

Music festivals go cleaner, greener

March 3 2015, by Melinda Ham



Tree planting at last year's Splendour in the Grass in Byron Bay. Credit: Aimee Catt

Every summer, tens of thousands of people across Australia revel in live outdoor music, staying for a day or pitching their tents for a weekend. When the music dies, however, what's left may be less appealing – a churned-up landscape with tonnes of food and drink packaging, a sea of discarded possessions and overflowing portable toilets.

Environmental researcher Laura Wynne is an avid festival-goer and

enjoyed the Falls Festival at Lorne, in Victoria, over New Year. An earlier Falls Festival, in Tasmania a couple of years ago, was not such a good experience.

"As we left the festival on New Year's Day, the scene was almost apocalyptic. The beautiful hills of Marion Bay were covered in debris – everything from beer cans and chip packets to abandoned camp chairs, tarpaulins and tents," she says.

"Seeing this fallout first-hand really brought home the need for action to improve the [music](#) industry's impact."

While there is no strong data to measure the carbon footprint of festival audiences in Australia, Wynne expects it would be similar in Britain, where a not-for-profit group has found festivals generate 43 per cent of [greenhouse gas emissions](#) for the entire music industry.

There is hope for change though, says Wynne, a research consultant for the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS).

Wynne has completed a report on the barriers and opportunities for a greener music scene, and says "audiences and artists both care a lot about the environment and want to take action".

There are several real and perceived barriers to greening the industry, she says. "There is a perception that taking action on environmental issues is complicated, expensive and time consuming. This is not necessarily true."

But Wynne concedes that changing business practices is likely to be a challenge for the industry. Some initiatives may deliver a long-term return on investment but upfront costs could be a barrier to action in an

industry where many are barely turning a profit.

However, she says many organisers are already taking practical steps to make their events more sustainable.

Environmental scientist Mat Morris is general manager of North Byron Parklands, a 270-hectare property that is home to the Falls Festival each summer and Splendour in the Grass, Australia's largest winter music festival, which attracts 30,000 visitors each July.

"One of the things we do is offer a carbon offset ticket to patrons, to pay a bit extra to invest in climate-friendly options to offset their travel to the event," Morris says. "We also get patrons to plant trees. They love it."

Morris says more than 2000 trees were planted at the Splendour in the Grass festival last year and more than 1000 at the Falls Festival.

Other measures include 246 dry-composting toilets; 192 gas-fired, low-flow showers and treating all grey water and waste onsite. Festival-goers can also refill their containers from rainwater collected from the roofs of the ablution blocks.

Morris's team also provides green tent options including Camp Little-Foot Print, where patrons sign a pledge to have as little environmental impact as possible in return for the best camping spots, closest to the music.

Simon Luke, co-ordinator of the Festival of the Sun, held in Port Macquarie in December, has adopted some measures used by Splendour in the Grass.

"It's really put my faith back in the customers," he says. "I'd

underestimated how willing they were to recycle, remove their own waste and keep their campsites clean."

To encourage festival-goers to pool their cars, rather than camp near their cars to charge their mobile devices, Luke has introduced portable chargers with lithium batteries.

In her report, Wynne suggests Green Music Australia should take the lead in co-ordinating and supporting organisers such as Luke and provide more green education.

Musician Tim Hollo, chief executive of Green Music Australia, is already heeding Wynne's advice and working with St Jerome's Laneway Festivals (which holds events in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and the US) to make them more eco-friendly.

Initiatives include encouraging people to cycle to the event, providing a cycle valet service at the festival's five Australian venues, and supplying free public transport to the event. Most lighting is changing to LED and sponsors will sell reusable water bottles instead of bottled water.

Green Music Australia is also supporting initiatives at other festivals such as the Caloundra Music Festival, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. In December, it became water bottle free. The sale of water bottles was banned on site in favour of town-water hydration stations and reusable containers. "It was a spectacular success and saved 60,000 [water bottles](#) from landfill," Hollo says.

Wynne says more research is needed to minimise the wider environmental footprint of the industry.

As recorded music moves rapidly away from CDs (with many in recycled cardboard sleeves rather than plastic) and into downloading and

digitisation, there is a need to quantify the impact of this transition, says Wynne.

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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