Hunter Joint Organisation Event Strategy Reference Group

Notes of the first meeting of the Hunter Event Reference Group, held at the **Local Government Training Institute** at Thornton on **Thursday 14 June 2018 from 1.00 – 2.00pm.**

The purpose of the meeting was to advise the Reference Group of the project team's progress to date and current proposed activities for June to August.

Chair   John Trevillian AM

Attendees   Cr Tracy Norman (Dungog)

Cr Kay Fraser (Lake Macquarie)

Cr Ryan Palmer (Port Stephens)

Coralie Nichols (Dungog)

David Evans (Maitland)

Steve McDonald (Upper Hunter)

Stephen Wills (DPC)

Roger Stephan (CEO SSA)

JTSSE team members Sharon Boyd and Bill Tatnell

1. Welcome and overview of recent project activities

John Trevillian (JT) thanked the group for their support for the project and outlined the findings from his recently completed round of meetings with each local government member of the JO:

- The meetings highlighted the wide range of events that the Hunter hosts.

- Councils' commitment and enthusiasm for their individual event programs was strong but all supported a stronger whole of region approach to a signature events program.

- The variety of event activities in the region is remarkable. From Lake Mac's Float your Boat, to Singleton's 10 year strategic plan to develop adventure tourism, Maitland's developing arts and culture precinct through to the Upper Hunter's plans for the Scone facilities there is a rich base to develop a strong regional program.

- All supported the regional events entity in principle but addressing concerns about how it could be funded will be a priority for most.

- Interested to hear about the cost of putting on regional events and more attention could be given to how these can be improved.

2. The 2018 Hunter Event Strategy Implementation Project

- JT provided a quick overview of the three groups that had been established for the project:

i. The Reference Group will provide a link between the project team, the JO Executive and regional stakeholders. It has an important role as a sounding board and a "reality checker" for ideas and issues under consideration.

ii. The Advisory Group is a small group of representatives with Hunter event experience.

iii. The Operations Group is comprised of representatives of each Hunter council with responsibility for their council's event program.

- Sharon outlined the process by which priorities were established for the project's work program:

i. The original workplan proposed the initial project activities would focus on event development initiatives. In response to feedback from councils and other regional stakeholders, priority will now be given to developing options, and a detailed business case, for a professional entity to drive a signature event program. Without this, "Who will do the work?"

ii. There was agreement that a business case for an entity could not be based on councils as the primary investors. JTSSE is proceeding to develop a model for the entity, including funding options, that does not put additional financial responsibilities for events on councils. The next meeting of the Reference Group will focus on the entity.

iii. Business events is another key area of work for the project team. The potential exists for business events to drive significant visitation and event activity throughout the whole region.

iv. Event enhancement/development of existing events will be addressed as the opportunities arise through the Advisory and Operations Groups.

3. Communication strategy

- Roger outlined the further development of the JO Website to include links to the project, the JTSSE team and the members of the project groups.

- Sharon will provide some copy for a "Project news" section and this will be updated over the course of the project.

- Discussion on how councils can contribute information on their own event activities through the website was wide ranging:

i. How could a regional events calendar improve navigation of event information for visitors and Hunter locals?

ii. How can Destination NSW (DNSW) support a regional calendar better when the majority of events are not funded by DNSW?

iii. A calendar may help many event planners think about the timing of events so that they complement, rather than compete with, other activities in the region and so provide incentives to extend overnight visitation in the Hunter. This cooperation between councils was already happening in some areas but examples of opportunities lost were also in evidence.

iv. Coralie noted that there were other options for improving visitor information in addition to regional calendars and websites. She described an App developed by the Sunshine Coast which allowed visitors to search on their activities preferences. Something like this might work well in the Hunter.

v. There was general agreement that improving existing apps, websites and calendars was better than creating new ones at this point.

vi. The Hunter Events Operations Group (HEOG) could be best placed to look into a regional events calendar as they have the best knowledge of the region's events. Issues such as clarifying tourism and events opportunities; how coordination of information could be improved; and exploring how signature events can be supported and enhanced by complementary activities should be part of these discussions.

vii. It was noted that HEOG can play an important role in building regional ownership of a signature event program for the region.

4. Discussion on an event entity for the Hunter

- The importance of the entity being able to demonstrate runs on the board will be important if state government funding is to be sought.

- The difficulties of building a truly regional approach to the signature event program, and the entity, were noted. Other regional tourism bodies have come and gone, so attention will need to be given to making the case for a different model for the proposed entity.

- Noted that other comparable major regional areas have already established their own event and tourism bodies to drive their event programs, The Hunter is a notable exception to this trend but probably has greater opportunity than others to offer more.