

Keep the Open in Sydney and play on regardless

Paul Nicolaou



All who support our city's reputation for big events should be alarmed that we could lose the Australian Open Golf tournament to Melbourne.

Sydney should fight like hell to stop this wonderful event on the international sports calendar going south along with its economic benefits.

Unfortunately, the outlook isn't great. Sydney's events cupboard is already almost bare when it comes to big awe inspiring, economy boosting events in our city in 2024.

By next year, such high profile events as WorldPride 2023, the FIFA Women's World Cup and SXSW will be distant memories.

Sadly, apart from Vivid and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras 2024, we don't currently have other big celebratory events to inspire and unify the city and help supercharge the economy.

The events drought is all the more concerning because Destination NSW, which has traditionally driven the agenda for big ticket events, faces its own funding challenges.

It no longer has the marketing dollars to help showcase Sydney to the

world to the same extent. The timing couldn't be more disappointing for Sydney when the economy is still in recovery mode after the pandemic.

Destination NSW deserves our thanks for what they have already achieved with their 2022-23 program. It supported 74 events that delivered more than \$900 million to the NSW visitor economy.

Their program last summer alone comprised 38 major events that attracted an estimated 230,000 visitors with an economic boost of more than \$260 million.

Looking at a dismal big events calendar for 2024, it's worth remembering how important they are for Sydney's economic wellbeing and getting the city's mojo back.

Sydney WorldPride 2023, for example, attracted an estimated 78,000 visitors and generated \$112 million in visitor expenditure.

Vivid typically injects well over \$100 million and attracts millions of visitors. It's good to know we will still have Vivid and Mardi Gras to light up the city and our spirits in 2024.

So what can we do to help when events are down? Sydneysiders, we all have to step up as much as we can – even at a time when family finances are tight due to rising interest rates and other costs.

We must do our best to become a city of theatregoers, enjoying the wide variety of performances on offer. This year, we experienced a remarkable situation where every major

theatre stage in the city was home to world class productions.

Looking ahead, let's support the great attractions of the Sydney Festival. Visit our museums and cultural institutions. The Australian Museum's Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs is a once in a lifetime must-see exhibition.

And we need to support the night time economy. Sydney has the best when it comes to restaurants, entertainment venues, hotels, nightclubs and bars. Our city boasts operators of the highest standard in these areas.

And we have government authorities including the police and Michael Rodrigues, the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner, working cooperatively with these business leaders to make the night time economy hum.

Business Sydney is looking forward to the results of the arts and culture review initiated by NSW Arts Minister John Graham. We have long

advocated the appointment of an arts and culture commissioner to co-ordinate and promote what our many institutions have to offer.

The live music scene that suffered so much during the pandemic also needs to be encouraged in a big way.

There are precincts in the city such as Enmore that are firing in the night-time economy. Let's boost strategies that are working in these areas.

The Enmore Theatre for example is doing a great job with attractions such as their comedy festival. There is no reason why Melbourne should be seen as the home of Australian comedy. We can outdo Melbourne in that and almost every other department.

In coming weeks, Sydney should be open all hours as it parties like it's post-pandemic 2023 to celebrate the festive season. The challenge in a largely big event free 2024 is to keep that magic happening.

When funds for our destination experts are tight, we all need to become barrackers for our wonderful city.

And that means taking part in what Sydney has to offer as we enjoy the summer holiday season.

Let's hope Chris Minns, Treasurer Daniel Mookhey and Sports Minister Steve Kamper can win the arm wrestle with Melbourne for the golf tournament that attracted near record crowds in recent days.

It's vital that the Australian Open stays right here in Sydney.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney

**Support the
Sydney Festival.
Visit museums
and cultural
institutions**