

**Submission
No 85**

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Arts Northern Rivers

Date received: 4/10/2013

ARTS NORTHERN RIVERS

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Arts Northern Rivers
Submitted: 4 / 10 / 2013

Background

Arts Northern Rivers is the regional arts board for the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales. Established as a not-for-profit incorporated body in 2004 the organisation is funded through Arts NSW and the seven local governments of the region.

The Northern Rivers region of New South Wales is one of the most creative and vibrant regions in Australia. It is home to the largest numbers of people working in the arts and creative industries in any region of this country. This fact presents both an opportunity and a challenge to our mission, which is: to ensure the arts and creativity flourish in our community.

We aim to realise our mission by delivering core and project programs of activity that seek to deliver our key goals. Our goals have been developed through extensive consultations with stakeholders in our region. We have a number of strategic priorities that have also been developed through this consultative process, which we use to deliver our goals.

Our Goals

- To foster and promote the culture of our region
- To develop and support Indigenous arts and cultural programs and practices
- To enhance social and economic development through the arts and creative industries
- Ensure effective governance

Our Strategic Priorities

- Community Cultural Development
- Indigenous Cultural Development
- **Arts and Creative Industry development**
- **Cultural Tourism Development**
- Marketing & Communication
- Management & Governance

Arts Northern Rivers' footprint covers an extraordinarily creative area of New South Wales. We enjoy support from the many artists, arts workers, arts organisations and creative industries that reside in this area. Arts Northern Rivers works closely with other peak arts industry bodies in the region such as NORPA (Northern Rivers Performing Arts) and Screenworks - through collaboration on projects as well as general promotional and advocacy support. In addition, Arts Northern Rivers works closely with the Festival and Events sector – key economic drivers in the region.

Many of our projects are co-funded through partnerships developed with key agencies in the region including Regional Development Australia (Northern Rivers), Trade and Investment and Southern Cross University - we continue to develop partnerships to support or project activity.

The Value of the arts and creative industries to tourism in the Northern Rivers

Arts Northern Rivers wishes to submit the following points for consideration regarding the impact of the arts and creative industries tourism in the Northern Rivers region

1. Arts and Creative Industry development in the Northern Rivers
2. How the Arts and Creative Industry contribute to the Northern Rivers visitor economy
3. Issues and challenges for the arts and creative industries sector in our region

1. Arts and Creative Industry Development in the Northern Rivers

The recently tabled NSW Creative Industries Action Plan developed by the NSW Government's Creative Industries Taskforce has highlighted the Northern Rivers as a regional creative hotspot. This assessment aligns with much we already know about the creative industries in our region. The findings are also reflective of the Northern Rivers Creative Industries Strategy (NRCIS), which was developed by Arts Northern Rivers in 2008 and funded by **Arts NSW, NSW Trade and Investment, NSW Department of Premier & Cabinet** and the **7 local governments** of the region.

Long renowned for its creative communities, the Northern Rivers is a significant regional hub for creative industries and continues to attract national and international attention. The region has:

- The highest concentration of artists outside of the capital cities,
- The highest number of filmmakers outside Sydney and Melbourne;
- Over 6% of the regional work force in creative industries (NRCIS 2009);
- Nationally renowned cultural festivals (Writers Festival, Bluesfest, Splendour, Boomerang);
- Collaboration between arts and regional development boards;
- A decade of research on the development of the creative industries;
- A strong arts education tradition; and
- Local government support for the regional strategy.

Creative Industries growth in the region has been driven by a unique suite of industry organizations with a track record of successful industry development initiatives.

In 2006 these organizations came together with regional development and education agencies to form the Northern Rivers Creative Industries Consortium, with the specific goal of developing the country's first regional creative industries strategy and collaborating to support creative industry development. The Consortium members include:

- **Industry organisations** - Arts Northern Rivers, Screenworks, NR Writers Centre, NORPA, NCEIA and the Regional Gallery network;
- **Education and training organisations** - TAFE, Southern Cross University, NR Conservatorium; and,
- **Regional development organisations** - Regional Development Australia NR, Trade and Investment, NR Tourism and NR Social Development Council.

The strategy continues to provide a framework for stakeholders to work together to realise the potential of the creative industries in the region, for the economic benefits and job creation.

2. How the Arts and Creative Industry contribute to the Northern Rivers visitor economy

The World Tourist Organisation claims that arts and cultural tourism has an annual average growth rate of 15% - three times the overall projected growth rate for general tourism. This is a reflection of the increasing importance placed on arts tourism by markets and the shifting trends in demand with travellers increasingly wanting distinctive, authentic and more meaningful experiences.

The Northern Rivers possesses a thriving, vibrant arts sector offering (amongst other things):

- A state of the art regional gallery (Tweed River Gallery)
- Significant capital development projects including the Margaret Olley Centre (at the Tweed River Gallery) and Tweed Regional Museum
- A world renowned Festival and Events program including: Bluesfest, Byron Writers Festival, Splendour in the Grass and the recently added Boomerang Indigenous Arts Festival and Byron Falls Festival
- A connected and vibrant visual arts community supported by a regional gallery network
- One of the country's longest running and critically acclaimed regional theatre companies (NORPA)
- 21 volunteer run museums with diverse collections ranging from community social history museums to specialist museums
- and an exciting music industry supported by its peak body – the North Coast Entertainment Industry Association.

All contribute significantly to the region's reputation as a world renowned cultural destination

Visual Arts & Craft

- The Northern Rivers has a higher proportion of artists and craftspeople than any other regional area in Australia.
- It also hosts significant events and exhibitions through its regional gallery network
- It has nationally and internationally recognized acquisition arts prizes (Olive Cotton Award, Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Prize)
- An established arts and craft community market program throughout the region which attracts significant visitation from SE Queensland and other interstate markets
- And significant building projects such as the Margaret Olley Centre at the Tweed River Gallery – which will gain new national and international audiences and add to the region's reputation as a cultural destination in its own right.

Issues and challenges for the Visual Arts & Craft sector

- Access to education and training pathways for artists – demise of the TAFE fine arts courses make it difficult for emerging artist to access affordable training options in the region
- Skills and Professional development projects are based on limited, short-term grants
- Access to affordable work spaces
- Significant regional galleries such as Lismore are operating in sub-standard building which restrict ability to program high profile exhibition programs

Festivals and Events

The Northern Rivers region is home to some of the country's most significant festivals and events, attracting national and international audiences throughout the year. The diversity of festival and event genres ensures a broad market to draw from. In addition to attracting local, state, national and international audiences festivals and events are important economic drivers for local employment. Many of the music festivals and events are able to draw on a rich pool of local talent to fill their programming. Key festivals and events include:

- Byron Writers Festival – featuring international, national and local programming
- Splendour in the Grass – returning to the Byron Shire after a three-year absence due to planning and permit issues
- Cullum Music Festival – a grass root music festival strongly supported by the local community and attracting growing numbers from interstate and international markets
- Bluesfest – Tourism Award winning Festival with huge local, interstate and international attendance

New Festivals:

- Byron Falls Festival
- Boomerang Indigenous Arts Festival

Issues and challenges for the Festivals and Events sector

- Sustainability – working with LGAs to strike the right balance between ecological and economic considerations
- A need to cut 'green tape' in some instances
- Financial support for small emerging Festivals to allow them to program high profile acts

Music

The Northern Rivers region is well recognised for its creative industries and artistic community, and is home to some of the most acclaimed musicians in the country. The depth of the music sector in the region feeds into the programming of Festival and Events as discussed above. Our musicians are programmed into the extensive pubs and clubs network in the region that attracts significant visitors from across the Qld border.

Issues and challenges for the Festivals and Events sector

- While the sector is strong in numbers there is an ongoing need to offer skills and professional development opportunities to support this sector to ensure it continues to grow.
- This support will ensure programming of Festivals mentioned above continue to be serviced
- Arts Northern Rivers has stepped into this space and is currently delivering a professional development project funded through arts NSW - however we need to find a way to make these successful development programs on-going and sustainable

Conclusion

- The arts and creative industries play a pivotal role in supporting and contributing to the visitor economy of our region.
- The strength of this sector as played an important role in identifying the Northern Rivers as a 'cultural destination' for visitors
- While the Northern Rivers is considered a creative hotspot – it is actually a made of numerous 'hot spot' sectors – music, festivals, visual arts etc - each has their own issues and needs to make them strong and sustainable.
- Many of the projects delivered by peak organisations such as Arts Northern Rivers are short term and difficult to extend past the life of the project without further financial support
- Education and training pathways have been diminished and access to affordable training options will begin to impact on the sector
- Peak bodies such as Arts Northern Rivers and Screenworks have delivered industry development models that are proven to work – these models need to be supported, developed and sustained
- Investment in the creative industries in our region is essential to ensure we continue to grow a culturally vibrant 'offer' for visitors / tourism
- Investment in cultural/arts tourism products is as important as investing in the more traditional tourism product (it's not all about airport transfer buses)