

# NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL ANNUAL REPORT

21-22





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# BACKGROUND

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 2022 the National Folk Festival celebrated its 54th annual event, a testament to its ability to remain culturally relevant and enduring.

## THE CURRENT EVENT

The National Folk Festival is an annual highlight for Australia's folk community as well as 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 a total of over 4,000 volunteers, stallholders, instrument makers, both national and international performers and community folk groups.

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.



# STRATEGIC PLAN 21-23

## 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.



# STRATEGIC PLAN 21-23 - 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 National Folk Festival
- **Teamwork** - common goals, different roles, collaborative action, shared accountability and rewards
- **Professionalism** - good governance and management, honesty, integrity and transparency



# STRATEGIC PLAN 21-23 - GOALS

## 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.



## **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.



## Goal

- Increase participation, audience and community engagement

## Actions

- Deliver a program that both addresses the interests of our core audience and is able to appeal to potential new audiences;
- Refine our volunteer program to ensure that we are efficiently using the time and expertise of our volunteers, and the volunteer experience at the NFF is well-regarded by our volunteer community;
- Increase our market reach by increasing marketing to our local region to maximise ticket sales to our local area;
- Implement initiatives to engage our core audience as well as identify and implement special initiatives to improve audience diversity, e.g. be proactive in building associations with folk art practitioners from underrepresented groups;
- Increase/improve opportunities for patrons to actively participate in the event through workshops, jam sessions and volunteering;
- Seek ongoing feedback on how to improve the NFF experience.

## Measures of success

- Volunteer numbers are sufficient for the needs of the Festival each year and volunteer experiences are positive.
- Formal and informal sessions, dances, choirs and other participatory events are well attended and remain an essential part of the Festival.



## 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 Canberra's tourism calendar.



## 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

Every year our reporting season provides an opportunity to pause and reflect on the year that was. And what a year it was for the National Folk Festival in 2021-22. Our Festival came back for the first time since the devastating cancellation of the 2020 National Folk Festival. The 2022 National Folk Festival showcased the diversity of Australian folk and delivered on a vision to Find Your Home, Find Your Family and Find Your Folk.

It has always been the case that the Festival exists for and because of our people. I am immensely proud of and thankful for the whole team that come together and make magic happen each year at Easter. Our tireless staff who lead the organisation and delivery of the Festival. Our amazing volunteers who selflessly give their time, skills and expertise to make the Festival happen. Our artists who bring stages, dance floors and the street to life with their music and art. Our partners and sponsors who support us. And I can't forget our patrons who sustain the Festival through their ticket purchases and by bringing the National Folk Festival to their friends and families to grow the community each year.

For all those involved in producing this year's Festival there were myriad challenges, including those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Aside from the direct impact of COVID-19, the new Festival team navigated a complex and changing regulatory environment, the loss of long-term suppliers and changing community behaviours. I thank all of those involved in the Festival, especially our volunteers, staff and Board, for the way they navigated those challenges to present a Festival which appeared seamless to all those patrons who came through the gates. We will learn from this year to make sure the 2023 National Folk Festival is an even better experience for all.

It is remarkable to be able to report that the Festival ends the year having posted a modest surplus. I thank our partners, sponsors and supporters for helping to make this a reality and acknowledge the significant work of the Board and staff to carefully and successfully navigate a very challenging year to deliver this result. While it is pleasing to have posted a profit, we remain conscious that this result was only possible thanks to the generous support of the Australian Government through the RISE Fund and Australia Council grants, and that of our other partners and sponsors. In this context, there remains significant work to be done to build long-term, ongoing revenues and to maintain a sustainable cost base. Our focus in coming years needs to be on rebuilding our financial reserves following the losses associated with the pandemic period.

Finally, in 2022 the Board updated the Festival's strategic plan. The Strategic Plan builds on recent plans in supporting the organisation to be a nationally recognised showcase of folk culture in Australia. We recognise through the plan, the role we play in creating space for a range of folk traditions, including those of our First Australians as well as those of our immigrant communities, past and continuing. The plan also emphasises the National Folk Festival's focus on participation in the folk arts with dance, song, spoken word, and other forms being a key focus alongside the practice and performance of music.

As we look ahead to 2023, there is much work to do but there is an exciting future for the National Folk Festival. I look forward to working with the entire Festival team as we continue our work to achieve our organisational aims and stage the event that our patrons, volunteers, staff and members know and love so much.

David Gilks

President



# MANAGING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The NFF Team would have to concur, the 2022 festival was a significant challenge, but the Festival Gods were with us. The sun shone throughout the 5 days in a perfect (but very different) world.

As you may have been aware, all our timelines were thrown into chaos for the 2022 festival – as we dealt with an ever changing environment – a brand new event team, new volunteer and event software, lost records, faithful stallholders and contractors going out of business or pausing due to COVID-19, unprecedented rain damage (mould and mud) including the redirection of booked equipment to the flooded Northern Rivers, contractors and performers cancelling due to the COVID-19 Omicron outbreak, apprehension from our volunteers to travel and lack of access to our venues due to protesters and venue staff absences due to COVID-19.

But we did it! Against all odds the small but mighty team delivered a truly wonderful festival. We could not have done it without the amazing team of volunteers who stepped up and shone brightly, and to those who worked well over and above the call of duty – we salute you.

I took on the challenge of leading the team when the previous Managing Director left in June 2021 with my role as interim MD and with the task of steering the Festival through unprecedented times. With my strengths in grant writing and working in challenging environments managed to bring some much-needed RISE Funding to get us through the pandemic and its associated challenges. I have now taken my place back on the NFF Board to provide continuity and support as we rebuild our beloved NFF.

2021 – 22 Achievements include;

- A brand-new user-friendly website
- A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in progress
- A Diversity Action Plan (DAP) on the agenda
- A renewed focus on event sustainability
- A focus on attracting younger audiences and financial stability
- New Volunteer and Event Management software

The team are working with the new Managing Director, the Board of Directors, our faithful volunteers, and Company members, planning for 2023 and into the future. The next 2 years are critical to the survival of our beloved festival.

There were some 'once in a lifetime' moments at the 2022 festival, and I am personally proud to have been part of this festival. To Katie Noonan: an absolute force of nature – your artistic vision was inspired. We are also grateful for your support and contribution in securing funding for the Festival.

We were honoured to have presented Archie Roach in his final concerts on Ngunnawal Country before he joined his ancestors. A moment in time to be remembered with love and sadness.

A special moment for me? Yothu Yindi performing 'Treaty' on its 30th Anniversary in our closing concert. It's also great to see a renewed commitment to a referendum and the Uluru Statement from the Heart now a reality. I look forward to supporting the team to deliver the 2023 Festival.

Lynne O'Brien

a/g Managing Director 2021 -22



# TREASURER'S REPORT

The 2021-22 financial year encompasses our 2022 Festival, our first full Festival since 2019 and post COVID-19 (sort of). In the year of our last Festival, the 2018-19 financial year, we recorded a loss of \$79,712. This financial year, we recorded an operating surplus of \$90,157, with total revenues of \$2,552,279.

The major factor contributing to the financial outcome this year was grants. We received \$450,000 towards the 2022 Festival (and a further \$450,000 which will go to the 2023 Festival) from the Commonwealth Government under its COVID-19 recovery Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) program as well as \$100,000 from the Australia Council and \$100,000 from the ACT Government's Major Events Fund (MEF). That means we received a total of \$650,000 in grants, a level the Festival has never seen before, and one unlikely to be repeated.

Ticket sales for the 2022 Festival amounted to \$1,412,470, which is lower than in 2019 - \$1,589,160. However, there were many reasons for this. This year season tickets and camping did surprisingly well especially when it was only at the relatively last minute that we found out that we could provide camping. Day ticket sales dropped off sharply (compared to previous years) in the last 2 weeks before the Festival and the escalating Omicron outbreak during that time may have contributed. Bar sales held their own but stall numbers were down by 50% with many of our traditional stall holders driven out of business or into hibernation because of COVID-19.

In terms of expenses, grant funding allowed us to spend more on performers and marketing than ever before. Other festival costs held relatively stable overall but there were many variations and challenges beneath that total cost and we harbour concerns for future costs with inflation levels high and continuing staff shortages with key providers.

At the end of the year, the balance sheet showed \$1,127,703 in current assets and \$593,373 in current liabilities (including the RISE Grant funding), creating net current assets of \$534,330. While this is a useful increase over the \$425,740 in net current assets held at the start of the year, it is well down on our historic levels of reserves. In looking at the adequacy of these reserves, it should be noted that each year we draw down on cash in the opening few months as we spend money in advance of tickets going on sale.



# TREASURER'S REPORT

While 2022 has therefore been a useful beginning to rebuilding both the Festival and its finances, we have a long way to go to recapture the relative security we had before COVID-19. The further RISE funding for 2023 continues to support our rebuilding but that funding will end after 2023 and we will need to be ready to stand on our own with a viable 2024 Festival.

Chris Grange

Treasurer



# 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 Coordinators 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 2021/22 Financial Year are listed below.

- Stephen Gallacher - President - Appointed 2018, resigned 2022\*
- David Gilks - Vice President - Appointed 2018\*\*
- Peter Williams - Director - Appointed 2013
- Chris Grange - Director - Appointed 2018
- Helen Ludellen - Director - Appointed 2018
- Lynette O'Brien - Director - Appointed 2020, Acting Managing Director of the 2022 Festival
- Chris Harris-Pascal - Director - Appointed 2020
- Dr. Iain G. Johnston - Director - Appointed 2020
- Virginia Cook - Director - Appointed 2020\*\*\*
- Rafe Morris - Director - Appointed 2022
- Genevieve Jacobs - Director - Appointed 2018, resigned 2021

\*Resigned after the end of the Financial Year

\*\*Appointed President after the end of the Financial Year

\*\*\*Appointed Vice President after the end of the Financial Year



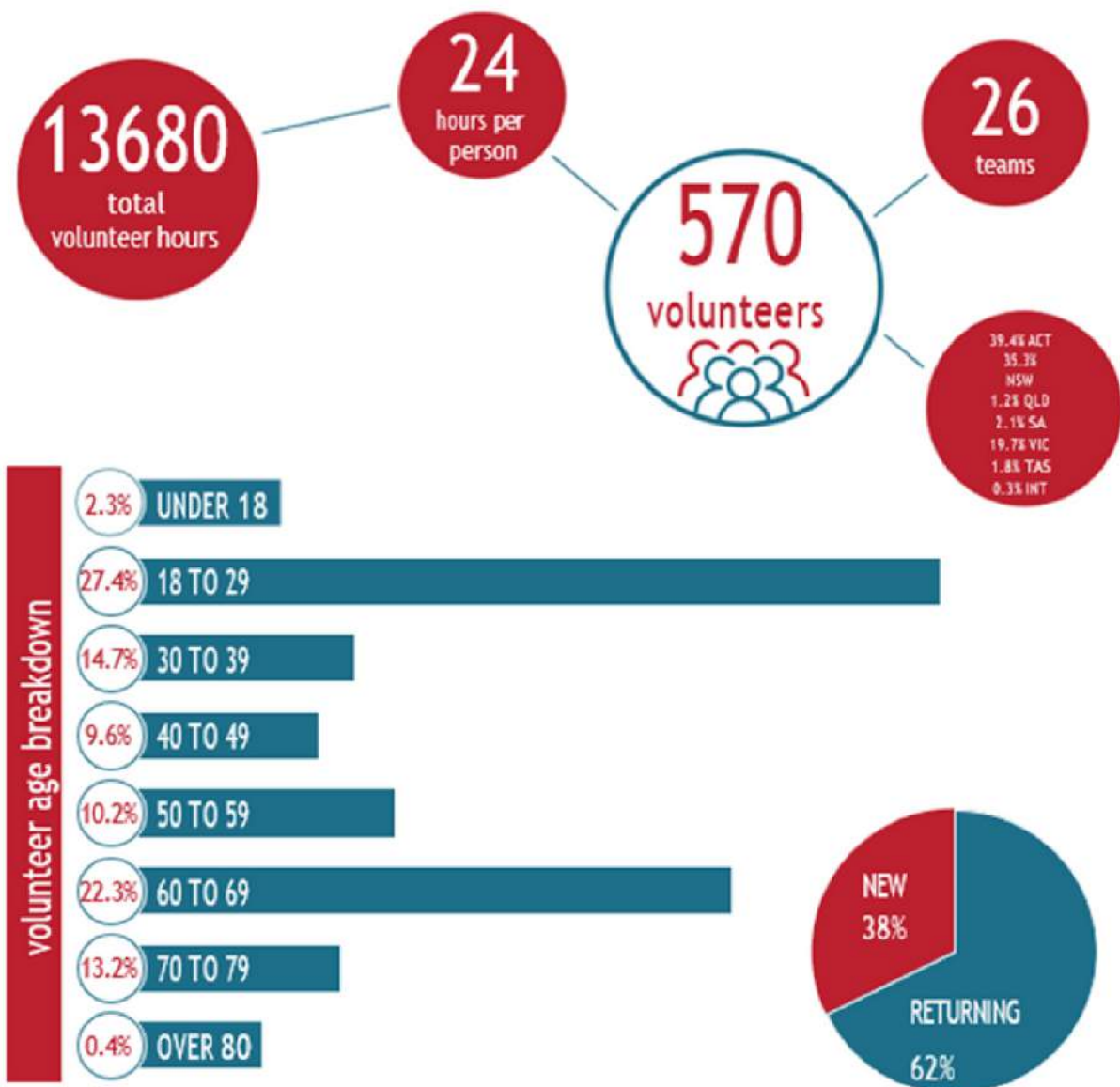
# FESTIVAL TEAM

- Managing Director: Lynne O'Brien
- Artistic Director: Katie Noonan
- Event Operations Manager: Rebekka Ambroz
- Vendor Manager and Office Administrator: Lara Wood
- Volunteer Manager and Office Administrator: Sharmini Caldwell
- Programming Manager and Office Administrator: Tom Kentwell



# VOLUNTEERS

The Festival had over 500 volunteers including 30 Area Coordinators for major areas of the Festival operation. Other persons who give assistance in a variety of ways (including program, site and venue decoration, marketing and photographs) are also acknowledged in the Program. Volunteers are the heart and soul of our Festival, and in many ways the Festival belongs to the fun loving community minded individuals who choose to get involved and become part of the Festival Family.



# FESTIVAL AWARDS

Recognising achievement and excellence, and nurturing new talent, the Festival awards make an important contribution to maintaining a dynamic Australian Folk community. The National Folk Festival is proud to host the following awards that are presented to individual artists and groups in recognition of artistic endeavours in folk music, dance and the folk arts. Congratulations to the following 2022 Award Winners:

## NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Judy Small

## NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Maria Beckett and Duncan Grylls - Construction & Mesh Team

## NATIONAL FOLK FELLOW RECIPIENT 2022

Dr. Mahesh White-Radhakrishnan

## ALISTAIR HULETT MEMORIAL AWARD

Bob Wilson

## TRADITIONAL SOCIAL DANCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA AWARDS

Beatrice Klippel Memorial Trophy for General Social Dance

Cecilia Johnson For *Ursula's Fancy* and Peter Foster for *Simply Elegant*

VFMC Perpetual Trophy for Dances for More Experienced Dancers

Keith Wood for *Crossing the Divide*

## NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL RECITER OF THE YEAR

Fleassy Malay

## BLUE THE SHEARER AWARD FOR BEST ORIGINAL POEM

Laurie McDonald

## INFINITE SONG COMPETITION

With Once Voice Choir

## GILL REES MEMORIAL AWARD

Layla Barnett



# FESTIVAL ATTENDANCE AND TICKETING REPORT

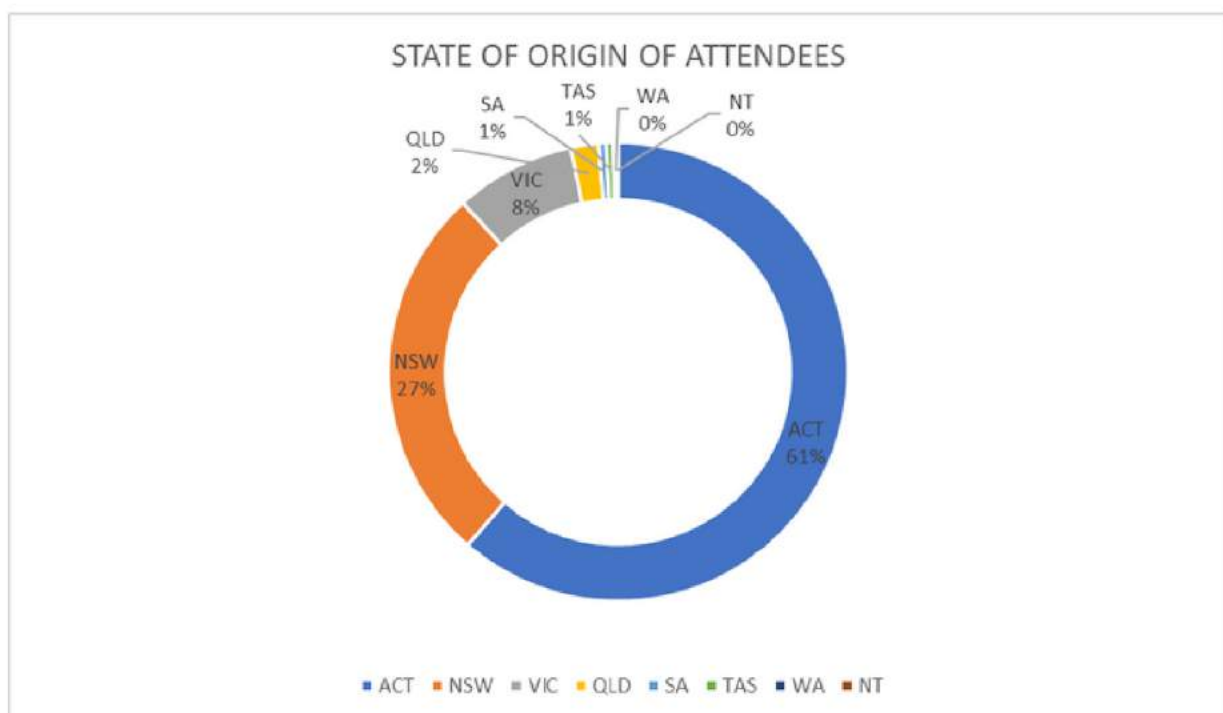
In 2022 the Festival had an aggregate attendance of 33,277 across all categories including paying attendees, performers, volunteers, staff, stallholders and contractors. When repeat attendees are factored-out the total number of unique persons was 11,577. Data was collected from each attendee at ticket point of sale and from information extracted from stalls, performer, volunteer and contractor databases.

The total daily attendance at the Festival is shown below. All attendees represented are unique persons.

## Attendees

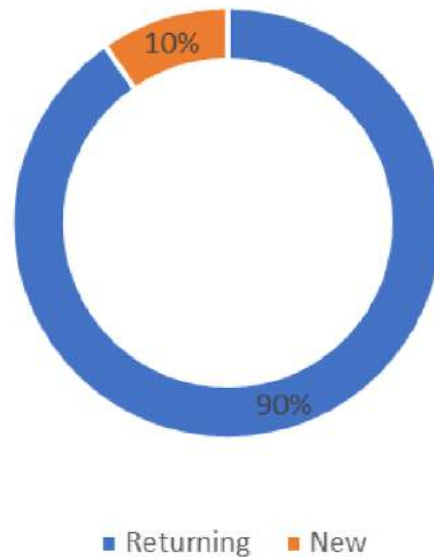
- Season Ticket Holders - 2,018
- Season + Camping Ticket Holders - 893
- Day Ticket Holders - 6,152
- Contracted Performers - 1,557
- Volunteers - 570
- Stallholder + their staff - 310
- Festival Staff + Event Contractors - 131
- **TOTAL - 11,577**

# FESTIVAL DEMOGRAPHICS



In 2022 the National Folk Festival had a total unique attendance of 11,577 persons. Data was collected from each attendee at ticket point of sale and from information extracted from stalls, performer, volunteer and contractor databases.

### RETURNING SEASON TICKET HOLDERS



In 2022 Festival attendees provided feedback through the post Festival survey. Feedback from our 2022 survey was positive noting increases in customer satisfaction across key areas of: concert venues and sound quality at those venues.

Feedback from our stall holders was positive, with many grateful to return to the Festival post-COVID-19. For 2023 we are repositioning some stallholders and offering increased trade areas within stalls to optimise sales.



# MARKETING

This year the Festival partnered with Agency9, a marketing and PR firm, who developed the festival's marketing plan, and Against The Grain, a national PR firm specialising in festival public relations. The Festival wanted to position itself as Australia's heart and home of folk culture for world-class performers, music lovers and volunteers who return year-on-year for an immersive, creative experience where they feel safe, enriched, inspired and connected.

The marketing plan for the 2022 National Folk Festival was based on three major objectives: to raise awareness of the festival, build engagement and maximise revenue. The focus was to position the festival as world-class event featuring performers, music lovers and volunteers who return year after year for an immersive folk experience. As the Festival had been on hiatus for two years, there was a distinct lack of activity on the NFF's social medial channels. There was a primary focus on social media and web-based forms of marketing and communication in an effort to capture the identified potential growth groups – Millennials, young families, and Gen Z.

The campaign strategy was planned and facilitated in month-long segments and dotted with promotional events to raise awareness and excitement for the festival. These promotions included advertising Early Bird tickets, major line-up announcements, a volunteer drive, and a media launch event amongst others.

The 2021-2022 National Folk Festival marketing toolbox was developed by the NFF's marketing company Agency 9 in collaboration with the Festival staff. The toolbox consists of primary and secondary channels of communication and marketing designed to ensure that the Festival reached as many people as possible.

The marketing tool box was anchored by 4 measurable metrics, all of which were achieved. These metrics were:

- Generate awareness of the National Folk Festival
- Attract new audiences to attend the National Folk Festival
- Attract younger audiences to attend the National Folk Festival
- Increase social media pages' followings and sign ups

Overall, the marking campaign was a success, with the four key objectives being achieved with strong results.



# NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL

Australia's Home & Heart of Folk for  
over 50 years

ABN: 96 058 761 274



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