



AREA

AUSTRALIAN
REGIONAL
EVENTS
ALLIANCE

RVE Discussion Paper Submission

“Today is your opportunity to build the tomorrow you want” – Ken Poirot

Report

**The Hon. Martin Ferguson
Chair**

11.6.21

RE: Submission to the Reimagining the Visitor Economy Expert Panel

Dear Mr Ferguson,

Thank you for the opportunity for AREA (Australian Regional Events Alliance) to offer a submission to the Reimagining the Visitor Economy (RVE) Expert Panel.

AREA is a newly established volunteer working group that represents operators and professionals from local government through to not-for-profit. We are inclusive of all types of regional events, from sporting, music and business, to tourism, cultural and community events.

With a focus on events outside of a capital city, AREA seeks to empower regional operators and leverage opportunities that will champion, inspire and support the regional events industry. While being self-supporting, AREA have established a mutually beneficial partnership with ART (Australian Regional Tourism).

Providing feedback on the RVE discussion paper for expert panel review provides us with the valuable opportunity for us to further highlight the value of the regional events sector as well as AREA's key priorities, which are all aimed at building strong foundations for event sector recovery and industry sustainability.

More details on AREA's priorities can be found at: <https://regionaltourism.com.au/area/>

We believe the RVE expert panel would benefit from an opportunity to discuss / workshop our ideas with AREA during the consultation process.

We are readily available and can be contacted as follows:

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Report

Who is AREA?

The Australian Regional Events Alliance (AREA) was born in 2020 from a time in our industry that has presented some of our greatest hurdles. We have come together to represent events across regional Australia and to highlight the importance of their existence, both socially and economically, for our communities.

Many of our metro counterparts are far more visible within the event sector and quite often our industry needs stem from their needs, not ours.

With a focus on events outside of a capital city, AREA seeks to empower regional operators and leverage opportunities that will champion, inspire and support the regional events industry.

AREA represents operators and professionals from local government through to not-for-profit, and is inclusive of all types of regional events, from sporting, music and business, to tourism, cultural and community events.

In 2021, AREA's core focus will be to take on 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.

AREA will also focus on developing connections and strengthening partnerships with federal, state, regional and industry bodies, and will provide support and advice to relevant departments around the needs of the regional events industry as it tries to recover not only from COVID-19, 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.

AREA Members:

Andrew Hiebl	Association of Australian Convention Bureaux
Dale McIver	Director Alice Event Management & Consultancy
Gary O'Dell	Land Use Strategy and Regulation Specialist for Temporary Activities
Kelly Mapleston	Events Manager Port Macquarie – Hastings Council
Linda Tillma	Director Tilma Group
Lyndel Moore	Visitor Economy Bushfire Recovery Manager Destination Gippsland
Pam Burley	Jumpers & Jazz in July Festival
Sondra Stewart	Tourism Partnership Advisor, Adelaide Economic Development Agency
Vanessa Briody	Director of Marketing & Strategy Oregional Collective

Report

FOREWARD

Before addressing the relevant discussion paper categories through the lens of regional events, we would first like to note that overall AREA believe the discussion paper fails to recognise the value, significance, and role events play towards a prosperous visitor economy.

Events, and not just major events, make up a vital component of the tourism sector. They have far greater impact beyond the opportunity to diversify our international customer base via a major event, offering extensive social and economic benefits, not just to regional and rural destinations, but across Australia. Despite this, our industry's importance continues to be overlooked.

We appreciate the need for our industry to come together in order to research, document and then communicate the value of events so it is better understood. The practical advice and solutions within this submission will enable us to address this? and many of the practical advice and solutions within this submission will enable us to do so.

Regional events aren't just "something nice to do." They are not ran by hobbyists but highly skilled and passionate professionals, whose insights are worth bringing to the tourism table.

We want to see events recognised as an industry essential to the national economy, and recommend 'Events' are listed as a structural trend that will affect the visitor economy to 2030 or at the very least, part of the structural trend 4 - Experiential tourism / [Events](#).

They certainly have great potential to do so.

Industry-led, government enabled recovery

How can industry bodies enhance their offerings and engagement to drive business improvement and resilience?

1/. INVESTING IN A NATIONAL VOICE FOR REGIONAL EVENTS

AREA was born from a common voice across the country which repeatedly expressed a need for greater connection and representation collectively as a result of COVID-19.

Without a common advocacy and support group, it is challenging for our industry, or any industry, to connect with all levels of government, state and national tourism organisations, and other sectors who are reliant on events such as music, sport, arts and business.

Report

Regional events want their needs and importance to be heard, but equally, wish to provide assistance and support to government authorities and stakeholders, so the sector can continue to drive social and economic outcomes for regional and rural Australia.

A working group that collectively possesses impressive skills and experience, AREA work well as a volunteer team, however our intentions and priorities need to be valued by the resourcing one part-time paid role and operational costs.

Practical advice / solutions -

- Consultant AREA on job description, KPI's, role, responsibilities and remuneration
- Fund a support role / contractor (potentially via Australian Regional Tourism)

2/. THE VALUE OF EVENTS - RESEARCH PROJECT

The relationship between tourism and events, and the significance of events to the regional tourism / visitor economy needs to be better understood and communicated in order for our importance to be recognised, yet there is a undeniable lack of quality data (outside of the business event sector), and a inconsistent approach to collecting it, making this essential task extremely challenging.

Practical advice / solutions -

- Fund (nationally) the development of a research protocol, evaluation plan, or proposed study method for regional events (or events generally, where it can be broken down between regional and metro).
- Start with a pilot study using a cross section of events, with a view to scaling up the method.
- Fund the implementation of a national research project that gathers consistent and quality data, and a findings roll-out from this.

This value will be demonstrated in areas of social, economic, marketing and community impact. This cost / benefit understanding will also enable authorities to better develop effective funding criteria, and make informed decisions.

NOTE: There is no agreement as to what constitutes an event and as such the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not collect useable data. A working group of government and business is required to progress this with the ABS.

Report

Where are the regulatory bottlenecks to the visitor economy?

3/. BESPOKE FUNDING PROGRAM (with flexibility)

More so now than ever, events need to be invested in. We require the development of a *bespoke* regional event sector funding program that focuses on developing and strengthening critical success areas such as strategy, planning, operations, marketing and delivery, which all works to drive destination awareness.

Practical advice / solutions -

- Industry consultation on funding criteria. Our industry needs more funding, and with that more flexibility. Funding is often suited to not-for-profits, or those with the dollars to match the dollars. The potential of an event or its full value can be overlooked with this approach. To build a more resilient sector, the industry needs funding flexibility and investment into these areas in order to elevate the event experience and regional reputation:
 - Governance (policies, procedures, systems)
 - Accessibility
 - Sponsorship development
 - Strategic planning
 - Branding (and marketing)
 - Staffing / Operations
 - Infrastructure
 - Volunteer programs
 - Risk mitigation
 - The talent / The experience

AREA are well positioned to be consulted during such process.

- Filter the funding through the LGA's. With community and stakeholder engagement, this framework can help determine what events are, or could be, most important for their region, no matter the type of event, new, existing, private, not-for-profit - sporting, business, tourism, trade, fund-raising, music, arts, community, culture, etc. This approach would also ensure remote and rural communities are included.

How can we better foster collaboration between businesses and governments to offer great experiences, create and sustain high-yield destinations and make the best system wide decisions?

Report

How can we increase collaboration between businesses within regions and destinations to improve the visitor experience?

4/. LOCALLY-DRIVEN & CURATED COLLABORATIVE WORKSHOPS

Events have the power to drive collaboration between STO's, RTB's, LGA's and regional businesses and events of all kinds. A locally driven, curated and facilitate workshop, with an agreed agenda, would allow a diverse group of stakeholders to work together in order to drive destination awareness and deliver a memorable visitor / event experience. It would allow parties to discuss opportunities where they can collaborate to streamline communications and resources. This should not come at the expense of a ticket to a conference or convention.

At the local government level, there is often a perceived conflict of interest between the local government roles as a venue or recreational space / park owner, sponsor and its role as a regulator of events. Each LGA approaches events differently, depending on both budgets and resources. These roles and responsibilities can be discussed and determined within this collaborative planning platform.

Practical advice / solutions -

- An agreed, yet flexible, national set of roles and responsibilities for all LGA's when it comes to events
- Facilitated workshops at a local / regional level with LGA authorities, RTB's, event operators and other stakeholders
- Regional Tourism Bodies (skills based) should have a minimum of 1 x event representative on the board.
- Provide opportunities for key event operators to "speed date" the board members or other key influencers / decision makers, to open up dialogue about the event needs and benefits
- Include 'event' content in all tourism conferences and conventions
- Transform parts of the Visitor Information Centres, or fund industry co-working spaces to create conversation and collaborate.

NOTE: Event permitting at a local government level is a regulatory bottleneck, a consistent framework or permitting process would same time and reduce red tape.

Capturing the domestic travel opportunity

What needs to be done to encourage domestic visitors to travel for longer, spend more and diversify the destinations they visit?

Report

LGA's, tourism bodies and operators need to collaborate with events in order to leverage the many opportunities events can provide. These opportunities include:

- Destination Awareness
- Brand / Marketing / PR / Word of Mouth
- Partnerships
- Repeat Visitation + Extended Yield

Events can often be the reason for a tourist to visit a destination for the first time, offering opportunity for the destination to leverage via repeat visitation and extended yield. This doesn't necessarily mean we need more events, we need smarter events, and better support.

Practical advice / solutions -

- Investing in an event's brand creative so it aligns the event with the destination brand to extend reach
- Use events to highlight a destinations attributes and attractions
- Operator opportunities to package, bundle etc
- Using events to put destinations on the map
- Leveraging marketing platforms to showcase the destination beyond the event
- Using events to generate publicity
- Tapping into the VFR market via events

What will domestic business travel look like in 2030 and what needs to be done to adapt?

Events can help drive domestic business travel, our colleagues in business events have provided expert feedback and advice on.

Diversifying our international customer base

This is best responded to by our metro counterparts.

Labour, skills and workforce

How can the sector develop and promote career pathways to make the visitor economy a career of choice?

How can we attract and retain workers in the sector, especially in the regions?

How do we build the skills we need for the visitor economy in the future through training and business support services?

Report

The individuals who create opportunities for regional visitation via events are not valued enough, many of whom are volunteers. Events require the funds to accommodate these highly skilled positions in region, whether it be at an LGA level, through funding, or provisions for professional services that work with the event to map out the steps required for the roles to be self-funding.

Investment in a skilled workforce to help supplement the burnout volunteer base in regional communities and will help meet the expectations of high value tourists. The model around regional events and volunteering expectations needs a radical shift.

Practical advice / solutions -

- We need to be promoting the events (tourism and hospitality) sector in high schools - change the perception from a casual 'fill in job' to a lifelong career choice.
- Introduction of a national voluntourism project / campaign
- Fund an Events (Strategy & Management) Mentor Program (filtered through state or local commerce authorities). Program should include up-skilling operators in the attraction and management of sponsors.
- A state funded communications campaign that will help to strengthen the narrative around the importance of events, and therefore the value of a 'ticket'. This will grow industry confidence in raising ticket prices to accommodate for the continual increase in expenses.
- Regional hospitality training spaces, cooking, event schools.

Indigenous Tourism

We need to embrace and showcase our indigenous heritage and culture through events, but we cannot expect the indigenous communities to flick on a switch and be engaged. Relationships need to be developed and nurtured and consultative engagement needs to take place.

We need an indigenous tourism body in regional Australia that educates and supports government in connecting with indigenous communities and building positive relationships that will nurture tourism development.

Let's stop looking for short term immediate wins i.e. Year of Indigenous tourism. There is a lot of relationship building and a process that needs to be undertaken by government before the tourism product will emerge.

IN SUMMARY:

Events can be designed to support industries, for example, Noosa Food & Wine showcases their hospitality scene; Groovin' The Moo supports homegrown and international artists; and Energy

Report

Breakthrough encourages the exploration of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths through school curriculum.

Events however have far greater impact beyond industry support, and in particular to tourism and hospitality operators, who greatly benefit from a vibrant local events calendar.

AREA would like to point out the many job opportunities events generate and just some of the businesses that benefit from a prosperous, supported and recognised events sector:

- Event managers
- Strategic planners
- Risk and safety experts
- Graphic designers
- Support agencies
- Marketing, PR, social media experts and advertising platforms
- Talent (musicians, performing arts, visual arts, professional sports players, key speakers, trainers)
- Photographers, videographers
- Infrastructure (marquee, toilets, generators, furniture, theming, rubbish)
- Sound, Staging & Production
- Security
- Staffing agencies
- Venues hire
- Volunteer (fund-raising bodies)
- Print (signage, booklets)
- Cleaners
- First aid, safety officers
- Catering / food truck
- Beverage suppliers
- Right through to the retail, grocery, fuel and every day purchases at local businesses.

Report

“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, AREA.