

Submission  
No 235

## INQUIRY INTO THE MUSIC AND ARTS ECONOMY IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Organisation:** Arts Mid North Coast

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# **Inquiry into the Music and Arts Economy in NSW**

## **Introduction**

This submission is made on behalf of Arts Mid North Coast, the peak regional body for arts and cultural development across the Mid North Coast region of New South Wales, a region of 305,000 residents in the six local government areas of Mid Coast, Port Macquarie Hastings, Kempsey, Nambucca, Bellingen and Coffs Harbour. It embraces the Woromi, Biripi, Dunghutti and Gumbaynggirr Nations. We work closely with State government and our six local government partners plus the key arts, cultural and creative stakeholders in the region.

We are part of the network of 14 Regional Arts Development Organisations in regional New South Wales providing considerable experience in strategic planning processes in regional areas. Our Strategic Plan 2016-2018 provides as one of our five key goals:

*To encourage and support regional arts, creative industries and cultural development planning to provide leadership to ensure positive outcomes for local, community and regional initiatives.*  
(Strategic Development)

Our involvement seeks to highlight matters that we feel are important to either begin or advance conversations we may already be having or need to have within the region.

Arts Mid North Coast wishes to make the following submission in relation to the matters detailed in matters noted in the terms of reference for the Portfolio Committee No. 6.

## **The Value of Music to our Region**

Mid North Coast communities have a strong history of engagement with music across a very wide spectrum of genres. It is the art form that more than any other spans the generations and different sectors of the community and brings them together. It is also the art form that best spans both the commercial and community sectors ensuring the delivery of both economic and social benefits.

Our submission is informed by this rich history of music in our region as highlighted by the following key indicators of its importance:

- The region's many festivals feature jazz, contemporary, acoustic, folk and bluegrass genres and attract broad interest both within and from outside the region. These festivals typically accommodate a mix of local and touring performers and provide opportunities for emerging local talent and community participation. These Festivals now have a strong record of success and recognition including: the Festival of the Sun, (Port Macquarie) Wingham Akoostik Festival. Bellingen Music Festival, Dorrigo Folk and Bluegrass Festival, Lakeside Festival (Forster) and the Big Band Blast (Port Macquarie). The small township of Kendall hosts the finals of the Kendall National Violin Competition, Australia's pre-eminent contest for young violinists. A recent trend is also young people establishing and managing their own laneway and music festivals in Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie and Forster.
- Another key element in how music is delivered to the region and extends into smaller communities is the importance of local halls. With connections to the Festival of Small Halls and the Woodford Folk Festival there is a strong connection to the rural touring of music and the use of halls such as Wauchope School of Arts, Oddfellows Hall at Kempsey and the

historic Bellingham Hall . Wauchope managed by a community arts group for over 30 years stages an incredible one to two shows a month.

- Music in the region is now taking place in many locations and is no longer tied to festivals or major performance spaces. Arts Mid North Coast has recognised this by its Food & Art Cultural Trail which features many cafes, restaurants and vineyards that add music to their food and wine experiences to enhance their businesses and destinations. [http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/cultural\\_trails/food-art/#all](http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/cultural_trails/food-art/#all) Bellingham is an excellent example of the economic value of such matters to the community and is recognised by its designation as one of the Creative Communities of the Mid North Coast [http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/creative\\_community/bellingham/#all](http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/creative_community/bellingham/#all)
- Arts Mid North Coast has also introduced a Live Venues/Gig section to its Arts Trails [http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/cultural\\_trails/performance/#all](http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/cultural_trails/performance/#all) and has sought to retain and encourage this valuable part of the music landscape by showcasing the excellent work and advice of the Live Music Office and Music NSW in our online SmartArt business development feature on the website. [http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/toolkit\\_category/music\\_events/](http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/toolkit_category/music_events/)
- We have two Conservatoriums of Music (Coffs Harbour and Mid Coast) in the region providing formal music training and strong music education opportunities within many primary and secondary schools.
- Arts Mid North Coast has the most comprehensive directory in regional NSW of teachers of art including music. [http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/teacher\\_type/music-teacher/?region](http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/teacher_type/music-teacher/?region) While there is in some areas a shortage of music teachers compared to other art forms such as dance this is compensated by excellent music programs in local schools especially secondary and highlights the importance of ongoing support for music teachers in schools and school bands these are the talent pool of the future of music in the region.

## Terms of Reference

### **(a) Progress on the implementation of the Government response to the New South Wales Night-Time Economy Roundtable Action Plan.**

Apart from stating the obvious that the New South Wales Night time Economy Roundtable Action Plan actually JUST relates to Sydney (a matter recognised in the footnotes of the terms of reference) it is our submission that its content remains very relevant to regional NSW. Considerable focus is being placed in our Regional Cities of Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie on the development of cultural precincts. This is also a highlighted focus of the work being done by the Cultural Infrastructure Project Management Office (CIPMO) in the development of the Infrastructure Plan 2025.

*The Cultural Infrastructure Program Management Office (CIPMO) was established in April 2017 to enable a sector-wide coordinated response to Cultural Infrastructure in NSW. CIPMO works in collaboration with Cultural Institutions, State Significant Organisations, other Government Departments and the broader arts and culture sector **to create significant cultural precincts and infrastructure for New South Wales.***

While all aspects of the Night Time Economy Plan may not be applicable to regional cities the amount of research and work that has gone into the NSW (Sydney) Plan should not be lost to the regions.

If one removes the word Sydney from the key actions of the Plan it is just as relevant to regional cities especially those such as ours which are also major tourism destinations.

#### Key actions

- Developing a night-time economy masterplan with an overarching vision for x at night.
- Promoting x's diverse and vibrant night-life to encourage visitors and boost the local economy.
- Investigating reforms to planning regulations to encourage new night-time offerings from entrepreneurs, creatives and small businesses.
- Working with stakeholders to facilitate the use of vacant commercial spaces and public places for temporary arts and cultural activation.
- Exploring options for an increased late-night retail and non-licensed premises trading program.
- Investigating the development of a NSW contemporary music strategy

It is therefore our submission that the Committee investigate and make recommendations on how the findings of the NSW Plan can be made available to assist designated Regional Cities and other cultural precincts in regional NSW to achieve similar objectives.

#### **(b) Policies that could support a diverse and vibrant music and arts culture across New South Wales**

As noted in our introduction we are very supportive of the work being undertaken in recent years by Live Music, Music NSW and Create NSW in this area of policy development for music. WE offer no comment other than to note these organisations should continue to have appropriate resourcing and funding to continue and expand this work. As well as the excellent role they play in informing and collaborating with regional organisations such as ours we also note that they have a very good connection to individuals and young people in Regional NSW through solid engagement processes and programs such as INDENT.

#### **(c) Policies that could support the establishment and sustainability of permanent and temporary venue spaces for music and for the arts**

Our submission in relation to this term of reference relates to the importance of local halls in regional and rural NSW as venues not only for music but all art forms and their potential for production (rehearsal spaces) as well as consumption through concerts and events.

Community halls have traditionally been at the heart of regional and rural communities. They were places where people met, performed, danced and participated in community events. Today many community halls are no longer seeing the activity that they once enjoyed while others have been re-invigorated by connecting to the arts and other creative activities.

A very successful example is the Bellingen Memorial Hall which over many years has been an integral part of the lively Bellingen culture. First established in 1929, the hall features classic 1920s architecture and today the main hall is licensed for a maximum of 600 people (non raked seating) and caters to various scales of events by use of a flexible system of dividing the room for more intimate events. The Hall is used for everything from public meetings and weekly classes to plays,

gigs, movies, and a wonderful array of touring acts. Coupled with its use for local festivals the venue has been an important part of developing the identity of Bellingen and its nationally recognised reputation as a cultural hub, despite it being a small country town. Other halls that provide such a strong community focus are at Wauchope and Kendall.

Today community halls represent a major potential form of infrastructure for the delivery of the arts. In total there are over 60 halls still owned by Councils on the Mid North Coast and almost as many again by the NSW Department of Lands or in community ownership. In many cases their management has been devolved to Section 355 Committees or Reserve Boards and perhaps the “lucky” ones where ownership has actually passed to the local community. Some rationalisation of management models would be very useful although this maybe outside the scope of this report

Historically there is strong precedent for such a movement as the arts were centre stage in the 19th century of the development of many existing halls. They came into being through the development of Mechanics Institutes and Schools of Art, an international philosophical based initiative to further the education of the working class. Although initially this was very city based a second wave was to occur in Australia especially in country areas which had more modest goals, centred not so much on educating the artisan class, but rather providing a local home for reading, culture, civic action, recreation and entertainment. The architecture of the Institutes was reflective of their important role in the community. Townships erected the largest and most impressive structures that their budgets would stand. Today many small towns still have their School of Arts and this legacy and they are finding a new energy. What is more there are now increasingly important through events such as the Festival of Small Halls.

What is common to all such halls is that they are now almost all at least 100 years old. They may have rediscovered a new life in how they are used but they will only continue if the main asset, the infrastructure, can be maintained and brought up to date. While the NSW Infrastructure Plan 2016 focuses on asset renewal of major institutions in Sydney for rural and regional New South Wales that same potential to deliver similar benefits and outcomes may well rest in its Halls.

Recognition of this potential needs to be made and funding options seriously increased with proven business cases. This could be through a separate category of the recently announced Regional Cultural funding or by increasing funding under the ClubGrants Infrastructure Funding. Any such review should also focus on widening eligibility as some forms of delegated local management of community halls makes them ineligible for this funding

#### **(d) Policy and legislation in other jurisdictions, and options for New South Wales including red tape reduction and funding options**

Our submission on this matter relates to the valuable addition made to funding in the last year by extending the Live & loud Music funding to Regional and Rural NSW. The number of applications made suggests strong demand and it is our submission that this funding should be extended as indeed it has for Sydney.

It is also our submission that consideration be given to applications by other than Councils. In our regions proposals from musicians and other commercial parties were limited by whether they could gain the support of their Councils.

**Kevin Williams**  
**Executive Director**  
**Arts Mid North Coast**