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Sydney needs to thrive to survive

Paul Nicolaou



Restrictions on events in parks and open spaces managed by Sydney City Council are not only dimming the lights on our cultural scene but also draining the lifeblood of our entertainment and hospitality industries.

From music festivals and outdoor theatre to multicultural food markets and community celebrations, these events play a crucial role in shaping Sydney's identity as a diverse, creative, and globally engaged city.

When we shut down these opportunities, we don't just lose a night of entertainment – we chip away at the city's cultural and economic recovery.

During Covid, many venues closed, jobs disappeared and creative workers were left with little support. Now, just as momentum builds, we're faced with barriers that threaten to reverse those fragile gains.

The events sector isn't asking for carte blanche. Organisers understand respect for local residents. What they're calling for is a fair, transparent and supportive framework that allows events to flourish while balancing community needs.

There's also a broader question: What kind of city do we want Sydney to be? One that leans into its multicultural vibrancy, where public spaces are activated with life, art, music, and connection? Or one where silence and restriction are seen as the default, where public parks are treated like private lawns – empty, pristine, and off-limits to shared celebration?

It's possible to strike a balance. Other global cities have done it. They've created systems where events are welcomed and managed thoughtfully, where communities are consulted but not given veto power over public enjoyment, and where economic development and cultural vitality go hand-in-hand.

Sydney of City Council and state government leaders must now step up. This isn't just about one or two festivals being shut down – it's about the future of Sydney's civic life. We need a consistent and transparent approach to permitting events in parks and public spaces.

Let's not retreat into restriction. Let's choose revitalisation. Our parks and public spaces should be stages for community and cultural expression – not battlegrounds for bureaucracy.

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