



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

**Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya (Seeking the Stars)
celebrating 65,000+ years
of Wiradjuri Culture, Continuity and Creativity on Country
at the Wiradjuri Study Centre, Condobolin, NSW
2-4 September 2022**

Version 17 July 2022

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for Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation and Big Skies Collaboration

facebook.com/CondoSkyfest/
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OUR MISSION

1. To grow **Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya** (Seeking the Stars) into a world-class annual celebration of Wiradjuri Culture, Continuity and Creativity on Country to re-awaken ancient knowledge, enrich local people's lives, catalyse new opportunities, strengthen capabilities, and drive positive change in the spirit of Yinndyamarra Winhanganha (The wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in)
2. To establish **Miima-gu Ngaahna¹ Regenerative Futures Expo** as a space for regionally-based corporations, businesses, government departments, educational institutions, non-government organisations, charities, entrepreneurs and Wiradjuri arts and crafts practitioners to engage with First Nations and other communities, showcase their products and services, promote new opportunities and visions of the future, and contribute to SkyFest's economic viability (See Section 2.8)

¹ Miima-gu Ngaahna means Reaching for the Stars

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation (WCC) and Big Skies Collaboration established Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya (Seeking the stars) in 2018 as an annual celebration of 65,000+ years of Wiradjuri Culture, Continuity and Creativity on Country. For Wiradjuri and other First Peoples, the all-inclusive concept of Country includes the land, waterways, and the sky, including the stars, planets, and other celestial phenomena. We chose the name SkyFest because the sky unites people across all cultural traditions and because Wiradjuri people are now reawakening and revitalising their ancestral traditions and knowledge, including their astronomy and skystore, to reverse the damaging impacts of colonisation.

SkyFest also embodies a commitment to protecting and nurturing Country in the spirit of Yinndyamarra Winhanganha (The wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in.) The SkyFest 2022 program includes the inaugural Miima-gu Ngaahna² Regenerative Futures Expo to showcase local and regional initiatives that are taking Australia and the world towards a safer, greener, renewable energy future (See Section 2.8).

WCC and Big Skies Collaboration are implementing tried and tested community cultural development strategies to create opportunities for Wiradjuri people to participate in SkyFest through the Arts, Heritage, STEAM activities, and sports. This Statement of Purpose presents recent academic research which shows how cultural festivals can improve First People's health and wellbeing, maintain and revitalise cultural heritage, and drive positive cultural, social, and economic change.

Covid forced us to cancel the 2020 and 2021 SkyFests. Before the 2021 cancellation, however, Central NSW Joint Organisation of Councils commissioned a Sydney-based PR company to promote the 2021 festival as a 'must see' Indigenous tourism and astro-tourism experience (See Section 2.3). The success of this promotional campaign forced SkyFest organisers to acknowledge that WCC could not yet cater for a large number of visitors or to meet the expectations the promotion raised. We were also concerned that, by promoting SkyFest as an exclusively tourism experience and focussing on the so-called visitor economy, the Joint Organisation's campaign ignored the many non-touristic, non-economic benefits that cultural festivals offer their host communities.

For Condobolin's Wiradjuri families, SkyFest provides a safe space to creatively affirm their own identities, to re-awaken, revitalise, share and maintain their ancestral knowledge, language, stories, arts and crafts, and to strengthen and heal their community. Recent research suggests that many tourists are now also seeking meaningful ways of 'doing good' in the communities they visit rather than simply having a good time. The term 'regenerative tourism' encapsulates the values of this trend.

Condo SkyFest has the potential to serve many purposes, as we outline in this document. It can improve Wiradjuri people's health and wellbeing *and* attract hundreds of tourists and visitors to Condobolin. But to achieve its full potential, it needs long-term financial and in-kind support from the public and private sectors. WCC and Big Skies Collaboration cannot grow Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya into a world-class event without such support. We need external help.

² *Miima-gu Ngaahna* means Reaching for the Stars

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya (Seeking the Stars) is a First Nations community festival hosted by Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation (WCC) and Big Skies Collaboration at the Wiradjuri Study Centre in Condobolin, a remote river town at the geographical heart of New South Wales.³ Condo, as the town is fondly known, has a population of nearly 3,000,⁴ more than one-quarter of whom identify as Wiradjuri and other First Nation groups. With a median age of just 21 (compared to 38 for the general population), the Wiradjuri Condobolin community is very youthful and is expected to grow rapidly in the coming decades.⁵ We believe these young people and their extended families deserve the best Australia can give its citizens.

Most of Condo's First Nations families have been living in and around the townsite and along the Galari-Lachlan River and its tributaries since time immemorial. Although some locals have achieved success and personal fulfilment in their chosen fields, others continue to experience socio-economic disadvantage, poor health, discrimination, cultural impoverishment, and trauma associated with the intergenerational consequences of dispossession and colonisation. Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya was conceived as a way of creatively addressing some of these injustices by catalysing new cultural, social, spiritual and economic opportunities consistent with the objectives of the national Closing the Gap Campaign, Blak Lives Matter, Change the Record, the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.⁶ We hope to grow Condo SkyFest into a world-class celebration of 65,000+ years of cultural heritage and continuity on Country to drive positive change and improve people's lives. For us, this is a moral imperative.

Academic research on other First Nations festivals confirms that such celebrations can positively affect people's quality of life (See Section 2.1). We are confident, therefore, that Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya can improve the lives of the Condobolin Wiradjuri community over time and enhance the liveability of their town. If properly managed and marketed, SkyFest can also become a world-class First Nations tourism experience and a significant driver of cultural and economic innovation throughout the region.

³ Condobolin is the largest town in the Lachlan Local Government Area (LGA). Other towns and villages within this LGA are Fifield, Lake Cargelligo, Tottenham, Albert, Burcher, Tullibigeal and Derriwong. The Shire is in the Federal Electoral Division of Parkes held by Mark Coultan (Nationals), and the NSW State Electoral District of Barwon held by Roy Butler (Shooters Fishers and Farmers Party).

⁴ According to the 2016 Census data, Condobolin's population was just 2,864 people (Urban Centres and Localities), down from 3,050 in the 2001 Census figures. The percentage of First Nations people in Condobolin has risen during this period. In the 2001 Census, it was given as 17.8 per cent, while in 2016 First Peoples constituted 25.8 per cent of the town's population. It is probably now closer to one-third of the town's population. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 and 2001 ABS Census QuickStats, + <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/Home/2016%20QuickStats>. Last viewed 14 December 2021.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, ABS 2016 Census Quick Stats Condobolin: https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC11002 last viewed 11 October 2021.

⁶ See <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>, accessed 15 December 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Lives_Matter, accessed 1 January 2022, and UN Sustainable Development Goals <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, accessed 24 January 2022.

1.1 Background

Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation was established in 2003 as part of a Native Title Agreement with a gold mining company based at Lake Cowal, NSW, a site of great cultural significance to Wiradjuri people. The organisation's primary purpose is to create opportunities for a better quality of life for the Wiradjuri Condobolin community. Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya is one of its most innovative and visionary community cultural development initiatives.

The first SkyFest was held in November 2018 with the support of Big Skies Collaboration, an informal network of professional creatives and organisations committed to catalysing new opportunities in south-eastern Australia's rural and remote Inland.⁷ Our 2018 project partners included Lachlan Shire Council, Arts OutWest, and several corporate sponsors. The second SkyFest, a smaller event, was held in 2019. Unfortunately, the 2020 and 2021 celebrations were cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic.⁸

At the time of writing, WCC and Big Skies Collaboration are planning the third Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya to be held on the first weekend in September 2022. This event will draw on government arts funding received for the 2021 festival, in-kind support from Lachlan Shire Council, Arts OutWest, Evolution Mines and other sponsors, and WWC's own financial and in-kind resources.

Condo SkyFest celebrates 65,000+ years of Wiradjuri heritage, as we've already stated. This includes the Inland's very dark night skies and vast horizons, which are amongst the Lachlan Shire's most valuable natural and cultural assets. Visitors are often amazed by the number of stars and other celestial bodies they can see on a clear night here and by the brightness of the Milky Way. For Wiradjuri people, celestial phenomena are as much part of Country as terrestrial, and riverine phenomena are. Over the millennia, the ancestors developed a deep knowledge of the night sky and encoded it into their language and stories. Tragically, the processes of colonisation blocked the transmission of this knowledge – but now, in the twenty-first century, Wiradjuri and other First Peoples are re-awakening and reclaiming their cultural heritage and repairing the ancient songlines to connect Heaven and Earth. SkyFest's Wiradjuri name, Miima Warrabinya, or Seeking (lost) Stars, alludes metaphorically to this renaissance.

Condobolin's starry nights are also worth celebrating for other reasons, since Lachlan Shire is endowed with large deposits of precious and critical metals created billions of years ago in stellar explosions. A German company has also established a photovoltaic solar farm with battery storage near Condobolin to harvest the power of our local star, the Sun.⁹ More solar farms are expected to follow. Lachlan Shire is about to experience twin mining and energy booms that will transform

⁷ See Big Skies Collaboration website <https://bigskiescollaboration.wordpress.com/projects/condo-skyfest/condo-skyfest-2018/>, and Condo SkyFest website skyfest.com.au, last accessed 17 October 2021.

⁸ Condobolin Argus, Condo SkyFest Postponed, 4 August 2021, <https://condobolinargus.com.au/condo-skyfest-postponed/>, last viewed 25 October 2021; Arts OutWest, Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya: Reaching for the Stars -- Postponed: <https://artsoutwest.org.au/events/condo-skyfest-miima-warrabinya-reaching-for-the-stars/>, last viewed 28 October 2021.

⁹ Melissa Blewitt, Condobolin Argus online, 14 July 2021, <https://condobolinargus.com.au/solar-farm-worth-over-4-million-approved-for-condobolin/> last viewed 18 December 2021

Inland economies.¹⁰ Condo SkyFest organisers have responded to these new opportunities by adding a regenerative futures expo to the 2022 program (See Section 3.0) to showcase the exciting developments now occurring within the Shire that will take us closer to a healthier, more ecologically sustainable net-zero emissions future.

1.2 Challenges

SkyFest presents organisers with many challenges. These include the event's long-term financial viability; the town's geographic distance from capital cities and regional population centres; cultural and socio-economic disadvantage; and the shallow labour pool and skills deficit that all small rural and remote communities experience. We are attempting to address these challenges in new and creative ways.

1. Financial sustainability

WCC is committed to ensuring that entry to SkyFest remains free to the public. This means it must be financed from government and corporation grants, sponsorships, donations, WCC's reserves, and in-kind support. To sustainably grow SkyFest into a world-class celebration, however, we need to find new sources of income. We are doing this by developing a series of special revenue-producing ticketed events within the SkyFest program. The 2022 festival includes, for example:

- The **Miima Warrabinya Gala Dinner** offering a menu of native and locally produced food prepared by a visiting First Nations chef, and accompanied by stargazing, a preview of SkyFest performances, and (possibly) a prominent guest speaker (See Section 2.5)
- **Miima Warrabinya cultural heritage tours** to sites of significance, with local Wiradjuri guides and storytellers (See Section 2.3), and
- the **Miima-gu Ngaahna (Reaching for the Stars) Regenerative Futures Expo**, at which exhibitors will be able to share and promote their goods and services and, we hope, be inspired to sponsor future SkyFest events (See Section 2.8)

2. Cultural disadvantage

Another major challenge we face is the one Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya was established to reverse: the limited opportunities for people in small rural and remote communities to experience and creatively engage in high-quality recreational arts and crafts activities, including live workshops and performances by arts professionals. Some Condo locals also have limited or zero access to the internet. In this sense, people of all backgrounds in Condobolin and other remote inland communities are culturally deprived. Recent Census statistics show that Condo people also tend to be older, less healthy, less educated, and more economically disadvantaged than those in metropolitan centres and regional cities.¹¹ They are therefore disadvantaged in multiple ways: culturally, socially, educationally, and economically.

¹⁰ Critical and precious minerals mined or about to be mined in Lachlan Local Government Area include gold, copper, cobalt, platinum, nickel and scandium. Lachlan Shire Council approved its first solar farm with battery storage in 2021.

¹¹ Last Census stats.

Cultural and social disadvantage and cultural deprivation have very negative impacts on people's wellbeing, as we discuss below. These conditions also mean that many locals find it difficult, even impossible, to imagine a positive future for themselves and their families, or to envisage the many ways a successful Condo SkyFest could economically, socially and culturally benefit their community.

To address some of these challenges, we are planning to introduce the Miima-gu Ngaahna (Reaching for the Stars) Cultural Ambassadors Program to give Wiradjuri locals opportunities to experience First Nations cultural events in larger communities and to meet First Nations cultural leaders in Sydney, Canberra and elsewhere. Participation in this program will broaden cultural ambassadors' horizons, enable them to scout for talent for future festivals, and to benchmark SkyFest against other cultural events. It will also enable them to establish their own support networks.

We hope that the Cultural Ambassadors Program will give participants the confidence to oversee SkyFest and determine its future. We cannot introduce this program until WCC has the funds to employ staff to run it, however.

3. Remoteness

Condo is around 100 km from the much larger inland towns of Parkes and Forbes, 200 km from the regional cities of Dubbo and Orange, 260 km from Wagga, 370 km from Canberra, and nearly 500 km from Sydney. The town has a small airport but does not support regular commercial flights. There are several coach services per week linking Condobolin with larger centres, however, and a weekly train from Sydney to Broken Hill which can stop at the local railway station. The only other way to reach Condo, and the most convenient, is by private vehicle. This means that, if we are to attract visitors and performers to Condo SkyFest, we will need to present them with very good reasons to drive hundreds of kilometres to a small Inland town that's a long way from anywhere!

As we saw during the pandemic travel restrictions, Australians *can* be enticed to drive long distances for new experiences though. Destination NSW's slick YouTube and social media road trip campaigns were very successful and, according to the NSW Visitor Economy Strategic Plan 2030, will be expanded over the next two years. The Strategic Plan also promises support for regional events "to facilitate regional dispersal."¹² We will be seeking this support.

4. Job vacancies and skills deficit

The most immediate challenge we face is one that affects most organisations in small rural and remote towns: a shortage of skilled people to fill specialised job vacancies.¹³ This challenge is exacerbated in First Nations communities. WCC has first-hand experience of this. In early 2021 the

¹² {NSW Government, 2022 #397}

¹³ Houghton, K. and D. Hopkins (2022). Regional Labour Market at Full Employment: Quarterly Update. Barton, ACT, Regional Australia Institute.

organisation advertised for a Tourism Development and Finance Assistant to ‘be responsible for strengthening community and industry partnerships and developing local Aboriginal tourism initiatives and events.’ It received no applications. WCC is now exploring alternative options, including a trainee program.¹⁴

An easy solution to this challenge would be to hire city-based contractors to engage with local people remotely and/or to make regular FIFO visits to Condo. This would do little to grow the Condobolin Wiradjuri community’s cultural and human capital, however.¹⁵ A better approach would be to invest in local people through carefully targeted professional development and community upskilling strategies supported by inspirational mentoring.

This preferred path would require long-term, meaningful, multi-helix collaboration (see below) with a wide range of stakeholders, including government departments, corporate entities, local businesses and entrepreneurs, educational institutions, and non-government agencies, as well as from the WCC board and management. We are working on this.

1.3 Multi-helix collaboration framework

Regional and community development agencies all over the world are now using what are known as multi-helix frameworks for stakeholder collaboration to drive innovation and improve people’s lives. These models are described as triple, quadruple, and quintuple helix frameworks. (The helix metaphor evokes the twisted ladder structure of the DNA polymer.)¹⁶

A triple helix framework, for example, would involve people from academia, industry and government interacting collaboratively to foster wellbeing, entrepreneurship, innovation and economic growth. A quadruple helix framework would add civil society stakeholders, their values and their concerns, such as Wiradjuri cultural heritage, arts, social media, creative industries, and lifestyles, to the collaborative mix; and a quintuple helix framework would consider the environment and natural assets, such as Condo’s very dark night skies and wide horizons, the

¹⁴ To produce and grow SkyFest, WCC requires staff, volunteers and contractors with a very broad range of skillsets, many of which are currently not available in Condobolin. We need people to plan, budget, administer, curate, produce and promote the festival across multiple platforms; write the funding and sponsorship proposals; talent-scout, network with other festival organisers and look after sponsors, supporters and VIPs; conduct community capacity building workshops; set up the stages, lighting and sound system and demount them at the end of the event; manage and decorate the site; produce and deliver diverse, high quality events and experiences; provide accommodation, food, drink, security, parking, garbage collection and disposal, and other services and amenities on- and off-site; erect and staff information booths; liaise with journalists and tourist operators; and maintain the website and live social media updates, for example. Some of these skills are available in a small country towns but many cannot.

¹⁵ In the field of sociology, cultural capital comprises the social assets of a person (education, intellect, style of speech, style of dress, etc.) that promote social mobility in a stratified society.’ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_capital, accessed 2 February 2022.

Human capital is ‘an economic and social science term which refers to people’s education level, training, skill sets, talents, knowledge and capabilities.’ Wikipedia accessed 26 January 2022: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_capital

¹⁶ See Wikipedia, Quadruple, and quintuple innovation helix framework, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quadruple_and_quintuple_innovation_helix_framework, last viewed 30 December 2021.

constellations and other celestial phenomena, landscape features, native species, the Galari-Lachlan River, and the inclusive Wiradjuri concept of Country.¹⁷

Multi-helical projects in other parts of the world, notably in Europe and South Africa, have shown that, when diverse sectors of society collaborate meaningfully, then rural and remote communities, indeed, whole regions, can be transformed in remarkable ways.¹⁸

¹⁷ König, J., et al. (2020). Helix Models of Innovation and Sustainable Development Goals. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Leal Filho, Walter Azul, Anabela Marisa Brandli, Luciana Lange Salvia and Amanda Wall. Berlin, Springer: 1-15.; Cai, Y. and A. Lattu (2021). "Triple Helix or Quadruple Helix: Which Model of Innovation to Choose for Empirical Studies?" Minerva.

¹⁸ Bikse, V. and B. Rivza (2017). "The Helix Model System as a Challenge and Driver for Rural and Regional Development." New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences 2: 24-34; Lee, E. and R. Eversole (2019). "Rethinking the regions: Indigenous peoples and regional development." Regional Studies 53(11): 1509-1519; Cai, Y. and A. Lattu (2021). "Triple Helix or Quadruple Helix: Which Model of Innovation to Choose for Empirical Studies?" Minerva: 1-24; Chatziniolaou, D. and C. Vlado (2019). University-Industry-Government Linkages and the Helix Theory on the Fourth Industrial Revolution-Preprint. 6th International Conference on Applied Economics "Institutions and the Knowledge Economy". University of Thessaly, Department of Economics, Volos, Greece; Franc, S. and D. Karadzija (2019). "Quintuple helix approach: The case of the European Union." Notitia: Journal for economic, business and social issues(5): 91-100; Widowati, S., et al. (2019). "Penta helix model to develop ecotourism." International journal of social sciences and humanities 3(2): 31-46; Ješić, J. and R. Pejanović (2019). Fostering Rural Tourism Development: Quadruple Helix Model Approach TISC-Tourism International Scientific Conference Vrnjačka Banja; Franc, S. and D. Karadzija (2019). "Quintuple helix approach: The case of the European Union." Notitia: Journal for economic, business and social issues(5): 91-100.

Our preferred development strategy is a multi-helix framework that involves all levels of government, the corporate sector, academia, local businesses and community groups, with full consideration given to Wiradjuri people's concerns and interests within the broader context of Country. We are now seeking other collaborators to work with WCC to develop Condo SkyFest into a world-class First Nations celebration of culture and continuity on Country.

2.0 SKYFEST STARTS WITH CULTURE

Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya celebrates Wiradjuri Culture in all its richness and complexity to inspire and educate participants and to improve the lives of First Peoples in Condobolin and beyond, especially those who are culturally, socially and economically disadvantaged. As a 2010 survey of the benefits of Indigenous festivals found,

Culture has to be the starting point in any serious efforts to address Indigenous disadvantage Increasingly, agencies with responsibilities for Indigenous health, education, employment and other wellbeing outcomes are realising that cultural festivals are a powerful space for working effectively with communities on their own terrain: opening dialogue, engaging participation and working in partnerships to both imagine better futures and deliver results in these crucial areas.¹⁹

Culture is a complicated concept, however, with at least two definitions. The first, the more anthropological and sociological meaning, includes all the values, beliefs, and ways of seeing, being and behaving we share with other people in the groups, communities, and societies we feel part of. The second definition refers to the expression of these values, beliefs, and ways of being through storytelling, writing, music, dance, visual arts, books, films, theatre, radio, TV shows, film, video games, podcasts, artifacts, craft, design, buildings, landscapes, sports, science, and all the other things we humans make, do, and think.²⁰ Culture is always changing, too; always evolving in new and often surprising ways.

The concept of Aboriginal cultural *heritage* fuses these different meanings. The NSW draft Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill 2018 defines it as:

the living, traditional and historical practices, representations, expressions, beliefs, knowledge, and skills (together with the associated environment, landscapes, places, objects, ancestral remains and materials) that Aboriginal people recognise as part of their cultural heritage and identity.²¹

Cultural heritage can be either tangible or intangible. Tangible heritage refers to physical or material things, such as artifacts, cultural landscapes, old buildings, artworks, archaeological sites, human remains, and museum, library, and archive collections. Intangible heritage includes language, songlines, traditional knowledge and customs, kinship relations, stories, folklore, dances, ceremonies and large gatherings, such as corroborees, for example.

¹⁹ Phipps, P., et al. (2010). Indigenous Cultural Festivals: Evaluating impact on community health and wellbeing. Report to the Telstra Foundation on research on Indigenous festivals 2007-2010. Melbourne, Globalism Research Centre.

²⁰ A New Approach (ANA) think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities (2018). The Big Picture: Public expenditure on artistic, cultural and creative activity in Australia.

²¹ NSW Government (2018). Draft Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill 2018. O. o. E. a. Heritage. Sydney, NSW Government.

Like many other intangible cultural traditions, corroborees were discontinued in Wiradjuri Country in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because of the forces of colonisation. They are now being revived in First Nations communities throughout southeastern Australia, however. In Condobolin, Amanda Coe and members of the dance groups Galari Bila Waga Dhaanys and Dinawan's Connection have established the Condo Corroborree in memory of a very talented Wiradjuri dancer, the late Lewis Coe. This event is held in May each year on the Wiradjuri Study Centre's bora ground. The 2022 event attracted several hundred people from all over New South Wales, many of whom will return to Condo for SkyFest Miima Warrabinya.

One of the groups driving the revival of the corroborree tradition in New South Wales is Dinawan's Connection, which takes its name from a Wiradjuri word for Emu -- because, as the Dinawan men explain in their promotional material, "The male Dinawan (Emu) raises the chicks as soon as they come out of the egg and teaches them everything they need to know to survive in this world preparing them for adult hood."²²

They continue:

Long story short Culture saved our life! Growing up as kids,
We had NO role models, NO Dance and NO connection to country or stories,
We were walking around without direction.
Then we had the privilege to learn the old ways & we have never looked back
NOW, we have belonging. NOW we have dance. NOW, we have connection to Country and stories.
And NOW we want to GIVE back to our community by being role models for our youth and sharing
dance with them.²³

It's a powerful message. Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya continues the cultural tradition of the corroborree with a similar mission.

Evidence from other cultural festivals confirms that large gatherings, like corroborees and cultural festivals, can be psychologically transformative and lead to long-lasting attitudinal change. Recent research from Yale University, for example, reports that festival-goers can experience what sociologist Emile Durkheim called 'collective effervescence,' a transcendent emotion of feeling socially connected with those around you, a sense that you are one with the rest of humanity, or one with the universe.²⁴ By catalysing such emotional responses, festivals have an important role to play in breaking down prejudices and promoting inclusivity, reconciliation, and an openness to difference which benefits everyone.

As we show in the following pages, cultural festivals can be consequential in many other ways too – which is why we believe that Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya deserves wide support.

²² SYellow.place website, accessed 29 May 2022: <https://yellow.place/en/dinawan-s-connection-cowra-nsw-australia>

²³ Locale online website, accessed 29 May 2022: <https://au.locale.online/dinawans-connection-1054667103.html>

²⁴ Hathaway, B. (2022) 'Transformative' effects of mass gatherings like Burning Man are lasting. *Yale News*; Yudkin, D. A., et al. (2022). "Prosocial correlates of transformative experiences at secular multi-day mass gatherings." *Nature Communications* **13**(1): 2600

2.1 SkyFest as Cultural Medicine

WCC and many other groups and individuals in Condobolin are working together to re-awaken, revitalise, and share Wiradjuri culture, language, and heritage through storytelling, dance, painting, traditional weaving, music, video, photography, computer games, family histories, visits to significant sites, cultural astronomy, and other traditional and contemporary practices and knowledge. Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya provides a focus for many of these activities; a safe and supportive environment for local First Nations people of all ages and abilities to share their knowledge, skills and experience, exhibit, perform and sell their work, participate in workshops, and be inspired in ways that affirm their First Nations identities.

The multiple benefits of these arts and cultural activities are now well established. The Australia Council's Submission to Closing the Gap Refresh, for example, categorically states that:

The evidence is clear that First Nations arts and cultural participation can support: the development of strong and resilient First Nations children; improved school attendance and engagement; higher levels of educational attainment; improved physical and mental health and wellbeing; greater social inclusion and cohesion; more employment, economic opportunities and meaningful work; safer communities with reductions in crime and improved rehabilitation; as well as the prevention of suicide – fostering a secure sense of cultural identity is a powerful protective factor against self-harm for young First Nations people and helps First Nations children and young people to navigate racism and being a minority group in their own country.²⁵

Stephen Page, former artistic director of Bangarra Dance Theatre, highlighted the healing power of the arts in his keynote address to the Australian Performing Arts Market back in 2012:

Art is a medicine; it can heal us, unite us, strengthen us, challenge us and inspire us, it feeds our bodies and our imaginations. We see ourselves through art and learn about our community, and our place within it. Discovering who we are - writing our own verse in a songline that has been carried through the ages - gives us a sense of belonging. And the knowledge of where we come from empowers each and every one of us.²⁶

In this sense, SkyFest is medicine too. As we've already described, it gives First People space to share, revitalise and celebrate their cultural heritage, tell their own stories in their own ways, display their creative works, share their knowledge and skills, socialise, make new friends, be entertained and inspired, and affirm and validate their identities in ways that can instil pride, joy, social connectivity and a sense of wellbeing and belonging.

Academic research supports claims about the beneficial impacts of cultural festivals for First Nations communities. A 2010 publication, *Indigenous Cultural Festivals: Evaluating impact on community health and wellbeing*, for example, reported that

²⁵ {Australia Council for the Arts, 2018 #380}

²⁶ Stephen Page, Keynote Address APAM 2012, *Art as Medicine*, Keynote Address <https://apam.org.au/2012/assets/Stephen-Page-APAM-keynote-2012.pdf>. Accessed 1 February 2022.

festivals really do matter to communities; from a proliferation of very small events celebrating local community life, to complex, large-scale events with a national and international profile. Whatever scale they operate at, festivals support communities in their efforts to maintain and renew themselves through the celebration of culture.²⁷

No formal research has been done on the healing benefits of our Condo SkyFest and the community cultural development activities associated with it so far, but anecdotal evidence suggests that it is already making a positive difference to people's lives. Maryann Parker, who participates in informal weaving workshops with local artist and Big Skies Collaborator, Aunty Beverley Coe, at the Condo SistaShed, described what this experience means to her:

I enjoy learning how to weave baskets and all our other things in our traditional way. I find it very healing. I also find weaving good therapy for loneliness, depression, grief and loss.²⁸

Many other workshop participants and exhibitors, including those who are disabled, elderly, or suffering from trauma and mental illness, would agree with her. Some of the young people participating in the dance programs, and their families, also acknowledge the cultural and health value of these activities.

Given all the available evidence demonstrating the beneficial impacts that creative interventions can have on First Nations communities, we have no doubt that Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya can improve at least some participants' mental and physical wellbeing over time. And, because SkyFest presents traditional and contemporary Wiradjuri culture in so many different ways, it is also likely to benefit non-indigenous people, including tourists and other visitors, as we discuss below.

2.2 SkyFest as Cultural Revitalisation

WCC and Big Skies Collaboration support and nurture Wiradjuri cultural revitalisation through community cultural development projects, as listed below, and through the festival program itself. The 2022 program features a line-up of Wiradjuri and other First Nations performers, some of whom were born and raised in Condobolin and have developed strong professional careers in music in the capital cities. Others will be performing on stage for the first time.

External funding received in 2021 from a range of sources, including the Australian Government's Regional Arts Fund and Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS), and the NSW Government's Create NSW and Arts Restart via Arts OutWest Inc, allowed us to introduce three new community cultural development initiatives in 2021/22. This funding also supported some of the regular SistaShed workshops with local artist and Big Skies Collaborator Aunty Beverley Coe. Projects that were postponed in 2021 because of COVID have since resumed for SkyFest 2022. These are:

²⁷ (Phipps, Slater et al. 2010) p. 8.

²⁸ See <https://bigskiescollaboration.wordpress.com/projects/condo-skyfest/condo-skyfest-2018/condo-sky-weavings/>, accessed 25 February 2022.

1. **Gaalmadhaay Songmakers Project** with local Wiradjuri poets Monique Merritt and Marion Wighton-Packham and Wiradjuri singer Janita Coe (all from Condobolin), with Wiradjuri singer-songwriter Shane Riley (Dubbo) and Big Skies Collaborator Peter Kennard (Blue Mountains), to co-author and perform a series of songs in Wiradjuri and English
2. **Lighting the Night Lantern Project** with Phil Relf, of Ikara Celebratory Events, Northern Rivers, and Aunty Bev Coe, with the Condo SistaShed artisans, Marathon Health, Condobolin Primary School, and St Joseph's Catholic School, to build hundreds of lanterns with sky-themed images on them, for a dramatic festival decorations and a children's lantern parade
3. **SistaShed Workshops** with Aunty Beverley Coe to create sky-themed artworks
4. **Ngamurr Waganha Walan** (Daughter Dance Strong) Project to establish a girls' dance group with Wiradjuri choreographer and teacher Jo Clancy from NAISDA Dance College

At the time of writing, hundreds of paper lanterns created in 2021 by the SistaShed artisans, and students in the two local primary schools, are in storage at the Wiradjuri Study Centre and other sites. Condo Primary School teacher Marion Wighton-Packham used the lantern project to introduce her students to Wiradjuri astronomy and skylore during NAIDOC week 2021. Many of her students decorated their lanterns with cut-outs of animals represented in the Wiradjuri constellations, such as the Celestial Emu, for example. The children were expecting to parade their lanterns at SkyFest 2021 but, after it was postponed, were offered an opportunity to parade their creations at Chamber of Commerce's pre-Christmas Late Night Shopping event led by members of the Condobolin Pipe Band.

The girls' dance group, Ngamurr Waganha Walan, complements the boys' dance group, Galari Bila Waga Dhaanys, established by Wiradjuri local Mandy Coe and colleagues, including local teacher Marion Wighton-Packham with the support of Waiwan dancer, Steve Taylor and his Dinawan's Connection group. (Mandy Coe and her colleagues also host the Lewis Coe Memorial Corroborree at the Wiradjuri Study Centre in May each year. This event attracts First Nations families from all over NSW.) The local boys' and girls' groups will be dancing new works for SkyFest, and other dance groups from throughout the region have been invited to join them on the bora ground.

The Gaalmadhaay Songmakers Project will restart in mid-2022 after being postponed in 2021. At the time of writing, our two local poets, Monique Merritt and Marion Wighton-Packham, have completed the lyrics for a series of songs in Wiradjuri and English, and Wiradjuri singer-songwriter Shane Riley from Dubbo, and Big Skies Collaborator Peter Kennard, a composer from the Blue Mountains, are composing the melodies. The Peter and Shane will hold further workshop with the poets/lyricists and Wiradjuri singer, Janita Coe (also from Condobolin), in July and August. Shane and Peter will work closely with Janita as she learns the songs and will then record them for local release as MP3 files. The new songs will be premiered live at SkyFest 2022 with backing from Shane, Peter and other musicians.

Local weaver, visual artist and Big Skies Collaborator, Aunty Bev Coe, whose work has already been mentioned, has led one of our most successful cultural revival initiatives through the Condo

SistaShed, where she conducts twice-weekly workshops with First Nations women. Many of the SistaShed makers are associated with Marathon Health's Condobolin Wiradjuri Wellness Project.

Aunty Bev's recent work has been inspired by her visits to Seven Sisters Ridge, a sacred site on the transcontinental Seven Sisters Songline about 45 kms east of Condobolin. Unfortunately, Bev's own elders were unable to pass the Seven Sisters stories on to her, so she has done her own research about other Seven Sisters sites and their connection to the Mulayndynang, the star cluster (also known as the Pleiades or M45). Aunty Bev shared these stories with the Sistas, and, together, they have created a series of Seven Sisters artworks to keep the stories alive for their own children and grandchildren. Their Seven Sisters installation was featured in their first SkyFest exhibition, *Seven Sistas Weavings*, at the Wiradjuri Study Centre in 2018.²⁹

The Mulayndynang story is, in part, a cautionary tale for young women and girls about keeping themselves safe from predatory males, and about the dangers of unsanctioned relationships. It meant a lot to the SistaShed makers, all of whom have either experienced family violence themselves, or witnessed it. For some of them, creating the Mulayndynang effigies for the exhibition was cathartic.

Aunty Bev and the Sistas have also created mythic representations of other Wiradjuri constellations, including a two-metre-high steel and fibre Gugurmin, or Celestial Emu, the dark constellation visible in the Milky Way; Maliyan the Eagle (the constellation Aquila); and Gugaa the Tree Goanna (Scorpius). The Sistas have since used these works to educate their children, grandchildren and the broader Wiradjuri community about their people's traditional astronomy and skylore.

Bev Coe has also drawn on the Seven Sisters story in her personal art practice. Before the first Covid lockdown, Western NSW Local Health District commissioned her to create an original work for the new wing of the Condobolin District Hospital. This work, a sequence of traditionally inspired monochrome images of Seven Sisters Ridge encircled by the stars and footprints of local elders, is now installed as a series of decals on the hospital windows. The story associated with these images is told, in the artist's own words, on a small interpretation panel on a wall in the entrance hall. Aunty Bev is currently preparing a new exhibition of large acrylic paintings to re-interpret the Mulayndynang stories yet again.

Bev Coe's work epitomises the multidimensional ways that the Arts and cultural festivals can enrich community life, re-awaken and revitalise cultural heritage, help to heal those who've experienced trauma, and introduce new ways of thinking about the past, present and possible futures. Her work has made a great difference to many people's lives.

We hope to introduce more community cultural development projects to revitalise other aspects of Wiradjuri culture in coming years. These will probably include a series of storytelling workshops

²⁹ See <https://bigskiescollaboration.wordpress.com/projects/condo-skyfest/condo-skyfest-2018/condo-sky-weavings/>, accessed 22 March 2022.

with aspiring tour guides who have a deep knowledge of Wiradjuri traditions and bushcraft but little experience in communicating it to the general public. The second project will, we hope, be a series of workshops with professional astronomer Donna Burton from Milroy Observatory, and Wailwan stargazer Steve Taylor from Cowra. These workshops will also be open to non-Wiradjuri locals to encourage them to develop their own Astro-tourism businesses in Condobolin. We do not yet have funding for either of these projects, however.

Our community cultural development model sets Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya apart from most other cultural festivals in rural and remote communities which, too often, depend on big-name performers, speakers and exhibitors from other towns or cities. SkyFest focuses on local talent and skills development, because we believe that we need to invest in local people if we are to improve the lives of Condobolin's Wiradjuri community and create new cultural, social and economic opportunities for them.

We cannot do this alone, however. We need long-term collaborators and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, including government departments, corporations, educational institutions, non-government agencies, and local businesses and entrepreneurs. And, slowly, we are building these relationships.

2.3 SkyFest as a Tourism experience

Tourism has long been recognised as both a driver and enabler of cultural, social and economic development and revitalisation, especially in small rural and remote towns experiencing population decline, cultural deprivation, and social disadvantage.³⁰ Lachlan Shire has also experienced a long drought, floods, a mouse plague, and the COVID-19 pandemic in the last few years. SkyFest Miima Warrabinya, which incorporates the arts, creativity, community development and tourism, can contribute to the Shire's recovery in very positive ways, as a 2020 publication from the Australia Council for the Arts emphasised:

As our families, communities and nation come to terms with the uncertainty, isolation and social and economic disruption of the world in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the power of the arts and creativity to connect and uplift us, to reduce expenditure across health and social services and to stimulate tourism and local economies, has never been more important.³¹

The tourist industry and visitor economy almost ceased to exist during the COVID-19 pandemic and, at the time of writing, is still in need of government support. The industry itself has changed over the past two years, however. In the absence of cruises and cheap flights to Bali and other exotic overseas destinations, younger Australians developed a taste for driving tours within Australia, as promoted by a series of social media campaigns by the State and Federal departments of tourism. This market sector (young people), like retirees' taste for long road trips (the 'grey

³⁰ Briedenhann, J. and E. Wickens (2004). "Tourism routes as a tool for the economic development of rural areas—vibrant hope or impossible dream?" *Tourism Management* 25: 71-79.

³¹ {Australia Council for the Arts, 2020 #284}.

nomads' phenomenon), is of particular benefit to small inland towns like Condobolin, which are well beyond the 2-3- hour comfort zones of most city-based travellers in the pre-Covid era.

Another recent trend which could benefit Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya is the increased interest in Astro-tourism and stargazing. Most people in Australia and in the rest of the world now live in cities and large towns where the full glory of the night sky has been bleached-out by light and atmospheric pollution. City visitors are often astonished at the brilliance of the Milky Way and other celestial phenomena they can see in places where light pollution is minimal.

At Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya visitors experience the horizon-to-horizon glory of the dark night sky from the grounds of the Wiradjuri Study Centre. They can also be guided around the universe by Steve Taylor, and astronomer Donna Burton (see p. 18). Together, Donna and Steve will be telling stories from both 'Western' scientific and First Nations perspectives. A rare opportunity for most tourists.

Star gazing is about much more than simply looking at the stars and other celestial bodies, and hearing the stories attached to them, however. Exploring the night sky and learning about the scale of the universe can also be an emotional experience. For many people, it can induce the emotions of amazement, wonder and awe which can be as transformative as the 'collective effervescence' that festivals can induce.³² Indeed, a recent column in Astronomy magazine suggested that "Amazement may be the top reason people are into astronomy."³³

Or is it awe? "Awe is so powerful it alters your sense of self, connects you with humanity and boosts your mind and body," New Scientist reported in 2017. "Feeling awestruck can dissolve our very sense of self, bringing a host of benefits from lowering stress and boosting creativity to making us nicer people."³⁴

Recent research has revealed that many tourists are actively seeking feel-good experiences such as these. They want to feel awed and amazed, but more than this, they want to feel they are doing good in the world.³⁵ A recent survey by the Catalyst social and environmental research group found that nearly two thirds of Australians agreed that

It's no longer enough to be sustainable, the tourism industry should be making a positive contribution to communities and natural places.³⁶

At least 60 per cent of respondents to this survey across all demographics, including men, older people, regional Australians, and less affluent households, agreed with this statement. More

³² {Piff, 2015 #344} {Gottlieb, 2018 #349} {McPhetres, 2019 #351} {Craig, 2022 #413}

³³ Bob Berman, Levels of amazement, Astronomy magazine, June 2022, p. 12.

³⁴ {Marchant, 2017 #414}

³⁵ See Marina Laurent, EHL Insights, Regenerative tourism will be at the forefront of the recovery effort <https://hospitalityinsights.ehl.edu/regenerative-tourism>, last accessed 16 May 2021.

³⁶ Childs, C. (2021) Australians are ready for regenerative tourism, is the travel industry? [Glow Feed](https://www.glowfeed.com/2021/10/18/australians-are-ready-for-regenerative-tourism-is-the-travel-industry/) <https://www.glowfeed.com/2021/10/18/australians-are-ready-for-regenerative-tourism-is-the-travel-industry/>

Millennials than other groups supported this view, however, with nearly 70 per cent believing that tourism, and the travel industry in general, should be a force for good. As one of the researchers, Carolyn Childs, CEO of MyTravelResearch.com, concluded

Australians of all kinds are inviting the travel industry to enter a new contract — one that acknowledges communities and nature as partners, rather than resources to be exploited.³⁷

The term regenerative tourism is increasingly used to describe this more holistic and beneficent kind of travel now being championed internationally by groups such as the Future of Tourism Coalition,³⁸ and the France-based Regen (Regenerative Hospitality), which describes itself as

a collective of hospitality practitioners, researchers, architects, scientists, NGOs, and impact investors, dedicated to making travel a force for good by sharing their knowledge, expertise, insights to transform the travel and hospitality economic model into one that is regenerative for all the stakeholders and the Planet.³⁹

Those involved with regenerative tourism measure success not in purely economic terms, but “against the wellbeing of the country, considering nature, human health and community identities,” according to New York Times travel writer Elaine Glusac.⁴⁰ The fresh ideas, expertise, practical support, and economic and social benefits that regenerative tourism offers host communities is potentially life-changing for them, and for visitors and tour operators too,⁴¹ as many New Zealanders are discovering. In 2018, the New Zealand government and its partner organisations launched the Tiaki Promise, and invited visitors to commit to it online:

While travelling in New Zealand

- I will care for Land, Sea and Nature, treading lightly and leaving no trace
- Travel safely showing care and consideration for all
- Respect culture, travelling with an open heart and mind

New Zealand is precious, and everyone who lives and travels here has a responsibility to look after it. The Tiaki Promise is a commitment to care for New Zealand, for now and for future generations.⁴²

Australian government tourism authorities might have missed this trend, however. Although both the Federal and NSW Governments released strategic plans to revive the tourism industry during the Covid lockdowns, they focused almost exclusively on visitor experiences rather than on the needs of local communities and our planet, or visitors’ responsibilities to care for them. These government-promoted strategies also failed to acknowledge the entrenched disadvantage so many rural and remote communities still experience, or the threats from Climate Change and land degradation, for example; and nor do they fully acknowledge the many positive social, cultural and

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See <https://www.futureoftourism.org/>, last accessed 16 May 2022.

³⁹ Regen (Regenerative Hospitality), <https://regenhospitality.com/>, last accessed 26 May 2022.

For the guiding principles for Regenerative Tourism, see <https://www.futureoftourism.org/guiding-principles>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Elaine Glusac, 2021, Move Over, Sustainable Travel, Regenerative Travel has arrived, New York Times, 27 August 2020, updated, 25 February 2021. Last accessed 26 May 2022: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/27/travel/travel-future-coronavirus-sustainable.html>

⁴² Tiaki New Zealand, Tiaki means to care for people, place and culture, <https://www.tiakinewzealand.com/>, last accessed 26 May 2022.

economic contributions visitors can make to rural and remote communities when they engage personally with locals.

The government strategies at least recognise that, to successfully revive the tourist industry, State and Federal agencies must collaborate with *all* stakeholders, including First Peoples.⁴³ The NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030, for example, commits Destination NSW to

Develop and deliver an annual state-wide program of workshops, mentoring and other business support to foster the growth and sustainability of the Aboriginal cultural tourism sector,⁴⁴

and to

Partner with the NSW Aboriginal Tourism Operators Council (NATOC) and Aboriginal tourism stakeholders to make NSW Australia's premier destination for Aboriginal tourism by showcasing and developing authentic, accessible, high-quality, and compelling visitor experiences.⁴⁵

WCC and Big Skies Collaboration are developing a program of unique cultural tours with the local community and will be seeking support from Destination NSW to ensure that these tours do, in fact, offer "authentic, accessible, high-quality and compelling visitor experiences."

The Australian Government's draft recovery strategy describes the conventional tourism industry/visitor economy as, "a complex ecosystem of many stakeholders".⁴⁶ At a local level, this 'ecosystem' depends on the host communities' cultural and natural endowments and on the vision, entrepreneurial zeal, commitment, skills, and financial resources of entrepreneurs and tour operators who can develop and package these 'resources' into marketable 'products'. It also depends on a diverse range of local businesses and contractors who can provide the services, amenities, knowledge, and expertise that traditional tourists have come to expect. Unfortunately, these services, amenities, knowledge, and expertise are not always available in remote inland towns like Condobolin.

Such gaps are of great concern to WCC, Big Skies Collaboration and our partners because, to develop Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya into a world-class experience, we would need the same range of professional services, expertise and support that organisers of current world-class tourist events take for granted -- but this is not yet possible in Condobolin.

The scale of our predicament became glaringly apparent in 2021 when Central NSW Joint Organisation of Councils (which includes Lachlan Shire Council) commissioned a Sydney-based

⁴³ Australian Government and Australian Trade and Investment Commission (2021). Thrive 2030 - The Re-Imagined Visitor Economy: A national strategy for Australia's visitor economy recovery and return to sustainable growth – 2022-2030 DRAFT. Canberra.

⁴⁴ {NSW Government, 2022 #397}

⁴⁵ {NSW Government, 2022 #397}

⁴⁶ Australian Government and Australian Trade and Investment Commission (2021). Thrive 2030 - The Re-Imagined Visitor Economy: A national strategy for Australia's visitor economy recovery and return to sustainable growth – 2022-2030 DRAFT. Canberra.

public relations company to promote Condo SkyFest throughout Australia and beyond. (This was, of course, before the second round of COVID-19 restrictions forced us to cancel SkyFest yet again.) As a result of this campaign, Tourism Australia and Destination NSW both published articles about SkyFest in their widely distributed newsletters. Tourism Australia described our festival thus:

In the heart of Wiradjuri Country in New South Wales, the small town of Condobolin is preparing for its biggest annual event, Condo Skyfest: Miima Warrabinya ... from 3 to 5 September 2021. This free immersive celebration of Wiradjuri heritage is a must for anyone with an interest in learning more about ancient night skies and celebrating Aboriginal culture.⁴⁷

The Destination NSW article added more details:

This immersive celebration of 65,000+ years of Wiradjuri heritage invites guests to learn more about the ancient night skies and celebrate Aboriginal culture. The program features special sky-dances, live music, boomerang throwing, a parade of illuminated sky-lanterns, workshops on Wiradjuri language, Aboriginal art exhibitions and food, and stargazing with professional astronomers. Now in its third year, the event brings together people of all backgrounds from throughout Central West NSW and beyond to celebrate Wiradjuri culture and heritage.⁴⁸

Other newsletters, blogs, magazines and newspapers published their own SkyFest stories based on a campaign press release. Australian Traveller magazine highlighted Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya as a cultural astronomy and astro-tourism event, for example:

SkyFest in Condobolin in September features more of the stargazing and storytelling that shows our fascination with the night sky through the eyes and stories of our First Nations people.⁴⁹

SkyFest stories also appeared in Bathurst's Western Advocate,⁵⁰ Caravan World,⁵¹ Hema Maps e-newsletter,⁵² the Travel Industry's Global Media Network's TravMedia,⁵³ and Arts OutWest's newsletter, ArtSpeak, and other publications.

⁴⁷ 'Condo SkyFest celebrating local Aboriginal culture this September,' Tourism Australia Update, Essentials e-newsletter 14 July 2021, <https://www.tourism.australia.com/content/dam/digital/corporate/documents/essentials-14-july-2021.pdf>

⁴⁸ Destination NSW Insights e-newsletter: Tourism & Events Industry News, 9 July 2021, 'Spotlight on Condobolin and SkyFest Miima Warrabinya,' <https://createsend.com/t/r-6DC9B281162795D02540EF23F30FEDED>, last viewed 25 October 2021.

⁴⁹ Australian Traveller, Star Attractions of Central NSW, 8 March 2021: <https://centralnsw.com/australian-traveller-names-star-attractions-of-central-nsw/>, last viewed 28 October 2021.

⁵⁰ Steven Cavanagh, Western Advocate, Upcoming Condo Event Is Reaching For The Sky, 20 July 2021: <https://www.westernadvocate.com.au/story/7348218/the-arts-upcoming-condo-event-is-reaching-for-the-sky/>, last viewed 25 October 2021

⁵¹ Caravan World, <https://www.pressreader.com/australia/caravan-world-australia/20210805/281797107038793>, last viewed 25 October 2021

⁵² Hema Maps e-newsletter, September Events, Visit Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya: <https://shop.hemamaps.com/blogs/community-news-and-events/september-news-events-2021>, last viewed 28 October 2021

⁵³ TravMedia: The Travel Industry's Global Media Network, 30 March 2021, The Best Places and Events to Stargaze in Central NSW: <https://travmedia.com/showPRPreview/100080261>, last viewed 28 October 2021

Jenny Bennett, Executive Officer of the Joint Organisation, welcomed the success of the Joint Organisation's campaign; as she told the Condobolin Argus newspaper, it showed that "Visitors are hungry for authentic Indigenous experiences:"

Especially events like Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya where the local community gets involved to share their stories and talents in engaging and inspiring ways.⁵⁴

Former CEO of Tourism Australia, John Morse AM, agreed, but suggested that the increased interest in First Nations tourism was a consequence of the COVID-19 bans on overseas and interstate travel.⁵⁵ The 2020 Australia Council report, Domestic Arts Tourism: Connecting the Country, pointed out, however, that interest in First Nations events and experiences was high even before the restrictions:

Prior to COVID-19, one in five Australians attended First Nations festivals. In 2019, 3.9 million Australians attended a First Nations festival, or 19% of the population aged 15 years and over.⁵⁶

The Joint Organisation's promotion, gratifying though it was, forced us to acknowledge that WCC and its partner organisation, Lachlan Shire Council, had neither the personnel nor the expertise to fulfil the expectations the campaign was generating. We were confident, however, that, with long-term investment in capacity building and support to overcome these gaps, WCC and its partners could grow Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya into a celebration of Wiradjuri culture to serve the needs of the local Wiradjuri community, as well as tourism operators, local businesses, and non-Indigenous visitors.

For tourists and other visitors, SkyFest is a rare opportunity to experience contemporary Wiradjuri culture and heritage in authentic and engaging ways, and to experience the awe, wonder, amazement, happiness and curiosity that the night sky inspires. It's also an opportunity for settler descendants to embrace the feel-good values of the Closing the Gap campaign, Black Lives Matter, Reconciliation, the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the life-affirming principles of regenerative tourism. For the Wiradjuri Condobolin community, SkyFest it is all these things as well as a safe space to re-awaken, revitalise and share their traditional cultural knowledge and practices, and celebrate and affirm their identities.⁵⁷ In all these

⁵⁴ Condobolin Argus, posted 4 August 2021, Condo SkyFest Postponed: <https://condobolinargus.com.au/condo-skyfest-postponed/>, last viewed 28 October 2021

⁵⁵ Melissa Martin and Fiona Poole, COVID-19 credited with rising interest in Indigenous cultural awareness and tourism, ABC News Online, 11 February 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-11/covid-19-creates-a-boom-in-indigenous-culture-and-tourism/13140280>, accessed 18 February 2022

⁵⁶ Australia Council for the Arts (2020). First Nations Factsheet - Creating our Future: Results of the Nation Arts Participation Survey. Sydney, Australia Council, Australian Government, p. 2.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Nicole Curtin and Steven Bird (2021), "We are reconciliators": When Indigenous tourism begins with agency, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, accessed 15 October 2021: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09669582.2021.1903908>.

Also see Sonya Graci et al., (2019) Thoughts from the think tank: lessons learned from the sustainable Indigenous tourism symposium, *Journal of Ecotourism*, vol. 20, 2021, issue 2: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14724049.2019.1583754>, last viewed 25 October

ways, Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya can truly be a force for good -- for locals, for visitors, and for our planet.

2.4 SkyFest as Cultural Astronomy

The night sky is part of humanity's universal cultural and natural heritage. Since time immemorial, we humans have projected our most profound hopes and fears onto celestial phenomena and encoded our most profound knowledge, beliefs, and traditions into the stories we've told about them. For Australia's First Peoples, the stars, planets, constellations, gas clouds and other celestial phenomena are imbued with religious, metaphysical, and secular significance. Over tens of thousands of years, Wiradjuri people have connected Heaven and Earth in a web of stories and encoded into them all the knowledge, customs and lore their people needed to survive and flourish on south-eastern Australia's riverine plains. These stories told people how to behave, how to stay safe, how to live their best lives, how their world was created, and what happened to them when they died, for example.

Other stories held more scientific and practical knowledge about using the movement of the stars and planets to measure time, herald special events, mark the seasons and lifecycles of totemic plants and animals, forecast the weather, and navigate their way to and from distant places.⁵⁸ People recounted these stories in song, dance, paintings, carvings and weavings to pass the knowledge on from one generation to the next. As cultural astronomer Duane Hamacher told ABC News back in 2016,

You see these stories, you hear the stories, you see the songs and dances and they're beautiful, they're poetic but that's not really what they're meant to be, it's a great way of learning stuff and passing it on but within those traditions there is a lot of scientific knowledge.⁵⁹

Tragically, the ravages of colonisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries blocked the transmission of too many of the stories that held this ancient knowledge. Wiradjuri communities are now re-awakening, reclaiming and re-interpreting their astronomical heritage with the support of traditional knowledge holders and university-trained cultural astronomers, astrophysicists and cosmologists, however. The Wiradjuri name for Condo SkyFest - Miima Warrabinya or Seeking the (Lost) Stars - alludes to this process of re-discovery and renewal.

Several Wiradjuri creatives contribute to this process through their arts and crafts practices in Condobolin. Big Skies Collaborator Marion Wighton-Packham, a teacher at Condobolin Primary School, has used dance and lantern-making to teach her students about Wiradjuri constellations, for example. Another Big Skies Collaborator, Aunty Beverley Coe, has been creating works inspired by Wiradjuri skylore, as we've already mentioned. Aunty Bev also works with other local women to pass on this knowledge through arts and crafts at the Condo SistaShed at the Wiradjuri Study Centre. (See Section 2.2 for more on Marion Wighton-Packham and Aunty Bev's work.)

⁵⁸ {Hamacher, 2011 #399}

⁵⁹ Cultural Astronomer Duane Hamacher speaking with Larissa Romensky for ABC News {Romensky, 2016 #401} See <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-03/astronomy-the-center-point-of-indigenous-culture/7476208>

On a less traditional note, SkyFest 2022 will feature Space Play, an interactive 3-D projection of the solar system created by Big Skies Collaborator David Clarkson, creative director of Sydney's Stalker Theatre, and his Box of Birds team. This awe-inspiring augmented reality work attracted 6,000 people at Adelaide's Science Alive in 2021.⁶⁰ For Condo SkyFest, it will be projected onto a wall of shipping containers where participants will be able to interact with 3D images of the planets, moons, asteroids and other celestial phenomena. The creators hope their work will inspire young Wiradjui people to consider careers in astronomy, space science or astrophysics, or as storytellers working with augmented reality and other contemporary technologies.

Stargazing and astronomical science have been part of the SkyFest program since our inaugural event in 2018. This year, 2022, we hope to expand our Astro-STEAM⁶¹ offerings with afternoon workshops in the Wiradjuri Study Centre's small auditorium, or in more informal campfire settings. The workshops will include an online tour of the night sky with Donna Burton, aka Donna the Astronomer (Donna Burton) and Steve Taylor. We'll also be offering workshops with physicist Dr Tatiana Bonch from Sydney, science communicator Luke Steller from the University of NSW, and possibly other guest presenters.

On Saturday night, Donna and Steve will lead our live stargazing sessions in a sheltered grove within the Wiradjuri Study Centre grounds. An open invitation has been extended to amateur and professional astronomers from throughout the region to share their knowledge and experience, and enjoy the fellowship of others astronomers and stargazers under Condobolin's night sky.

The inclusion of astronomy and STEAM outreach in the Condo SkyFest program supports efforts by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to 'Close the Gap' between the learning outcomes of First Nations and non-indigenous students in Australian schools. ACARA recently introduced cultural astronomy into the school curriculum to ensure that First Nations students can see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected in their courses in ways that encourage their participation and enhance their self-esteem. The cultural astronomy curriculum also ensures that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, learn to recognise and respect "the world's oldest continuous living cultures" and engage in the processes of reconciliation.⁶²

As well as traditional Wiradjuri astronomy, SkyFest celebrates recent discoveries by twenty-first-century astronomers and astrophysicists, who have radically changed our understanding of the universe. We now know, for example, that most of the elements that make up visible matter,

⁶⁰ See <https://www.stalker.com.au/news>, accessed 11 March 2021.

⁶¹ STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, **Arts**, and Mathematics. Combining Arts and Humanities subjects with traditional STEM subjects promotes creative and critical thinking which are as important in Science, Mathematics and Engineering as they are in any other field of human endeavour.

⁶² ACARA, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

<https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/cross-curriculum-priorities/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-histories-and-cultures/>, last accessed 8 February 2022.

Also see Krystal de Napoli, Indigenous astronomy to revitalise the Australian curriculum, IndigenousX, 8 December 2018, <https://indigenoux.com.au/indigenous-astronomy-to-revitalise-the-australian-curriculum/>, last accessed 11 March 2022.

including we humans, were created in the stars, most of them in stellar explosions known as supernovas or in kilonovas, the unimaginably powerful blasts of energy released when two neutron stars, or a neutron star and a black hole collide.⁶³ This new knowledge is relevant to Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya because Wiradjuri Country is extremely rich in gold and the critical minerals the world needs if we are to transition to a zero-carbon economy,⁶⁴ most of which were ‘cooked’ in exploding stars.

Some of Australia’s richest critical mineral prospects have been found just 50 km from Condobolin near the historic village of Fifield, where several companies are preparing to mine the minerals required for electric cars, batteries, smartphones, and satellites, for example. This fortuitous concentration of useful minerals in Lachlan Shire is expected to transform Condobolin’s economic, social and cultural life over the next decade. For Wiradjuri people, this boom represents both opportunities and a potential threat to Country. Our Miima-Gu Ngaahna Regenerative Futures Expo (Section 2.8) addresses this conundrum.

2.5 SkyFest as Wiradjuri Gastronomy

Our 2022 Condo SkyFest will open on the evening of Friday 2 September with a Gala Dinner of traditional Wiradjuri food prepared by Juru chef, Gerald Power, and his crew from Indigenous Cultural Adventures in the regional city of Orange.⁶⁵ Gerald will be assisted by Wiradjuri trainees from WCC’s Galari Agricultural Company. The menu will include foods that Wiradjuri people have been enjoying for tens of thousands of years, such as Golden Perch (Yellow Belly), yabbies, kangaroo meat, saltbush and wattle seeds, along with native and introduced vegetables and spices, damper, and Wiradjuri-inspired dessert and non-alcoholic beverages. Diners will also be able to preview SkyFest exhibitions and performances and enjoy an after-dinner tour of the universe with our resident astronomers.

The Gala Dinner offers diners, especially those representing corporations, government departments, non-government agencies, educational institutions, and local and regional businesses, a valuable networking opportunity in a relaxed and convivial environment on the Wiradjuri Study Centre veranda. We hope it will also inspire some of them to sponsor SkyFest events to help us ensure the financial viability of this festival (See Section 2.8). Bookings can be made via 123tix.com.au.

2.6 SkyFest as Language Renewal

The year 2022 is the beginning of the United Nation’s Decade of Indigenous Languages, an initiative designed

⁶³ <https://news.mit.edu/2021/neutron-star-collisions-goldmine-heavy-elements-1025>

⁶⁴ {Bruce S, 2021 #403}

⁶⁵ See Carla Grossetti, Australian Traveller, Gerald Power on why he started Indigenous Cultural Adventures, last updated 26 November 2021: <https://www.australiantraveller.com/nsw/central-west/orange/gerald-power-on-why-he-started-indigenous-cultural-adventures/>, last accessed 26 May 2022.

to draw global attention on the critical situation of many indigenous languages and to mobilise stakeholders and resources for their preservation, revitalisation and promotion.⁶⁶

For many years, Wiradjuri people were punished for speaking their language in Condobolin and other places. Because of this, most were too afraid to pass the language on to their children and grandchildren. This break in transmission meant that the Wiradjuri language and other cultural knowledge ‘went to sleep’ in Condobolin, as it did in many other First Nations communities.

Now, however, Wiradjuri language is being re-awakened and revived in Condobolin and elsewhere – thanks to the activism of community leaders and the support of both Federal and State Governments.⁶⁷ The historic NSW *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017*, which finally came into force in 2020, for example, confirms that

- (a) The languages of the first peoples of the land comprising New South Wales are an integral part of the world’s oldest living culture and connect Aboriginal people to each other and to their land.
- (b) As a result of past Government decisions Aboriginal languages were almost lost, but they were spoken in secret and passed on through Aboriginal families and communities.
- (c) Aboriginal people will be reconnected with their culture and heritage by the re-awakening, growing and nurturing of Aboriginal languages.
- (d) Aboriginal languages are part of the cultural heritage of New South Wales.
- (e) It is acknowledged that Aboriginal people are the custodians of Aboriginal languages and have the right to control their growth and nurturing.⁶⁸

Wiradjuri is now being taught in local schools, at Condobolin TAFE, and at Charles Sturt University’s Wagga campus, which offers an award-winning Graduate Certificate in Wiradjuri Language, Culture and Heritage. SkyFest contributes to this process of re-awakening, growing and nurturing Wiradjuri language through the WCC Language Program,⁶⁹ which works with language groups to develop educational resources and promote the benefits of learning ancestral languages.

The psychological, social and economic benefits of maintaining or reclaiming ancestral languages are well recognised. As the Australian Human Rights Commission’s Social Justice Report demonstrated more than a decade ago, maintaining ancestral languages

- promotes resilience
- improves health
- improves cognitive functioning
- increases employment options
- reduces costs and compensation claims, and
- has intrinsic value⁷⁰

⁶⁶ UNESCO, Welcome to the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, <https://en.unesco.org/idi2022-2032>, last accessed 26 May 2021

⁶⁷ See <https://www.alt.nsw.gov.au/>, accessed 11 February 2022

⁶⁸ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aboriginal_Languages_Act_2017 last accessed 9 February 2022.

⁶⁹ See WCC Language Program site, <https://wccpl.com.au/> accessed 8 February 2022.

⁷⁰ <https://www.firstlanguages.org.au/about/why-maintain-languages>

The 2020 National Indigenous Languages Report similarly found that recognising and validating these languages increases First People's pride in their culture, increases students' confidence and engagement in schools, and increases trust in the institutions that use and promote traditional languages. Individuals who can speak their ancestral languages also reported feeling more socially connected, happier and more engaged with their communities.

Other research suggests that the social benefits of maintaining or learning ancestral languages "may include healing and enhanced family and community functionality."⁷¹ The use of these languages in education, business, land management, tourism, hospitality and other service sectors has also been shown to increase productivity and competitiveness.⁷²

For all these reasons and more language renewal is an integral part of Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya. The 2022 program includes several language workshops for the general public hosted by the Wiradjuri Language Program, performances of new songs in Wiradjuri and English completed through our Gaalmdhaay Songmakers Project (see Section 2.2), and a pair of very bold Wiradjuri-speaking puppets operated by Dr Petal Love and Ruth Davy, co-founders of the Albury-based production company Giilangyaldhaanygalang.⁷³ All festival participants, regardless of their ages and backgrounds, will therefore have multiple opportunities to read and listen to Wiradjuri language at Condo SkyFest 2022. Some might even learn a few new Wiradjuri words.

2.7 SkyFest as Closing The Gap

Although many Wiradjuri families in Lachlan Shire are doing well, others continue to experience racism, trauma, social and economic disadvantage, family dysfunction, poor mental and physical health, premature death, substance use disorder, disability, and incarceration at significantly higher rates than the rest of the Shire's population. Nationally, the health statistics for First Peoples remain alarming. The 2020 report from the Close the Gap Campaign for Indigenous Health Equality (Close the Gap Campaign) showed that the life expectancy gap for First Nations males was still 8.6 years and 7.8 years for females, and the disease burden for First Nations people was 2.3 times higher than for non-Indigenous Australians. The leading causes of this burden were mental disorders, substance use, injuries (including suicide), cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and respiratory diseases.⁷⁴

In a renewed effort to address these inequalities, the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations signed a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap with all Australian governments in 2020.⁷⁵ Many different groups and organisations were part of this effort, including the Lowitja Institute, First Peoples Disability Network, the Change The Record campaign,

⁷¹ Office of the Arts, 2020, National Indigenous Languages Report, Chapter 2, Benefits from speaking language, <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/national-indigenous-languages-report>, last accessed 9 December, 2021.

⁷² Office of the Arts, 2020, National Indigenous Languages Report, Chapter 2, Benefits from speaking language, <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/national-indigenous-languages-report>, last accessed 9 December, 2021.

⁷³ See <https://www.giilangyaldhaanygalang.com/> accessed 11 February 2022

⁷⁴ {Lowitja Institute, 2020 #415}

⁷⁵ {Lowitja Institute 2021}

Blak Lives Matter, and other organisations serving First Nations communities in Condobolin and elsewhere.

At a local scale, Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya is attempting to address some of the Closing the Gap goals through our cultural revitalisation program. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the 2021 workshops conducted by local and visiting Arts professionals in contemporary Indigenous dance, weaving, songwriting, and lantern-making improved participants' physical and psychological wellbeing and catalysed new opportunities and aspirations for them, for example.⁷⁶

Academic research into the benefits of First Nations community festivals confirms what we have observed in Condobolin. A recent Closing The Gap document listed the following:

improved physical and mental health and wellbeing; increased social inclusion and cohesion; some improvements in school retention and attitudes towards learning; increased validation of, and connection to, culture; improved social and cognitive skills; and some evidence of crime reduction.⁷⁷

The Australia Council for the Arts 2018 submission to Closing the Gap Refresh reported the following tangible and intangible benefits of participating in cultural activities:

empowerment, capacity building, social capital, exposure to positive role models, cultural security, cultural confidence, local leadership, economic opportunities and pride in Indigenous identity.⁷⁸

The Australia Council submission continued:

The evidence is clear that First Nations arts and cultural participation can support: the development of strong and resilient First Nations children; improved school attendance and engagement; higher levels of educational attainment; improved physical and mental health and wellbeing; greater social inclusion and cohesion; more employment, economic opportunities and meaningful work; safer communities with reductions in crime and improved rehabilitation; as well as the prevention of suicide – fostering a secure sense of cultural identity is a powerful protective factor against self-harm for young First Nations people and helps First Nations children and young people to navigate racism and being a minority group in their own country.⁷⁹

Those of us involved with Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya remain committed to ensuring that this festival focuses on the needs of First Nations families in Condobolin and the region and demonstrably improves their lives. But developing and sustaining new cultural initiatives in small inland communities is not easy, and nor can it be done quickly. As another Closing The Gap report emphasises,

Arts programs require long-term, sustained and regular contact between arts professionals and participants to allow time to consolidate new skills and benefits that flow from involvement in the program.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Authors' personal communications, 2021-22

⁷⁷ Ware, V. A. (2014), Supporting healthy communities through the Arts: Resource sheet no. 28 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

⁷⁸ Australia Council of the Arts. (2018), Submission to Closing the Gap Refresh. Sydney: Australia Council of the Arts.

⁷⁹ (Australia Council for the Arts 2018)

⁸⁰ Ware, V. A. (2014), Supporting healthy communities through the Arts: Resource sheet no. 28 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Our experience with Condo SkyFests 2018 and 2019, and now with the lead-up to SkyFest 2022, has shown that, without “long-term, sustained and regular contact between ... professionals and participants”, plus time for locals “to consolidate new skills and benefits,” Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya will never fulfil its potential.

As discussed in Section 1.3, SkyFest organisers favour the multi-helix collaboration development model, which involves meaningful collaboration between all levels of government, non-government organisations, educational institutions, the corporate sector, local business partners and community groups. With such collaboration, we believe we can develop Condo SkyFest into a world-class First Nations celebration of culture and continuity on Country to benefit the Wiradjuri Condobolin community, and other remote First Nations communities in Inland New South Wales.

2.8 SkyFest as Regenerative Futures Expo

Lachlan Shire is about to experience a renewable energy and critical minerals boom, which will transform local economies and help drive Australia and the world’s transition to a net-zero emissions future,⁸¹ as we’ve already noted. Some of the region’s richest mineral prospects are near the historic village of Fifield, some 50 km from Condobolin, where several companies are preparing to mine cobalt, nickel, scandium, gold, silver, and platinum. One company, Sunrise Energy Metals, is investing \$2.4 billion to mine nickel, cobalt and scandium and develop a battery materials processing and recycling facility at Fifield, for example.⁸²

For WCC and Big Skies Collaboration, this imminent boom presents a timely opportunity to identify regional change-makers committed to co-creating a safer, healthier, net-zero carbon future, and invite them to showcase their products and services, promote their future visions, and engage with locals and visitors at SkyFest’s inaugural Miima-Gu Ngaahna (Reaching for the Stars) Regenerative Futures Expo. Invitees are expected to include the new generation of miners developing the region’s critical minerals, precious metals and rare earth deposits, ‘green’ manufacturers, renewable energy producers, food and fibre producers, green corporations, and government agencies, non-government organisations, educational institutions supporting the shift towards regenerative processes, along with small businesses, health professionals, natural resource managers, scientists, science communicators, arts and crafts practitioners, community organisations, First Nations entrepreneurs, and other groups and individuals promoting regenerative modes of production and healthy ways of living. The Regenerative Futures Expo will also be an opportunity for WCC to share some of its own projects, including the Galari Agricultural youth training program on its farm at Lake Cowal.⁸³

⁸¹ Critical minerals mined or about to be mined in Lachlan Local Government Area include gold, copper, cobalt, platinum, nickel and scandium. Lachlan Shire Council approved its first solar farm with battery storage in 2021.

⁸² See David Carroll, \$2.4 billion battery minerals complex granted major project status, PV Magazine, 3 December 2021; <https://www.pv-magazine-australia.com/2021/12/03/2-4-billion-battery-minerals-complex-granted-major-project-status/>, accessed 25 May 2022.

⁸³ See <https://evolutionmining.com.au/case-study/wiradjuri-condobolin-corporation-galari-agricultural-company-business-at-cowal/>, viewed 16 December 2021.

Prospective exhibitors will be able to book booth space online at 123tix.com.au, or via the QR code on Facebook/CondoSkyFest and the SkyFest poster, or by contacting the Wiradjuri Study Centre. Site prices range from \$10 for community members to \$500 for large corporate sites. Wifi and other amenities will be included in the fee. Exhibitors can either provide their own booths or hire them via the 123tix site. We'll also be offering exhibitors opportunities to sponsor future SkyFest events and experiences.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This document has presented abundant evidence for the multiple benefits that cultural festivals, such as Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya, produce for First Nations communities and small remote communities like Condobolin. As we have shown, these positive outcomes include:

- improved mental and physical wellbeing
- a heightened sense of cultural pride
- confidence and a sense of belonging
- capacity building, skills development, and knowledge sharing
- diversion from self-harm and other negative social behaviours
- improved school attendance and engagement
- 'collective effervescence', positive emotions associated with doing good in the world
- experiences of awe, amazement and wonder
- fresh visions of a decarbonised future
- all the economic and social benefits tourists bring to remote communities

What sets Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya apart from other First Nations festivals, in practical terms, however, includes the following:

- our community cultural development ethos
- collaborative approach
- predominantly Wiradjuri programming
- active re-awakening and reclaiming of 'lost' traditions, including language, stories, and astronomy
- diverse cultural heritage, arts, crafts, STEAM and Wiradjuri language workshops
- exhibitions focussing on works by local artists and makers
- the regenerative futures expo

We believe that Condo SkyFest Miima Warrabinya can become a world-class annual celebration of 65,000+ years of Wiradjuri Cultural heritage on Country. It can enrich local people's lives, catalyse new opportunities, strengthen capabilities, and drive positive change in the spirit of Yinnyamarra Winhanganha (The wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in).

We also believe that Miima-gu Ngaahna (Reaching for the Stars) Regenerative Futures Expo can become a nationally significant space where regional change-makers in diverse fields, including the mining, agriculture and education industries, can showcase and share their regenerative futures products and services. Some exhibitors might also like to sponsor future SkyFest events and experiences.

To achieve these goals, we need significant financial and in-kind support from multiple sponsors and collaborators. We would be very grateful for your help.

References are available on request.

This Statement of Purposes was developed by Dr Merrill Findlay in collaboration with WCC CEO, Harold (Ally) Coe, for Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation and Big Skies Collaboration.

June 2022

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