



YUIN FOLK CLUB
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22 October 2020

Committee Secretary

Senate Committee on Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries and Institutions
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Chair and Members

The Yuin Folk Club has produced the annual Cobargo Folk Festival for 25 years. A medium sized volunteer-run event. The Cobargo Folk Festival is recognised as a NSW tourism Flagship Event. The festival is renowned locally, nationally and internationally for the quality of its artistic program, its contribution to regional cultural activity, for its support of Australian and international performers, and for its contribution to the regional economy, community connectedness and the overall wellbeing of the Cobargo and Far South Coast community.

The Club wishes the attached document be considered as its submission to the Inquiry.

As a member of the NSW Folk Federation, we also wish to register our endorsement of the Federation's submission.

We are happy to talk further to our submission.

Yours sincerely

Peter Logue
President
Yuin Folk Club Inc
Cobargo

Zena Armstrong
Director
Cobargo Folk Festival

**Senate Committee on Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries and
Institutions
Submission from the Yuin Folk Club Inc, Cobargo**

Specific terms of reference addressed by this submission:

The direct and indirect economic benefits and employment opportunities of creative and cultural industries and how to recognise, measure and grow them.

Destination NSW has estimated the total contribution to the regional economy of our festival including flow-on benefits at close to \$2m. In 2019, we contracted more than 60 local, national and international acts, amounting to around 180 paid performers. We also provide employment opportunities and income for a range of contractors, tradespeople, suppliers and merchant traders including but not limited to tent, stage, sound and lighting and equipment hire providers, security, photographers and videographers, managers and booking agents, professional services, market stall and food vendors.

We provide professional development opportunities and training for our volunteers in event management, security and risk planning, not-for-profit governance, event production, construction and staging, young musicians, sound and digital, and waste management. This work is helping build skills and capacity in a region that does not have many opportunities for training in this area.

We put back into the local community through our program of grants and donations, supporting capital improvements at the Cobargo Showground, providing funding to support improvements in community owned assets in Cobargo village and support for community music and artistic development, particularly for young musicians in the Cobargo region.

Our festival has conducted professional market research and audience surveys over many years which demonstrates that the festival and its promotion is a significant factor in attracting tourism to Cobargo outside of the festival weekend.

The non-economic benefits that enhance community, social wellbeing and promoting Australia's national identity, and how to recognise, measure and grow them.

In Cobargo, we are now ten months into the long process of recovering from the bushfires that destroyed so much of the eastern seaboard.

The work we are doing to get our community back on its feet has brought home to us the enormous **social capital** that's generated by community-run events like the Cobargo Folk Festival.

Many of our core festival volunteers have been, and continue to be, closely involved in ongoing relief and recovery efforts.

Their skills and experience in event and project management, not-for-profit governance, financial management, production and community engagement is proving to be of great value in supporting Cobargo's recovery.

Their commitment to volunteerism, their well-established networks across the community plus long habits of cooperation and trusted relationships are invaluable assets. The success of our festival relies upon this close cooperation with other community groups and on the goodwill and support of the local community more broadly.

In addition, the festival's many supporters - performers, audience, stallholders, suppliers, other folk festivals and folk clubs - have rallied around Cobargo in the aftermath of the fire. This group has contributed a very significant portion of the almost \$700,000 raised by the Cobargo Community Bushfire Recovery Fund Inc. and we are very grateful for this support. The community recovery projects now underway in Cobargo, Quaama and elsewhere in our district would not have got off the ground with these generous contributions.

The active involvement of so many festival volunteers and supporters in the relief and rebuild of Cobargo is a clear demonstration of the extent to which events like

the Cobargo Folk Festival, contribute to the social capital of small communities, to overall community connectedness and to social wellbeing.

The impact of COVID-19 on the creative and cultural industries.

We believe that Covid-19 is just one manifestation of the type of extreme natural disaster that has potential to disrupt the events industry in the years ahead.

The Cobargo Folk Festival was to celebrate its 25th anniversary in February this year, with a top line-up of local, national and international talent.

We cancelled the event in January because of the bushfires.

Nine members of our 12-member committee were very directly affected, losing homes, property, with close family members having lost homes or suffering illness exacerbated by events. Others were defending their homes well into February.

Our community lost family and friends in these fires, saw the destruction of many of the beautiful historic buildings in Cobargo village, and our natural environment was, and remains, devastated.

In addition, the Cobargo Showground - the festival venue - was used for many months as the relief centre, providing shelter and support for people who had lost their homes and as the distribution centre for the tonnes of donations that flooded into the village after the fires.

Delivering a festival in these circumstances was a little beyond us.

We planned a major bushfire benefit concert for Cobargo, headlining Lee Kernaghan and Shane Howard. This was to be a 5000 person event at the showground in May, raising around \$200,000 for our bushfire affected Community.

All the performers and production crew were donating their time -- all the stages, sound and lighting were donated.

Covid put paid to this event -- another considerable blow.

And we recently announced the cancellation of the 2021 Cobargo Folk Festival in October. As well as the restrictions placed upon all of us by Covid, many of our organisers and volunteers are still working hard to recover from the effects of the New Year's Eve bushfires. Those fires have had a direct impact on many of our leadership team and it's important that they have time to get back to what now passes for normal.

Covid is such a conundrum for organisers.

Of course, we want festivals to go ahead - and we really need a festival in Cobargo after the year we've been through - but not if it means risk to peoples' health and financial damage to our organisation.

Can anyone run a relaxed, feelgood, friendly folk festival in this deeply uncertain environment?

In November, we are running two small concerts in Cobargo for just 50 people each, as part of Great Southern Nights.

The Covid-plan requires us to pre-ticket everyone, keep email and phone records **and** provide them to health authorities if requested.

Then we have to place people in numbered seats with four metre spacing - leaving empty seats or drawing markers on the ground to ensure people keep at the right distance - this has to be policed and enforced.

Then we must clean down doorknobs and other high touch surfaces regularly through the event. We have to disinfect stage surfaces and stage gear between acts. At the end of the concert everything has to be Covid-cleaned - including every seat - before packdown.

Cleaning is not a risk we are prepared to place on our volunteers so we are paying to bring in professional cleaners. Imagine the amount of work if we ran an outdoor event with just 500, let alone a three day event with camping and many thousands - a costly nightmare!

Our regional folk festivals are so much more than a simple concert experience.

The part that is harder to regulate is the people hanging out in the bar, in their campsites, mingling with old and new friends, meeting strangers and sharing spaces.

How do you police the 1.5m rule when people really want to be close to each other, singing, dancing and playing?

Not many folk festival organisers are comfortable policing behaviour even in normal times.

It is of course much easier to manage behaviour when people are arranged in seating ringed by marking tape, when they have a ticket with a row number and when you can see immediately who is getting out of Covid-line.

Corralling people like this reduces the chance of the unexpected, grinds down all the unpredictable edges and shuts down the potential for the creative chaos out of which wonderful art is born.

But for us this is no answer, even though it may suit the times. And this is not a folk festival.

Avenues for increasing access and opportunities for Australia's creative and cultural industries through innovation and the digital environment.

In many ways volunteer-run festivals - if they have a rainy day fund as we do - are relatively well-placed to simply ride out the turbulence and re-engage when the time is right.

Our smaller size (6000 total participants over the three days) and our business model keeps our upfront costs low and our financial exposure in the event of cancellation is also relatively low.

Here in Cobargo, we don't have an office and our event management is done almost totally online. Covid presents little change to work practices and we have no overheads.

We have no staff to support and so have avoided that terrible responsibility of laying off people in difficult circumstances - unlike so many other events with paid administrators.

A key organisational challenge for community-run festivals is maintaining contact with our volunteer base and festival supporters so that when conditions ease we can step up activities quickly. Our volunteers are invaluable and their contribution is the only way that we keep these festivals running.

We have good outreach through our social media platforms, email lists and word-of-mouth. But for how long can we hold our base together without an event to celebrate?

Perhaps our greatest concern however, is the devastating impact of Covid on performers - in Australia and internationally.

Musicians have been knocked sideways by Covid. Many are just giving up and leaving behind years of hard work dedicated to developing their skills.

Many young people with promising musical lives ahead of them are making the hard decision not to take up a career in music.

Many independent artists weren't even able to access JobKeeper - most are on a reduced rate and will be required to look for work outside music quite soon. This diminishing of so many unique Australian voices is a national tragedy.

One part of a solution here may be more direct grants for musicians to support artistic development and new works; and a more flexible and extended Jobkeeper to ensure our musicians are well-supported, like other businesses, workers and

professionals? More direct support to develop appealing digital branding and compelling online content would help performers and small festivals alike.

If Covid does continue into a second and third year will we be able to adapt in a way that keeps the folk sector viable? Are online events a suitable alternative when we are already drowning in content? Will we have to cage everybody to run festivals - stripping out the heart of everything that makes folk festivals fun?

The folk sector has few solutions as yet. The NSW Folk Federation ran the second Sydney Folk Festival entirely online in August, live-streaming some stunning performances on Facebook. It's an option. It ran at a loss though.

Yet adversity always presents opportunity, and given the right support, we could be moving into a very creative period for Australian independent artists.

Covid has put the brakes on international performers touring Australia. Many international artists on tour in Australia this year lost money when their tours were cancelled.

Quite apart from the travel bans, many internationals will be thinking twice about coming here and are very likely looking at introducing cancellation clauses into their contracts, with more upfront payments and the like. This will put them out of reach for many small to medium-sized festivals. It is inevitable that artistic programs will feature more local and national acts - which will be a very welcome development if it Australian artists have the resources to step up.

We also need some new thinking about getting folk, roots and world music out there given the ABC's decision to kill off most of its independent music programs. We need an Aussie equivalent of the Folk Alley online radio station in the US. And what about an Aussie folk and roots television station - with the NSW Folk Federation we have developed a great concept... but it needs funding.

In Cobargo we are focusing on small concerts and upping our support of music education and development locally. We would like to see more done to encourage music education across the community - not just in the classical genre but in folk, world and roots music.

We are working with local musicians to deliver workshops for young musicians, focusing on songwriting and performance skills, using Covid quick response funding.

We are funding community music projects - using bushfire recovery funding to use music to address trauma and nurture community wellbeing.

The aim is not only to produce musicians for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra but to encourage parents and children to see music as an activity that anyone can take up, has proven educational and health benefits, can be done in community and is heaps of fun.

Creating opportunities to learn music in communities is one way of making sure that children and adults alike can come to love **musicking** - making music not just consuming music - as much as we do, and to ensure that music learning and playing doesn't fall completely off the national agenda. An active community music program will help all of us to keep engaged with our base and to develop our future festival performers, audience and organisers.

The best mechanism for ensuring cooperation and delivery of policy between layers of government

Like others in the events and music industry we are advocating for greater government support. Recent studies show that festivals contribute \$2.7 billion to GDP. Add to that the immeasurable benefits that festivals, music and art brings to social well-being and connectedness -- we are a sector that not only **needs** but **merits** the kind of support given to other industries.

The longer Covid is around the more our sector will be eroded without significant external assistance - a larger Covid stimulus package, perhaps -- without which it will be very tough to make the comeback when the time is right.

Pandemic-risk and compliance measures may be required for a long time yet - we may never be free of them. The cost burden will fall wholly on the event producer, given the demonstrated reluctance of governments to assist the sector.

The insurance issue alone is a massive hurdle. We've cancelled three events now - none of which had event cancellation insurance for either bushfires or pandemics. And as we all know, the insurance industry has moved swiftly to exclude communicable diseases from their event cancellation policies. Can bushfire and extreme weather exclusions be that far behind?

We endorse the calls from others in the festivals sector for more endeavour from governments and the insurance industry to find mechanisms that will enable event producers to reduce their exposure -- beyond the endless competition for grant funding.

From a community festival perspective, the best projects are those that are community generated in response to local needs. Extending and strengthening the regional development network for arts and culture will help community organisations identify those needs, to develop projects that are suitable for funding, to compete for grant funding and to implement successful projects.

However, meaningful government support of the arts requires a recognition of the importance of a dynamic and thriving Australian cultural sector. We are living in increasingly challenging times. Australia has its own stories to tell about our infinitely complex lives. It's our musicians, artists, writers, poets, filmmakers, craftspeople, dancers, performers and many other creators who help us do this, who help us make sense of the world around us. Without them, the Australian story, in all its diversity, is doomed to fall into obscurity.

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