

## Submission re North Byron Parklands proposed festival site

Leonard Cronin

### 1. Financial return to Council and Shire residents.

North Byron Parklands submitted an economic impact and benefits statement that has no scientific basis, supplies no back-up data to justify sweeping conclusions, is contradictory, and would be rejected by any respectable peer-reviewed journal. Yet this statement is used by NBP to justify to locals, council and the DPoE its existence as a festival site and promote its expansion. The economic benefits to Byron Shire residents are negative when we take into account:

- social disruption to a small community suddenly exposed to 50,000 plus extra tourists the majority of whom stay and eat onsite while heading off to local suburbs during the day where they use facilities provided for a relatively few locals.
- cost of council to supply and maintain infrastructure, including roads, sewage treatment, water from our local water supply and other public facilities used by NBP to establish the festival site and used by festival patrons.

The following statements (in **bold**) are taken from the Economic Impact and Benefits 2016 submission supplied by NBP as justification for their existence and expansion. My comments follow in *itals*:

**The benefits to the local economy (as a proportion of the total) are higher than anticipated. These economic links have been derived from discussion with event organisers, contractors and service providers. (p.11)**

*Any modelling be based on "discussions" with stakeholders with vested interests in the project has no scientific or economic validity whatsoever. No data is supplied, no figures produced, so any assumptions made on this basis should be removed from the report.*

**As the use of the site is expanded it is expected the capacity of local businesses to cater these events will also increase, reducing the necessity for event organisers to use out-of-region suppliers. (p.15) ...In reality, however, it may be more efficient to increase imports. (p.22)**

*The first statement is pure speculation, and is contradicted by the second statement.*

**Byron Bay, and the surrounding shire, are iconic locations with a well-established national and international brand and reputation. An event held in Byron Bay does not have to 'sell' the location, it can leverage the location to enhance the appeal of the event. This is particularly important for smaller (or starter) events that do not have an established reputation. (p.16)**

*NBP acknowledge the benefit of our community in enhancing the profitability of their business, and the value of that contribution in leveraging the appeal of the event. Such 'Branding' brings a considerable financial benefit to NBP, yet NBP pays nothing for that branding advantage. Products sold using well-known, respected branding command a premium over products without such branding, and indeed, companies pay substantial*

*royalties or other payments for the use of such branding. NBP offers and pays nothing to our community for this financial benefit.*

This report continues with unsubstantiated economic benefits to the community, and finishes with the telling statement that the assessments used to calculate the economic benefits have been criticised by academia and Government and that they are **“Not applicable for small regions: Multipliers that have been calculated from the national I–O table are not appropriate for use in economic impact analysis of projects in small regions.”** (p.22)

It is my submission that this report is fatally flawed and should not be used in any way to determine the suitability of NBP’s proposal.

It is also clear that Byron Shire and its ratepayers obtain minimal financial benefits (in the form of grants to selected groups) while subsidising the NBP business model by providing infrastructure and branding advantages to NBP without compensation. This proposal should be contingent upon the payment to Byron Shire Council of not less than 10% of the festivals’ gross receipts.

## 2. Overloading of local hospital emergency services.

While NBP provides some medical facilities at the site, they are unable to provide emergency treatment, and injured or sick patrons are sent off to Byron or Tweed hospitals for treatment. This is a considerable burden on staff at our local hospitals and adds an extra risk for locals who may be in need of emergency medical treatment. NBP is under no obligation to pay the extra costs associated with this issue. This is wrong, and must be factored into the fees paid by NBP for the use of this site.

## 3. Noise impact on native fauna.

Some festival events take place at the beginning or during the breeding season of local koalas, possums, birds and reptiles. The effect of loud noise and the impact of 50,000 plus festival goers forces these animals to leave the area, disrupting their natural cycles, adding stress to an already endangered koala population, cutting animals off from their natural ecological corridors. This problem will only increase if the site has more festival days/patrons.

According to Dr. Stephen Phillips from Biolink Ecological Consultants, of 20 surveyed koalas initially found close to the site of the northern NSW Blues festival in 2010, none were alive today. He said the noise from the festival, which stressed the animals and forced them to move, was the main cause of the deaths. Phillips has published a paper in the journal *Australian Mammalogy*, where he claims that koalas disturbed by the noise of the festival, have uncharacteristically moved outside their home area. (*Australian Mammalogy* 38(2) 158-163)

## 4. Planned conference centre and bar

This idea has not been brought up for consideration by the local community. The effect of this conference centre, bar plus permanent cabin accommodation would be altering the use of the site for permanent tourist accommodation and facilities. I regard this as an

unacceptable use of the site and of no economic or social advantage to our community. This would extend the tourist footprint to the far north of our shire, when most residents are at odds with the current excessive tourist numbers in our shire.

#### **5. Overloading Ocean Shores Sewage Treatment Plant**

The local sewage treatment plant is already used to capacity by local connections, and in times of flooding is overloaded, leaking untreated waste into local waterways. The addition of the sewage from 50,000 plus extra people is equivalent to nine times that of the local population. The use of composting toilets, as suggested in the NBP submission, will not deal with the amount of sewage produced onsite, and will leak into surrounding waterways in times of flooding (this area is low-lying and subject to high rainfall).

#### **6. The social impact of the importation of dangerous drugs by festival goers**

The cost to the community and our young people by mass importation of illicit drugs has a negative influence on our youth and encourages drug taking by young people, as witnessed by the number of patrons requiring medical attention for drug use and the drug checking by police. This problem will only be exacerbated by increasing the number of festival days/patrons.

#### **7. Fire risk**

There is a substantially increased risk of fire by festival-goers (some of whom light fires on the beaches, may set fire to the camping areas, wander off to local bushlands where just one cigarette butt could cause a devastating bush fire adjacent to a populated area). This problem will only be exacerbated by increasing the number of festival days/patrons.