

Open Letter to Theatre New Zealand

22 September 2026

Open Letter to the Executive and General Membership of Theatre New Zealand

From: Theatre New Zealand Life Members

Bryan Aitken, Ewen Coleman QSM, Pam Logan KSM, Margaret Robertson QSM, Steven Arnold,
Murray Lynch ONZM

Dear Executive and Members,

We acknowledge and thank Paul Percy, the recent President of Theatre New Zealand, who has resigned due to ill health. We wish Paul well and sincerely thank him for his leadership and guardianship of Theatre New Zealand.

As Life Members, we have met to consider a number of matters that we believe require the attention of the membership and Executive at this important point for the organisation. We respectfully request that this letter be circulated to members and formally recorded at the 2026 AGM on Sunday, 27 September. We are available to speak to any of the matters raised.

1. Governance and Leadership

The current vacancy in the presidency highlights a gap in the existing Constitution, which does not appear to provide adequately for a President resigning during a term of office. We therefore ask the membership to support an appropriate process at this AGM to enable the election of a President, together with any other vacant positions, subject to the normal democratic procedures.

In the absence of a President, we support Marilyn Ollet chairing the AGM. We also support Marilyn being considered for the presidency, subject to the appropriate election process.

More broadly, we believe the time is right for a considered review of:

- the composition and responsibilities of the Executive;
- the regional structure and its effectiveness;
- the tenure and succession of office holders; and
- the relationship between the Executive, regions and wider membership.

The objective should be to establish a governance structure that is sustainable, representative and capable of supporting the future needs of Theatre New Zealand and its members.

2. THEATREFEST

We commend the Executive for achieving healthy entry numbers at the most recent THEATREFEST and acknowledge the considerable work involved in delivering the event.

At the same time, we believe the current systems, processes, format and associated events now require a thorough review. That review should consider the needs and expectations of participating teams, organisers, communities, past contributors, the public and adjudicating bodies, while ensuring that THEATREFEST remains sustainable and fit for purpose. Clear communication channels, responsibilities, expectations and timelines should be established and consistently applied.

3. Relationship with ANZDA

We strongly encourage Theatre New Zealand to normalise and rebuild its relationship with the Association of New Zealand Drama Adjudicators (ANZDA), and to recommence contractual discussions. As Theatre New Zealand reviews and clarifies its aims and objectives, we believe ANZDA should be offered first right of refusal for the adjudication role. This would recognise the longstanding relationship between the two organisations and honour the historical intent and contribution of both.

4. IATA 2027 Wellington

We support the decision to postpone the proposed IATA 2027 Wellington event, given the significant challenges around funding, the availability of international teams, disruption to international travel, marketing timeframes and the availability of people required on the ground. We believe the Executive should now also give serious consideration to cancelling the event rather than continuing to commit resources to an undertaking for which the necessary conditions may not exist. This would allow Theatre New Zealand to concentrate its resources and energy on strengthening its core activities and membership.

5. Membership and Community Engagement

We believe rebuilding and strengthening relationships with the membership must be a priority for the Executive. This should include meaningful engagement with theatre societies, schools and associations throughout New Zealand, supported by:

- workshops and professional development;
- advocacy for community theatre;
- regular and accessible communication; and
- opportunities for members and regions to contribute to the organisation's direction.

A strong national organisation depends upon an active, informed and connected membership.

6. SHOWCASE

We seek clarity regarding the current status, planning and intended delivery of SHOWCASE, as there appears to be limited concrete information available at this stage. We suggest that consideration be given to cancelling the event and recognising the current participating teams as the Final, making their achievement the ultimate reward. Whether this is a one-off decision or becomes part of a longer-term approach should be considered alongside the wider organisational review proposed under Item 2.

7. SUMMER SCHOOL

We strongly support the concept of SUMMER SCHOOL and recognise the logistical and financial challenges involved in delivering it effectively. We also recognise its potential value in developing individuals, strengthening communities and creating opportunities for learning and connection throughout the theatre sector. It is an initiative that aligns well with the constitutional objectives of Theatre New Zealand and deserves continued consideration and support.

Conclusion

We offer these comments in a spirit of constructive support and with genuine respect for the considerable work undertaken by the Executive, volunteers, members and the many generations of people who have contributed to Theatre New Zealand. We believe Theatre New Zealand has an important role to play in supporting, developing and advocating for community theatre throughout New Zealand. This is therefore an opportunity to take stock, strengthen the organisation, reconnect with its membership and ensure that its governance, programmes and priorities are sustainable and fit for the future.

We encourage the Executive and membership to consider these matters openly and constructively at the AGM. Our intention is not to diminish the work that has been done, but to contribute our experience and support to ensuring that Theatre New Zealand continues to serve its members and the wider community theatre movement effectively.

Yours sincerely,

Theatre New Zealand Life Members

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