

Folk Federation of NSW President's Report to Annual General Meeting 2006

Strategic Plan

One of the first things undertaken by the outgoing committee was a review of the Folk Federation's primary goals and core activities. A copy is attached to this report. I want to acknowledge Keith Preston's expertise and experience which was invaluable to us in developing this plan. This document is probably best reviewed annually by each incoming committee. Changes to the folk environment relevant to our federation would include the recent transfer of editorial responsibility for national folk magazine Trad and Now and related change to cheaper format and cheaper subscription. On the table is the merge of FAA quarterly newsletter into Trad and Now. Our esteemed treasurer, who is not only numerate but extremely literate as well, has pointed out that the content of the new format Trad and Now is overwhelmingly from NSW, which puts a certain pressure on our own publication Cornstalk for the future. This is an issue for the new committee to consider over the next few months.

Committee proposed new working format

The outgoing committee has experienced the predictable problems of good ideas and good intentions being compromised by busy lives and diverse responsibilities. In discussing approaches to make best use of committee input we have leaned towards a 'portfolio' approach for future committee positions. This would mean that if you join the committee, you would take on primary responsibility for an area of the federation's mandate, as identified in our strategic plan. In other words, you will have a job to do in addition to just attending meetings. But you can get on with it in your own time, and with as many or as few helpers as you feel like recruiting. It also means that if you can't attend a monthly committee meeting, an emailed report can allow for work to progress regardless. I recommend this approach for consideration by the incoming committee.

FOG (Folk Operators Group)

Three meetings of this new network of folk venue conveners from Sydney and surrounds have taken place. The purpose was to get these people in touch with each other, to break down perceptions that other venues are 'the opposition' and replace those perceptions with practical ways of developing of mutual support. The first two meetings were successful in drawing attendance from representatives of many different folk venues from as far afield as Canberra and the central coast. Discussion was lively and the feedback suggested that the meetings were most useful to the conveners who work as volunteers with limited prior experience of running venues, booking performers, doing promotion etc. In particular, FOG has attracted the interest of several new players in the scene. Worth special mention is the success of Fairlight Folk and Acoustic Lounge, which meets every three months and to date has had a full house at every meeting (between 80-120 paying punters).

The third meeting of FOG had very poor attendance. I'll treat this as a one-off problem unless the next meeting suffers the same fate.

An email network for this group has been in operation for several months now. Usage is small and tentative but from my perspective interest in its potential is growing – I

get quite a few individual emails from FOG participants making suggestions about issues which could be taken up on the email network. The next step is to get them to initiate discussion themselves.

Almost Acoustic

The future of our folk concerts at Eastside Arts hangs in the balance after 8 months of operation. Audience attendance is not covering costs and they need more volunteer help. Any committee member or Folk Federation wishing to attend but not pay is welcome to offer volunteer assistance. Even from the kitchen you get to see/hear virtually the whole show.

However the main assistance needed is with promotion. A letter box drop in the local area, one of the most rewarding strategies for Fairlight Folk, would require several people willing to commit a couple of hours 2 weeks before a show. The incoming committee should consider supporting Almost Acoustic with a working group to address these promotional needs.

The partnership with Eastside Arts has the potential to be a step in the right direction for the Folk Federation, not only with access to an excellent venue and support with putting on concerts, but also in putting the Federation together with Eastside Arts on the map for arts funding bodies in the future. I urge the new committee to treat the success of Almost Acoustic concerts as a priority in the coming year.

Cornstalk

Notwithstanding all our efforts to create and provide more services to members, Cornstalk is still the most tangible evidence of the Folk Federation's operation and the main reason we are able to retain a membership base. My annual thanks to our editor, Coral, and wrap co-ordinator, Julie, for the countless hours over years they have contributed, is pitifully inadequate.

The committee's review of Cornstalk during the past twelve months brought about a return to the regular inclusion of Folk Contacts and a reduction in the space devoted to reports from folk clubs on recent concerts, in favour of using more space to promote forthcoming events. Our editor, Coral, has the magazine looking really good but could do with some help in gathering diary dates and promotional information about forthcoming events from a variety of sources, as this in itself is a time-consuming task.

Rumour has it that someone may be offering to take over the monthly 'wrap' which gets Cornstalk into people's mailboxes after printing. In which case, expect many more contra dances on the Sydney scene in future ... (Julie is one of Australia's best contra dance callers, and has organised the wrap for the past 20 years).

Website

Use of the federation's interactive website has continued to gather pace during the past twelve months. We are still waiting for the launch of the new version of the software employed by our webmaster, Wayne, which will enable him to do some

major reorganization of the site including a search capacity and the means to organise entries according to a wider range of criteria.

Members' social event

This has been under discussion within the committee for almost twelve months now. The concept is to recognize Folk Federation membership within the Sydney metropolitan area with an enjoyable social event. What we need now is a sub-committee of 3-4 people who can make this event happen.

Insurance

Since the launch of the new insurance deal between Folk Alliance Australia and insurance company AON, FFNSW has had no further active commitment to providing or seeking insurance cover for its members, beyond advising people of the existence of this new deal. Insurance cover offered under this new arrangement is more affordable than previously and considerably better targeted towards the needs of people active in the folk scene.

Chris Kempster CD

This major project was completed in time for a launch at this year's National Folk Festival. CDs are selling well and two more events are currently planned to keep the cd in the eyes and ears of the listening public, a concert at the 2007 Blue Mountains Folk Festival and a main feature concert at the 2007 Henry Lawson Festival in Grenfell NSW. Any other promotional or musical ideas to support cd sales are very welcome. A reprint Chris' book on musical settings of Henry Lawson's poetry is still the intention of the Chris Kempster sub-committee, making use of the funds generated by cd sales.

Tribute to committee

It's been a most exciting year for me on the committee, with more ideas than any of us could poke a stick at. Heartfelt thanks to all the new members for the past year – Marcus, Keith, Pam D, Pam M, Mary Jane, Carol, Rhona and Kate for your stimulating ideas and fresh enthusiasm for revitalizing the Folk Federation. Our long-time committee members and seconded members Bruce, Sandra, Julie, Wayne and Coral continue to provide excellent advice and a steady hand to stop the rest of us getting carried away with a new enthusiasm. Rhona retired because of ill-health and change of circumstances during the year. Keith has just moved back to Adelaide with his family and is already steering a couple of new festivals to completion over there. Marcus is increasingly living the life of a highly successful musician which allows for little routine and few opportunities to attend committee meetings. We'll keep in touch with all of you. I look forward to welcoming some new faces on to the committee for 2006-7.

Christine Wheeler, 24 August 2006