



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Byron Bay Bluesfest**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 26 May 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 26 May 2014  
**Page** 4231  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Elliot, Justine, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

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**Mrs ELLIOT** (Richmond) (12:53): I move:

That this House notes that:

- (1) 2014 is the 25th anniversary of the Byron Bay Bluesfest, Australia's premier Blues and Roots music festival;
- (2) Bluesfest has been acclaimed as a premier contemporary music, tourist and business event, winning multiple awards from New South Wales Tourism, the Australia Event Awards, the Australia Helpmann Awards, and the North Coast Tourism Awards;
- (3) Bluesfest has also been internationally recognised for its work on environmental sustainability and minimising the environmental impact of the festival on its surroundings, being awarded the international 'A Greener Festival Award' seven years in a row;
- (4) in 2013, Bluesfest director Peter Noble and Bundjalung woman and festival director Rhoda Roberts founded the Boomerang festival, which celebrates the valuable contributions of our Indigenous people through music, art, dance, film and cultural exchanges; and
- (5) Bluesfest director Peter Noble received on 4 February 2014 the prestigious Rolling Stone Award recognising his outstanding career-long contribution to popular culture.

Bluesfest at Byron Bay is an outstanding annual event held in my electorate of Richmond. This year the festival celebrated its 25th anniversary. The East Coast Blues Festival began in 1990 as a four-day indoor festival at the Arts Factory in Byron Bay, drawing a capacity crowd of about 6,000 in its first year. It quickly became known as the Byron Bay Bluesfest, then the Byron Bay Festival, and today it is simply known as the Bluesfest. In the Bluesfest, Australia had for the first time a genuine international multicultural music festival. In 1993, the event moved indoors to the Belongil Fields until relocating to Red Devil Park in 1997, where it stayed until 2007. The festival then moved back to Belongil Fields in 2008 and 2009 and, in 2010, moved to its new permanent home at the Tyagarah Tea Tree Farm, about 15 minutes drive north of Byron Bay.

The event is absolutely massive. It includes seven performance stages, five licensed bars and a number of huge undercover food halls. There are also daily children's activities, merchandise stalls, onsite camping and market stalls. This year saw the silver anniversary of the Bluesfest draw its highest attendance in the history of the festival, with more than 104,500 people attending over the five days. This is a real credit to the festival director, Peter Noble, and his team, who do such an outstanding job.

Economically, Bluesfest is a major contributor to the Byron Shire. Looking solely at the economic benefit of the 2013 Bluesfest, there was a total benefit of \$64.1 million for the Byron Shire, including an estimated total income—that is, wages and salaries—of \$10.8 million for the Byron Shire. Bluesfest is also very supportive of charitable groups as diverse as kindergartens and hospices and also of some musicians who have fallen on hard times. Bluesfest fundraising alone raised \$130,000 for the victims of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. Major charity fundraising over the past 15 years has been for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and guitar raffles at the festival have raised over \$374,000 to date. This year, charity stalls included things like Australian Seabird Rescue, Bay FM, Byron Youth Service, Cancer Council, Playing for Change, The Uncle Project and Westpac Lifesaver Rescue. So we can see that Bluesfest brings enormous economic benefits to Byron Bay and, indeed, to the Northern Rivers. And it is a great support for many organisations.

Bluesfest is also one of the most highly awarded festivals in Australia. In 2005 and 2006, Bluesfest won the Helpmann Award for Australia's Best Contemporary Music Festival. Between 1994 and 2010, Bluesfest has consistently been awarded *Rhythms Magazine* readers' poll for Australia's Best Music Festival. The awards Bluesfest has won are unprecedented for a regional event. Bluesfest has also been nominated by the international

concert magazine *Pollstar* in 2005 and 2006 as one of the top five finalists in the International Venue of the Year category, alongside major festivals such as the Montreux Jazz Festival. Bluesfest is viewed as one of the world's great music festivals—something that we are very, very proud of.

Bluesfest is not just about the music. It is also important to note that it is a leader in low carbon pollution tourism. Each year since 2007, Bluesfest has been awarded the international A Greener Festival Award, recognizing its outstanding commitment to sustainability. Another very exciting initiative of the Bluesfest director, Peter Noble, was to team up with Bundjalung woman and leading cultural creator, Rhoda Roberts, to create the first Boomerang Festival, which was held in 2013 for the first time. More than 5,000 people attended over the three days to celebrate Indigenous culture through traditional and contemporary music. I am sure it will continue to grow.

I would like to acknowledge all the volunteers who helped with the Bluesfest Festival; they make an outstanding difference. I would also like to note that festival director, Peter Noble, took out the Rolling Stone Award at the 5th Annual Rolling Stone Awards held in Sydney recently. Congratulations to him! The award acknowledges the contribution by Peter not only to Bluesfest but also to the wider music industry that he has been a part of, at a professional level, for 50 years. It was fitting that Peter was awarded this honour as Bluesfest celebrated its 25th anniversary over the Easter long weekend.

Bluesfest 2014 saw industry heavyweights such as John Mayer, Dave Matthews Band and Jack Johnson take the stage, alongside wonderful Australian artists such as the John Butler Trio, The Black Sorrows and John Williamson—to name a few of the great artists. The event has now grown to a point where artists from every continent appear. People make the pilgrimage from all around the world to attend the Bluesfest each year. It has an incredible reputation. For those who have been to Bluesfest, you know exactly what I mean. You know how special it is and how important it is. If you have not been and are interested in going to Bluesfest, then please make the trip to it next year. It is a unique, iconic and very special festival. It is one that we are very proud of in the Northern Rivers. I am very proud to have it in my electorate. I would certainly welcome everyone from all sides of the house to come along to see what the beautiful north coast has to offer. When it comes to Bluesfest, we have an outstanding festival—one that we are all incredibly proud of.

In closing, I would again like to acknowledge the great work that Peter Noble does and has done as director over the years to put us on the world stage with Bluesfest.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

**Mr Burke:** I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.