

9.5.2

CULTURAL & COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT - VALUE AND CONTRIBUTIONS IN 2023/2024

FILE NO: 03.00370

RECOMMENDATION:

That the information be noted.

REPORT:

The Cultural & Community Services Department of Bathurst Regional Council consists of six areas, the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery (BRAG), Museums Bathurst -encompassing the National Motor Racing Museum, Australian Fossil and Mineral Museum, Chifley Home, Bathurst Rail Museum and the Central Tablelands Collections Facility, Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre (BMEC), Community Services, Bathurst Visitor Information Centre/Destination Management (BVIC) and Bathurst Library. All sections work collaboratively in the development and delivery of cultural programs, events and community programs and in establishing community partnerships and fostering Bathurst's cultural identity and unique sense of place.

This report provides a high-level overview of the activities and achievements of the Department in the 2023/2024 financial year. Measurement of success can be challenging given the wide range of initiatives and actions undertaken across the Department. The value of these activities, whether undertaken directly or supported by the Department, are not exclusively economic or assessable via conventional metrics such as visitation or revenue. Social value is less easily quantified at a local level, yet is of no lesser importance. It is widely recognised that arts and culture contribute powerfully to individual and community wellbeing and that healthy communities are also inclined to be more economically vibrant. Research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows a clear link between social wellbeing and a stronger and faster growing economy.

In 2023/2024 Bathurst Regional Council has maintained its commitment to ensuring that the arts, culture and delivering strong community programs continue to underpin our identity, sense of place and therefore our region's future. This commitment, and Council's ongoing investment into the cultural vitality of the region, enhances the liveability of Bathurst, the health and resilience of our community and the desirability of the city and region for attracting regional relocation and investment.

Visitation, Engagement & Financial Benefits

The Department delivered services and experiences to both the local community and to visitors to the region in 2023/2024.

Across all facilities and activities, the Cultural & Community Services team have directly engaged with an estimated 478,000 people in the 12 months to 30 June 2024. This figure

includes 449,969 visitors to all facilities operated by the Department of whom 130,000 were visitors to Bathurst from outside the LGA. This figure is particularly significant given the difficult economic climate of the past 12 months which saw widespread reductions in travel and visitor spend. Despite this, the National Motor Racing Museum broke its all-time attendance record, exceeding 45,000 visits for the first time ever. All museums cumulatively welcomed 118,000 visitors and had 662 annual memberships.

Online, the Department achieved a further 400,000 engagements and exceeded 80,000 followers online across social media channels and 1.2 million pageviews on websites administered by the CCS team including 517,228 for BMEC alone. The National Motor Racing Museum became the first Council Facebook account to exceed 40,000 followers.

Delivering essential community building services, Scallywags and Family Day Care have provided care for 298 families in 2023/2024 whilst the Bathurst Library grew total membership to 10,962 at an average of 110 new members a month.

Utilising Tourism Research Australia figures, the positive economic impact of external visitation driven by Council's cultural facilities would exceed \$26 million in total visitor spend, demonstrating the vital role that museums and cultural facilities play within the Bathurst economy. The Bathurst Visitor Information Centre also welcomed 42,785 visitors. Accredited Visitor Information Centres are calculated to increase spending in a region by between \$56-\$107 per visitor according to research undertaken by SATC, so very conservatively, this would give a figure of \$2,263,950 added to the Bathurst visitor economy from the direct customer service provided by BVIC.

Data from the *Spendmapp* platform utilised by Council measuring spend in the Bathurst region shows, significantly, that external visitor spend in the region has grown by 21.5% this financial year, demonstrating that Bathurst as a destination is experiencing strong positive economic growth. In the same period, resident escape spending only increased by 3.52% showing a strong net positive for the regional economy.

In addition, it is recognised that the creative economy, including tourism, is labour intensive as an industry and therefore is a disproportionately strong source of local employment when compared to other industries. As a comparison, research from *The Australia Institute* shows that for every million dollars in turnover, arts and entertainment produce 9 jobs while the construction industry only produces around 1 job. The strength of this sector in Bathurst is also critical in preventing the loss of local talent through migration to other regions.

The Department continued to support activities through sourcing of available grants which in 2023/24 successfully resulted in:

- BMEC securing Create NSW Multi-Year Funding of \$80,000 to support programs.
- BRAG securing Create NSW funding of \$60,000 and Creative Australia funding of \$42,500 to support the exhibition *Dhuluny: the war that never ended*.
- BVIC secured \$20,000 in Destination NSW Regional Events Flagship Funding for the 2024 Bathurst Heritage Trades Trail event.
- Community Services and Bathurst Library were successful in securing a Connecting Seniors state grant of just \$39,820 which enabled hosting of an intergenerational program at the library offering paid employment and life skills to local young people and one on one personalised tech assistance to local seniors.
- Youth Week, coordinated by Community Services, received \$4,190 in additional grant funding to host events for young people in Bathurst.

- The Central Tablelands Collections Facility obtained a \$45,000 Creative Capital grant for establishing ongoing Collections digitisation activities.
- Bathurst Library also received a \$10,000 donation to develop its dementia resources. The project involves expanding research and consultation with local dementia services as well as state and national peak bodies to develop new specific dementia friendly resources.

Events, public programs and activities

The Cultural & Community Services Department delivered a diverse ongoing series of events, programs, shows and activities in 2023/24 including, importantly providing access to many free, accessible and inclusive activities. Highlights included:

- Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre hosted 172 shows/events and functions in the last twelve months including the Bathurst Writers & Readers Festival in partnership with the Bathurst Library.
- Bathurst Library ran 283 events and programs ranging from Digital literacy to Author talks and workshops, Early Literacy, intergenerational tech support and human library (borrow a person and listen to their story). Total attendance of 7,157. Each year we partner with around 50 individuals and organisations.
- Bathurst Regional Art Gallery engaged 1,035 participants in its public programs
- Community Services coordinated annual Senior Week with 97 events, Community Safety initiatives such as addressing homelessness, scams awareness and cyber security campaign in partnership with the Library and Bathurst Police, programs at Kelso Community Centre through Marang Connections which engaged 85 young people whilst partnering with 17 external organisations, International Women's Day including a joint panel discussion with members of the Cirencester Town Council and local business community, Harmony Week and Youth Week including Cuppa with a Youth Councillor
- BVIC coordinated the annual Autumn Colours Heritage Festival and Bathurst Heritage Trades Trail which together attracted over 3,500 attendees and worked closely with community groups to deliver important events such as the Bathurst Spring Spectacular, Rebellion on the Turon, Rockley Gardens and Art Festival, Hill End Analogue Festival and Perthville Artisans Markets.
- Museums Bathurst delivered major activities for visitors and the local community including Museum Selfie Day, Steam Weekend, Father's Day and Dinosaur Family Day & Tea with Lizzie at Chifley Home engaging with over 5,000 individuals in total.
- The Central Tablelands Collections Facility partnered with the Australian Museum in the relocation of the storied Somerville collection with seven staff from the Australian Museum working with Bathurst Museum staff over a six week period.

Innovations

The past year saw a number of significant achievements in developing new initiatives and in improving existing practices across the Department with notable innovations including:

- BMEC undertook a structural change from use of a cleaning contract to engaging casual staff as Custodians of the building delivering noticeable improvement in cleanliness of the building as well as improved maintenance and repainting resulting in an enhanced venue experience.
- The BMEC Membership model was reviewed and restructured with the result that membership is now at the highest level ever.
- BRAG and the Central Tablelands Collections Facility have worked to make the first selection of the BRAG Permanent Collection available online.

- The team at Bathurst Library has developed and launched the Bathurst Community Directory. The information has been collated from existing community directories and the knowledge of Bathurst Regional Council staff. The Bathurst Community Directory contains comprehensive information about close to 300 local community services, organisations, and groups. All details are provided directly by service providers.
- A memorandum of understanding was entered into in August 2023 with Share the Dignity Ltd, for the supply, installation and operational management of the distribution machine in the Library/Gallery public toilets which was subsequently installed 11 April 2024. Since the implementation, 296 feminine hygiene packs have been distributed. The aim of the project is to establish greater access to period products for those experiencing period poverty and/or vulnerable and in need in Bathurst.
- The Central Tablelands Collections Facility has become the first public sector organisation to generate revenue from the provision of collections storage and services for regional groups. This activity significantly offsets operating costs.

Industry Recognition

The activities of the Department are frequently recognised outside of Bathurst as being industry leading examples. In 2023/24, instances of such peer and industry recognition included:

- The Library's work with people experiencing homelessness being recognised and publicised by the NSW Public Library Association and emulated by other regional libraries.
- The Central Tablelands Collections Facility won the Leo Kelly Arts and Culture Award and the prestigious Museums and Galleries NSW IMAGINE Award, bringing its total count of awards received since the facility opened to six.
- A total of 18 other Local Government areas have now held discussions with Bathurst Regional Council regarding their interest in developing their own form of collective collections storage based upon the successful example of the Central Tablelands Collections Facility.
- BVIC won the Gold Award at the 2023 NSW Tourism Awards for best Visitor Information Centre and received a Highly Commended at the 2024 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards. BVIC has won two gold and one silver awards at State level over the past three years.
- The Bathurst Heritage Trades Trail, coordinated by BVIC, was awarded the Silver at the 2023 NSW Tourism Awards, a Highly Commended in the Events, Exhibitions and Tours category and the President's Prize at the 2024 NSW National Trust Heritage Awards.
- The Marang Connections program at Kelso Community Centre coordinated by Community Services was a finalist in the 2024 NSW Local Government Excellence Awards.

Social impact, Community Value & Intrinsic Value

The arts, culture and heritage are the foundations upon which vibrant, resilient and inclusive communities are built. Developing such a community requires a collaborative approach and strong leadership and 2023/24 has seen Council demonstrate this leadership with the activities and initiatives summarised within this report supporting no less than 19 of the strategic objectives of the current Community Strategic Plan.

Measurement of the return on Council's investment in these objectives is unlikely to ever capture the full positive impact as so many activities support intrinsic value to sense of

self, lifelong learning, the engagement of young people, foster community cohesion and wellbeing and generate active citizenship and local pride. Metrics around these outcomes are often missing, and the positive impacts are diffused and can be indirect. But such impact is no less critically important for its lack of a direct measurement. The symbiotic relationship between social wellbeing and a strong economy is well established.

It is significant to note that the most recently released Estimated Resident Population (ERP) annual dataset from the ABS, for the year ended June 30th, 2023, Bathurst was one of only two inland cities to record a positive net internal migration figure, with Albury the second. Both are regional centres which have chosen to invest in cultural infrastructure and in strong community programs. These are essential attributes in creating the lifestyle conditions that encourage such relocation, and it is considered no coincidence that internal migration is strongest from those areas known to be Bathurst's strongest catchment areas for tourism as enjoyment and satisfaction in visiting is the first stage in choosing to relocate to an area.

Council's Cultural & Community Services Department will continue to innovate and strive to deliver enhanced visitor experiences, artistic and cultural practices and community programs and activities in 2024/2025 that support and grow the local economy, that respond to the changing needs of visitors and to the welcome increase in Bathurst's cultural diversity and which continue to underpin our community's sense of place and the unique vitality of the Bathurst region.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Funding for this item is contained within existing budgets

BATHURST COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN – OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES:

Objective 1: Our sense of place and identity.

- Strategy 1.1 Respect, protect and promote the region's Indigenous heritage assets.
- Strategy 1.2 Protect, enhance and promote the region's Non-Indigenous heritage assets and character.
- Strategy 1.3 Enhance the cultural vitality of the region.

Objective 2: A smart and vibrant economy.

- Strategy 2.1 Support local business and industry.
- Strategy 2.2 Grow local employment, investment and attract new businesses skills by nurturing and supporting entrepreneurs, partnerships and local skill development.
- Strategy 2.4 Promote our City and Villages as an attractive place to live.
- Strategy 2.5 Support Mount Panorama Wahluu as a premier motor sport and event precinct.
- Strategy 2.6 Promote our City and Villages as a tourist destination.

Objective 5: Community health, safety and well being.

- Strategy 5.1 Provide opportunities for our community to be healthy and active.
- Strategy 5.2 Help make the Bathurst CBD, neighbourhoods and the region's villages attractive and full of life.
- Strategy 5.3 Help build resilient, inclusive communities.
- Strategy 5.4 Make our public places safe and welcoming.

Strategy 5.5 Plan and respond to demographic changes in the community.

Objective 6: Community leadership and collaboration.

Strategy 6.1 Communicate and engage with the community, government and business groups on important matters affecting the Bathurst region.

Strategy 6.3 Advocate for our community.

Strategy 6.4 Meet legislative and compliance requirements.

Strategy 6.6 Manage our money and our assets to be sustainable now and into the future.

Strategy 6.7 Invest in our people.

Strategy 6.9 Progressive Local Leadership.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

01 **Inform** - to provide the public with balanced and objective information to help them understand the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

ATTACHMENTS:

Nil

MINUTE

RESOLUTION NUMBER: ORD2024-211

MOVED: Cr M Hogan SECONDED: Cr B Fry

RESOLVED:

That the information be noted.