

In the United States, at least 35 States have laws, executive orders or formal resolutions against boycotts of Israel.

In November 2016, Pennsylvania passed a law prohibiting the State Government from contracting with any entity that engages in the BDS against Israel.

Mr Secord said: "While I acknowledge that the Arts Minister Ben Franklin has posted about the performance on his Facebook page at 2pm on January 8, it is now time for real and meaningful action on the BDS. I also note that nowhere does he denounce the vile BDS movement."

Last week (January 7, 2022), Mr Secord wrote to NSW Arts Minister Ben Franklin asking that the Perrottet Government consider introducing a policy whereby if NSW arts organisations agree to the BDS policy or ban Israeli artists or productions, then they will not receive State government funding."

Mr Secord said that while the Sydney Festival's January 6 performance of Decadance went ahead – to nothing less than rave reviews – he was aware of other NSW arts organisations, which were considering joining or endorsing the aims of the BDS movement.

He also said that he was aware that overseas experience shows that arts organisations have extended their boycott to include performers who were born in Israel or are Israeli citizens – or performances with Jewish themes. "That is irrational, bigoted, and absolutely unacceptable," he said.

"Unfortunately, I fear that the 2022 Sydney Festival experience will see NSW arts groups reluctant to invite Israeli performers and artists to our shores – or refuse to stage Israeli or Jewish-themed plays. This will also inhibit important cultural exchanges.

"And ironically, a boycott of Israel is utterly counter-productive. It hurts not just the Israeli government, but Jewish and Arab citizens, and the Palestinian people too.

"Worse yet, it actually makes Israeli-Palestinian peace more distant. So many of the Israeli acts targeted are in fact the greatest proponents for peace, and the strongest critics of Israeli government policy. Boycotts, apart from being repugnant, are inexplicable if your goal truly is a peaceful resolution to the conflict."

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