

2024 NATIONAL
FOLK FEST
MUSIC. CULTURE. GOOD TIMES.

ANNUAL REPORT



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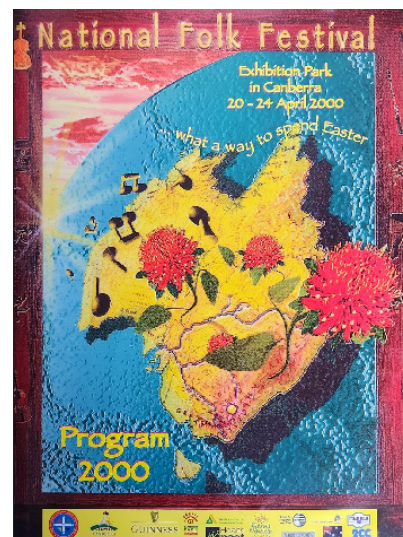
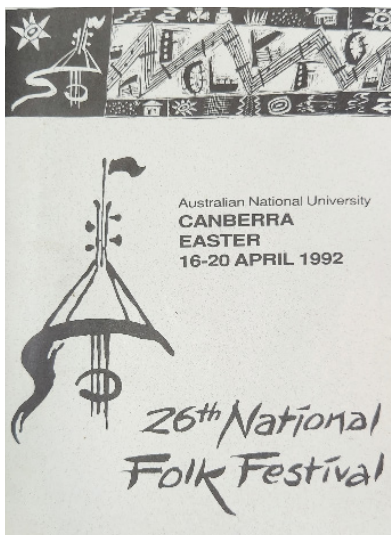
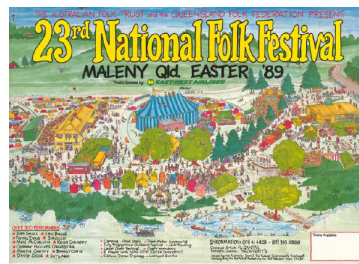
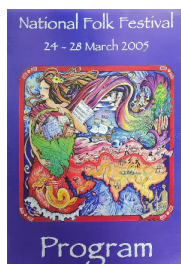
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NFF HISTORY

The National Folk Festival started life as the Port Phillip District Folk Music Festival on the weekend of 11 and 12 of February in 1967 at the Teachers College, Melbourne University. A second Festival was held in Melbourne in 1968 and then, in 1969 it was relocated to Brisbane. From then on, it crisscrossed the country, being held annually in a different state/territory under the auspices of the Australian Folk Trust.

The last travelling National Folk Festival was held in 1992 when the National Folk Festival Limited, a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, was formed for the primary purpose of annually conducting the event. From 1993 the National Folk Festival was permanently located on Ngunnawal Country in Canberra (ACT) where it established its current home at Exhibition Park. In 2024 the National Folk Festival celebrated its 58th year of the festival and 56th annual event (no event in 2020/2021 due to COVID), a testament to its ability to remain culturally relevant and enduring.



THE CURRENT FESTIVAL

The National Folk Festival is an annual highlight for Australia's folk community as well as for those who love the Festival for the quality and variety of its world-class program and the wide range of engagement it provides for attendees. Attracting a broad audience across different ages, sexes, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds patrons travel from all over Australia and some from overseas to attend the event. The Festival also attracts volunteers, stallholders, instrument makers, both national and international performers and community folk groups as well as our enduring community who return every year.

The National Folk Festival celebrates folk culture in all its diverse forms from high-end entertainment to the expression of folk-life through grassroots and participatory activities. Its multi-disciplinary program offers music, dance, circus, spoken word, street theatre, talks, master classes, community arts and a range of family and child-oriented activities. The Festival also provides many services that are beneficial to individuals and communities. These include, but are not limited to, stages and spaces to share and engage in the expression of folk culture, opportunities to participate in the folk arts through workshops and forums, the potential for new and emerging artists to develop and showcase their craft and, for industry practitioners, a chance to network and connect with each other.

The Festival supplements the large permanent venues on site with temporary venues providing patrons with a range of performance spaces and other facilities where they can relax and enjoy the entertainment or socialise with friends and family. Many come for the whole Easter weekend, camping on site. Over its long history, the National Folk Festival has prospered with the enthusiastic support of volunteers, performers and the wider folk community. The Festival is a cultural product with meaning and value, a strategic player in the wider folk community and a highly regarded advocate for excellence, innovation and accessibility across all disciplines of the folk arts. It is a key event on the ACT's cultural calendar and generates significant economic benefits to ACT tourism and the local community. In 2024 there were 14 venues and workshop spaces and over 1200 performers. Over the Easter break there were the following;

- 200+ staged performances
- 80+ dances
- 100+ workshops, sessions and forums
- 60+ street performances
- 140+ different groups/individuals across spoken word, music, circus, dance and community groups.
- 50+ collaborations
- 14 venues



OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The National Folk Festival is a hub for the Australian folk community. We provide a meeting place to perform, share and develop folk traditions. We serve an evolving community that values participation, learning, listening and creating. We value the diversity of folk traditions in Australia, including First Nations culture and traditions, and traditions brought during colonisation and through subsequent and ongoing migration.

Folk traditions are not static, but constantly adapting. They look to the past, to the present and to the future. Folk culture is varied it encompasses music, dance, spoken word, craft among other things. Our mission goes beyond simply presenting these activities to an audience. The National Folk Festival supports the ways in which this knowledge is passed on and transformed through practice, through listening and through exchange. This is what makes our Folk Festival unique. Our event is shaped by a community of participants who engage with the Festival on many levels.

We seek to create a forum for these active, engaged and skilled communities to become new again each year. In order to ensure the National Folk Festival remains viable for future generations and can continue to support these communities, and to attain our state goals, our event must be financially sustainable. We aim for continuous improvement in our business and our Festival, creating a safe and enjoyable environment for all involved.

VALUES

Respect - For our traditional and contemporary folk culture; for one another.

Diversity - In our programming, in our participants, in our knowledge, opinions and experiences.

Participation - A festival developed in collaboration with others; a festival for active participation.

Sustainability - In our festival business model, in our folk eco-system and in an environmental context.

Innovation - In our business, in our programming, in our vision for the future of the NFF.

Teamwork - Common goals, different roles, collaborative action, shared accountability and rewards.

Professionalism - Good governance and management, honesty, integrity and transparency.



STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal

Stage an annual folk festival that aspires to be the annual peak folk event in Australia.

Actions

- Stage concerts of curated folk music and dance that showcases a wide variety of cultures including those of our First Australians and our many immigrant communities both contemporary and past;
- Present, promote and provide opportunities at the Festival for people of all cultural backgrounds and ages to participate in the playing of folk music, participating in folk dance and engaging in folk culture;
- Provide opportunities for the teaching of folk traditions via organised sessions, poetry reading/recitation, dance events etc...and by enabling spontaneous jam sessions;
- Provide educational opportunities, (e.g., workshops and masterclasses), for folk music, dance and culture;
- Engage a limited number of artists and acts from overseas when funds permit;
- Create a festival environment that is welcoming and inclusive, and is able to attract a diverse audience and range of performers.

Measures of success

- The National Folk Festival is regarded as the festival of choice for practitioners, researchers and collectors of folk traditions in Australia.



STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal

Build a financially profitable and sustainable Festival.

Actions

- Develop a financially viable and achievable business model for the Festival;
- Aim to obtain a profit from the Festival that is sufficient to provide seed funding for the next Festival;
- Identify potential cost savings in the short term through infrastructure and technology improvements;
- Diversify and build new income streams to reduce our reliance on ticket sales by:
 - Increasing in-kind and financial support by developing partnerships and sponsorship,
 - Increase endowment via donations, corporate sponsorship, fundraising campaigns, e.g., Giving Day and bequests;
 - Cost recovery of services where possible, e.g., camping and parking, hire of equipment e.g. mobility scooters and wheelchairs;
 - Sales of merchandise.
- Develop a marketing plan that;
 - Identifies target groups, including new audiences;
 - Explores marketing opportunities via partnerships;
 - Considers improving the NFF website and utilising it as an effective communication and marketing tool;
 - Increases marketing via social media.
- Develop a contingency plan to ensure that we have options for another festival site if the current site at EPIC becomes unavailable, either temporarily or permanently.

Measures of success

- The National Folk Festival is able to continue providing a high-quality and valued event for the folk community.
- The National Folk Festival makes a profit from the annual Festival that is sufficient to provide seed funding for the next NFF.
- The National Folk Festival has contingency plans in place in the event the current Festival site becomes unavailable.



STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal

Develop key partnerships and mutually beneficial relationships.

Actions

- Enhance and extend the reputation of the Festival with existing and emerging stakeholders;
- Develop partnerships with, and sponsorship from, businesses and organisations in the Canberra region to become a well-recognised major event on the Canberra region tourism calendar;
- Develop relationships and partnerships to;
 - Increase sponsorship for both paid and in-kind for services;
 - Increase brand recognition for the Festival;
 - Create opportunities for publicity and media exposure;
 - Support other folk music events.

Measures of success

- The National Folk Festival remains well-regarded by folkies and folk organisations, by government, and by relevant businesses for large events and festivals.
- The National Folk Festival is regarded as a desirable partner for sponsorship opportunities.
- The National Folk Festival is regarded as having a positive financial impact on Canberra by relevant government and non-government organisations.
- The National Folk Festival is regarded as a major event on Canberras tourism calendar.



STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal

Continuously improve leadership and administration.

Actions

- Seek continuous improvement in Festival administration through, for example, the employment of experienced event professionals with the necessary skills to deliver the Festival;
- Increase efficiency by outsourcing functions that can be delivered more economically by third-party suppliers with the necessary expertise;
- Ensure the continued viability of the National Folk Festival through periods of uncertainty or economic shocks (e.g. COVID-19) by building a strong culture of risk management to work through ambiguity.
- Maintain an effective Board through strategic appointments and succession planning that complies with good governance principles and provides strong and clear strategic leadership for the NFF.

Measures of success

- Progress toward strategic goals is assessed at regular intervals.
- Strategic goals are reviewed at regular intervals and updated as needed.
- Pursuit of strategic goals is undertaken in a manner consistent with other NFF policies and plans (e.g., RAP, Sustainability plan etc...)



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

In the history of the National Folk Festival, 2023-24 will rank as one of the hardest years for the organisation. A phenomenal team of staff and volunteers produced an exciting and innovative festival. But despite the showcase of music, dance, song, poetry and circus that we know and love, the financial challenges of the 2024 Festival cannot be understated.

Once again, our community showed up. Our small army of area coordinators and volunteers turned up and their knowledge, dedication and skill were on show as our vibrant and colourful festival came to life at EPIC. We cannot put on the festival without this extraordinary team and I thank everyone who was part of making the 2024 National Folk Festival come to life.

A central aspect of the festival is a strong artistic program. Our artistic team led by Holly Downes, Michael Sollis and Chris Stone brought to life a vision for a festival that celebrated excellence, integration, inclusion and sustainability. Both on and off the program, our artists created amazing opportunities for festival-goers to get involved – learning, playing, dancing and more – and brought the celebration of the diversity of Australian folk to the fore.

The Festival could not be presented each year without the support of our stallholders who create the festival village alongside our volunteers. Likewise, our partners – be they key suppliers, media, production partners and the ACT Government – are essential to making the National Folk Festival happen. We appreciate the new ideas and commitment that each of these relationships bring to the organisation each year.

Of course, 2023-24 was not all positive. Despite the hard work of all involved, the 2024 National Folk Festival ran at a significant financial loss. The Festival is not immune from economic headwinds and cost of living challenges and, despite strong efforts in recent years to manage costs, revenue (led by ticket sales) was significantly below budget.

The results of the 2024 Festival demanded drastic action to put the organisation on a sustainable path. The board undertook the difficult, but necessary, decision to restructure our team. I recognise that this was a painful process but the signs are that these steps are working, enabling us to adapt to a changing market. I want to acknowledge our entire 2024 team for their dedicated efforts. In addition, I want to thank Heidi Pritchard, Natalie Bremer, Stephanie Vieceli, and Poorva Sangam for their contributions to the National Folk Festival.

Finally, we will continue to see change on the Board. Following several years as our Finance Chair – and a stint as interim Managing Director – Chris Grange has stepped down. Likewise, Jackie Luke and Jude Barlow have stepped back to meet other commitments. I am grateful for Chris, Jackie and Jude's contributions in their time on the Board.

David Gilks, President



FESTIVAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT

I started as the Operations Manager of the 2024 festival in October 2023, and really enjoyed the experience. It was also a steep learning curve, as I was busy organising logistics and operations, plus liaising with so many of our wonderful volunteers, and learning more about the festival's rich history.

The culture, the people and especially the music make this such a special event. We were also very lucky with the weather in 2024 – every day it was beautiful sunshine, and this helped add to the joyous experience of the event.

I'd like to thank Heidi and the whole 2024 team (including paid staff members, contractors and our amazing volunteer coordinators), who made it a great festival. But I also need to acknowledge the financial difficulties that the festival is currently facing, and I note that we are working hard towards building a more financially-stable festival.

The 2024 event wouldn't have happened without our volunteer teams, their passion and support – I am still in awe of how many people give selflessly their time, skills and experience to make the festival what it is. A special mention to our Waste Coordination Volunteer team, who helped to win the Sustainable Event category of the Climate Choice Business Awards, a well-deserved win for the team and the festival.

We have improved our accessibility on-site and this will be a special focus point for years to come – venues, stages, facilities will be closely aligned with these important goals, but we will also focus on making our printed and digital resources more accessible.

Our Artistic Directors Holly, Michael and Chris shaped the 2024 Festival, and are back on board for 2025 – here's something from them.

"In 2024, the National Folk Festival embraced an ethos of empowering artists and audiences to create and celebrate together, rooted in principles of Excellence, Inclusion, Integration, and Sustainability. Key moments included the Festival Choir led by The Maes, international singer-songwriters John Craigie and Grace Petrie, a Greek Glendi celebration with bouzouki player Con Kalamaras and dancer George Kiriakidis, and the Gay Charmers Old Time Band's revival of a mid-20th-century dance.

First Nation artists were central across the Festival, including the Us Mob Writing Group, Ngunnawal workshops by Richie Allan, Wiradjuri Echoes in dance, and Radical Son in music. Support from the ANU School of Music's Yil Lull Studio provided further First Nations artists and hosted numerous events.

The Festival's commitment to inclusivity and integration broadened cultural representation. This included an Indonesian focus with Gamelan Dan Anda and Suara Dance, and the Queer Céilí led by Queer The Set. Forums explored what "Australian folk" truly encompasses, challenging traditional narratives and enriching the folk landscape. The Festival continues to have a pivotal role of asking these questions, and will continue to do so in 2025.



FESTIVAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT

An increasing focus on interaction between music, dance, spoken word, community arts, and the circus program created fresh connections and artistic exchanges. This included Quebecois group Mélisande's playing for a contra dance with Tasmanian caller David Wanless, and an innovative collaboration between Warehouse Circus and the Ellery String Quartet.

Participation through Festival ensembles grew in number, with musicians like Irish concertina player Aisling Lyons leading the Festival Squeezeboxes. The reimaged Festival layout, which included an expanded Piazza, contributed to a 30% rise in dance engagement. The Festival is continuing to strengthen partnerships with Folk Alliance Australia and our sister festivals, and is increasingly bringing international artists to Australia to also feature in other festivals."

I'm excited to be back as the Festival Director for the 2025 festival, shaping the event to become fiscally more sustainable, while keeping true to its core.

To help achieve this we will be broadening our focus to look at streamlining suppliers, and receiving sponsorship and grants. We just received \$120,000 as part of the Revive Live grant funding from the Federal Government, which will really support next year's festival.

There is a lot of work to do, thinking and planning, but there can and will be an exciting future for the National Folk Festival, as we are moving towards our 60th anniversary in 2026.

I look forward to seeing you over Easter next year, we really appreciate all your support.

Anne Denzer, Festival Director



COMPANY MEMBERS

National Folk Festival Limited is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. All Company members are either:

1. Past or present members of the Board, and include the subscribers to the original Memorandum of Association of the Company.
2. Former Managing/Festival Directors.
3. Other persons with requisite qualifications, skills and experience. Many have also been Festival Area Co-ordinators or volunteers in other capacities or folk performers. All are long-term Festival attendees.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The volunteer Board of Directors is elected annually by Company Members, as are the executive positions of President and Vice President.

Board Members for the 2023/24 Financial Year are listed below.

David Gilks - President | *Appointed 2018*

Virginia Cook - Vice President | *Appointed 2020*

Chris Grange - Director | *Appointed 2018*

Dr Iain G Johnston - Director | *Appointed 2020*

Chris Harris-Pascal - Director | *Appointed 2020*

John Nicholls - Director | *Appointed 2022*

Daniel Watters - Director | *Appointed 2023*

Jacqueline Luke - Director | *Appointed 2023*

Emma Cottam - Director | *Appointed 2023*

Jude Barlow - Director | *Appointed 2023*



VOLUNTEERS

The festival in 2024 had 928 volunteers including 54 Coordinators across 43 teams who delivered a fantastic event. The total number of volunteers that signed up for the event was 1,010, up from 990 sign ups (and 820 working) in 2023, and applications were closed as all teams were full by the week of the festival.

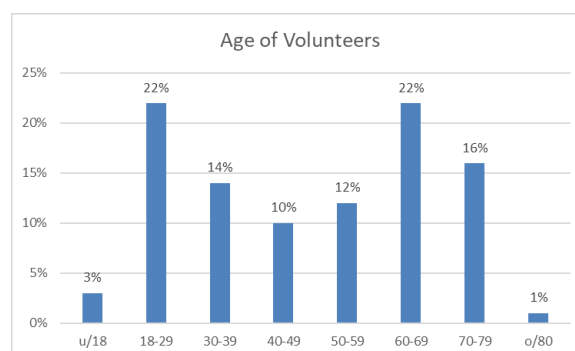
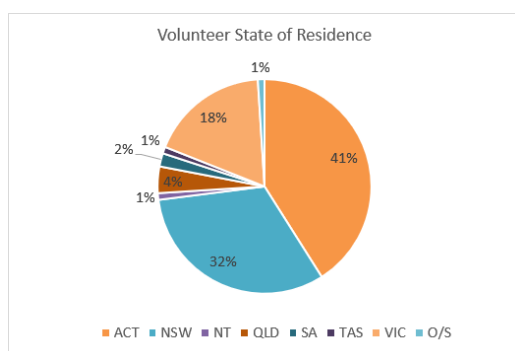
The difference between numbers signed up and those that attended is accounted for by volunteers who fell ill or had other circumstances that meant they were unable to attend.

With a target of at least 900 volunteers on site, a goal of 1000 signups allows for 10-15% contingency, and we are happy to have reached targets, building on the successes of the 2023 festival.

Most of our team coordinators are returning for 2025 as they continue to work closely with staff rebuilding post covid. This continuity is so important to the success of the festival and their dedication must be acknowledged.

A few statistics;

- There were over 928 volunteers with an average of 24 hours per person.
- At least 22,272 total volunteer hours were worked over the festival.
- There were 8 volunteers aged over 80, the oldest was 84



TREASURER'S REPORT

In the 2023-24 financial year, which includes our 2024 Festival, the company incurred a deficit of \$473,517 compared to a budgeted deficit of \$115,857. This amount of deficit put a significant strain on the company's cash reserves which is the why we ended the financial year with negative cash reserves of \$23,604 (mainly due to a bank overdraft of \$67,853), compared to positive cash reserves of \$540,654 in the previous financial year.

This unprecedented change in financial operation (excluding the COVID years) was not just isolated to NFF. It was the experience across the music festival sector in Australia during 2023-24 due to significant reduction in attendance numbers.

The deficit of \$473,517 was a result of total income falling by \$340,090, \$1,898,592 compared to budgeted income of \$2,238,682, a 15% decrease. Total expenditure increased marginally by \$17,570, \$2,372,109 compared to budgeted expenditure of \$2,354,539, a 1% increase.

The shortfall in income, compared to budget, was a result of decreases in ticket sales of \$322,544, and retail sales of \$54,092. This was offset by an ACT event fund grant of \$30,000, and an increase in Other income of \$6,546.

The increased expenditure was due to increases of \$74,083 in Performer and Site costs, \$15,328 in Administration costs, and \$24,386 in Occupancy costs (mainly due to an unbudgeted \$19,375 depreciation expense) . This was offset by savings in Promotional and Advertising costs of \$12,110, and \$84,117 in Staffing costs.

The impact of the deficit for 2024 was that our net assets decreased from \$1,288,242 in 2023, to \$814,725. More significantly, our working capital (consisting mainly of cash reserves) fell from \$467,560 in 2023, to \$28,987.

To ensure that the NFF would continue to maintain its financial viability, the Board did the following. Firstly, put in place a bank overdraft facility of \$250,000 secured by the Office building. Secondly, put the Office building up for sale for \$795,000.

At the time of writing this report, the Office building remains unsold but with ticketing for the 2025 festival underway in August 2024, this meant that we stopped being in bank overdraft by 22 August. The 2024-25 ticket sales are currently showing an increased uptake compared to 2023-24 year. In addition, we have been successful in securing a grant of \$120,000 from the Australian Government, under the Revive Live program, for the 2025 festival.

Looking to the 2025 festival, the early signals of strong ticket sales and with the Revive Live grant, I am of the view that we will finish the 2024-25 financial year in a stronger financial position ensuring ongoing financial viability.

Roy Volmari, Treasurer



FESTIVAL AWARDS

National Folk Festival Lifetime Achievement Award – Stephen Taberner

National Folk Fellow Recipient 2024 – John Shortis

Alistair Hulett Memorial Award – Paddy McHugh

Traditional Social Dance Association of Victoria Awards

Beatrice Klippel Memorial Trophy for General Social Dance - Joint winners
Patricia George and Cecelia Johnson

VFMC Perpetual Trophy for Dances for More experienced Dancers - Keith Wood

National Folk Festival Reciter of the Year – Sandy Holmes

Blue Shearer award for best Original Poem – Rebecca Rushbrook

Infinite Song Competition – The Spooky Men's Chorale

Gill Rees Memorial Award – Apolline

Norm Meriggan Award – Ziah Cooper

New Volunteer of the Year – Súlán Ó Muirgheasa

Returning Volunteer of the Year – Sabine Friedrich

Volunteer Team of the Year – Festival Office

People's Choice Volunteer of the Year – Robyn Bennet Healy



FESTIVAL ATTENDANCE, DEMOGRAPHICS AND TICKETING

In 2024 the festival had an aggregate attendance of 30,500 across all categories including paying attendees, performers and volunteers. When repeat attendees are factored out the total number of attendees was 9,717.

This year attendees provided feedback through the post festival survey, with the outcomes listed below.

According to our survey report, we encouraged 6,408 visitors to the ACT, brought \$4.33 million into the economy, and generated 30,476 individual nights for the ACT. 15.2% of our attendees were first timers and 71.6% of people who attended said they would come again. The gender split of attendees and age brackets have not changed markedly over the last few years and is to be expected. There is a slight majority of female attendees (62.4%) and people are more likely to be between 60 and 69 years of age (32.4%) and we are very popular with the empty nesters (75.4%).

24.9% of attendees said that the festival exceeded their expectations, and our attendee satisfaction is 4.1/5.

Almost half of non-local attendees (41.5%) decided to camp on site this year. Of those interstate attendees, just over one fifth (21.8%) stayed in a standard motel/hotel while 17% stayed with a friend or relative. When asked if our attendees had visited other attractions while they were here, the National Gallery, National Museum, and the National Portrait Gallery being the most popular.

31.3% of people want to see more of Canberra next time they return and according to the surveys, the most enjoyable aspects of the Festival were themed concerts, the sessions, socializing, music workshops, dance, street performance and blackboard venues.

Those surveyed had suggestions for key improvements for us. Number one was to include more / different performances, such as headliners, buskers and to increase the diversity of acts. Suggestions also included to improve the event map / program (physical and digital) and to offer more variety of stalls and non-alcoholic drink options.

We have listened to this feedback and intend to diversify the program and balancing the offering with headliners and other artists. We will be making the printed and especially the digital program more accessible with clear colors and language and we are also in the process of selecting stalls that will complement the 2025 festival with a variety of offerings and different price points. Our bar menu will be reimaged with more non-alcoholic beverage options and also a wider range of alcoholic pre-mixed drinks and wines.



2024 NATIONAL FOLK FEST

MUSIC. CULTURE. GOOD TIMES.

Monday to Friday 10am – 4pm
www.folkfestival.org.au
Unit 11/160 Lysaght St, Mitchell, ACT

