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# Open letter

January 21, 2022

To the Premier of Tasmania, hon. Peter Gutwein.

Cc: Dr Mark Veitch, director of Public Health

## Events and Public Health in 2022

In 2021, the Tasmanian agricultural show circuit was severely impacted by government Covid restrictions. Only 7 of 23 state-wide agricultural shows proceeded last year.

Our sector now invites the Tasmanian Government to challenge its previous thinking on Covid-19 given the new reality that has emerged since Tasmanian borders re-opened in December.

If local Tasmanian events are to survive 2022 – the third year of the pandemic - a co-operative effort needs to be made based on the principal that local events will proceed this year, and will proceed in a safe and financially sustainable manner.

If it is safe to hold an Ashes test in Hobart, or AFL games, or other "celebrity" events, then it must also be safe to hold an open-air agricultural show in regional Tasmania.

Local Tasmanian events currently remain under severe restrictions designed to stop the spread of the virus, whereas the virus is now active in every corner of the state. Last year's strategy now needs to be adjusted to the new realities.

The Minister for Health said in a news release dated 4 January 2022: "The evidence overwhelmingly shows that while the Omicron strain is highly transmissible, we're seeing much milder and less severe effects."

It is therefore logical – and crucial to the future of local events - that we revisit the strict limitations placed on Tasmanian events last year, especially given the more lenient treatment, together with active Government encouragement, for celebrity events in Tasmania such as the AFL and the cricket.

When agricultural show organisers – and other event organisers – called a meeting last November to work out an events frame work for 2022, the Government declined to attend, citing in writing that ministers were too busy.

We now call for a round table, consultative conference, involving the Premier and relevant ministers, agency officials, and representatives of agricultural shows and other events, to set a new frame work based on three principles:

- that local events should be encouraged to proceed in 2022
- they should proceed in a safe manner
- restrictions should not be of such a degree that it is organisationally or financially impossible to proceed.

In 2021, the Tasmanian Government also expressed a willingness to consider the underwriting of Tasmanian events. No further updates on this matter have been received from the Government. This is now a crucial issue, given that the re-opening of the state by the Government has engendered widespread community hesitancy about attending organised events. The Government should also work with the events industry to restore the confidence of the public.

Last year, many local event organisers found that excessive bureaucratic impositions, together with a lack of consultation or support, made the approvals process too complex and/or in the final analysis, a financial burden that would make the event operate in the red.

In the case of the Royal Hobart Show, the state government encouraged it to proceed because it recognised the importance to the community of a local events calendar. It supported the Show with some funding, but the Show lost a day due to a sudden Government lock down in southern Tasmania, and was a financial loss. This is unsustainable into the future, even for a major local event such as the Royal Hobart Show.

Without a commitment to developing a workable and sustainable Tasmanian event frame work, many Tasmanian events could be lost forever if the uncertainty and chaos of the last two years extends into a third year.

Over the Christmas holidays, many local and regional events were cancelled due to Government restrictions. Other events proceeded, but at some of them, social distancing and mask wearing appeared to be unenforced. Overlaying this difficult landscape, the Government proactively encourages major national and international events to occur in Tasmania.

The first of 23 Tasmanian agricultural shows are now just weeks away. At least one show has already been cancelled, and two others postponed until later in the year.

The Government must work with the community to ensure the survival of events – some of them annual events up to 200 years old. There is currently an unlevel playing field. Some local events are being restricted to stop the spread of Covid-19, when Covid-19 is now dominant state-wide, while other events are officially encouraged, endorsed, and supported by Government.

Ground rules for 2022 need to be established now, at the start of the year, that recognise the new landscape, and the importance of local events to the fabric of communities all over the state. These rules need to be worked out in cooperation between event organisers and government, and need to recognise the requirement that an event be financially viable, while also making the event Covid safe within the context of an Australian state which is now fully exposed to the virus.

While most agricultural shows were cancelled last year, the seven that did manage to proceed resulted in not a single case of Covid-19. The rules that will apply to public events in 2022 must be proportional to the risk profile. In reality, the risk now exists within every community in Tasmania.

We look forward to your response and stand ready to meet at any time.

Scott Gadd, President, TAG



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## Media Release January 20, 2022

# Tasmania's Troubled Events Landscape 2022

Tasmania has 23 state-wide annual agricultural shows. Only 7 proceeded last year due to rigid Covid restrictions imposed by the State government. Three weeks into 2022 and one show has already been cancelled while two others have been postponed in the hope they can proceed later in the year.

Other non-agricultural events, all over the state, have been forced to cancel this year or to postpone in the hope that conditions and restrictions will improve.

Tasmania was meant to be opening up this year, but continuing tough restrictions by the state government on non-celebrity events make it either too complex or too financially risky to mount many activities.

In November 2021, the Tasmanian Government said it was too busy to meet with event organisers from all over the state to set a frame-work for the events industry in 2022. Even though Covid-19 and Omicron have now become dominant throughout Tasmania, the local events industry remains subject to onerous restrictions imposed back when the strategy was to keep Tasmania virus free.

Given the widespread prevalence of the virus now, Tasmanian Agricultural Shows acknowledges a loss of confidence in the community about attending many events. The Government must re-focus on underwriting event activities, as it indicated it was open to consider in 2021. There has been no further communication from Government on this now urgent need.

The new pandemic landscape was created by the decision to re-open the State in December, so that it is incumbent on government to consider ways to restore the confidence of the public in attending events, and also reconsider now illogical event-killing restrictions.

This is the third year of pandemic chaos for Tasmania's events industry. The pandemic has now reached into every part of the state. Infection could occur on any bus, in any café, shopping centre, or entertainment venue. While restrictions are eased for major, "celebrity" events, tougher restrictions that severely impact on local events are now irrelevant.

- Ends -

For further information: Scott Gadd, President, Tasmanian Agricultural Shows, on 0417 322 460