



The Cygnet folk Festival acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First peoples of Australia, and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters, culture, and community.

We recognise the value of all continuing knowledge and cultural practice, which helps inform our understanding of history, culture and country.

The Cygnet folk Festival pays respect to the traditional and original owners of the land upon which our event is held, the melukerdee people; to pay respect to those that have passed before us and to acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community who are the custodians of this land.

The melukerdee people belong to the oldest continuing culture in the world. They cared and protected Country for thousands of years. They knew this land, they lived on the land, and they died on these lands. We honour them.

First Nations practice has always featured song and story. We hope that our organisation may contribute to this ongoing practice.

We acknowledge the strength and resilience of all of Tasmania's First Peoples, and we walk alongside them respectfully bearing witness and we support them in truth telling.

## Submission to The National Cultural Policy from the Cygnet Folk Festival

As it is outlined, The National Cultural Policy speaks to all that we see as necessary implementation to sustain a vibrant, healthy arts infrastructure.

As stated, cuts to the Arts in recent decades by previous governments have left the sector struggling and we heartily endorse the current administration's measures to address this theft of the Nation's Cultural significance.



That said, it is often our experience that the folk sector has largely been treated as a poor cousin to “mainstream” music and arts sector for decades, despite its popularity (as evidenced by the number of attendees at our festivals and events) and its importance to cultural identity.

The Cygnet Folk Festival has been supported through “Revive Live” funding for the past two years. Such funding allows us to be more creative and explorative in our practice. It allows us to attempt to appropriately remunerate our artists and arts workers and supports our event to be sustainable. The folk sector has survived for decades on the expectation of volunteerism. Laudable as this is in intent, it does not make for sustainability and undervalues the significant contribution that the sector has made to Australian cultural life.

The festival employs two permanent part time staff engaged in the programming, general management and curation of the event each year. The event also engages fifty general crew members and twenty-five professional production crew to manage the event over and leading up to the festival weekend.

Payments to both artists and crew have been substantially increased in the past decade and there has been a consolidated effort to professionalise the event, in management, production and payment to artists. The event features close to 1000 acts and over 400 individual artists over the four-day festival featuring music, spoken word, dance, workshops and children’s entertainment.

The Cygnet Folk Festival is an incorporated body; We are a Not-for-Profit entity managed by a volunteer committee. We have a sliding scale of remuneration of staff and crew, some employed year long and many more contracted for the duration of the event.

While this predominantly volunteer-based model has insulated Australian folk festivals from much of the closures experienced by many other festivals and events, it cannot be a sustainable model into the future and undervalues the work and considerable experience of arts workers in the field.

Our folk festivals feature an extraordinary collaboration and showcasing of musicians. They come from those exploring both traditional and contemporary expressions of indigenous and colonial influences, to migrant populations bringing their culture and musicianship into our events, to international visiting artists. Festivals such as ours provide employment for artists, directors, coordinators, administrators, production workers and a multitude of others required to manage an event. All these are deserving of a sustainable and liveable income with the security offered to any other worker.

## The Five Pillars

### First Nations First

The Cygnet Folk Festival is held on the lands of the melukerde people, managed by the South East Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation (SETAC). The festival staff and committee refer to SETAC for advice and guidance on protocol and engage them for guidance on events and inclusion in our programming. This consultation is ongoing and essential to our integrity.



The festival also collaborates closely with other First Nations artists who work with us as performers, and presenters of forums, workshops and choirs during the festival.

We are very grateful for the support of and engagement with SETAC and our local aboriginal community.

The festival team will always seek guidance on protocol, and continue our engagement with our First Nations artists and collaborators with utmost respect.

## A Place for Every Story

Genuine culture informed by history produces the richest cultural expressions and develops the most confident and grounded identities.

The folk community is first and foremost about story. It holds the stories of our forebears and tells the stories going forward of our hopes and dreams. Not only folk songs but our tunes hold and tell story. Our strength is continuing to simultaneously hold and develop these.

At our festival we feature storytellers of song and tune. We also host (very popular) spoken-word events and even traditional folk dances from all our folk communities hold a story.

## Centrality of the Artist

“Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators”

Without the artists, there is no festival!

During our event, The Cygnet Folk Festival showcases approximately 90 artists on 12-13 stages over a period of four days; predominantly musicians, but also poets, storytellers, comedians, dance callers, instrument makers and children’s entertainers. We are proud that we showcase a gender balanced program, diversity and inclusion of artists of colour, sexual preference and physical ability.

In the past 15 years the artist budget from our ticket revenue for the Cygnet Folk Festival has more than doubled. Without additional funding, this is still far from sufficient to ensure that our artists are appropriately remunerated for the years spent developing their art and the creativity and virtuosity they bring to our stages.

Additionally, we have a dedicated youth development programmes and showcase opportunities to ensure that the next generation of artists can also be front and centre.

## Strong Cultural Infrastructure

In recent years our festival has worked tirelessly to professionalise our organisation to ensure a safe and responsible workplace for our artists, arts workers and volunteers. Our systems are constantly being improved, and our constitution updated.

We work closely with Folk Alliance Australia, follow their guidelines, and encourage our artists to be members. We work with Music Australia so that artists are appropriately remunerated for original works, and for full-time professional artists (and others wherever possible) we work within union and minimum-wage guidelines or above to pay our artists.

Locally, we work with partners to ensure that our artists who have travelled to our state can receive sufficient work to make the travel viable and with partner organisations such as SETAC, local council, Arts Tasmania and local community groups to retain community consultation and regional relevance.



## Engaging the Audience

As a festival in a regional town, we have the distinct advantage of having a variety of venues to cater to audiences who will support a wide diversity of performers. In real terms, this means that we can showcase well-known or higher profile artists in our larger venues, while featuring young and emerging artists or community groups in smaller venues or free, outdoor stages.

Although the festival has a known profile within the folk-music communities, we are cognizant of the ongoing need to attract younger audiences. This has largely been achieved in recent years by the integration of a large outdoor venue with our children's performance and activities venues making it an ideal space for young families.

We have also been able to increase our social media presence in the past year due to a three-year marketing grant, thus enabling us to employ a dedicated part-time marketing coordinator.

## UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

In line with our sister festivals and our Australian representative body, Folk Alliance Australia we refer to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention.

As Folklore is a term used globally, it typically falls within Heritage and sustainability frameworks. One of the most prominent frameworks that would be applicable in this context is the UNESCO Intangible Culture Heritage Convention and by extension, the Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore.

The UNESCO framework offers a useful policy lens for recognising folk music and folklore as intangible cultural heritage: traditional, contemporary and living at the same time; transmitted across generations; and maintained by communities who recognise these practices as part of their cultural identity.

In this submission, UNESCO is used not to frame folk culture as static heritage, but to recognise the relationship between preservation, transmission and living contemporary practice within community. As such it is important to note that folk music and folklore should be recognised both as intangible cultural heritage and as contemporary creative practice



The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.

The “intangible cultural heritage”, as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains:

- a. oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- b. performing arts;

Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 32nd General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

## In conclusion

For our organisation, a successful national cultural policy would see our folk artists, festivals, educators, archivists and organisations recognised within mainstream cultural funding and policy settings; folk festivals treated as cultural infrastructure; preservation linked to living practice.

When a folk culture has grown organically in a place over decades or centuries, its practitioners hardly recognise it as a folk culture. Instead, it is just what they do, who they are and how they create. Folk traditions have shaped many contemporary musical forms, and continue to influence contemporary songwriting, instrumental practice, festival culture and participatory music-making. Our local musicians look in envy to countries where folk music has established streams in educational facilities and where funding for travel and representation is inherent. Many of our younger practitioners, inspired by those in other countries who have taken their traditional culture and “run with it” to create exciting new music where the old can still be heard and recognised, have sought to emulate this nod to tradition.

Our folk festivals are an example of how folkloric culture manifests in practice. Festivals demonstrate how folk music is both unique and exemplary in providing an inclusive space for communities to thrive and express themselves, involving people of all ages and abilities. Folk Festivals will generally feature workshops or masterclasses of both cultural and musical practice by the most virtuosic of practitioners in their fields, thus being a source of education and community engagement not generally experienced by mainstream festivals.

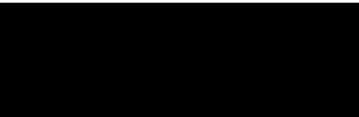
Our festivals are at the same time inclusive community spaces, while showcasing artistry and performances from practitioners who demonstrate expertise as finely honed as any esteemed classical musician. Our festivals are not only linked to fostering community identities, but also to regional and national identities, tourism, and national heritage.



Festivals such as ours support artist income, regional touring routes, volunteer development, cultural tourism, audience development, intergenerational learning, community identity and the transmission of living folkloric practice.

As stated previously, due partly to their inherent structure, but also a dedicated cohort of music and related arts practitioners and loyal audience base, festivals such as ours have survived (in the case of the Cygnet Folk Festival, almost 45 years).

Future policy must recognise the value of these art forms and the institutions that support them. We thank the federal government for instigating a National Cultural Policy that we hope to be more inclusive of the folk sector and our events.



Erin Collins, Artistic Director



On behalf of the Cygnet Folk Festival staff and management committee.

With thanks to contributions from



24<sup>th</sup> of May, 2026

