

Request for Expression of Interest

Management Regional Arts Centre

June 2026

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| The Opportunity <i>about the Regional Arts Centre</i> | 3 |
| The EOI <i>schedules for completion of the EOI</i> | 21 |

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and work. We honour the First Nations peoples culture and connection to the land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Information contained within this EOI has been prepared in good faith; however, no representation or warranty is made regarding its accuracy, completeness, or suitability. Respondents are responsible for undertaking their own enquiries and due diligence and should not rely solely on the information provided.



PART 1:

THE OPPORTUNITY

A new heart for regional performing arts

The Northern Rivers has long been recognised as one of Australia’s most vibrant and diverse creative regions. The construction of a new regional arts centre in the Clarence Valley will offer an iconic river-based performing arts experience building on the vibrancy of this region.

For the community, it provides an inclusive space to come together, celebrate our local identity and share in new cultural experiences. A space that will continue to shape our unique cultural identity – one deeply rooted in artistic innovation, community connection and resilience.

For the industry, it provides a critical investment into professional-standard spaces that addresses a structural gap in regional touring and cultural infrastructure, to in turn, create new opportunities for cultural events, industry collaboration and partnerships.

For the right operator, it provides an opportunity to establish a presence in the Northern Rivers to capitalise on the strength of the creative sector, and grow with the local, drive and visitor audiences.

Key features

The new venue is designed to balance regional touring viability, local activity, and multi-artform productions, ensuring sustainable operations for the long term.

Key features include:

- A total centre capacity of 372 people
- Auditorium with tiered seating for 297 people, providing a ‘sweet spot’ for sustainable event delivery
- 10m x 7m stage, suitable for a broad range of performance types
- Dressing rooms, backstage workshops and amenities, providing ease and comfort for performers
- 1.3m wide ramps for backstage access, offering quick access to manoeuvre simple stage setups
- Two multi-purpose spaces, for small rehearsals, workshops, community meetings or education
- Box office and gallery foyer, suitable for pre-show gatherings
- Outdoor public space, connecting the venue with the public realm and providing a small outdoor amphitheatre for small gatherings and performances
- Dedicated undercover parking and loading dock.

From design to operations, the centre prioritises user-friendliness to minimise the costs and resources required for hiring, staff turnover, equipment setup, food and beverage service and ticketing.



Artist impression of the new regional theatre from River Street



Artist impression of the new regional theatre looking back to the River Room

Restaurant/café tenancy

Attached to the centre is a restaurant/café space with views over the Clarence River.

With a separate entrance to the main building, it can operate as an integrated pre and post show dining experience, as well as provide a new dining destination for the region.

This venue provides an opportunity for those looking for a fully integrated precinct that manages and delivers the full visitor experience.

Key features:

- integrated restaurant/café that could offer exclusive pre and post show food and beverage services
- only true river front dining in Maclean
- a high visibility site with dual frontage between River and Wharf Streets, connecting to pedestrian routes and the riverside precinct
- strong tourism alignment, located in the Yamba-Maclean- Iluka visitor triangle, a key destination area within the Northern Rivers
- for the right operator, limited competition within Maclean and the Clarence Valley LGA, especially as a space for high-end events and weddings
- with the M1 upgrade completed and a rapidly growing 3-hour drive market, and serviced by Ballina and Coffs Harbour Airports, popular tourism market
- adjoins to Council's Maclean Office and Council Chambers for mid-week patronage.

Multi-purpose use

The space has been designed with flexibility in mind, to remain adaptable to a broad variety of performance styles.

- Local and regional performing arts, including theatre, dance, music and choirs.
- Rehearsal and workshops, including rehearsal, development and performance space.
- Regional, state and national touring productions, currently with limited suitable options in the northern rivers.
- Community and cultural performances, including multicultural, aboriginal and intergenerational groups.
- Schools, training providers and youth programs, supporting ceremonies, education, performance and creative skill development.
- Festivals and cultural events, providing an indoor anchor venue to complement outside programming.
- Industry events, including speakers, business events, hospitality and tourism or regional award ceremonies.
- Comedy, from national touring to local open mic-nights.
- Film and television, from independent showings to curated film festivals.
- Government or civic events, including presentations, ceremonies or performances.
- Private hire.

There is a demand for cultural infrastructure that *serves our community* and builds upon our *regional cultural strengths*

Design and construction

Construction commenced in mid-2025 with the project due for completion in early to mid 2027.

It has yet to be formally named with engagement currently underway, including engagement with First Nations and Scottish communities.

The total project is anticipated to cost \$22,506,268 and create 110 local jobs during construction through primary contractors Base Engineering (project management), Reeman (construction) and Nimbus Architecture and Heritage (design).

Industry expert, Craig Gamble from Setting Lines has also been engaged in the design of the project.

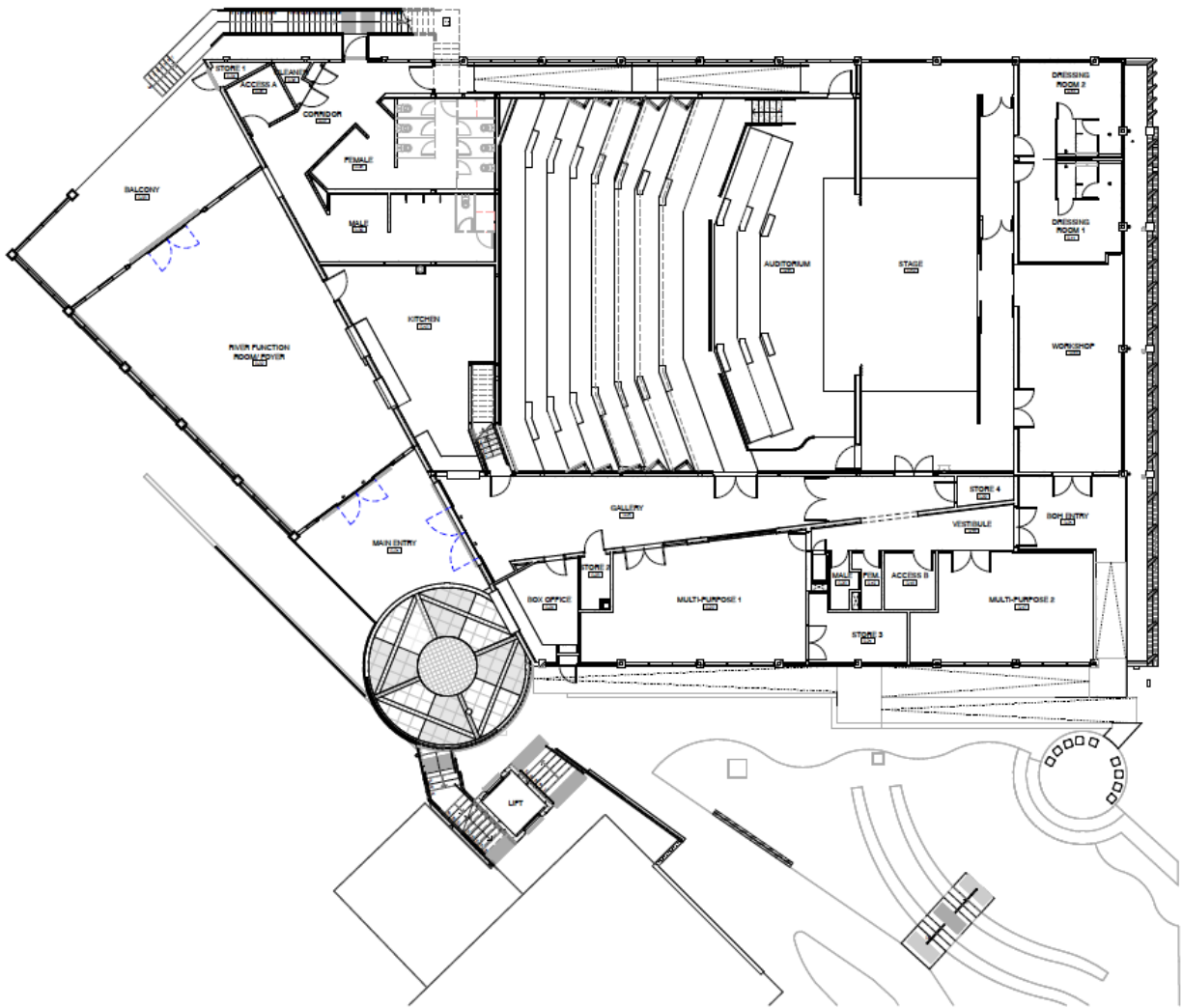
Touring readiness

The venue has been designed to be an efficient regional touring facility balancing professional standard performer / guest experience with operational efficiency.

Key design elements include:

- industry standard staging, audio and visual equipment (plug in and play model)
- dedicated backstage access
- accessible stage connections
- integrated front-of-house functionality
- flexible multi-use studio spaces
- reserved parking with direct access to a 1.3-metre-wide backstage ramp for rapid movement of equipment, significantly reducing bump-in and bump-out times for touring crews, as well as improving accessibility and safety
- dedicated dressing rooms, backstage workshops and performer amenities further enhance the venue's touring appeal by improving artist comfort.

These elements reduce bump-in, pack-down processes without expensive temporary infrastructure or additional venue modifications.



Floorplan

Target markets

The new centre is located in the heart of the Maclean Central Business District (CBD), offering direct access to residents, as well as unique opportunities to capitalise on the drive market and overnight visitors.

It provides a unique opportunity for the right operator to *get in early* and capitalise on future growth and cultural development in the region.

Size of market

| | Size | Projected growth (2046) |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Maclean | 3000 | 11.29% |
| Maclean catchment | | |
| Yamba – Angourie | 7,496 | 28.71% |
| Gulmarrad – Townsend | 4,022 | 24.54% |
| Lawrence and District | 2,234 | 19.28% |
| Ashby – Iluka – Woombah and District | 4,403 | 17.57% |
| Clarence Valley | 56,732 | 16.78% |
| Drive Market (3-hour) | | |
| Northern Rivers | 311,000 | NA |
| Southeast Queensland | 3,800,000 | 57% |
| Mid North Coast | 326,000 | NA |
| Northern Tablelands | 79,541 | NA |
| Visitor (visitor nights) | 2,000,000 | NA |

Source: *id demographic resources; ABS Regional Population Growth, Regional Development Australia (ABS Census 2021), Tourism Research Australia National Visitor Survey and International Visitor Survey 2021/22.*

Engagement

Local

According to the *Who We Are Report*, Clarence Valley audiences participate in a wide range of creative activities.

Clarence Valley audiences have participated in a variety of artforms in the past year including visual arts (78%), Aboriginal arts and culture (73%), festivals (66%), contemporary music (64%), dance or physical theatre (42%).

Looking ahead, the top three types of experiences that the Clarence Valley audiences want to see more of are exhibitions (61%), gathering and community ents (59%) and public art, murals and street art (54%).

Barriers include not knowing what's on (52%), financial barriers (46%) and having other priorities (46%).

Source: Who We Are Report (Pattern Makers on behalf of Arts Northern Rivers); Population and housing Forecast 2021-2046.

Drive

The drive market presents a significant opportunity to capitalise on growing cultural participation in the Northern Rivers, South East Queensland, Mid North Coast and Northern Tablelands regions.

According to the *Who We Are Report*, the Northern Rivers has rates of participation that are equal to, or higher than, inner metropolitan Sydney, despite vastly different access to opportunities. According to the ABS, 65 per cent of the region's population attend cultural events, providing a market size of 200,000 audience members. Of these galleries, libraries and live music are the most common forms of cultural attendance.

Overnight

The desire for experiences is increasingly influencing travel decisions, with the possibility of a transformative moment motivating people to book a trip (*Source: McKinsey*). Tourists who participate in cultural activities are known to stay longer and travel further from major cities. They are a high-value segment, who spent \$6.2 B in regional NSW in 2023. More cultural offerings for Northern Rivers has the potential to bring competitive advantages for the region.

Tourism NSW visitor reports indicate that 50% of domestic travellers are interested in theatre and performing arts, particularly older SINKs/DINKs. This demographic is motivated by 'discovery' and presents an opportunity to cross-sell experiences like dining, road trips and beaches.

There is a creative freedom and acceptance in this region. You can make things outside of the norm – simple or elaborate – and people embrace it.”

Who We Are Report



Cultural Landscape of the Region

Critically, the *Who We Are* report identifies access to appropriate space as the single largest issue facing the creative sector across the Northern Rivers.

Despite the size, strength and growth of the sector, the region has a severe shortage of contemporary, fit-for-purpose spaces for rehearsal, performance, presentation and touring. This structural gap is constraining creative production, limiting audience access and reducing the region's ability to attract professional touring work.

For the Clarence Valley, the new venue has been designed to address a long-standing gap in the event, cultural and economic infrastructure. While the Clarence Valley hosts a strong calendar of cultural and sporting events, it has yet to fully participate in regional touring circuits.

Maclean

Maclean is a unique historic village, blending river charm with coastal town character. It is shaped by the Yaegl people and early Scottish settlers and has a strong local identity shaped by the river village charm and creative communities.

Maclean is uniquely positioned to grow its reputation as a culturally rich town that honours both the long history of the Yaegl people and, in more recent decades, its celebrated Scottish connection. These layers of identity make Maclean an ideal location for meaningful cultural experiences that resonate with visitors.

Maclean already offers several notable experiences that reflect this cultural depth, including the Lower Clarence Aboriginal Tourist Drive, the Tartan Poles celebrating community heritage, the mural of respected elder Uncle Ron by artist NITSUA on the Public Art Trail, and the Yaegl Yarning Circle by artist Frances Belle Parker (MacNaughton Street).

Key events:

- Maclean Highland Gathering (March/April)
- Maclean Show and Working Dog Trials (April)
- Cane Harvest Festival (May)
- 2023 NORPA- Performance of FLOW: An event celebrating kinship, culture and connection
- 2024 Stars & Songlines: Yaegl Elders invited leading scientists from around Australia to provide 4 events over 2 days, providing education and learning on Aboriginal Science and Astronomy, and their connection to Aboriginal Culture and Practice
- Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation, including book launches and Yugaamgan (Emu) Festival
- 2026 Elders Olympics
- Flower festivals, textile shows, markets, art exhibitions, theatre, orchestras and live music.



Clarence Valley

The Clarence Valley is home to the largest and southern most river of the north rivers, the Clarence River (Biirrimba). It is the heart of the region running nearly 400kms, connecting many of the 60 towns and villages across the region including Grafton, Maclean, Iluka and Yamba.

It is a region rich with aboriginal culture and heritage represented by the three nations of the Yaegl, Gumbaynggirr and Bundjalung peoples. Today our community is made up of more than eight per cent of aboriginal peoples, compared with 6.6% in regional NSW. Celebrating our First Nations cultures, in 2025 alone the Clarence Valley will host the Elders Olympics and Art on Bundjalung, as well as multiple artist-led exhibitions and cultural programs through the Grafton Regional Gallery.

While awareness of Clarence Valley continues to grow, famous beachside towns of Yamba, Iluka and Wooli are well known, with family memories of holiday along the iconic coastal stretch. Specifically, Yamba, has a reputation as one of Australia's best towns, recently ranked #14 in the Australian Traveller 100 Best Towns. It blends pristine beaches, incredible seafood, and laid-back coastal culture.

Each year the region attracts close to 2 million visitor nights, making tourism and events a strong industry within the region. The annual events calendar continues to grow each year with a range of cultural and sporting events including Jacaranda Festival, Plunge Festival, Maclean Highland Gathering, Glenreagh Timber Festival, Yamba Triathlon, Grafton to Inverell Cycle Race and Wave Ski Surfing Australia.

The Clarence Valley forms a critical part of this regional creative ecosystem, with strong participation across music, performing arts, visual arts, festivals and community cultural development. According to the 2021 Census there are 153 creative businesses operating and 412 people employed within the sector.

The creative institutions of the region include major regional institutions, community galleries, festivals and events. Cultural activity centres around the main towns of Grafton, Maclean and Yamba, and smaller townships like Glenreagh, Iluka, Wooli and Ulmarra.

Key cultural attractors:

- Grafton Regional Gallery, offering six gallery spaces, workshop and meeting spaces.
- Clarence Valley Conservatorium, one of only two in the northern rivers
- private galleries and museums
- music and theatre organisers
- venues
- festivals and events.

Key cultural generators of participation

- Music and theatre organisations including The Briefs Factory International, Clarence Coast Theatrical Society, Lower Clarence Music Eisteddfod, Lower Clarence Community Choir, Maclean Music Academy, Maclean’s Music Ensemble, Maclean Scottish Dancers, and Clarence Valley Orchestra and Chorus.
- Arts groups such as Jacaranda Embroidery Group, Iluka Emporium, The Lower Clarence Arts & Crafts Association, Wooli Artist Group, Friends of Grafton Regional Gallery, Grafton Art Club, The Gallery Foundation and the Clarence Valley Woodworkers’ Association.
- Venues include the Saraton Theatre Grafton and The Pelican Playhouse, along with 37 halls and several community centres located across the Clarence Valley
- Festivals and events including annual Plunge Art and Cultural Festival, as well as an annual calendar of cultural events including Jacaranda Festival, Maclean Highland Gathering, Cane Harvest Festival, Clarence Valley Country Muster, Glenreagh Timber Festival as well as artisan markets and exhibitions.
- Private and community galleries include Iluka Emporium, Ferry Park Gallery, Cowper Gallery and Studio, Coldstream Gallery, Maclean Framing and Gallery, Yamba Community Centre Gallery, The Old Kirk, Peter Hill Gallery.

Art On Bundjalung is a leading First Nations led cultural market and presentation platform in the Northern Rivers, delivering strong economic, social and tourism outcomes while strengthening Indigenous cultural visibility and participation.



Northern Rivers

The Northern Rivers Region runs from the Queensland border in the north to Clarence Valley in the south and covers a total of seven Local Government Areas (LGAs) including Tweed Shire, Byron Shire, Balling Shire, Kyogle, Lismore City, Richmond Valley and Clarence Valley.

The region is defined by the Clarence, Richmond and Tweed Rivers and is home to 300,000 people and close to 30,000 businesses.

The region is famous for the cultural landscapes, creative community and world-famous beaches including Byron Bay and Lennox Head.

It is also recognised as one of Australia's most vibrant and distinctive creative regions, with a depth and diversity of arts practice considered exceptional for a non-metropolitan area. It has the highest concentration of cultural workers outside of Sydney with a cultural identity deeply rooted in artistic innovation, community connection and resilience.

It remains a highly attractive destination for cultural visitors. Tourism Research Australia identifies the area as one of the top regions in the country for cultural tourism, with an estimated \$435 million in cultural visitor expenditure (2023).

The Northern Rivers region is recognised as one of Australia's most vibrant and distinctive creative regions, with a depth and diversity of arts practice that is exceptional for a non-metropolitan area. According to Arts Northern Rivers' *Who We Are* report, the region has the largest concentration of cultural workers in New South Wales outside Sydney, with 4,941 people employed in cultural and creative roles—representing 1.5% of the population and exceeding the regional NSW average.

This scale positions the creative sector as a core contributor to regional identity, liveability and economic performance.

The region's creative economy has demonstrated strong and sustained growth, with the number of cultural and creative businesses increasing by 27% between 2016 and 2021—almost three times the growth rate of rural NSW more broadly. Over the same period, creative employment grew at four times the national average, generating an estimated \$887 million in annual turnover by 2021.

Arts and recreation have been identified as an emerging specialisation for the Northern Rivers economy, outperforming several traditional engine industries and underscoring the sector's role as a driver of regional diversification and resilience. Key cultural attractors include:

- M-Arts Precinct, Murwillumbah
- Brunswick Picture House, Brunswick Heads
- The Joinery (NORPA), Lismore
- Byron Theatre, Byron Bay
- Tweed Regional Gallery
- Lismore Regional Gallery.

Competitive advantages

The new venue provides specific benefits because of the geographical, cultural and market advantages, distinct from other regional areas.

It fills a gap within the market between audience (community, drive and tourism), geographically (between Coffs and Byron Bay) and versatility (major venue, halls and pubs and clubs). Strategically, with the right programming and audience engagement, the venue has the potential to drive strong utilisation and ensure long-term viability.

Connectivity

Maclean is located along the M1, providing direct access to key transport corridors making it just over one hour drive to Byron Bay or Coffs Harbour and less than two hours to Tweed and the southern Gold Coast.

It is a 'junction town' linking the coastal towns of Yamba, Iluka and Brooms Head to Grafton and the hinterland along a critical highway corridor. This creates three overlapping catchments.

Capitalises on tourism without existing competition

The venue is located on the Clarence River in Maclean, within a short drive of key tourism markets of Yamba, Iluka and Brooms Head. Each year the region attraction 2 million visitor nights.

The tourism product offering is largely characterised by beaches and national parks, with limited things to do and explore. While the Clarence Valley continues to invest in cultural tourism and offers a point of difference with public art and gallery/museum tourist drives, these serve as strong complementary activities.

A new arts centre, with strong programming, creates an opportunity to capitalise on the tourism market without the established competition, or higher costs, of areas such as Byron Bay.

Existing culture of community participation

The Clarence Valley has a strong history of hosting large, outdoor events that draw strong local, regional and interstate crowds including Maclean Highland Gathering, Jacaranda Festival, Maclean Show and Plunge Festival.

These events have a strong legacy in the Clarence Valley and are embedded in the culture of our region and demonstrate that Maclean can support large-scale cultural programming.

The active events, schools, businesses and cultural groups provide a built-in audience and a pipeline of emerging talent to support the future of the centre.

Scale and versatility

Smaller regional touring venues, between 200-400 seats, align with touring economics, enabling affordable and community-orientated operations.

Compared with larger venues regionally, the scale and versatility of the centre offer simpler, more affordable hire structures to increase utilisation throughout the year.

It fills a 'sweet spot' in regional touring viability by keeping hire costs low, while balancing viable audience sizes and capacities for ticket sales.

Cultural infrastructure gap

As identified in the Who We Are report, the lack of appropriate space is the most significant challenge facing the northern rivers creative sector. The region lacks purpose-built performing arts venues and many existing venues lack the technical capability to support a large range of productions.

The new venue offers a 297-seat theatre, provides a purpose-built cultural precinct, with contemporary design, professional acoustics, industry-standard audio and visual allowing plug and play, universal accessibility, and digital capability.

The seating allows for reconfigurable spaces including retractable seating to enable a wide range of uses and effectively a drop-stage for orchestras.

This professionalism and adaptability support diverse programming, higher utilisation and long-term operational sustainability.

Iconic river-experience (future realisation)

The new centre is positioned to provide an iconic river experience, with spectacular views across the Clarence River. Coupled with an integrated dining venue overlooking the river, the centre has the opportunity to generate foot traffic and activity outside of normal performance schedules to create an activated community space.

Cost Efficacy

The new venue, and surrounding services, including accommodation are comparatively cheaper.

Based on Airbnb room nights, Clarence Valley is between 50% to 90% cheaper than Byron Bay depending on the season and location.

With price-sensitivity increasing for producers and visitors, Clarence Valley can offer a genuinely more affordable option with opportunities to grow event tourism, and multi-day stays.