

Mamma Mia! Could we really miss out on ABBA?

Paul Nicolaou



It's enough to break the hearts of ABBA fans and Sydney businesses that could benefit from unleashing the economic power of the Swedish supergroup's contemporary incarnation as ABBA Voyage avatars.

Taylor Swift and Pink, with their blockbuster stadium concerts this month, are showing how vital big entertainment events are to the Sydney economy.

Business Sydney estimated that these two superstars combined could add more than \$130 million to the Sydney economy with their blockbuster stadium concerts.

But what if we could make that economic injection a year-round affair? Or five years for that matter because that was the run time that was planned for ABBA Voyage.

But instead of preparing to stage this phenomenon in our wonderful city, we are left looking enviously at the amazing impact it is having in London where it debuted.

Even worse, for the want of a \$70 million investment from the NSW Government to secure this incredible entertainment event for Sydney, we hear reports that Melbourne might

secure it for Australia. As a proud Sydneysider, it breaks my heart to see an opportunity lost to Sydney and we've lost a big one with ABBA Voyage.

News is just in that, in its first year, ABBA Voyage generated £322.6 million — a massive AU\$633 million — in economic activity in London and it continues to boom.

Business Sydney was part of a "coalition of the willing" seeking NSW Government backing for ABBA Voyage to open in Sydney. A group of experienced promoters were ready to make it happen. Sadly, the cupboard was bare and the opportunity evaporated.

Losing such an opportunity breaks my heart but if Sydney has lost it to Melbourne, I will shed tears of frustration. The NSW Government needs to backtrack and see if this situation can be saved so that ABBA Voyage finds its natural home in Sydney.

ABBA Voyage, in which the Swedish foursome appear as avatars, is staged seven times a week in the 3000-capacity ABBA Arena in East London.

Its positive impact has been measured and it's huge. One million people experienced it in its first year and, significantly, 20 per cent were visitors. Imagine what Sydney hotels, pubs, retail and transport operators could do with a surge of interstate and international visitors like that.

In London's case, nearly half of the \$633 million in economic activity happened in council areas in the immedi-

ate vicinity of the show. And no surprises that most of the activity involved local accommodation, food and beverage, transport, shopping and entertainment. The show also supported more than 5000 jobs, many of them in hospitality.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan knows that his city has been kissed by an ABBA Voyage rainbow saying that it has once again showed how "London is the music capital of the world and is roaring back from the impact of the pandemic."

He said: "I am so proud that City Hall was able to help ABBA bring this pioneering show to East London, providing huge benefits to both the local area and London's wider economy."

"It is a powerful example of how culture has a positive impact on our city, supporting jobs and a range of other industries. The show's success is testament to the group's enduring appeal and I hope it will continue to de-

light audiences and help enrich the local economy for years to come, as we build a better London for everyone."

We could be saying the same of Sydney as the music and live entertainment capital of the Asia Pacific region. Staging ABBA Voyage here should have been as natural as breathing for Australia's only global city.

Business Sydney has previously congratulated the NSW Government on becoming the first to have a 10-year arts and culture policy. But we have also said that there needs to be funding behind the strategy to take advantage of opportunities such as ABBA Voyage.

As things stand, Sydney has a drought when it comes to major events in 2024 apart from regulars such as VIVID Sydney, the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and the second session of SXSW.

We can't afford to lose opportunities of the magnitude of ABBA Voyage, shows that are capable of drawing audiences for years while in residence in a city. London's experience shows that, for Sydney, every dollar invested would return three dollars in economic activity to our great city. What a fantastic three-for-one deal for the Government.

Premier Chris Minns and Arts Minister John Graham — please say it's not too late to secure ABBA Voyage for Sydney.

Paul Nicolaou is Executive Director of Business Sydney

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