

2024 NATIONAL  
FOLK FEST  
MUSIC. CULTURE. GOOD TIMES.

# ANNUAL REPORT



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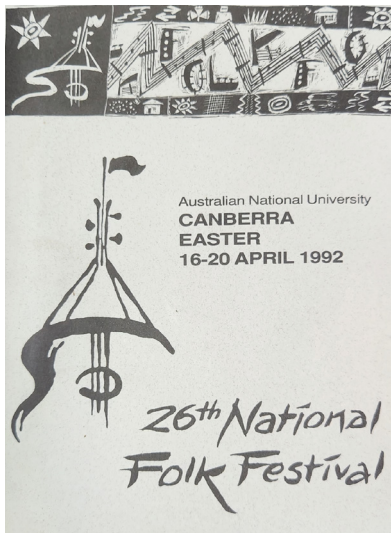
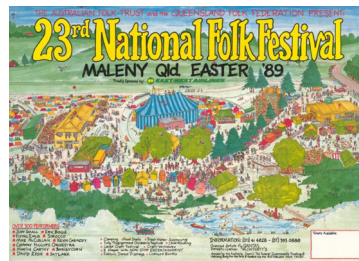




# NFF HISTORY

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 Ngannawal Country in Canberra (ACT) where it established its current home at Exhibition Park. In 2023 the National Folk Festival celebrated its 55th annual event (one year off for 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 55-year 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 2023 there were 11 venues, 3 workshop spaces and approximately 1478 performers. Over the Easter break there were the following;

- 230+ concert performances over 11 venues over four days
- 60+ workshops
- 35+ participatory singing and instrumental sessions
- 30 performances in the KidsFest
- 15 themed dances
- 25 dance workshops
- 30 dance displays
- 10 talks, forums and discussions
- Street performances by choirs, Morris dancers, circus performers and marching bands
- 150 performer acts
- 297 musical or spoken word acts
- 264 dance display groups
- 69 other dance activities
- 5 Morris sides (groups)
- 186 in participatory sessions
- 148 circus or street
- Three marching bands
- 121 choir members



## 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...)



# PRESIDENTS REPORT

As I look back and reflect on what the 2022-23 year meant for the National Folk Festival, the words that come to mind are community and renewal. It was a fantastic team that came together and put on a fabulous event. The 2023 National Folk Festival was a diverse and fun showcase of Australian and global folk and truly did present music, culture and good times for those who came through the gates.

The community that makes up the National Folk Festival was on show this year. Our fantastic volunteers returned lending their skills, experience and time to make the event a success. I never cease to be amazed at the industriousness of our volunteers and the area coordinators who really build and run the Festival each year. Without fail, they take an empty venue and breathe the life and magic into it that is the Festival. Thank you to each and every one of our volunteers who made the 2023 Festival as special as it was.

It really wouldn't be a folk festival without an exceptional artistic program. A diversity of artists brought their music, song, dance and words to the stage and the street, bringing joy to those who saw, heard and got involved. Our artists also lent in to one of the most important aspects of the National Folk Festival - participation. This year featured more opportunities than ever before to learn from our artists and to get involved, whether in workshops, sessions or dances.

I thank our partners - large and small - for the contributions they all make to the success of the Festival. Partnerships are essential to our organisation and whether it is the Australian Government RISE Fund, which supported us out of the pandemic, our media and production partners, or our key suppliers, each and every partner plays a role in making the National Folk Festival a success.

Our stallholders too play a critical role in bring life (and sustenance) to the Festival each year. I have to acknowledge the fabulous work of our team through a period of renewal for the Festival. Stalwarts of the Festival came together with new faces to build an exceptional team. I couldn't be prouder of the work they did to deliver a fabulous artistic program, produce the event, sell tickets and keep our volunteers happy.

While there were significant challenges in the lead up to the event, the dedication and professionalism shown was something to behold. I want to extend my thanks to those Board and Company members who stepped up to support the team and realise the 2023 Festival. As we head into 2024, I am pleased to report that we have a strong team on board with the capability and will to make sure that the finest traditions of our Festival are maintained, and that we continue a path towards a more sustainable future. The new team, lead ably by Heidi Pritchard, will also help the Festival to continue to play its role in Australia's ongoing journey of reconciliation with our First Peoples as we implement our inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan.

Renewal will continue as we welcome a new Board at our Annual General Meeting. After a decade of service, PJ Williams is stepping down from the Board. Lynne O'Brien, Rafe Morris and Helen Ludellen will also step down. I am immensely grateful for the contributions PJ, Lynne, Rafe and Helen have made to the Board and the Festival. I look forward to working with our new Board members who will join at the AGM.

**David Gilks, President**



# MANAGING DIRECTOR REPORT

What a beautiful time to come to the Festival as the Managing Director. I had the privilege of attending the 2023 Festival for the last time as a punter, knowing that in 2024 it would be me standing in the center of the Festival with the reins in my hands. I spent five days talking to people, hearing what they wanted from their Festival and encouraging them to imagine what it might look and feel like. Chris and his team and Lynne O'Brien before that set up a magical event. It felt like home.

The 2023 Festival had too many highlights to name. Despite that, let me give you a few of my favourites, I am sure you are going to recognise them. Watching Felicity Dowd come up through the Black-boards to perform with such passion at the closing concert.

Rushing out with everyone else to cheer on the Grand Parade and seeing the delight on the faces of our next generation of folk attendees and professionals. Sitting quietly in the dark of the Budawang and letting the beautiful words and musicality of Frank Yamma wash over me. Ushering Billy Bragg around the Festival hotly pursued by Morris Dancers, it was the bells that gave them away. Watching the volunteer teams clock off and go and see something but then rush back to their team to tell them all about it because they had formed such a tight-knit group.

It was a lovely experience. The 2023 Festival made some real gains, building on the foundation of the 2022 Festival. 2023 celebrated our First Nations performers both established and emerging as well as welcoming people from a variety of cultural backgrounds, adding to the rich tapestry of talent and showcasing Australia in all our shapes and colours. 38% of our visitors were from Canberra which means 61% of people travelled to Canberra to participate in our Festival. 23% of people stayed in hotels which left 20% of visitors camped with us.

We increased our vendor offering and despite a slight miscalculation when it came to gnocchi, people enjoyed the offering and we have learned more about what the Festival goes expect. 82.4% of attendees had attended more than one National Folk Festival, again showing us that return visitation and listening to our community is essential for the ongoing nature of the Festival. It also shows us that we can look to the future to encourage new participation.

As you all know, if we can encourage people to come once, they will come back to us over and over again. As the 2022-2023 Financial Year drew to a close, we turned our heads toward the 2024 Festival. The tryptic of Artistic Directors, Holly Downes, Chris Stone and Michael Sollis, haven given us a new lens with which to view the programming. The ADs have settled the dance, street choir, spoken word and other elements of the Festival before finalising the musical component as we celebrate the Festival with all its moving parts.

They are working hard to reinvigorate relationships as we finally put COVID and the post COVID slump behind us, reaching out to support new festivals, work with existing festivals to share artists and lean back into the Festival's history of scholar-ship and supporting emerging artists. We will focus on attracting new audiences including parents with kids under twelve as we lift our families offering, people from a multicultural backgrounds and people living with disabilities as we seek to improve our accessibility.

We want to see our people return after our years of disruption due to COVID. Our returning volunteers are back with vigor, ready to wrestle whatever is to come. We have appointed all of our Volunteer Coordinators and teams are filling up fast. The volunteers are the heartbeat of our Festival. In 2024 we will celebrate all the things that make us the National Folk Festival and look forward to seeing you all there.

**Heidi Pritchard, Managing 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 2022/23 Financial Year are listed below.

**David Gilks - President** | *Appointed 2018*

**Virginia Cook - Vice President** | *Appointed 2020*

**Helen Ludellen - Company Secretary** | *Appointed 2018*

**Chris Grange - Director** | *Appointed 2018*

**Peter Williams - Director** | *Appointed 2013*

**Rafe Morris - Director** | *Appointed 2022*

**Dr Iain G Johnston - Director** | *Appointed 2020*

**Chris Harris-Pascal - Director** | *Appointed 2020*





# VOLUNTEERS

The festival in 2023 had over 820 volunteers including 47 Coordinators across 39 teams who delivered a fantastic event. The total number of volunteers that signed up for the event was 990, with the difference being volunteers who fell ill or had other circumstances that meant they were unable to attend.

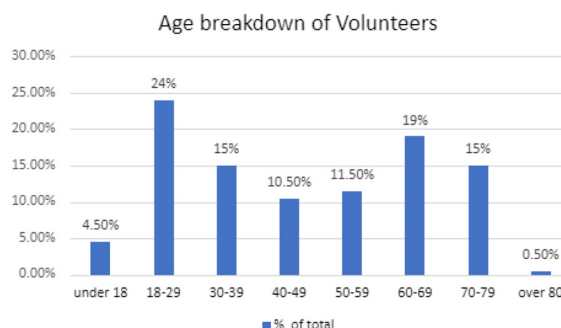
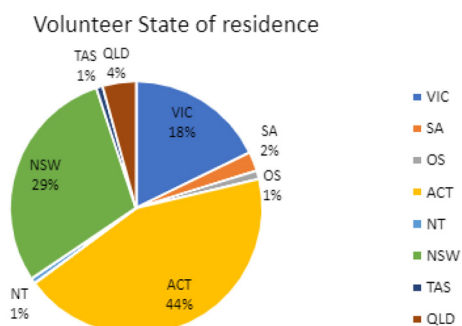
With a target of 850 volunteers on site, a goal of 1000 signups to allow for 10-15% contingency, we were very happy to reach so close to this target. COVID was still a factor for many of our volunteers decision to attend or not attend in 2023, including a reluctance to travel, congregate in large groups, or simply catching COVID in the week prior.

Those who were unable to attend were disappointed and intended to sign up again for the 2024 Festival.

We are thrilled at the number of volunteers who have signed up for the 2024 Festival, with all of our volunteer coordinator positions filled already and teams being built.

A few statistics;

- There were over 820 volunteers with an average of 24 hours per person.
- 19,920 total volunteer hours over the Festival.
- Our Waste team sent 4.0 tonnes of mixed recycling, 1.8 tonnes of organics for composting, 6.2 tonnes of waste to landfill and 7200 litres of grey water.
- There were 4,500 containers deposited in container deposit scheme.
- We lost one musician who we located after 48 hours.
- There were five kittens born in the Henley on day one of setup.



# TREASURER'S REPORT

The 2022-23 financial year encompasses our 2023 Festival, our second post COVID-19 festival. The audited financial statements are included in the annual report. In the previous 2021-22 financial year, we recorded a surplus of \$90,157 with total revenues of \$2,552,279. This financial year, we recorded a deficit of \$62,411, with total revenues of \$2,443,947. In 2021-22, revenues included \$650,000 in grant revenues but this reduced to \$450,000 in 2022-23ar but some of the reduction was offset by growth of \$100,000 in our own revenues.

This was also the last year of our \$450,000 grant from the Commonwealth Government under its COVID-19 recovery Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) program. The following comments are comparisons to our 2022 performance and/or to our 2023 budget. The 2022-23 budget, as approved by the Board, planned for a surplus of \$79,812 but we have instead recorded a loss of \$62,411. This is an adverse variation of \$142,223.

In October-December 2022, we experienced a number of problematic staffing issues. A new managing director came and went quickly and we lost all the other staff for a variety of reasons. The timing of our problems coincided with the window of time when we should have been strongly selling season tickets. Ultimately, we sold only \$632,171 of season tickets, less than the 648,000 we sold in 2022 and well under the \$771,713 budgeted. This also impacted camping revenues, which were \$16,610 under budget.

This was offset by intensive selling of day tickets: we sold \$632,032 in day tickets compared to \$611,000 in 2022 and well above the \$563,239 budgeted. We also significantly outperformed on stalls revenues, coming in 56,638 above budget and achieving the best customer ratings on food ever recorded at the Festival.

Overall, total revenues came in only \$23,254 below budget. This means that the majority of downturn in surplus (~\$120K) was due to expenses exceeding budget.

This variation can be largely attributed to 3 factors. Firstly, we overspent on marketing, spending \$48,000 more than an already large marketing budget, in an effort to make up the aforementioned lost ground on ticket sales. To some extent this succeeded with the outperformance in day ticket sales but the return on the extra investment is questionable. The second major variation was a mistake in the original budget where, for a variety of reasons, EPIC hire fees were understated by \$42,863.

The third variation was an overrun on performer expenses where budget was exceeded by \$42,893, largely due to flaws in assessing travel and accommodation requirements in the artist application process. Some other expense lines were marginally higher but a significant list of expense lines: equipment hire, sound and lighting, safety and medical, and security performed significantly better than budget.

There are 2 other notable matters. Firstly, the premises in Mitchell were revalued, recording an increase in value to \$775,000, an increase from the \$600,000 of the previous valuation undertaken in 2019. Secondly, we trialled selling tickets to the following year's Festival at a stall during the Festival itself and achieved \$30,000 in sales. While this is a small amount, it is not trivial and we intend to continue the practice. This practice allows us to capture some additional cash to see cover our expenses through until the beginning of early bird sales. At the end of the year, the balance sheet showed \$642,483 in current assets and \$174,923 in current liabilities, creating net current assets of \$467,560. This is a decrease from the \$534,330 in net current assets held at the start of the year.



# FESTIVAL AWARDS

**National Folk Festival Lifetime Achievement Award – Bob McInnes**

**National Folk Fellow Recipient 2023 – Martie Lowenstein**

**Alistair Hulett Memorial Award – Fred Smith**

**Traditional Social Dance Association of Victoria Award**

**Beatrice Klippel Memorial Trophy for General Social Dance** - Joint winners Peter Foster for Summer Eve Waltz and Cecelia Johnson for The Albert Cotillion

**VFMC Perpetual Trophy for Dances for More experienced Dancers** - Peter Foster for The Compass

**National Folk Festival Reciter of the Year – Cat Kidd**

**Blue Shearer award for best Original Poem – Laurence Webb** for the poem A letter to Fitzroy North

**Infinite Song Competition – The Pigs**

**Gill Rees Memorial Award – Felicity Dowd**

**New Volunteer of the Year – Micky Witteveen**

**Returning Volunteer of the Year – Liz Langdon**

**Volunteer Team of the Year – Waste & Recycling**

**People's Choice Volunteer of the Year – Andrea Doherty**



# FESTIVAL ATTENDANCE, DEMOGRAPHICS AND TICKETING

The 2023 Festival continued our steps out of the difficult COVID years. Many large-scale events and music festivals suffered this year with reduced numbers due to lingering concerns about border closures and gathering in large numbers. Despite that and heavy rain on the Friday of the Festival, our economic impact and attendee research report showed that our community is coming back to us and are as engaged as always. We had 4,975 season passes which works out to 24,875 individual day attendees and 5,714 day passes.

When we add all of the ticket holders together including performers, stallholders, volunteers, complimentary passes and family tickets, that gave us a total of about 43,659 attendees over the five days. According to our report, we encouraged 8,721 visitors to the ACT up on 6,277 the previous year. Bought \$5.76 million into the economy, up from \$4.29 million and generated 33,125 individual nights generated for the ACT. 17.6% of our attendees were first timers and 71.7% 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 (61.8%) and people are more likely to be between 60 and 69 years of age (31.3%) and we are very popular with the empty nesters.

We have great audience development opportunities in the 18 to 29 and again in the 30 to 39 age groups as we attempt to market to them and program for them to increase our numbers in those demographics. Of those interstate attendees, nearly one quarter (22.5%) stayed in a standard motel/hotel while 20.7% stayed with a friend or relative. Our brave campers continue to take over the site with motorhomes and tents being a popular choice. When asked if our attendees has visited other attractions while they were here, quite a few had with the National Museum, National Gallery and the National Arboretum being the most popular.

Interestingly 33.8% of people want to see more of Canberra next time they return, hopefully changing the perception that Canberra is full of politicians. According to the surveys, the most enjoyable aspects of the Festival were themed concerts, socialising, the sessions, blackboard venues, street performers, workshops, dance and spoken word. This reflects the enjoyment of most of us as we all engage in the Festival in a variety of ways. The empty nesters were significantly least likely to enjoy the street performers or the children's entertainment, which is to be expected.

Those surveyed had suggestions for key improvements for us. Number one was increasing the size and number of venues. We have listened to this feedback and intend bringing the Fitzroy Pavillion back on line for 2024 as a built stage area. 14.2% of people asked for more clarity around the event, signage, programs and general information. We will attempt to build on the work of the 2023 communications by increasing our digital communications and providing information in a variety of ways including digital, print and onsite signage. As always people would like more food and beverage options. We are increasing the number of vendors at the 2024 Festival by activating the space between the Coorong and Fitzroy pavilions, providing more seating and shade and giving people more options of places to stop and relax.

There was a small amount of people who asked for better weather predictions, we'll see what we can do. In addition, we are committed to providing better access for people living with disabilities including physical, intellectual and sensory disorders. There is a team of us, paid and volunteer staff, working on utilising the site to the absolute best of its ability and improving the entry and visitor experience. We know that people want clean bathrooms and they want to know that we really put a lot of time and effort into sustainable practices as we work towards a zero waste Festival. The feedback that we receive from our community is the building blocks of the following Festival.





# 2024 NATIONAL FOLK FEST

MUSIC. CULTURE. GOOD TIMES.

Monday to Friday 10am – 4pm  
[www.folkfestival.org.au](http://www.folkfestival.org.au)  
Unit 11/160 Lysaght St, Mitchell, ACT

