



Southern Tablelands Region Arts & Culture Snapshot | 2013

Introduction

This report has been prepared by the Regional Arts Development Officer, Southern Tablelands Arts, and provides an overview of the arts and cultural sector in the Southern Tablelands region of NSW. It outlines some of the key issues and trends impacting upon the region and provides a summary of the structure and business models it operates within. It has been developed to provide Arts NSW Arts Funding Program (AFP) assessment panels with an up to date overview of the region.

Overview – Southern Tablelands Region in NSW

The Southern Tablelands region covers an area of 22,365 square kilometres and a population of 192,090 (2011 Census). The region was one of the first areas settled in Australia and as a result there is very few and very little knowledge remaining of the original Aboriginal custodians.

Main industries of employment include farming, mining, education, transport and distribution (being goods), community services, hospitality, local and state governments and the Goulburn Gaol. Unlike other areas in regional NSW, this region is not known for its tourism visitation, though it does receive a high number of short term visitors for special events and others travelling through to other destinations. Queanbeyan has a high number of visitors who are visiting the National capital.

The region is particularly well known for its rural landscape of undulating hills with escarpment down to the south coast. There is a relatively large population living in over 100 villages/towns, rural districts and two cities, with thirteen suburban areas in Queanbeyan, spread over the region.

The Southern Tablelands region comprises the eight Local Government Authorities (LGAs) of:

Upper Lachlan Shire Council – 7,129 sq km; 7,193 pop; median age 46; major towns Crookwell, Gunning and Taralga.

Boorowa Shire Council – 2,579 sq km; 2,399 pop; median age 45; major town Boorowa.

Yass Valley Shire Council – 3,999 sq km; 15,020 pop; median age 40; major town Yass.

Queanbeyan City Council – 172 sq km; 37,991 pop; median age 35; major town Queanbeyan.

Palerang Council – 5,147 sq km; 14,352 pop; median age 41; major towns Bungendore, Braidwood and Captains Flat.

Goulburn Mulwaree Council – 3,220sq km; 27,481 pop; median age 41; major towns Goulburn and Marulan.

Wingecarribee Shire Council – 2,689sq km; 44,395 pop; median age 45; major towns Mittagong, Bowral, Moss Vale, Berrima, Bundanoon and Robertson.

Wollondilly Shire Council – 2,557sq km; 43,259 pop; median age 36; major towns Picton, Thirlemere, Thamoore and The Oaks.

All LGAs, except Goulburn, have a lower than State average Aboriginal population. However there is a very small, but growing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) population in Goulburn. Significant service providers i.e. disability services, youth, aged care, etc. are located in Queanbeyan, Yass, Goulburn Mulwaree, Wingecarribee and Wollondilly.

Arts and Cultural Practice

The main areas of activity are in the visual arts, literature (including poetry), performance, music and a small number of independent filmmakers. Activity occurs in a very diverse range of venues, including old courthouses, libraries, outdoor venues, churches, pubs, clubs, community halls, community buildings, schools, and empty shops.

Key arts infrastructure

- Goulburn Mulwaree – Goulburn Regional Conservatorium, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, The Lieder Theatre, Goulburn Sound Shell, and Goulburn and District Arts & Craft (gallery and workshop facilities).
- Wingecarribee – Sturt Gallery, Mittagong Playhouse, Bowral & District Arts Society (gallery and workshop facilities).
- Queanbeyan – The Q Queanbeyan, The Artist Shed (artist collective), Queanbeyan Art Society (exhibition space with workshops held in the space).
- Yass Valley – Yass Arts (an online support and sales website).
- Museums are prolific in the region and receive strong support from local governments. There are two museums of international standard, being the Bradford Museum (Wingecarribee) and the Train Works (Wollondilly).
- There are a high number of independent artists, many of which earn their living through their practice supported by teaching (although this is now very difficult due to the closure of TAFE art courses). There are also a significant number of nationally and internationally acclaimed artists from the area.
- Diverse arts and culture activities between the LGAs.

Upcoming/anticipated developments, including proposed capital developments:

- Wingecarribee Council is proposing to develop a regional gallery and a performance space suitable for large touring productions.
- Goulburn Council is building a multi-purpose centre suitable for sports and performances; however, it is going to be far more suitable for indoor sports than performances.

Key issues and trends

Performance and Touring

- Touring shows produced outside of the region has occurred very irregularly over the last nine to ten years due to cost versus audience numbers – it is hard to reach a critical mass.
- Audiences respond well to locally-produced theatrical works.
- Seven of the eight LGAs have amateur theatre groups, with some supporting more than 1 group.

- The Southern Highlands International Piano Competition is held biannually in Bowral with a prize pool of \$50,000.
- Goulburn's Lieder Theatre (Australia's oldest continually running community theatre) employs a professional artistic director and runs an annual program of youth and adult education programs in addition to main stage and foyer (experimental) productions.
- Queanbeyan boasts a fantastic performance and exhibition space, The Q, which employs professional staff and hosts local and touring productions.
- The Blues Festival is held annually in Goulburn and attracts a small number of visitors to the event.
- Goulburn Regional Conservatorium has recently dropped its 'big name touring' program to concentrate on strengthening the development of local performances. The Conservatorium is experiencing growth in its student population and expanding its geographical reach through the provision of a stronger outreach program.
- Yass Valley Council supports a flourishing youth music scene through providing support for bands and individual performers, and staging events at which they can play.
- Clubs and pubs in all eight LGAs host local band nights and bring in touring performers. The larger clubs bring in known mainstream performers.

Visual Arts

- All LGAs have commercial galleries, most of which are run by the artists themselves. Palerang, Queanbeyan, Wingecarribee and Upper Lachlan support the majority of privately owned galleries.
- Goulburn Regional Gallery and The Q Exhibition Space offer an annual art award.
- Goulburn & District Arts & Crafts and Bowral and District Arts Society hold annual award exhibitions.
- All of the existing community arts groups run skill development workshops, with many of the workshops subsidised through funding (Country Art Support Program (CASP) or local government community support schemes).
- Annual open studio trails (days/weekends) are held in Palerang, Queanbeyan, Wingecarribee. An inaugural studio trail was held this year in the Upper Lachlan. Queanbeyan and Wingecarribee attract visitation from Canberra and Sydney respectively.
- Throughout the region, visual artists both professional and amateur are mourning the loss of TAFE art facilities.

Literature/poetry

- There are writers groups in all LGAs. Annual workshops are hosted by at least one of the writers groups, with strong communications between all groups occurring ensuring that workshops are well attended. The majority of the workshops are subsidised by funding (CASP or local government community support schemes).
- Poetry events occur throughout the region on a regular basis and there are a number of published poets in the region.
- Wingecarribee has a significant number of independent bookstores, whose owners/managers have established a 'literary trail'.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal activity

- There are no Aboriginal art centres or facilities in the region.
- Goulburn Regional Art Gallery has implemented strategies to ensure that Aboriginal artists in the region have access to education and exhibition opportunities.
- The Lieder Theatre and the Goulburn Regional Art Gallery have partnered to work with the Aboriginal inmates of the Goulburn goal to produce a theatrical work.
- Wollondilly Shire Council hosts an annual exhibition of Aboriginal artists work as part of NADOIC week.

- Queanbeyan City Council has over the years undertaken a number of arts projects in partnership with the local Land Council. This has included painting of local buses and creating artworks in public places.
- There are no CALD specific activities occurring on a regular basis.

Museums

- There are a significant number of volunteer run museums throughout the region. A number have a focus on a particular issue such as war, rail, building heritage, water works and hospitals. These museums have strong curatorial practices. Others are collectors of all things curious with a history within that location. Many of these museums are working towards developing curatorial principles in staging exhibitions. Most of the volunteer run museums receive strong support from LGA. An issue facing volunteer run museums is the ageing of their volunteer support
- There are two commercial museums – The Bradford Museum (Wingecarribee) and the Train Works (Wollondilly).

Festivals

- All festivals held in the region, with the exception of the Goulburn Blues Festival, are community based and are either completely volunteer run or events held by local government authorities for the benefit of the community (e.g. Australia Day, NAIDOC Week, ANZAC Day).
- The Boorowa Running of The Sheep Festival, held annually, has a high visitation from Canberra residents. The event is run by the Boorowa Shire Council and is an annual community celebration.
- Thirlmere Festival of Steam is an annual community run event that attracts visitation from Sydney.
- Most festivals are held in spring, with a slowly increasing number of community events that have appeal to audiences outside of the region. For example: Apple Day in Tallong and The Pumpkin Festival in Collector.

Career pathways

- Significant number of professional artists living and practicing in the region due to affordability, access to major centres – being Canberra and Sydney.
- Limited number of career opportunities in arts management, administration, and education.

Education and training

- The region only has one campus of the James Sturt University, specifically for training police.
- Young people must leave the region to gain higher education.
- The loss of TAFE art education facilities impacts on education and training.

Current Issues affecting the arts and cultural sector

- Perception that the easy access to Canberra and Sydney reduces the need for infrastructure in the region.
- Very limited public transport significantly impacts on access to facilities across the region and in Canberra and Sydney.
- Most activity relies heavily on volunteer support for coordinating, fundraising and ongoing maintenance.
- Geographical spread of population reduces capacity to obtain critical mass for activity, as there is a reluctance to travel outside of one's own neighbourhood to attend events.
- Opportunities for the development of creative industries is limited for many reasons, including limited audience numbers, few employment opportunities and competition from Sydney, Canberra and Wollongong.
- Governance, insurance requirements and financial stability and sustainability are issues that impact on all community activity.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Unlike other regional and rural areas, there is not a downward turn in population.
- Growing community expectation of accessible cultural amenities.
- Increasing number of artists and cultural professionals with significant skills, experience and profiles moving to the area.
- Some LGAs have established groups and an increasing number of Aboriginal services.

Weaknesses

- Small number of professional arts workers in the region.
- Predominate demographic group are older and earn less than the state median.
- Limited understanding of art as a business.
- Large number of small towns/villages.
- Volunteers in arts councils etc. are also volunteers on the rural fire brigade, sporting club, recreation club etc.
- Limited number of trained people to implement audience development programs for their organisations.
- Growing community expectation of accessible cultural amenity.
- Small and fragmented communities of Aboriginal people.
- Small numbers of residents born overseas.

Opportunities

- Develop partnerships with other government departments.
- Growing community expectation and support for accessible cultural amenities.
- Tapping into the skill wealth of the high number of older people in the region to develop projects that have provision for the handing down of knowledge, skills and traditions.
- Building on audience development projects already undertaken in the area to develop new audience for locally produced work.
- Partnerships with developing Aboriginal reference groups, community organisations, reconciliation and specific services.

Threats

- Dominance of services by mainstream demographic. This threatens equity of access for marginalised groups.
- New residents continuing to travel to other areas for cultural / arts consumption and production.
- Volunteer burnout.
- Funding in a tight fiscal environment.
- Loss of young people who need to leave the region for higher education and employment opportunities.