

## **Australian Regional Events Alliance offers support to events industry**

There is no doubt the events industry across regional Australia, along with the thousands of businesses who support it, has been presented one of its toughest ever challenges as a result of COVID-19. A very unlucky Friday indeed, the 13th of March in 2020 infamously saw the cancellation of festivals and events across the country, and sadly, this proposition remains a stark reality for many of these same events in 2021.

Heartbroken and shocked at the industry devastation, a common need for greater connection and collective representation has been repeatedly expressed in industry forums over the past nine months, and so the Australian Regional Events Alliance, or AREA, was born.

Set to champion and inspire the regional events industry, working group members include Alice Event Management and Consultancy, represented by Dale McIver, regional tourism organisation, Destination Gippsland represented by Lyndel Moore; Queensland's Jumpers & Jazz festival, represented by Pam Burley and Bette Bonney; events and marketing agency, Oregional Collective, represented by Vanessa Briody and Kate Kirkpatrick; and regional tourism consultants, Tilma Group, represented by Linda Tillman.

Also joining the team are specialist in land use for temporary activities, Garry O'Dell; Kelly Mapleston from the Port Macquarie Hastings Council; Sondra Stewart from Regional Development Australia on the Eyre Peninsula; and Andrew Hiebl, who will be the connecting board member between AREA and Australian Regional Tourism.

"We are thrilled at the strategic partnership formed with AREA. Events and festivals play a critical role in regional tourism and we look forward to supporting the working group so that events not only survive at the other side of COVID, but well into the future," said Australian Regional Tourism Chair, Coralie Bell.

AREA's core focus will be on taking the learnings from recent devastation to build a more sustainable and resilient regional events sector that continues to drive social and economic outcomes for regional and rural Australia. The initial priority will be to advocate for a bespoke funding program designed for the regional event sector. The program will aim to evolve the industry in areas such as governance, marketing and operations, and would keep professional event operators and skilled contractors in work while events wait upon a return to covid-normal.

Group members will also focus on developing connections and strengthening partnerships with federal, state, regional and industry bodies and will provide advice to relevant departments around the needs of the regional events industry as it tries to recover not only from COVID, but in many cases, the devastation caused by the bushfires in early 2020.

An equally important priority of the group is to strengthen the understanding and narrative around the significant direct and indirect impact of events, both socially and economically.

“It is vitally important that regional events are considered as essential to our economy as our metro counterparts, not only when it comes to funding, but also in recognising the marketing, tourism, social, employment and regional development value they bring. Regional events are the backbone of this country and provide so much more to the lifeblood of our nation than dollars and cents,” Lyndel Moore said, who has also been working in a bushfire recovery role in Victoria’s Gippsland region.

AREA represents all regional events, from local government and not-for-profit, through to private operators and event professionals. The support and advocacy group are inclusive of all types of regional events, from sporting, music and business, through to tourism, cultural and community events.

Get in contact with AREA at [area@regionaltourism.com.au](mailto:area@regionaltourism.com.au)