



# National Folk Festival ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19



# 2018-19 ANNUAL REPORT



Background	3
National Folk Festival Strategic Plan 2017 – 2020	4
President’s Report	5
Festival Director’s Report	7
Company Members	9
Board of Directors	9
Festival Staff	10
Volunteers	11
Festival Awards	12
Festival Attendance and Ticketing Report	13-14
Marketing	15
A Commitment to Sustainability	16

## 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 in Canberra (ACT) where is established its current home at Exhibition Park. In 2019 the National Folk Festival celebrated its 53rd 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, a dedicated First Peoples program, 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 (all with seating) 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 52-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.



## NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL STRATEGIC PLAN 2017 – 2020

**Mission:** To deliver an annual National Folk Festival that offers a wide range of engagement in the folk arts, and a high level of participation for its attendees.

To ensure the event is safe, culturally relevant, creative and enduring with a strong sense of community.

**Vision:** The National Folk Festival will be a nationally recognised, annual exposition of folk culture.

### Core Values:

1. Respect – for our traditional and contemporary folk culture; for one another
2. Inclusiveness – openness to diverse participation, respecting personal contribution and effort
3. Teamwork – common goals, different roles, collaborative action, shared accountability and rewards
4. Professionalism – good governance and management, honesty, integrity and transparency

### Goals

1. ARTISTIC – Present an artistically engaging and exciting festival
2. FINANCIAL – Strong financial resilience
3. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION – Innovative Marketing and Promotion
4. BUSINESS – Good business, and an efficient organisation
5. PEOPLE – A motivated flexible team
6. GOVERNANCE – Effective and sustainable governance
7. OPERATIONS – Smooth, efficient operations and a safe, environmentally aware festival



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Every year the Festival appears like a gleam on the horizon. We anticipate it at our sessions, at recitals and dances, in our homes, our hearts and in our very fingers they fall on strings, buttons and keys.

Coming to the Festival is a chance to be surrounded by those who believe that a tune is never fully learnt, but made anew by each player, those who know a dance shifts with each partner and a story is unmade and remade with each retelling. We dance, sing and play to connect with the past and to shift and shape the present. Folk traditions are action rather than endpoint.

Every year we bring those active traditions together through the Festival, a task undertaken by many hands.

One of the reasons the National looms so large in the festival calendar is the quality of the program. The 2019 site was beautifully laid out and set the stage for a wonderful weekend. Pam and the team delivered another year of music, dance, poetry and arts that showed us what it means to be part of an active, vibrant folk community.

Of course, in order to grow our community and build the future of folk we need to let people know what we have to share. As Pam has mentioned in her report, Kylie Cobb from Kitty Kitty Bang Bang PR and Marketing brought some fresh ideas and approaches, building up our Festival launch through targeted media invitations, extending our online reach and growing the Festival profile across multiple media, culminating in some great coverage over Easter. We are looking forward to building a clear marketing strategy for the 2020 Festival, using data collected over recent years to hone in on specific demographics and ensure our existing audience knows what's in store.

Unfortunately, the Festival ran at a loss in 2019, as anticipated by Chair, Gabrielle Mackey, in her report at the last AGM. This year there were several unexpected costs arising after the budget had been set. While increased costs in operations and staffing contributed to this loss, we also saw a decrease in ticket sales from the projected budget. This loss is a warning bell for the Festival.

A changing of the guard in our participants, the significantly increased workload for all festivals in the operations and compliance, and strong competition in the entertainment sector tell us that we must look to the long-term sustainability of the Festival.

This means looking at the way we run the Festival, paying attention to past mistakes and finding new, innovative strategies for ensuring the Festival continues. Considering the organisational structure, a focus on streamlining IT and making the Festival more accessible through cashless bar systems and online apps, are steps towards addressing these issues. This year the Board made the decision to create separate Artistic and Managing Directors. This decision recognises a surely and steadily increasing workload in the operational, financial and management areas. Strategic planning for marketing, sponsorship and fundraising and community building is a priority and work has already begun to increase revenue and decrease costs for the 2020 Festival.

Change is not an easy process, requiring a high level of research and attention if we are to preserve the core values of the Festival while making space for new ways of engaging our folk community. Over the year staff and Board members in the Finance, Marketing, Sponsorship and Fundraising committees have also looked closely at the ways these areas are delivered, and the governance and staffing committees have focused on organisational structure.

I would like to give my particular thanks to our volunteer Board. Our Board is made up of active folk participants, those who have played music for years and those who are just beginning their journeys, people who have volunteered across numerous festivals in Australia, people who care about creative practice and community. Thank you all for giving countless hours and unceasing energy to this festival, it is a pleasure to work with you.

Thank you to our spectacular staff for your year-round energy and commitment. Your work and dedication to the Folk Festival comes from a love of the event, and a love of the tradition, and we are grateful for the ways you bring this into your daily work.

This report also marks the end of Pam's time as Festival Director, and I would like to thank her for all the work, energy and care she has put into her role. Pam joined the Festival as Artistic Director and stepped into the newly created Festival Director role at a time when the Festival was in some difficulty. We are pleased that Pam will continue to bring her deep knowledge of folk to her role as Artistic Director, and to share this with our new Managing Director, Helen Roben. Pam's continued emphasis on and love of diverse folk traditions has had a lasting effect on the Festival and on our community. Pam, as you said in your report, folk is the life!

Thanks also go to our company members, all of whom have given so many years as board and staff. Thank you for your ongoing gift of attention and care for the Festival we all love. We look forward to sharing in your knowledge and skills as we look to the future.

Some of the most exciting and active traditions that emerge each year come from our Festival volunteers. Every Easter they come to build the venues, power the site, make paths and systems that are our unseen framework. Volunteers, your love and energy are overwhelming, thank you.

Our Festival is not only tended to and created by those who build it, but also by those who activate it. The participants wandering the site, the musicians, performers, dancers, sessioners, rushing to watch spectacular acts and rushing to be in spectacular acts, filling our venues, streets, sessions and dance floors. Thank you for making the Festival shine.

Just like our folk traditions, the Festival is not an endpoint or an outcome. It is a living, breathing, buzzing thrum of activity, bringing our many and varied folk lives together for a brief moment and giving us a chance to re-charge and renew for the year ahead. May we all work together to ensure it continues to light our way for decades to come.

**Jacqueline Bradley**  
**President**



## FESTIVAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The National Folk Festival is our much anticipated, annual celebration of Australian “folk life” in all its incarnations. The dust barely settles on one Festival than we begin work on the next and it is an extensive and extended Festival team that works tirelessly throughout the year to ensure all the pieces come together to create this fantastic event.

Our 2019 Festival was blessed with exceptional weather, especially for such a late Easter. While this did not translate into an increase in ticket sales that are historically conservative when Easter is late, with the new site layout in its second year and nicely bedded down, there was a real buzz throughout the entertainment zone and a carnival atmosphere that emanated excitement, anticipation and goodwill. The perfect setting for people to find their folk at the National.

The National Folk Festival operates in a continually changing and competitive event landscape. If it is to continue for another 50 years it must, without compromising the integrity and ethos of the event, respond to change when it informs best practice for the organisation and find new, smarter ways of doing business. Significant changes implemented in the last year have been especially beneficial in streamlining processes for the organisation.

The outsourcing of ICT management provided considerable savings in staff costs and gave NFF access to industry specialists and the latest technologies with 24x7 support. The strongest element of this move is that it supports both the year-round operations of the business with portability of access as well as providing a smooth and efficient onsite set up with virtually no disruption to our ability to operate effectively.

Marcato, the NFF's new event management software has also been a resounding success, streamlining many of the processes for artist, volunteer and stalls management and integrating seamlessly with both our website and our new Festival App, saving valuable time. As we dig more into of the features of Marcato I believe the way we operate will be even further enhanced.

Speaking of the App, this proved to be one of the most successful investments made by NFF and has received overwhelming positive feedback from attendees. It also ticks a box for future reduction of paper and waste.

Another example of good business practice was the introduction of onsite cashless bar transactions as a first step in reducing the amount of cash held onsite and the associated risk. The system also provided greater accountability of stock and real time monitoring and management of sales.

Our core business is the Festival, with the artistic program at its heart. The focus of the 2019 program was to showcase the great diversity of folk, its relevance in contemporary societies and its ability to connect audiences and engage people in unique and interesting ways. The NFF's special point of difference that sets it apart from other festivals is the sense of community and participation expressed through the many opportunities provided across disciplines for attendees to be hands on with “folk”. Communities are not passive entities, they are sharing, they connect people, they provide ways for them to interact. While high-end concert performances will always be an essential element of the NFF Program, participation continues to be at the heart of the event.

A big part of our marketing is focused around the artists, the experiences we promote and the stories we share. It is important to get the balance right especially when we reach out to such diverse audiences. In 2019 NFF publicity and marketing was contracted to Kylie Cobb of Kitty Kitty Bang Bang PR and Marketing. Kylie first came on board to review and develop our marketing initiatives as part of three-year funding from Events ACT. Kylie has been a welcome addition to the team and her slogan Find Your Folk at the National has become a catchphrase.

The Festival doesn't happen without the year-round work of our Operations and Production team and their supporting sub-contractors. We continue to learn from previous events and in 2019 benefitted from having a highly experienced Operations Manager in Patrice Wallace with her extensive knowledge of the site and of the ACT regulatory authorities. Having the right balance of people with clear and even delineation of tasks meant that both bump in and bump out went seamlessly with only minor issues that were easily resolved. This created a positive and productive atmosphere that filtered right down to the volunteers on the ground and seemed to set the tone for the event as a whole.

Of course, underpinning our Festival is the army of volunteers who give so generously of their time and experience. This year some 1200 of them worked across 61 teams delivering over 24,500 hours of work. Hats off to you all and to everyone who plays their part in this amazing production.

As the curtain comes down on another National Folk Festival, the 53rd I'm left to reflect on the power of folk. Its palette is broad and, like the artist dipping into a paint pot, folk traditions can be experienced in their purest forms or mixed together, absorbing characteristics from elsewhere. Folk is welcoming, folk is forgiving, folk brings people together. Folk is the life!

In this final report as Festival Director I would like to say how much I have enjoyed the time spent in that role. I accepted the extra responsibilities during what was a difficult time for the NFF and believe I am leaving the organisation in a much stronger position than when I assumed the role in 2013. I am now very much looking forward to focusing my energy on creative initiatives to further enhance the delivery of the Festival's artistic program and to engage with folk and like-minded communities in developing projects that strengthen folk arts practice and provide pathways to support organisations and individuals in that pursuit. I also take this opportunity to recognise all those who I have worked with over the past six years. Thank you for your friendship, support and advice. It is also an opportunity to welcome and to wish Helen Roben, our new MD, every success in the role.

Finally I will leave you with some words from the wonderful Pete Seeger.

"I've found that festivals are a relatively painless way to meet people and make a few points that need making, without having to hit them over the head with too many speeches."

"Participation - that's what's gonna save the human race."

**Pam Merrigan**  
**Festival Director**





## COMPANY MEMBERS

National Folk Festival Limited is a not for profit company limited by guarantee. There were 32 Company Members at the end of the reporting year. 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

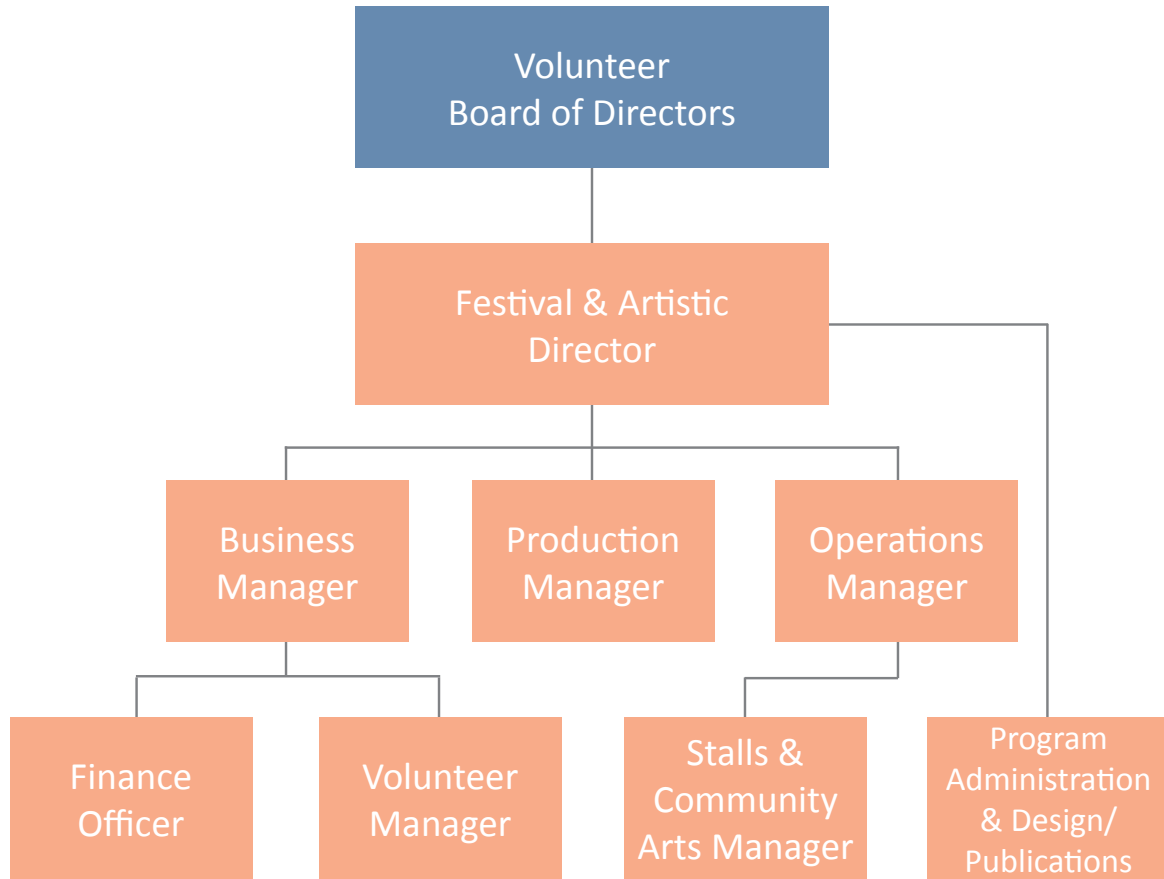
Many have also been Festival Area Coordinators or volunteers in other capacities or folk performers. All are long-term Festival attendees.

## 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 in the current reporting year (including positions held and the year appointed to reappointed\* to the Board) are listed below.

Name of Director	Position	Appointed	Resigned
Jacqueline Bradley	President	2011	
Graham Chalker	Vice President	2018*	
David Gilks	Secretary	2018	
Peter Williams	Ordinary Member	2013	
Jocelyn Vasey	Ordinary Member	2016	
Genevieve Jacobs	Ordinary Member	2018	
Stephen Gallacher	Ordinary Member	2018	
Chris Grange	Ordinary Member	2018	
Helen Ludellen	Ordinary Member	2018	
Judy Turner	Ordinary Member	2018	
Graham McDonald	Ordinary Member	2013	2018
Ronald Brent	Secretary	2014	2018
Rob Thorman	Ordinary Member	2015	2018
Pam Merrigan	Festival and Artistic Director		

## ORGANISATIONAL CHART



## FESTIVAL TEAM



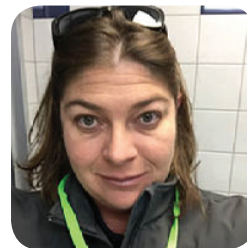
PAM MERRIGAN  
Festival & Artistic Director



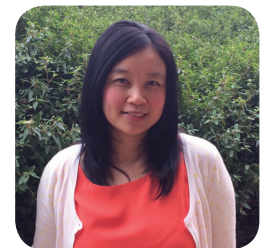
RUBY HUDSON  
Business Manager



AMY WHITING  
Production Manager



PATRICE WALLACE  
Event Operations Manager



PIYA PATTAMARANGGOON  
Finance Officer



JESS HENDERSON  
Program Administration,  
Design / Publications



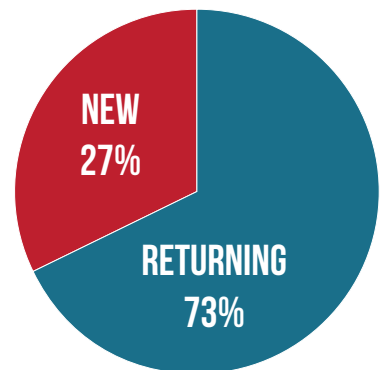
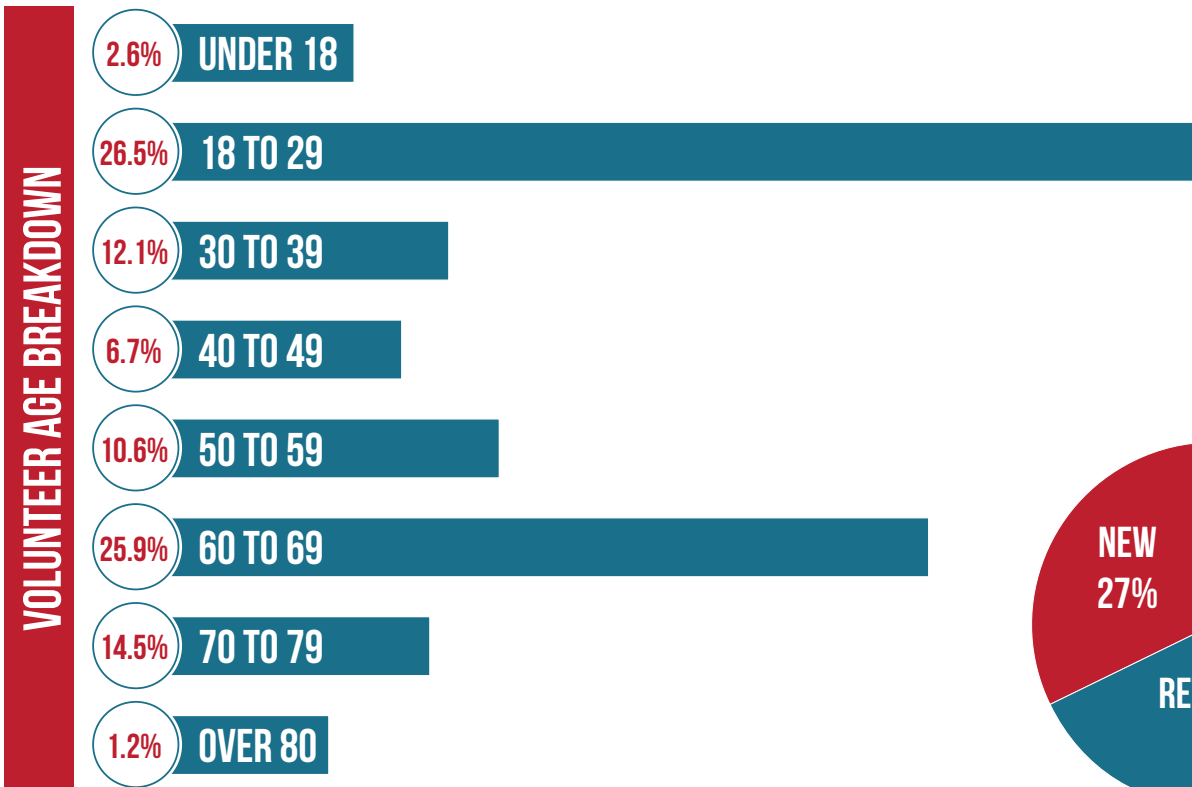
SAMANTHA BARRETT  
Stalls & Community Arts Manager



NATASHA KING  
Volunteer Manager

## VOLUNTEERS

The Festival had over 1200 volunteers including over 50 Area Coordinators for major areas of the Festival operation who are personally acknowledged in the Festival Program each year. 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 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 endeavor in folk music, dance and the folk arts. Congratulations to the following 2019 Award Winners:

### **National Folk Festival Lifetime Achievement Award**

Eric Bogle (SA)

### **National Folk Festival Volunteer of the Year Award**

Alan Hill – Setup and Pack Down team (NSW)

### **National Folk Fellow Recipient 2018/19**

Shane Lestideau (VIC) – “New Albion” Scottish music present in Australian musical culture.

### **Peter J Daly Memorial Award**

Amber (VIC)

### **Alistair Hulett Memorial Award**

Penelope Swales (VIC) for her song Cambridge Analytica

### **FAA Young Performer of the Year**

Saije (NSW)

### **Traditional Social Dance Association of Victoria Awards**

Beatrice Klippel Memorial Trophy – Cecilia Johnson (VIC) for Floriade

VFMC Perpetual Trophy – Keith Wood (NSW) for Monkey Mia Dolphins

### **National Folk Festival Reciter of the Year Award**

David Hallett (NSW)

### **Blue the Shearer Award for Best Original Poem (NEW)**

Irish Joe Lynch (QLD) for his poem Strawberries and Cream

### **Infinite Song Competition (Infinite Glam Rock)**

Mélisande [Electrotrad]

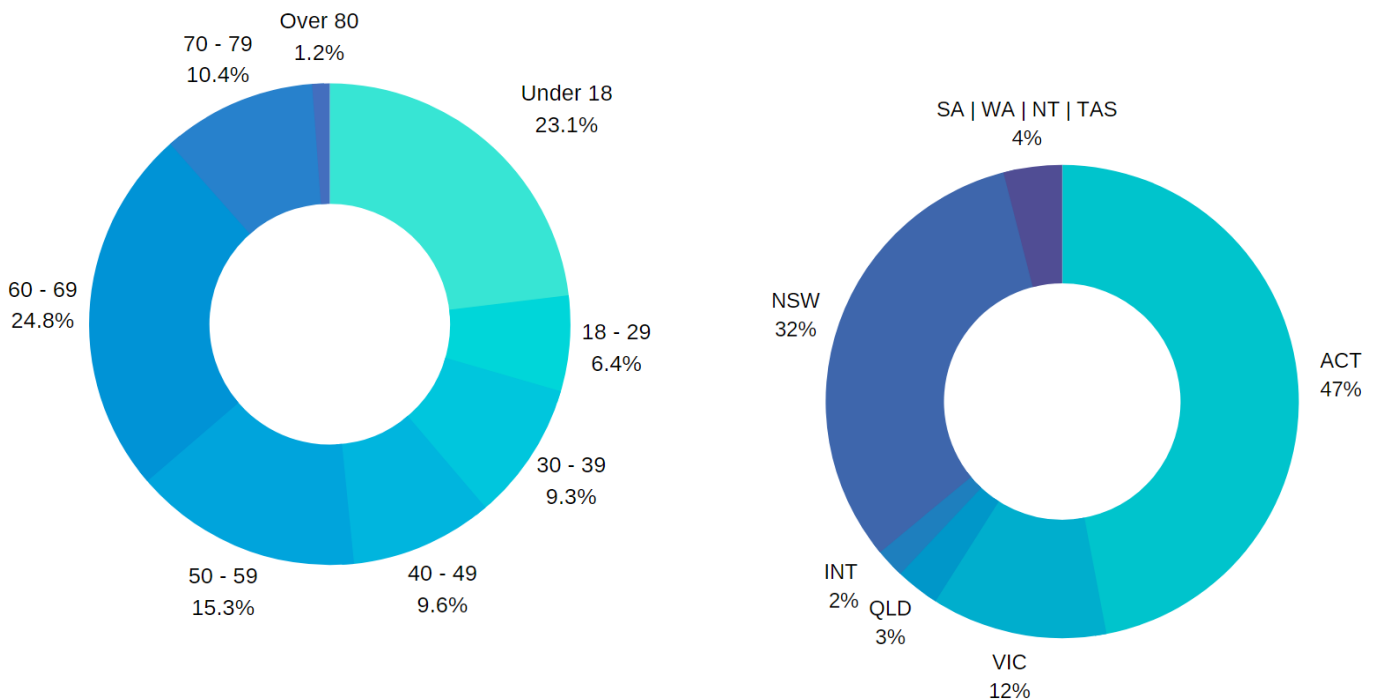
## FESTIVAL ATTENDANCE AND TICKETING REPORT

In 2019 the Festival had an aggregate attendance of 38,231 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 13,335. Data was collected from each attendee at ticket point of sale and from information extracted from stalls, performer, volunteer and contractor databases.

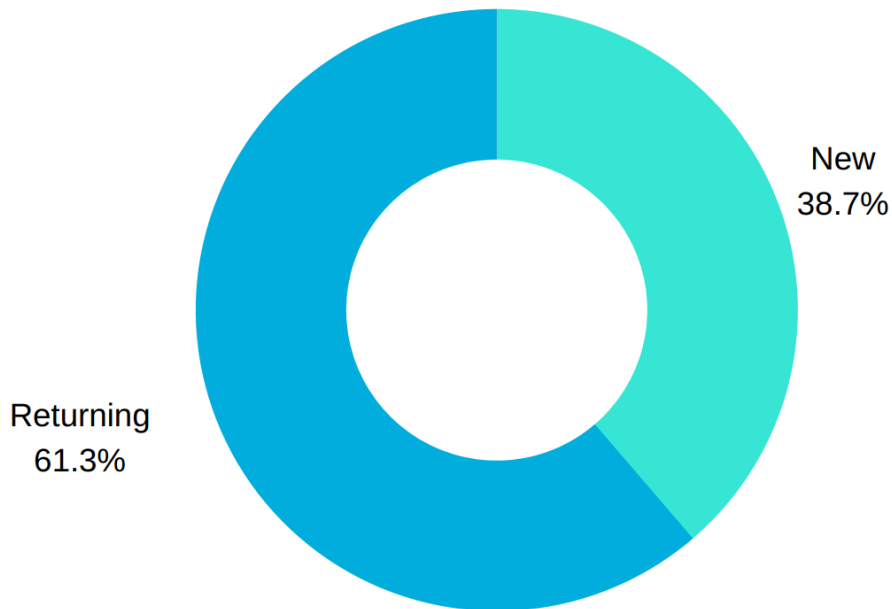
Table below shows the origin by State or Territory of attendees including international visitors (INT). All attendees represented in the table below are unique persons.

Attendees	Total no.	ACT	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	INT
Season Ticket holders	1752	43%	28%	14%	6%	4%	2%	1%	-	2%
Season Camping ticket holders	1631	10%	55%	21%	6%	4%	1%	2%	1%	-
Day ticket holders	7031	64%	26%	7%	1%	1%	-	-	-	1%
Contracted Performers	1129	24%	28%	18%	4%	5%	5%	3%	2%	11%
Volunteers	1199	34%	40%	17%	3%	3%	1%	1%	-	1%
Stallholders & their staff	433	29%	39%	24%	5%	1%	1%	-	-	1%
Festival Staff and Event Contractors	160	38%	55%	7%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	13,335	47%	32%	12%	3%	2%	1%	1%	-	2%

## FESTIVAL DEMOGRAPHICS



In 2019 the National Folk Festival had a total unique attendance of 13,335 persons. Data was collected from each attendee at ticket point of sale and from information extracted from stalls, performer, volunteer and contractor databases.



In 2019, 993 Festival attendees provided feedback through the post Festival survey. The below compares overall customer satisfaction in various areas of the Festival from 2018 to 2019.



Feedback from our 2019 survey was positive noting increases in customer satisfaction across key areas of: Overall Festival, Site Layout, Concert Venues and our increasingly popular Kidzfest.

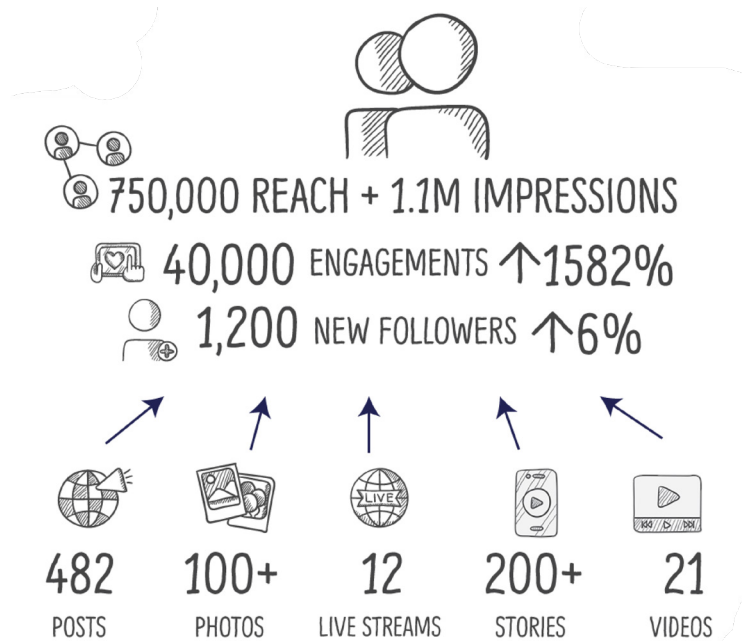
Feedback from our stall holders was influenced by the warmer weather conditions which kept festival goers inside the venues. For 2020 we are repositioning some stallholders and offering increased trade areas within stalls to optimise sales.

We expect through increased communication our transition to cashless bars will be more widely embraced in 2020.

## MARKETING

During the year our marketing team developed a strategic and actionable Marketing Plan for the 2019 Festival, which incorporated the objectives of the organisation, marketing tactics and the target markets.

Our team ran a successful campaign consisting of over 180 media appearances nationwide, and more than 420 social media posts.



## A COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY

The Festival partnered with Greening Australia for the fourth year in 2019. This helps to offset the organisations carbon footprint by donating \$1 from each souvenir program sold at the event to support the planting of native trees and shrubs. Prior to the 2019 Festival 400 seedlings were planted in an area just north of the Festival site in NSW. Greening Australia presented a Bush Tucker workshop led by Aaron Chatfield, Indigenous Engagement and Training Officer, as well as a workshop on Native Propagation over the weekend.

The Festival also partnered with ACT Smart, a Government initiative committed to creating a more sustainable future, for the fourth year in a row. The Festival and ACT Smart event teams have continued to develop Festival waste signage, the provision of water refill stations, and worked to educate and encourage attendees to dispose of their waste thoughtfully.

Six water bottle refill stations were provided around the site to encourage attendees to bring their own bottles; this was made possible with the support of Tap into Water – an ACT Health directorate. Resources from previous partnerships saw the provision of reusable water bottles for performers and volunteers where needed.

Food vendors were required to provide biodegradable plates, cups and utensils, and for the first time in 2019 were not permitted to sell single use plastic bottles and instead encouraged attendees to utilize the Tap into Water refill stations. Attendees were notified of this change through our minimising environmental footprint social media campaign. Regular inspections by our Stalls Volunteer team ensured compliance.

Three bin types are used onsite during the event and the Festivals organic waste was taken to local organic fruit and vegetable farm Able Organics for composting. Information about waste disposal is presented on the inside front cover of the Program, including images of each bin and what should go in them. Prominent signage at each waste station shows information about recycling and organic waste to encourage the use of the correct bins. 2019 saw an increase in Waste to Landfill from previous years, which can largely be attributed to the disposal of props and scenic decorations that had reached the end of their reusable lifecycle – rather than keeping for reuse in future year’s events. Despite this increase, 54% of waste was diverted away from landfill.





# NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL

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

ABN: 96 058 761 274



/folkfestival



@nationalfolkfestival



@natfolkfest



/nationalfolkfest

