

**Submission  
No 382**

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

**Organisation:** Coffs Harbour City Council

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6 March 2018

Ms Jenelle Moore  
Committee Director  
Music & Arts Economy Committee

By online submission to [www.parliament.nsw.gov.au](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Ms Moore

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

On behalf of the Coffs Harbour City Council, I would like to make a submission to this inquiry. As our community and city have grown Council has placed an increasing priority in maintaining and improving its cultural facilities and services. Council also provides financial assistance to cultural programs, events and community organisations.

Council has put considerable effort into planning for the development of arts and culture in the LGA. It has endorsed Creative Coffs - Cultural Strategic Plan 2017-2022 which provides the framework for the community and for Council's future investment. Council has also included cultural aspects in its other strategic plans, in particular in relation to tourism, events and the built environment.

The largest of these projects is the Cultural and Civic Space project which will create a creative precinct in the heart of the city centre. The new Regional Gallery, Regional Museum and Central Library will be an energised and creative space which will excite both residents and visitors. The facility will also include a co-working centre for microbusinesses (including creative industries), meeting and event spaces and Council administrative offices. A multi-purpose 200-seat "town-hall" style space will form an important part of the facility. We anticipate that both this space and the Gallery will provide effective venues for small to medium events, including for music.

We would welcome the support of the NSW State Government to the ongoing development of the music and arts economy in Coffs Harbour and the Mid North Coast Region.

For any further enquiries please contact Sian Nivison, Group Leader - Community and Cultural Services, on either \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

Yours faithfully

Chris Chapman  
Director Sustainable Communities

**Coffs Harbour City Council Submission to  
Portfolio Committee No. 6 - Planning and Environment**

**“To inquire into and report on the music and arts economy in New South Wales, including regional New South Wales”**

## **1. Background**

Coffs Harbour LGA is a major regional centre on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales, about midway between Sydney and Brisbane. It had a population of 73,000 in 2015 with projected growth to approximately 95,000 by 2036.

Cultural planning extends beyond the arts, recognising the broader lifestyle of residents and the experiences of visitors. The Coffs Harbour City Council Local Government Area (LGA) is made up both of villages and urban centres but it also services the wider region through education, work and cultural opportunities.

As our community and city have grown, Council has placed an increasing priority in maintaining and improving its cultural facilities and services. Council also provides financial assistance to cultural programs, events and community organisations. Council has endorsed *Creative Coffs - Cultural Strategic Plan 2017-2022* which is intended to implement the Cultural Policy and together they provide the framework for Council’s future investment in arts and cultural development. Council has also included cultural aspects in its other strategic plans in particular in relation to tourism, events and the built environment. Over 1000 community members were consulted in the development of this plan.

The vision of Creative Coffs is:

*“A vibrant and creative Coffs lifestyle enriched by its natural beauty, diverse people and capacity for innovation.”*

The goals of Creative Coffs are to:

1. Engage our community and visitors in the cultural life of the area
2. Create and maintain vibrant cultural and public spaces
3. Understand and celebrate our Aboriginal and diverse cultural heritage
4. Value and support our creative industries
5. Encourage connections, collaboration and partnerships.

## **2. Challenges of developing night-time economy in a regional area**

Some of the challenges are the result of the way the city and town centres have developed. At night-time, the challenges of roads designed to favour traffic, inhospitable pedestrian conditions, and isolated spaces are exacerbated. The large proportion of older people in our community makes the safety of, and the perception of safety of spaces, such as cultural precincts at night particularly important. There is the opportunity to address this through innovative urban planning.

### **2.1 CBD Masterplan**

Through the Coffs Harbour City Centre Masterplan 2031 (the CBD Masterplan), Coffs Harbour City Council has articulated its vision for the revitalisation of the whole of the Coffs Harbour LGA and sees the Central Business District (CBD) as playing a pivotal role through the creation of economic, social and cultural opportunities. The aim is to create an attractive urban environment that is rich in

lifestyle facilities, attracts residential living to the City Centre and creates a new attraction for visitors. As an amendment to the CBD Masterplan, a Precinct Analysis of the Gordon St area has been completed to ensure that the development of the surrounds will be mutually complementary with the new facility.

## **2.2 Footpath Activation**

Council is currently conducting a six month footpath activation trial in the Coffs City Centre Masterplan footprint. *Trading Places: Footpath Activation Trial* involves a new approach for managing footpath activities to encourage more vibrancy. This trial aims to replace rules and regulations for footpath use with a more common-sense approach to making our footpaths more colorful, lively, entertaining and interesting. The end goal is providing more vibrancy on the street to attract people to stop, look and linger for longer both during the day and at night.

Council is partnering with local businesses and their customers to trial the new model, which involve:

- Waiving of fees (e.g. for A-Frame Signs, Merchandise Stalls/Displays, Non-commercial Street Stalls, Outdoor Dining and Buskers and Performers).
- Eliminating approval processes.
- Giving retailers and traders more ownership and accountability for their footpath spaces
- Ensuring existing public safety and liability requirements remain.
- Providing Council support to businesses involved in the trial with guidelines and practical help on the ground around how to “activate” spaces.
- Supporting a change in culture where we are less about “controlling” spaces and more about working with traders to make areas come alive.
- Encouraging new participation from local community groups and not-for-profit organisations previously turned away due to not having a process or permit for the way they would like to use the footpath.

## **2.3 Woolgoolga Masterplan**

The Woolgoolga Town Centre Masterplan 2018 identifies opportunities for increased street-life in the town through the establishment of building forms than enhance commercial activity and improve the character of the area. In particular, Beach St is envisaged as a vibrant village centre with shopping, dining, cultural and music/entertainment options.

## **2.4 Cultural Tourism**

The planning done by Council, particularly in relation to *Creative Coffs - Cultural Strategic Plan 2017-2022*, the CBD Masterplan, the Laneways Strategy and Precinct Analysis include consideration of the positive impacts of cultural tourism. In Australia and globally, cultural tourism is growing at a faster rate than tourism overall, growing at a rate of approximately 15% per year. Both international and domestic tourists who engage in a cultural or heritage activity tend to make longer visits than other tourists, which is to the economic advantage of their destination. Across Australia, international cultural tourists spend 24% more and stay 24% longer than international tourists generally. And domestic tourists staying overnight at a destination spend 56% more and stay 37% longer when they incorporate cultural activities into their visit. The more things there are to do the greater the chance of tourists making the decision to stay overnight or longer.

## 2.5 Cultural and Civic Centre

In support of all the planning and strategic work listed above, Council has a major initiative which specifically includes night-time activation of the city as a goal.

The Council is developing a proposal for a new Library, Gallery, Council administration/chamber and co-working space in the heart of the city centre. These would be built within a new Cultural and Civic precinct in Gordon Street. The development would deliver greater foot-traffic and activate the CBD both during the day and at night. It will also bring much greater cultural tourism to Coffs Harbour.

The Cultural and Civic Space goal would include:

- A new and much larger state-of-the-art central Library.
- A new Regional Gallery with exhibition spaces approximately three times the size of existing facility.
- A café and co-working spaces, including hot-desking, for micro and small business use.
- A 200 seat, multi-purpose civic and events space, also to be used for Council meetings.
- Council customer service and administration offices.

Councillors and members of the community on the Library and Gallery Planning Advisory Group (LGPAG) and Council project team assessed eleven sites and this site was identified as the best. A prime and central location, it supports the CBD Masterplan vision of creating a vibrant City Centre.

Specific advantages of this precinct development for night-time activation of the City are that it will be open for events and after hours activities. For example, it will encourage restaurants and other businesses to stay open later. The selected site was assessed as the best one to achieve this city activation because it is:

- Close to Coffs Central and Harbour Drive, allowing people to combine visits with their day-to-day shopping, socialising and other activities.
- Highly visible street-frontage location with a big impact on how the community and visitor see the character of the Coffs Harbour.
- Priority pedestrian access which is safe and attractive, particularly for older residents, children and parents with prams. Fully accessible for people with limited mobility.
- Night-time activation of the CBD, bringing life to the City after 5pm.
- Walking distance from public transport with a minimal gradient.
- Access to convenient and safe car parking.

## 3. Policies that could support a diverse and vibrant music and arts culture across New South Wales

The Coffs Harbour City Council has deeply considered what music, arts and cultural initiatives will support the social fabric of the City.

Most of the strategies in *Creative Coffs* would either benefit from or need State Government support. Those which could also be usefully extended across regional NSW are listed below:

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Strategies include:</b>
1. Engage our community and visitors in the cultural life of the area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- developing audiences, including young people</li> <li>- create programs in art and health, in particular to support mental health and healthy aging</li> </ul>
2. Create and maintain vibrant cultural and public spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- integrate public art into new built projects</li> <li>- better access to spaces for workshops, rehearsals etc.</li> </ul>
3. Understand and celebrate our Aboriginal and diverse cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improve access to and promotion of local art, heritage and library collections</li> <li>- walk together with the Aboriginal community to communicate their stories</li> <li>- provide relevant signage in the local Aboriginal language</li> <li>- create cultural education programs with diverse and refugee communities and celebrate their stories</li> <li>- conserve and interpret built and natural heritage</li> </ul>
4. Value and support our creative industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- assist creative professional and community artists to develop their skills including in business</li> <li>- measure the economic and community impacts of creative industries</li> <li>- support access to education, including that in arts and health practice</li> <li>- support creative industries' and cultural networks</li> </ul>
5. Encourage connections, collaboration and partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- support cultural volunteers</li> <li>- maximise the use of community facilities</li> </ul>

### **3.1 Arts Mid North Coast (AMNC)**

Arts Mid North Coast (AMNC) is part of a network of 14 Regional Arts Development Organisations and are members of Regional Arts NSW (RANSW). RANSW acts as the peak body and service agency for the regional network, working cooperatively and collaboratively in order to achieve the best outcomes for all parties. The 22,000 square kilometres of the Arts Mid North Coast region embraces the six local government Councils of MidCoast, Port Macquarie-Hastings, Kempsey, Nambucca, Bellingen and Coffs Harbour City. The Mid North Coast is the most populated region of the New South Wales RADO Network and as at the 2016 census had 301,983 residents. This is over ten times larger than the smallest of the 14 RADOS. Consideration should be given to additional State Government resources for this region.

### **4. Establishment and sustainability of permanent and temporary venue spaces for music and for the arts**

In addition to the new Cultural and Civic Space, the Coffs Harbour LGA has a number of other infrastructure needs which would benefit from State Government support:

#### **4.1 Jetty Memorial Theatre (JMT)**

The JMT is currently the main performing arts venue in Coffs Harbour but it only has 250 seats, and is increasingly used at or near capacity. It caters for touring productions across theatre, dance and music and is the home of a variety of local productions each year. Coffs Harbour Musical Comedy Company (CHMCC) and Coffs Harbour Amateur Theatre Society (CHATS) are both very active and continue to provide the community with high-quality local theatre. The number of sold out shows has been increasing as is the utilisation of the venue. In 2017, there were 16 sold out professional touring shows, three sold out film screenings and many sold out community musical performances by the CHMCC. It increasingly hosts screenings of independent and foreign films in association with the Screenwave organisation. For three years it has hosted the highly successful Screenwave International Film Festival. With over 70 films and sessions this is now the largest Film Festival in Regional New South Wales. The facility however needs better technical facilities, in particular a Digital Cinema Package Compliant Projector to improve programing selections for the various cinema events.

#### **4.2 Southern Cross University (SCU) / Coffs Harbour Education Campus (CHEC) - Enhanced use of Theatre D-Block**

Theatre D is an existing 500 seat lecture theatre at CHEC, which houses a senior college, the SCU and TAFE. With the change of teaching practice over time, the facility is no longer fully committed with lectures. It is already used for some cultural purposes currently such as small group/solo performer music recitals. For larger performances, additional staging, audio-visual equipment and lighting must be brought in at a considerable cost. In the absence of comparable size performance venue in the LGA, the opportunity now arises for this facility to be upgraded to allow greater performing arts use. Importantly, touring productions currently bypass Coffs for lack of a venue with a commercially viable capacity for their show. A 500-seat venue would be attractive for them.

The up-grade/repurpose would require a complete re-fit. It would include substantially increased lighting, audio-visual, air-conditioning, staging and three-hour seating (currently thin lecture seats). It has the advantage that an upgrade could be undertaken comparatively quickly, with immediate community benefits, should funding become available.

#### **4.3 Performing Arts Centre (PAC)**

Council has undertaken a great deal of recent research about a PAC. It suggests that a purpose-built facility of greater than 500 seats would offer a great deal to the community in the mid to long term, i.e. in the next 5 -10 years. This research further suggests that location in the CBD would be very important to its success. Detailed feasibility is planned for later in 2018.

#### **4.4 Outdoor Performance Space**

Consideration has commenced for an open-air performance space for the LGA. As part of the consultation about the Creative Coffs Cultural Strategic Plan 2017-2022, people commented on the need for outdoor but all-weather spaces for performances, and an under-18 youth music venue.

Currently large music concerts are held in carparks or the Showgrounds and large concerts, i.e. greater than 8,000 cannot be staged in any venue. There are a number of sites under consideration in order to allow both commercial and not-for-profit events of this scale to visit our community, along with music festivals.

The CBD Masterplan includes a performance space of for medium-size events at the central location of Brelford Park, Harbour Drive.

#### **4.5 Community Halls**

The LGA community halls are vital for small communities and are used for all cultural activities, classes and performances which take place in those towns and valleys.

Lighting upgrades, audio-visual upgrades (PA's and projectors), and stage drapes renewal are needed for:

- Eastern Dorrigo Community Hall, 13 Pine Avenue, Ulong
- Toormina Community Centre, 171 Toormina Road, Toormina
- Woolgoolga Community Village Hall, 8 Boundary Street, Woolgoolga
- Lower Bucca Community Hall, Lower Bucca Road, Lower Bucca
- Coramba Community Hall, Dorrigo Street, Coramba
- Lowanna Community Hall, Grafton Street, Lowanna

#### **5. Policy and legislation in other jurisdictions, and options for New South Wales including red tape reduction and funding options.**

A number of governments both nationally and internationally have a "Percent for Art" program. For example, the Western Australian State Government program started in 1989. The Scheme is managed by the Building Management and Works business of the Department of Finance, in partnership with the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries which is responsible for arts policy in the State. The Scheme aims to:

- improve the quality of the built environment and the value of public facilities; and
- create new professional opportunities for artists.

It delivers these benefits through a percentage allocation (up to one percent) of the estimated total cost of a State funded capital or major infrastructure project for public art.

A comparable program is currently under consideration by the Coffs Harbour City Council as part the *Creative Coffs - Cultural Strategic Plan*. A State Government program along similar lines may have considerable merit.

#### **6. Other issues relevant to music, arts and culture**

##### **6.1 Our diverse community**

The traditional custodians of the Coffs Harbour LGA are the Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal people. During the preparation of *Creative Coffs*, the community expressed strong community support for and pride in that their cultural heritage.

Coffs Harbour LGA is a designated resettlement area for migrants and refugees, and there are a larger proportion of those speaking a non-English language at home compared to Regional NSW in general. The dominant language spoken at home other than English is Punjabi with significant increases in Burmese, Mandarin and Dinka.



## **6.2 Creative Ageing**

The region's most striking demographic feature and one that is central to the planning of future infrastructure is our age structure. This age structure is in part a reflection of the overall ageing of the Australian population but it is primarily a reflection of the region attracting a large number of people retiring to the area.

Between 2011 and 2026, the age structure forecasts for Coffs Harbour LGA indicate a 17.5% increase in population under working age, a 6.2% increase in population of working age and a 49.6% increase in population of retirement age. Coffs Harbour LGA has a slightly higher than average number of people who live on their own than the NSW average. In 2011, it was 27% of the local population, which is consistent with regional NSW as a whole. With greater numbers of people moving to the region, this percentage may increase. These factors have significant implications in particular for programs supporting arts initiatives for health and treatment outcomes as well as promoting health and wellbeing in the wider community. "Creative Ageing" will be an important focus, encouraging social engagement as well as the expression of creativity for older members of the community.

## **6.3 Online and digital access**

Online and digital access is an increasingly important aspect of how community members experience music, arts and culture. While access to material from all over the world is now possible, often local material is not easily found.

Coffs Harbour is currently working on a project would see the installation of a platform to facilitate the digitisation, hosting and integrated discovery of Museum, Gallery and Library Local Studies heritage and arts collections in Coffs Harbour. A flagship platform will provide a perpetual home for the distributed pockets of activity within the community, allowing access to online (and offline) discovery of Gallery artworks, Picture Coffs Harbour photographs and museum artefacts. It would allow other unseen valuable content such as rare maps and oral histories to be incorporated.

A unique aspect of the project is to extend digitisation activities community-wide and explore and implement new business models for hosting cultural heritage and arts content. Local historical societies, schools and commercial enterprises have been approached to discuss possibilities for supporting contemporary collecting, comprehensive digitising and extending outreach. They have expressed significant interest in such a strategy.