

Submission
No 7

**INQUIRY INTO LIQUOR AMENDMENT (MUSIC
FESTIVALS) REGULATION 2019 AND GAMING AND
LIQUOR ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (MUSIC
FESTIVALS) REGULATION 2019**

Organisation: Regional Arts NSW

Date Received: 3 July 2019



3 July, 2019

**Legislative Council of NSW
Submission to the Inquiry**

- Liquor Amendment (Music Festivals) Regulation 2019
- Gaming and Liquor Administration Amendment (Music Festivals) Regulation 2019.

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am responding to this Inquiry in my position as the CEO of Regional Arts NSW, the peak body and service organisation for Arts and Cultural Development in regional NSW. The remit of this organisation encompasses all art forms and genres for the area of NSW excluding the greater Newcastle/Sydney/ Wollongong conurbation.

Music festivals are an integral part of the regional areas in which they are staged. From the large events running over days to small boutique festivals, they all make significant financial contributions to the local economy where they are held. We are now facing a situation in NSW where these events are so over-regulated that some are choosing to move interstate such as *Rabbits Eat Lettuce* moving to Queensland, or small ones closing down because the costs of over regulation make them financially unviable. The beat up in the press and the knee jerk reaction from the NSW Government around these regulations is causing considerable stress and confusion for smaller festivals, outside the intended purpose of the above amendments.

NSW needs a complete overhaul of all regulations pertaining to all festivals and I would strongly recommend that a separate body be set in within Create NSW to ensure that this vital sector for artists and audiences continues to thrive and grow in NSW. If an event is planning to sell liquor, it should simply apply for a liquor licence at a level that is determined according to the size of the planned event. The amount of red tape required by festival organisers is not just at state government level. Every single local government has different processes and requirements to stage any sort of outdoor event. I am currently delivering a four year project (primarily funded by the NSW Government), *Artstate*, that combines a multi-genre arts event and a conference in four different regional cities. This is an extremely low risk event and not subject to the amendments, but each council has a completely different set of requirements and regulations. The documentation that needs to be developed each year impacts on the budget and the number of artists we can schedule. A uniform set of sensible regulations scaled to the size and risk of the event determined by the state government and adopted across all LGAs would enable festival organisers to save money that would be reinvested in programming and artists fees.

Festivals in regional NSW are a major contributor to the regional economy. The obvious contribution comes from the visitor economy with audiences travelling to the event and spending money on accommodation, food, transport, fuel etc. This economic benefit is expanded when the spending of artists, festival crew including sound engineers, lighting designers, roadies, stage managers, security staff and volunteers are added to the mix.

What appears to be less understood is the amount of money the event itself spends in the community and the impact on regional businesses. Small business across regional NSW supports festivals and events. These include hiring companies that supply staging, seating and other temporary infrastructure, those that supply AV, sound and lighting equipment, temporary fencing, vehicle hire, catering, site décor, transport, security services, toilet blocks - the list is endless. Regional businesses set up to support regional festivals make economic sense as the costs of freighting this equipment from a metropolitan area or interstate is prohibitive.

The next factor that contributes to the broader economy is jobs for regional people. Festivals employ specialist staff who make their living providing skilled services to these events. Most operate as independent self-employed contractors who work on a number of festivals on an annual circuit and live in regional NSW. These services including production managers, site managers, lighting designers and operators, sound designers and operators, stage managers, riggers, electricians, site managers, volunteer managers, catering staff. For my own event I employ skilled managers living in Wagga Wagga, Byron Bay, Grafton, Bellingen and Tamworth and support crew on the event come from a dozen different regional areas.

Music festivals support local artists. Many artists get their first career break at the big music festivals. This is the chance to have their music heard by a large audience attracted to the event by the big name artists. Without this opportunity to be programmed in a big music festival, many of the rising stars on the Australian music scene would remain unknown. Additional exposure and income is generated by broadcasting rights. Triple J as an example, records at a number of music festivals and the subsequent broadcast reaches an even bigger listening audience. Artists earn an income from their appearances in music festivals. In addition to the musicians, many festivals diversify and engage visual and performance artists to enhance and grow the event. Visual arts programs run alongside the big music stages. Artists are commissioned to develop sculpture, ephemeral arts installations or run workshop during festivals.

Festivals create social impact outcomes for the local community where the event is held. They create an identity for a regional town and a reason for community celebration. A great example is the *Elvis Festival* in Parkes. The whole community gets behind the event bringing locals and visitors together on the streets in a celebration of pride in their community. A reason to be outside, to meet your neighbours and friends and make new friends, all in the name of Elvis Presley. Similar genre specific music festivals such as country, jazz, folk, dance, electronic and classical music festivals across the state bring together audiences and local community to revel for a weekend to their favourite beat. *Tamworth Country Music* has grown in stature over many decades of development to be on the international circuit with Australian artists having international careers. It now invests in youth programs for aspiring young artists. In a world of increasing social isolation and rising mental health issues, the government should be encouraging these sorts of events.

The tragic deaths of festival goers taking drugs is certainly cause for significant concern. No festival organiser ever wishes a death to occur during their event. Apart from all the emotional distress and grief for affected relatives, it's very bad for business. All work extremely hard to provide a safe and enjoyable environment for their audiences. However, prohibition does not work. It did not work in the USA during the 1920's and early 30's. Secret distilleries turned out rotgut and the criminals made a fortune from bootleg liquor. A heavy handed police presence at festivals is not stopping some people attending taking drugs.

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This whole issue should be restated as a health issue and the government should support pill testing using the model recently trialled at the *Groovin the Moo* festival in Canberra. For this event, police, security and health workers worked together to enable young people to have their pills analysed while being given a health message about the dangers of drugs. The police did not hang around the medical tents creating a barrier to those accessing the service.

In my opinion, saved lives should take priority over number of arrests made. Let's get realistic in this state. Young people are always going to do silly and life threatening things. Research is showing a decline in alcohol consumption across the population and particularly in the younger generation. 'Party' drugs are a far cheaper option than alcohol at festivals. Illegal drug taking is not to be condoned and unscrupulous suppliers should be pursued by the law enforcement agencies. NSW should give up the idea that prohibition and threats of arrest are going to change attitudes and support pill testing and health support for those festivals considered as high risk events.

Summary recommendations for the Inquiry's consideration:

1. Festival sector regulations should be completely overhauled, removed from Liquor and Gaming and a new Festivals agency created within Create NSW. A new template to be developed for local government with consistent requirements for all jurisdictions.
2. Introduce and support pill testing at identified 'high risk' events while reducing police presence at medical stations. Health and police to work together to determine the best outcome for the audience and the community.
3. Understand the total economic value to regional economies and the social impact value to regional communities.
4. Respect the rights of the population to freely enjoy music festivals of whatever size and genre.
5. Accept the role of festivals in the overall music and arts ecology in providing employment, performance opportunities and new audiences for musicians, composers and songwriters.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours faithfully,

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