

"Be part of the story"

BELLINGEN
READERS &
WRITERS
FESTIVAL

BELLINGEN - COFFS HARBOUR - DORRIGO

**THE NEXT CHAPTER
FESTIVAL 2012 REPORT**



INTRODUCTION

The second Bellingen Readers and Writers Festival was presented in Bellingen, Coffs Harbour, Valla Beach and Dorrigo in the mid north coast region of NSW from 18 – 27 March, 2012. This important community arts initiative built on the success of the inaugural festival in April 2011. We retained our original vision to create an annual regional literary festival in an intimate setting, which focuses entirely on Australian authors, with opportunities for local authors.

It is unique amongst Australian writers' festivals in staging events using the region's rich natural environment. Imaginative special events celebrated the magnificent natural environs of the Bellinger River, Dorrigo World Heritage rainforest and the beaches of the Coffs Coast. The program included poetry readings while canoeing along the river, a poetic walk through the rainforest, weaving stories by the river, and a surfing session with legendary surfers.

The 2012 festival was bigger in all dimensions than the first festival, more people, more events and over a longer period of time. Compared to the inaugural 2011 festival, in 2012, the main festival expanded from two to three days, the number of guest authors and moderators from just over 30 to more than 50, the number of Festival sessions and events from 30 to 42; and the number of workshops for aspiring writers from four to six. A pre-festival event featured a marathon reading of patron Peter Carey's Booker-winning novel 'Oscar and Lucinda' for charity. This occurred in the hall beside the small church which inspired the novel's main motif – the floating glass church.

Also in the lead-up, the Festival's schools program doubled to offer 28 sessions to primary, secondary and senior college students at schools all over the mid north coast region, providing more than a thousand students with valuable opportunities to interact with authors.

The Festival saw engaged audiences who enlivened every session with their knowledge and enthusiasm. Readers and writers alike expressed their delight at the intimacy of the festival - the many opportunities that were afforded to share their ideas and love of words and stories in the beautiful natural environs.

As in 2011, the generosity of our eternally patient, good humoured and hard working band of volunteers ensured the festival's success.

The experiences and successes of the first festival laid solid foundations for the second, and we see this growth continuing as the event becomes a major fixture on the NSW regional events calendar for many years to come.

Already the Festival has had a major impact on the regional communities. Relationships are developing between writers and schools and libraries. Authors like Deb Abela and Michael Robotham have been invited back to the region by libraries. Other authors have returned to schools or kept up online relationships with writing students.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all who participated in, supported and attended this historic event. We look forward to 2013.

Festival Committee



“We are attempting to create an annual regional festival that is intimate and fun, but thought-provoking and sometimes challenging. We are working on a festival that engages readers and writers of all ages and backgrounds and that aspires to be unique among other literary festivals in using the region’s rich environmental and cultural heritage and the passions of local writers and readers.”

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The Bellingen Readers & Writers Festival aims to provide:

- ▶▶ a flagship annual literary festival on the mid-north coast of NSW that focuses on and celebrates Australian authors
- ▶▶ a program of events that engages and inspires the interest of the regional community in many forms of the written word
- ▶▶ a program that is unique among other literary festivals in paying homage to the local landscape
- ▶▶ an inclusive forum that brings together those with a common interest in the written word
- ▶▶ a program that honours and utilises the region’s rich cultural heritage of the Gumbaynggirr people
- ▶▶ new opportunities for social and cultural interaction
- ▶▶ a public arena for the promotion and presentation of local and regional writing

and to:

- ▶▶ inspire and support the ongoing development of written word activity in the region
- ▶▶ encourage regional youth to actively participate in the creation of literature
- ▶▶ attract the participation of emerging and established Australian writers of excellence
- ▶▶ develop a unique identity for the festival that nurtures innovation and reflects local and regional strengths and community interests
- ▶▶ generate increased tourism visitation and economic benefit to the region
- ▶▶ attract attendance from outside the mid north coast region with a particular emphasis on Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane and Melbourne
- ▶▶ engage the support of key community groups and arts organisations in the mid north coast region.



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STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The Bellingen Readers & Writers Festival was initiated in October 2009 by founder Brian Purcell with the support of Arts Mid North Coast and Bellingen Shire Council. The renowned summer arts school organisation Camp Creative continues to auspice the Festival organisation and their support is integral to its success.

The Festival's vision is to provide an annual regional celebration of Australian writing on the mid-north coast of NSW, to engage the interest of participants of all ages and backgrounds and to promote regional cultural development and economic benefits.

FUNDING

Grant funding covered the cost of the attendance of the many visiting authors (including flights, accommodation and session fees). This year it was provided by Year 2 of the Federal Government's Regional Arts Fund, as well as first-time funding from the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

The two year \$33,500 RAF funding and last year's \$18,500 from the Department of Industry and Investment's Enterprising Regions Program (ERP) provided critical support for the development of an extensive program of guest authors and events, project co-ordination and the implementation of a comprehensive marketing plan.

The ERP funding was only for one year, but increased box-office takings in 2012 and great, ongoing support from our partners enabled us to successfully stage a much larger second festival.

Strategic partnerships were sought and developed with:

ABC Mid North Coast

Extensive marketing support through program editorial and interviews, online editorial, event promotion and consumer promotions. Hosts Cameron Marshall, Fiona Poole and Katya Quigley provided comprehensive Festival coverage throughout the mid north coast region.

ABC Open

ABC OPEN producer, Liz Keen mentored the winner of the Shopfront Shorts youth writing competition, helping a young writer develop her writing voice.

Coffs Coast Advocate

The region's biggest newspaper provided bi-weekly, comprehensive editorial coverage and stories in the months leading up to the Festival. It provided extensive complimentary advertising throughout the marketing campaign, and with Dymocks co-sponsored the Literary Lunch featuring Robert Drewe.

Officeworks

Provision of complimentary printing services including 900 copies of the Festival's 22pp colour program and flyers.

Dymocks Booksellers

Our official Festival bookseller provided in-store promotional support, consumer promotion prizes and promotion to Dymock's Booklover customer database. It co-sponsored the Literary Lunch and operated book sales from Waterfall Way Centre during Festival.

Southern Cross University (SCU)

A major sponsor with a presence on the Festival Committee, SCU provided very welcome production funding and hosted events both at the festival and on the Coffs Harbour Campus.





Bellingen Shire Council

The council provided logistic support and funded the Shop-front Short youth writing competition.

University of New England (UNE)

A new sponsor, UNE funded a panel session.

Nambucca Valley Web Design

Provided an engaging, multifunctional website which was a vital part of the festival's success.

Guy Saddleton Real Estate

This local company became a community partner with a welcome donation and assisted with the running of the festival.

Affirmations

This local business became a community partner and part-funded the Poetry Slam.

Northern Rivers Writers Centre

Provided promotion to regional subscribers through its website and its member magazine. It supported the festival through contribution to guest author costs.

New England Writers Centre

Sponsored a panel session.

2BBB Community Radio Station

The local radio station provided support with the promotion of the festival.

Australia Poetry Inc

As part of its overall program for NSW in 2013, the national poetry organisation, Australian Poetry Ltd, proposes to run a master-class for NSW regional poets in the week prior to the Bellingen Readers & Writers Festival, which will culminate in a joint presentation by the facilitators and their attendees at the festival itself, together with the curation of an e-anthology of their work for the AP website.

Brindabella Airlines

Donated 5 return flights from Coffs to Brisbane.

These partnerships provided invaluable in-kind support, without which the Festival would not have been possible. Strategic partner logos were prominently displayed in all Festival marketing materials, advertising, signage and promotional items.

FESTIVAL THEME

Following discussions with regional community and arts groups, the Festival committee resolved that the BRWF should focus exclusively upon Australian literature and include strong regional elements. In line with its mission to promote reading and writing to a very broad audience, the program was designed to include:

- ▶ Popular and emerging Australian authors across a range of genres
- ▶ Events taking advantage of the natural environs
- ▶ A focus on youth, environmental and indigenous writing/storytelling
- ▶ An extensive schools program utilising regional and visiting guest authors
- ▶ Free events for the community featuring local and regional writers
- ▶ Children's events

Event programming commenced in September 2011. The programming sub-committee considered a wide range of events and guest authors for inclusion in the 2012 Festival program.



"Above all, I enjoyed the great enthusiasm of those who attended and the relaxed atmosphere that allowed for easy interaction between writers and readers, audience and participants. I was deeply impressed by how well the festival was run by such a small band of volunteers and enthusiasts. They made the writers feel relaxed, valued and welcomed. With continuing support it can grow into a special regional writers festival that attracts both well-known Australian writers and new voices to a beautiful setting in an area in which the arts are greatly valued and events so well attended." ARNOLD ZABLE



EVENT VENUES

The festival program in both years has utilised a range of event venues in Bellingen, Coffs Harbour, Valla Beach and Dorrigo and surrounds. These include:

BELLINGEN

- » Memorial Hall (main venue)
- » Bellingen Library
- » Maam Gaduying (Meeting Place Park)
- » The Old Butter Factory
- » North Farm
- » Bellinger River
- » Gleniffer Hall
- » Waterfall Way Visitor Centre (ticket and information hub/bookseller venue - Dymocks)
- » Bat Island

COFFS HARBOUR

- » Coffs Harbour Library
- » The Southern Cross University

DORRIGO

- » Dorrigo National Park
- » Dorrigo Rainforest Centre

VALLA BEACH

- » The Headland Cafe
- » South Valla Beach

FESTIVAL EVENTS

The 2012 program offered a broad range of events to audiences from around the region and beyond. These included:

- » Author panels, readings and presentations
- » Book launches and author signings
- » Discussions and forums
- » Writers' workshops
- » Children's events
- » A poet-led canoe safari and Dorrigo National Park bushwalk
- » Poetry Slam
- » Literary Lunch
- » Marathon charity reading
- » Youth writing competition
- » Music, spoken word and variety performance

FESTIVAL PARTICIPATION

Along with invited guest authors from around Australia, the Festival encouraged and featured participation by numerous local and regional writers, writing groups and organisations. Opportunities were offered to local authors to contribute to the Festival program through the Talking Tent (a free marquee featuring readings and book launches in the Festival's main precinct) and other events/venues.

The marquee featured readings throughout the Festival weekend by members of the Bellingen Writers Group, the Nambucca Writers Group and numerous local and regional self-published authors. These groups and writers also took up the opportunity to sell their books to the Festival audience through a dedicated stall in the park precinct. The Dorrigo Writers Group and the Coffs Harbour Writers Group read their work at the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre.

2012 AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

Morris Gleitzman, Alice Pung, Richard Glover, Charlotte Wood, Robert Drewe, Kate Forsyth, Marele Day, Steven Carroll, Mark Tredinnick, Alan Gould, Colin Falconer, Arnold Zable, Andy White, KirstenTranter, Marele Day, Bronwyn Lea, Uncle Gary Williams, Michael Sharkey, Ian Irvine, Sophie Masson, Peter Boyle, Kate Rigby, Martin Harrison, Lorraine Shannon, Tony Lawrence, Auntie Emily Walker, Laurel Cohn, Siboney Duff, John Bennett, Deborah Bird Rose, Robert Carter, Kit Kelen, Claire Dunn, Rod Howard, Bronwyn Rodden, Pantelis Roussakis, Nell Cook, Michael Jarratt, Pema Baker.

2012 PRESENTERS AND CHAIRS

Annette Marfording, Angela Meyer, Brian Hawkins, Lisa Milner, Michael Jarrett, Ross Macleay, Freya Mathews, Liz Keen, Carrolline Rhodes, Brian Purcell, Liz Routledge, Janie Conway-Herron, Kim Satchell, Ian Irvine.





THE 2012 FESTIVAL FRIDAY EVENTS

The festival opened with glorious weather and the first session featured Paddle with a Poet, a wonderful guided tour down the Bellinger River featuring poet Michael Sharkey. 14 people attended each of the two sessions, the second being held on Saturday morning. In the completed survey responses it was the highlight of the weekend for those who participated.

There followed a brilliant schools-only session with one of Australia's best-loved authors, Morris Gleitzman. More than 250 children aged 7-13 from all over the Mid North Coast were bussed into this highly successful sold-out event at the Memorial Hall. Morris read from his work, talked about writing, answered questions and signed books for his enthusiastic young audience.



"Thanks for a wonderful festival. I've been to heaps over the years, but rarely have enjoyed such hospitality and conviviality. Congratulations to you both, and your team of kind and capable volunteers. Thanks again" MORRIS GLEITZMAN

THE 2012 FESTIVAL FRIDAY NIGHT EVENTS

OPENING NIGHT EVENT - OLD BUTTER FACTORY, BELLINGEN

The opening night of the Readers & Writers Festival featured a welcome to the festival writers, staged at the Old Butter Factory in Bellingen. Attendance was by invitation and included representatives of all stakeholders, community groups, strategic partners and sponsors.

Over 120 people attended and the Festival was officially declared open by Bellingen Shire Council Mayor Cr Mark Troy.



THE POETRY SLAM

The Festival weekend was kicked off in grand style by the Poetry Slam, staged at the Memorial Hall.

A lively crowd of over 250 people packed the venue, even sitting in the aisles to hear both local and interstate performance poets take their words from the page to the stage. With only three minutes to present their work and lucrative prizes on offer (\$500 to the winner provided by Affirmations), the competition was fierce and the quality of performance outstanding. The 1st prize went to Brisbane performance poet, Scott Sneddon AKA Darkwing Dubs, who razzled and dazzled the crowd with his incredibly moving performance. The event was conceived, organised and compered by Nimbin World Cup winning poet Elizabeth Routledge.



THE 2012 FESTIVAL SATURDAY EVENTS

BELLINGEN MEMORIAL HALL

Festival audiences took their seats in Bellinghen’s Memorial Hall on Saturday morning to be greeted by a stage set as a vintage but comfortable living room, a good place for conversations between festival guests. Following a traditional Gumbaygnirr welcome to country ceremony with elder Gary Williams, the first session in the Library focused on Gumbaygnirrind culture and language with Gary and Michael Jarrett.

Themes on Saturday included the writing of memoir, telling refugees’ stories, turning history into fiction, and poetry and climate change. An intriguing session involved live reading of poetry inspired by award-winning underground filmmaker Tony Lawrence’s dreamlike films – the poetry of film.

The afternoon program featured popular ABC broadcaster Richard Glover, who entertained another full-house audience with his Laugh Your Head Off session.

BELLINGEN LIBRARY

The Festival was given enormous support by Bellinghen Library, in particular by Shire Librarian Sharon Uthmann who tweeted while the authors talked. Morning sessions at the library featured a free kids’ session with fantasy author Kate Forsyth followed by sessions on blogging and writing about place (mapping the heart of belonging).

LITERARY LUNCH

Sixty people packed out the Festival’s sold-out literary lunch at Bellinghen’s Old Butter Factory Cafe, presented by Coffs Coast Advocate and Dymocks booksellers. Following his inability to attend in 2011, it was a great pleasure to introduce bestselling writer Robert Drewe to entertain the audience with his stories and wit.

SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE

Saturday night in Bellinghen’s Memorial Hall saw hundreds of people return to the venue to enjoy some of the hidden talents of festival guest authors in a unique variety performance. Hosted by the Coffs Advocate’s editor Graeme Singleton, it included poetry and songs from the legendary Andy White, Colin Falconer on guitar, Morris Gleitzman’s and Robert Drewe’s stories, and Mark Tredinnick’s poems plus John Bennett’s famous literary quiz.

THE 2012 FESTIVAL SUNDAY EVENTS

THE TALKING TENT

Throughout the weekend, writers’ group members and local authors gave audiences in Maam Gaduying (Meeting Place Park) a sample of the ample writing talent resident in the Mid North Coast region. Saturday and Sunday

BELLINGEN MEMORIAL HALL

Sunday morning began with the panel “how to keep kids happy” in the Memorial Hall, and with Morris Gleitzman presenting prizes to the young starry-eyed winners of the ‘Shopfront Shorts’ competition. Sessions on ‘Telling Real People’s Stories’, ‘An Australian in Paris’, ‘Does Journalism equal Objectivity?’ and ‘The Power of the Story’ followed. The day ended with a wonderful interview with locally-based filmmaker Robert Carter talking about shooting his near-impossible film Thirst in the desert at Broken Hill.

BELLINGEN LIBRARY

We started the day with leading Australian poets, continued with panels on ‘Writing as a Daily Practice’, ‘What is the Pattern?’, ‘From the Mountains to the Sea’, and a one-on-one session with best-selling author Colin Falconer. The day ended with stories and poems from Gumbayngirr elder Auntie Emily Walker.

“I just wanted to congratulate you all on a great festival weekend, and to thank you for the opportunity to be involved. It was a pleasure – stimulating, cruisy, interesting and fun. Well done to you and the team. ‘ Cheers, LAUREL “(COHN)





FESTIVAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM MARCH 21 – 26, 2012

The festival schools program began with the inaugural festival (April 2011) and developed at our second (March 2012) at various schools and venues on the Mid North Coast. The schools program is part of the Festival's commitment to promoting literacy and inspiring a passion for reading and literature among the younger members of our regional communities. State, independent, Catholic and community schools were involved in the program.

For the inaugural 2011 Schools Program, nine authors visited seven schools and delivered fifteen sessions to students at their schools. Four sessions were with primary students, one with senior secondary college students and the remaining ten with high school students. State, independent and community schools were involved in the program. The 2012 program involved eleven authors delivering twenty-eight sessions (so almost twice as many as in 2011) to eleven schools. The average size of the sessions was twenty-five students with some groups comprising up to eighty students. The length of sessions varied from 50 mins to 2.5 hours. A total of approximately 450 students took part in 2011; 840 in 2012.

The 2012 schools program ran over three days immediately prior to the festival weekend and the day after. The goal of the program was to introduce students and young writers to current practitioners to learn about their methods and to make concrete the idea that real people write books. Authors visited schools as far south as Macksville, as far north as Grafton and west to Dorrigo.

The nature of the sessions varied considerably depending on the schools' requirements, from workshops to readings combined with Q & A sessions and informal lectures. Specific topics requested included structure, editing and discussion of inspirations and influences. Smaller sessions were recommended to schools to allow for greater individual interaction. Sessions by several authors were particularly aimed at English Extension 2 and Advanced English Year 12 students.

English Extension students create their own substantial work as part of the curriculum and several of the festival's guest authors who do not usually speak at schools took up the opportunity of leading these sessions and passing on their experience as professional writers. The response to these sessions from authors, teachers and students was very enthusiastic.

This important festival program was planned and delivered by volunteer festival schools program coordinator, **Christabel Wright.**



ATTENDANCE

The Audience

In 2012 ticket prices were as listed below:

- ▶▶ Festival early bird weekend passes - \$100
- ▶▶ Festival weekend passes - \$130/\$100 student concession
- ▶▶ Festival Saturday pass - \$90/\$70
- ▶▶ Festival Sunday Pass - \$70/\$50
- ▶▶ Festival Literary Lunch - \$60 (inc. 2 course meal with wine)
- ▶▶ Separately ticketed events (including Poetry Slam, Dorrigo National Park events, writers' workshops) various prices
- ▶▶ Individual session passes were released on the weekend of the festival, subject to availability. These were priced at \$15 per individual session.

The total number of tickets of all types sold for the main festival was 812 at an average of \$30.58 per unit. This does not include festival subsidiary events. Paid author visits to schools reached a total of 1170 students. With free sessions in the Council park and the library for kids, total attendance came to well over 2,500.



FESTIVAL VISITOR SURVEY

A total of 109 festival visitor surveys, both paper and online, were collected in 2012.

1. Overall satisfaction rating (out of 10) – average 8.2
2. 46% of visitors came to the festival from the immediate local area (postcodes 2452, 2454 and 2450. More than half attendees (54%) came from outside the region.
3. Of 43 non-local respondents, 37% stayed with friends or family, and 63% in B&Bs/motels/hotels/backpackers.
4. 11% of the non-local visitors stayed in the area for no nights, 4% stayed for 1 night, 51% stayed for 2 nights and 32% stayed for 3 nights of more.
5. Of the 109 respondents, 74% came by car, 10% by foot/bicycle/motorbike, 8% by bus/coach, 6% by plane and 0.9% by train.
6. All non-local respondents reported using other services in town. Over 90% used cafes/restaurants/pubs and over 75% used other local shops/boutiques, which is a very good result for local business.
7. 30% of non-local respondents reported visiting or intending to visit other local attractions.
8. Over 40% of respondents first heard about the festival via word of mouth, 27% through newspaper or magazine, 15% from the internet, 11% from advertising, 3% from a tourism promotion and 1% from a radio program.
9. Suggestions: 104 of the 109 respondents provided congratulations or suggested improvements, on a wide variety of topics.





OVERVIEW

The 2012 Bellingen Readers & Writers Festival was successful in tapping the enormous passion for words and literature among communities in the Mid North Coast region of NSW.

A high volume of positive feedback was received from attendees, many of whom had not previously attended a writers festival elsewhere. Of those who had previously attended a writers festival, many were happily surprised by the intimacy of the event, where writers and readers freely mingled outside venues and engaged in discussion in the festival precinct and local cafés.

Many retail businesses in Bellingen reported a significant increase in trade over the festival weekend and many festival attendees stayed in regional accommodation from B & Bs to motels and caravan parks.

Many attendees and participants also commented on the successful promotion of the event - it is this market awareness and word of mouth generated by the festival itself that will provide the impetus for increased audience over following years. There was also great enthusiasm for further events that maximise the use of the natural environs.



FESTIVAL BUDGET AND FUNDING

The festival was operated within budget estimates, resulting in a small surplus for re-investment in the 2013 festival.

The second year of Federal Government RAF funding provided a foundation for the 2012 festival; however in-kind contributions from business and media organisations (particularly in the areas of marketing and promotion) remained critical to the festival's sustainability.





AUTHOR COMMENTS

Dear Annette, You were a wonderful chair – it makes ALL the difference at these things – and every writer I spoke to had a really lovely time over the weekend. I really appreciate being invited and all the incredible hard work from you and the rest of the planning and volunteers’ team. Thank you very much. **Charlotte Wood**



The Bellinghen festival surpassed all expectations. It was warm, with a wide welcome, a great variety of inventive, enjoyable, and meaningful opportunities to listen and speak. Thanks so much for the opportunity to participate. Sincerely, **Debbie Rose**



“I had a great time and was really happy with the way all the sessions I was involved in went – both those with Kangaloon and those where I was in a reading with other poets. Bellinghen is a fabulous place – the first time I’ve been in a country town and thought, yes I could live here and could imagine a really fulfilling life in a calmer, richer environment than our hassled cities. The canoe ride down the Bellinghen was a real buzz”. **Peter Boyle**



Thank you for a wonderful festival, it was one of the nicest to which I have ever been. The warmth and hospitality of the hosts and volunteers was terrific and I was pleased to have stayed in such a nice Lodge with the other writers. The green room was a great peaceful place to hang out, and I enjoyed the Saturday night readings session too. Very best wishes, **Alice Pung**



“Thank you for the invitation to participate in this year’s Bellinghen Readers and Writers Festival. I had a marvellous time, both personally and professionally. I was pleased for the opportunity to meet and talk to new readers, some of whom were emerging writers; and I was also grateful to meet, and in some instances reconnect with, other guest authors whose work I have read and admired from afar.



I thought the programming worked really well, and despite concurrent sessions (which were balanced thoughtfully) they appeared to be very well supported by the community. As you can probably guess, the stand-out session for me personally was the “Paddle with a Poet” canoe ride down the glorious Bellinghen river – the friendships formed were immediate and enduring, and I came away reinvigorated and inspired.

“Thank you for including me in this year’s festival. The scale and spirit of your festival, not to mention the intelligence of everything about it and the wonder of that scenery you’ve got up there, made your festival, for me, one of the loveliest I’ve attended.”

Mark Tredinnick



I’d like to thank you and Brian Purcell not only for the invitation but for making my stay so comfortable. The volunteers were marvellous too – friendly, generous and always helpful. I wish you every success with your festival – I know it will move from strength to strength. I do my best to spread the good word...” **Bronwyn Lea**

“Just a short note to say that I had a great time at Bellinghen. It’s a terrific festival – and so well organised. Be happy to return if and when the festival sees fit. Thanks for everything again. Cheers, **Steve (Carroll)**



www.bellinghenwritersfestival.com.au