**Festivals and the environmental sustainability challenge**

Festivals are fun activities - we go to meet up with friends and family, escape the hum drum of daily life, be exposed to new cultural forms or simply to be entertained. Rarely do we consider the demands our attendance makes on our environment, yet like all human activities festivals require resources – water, energy, land, equipment, food and products of various types. Given that many festivals, even at the local level, can involve thousands of attendees these requirements bring with them the potential for negative environmental impacts. This brief article looks at the nature of such impacts, what represents best practice in dealing with them, and asks the question as to whether festivals can be managed in a way that reduces or eliminates their environmental footprint.

Take an imaginary walk with me through a typical ‘greenfield’ festival site. As we enter the festival gate you will notice that placed strategy throughout the site are a number of marquees used for the sale of food and/or beverages, along with stalls for the sale of various types of merchandise. As you look beyond these you will see a vast array of other items key to the delivery of such an event - lighting towers, water tanks, signage, fencing/barricades, stage(s), temporary toilets and rubbish bins – all of which needed to be transported to, and will later need to be taken away from, the site. You will also notice that the festival’s need for power has been met by cabling electrical services to various site locations and/or by the strategic placement of generators. Water may also have been plumbed to selected areas. As you look beyond the festival site itself you will see a substantial dedicated car parking area, along with a bus drop off/pick up location. Given this scene, it is not hard to imagine that during the set up, operational and post event phases of this, and indeed all festivals, environmental impacts will indeed occur. These impacts fall broadly into the categories of: CO2 emissions (e.g. from transport and power usage); waste generation (e.g. containers, food scraps, grey water and sewerage; consumption of non renewable resources (e.g. fuel associated with energy provision); and possible damage the site itself from foot and vehicle traffic.

Many (but not all) festival organisers from both the private and public sector are conscious of the need to reduce or eliminate the types of environmental impacts previously noted. This desire has been born, at least in part, by pressure from a more environmentally literate audience, an acceptance by the event industry more generally of the need to engage directly with the challenge of environmental sustainability and a recognition that efforts in this area can reduce operational costs.

At the national level, events such as the Woodford Folk Festival (Queensland) and the Peats Ridge Sustainable Arts and Music Festival (New South Wales) serve as beacons to the festival sector as regards how to approach the sustainability challenge. Viewed collectively these two events employ such initiatives as: treating their sewerage and grey water on- site; reducing waste to landfill through recycling, composting and eliminating the use of products not suitable for such; use of renewable fuels; encouraging and facilitating the use on site of only locally sourced organic food (thus reducing the carbon footprint of food provision); providing/encouraging the use public transport; incorporating environmentally themed talks into their programs; and enhancing the ecology of their sites through using festival resources for habitat restoration. Australian Festivals are not alone in being proactive in this area with a number of iconic overseas festivals, such as Glastonbury (UK) Roskilde Festival (Denmark) having well developed programs in this area (see [www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/information/green-glastonbury/our-green-policies](http://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/information/green-glastonbury/our-green-policies)) and
The interest in environmental sustainability amongst festivals globally has recently (2012) given rise to an International Standard for Sustainable Event Management (ISO 20121) that seeks to provide a systematic basis for approaching the challenge of producing more sustainable events. Additionally, recent years have seen bodies emerge to aid the efforts of festivals in this area, most notably A Greener Festival (www.agreenerfestival.com/) and the Sustainable Event Alliance (http://sustainable-event-alliance.org/). Software tools have also been developed for this purpose such as Carbon Calculators (e.g. the Australian Centre for Event Management’s Carbon Calculator - https://calculator.noco2.com.au/acem/) and the Sustainable Event Management Solution Tool (www.semstoolkit.com/section/Home/Products) being but too examples. Substantial online databases of material to inform the ‘greening’ process of festivals are also now available (e.g. Australian Centre for Event Management’s environmental resources database- http://www.business.uts.edu.au/acem/resources/environmental.html).

While the previous discussion makes clear that the festival sector has become proactive in the area of environmental sustainability, it needs to be made clear that degree to which individual events will seek to be proactive in this area varies enormously, as attendance at a cross section of festivals in Australia today will attest. Nor does being proactive in this area necessarily guarantee, or link to, longevity as the recently (2013) bankrupted Peats Ridge Sustainable Arts and Music Festival indicates. What the discussion here does point to, however, is an emerging environmental ethos which is quickly being incorporated as a ‘business as usual’ element into the overall process of festival production.