



## **Northern Rivers Tourism Inc.**

Wednesday, May 20, 2009

Mat Morris  
North Byron Shire Parklands  
PO Box 517  
Bangalow NSW 2479

Dear Mat,

I have followed with interest the recent publicity surrounding the Splendour in the Grass music festival's application to run a trial event at the North Byron Shire Parklands site. I'm writing to express my professional and personal support for the event as an integral part of the region's economy, culture and community.

Each year, nearly five million domestic and international overnight visitors and daytrippers come to the Northern Rivers and contribute nearly \$1.2 billion to the regional economy. They come for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the natural beauty evident from Tweed Heads to Woolli to Tabulam in the region's west.

Like the 262,000 residents of the region, they also come to appreciate the region's vibrant market culture, its diversity of agriculture and food production, the thriving arts and creative industries sector, to study at highly regarded educational institutions, for health and wellness and to briefly 'live the life' of the region's diverse communities.

Tourism is economically and socially crucial to Byron Shire and to the Northern Rivers region. It provides income to thousands of small to medium enterprises (including accommodation providers, attractions, restaurateurs, retailers, pubs and clubs and fuel suppliers) and those in the supply chain of goods and services for visitors. It fosters social cohesion through visiting friends and relatives and brings about

tolerance and appreciation of different cultures and sub-cultures. Travel broadens the mind.

As a tourism industry professional and concerned resident, I voice my unequivocal support for cultural tourism of the kind generated by events like Splendour in the Grass. Not only does this event generate undeniable economic benefits in a traditional low season (\$5.7million injected into the Byron Shire economy, 40,000 visitor nights into regional NSW in 2007), but the organisers and site owners demonstrate a commitment to corporate social responsibility that should serve as a benchmark for all event organisers.

The published accusations of environmental destruction and ruining wildlife corridors levelled by some opponents including CONOS are in-correct and misleading, obfuscating the facts of the recent Land and Environment Court decision regarding Council's approval of the event.

The Land and Environment Court decision to revoke Byron Shire Council's approval of the trial event was based on Chief Justice Brian Preston finding fault with Council's technical processing of the application, not on the merits of the application.

Having reviewed relevant parts of the Development Application for a trial event at North Byron Shire Parklands, I am impressed by the degree of consideration given to assessing the environmental, cultural and social impacts of the event. Amongst many investigations, assessments, surveys and consultations, NBSP and Splendour in the Grass have:

- Been proactive in revegetation, native tree-planting and articulating a vision to re-establish the (currently fragmented) wildlife corridor linking Billinudgel Nature Reserve and the Wollumbin-Mt Warning Caldera.
- Conducted a Koala Field Survey and developed a Koala Plan of Management
- Modelled and met noise goals defined in the EPA's Industrial Noise Policy
- Assessed options for vehicular and pedestrian access infrastructure to and around the site, including providing residents unimpeded access and improved road safety.
- Developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Minjungbal People whose traditional lands parts of the site occupy
- Undertaken extensive community consultation on a range of issues incorporating strategies to mitigate negative social impacts and maximise positive social impacts
- Provided financial support for local youth and community programs
- Commissioned an independent professional survey revealing overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward cultural festivals and events in Byron Shire

The Northern Rivers region is unique in attracting residents and visitors with a diversity of views, opinions and philosophies. Robust public debate is important to maintain a balance of competing interests; human, economic, social and environmental. Weighing private versus public interest is an ongoing part of that debate. Uninformed and misleading arguments put forward as facts are unfortunately also part of the debate.

On the facts, I commend the Splendour in the Grass Festival as a quality example of cultural tourism, and an event overwhelmingly in the public interest.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Russell Mills', with a small mark above it.

Russell Mills  
Chief Executive Officer  
Northern Rivers Tourism Inc

Cc: Lyndel Gray, Tourism NSW

Geoff Parmenter, Events NSW

Jan Barham, Byron Shire Council

Don Page MP, Shadow Minister for Tourism, Member for Ballina