



# Folk Federation of NSW

## *President's Report Nov 2023-Oct 2024*

*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 of the following year, while its operational year is from November 1 – October 31 of the following year.

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 operational year draws to an end I can't believe how quickly the time has flown by. I suppose, like most of our NSW Folk Organisations our focus over the past 12 months has very much been on consolidation and rebuilding now that things are settling into what could be called the "new" post-Covid normal. Recovery however has been slow and, while some clubs and festivals have fared reasonably well, we note that others are still struggling to reach pre-Covid audience and participation levels. FolkFedNSW has also had its challenges and, during the past year the particular focus has been on building greater engagement not only with our members but with the wider folk community. This has led to both changes in our primary focus and, in developing initiatives that support our NSW folk organisations and organisers.

One of this year's most notable changes was the absence of a 2024 Sydney Folk Festival. As I outlined in last year's report, while the 2023 festival was a creative success it was only financially viable because of two grants that were received. Unfortunately, ticket sales did not reach our projected targets giving us no seed money for a 2024 event. We did apply for a second Live Music Australia Grant, which was a bit of a long shot really, but "gotta be in it to win it". Unfortunately, we missed the cut for 2024. This, and that some of our key volunteers advised that 2023 would be their last festival, led to the decision to hold off on a 2024 event. It is my personal view that, for Sydney Folk Festival to continue as a viable entity, we need to develop a model more suited to a city environment and one that does not continually rely on grant funding. Of course, whether running a festival at all is the best fit for our organisation is another matter entirely and for future discussion.

In the 2023-24 year FolkFedNSW only ran one live folk music event which was our End of Year Folk Wrap in early December and held at the Gaelic Club. With a new title we also tried a slightly different format for this event though we did retain the Mummers' Play and this one certainly lived up to expectations and was a real hoot. Thanks to Russell Neal and Black Joak. Creatively the afternoon was a great success with a terrific line-up featuring The Peppercorns, Black Joak, Meremba and Margaret Walters & crew leading the Village Carols to conclude. While the venue looked reasonably well attended ticket sales again fell short and the Folk Wrap only got across the line financially due to some very generous donations, including from some of the musicians so a huge, huge thank you to all who contributed.

Currently front and centre of our mission to champion folk music and the folk arts is our Young Folk Artists' Program. I am pleased to report that this has been an ongoing success mainly due to the continued commitment of our Program Coordinator, Craig Sinclair. The contact Craig maintains with our young awardees throughout the year of their award has been especially important to the program's success and I'd like to extend a huge thank you to Craig for his work with our young folk. Our award recipients for 2024 are, Sam Fletcher (under 25 years) and Ais O'Neill (under 19 years). Two great choices. I'd also like to thank Christine Wheeler and Russell Neal for joining Craig on this year's selection panel. Another youth initiative in its inaugural year is the appointment of a Youth Ambassador and I am delighted that Felicity Dowd, a previous Young Folk Awardee and more recently FAA's Youth Folk Artist of the Year has accepted this post for the 2024-25 year.

One of the things we rely on to support our activities, most especially, our youth initiatives are our membership subscriptions. During the heavily affected COVID years which also coincided with Cornstalk ceasing to be a print newsletter there was a significant drop off in membership. We have worked diligently to rebuild this over the past two years, including some value-added incentives through our interactive website and following up with lapsed members. I am pleased to say that membership is steadily coming back including new memberships particularly in the Affiliate category. We now have almost 90 listings in our NSW Folk Directory, our Events page is also well used with folk activities currently listed up until December and we are now working to promote our online Cornstalk Magazine.

Not having to focus on running a festival in 2024 gave our committee some breathing space to focus on a variety of other projects, especially ways FolkFedNSW might be able to support or bring our folk community together. One of these was the idea of a family friendly folk music camp or gathering. While research into this is still ongoing much work by way of looking at venues and models for this type of event has already been undertaken and I would like to thank Christine Wheeler and Kirsten Hulse for their efforts thus far and I have no doubt that we can look forward to something along these lines, all going to plan, in 2026.

Another important activity undertaken by FolkFedNSW this past year was to initiate some discussions with our folk communities, to reach out and invite their input as to how, as the state representative body, FolkFedNSW could offer support both in the immediate future and longer term. These meetings were held via zoom to allow statewide participation and were attended by a good cross section of organisers including folk clubs, dance and festivals. To date there have been two get-togethers, one in March and a second in July of this year. From these meetings three key initiatives were identified: 1) a database of information to be available supporting the value of the Folk Sector; 2) appointment of a Media Officer to represent the NSW Folk Sector; and 3) establishing networks and communication channels to provide resource sharing and mentoring opportunities to support folk organisers. This is an ongoing initiative led by Cathy Rytmeister, Christine Wheeler and myself and I'd especially

like to thank Cathy and Christine for their invaluable contributions to these discussions. It is a work in progress so, watch this space.

A huge undertaking that began late last year has been the archiving and preservation of FolkFedNSW history. This has included our website, FolkMail which now has an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number which is a unique code for identifying serial publications) and, setting up a Wikipedia Page for the Folk Federation of NSW. This whole project, with contributions as necessary from various committee members, is currently being managed by Alex Bishop. The setting up of the Wikipedia Page has been particularly painstaking and time consuming and still ongoing. It is vitally important to the Folk Federation as an organisation that its history and the work it does be recorded for future reference as part of the pantheon of folk and contemporary music organisations and I would like to give a huge vote of thanks to Alex for the work already undertaken and, for Wikipedia work that is still ongoing.

The activities outlined above are all part of FolkFedNSW's current Strategic Plan which takes us through to the end of September this year and so, is up for review to see how successful we've been in achieving our goals and objectives. This is something that we will be looking at in the coming weeks to determine what we've achieved, what we need to tweak or change and what we still need to do, so that we can update, adjust, and/or redefine it based on what we find.

Overall, I think it has been a good year for the Folk Federation of NSW. The website is being used in the way it was intended, social media is ticking along nicely, for which I'd like to thank Kirsten Hulse who keeps up the weekly posts that link back to the website. Big thanks once again to Dallas Baxter for yet another year of managing all the finances. Whatever would we do without you? I must also extend a huge thank you on behalf of our committee to Wayne Richmond who not only backs up our membership information but also prepares and sends out our weekly FolkMail bulletin.

In fact, I'd like to thank every member of our committee for their continued involvement and commitment especially since everyone is giving their time freely which I know for some can be pretty tricky when juggling real day jobs, family, music gigs and other commitments. So again, many, many thanks. And finally, to our members, thank you for being Folk Fed!

Pam Merrigan  
President, FolkFedNSW