

Riverland Events Centre takes on COVID recovery

JOSH BRINE

A BARMERA venue is in negotiations to host several large-scale events expected to bring millions of dollars to the region over the coming years, as it recovers from a year lost to COVID-19.

Riverland Field Days executive manager Tim Grieger spoke to the District Council of Loxton Waikerie at last month’s ordinary meeting about the past, present and future of the Riverland Events Centre.

“The result of what we have been doing is attracting more events – like in 2018 when we had the Ulysses Club AGM and Rally which was huge,” Mr Grieger told the Murray Pioneer.

“We had over 2000 people on site and in the region, and a lot of the participants stayed in local hotels and motels as well.

“We now are expanding that to attract more events.

“We just locked in the National Caravan Clubs Rally for 2022, and we are talking with the CMCA (Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia) for a possible national event next year as well, and its the biggest club of its kind in Australia.

“We’ve had state rallies as well and smaller events, and we’re talking with a national panel van group about having a rally here possibly

next year as well.

“That’s why I wanted to explain to the council that the value of the site to the region is huge – the estimated spend from that Ulysses event was about \$4 million and the estimated spend from the caravan rally will be about \$2 million.

“We get more permanent use from the RiderSafe training program, the Riverland Dog Training Club and the Barmera Quilters Group, and then we get extra bookings like the CCW AGM next month.

“I’d like to see events every week, be it a birthday party or an organisation doing a workshop or a business doing a product launch.

“These are the kind of events (the centre) was designed for and works well for – it’s now just about getting it known.”

Construction of an \$850,000 pavilion at the site in 2017 and 2018 resulted in the Field Days committee taking out a \$190,000 loan with the Berri Barmera Council and a \$240,000 overdraft guaranteed by the council, with the committee keeping up with repayments.

“Prior to building the function pavilion we had no debt, so we extended ourselves significantly to be able to achieve that and we’re managing that well, but then COVID came along and mucked it



The Riverland Events Centre is in negotiations to host several national rallies and events over the coming years, following widespread cancellations in 2020. PHOTO: TM Aerial Applications

up a bit, as it did for everybody,” Mr Grieger said.

“We’re working around that and we are certainly grateful for the support of Berri Barmera Council who helped us work through that.

“Looking into the future, once we are well established with these facilities, it’s a matter of managing it so it is self-sustaining.

“By the end of next year we will be halfway through our loan commitments with only four more years to go and that will be all gone.

“We’ll build a strong base for our group to work into the future.”

Mr Grieger said the Field Days received a \$70,000 grant last year

to help cover ongoing costs following the cancellation of events due to COVID-19 restrictions.

“It didn’t cover everything, but it took us a long way to getting through,” he said.

“There are high costs associated with power for irrigation, water, insurance, cleaning and security, plus operating costs – you’re looking at something close to \$100,000 just to keep operating.

“With a Field Day event, those costs are well covered and we have a surplus out of that, but obviously we didn’t have that last year.

“But we made it through and are looking forward to having a great Field Days this year and with the

bookings coming through for the events centre we are looking forward to a great future.”

The Field Days committee is currently pursuing a grant through the Murray-Darling Basin Economic Development Program to construct more shower facilities on the site.

“To attract events, we have to have shower facilities on site, and at the moment we have eight,” Mr Grieger said.

“For big events we need double that, so we are trying to convert two toilet blocks that we don’t require to showers, and that’s where we are looking for a bit of help to get there.”

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● Helen Connolly

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Small grants to facilitate conversations with children and young people in their community are now available. PHOTO: provided



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