

Mayor Liz Innes
PO Box 99, MORUYA 2537
mayor@esc.nsw.gov.au



Dear Mayor

I write on behalf of A Better Eurobodalla concerning access to exhibition spaces by the arts community and particularly local artists, not-for-profit community organisations and art collectives. Eurobodalla has a diverse and vibrant arts and crafts community that contributes to the well-being and social capital of our region and attracts visitors. This was recognised in Council's own Creative Arts Strategy, 2019 which states:

We will have places and spaces that are appropriate and affordable, catering to arts practitioners who work in a range of mediums, both professional and community based, celebrating our creative life and identity.

ABE's community engagement has highlighted a continuing concern for artists and craft people concerning the dearth of affordable exhibition spaces to display their works and conduct public events. Many of our arts community live on strictly limited incomes and are unable to finance exhibitions in the limited venues available to them. In addition, the many not-for-profit organisations that support our artists as members are similarly disadvantaged.

Progress on the following actions in the Creative Arts Strategy could address some of the issues raised, particularly if these actions were undertaken in consultation with the arts community:

Action 7: Review Shire assets (Council and others) and develop a hierarchy of facilities suitable for creative arts activities and events; and

Action 8: Review existing facility hire fees, in line with identified hierarchy, to enable the appropriate spaces for creative arts activities.

ABE's own review of suitable Council facilities shows that the community halls in Bodalla, Tuross (Kyla Hall), Batemans Bay (Hanging Rock), Malua Bay, Dalmeny and Narooma are not ideal exhibition spaces due to heavy regular use by community groups and a lack of hanging and lighting systems. While not ideal for all artists, venues fees ranging from \$345 to \$ 545 for a 2-day, one night exhibition, should be reviewed for use by local artists and not for profit organisations to encourage arts activities across the shire. While the proposed Batemans Bay Regional Aquatic Arts and Leisure Centre should provide a sliding scale of fees for not for profit groups, this does not address the broader shire-wide need for Council support for the arts community.

In addition, the closure of the Batemans Bay and Narooma Visitors Centres by Council has resulted in the loss of exhibition space for 2 important local art groups, MACS and CABBI.

In Moruya, while the BAS provides an exciting space for some artists there are many who cannot exhibit there. The business model for the BAS is based on charges and a selective

exhibition program that precludes many local artists and not-for-profit groups from using the facility.

ABE understands that Council has been successful in gaining CASP funds to assist a small number of local artists (who were unsuccessful in their applications to the BAS) to exhibit their work in the Mechanics Institute in Moruya this year. This is a fine initiative that provides funding to cover some costs accrued to the artists, such as public liability insurance, with Council also waiving its fees for the Institute rental. However, this exception highlights the recurring problem for artists more generally.

In previous years the Mechanics Institute used to host many art exhibitions and events but now is rarely used due to the high rents charged by Council for this facility. Previously the hiring fees for the Mechanics Institute were set low which encouraged regular use of the facility by local artists and not-for-profit organisations. This is no longer the case, with the fees ranging from \$345 (2 days) to \$440 (one week) pricing many potential users out of the facility which is empty for most of the year.

ABE has canvassed a number of arts organisations in the shire to discuss hiring fees for the Council-run facilities listed above, as applied to local artists, local art collectives and not-for-profit organisations. MACS, CABBI, River of Art and the Arts Council of the Eurobodalla all support a review of charges as a priority. Such a review should also encompass the proposal for Eurobodalla Shire Council developing and supporting a public liability insurance package for artists using council exhibition facilities.

Yours sincerely

Bernie O'Neil
Co-convenor
ABE

10/5/21

cc: MACS, CABBI, River of Art and the Arts Council of the Eurobodalla