



Folk Federation of NSW

President's Report Nov 2022-Oct 2023

The Folk Federation of NSW acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout our state of NSW and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to Elders past and present.

We especially respect the role that music and songlines play and continue to play in the continuation of First Nation's culture.

ABOUT FolkFedNSW

The Folk Federation of NSW Inc. (FolkFedNSW) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation and a peak body in NSW actively championing folk music and the folk arts. It is also a registered charity. FolkFedNSW's financial year runs from May 1 – April 30 while its operational year is from November 1 – October 31.

FolkFedNSW supports and represents all aspects of the NSW folk sector including, but not limited to, musicians, venues, folk organisations and community groups and, folk arts enthusiasts of all ages and interests. FolkFedNSW also provides advocacy on behalf of the folk sector.

FolkFedNSW is overseen by a volunteer committee made up of up to 12 members at any time and elected by its membership. It is a "hands-on", skills-based committee where each member of the team contributes to furthering the organisation's purpose.

From the President

As our 2022/23 operational year unfolded it was a sense of relief to finally see the COVID curtain lift. This was a specific milestone for me as it was the first year that hasn't been severely impacted by COVID since I've been president. While we may never be rid of it, we have now moved into a post-pandemic phase of recovery though for some, particularly many of our folk clubs, rebuilding has been a slow process. More than ever, this highlights the role that the Folk Federation of NSW can play in stepping up to support these organisations which, in turn, will only serve to strengthen our Folk Sector.

At last year's AGM we welcomed two new committee members, Bridget Wardlaw who stepped into the secretary role vacated by Pam Davis and Glenys Eddy who joined as a committee member. In early December 2022 we held our first live music event which ironically, was our *End of Year Folk Bash* with Margaret Walters once again taking the reigns as organiser. This is always a great opportunity for us to come together, not only to celebrate folk but to enjoy an afternoon of friendship and community. Margaret curated a wonderful program and I thank her for that. Since she has now stepped down from the committee and her role as Vice-President this was her last *Folk Bash* as organiser so I would also like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank her not only for the work put into that event over many years but, for her valued contribution to our committee and the range of knowledge and support she shared. While she has been missed, her door, so to speak, is always open when council is sought so, thank you Margaret for your passion and commitment not only to the folk federation but to folk music in general.

A major undertaking for the Folk Federation of NSW over the past five years has been the Young Folk Artists of the Year Awards. These are going from strength to strength thanks to Craig Sinclair's continued commitment and his work with our young awardees throughout each year. I'd also like to thank Alex Bishop and Russell Neill who joined Craig on this year's selection panel as well as Andy Busuttill of Blue Mountains Sound for his continued support. Our 2023 Awardees are Rory Phillips under 25yrs and Tristan and Millicent White, under 19yrs. In 2024 we will look to extend our Youth Program with other activities to engage young musicians. This is something that I flagged in last year's report and, which is in the very early stages of development with Kirsten Hulse and Chris Wheeler investigating the possibility of a folk camp or similar. Another initiative planned for 2024 is the revival of the MOFO concerts that were developed during Anthony Woolcott's time as President. Ideas for this are currently being explored by Craig and Russell. I am also delighted to report that Felicity Dowd, our 2020 senior Young Folk Artist has just been announced as Folk Alliance Australia's Youth Folk Artist of the Year. In Chris Wheeler's words, *It's a real validation of our still very small program.*

Our second big commitment for the year was the Sydney Folk Festival, our flagship event, and I am pleased to report that the 2023 festival team delivered both a creatively and financially successful festival. I would especially like to acknowledge and thank Alex Bishop who once again took on the huge responsibility for operations and production of the event as well as chair of the festival organising committee. Other key people I would like to thank are Cathy Rytmeister and Pam Davis (volunteers), Terry Clinton (ticketing), Dallas Baxter (finance), Penny Plumb (box office) and Wally Byrne, Bridget Wardlaw, Glenys Eddy and Russell Neill for their various support roles. I would also like thank our marketing team, in particular Laura Bishop and Elsen Price. Everyone working on Sydney Folk Festival is a volunteer. Events like ours don't happen without these behind-the-scenes workers so, whatever your role, big or small, to all our festival volunteers, a huge thank you.

While the 2023 festival did realise a small profit, I must emphasise that, as it stands, it is not by any means a financially sustainable event without the support of grant funding. In 2023 we were fortunate to receive funding of \$26,000 from Live Music Australia. We also had a Quick Response Grant of \$3,750 from the City of Sydney to develop a street performance program aimed at raising community awareness of the event. Sydney Folk Festival has many strengths and points of difference that make it a stand-out event including that it runs during the winter months providing an excellent program of concerts and performance opportunities when other similar events are in hibernation. However, while Sydney Folk Festival relies on grant funding the future of the event is tenuous and, it may be that we need to develop a different model for it to remain viable.

At the forefront of all our efforts is our mission to champion folk music and the folk arts, a key platform of our current Strategic Plan which takes us through to September 2024. Next year will be a time to review this plan and, while I don't expect a major overhaul, there will be some minor tweaking required to ensure it remains relevant as our guide for future planning. Our Youth Program and the Sydney Folk Festival are key activities outlined in our current Strategic Plan but, there are others that have also been actioned over the year. These include more effective and regular use of social media. Thank you to Kirsten Hulse who has taken this on, ensuring weekly posts and updates on our Facebook page. We also now have a bi-monthly members' e-News Bulletin.

In the live contemporary music ecology, the folk sector is often overlooked as a key player. Through her work on the recent National Cultural Policy Submission on behalf of Folk Federation of NSW Chris Wheeler has contributed to furthering our objective to be an advocate for the Folk Sector, thus strengthening the reach and influence of folk, and I thank her for this valuable work. The Folk Federation of NSW website is also experiencing greater uptake of usage and, while there is more work to do in promoting the online Cornstalk and FolkMart, the Events Page and our Folk Directory are growing steadily. We've also ticked boxes in the key area of Finance. As our treasurer Dallas Baxter has oversight of this which includes both the Folk Federation of NSW and Sydney Folk Festival accounts and I would like to thank her, not only for continuing in this role but for the time put in to manage these accounts including keeping track of membership subscriptions and preparing the monthly reports. I'd also like to thank Terry Clinton for the assistance he provides in lodging our returns with the ACNC.

In terms of membership, while this hasn't yet bounced back to our pre-COVID level, we are now seeing steady growth each year. A report has been prepared by Wayne Richmond which I will speak briefly to and make available via the website. While not a committee member Wayne supports Folk Federation of NSW both as the current recorder of memberships and, in preparing and sending out the weekly "what's on" FolkMail. These are both time consuming jobs and we are very fortunate to have this valuable support. On behalf of the committee I extend a huge vote of thanks Wayne.

As a committee we share a common love of folk music and have worked together during the year to support our artists and our folk organisations in bringing folk to the widest possible audiences. Looking ahead there is still much to do and, we remain committed to our mission of championing and advocating for the folk arts and our artists. My heartfelt thanks to all who support us in furthering these goals, our members, musicians, folk practitioners and our audiences. We look forward to your continued support over the coming 12 months.

Pam Merrigan

President, Folk Federation of NSW (29 Oct 2023)