

Submission  
No 420

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

**Organisation:** Illawarra Folk Festival

**Date Received:** 2 July 2018

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## Legislative Council

### The Music and Arts Economy in NSW

#### *Introducing the Illawarra Folk Club, presenters of Folk Music in the Illawarra*

The Illawarra Folk Club Inc was established in 1979 as a not for profit organisation and has over this time run fortnightly Folk Music concerts in central Wollongong and throughout the Illawarra. We have run 33 annual Folk Festivals since 1986, initially at Jamberoo which we outgrew. The current version of the Illawarra Folk Festival attracts an aggregate 10,000 people with up to 12 stages over 4 days. It runs in January every year at the Bulli Raceway GBOTA site, the adjoining Bulli Showground and the Bulli Grevillia Park. This Festival attracts about 1500 on site campers and 400 volunteers giving a total of 5,000 hours of free help. The event puts \$1.5 million into the local economy. We believe that this festival is the largest volunteer run festival in Australia

In addition to the Illawarra Folk Festival we ran for a number of years a small one day festival on the Jamberoo to Robertson Road and since 2012 we also have run the smaller Folk by the Sea Festival at the Kiama Showground and Church Point precinct of Kiama. This event attracts 2,000 people over the 3 days including about 150 campers.

Both events include a festival licensed bar.

Both our festivals are wrist band entry only, for a day or for the entire festival. We do not sell concert only tickets at our festivals. These events are also enclosed within a specific area and do not have any main events in commercial premises apart from those already on site or in temporary accommodation such as tents. This means that we have total control over timetables and the selection of our musicians.

The Folk Music movement in is widespread with annual festivals throughout Australia. A large number of attendees at these Festivals are members of their local folk clubs and travel widely during the East Coast "season" (September to Easter), attending a number of similar festivals. Local festivals for the Illawarra residents include Kangaroo Valley and Cobargo Folk Festivals as well as the National Folk Festival in the ACT.

The largest of these is the final festival of the Eastern Australian season, the National Folk Festival in the ACT over the Easter weekend. This Festival attracts an aggregate weekend audience of 45,000 people with 1200 performers and 1300 volunteers. \$5 million is put back into the ACT economy.

Folk Festivals and the Folk Music Movement differ from similar festivals because there is a large effort put into the audience to encourage participation. Courses and clinics are run to teach musicianship at many levels using the performers as teachers. In many cases this means that your instructor may be one of the World's best in their field.

By all these events we aim to and have successfully kept alive a form of music that large production and distribution organisations for the most part regard as non commercial. This also means that we keep the "ownership" and also the diversity of our existing culture of our festivals in community hands and reach out to capture not only our heritage but the diversity of our existing culture.

### Comments on Terms of Reference

(a) progress on the implementation of the Government response to the NSW Night- Time Economy Roundtable Action Plan

No Comments on this section.

(b) Policies that could support a diverse and vibrant musical and arts culture across NSW

The Illawarra Folk Club runs concerts and festivals using international and local professional musicians and dancers as well as providing local amateur performers with an opportunity to perform before large and diverse audiences. This mix works for us artistically, financially and also as mentioned previously, as a way of encouraging audiences to learn instruments and to perform. However to achieve these aims and stay solvent means we have to work to a very tight budget. Our normal budget aims to break even on all expenses +10%. We have found that this covers the inevitable bad year. However we do welcome and receive grants from all levels of Government sponsors and commercial sponsors.

As an Illawarra based not for profit organisation, we are constrained in applying for some State Government grants because Wollongong is not regarded as a regional area for the purpose of regional grants and support. However our region does not have sufficient local commercial organisations willing or able to give sponsorship. In most cases our sponsorship is "in kind" sponsorship including equipment hire and waste recycling. The current NSW Government region system results in an artificial divide through the middle of the Illawarra. So a festival in Kiama is treated for grants differently to a festival in Bulli.

One of the problems with Government grants is that when granted they inevitably arrive only weeks before the event or even after the event. Reasonably, they are conditional on proving where they are spent. Overall this procedure means that while we get a last minute cash boost, if we had known about the grants 6 months out from an event, we would have spent at least some on better musicians, sound gear or site equipment. Six weeks out or after the event does not allow us to best utilise the money.

Government grants should be timed to allow for the actual timetable of events.

Government should re examine regions and allocations to reflect the actual financial position of regions

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

Festivals are expensive to run and rely heavily on the availability of a suitable site on an annual basis. It is also important that they are held at a similar time each year as return audience is very important. Also, certainly in the Folk Festival scene, we have to work around other festivals even if they are a substantial distance away if we are to source musicians, sound technicians, artists and audiences.

In our experience, most suitable sites are soon "adopted" by sporting groups who then assume that they have that site for an entire season. This then generates the position that local councils and sporting organisations then expect festivals to fit into a narrow band between for example, football and cricket. Clearly all festivals throughout NSW can't run over a 2 or 3 week band. In our case our main Festival is run in the major part, on a Greyhound track which means we have to erect and dismantle a festival for 10,000 people between weekly races. In the case of the GBOTA, they in turn have to work around Foxtel programming. Of late we have had exemplary co-operation from the Bulli GBOTA management, but this has not always been the case.

These difficulties have impacted on the availability of long term volunteers who reasonably don't expect to be put under such pressure.

In the case of Kiama festival we have a showground which has built structure and 2 football fields. Again we have exemplary cooperation with Kiama Council and the Football Clubs but we are still limited annually around the timing of the Festival and are always concerned that the football season may be extended by earlier bad weather.

Festivals, even the smaller ones such as Folk by the Sea, rely heavily on existing built structures on the site. In our experience for the type of festivals that we run, a bare field is not an economic proposition. In the case of the Bulli, Illawarra Festival, we have a site which is 50% existing structures and 50% hired structures and equipment. The existing utilities are insufficient for our needs so items such as tents, stages, toilets, generators, fencing, traffic barriers etc have to be rented in. Overall our hire costs and site waste removal make up close to 50% of our overall budget.

As populations expand away from Sydney, population densities in regional NSW are also increasing. In the cases of both the Bulli site and the Kiama site, there is a very real threat that noise regulations will impinge on festival hours, probably to level that will make at least one festival uneconomic. In the case of Bulli, the neighbouring old Bulli Brickworks site is approaching the last stage of development. By 2019 we will have housing on the southern boundary of our site. It is reasonable to expect stringent noise restrictions on our next Festival Development Application due in 2020 and our annual Section 68 Site occupancy license.

In addition, a large area of the Bulli Showground is owned by NSW Roads and Maritime as a reserve for completing the expressway from South Bulli to the expressway on the escarpment. When this occurs it will not be possible to use this site for a Festival

Over the last 5 years we have searched for a suitable alternate Festival site within the Illawarra Region. With the exception of the Kiama Bombo Quarry site and proposed re development, we have not been successful. The Bombo Quarry site is jointly owned by the NSW Government and Boral. There is a very real possibility that this area will be swallowed up in the very near future as housing redevelopment

See attached information.

Overall, in the medium term, if the Illawarra Folk Festival has to survive we have to find a suitable site that is not impacted by the above limitations. We suspect that this is true for all the current, once a year users of the Bulli Raceway and Showground.

The NSW Government should examine methods of creating regional festival and multi functional precincts within the State Planning Rules in key regions including the Illawarra Region.

The NSW Government needs to create a mechanism where suitable sites can be quarantined for future Festival and Function site development.

(d) policy and legislation in other jurisdictions and options for NSW including red tape reduction and funding options

Running a festival or event is to put it mildly a very frustrating and overly complex legal procedure. The first hurdle in the planning process is to obtain a Development Application (DA) via the normal council building planning process. In reality we are presented with a normal building DA form asking such non relevant questions like size of building, cost of building, height of building and lot number. There is absolutely no guidance on the standard form as to what is actually required by council planners. Planners actually require a site safety plan, first aid plan, insurance details, map of temporary structures, location of temporary toilets and showers, traffic plan, noise control and waste recycling. The DA is then granted for a number of years. This is normally five years but can be less. While this is underway we have to contract equipment hire, musicians sound technicians etc with no certainty that we will have a DA

Once a DA obtained we are then required to then obtain an annual Section 68C site occupancy license. This is virtual a repeat of the DA process but with an annual renewal. Besides being waste of time the whole procedure can take almost 10 months with the uncertainty this brings for ordering and contracting.

In our case we also run a festival bar which requires a liquor license. This can't be obtained until we have a DA. The liquor license procedure also is unreasonably prolonged and needs to be reviewed. See attached document from our Festival licensee.

In our experience while a cooperative Council can mitigate the process to a degree, in the years that we have to renew a DA, the final licenses will be down to days before the event which is far from satisfactory for everyone. This is not a building site where procedures can be rescheduled. We are committed to a fixed date. In the case of a volunteer organised festival such as ours are, failure to complete the "licensing" in time to run a festival would probably result in the demise of our organisation.

It seems to us that a better overall solution is that the site such as a showground be the holder of the DA and the event organiser is licensed by the showground owner in a method similar to current planning laws under a complying development.

In addition to Council licensing the Bulli site is as previously covered, owned by Roads and Maritime (RMS). Before a DA can be issued an authority to use the Showground must be obtained for NSW RMS. There is no clear path for this to occur and therefore no timeline.

Festivals always include food and craft stalls. These food stalls provide both food and drink to everyone on site and valuable income for festival organisers. Food stalls in NSW must be licensed by each local council. While this may work for fixed restaurants and even day markets, it is a major problem for festivals. Festival food stalls must be open for up to 18 hours a day to meet audience needs and bar licensing conditions. With a four day festival this is a substantial logistic exercise. In many cases local vendors can't meet these requirements but suitable vendors are unwilling to become licensed in a council area where they only trade for three days a year. This becomes a major problem when there is a last minute cancellation and often we have to run without enough food stalls with the resulting lack of customer supply and organiser income. While we do allow some excess capacity when allocating stalls this is only possible to a small level as too many stalls impacts on the overall profitability of our food vendors.

The NSW Government should examine the various licensing procedures required to run a Festival or event and streamline the procedures to facilitate a quicker and easier and less duplicated licensing system. This includes a review of the DA and Section 68 forms to make them relevant to the needs of Councils and Event Organisers.

Government Departments that hold land that is normally used as an event site should have a clear process available if a separate license is required for event usage. Alternatively if an overall event site DA is in place ,this should include an automatic license while the site is in use for a festival or event.

Festival food vendors should be seen as a separate category to market vendors and be covered by a State wide license.

#### Festival and Event Site Short Term Camping.

Folk Festivals have a large number of campers which are part of the Folk Festival scene. Many Folk Festival attendees spend their time playing music in what are known as sessions and camping facilitates this. It is for them the main reason to attend the Festival. Some Folk Festivals are mainly session events. Without campers who are always holders of a festival season ticket, most folk festivals would not be financially viable.

Currently festival and event site short term camping DA and Section 68C licensing requirements are identical to 365 days of the year permanent camping sites. This generates requirements for ratios of campers to toilets, showers, mirrors, washing machines, fire equipment and tent space which are prohibitive for short term festival camping. For example it is obvious for public health reasons that showers are needed in a full time camping area where people stay for extended periods of time. In the case of a 2 to 3 day stay the needs are far less compelling. The need for mirrors and washing machines are totally irrelevant for a 2 day stay.

There needs to be short term festival event standards for showers and facilities that recognises the different needs of short term audiences

(e)Any other related matter.

Both our current Bulli and Kiama sites are close to railway stations. This has enabled us to partner with the railway operators to market out festivals and to dedicate specific carriages as music carriages. This year the Bulli Illawarra festival had over 800 customers utilising the train system. Their festival experience started when musicians joined the trains and played during the journey. The Kiama /Bombo quarry site is adjacent to Bombo railway station and is the only site in the Illawarra that is close to a station.

In addition to an enhanced festival experience utilising public transport substantially reduced vehicle trips from both the Illawarra and our Sydney customer base.

When examining potential community festival and events sites, public transport infrastructure should be taken into account.