

Major Events Strategy 2021-2026



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Executive Summary

Major events is a **core pillar** of the visitor economy, given Wollongong's proximity to Sydney, existing infrastructure and natural assets. The opportunity to build on our burgeoning reputation in this sector is amplified by the need to stimulate the visitor economy in the wake of COVID-19, and leverage opportunities related to hosting the 2022 UCI World Road Championships.

A **city leaders' survey** helped inform this strategy, signalling a desire for a balanced approach between events of economic and reputational impact, and emphatic support to secure another global event.

In terms of proximity, scale and infrastructure, Wollongong should be competing with Geelong, Newcastle and the Sunshine Coast for hosting major events; however, realistically this is not the case due to funding constraints, with our comparative per capita spend currently significantly lower.

Wollongong boasts some obvious and emerging advantages in the events sector. Our **value proposition** includes: proximity to major markets, a range of both built and natural assets, demonstrated appetite to host and support events, and an event-specific approvals process.

Lingering perceptions of Wollongong as an "industrial oriented" city continue to drop, with major events and new destination branding to help drive this change. Securing hotel sites and cycling infrastructure, including mountain bike trails, are identified enablers.

The overarching **mission** of the strategy is to: host major events that showcase the region's strengths, drive the visitor economy and enhance Wollongong's reputation.

Strategic aims, which include relevant measures of success, have been identified across four pillars: global vision, portfolio growth, legacy and leverage, and event capacity building.

A **delineation of roles** sees Wollongong City Council act as an enabler, investor and champion of events, while Destination Wollongong acts as the strategist, broker and promoter.

Five **priority event sectors** have been identified to showcase the region's strengths: the Great Outdoors, Sport, Arts and Technology, Cycling, and Food and Beverage.

A tiered pyramid illustrates our **events classification** model. It depicts the aim to secure another global event, maintain signature events synonymous with the region, attract major events of proven value to the visitor economy, and maintain a base of regional events that engage locals and visitors alike. The **selection framework** is primarily based on economic and/or reputational impact.

A staged strategy to reach \$1 million annual investment in major event acquisition would herald economic impact in excess of \$100 million.



Situation Analysis

History & Status

Major events play a crucial role in driving Wollongong's visitor economy, based on where it is and what it offers. Just as crucially, the reputational impact derived from these events positions Wollongong as a vibrant, attractive and progressive city in which to work, play and live.

The initial strategy was established for 2012 to 2015 on the principles of proximity, capacity, opportunity and appetite. The subsequent strategy of 2016 to 2020 made huge steps in developing profile and partnerships.

This strategy, from 2021 to 2026, aligns with a pending five-year funding agreement between council and Destination Wollongong. Further, in hosting the UCI World Road Championships in 2022 and committing to significant cycling initiatives, the city aims to gain global accreditation as a 'UCI Bike City', which would provide four subsequent years of recognition, to 2026.

Wollongong is ideally placed to capitalise on opportunities in the major events space, due to:

- Its proximity to large metropolitan markets being ideal for tapping into the tourism trend of short stays
- Short of being a "top-of-mind" tourist destination, a strong events portfolio acts as a form of "forced tourism", with attendees drawn by the event, before learning to appreciate the area
- Exponential gains to be made on the back of established industry partnerships, and;
- Events representing an important growth enabler that deliver immediate economic results for a city in transition, especially in the context of COVID-19 recovery.

Destination Wollongong conducted a city leaders' survey to clarify the priorities of the region's influencers in relation to hosting major events. It confirmed a clear desire for a balanced approach between events of economic impact and reputational impact (on a scale of 1 to 5, 43% chose the mid-range of 3). Equally emphatic was a desire for the city to aim to secure another global event in the following five years, whilst acknowledging this requires significant investment and a step change in approach (56% deeming it essential and 19% necessary).

Wollongong has the platform, expertise and appetite to pursue this market with confidence and credibility. It's time to 'press play' on a bold, robust initiative that cements our burgeoning reputation as a major events city.



Milestones & Learnings

2016 - 2020 Strategy

A review of the 2016-20 Wollongong Major Events Strategy reveals a significant leap in the profile of events secured since the original strategy launched in 2012.

While Destination Wollongong regularly engaged in formal bid processes, significant success was achieved by engaging private entities to deliver curated events, with Harley Days and the historic Super League tour being standout examples. Multi-year deals with sports governing bodies such as Hockey Australia and Cricket NSW also delivered a steady flow of content.

Industry buy-in helped spread our investment, with Destination Wollongong forming a strategic alliance with Wollongong's largest hotel operators, resulting in the launch of a voluntary contribution scheme to acquire additional mass participation events. This progressive step, not common in Australia, illustrated the value of the private and public sectors working collaboratively to drive the visitor economy.

Focus on nominated priority sectors led to securing events suited to Wollongong's assets and culture. Tribal Clash (adventure sector), the Australian Motorcycle festival (motoring), and 3 Festival (technology) all reflect this strategic vision.

Securing the 2022 UCI World Road Championships was a landmark achievement, based on strong relations with State government agencies, our proven ability to deliver major events, and Council's outstanding response. Similarly, there will now be a focus on this sector, which represents unprecedented opportunities to derive community benefit from an environmentally-friendly pursuit.

A nimble business model repeatedly proved its worth, with events such as World Cup Dance and Cheer and the Fed Cup being secured literally within days, while forays into the international market established a relationship with European media arts entity, Ars Electronica, and saw Tribal Clash choose Wollongong as one of only four events in a global series.

Continuing to invest in events that reflect the region's cultural DNA – or 'inherent truths' – add to the narrative of Wollongong being a vibrant, relevant and attractive destination in which to live, invest and visit. Live music, mountain biking, artisan food and beverage, street art, surfing and the support of women's sport all attract a desired demographic and enable strong market positioning.

A 'traffic light' report (pages 8 and 9) points to Wollongong now being a regional leader when it comes to strategic partnering and mobility in the marketplace, albeit with challenges looming across funding, accommodation supply and event infrastructure.



Milestones

2016



- ✓ Economic boom for operators during winter thanks to Eastern University Games
- ✓ Australian Country Cricket Championships
- ✓ Downhill Speedskating World Cup showcases the escarpment
- ✓ Multi-year deals inked with Cricket NSW & Hockey Australia
- ✓ World Cup Dance & Cheer secured within 72 hours



2017



- ✓ Signing of Australian Indoor Hockey Championships leads to infrastructure improvements
- ✓ Debut of Spiegel tent
- ✓ Beats & Eats
- ✓ Global coverage via Ocean 6 surf lifesaving event
- ✓ Our focus on the motoring sector lands Harley Days



2018



- ✓ Wigan v Hull Super League Tour delivers unprecedented coverage and \$10 million economic impact
- ✓ Australian Cross Country Championships
- ✓ Elton John plays his only NSW concert
- ✓ Fed Cup tennis tie results in legacy infrastructure project
- ✓ Hotels voluntarily contribute to major events acquisition scheme
- ✓ 1 million views globally of Corona Sunsets within 24 hours



2019



- ✓ Debut of Tribal Clash as one of only four locations in the world
- ✓ Return of the Crossfit Games following an abandoned Sydney sojourn
- ✓ Wollongong edition of Ainsley Harriott's 'My Market Menu' tops weekly SBS ratings
- ✓ European entity ARS Electronica signs as part of a media arts collaboration
- ✓ Launch of Wollongong's "Press Play" brand
- ✓ Debut of Australian Motorcycle Festival breaks Sydney/Melbourne Rotation



2020



- ✓ Historic Super Rugby Games at WIN Stadium
- ✓ Australian Police & Emergency Services Games (cancelled due to COVID)
- ✓ Fisher Beach Party (postponed due to COVID)



Case Studies

Footy Fantasy



It started with talks about a training camp – and ended with Wigan and Hull playing the first ever Super League match outside of Europe, as part of a tour supported by Destination NSW. The historic match positioned Wollongong as a progressive city and delivered unprecedented international exposure. It was a win for strategic partnering and pie-in-the-sky thinking, which *The Guardian* labelled, “a bold move . . . but a smart one too.”

Beach Vibes



Corona came knocking because we told Bondi to send event operators our way. That resulted in a global brand falling in love with a premium events site and putting on a music festival that’s usually reserved for the world’s big-name cities. Corona Sunsets attracted one million social media views globally within 24 hours, boasted genuine environmental messaging, and enhanced perceptions of our city overnight.

Match-Maker



Whispers of a potential major media arts initiative with a leading European entity? We’re in. Our global match-matching exercise snared the internationally-renowned Ars Electronica, and resulted in Destination NSW, the University of Wollongong and Council collectively backing an event for the first time. COVID-19 has since thwarted the original deal, but a plethora of on-going arts and technology-based opportunities have emerged.

Full Throttle



The Australian Motorcycle Festival had never been held outside of Sydney or Melbourne – until we convinced the operator that Wollongong’s built assets, foreshore parks and scenic drives were a perfect fit. Add the Australian Supercross Championships, international brands and riders with huge followings, and Robbie Maddison performing a stunt in Wollongong Harbour live on *Sunrise*, and there’s plenty to get revved up about.



Learnings

Partnership Model



Establishing strategic partnerships that marry market opportunities with regional assets has proven fruitful. Three-year deals with Hockey Australia and Cricket NSW provided a steady program of elite content, utilised Council assets and helped secure infrastructure improvements.

Respond to Market



Not all events fit inside touchlines or on stages. Supporting the filming of 'Back of the Net' resulted in a Disney star showcasing our region to millions on social media; a TV show starring celebrity chef Ainsley Harriott gained good traction; and national coverage was achieved with motocross legend Robbie Maddison performing a stunt in Wollongong Harbour.

Need for Speed



While funding is an undeniable influencer, response times can make or break event acquisition. A nimble model enabled Destination Wollongong to secure the Fed Cup, aided by Council's quick response to infrastructure needs. To further entrench Council's aim to be market-responsive, it could consider an internal policy that sees event-operator queries replied to within a certain time-frame.

Clear Message



Unified branding and messaging remains the ultimate goal. Ideally, a singular destination brand should lead above-the-line messaging, with common threads linking subsets such as visit, invest, study and live. Consumers care for the experience, rather than the provider. Destination branding is a win for the city (and council) as, most often, co-branding is unwieldy.



Progress Report

Analysis of actions tabled in 2016-20 Major Events Strategy



While a staged increase in standard annual funding has not been achieved, Council's substantial investment in the UCI World Road Cycling Championships is acknowledged. In response to industry feedback, a commission-based accommodation portal was abandoned in favour of hotels making quarterly contributions to a major events acquisition scheme.



Progress Report

Analysis of events industry 'enablers' for future planning



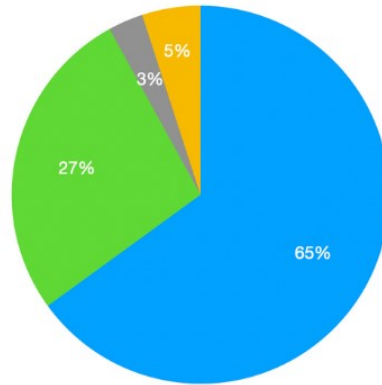
Identifying and quarantining potential hotel sites is a priority. Opportunities and challenges loom in relation to planning and investment in event precincts (Beaton Park, Stuart Park, WIN Stadium). Policy changes relating to temporary use (eg. select camping) and improved response times will aid major events. Mountain biking on the escarpment needs ratification.



Post-Event Survey Analysis 2016-20

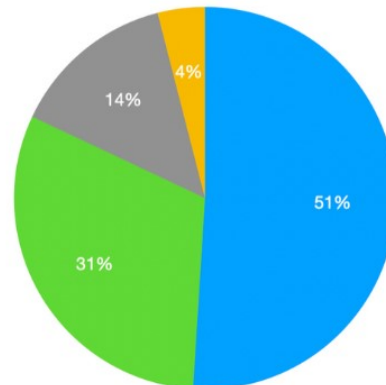
● Extremely Well ● Very Well ● Somewhat Well ● Not So Well

How well does Destination Wollongong meet your needs?



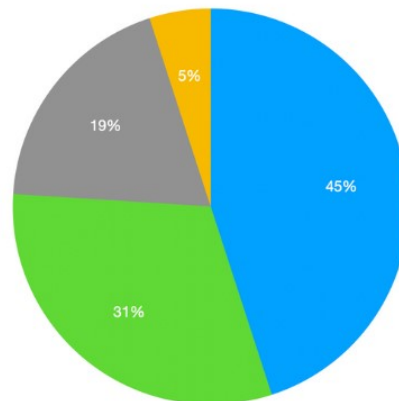
● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree

*Wollongong City Council
"I was given clear instructions
and timelines on the information
needed to provide"*



● Extremely Well ● Very Well ● Somewhat Well ● Not So Well

*Wollongong City Council
"I was kept up-to-date with how
my application was progressing"*



Notes: Analysis of multi-year events showed sustained satisfaction of event operators in relation to meeting needs and delivering services. Being kept up to date on the progress of applications remained a common frustration. Internal operational issues were the biggest challenge listed, although weather, Council-related concerns (infrastructure, sewerage, traffic management), and competing events (from industry competition to wedding bookings) were prominent.



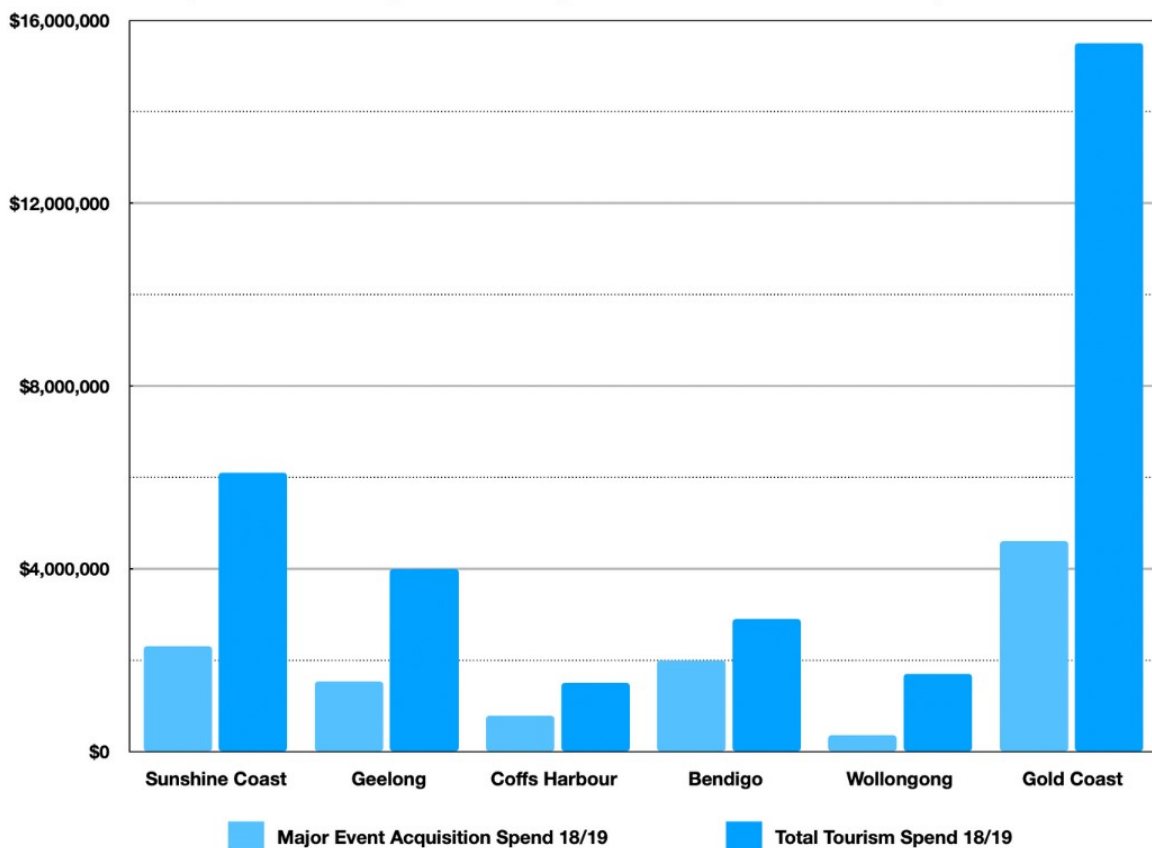
Industry Landscape

Regional Analysis

As with any commercially-driven market sector, competition for events that deliver significant economic impact is increasing. Sporting bodies and event operators have become more proficient in capturing information and, subsequently, are pedaling the 'worth' of their event to regions. Better transport linkages to regional cities, more efficient broadcast and streaming services, infrastructure upgrades across cities, and the advent of event brokers all contribute to a cluttered market.

In terms of proximity, scale and infrastructure, Wollongong should be competing with Geelong, Newcastle and the Sunshine Coast for hosting major events. Realistically, this is not happening, as current budgets are not comparative. We're most often competing with the likes of Mudgee, Bathurst, Townsville, Coffs Harbour and, locally, the Shoalhaven.

Proportion of Major Event Spend vs. Total Tourism Spend FY 18/19





As tabled below, Wollongong is lagging well behind other regions in regard to major event and tourism investment. Observations from budgets captured from like regions include:

- Coffs Harbour invests more than double on major events compared to Wollongong
- Bendigo has been a big regional mover in recent years, now spending well over double that of Wollongong across both major event acquisition and tourism
- Sunshine Coast has significantly increased its major events budget over the last three years, increasing 63%, to \$2.3 million
- While the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast understandably boast far higher tourism budgets due to being 'top-of-mind' destinations with strong accommodation offerings, they still spend a greater percentage on major events than Wollongong
- The per capita spend figures on tourism and events provide the starkest comparison, with Wollongong's commitment embarrassingly low

	18/19 EVENT SPEND	18/19 TOURISM SPEND	TOTAL BUDGET	PER CAPITA SPEND ON TOURISM & EVENTS
Sunshine Coast	\$2,300,000	\$3,800,000	\$6,100,000	\$17
Geelong	\$1,848,000	\$4,349,000	\$6,197,000	\$22
Coffs Harbour	\$782,000	\$1,500,000	\$2,282,000	\$88
Bendigo	\$850,000	\$4,260,000	\$5,110,000	\$34
Wollongong	\$350,000	\$1,700,000	\$2,050,000	\$10
Gold Coast	\$4,600,000	\$15,500,000	\$20,100,000	\$36

Figures based on published Council Budgets and Australian Bureau of Statistics Figures

Spend figures quoted are for direct event acquisition, which is essentially sponsorship or "hosting fees". Destination Wollongong spends approximately \$540,000 annually on event and conference acquisition, and associated administration.

If Wollongong wants to attract major events – especially those that enhance the reputation of the city, gain national and international exposure, or drive legacy projects – it must be able to respond to market opportunities, by way of a significant pool of funding for discretionary investment. Council's quick and positive response to the opportunity of hosting the UCI 2022 World Road Cycling Championships is a wonderful illustration of this at play – a commitment that will result in 300,000+ visitors and 200 million viewers worldwide.



Value Proposition

Wollongong has some distinct and emerging advantages to promote to the events industry. The following points are key considerations for decision-makers when choosing a host venue.

Proximity

The ability to tap into a market of almost 6 million people within a three-hour drive is an obvious advantage not lost on event operators. Proximity to Sydney's domestic and international airports is also a strong selling point.

Assets

The region's stunning natural assets are appealing, but only useful in an event sense if they can periodically be utilised for music festivals, adventure/sporting fixtures and mountain biking. Such events speak to an initiated audience, given 86% of surrounding region visitors recognise Wollongong offers beautiful, unspoilt natural attractions (IRIS Study 2020). Collaborating with Government agencies and the private sector can deliver new sites, while targeting events that utilise Wollongong Sports and Entertainment Centres and IPAC is also a strategic imperative.

Appetite

Being able to demonstrate a city-wide appetite for events is crucial, from Council's role, to accommodation options, transport solutions, media partnerships, multi-agency meetings, supply chain links, volunteer networks and community engagement. While 'event fatigue' at select sites must always be considered, event operators are now approaching us (we secured an international event on the back of Corona Sunsets), so now is the time to leverage that hard-won credibility.

Approvals Process

Significant improvements have been made in recent years, with pre-approved major event DAs providing a point of difference and a triage process being implemented. Further fine-tuning should continue in regard to response times to event operators (crucial in a fast-moving market), a 'whole-of-Council' commitment to events (it's not just the job of the events team), and flexibility (potential policy changes to accommodate temporary solutions).



Perception

Unfairly or otherwise, there remains a lingering perception of Wollongong as a polluted, industrial city. The good news is, this is changing, as identified by Council's *Economic Development Strategy 2019-29*. Further, a 1999 IRIS study saw 87% of those surveyed perceive Wollongong as "industrial oriented", but that figure dropped to 80% in 2004 and, in the latest survey in 2020, was 67%.

Events are one of the most immediate and effective tools to impart changes in perception. They also help impart generational change, with youth-based events attracting receptive audiences (52% of 18 to 34-year-olds see Wollongong as industrial oriented, as compared to 72% of 50 to 64-year-olds).

Considerations



Exclusions

Business events (or conferences) are excluded from this report, as they are not open to the public; however, as a high-yielding sector with proven mid-week traction, they remain a key sub-set. Community events are also excluded, as they do not contribute significantly to the visitor economy. Notwithstanding, they contribute to forming vibrant communities by bringing people together for shared experiences and improving the 'liveability' of an area. *Creative Wollongong 2019-2024* cites the need for expanding the range of activations in public spaces, with a focus on increasing the number of activations in the suburbs. The curation and scheduling of these events are an important part of the overall mix in the events sector.



Bushfires & COVID-19 Recovery

The hospitality and tourism sectors have suffered unprecedented challenges. Downturns of 40 to 60% were recorded during the bushfire crisis; revenue voluntarily contributed by hotels as part of an events acquisition scheme will likely cease; and 48% of Destination Wollongong's partners closed their doors during the COVID-19 crisis. The private sector has been decimated and original visitor economy KPIs will not be met. However, given our proximity to Sydney and credibility in this sector, events can play a pivotal role in the region's recovery.



Strategic Alignment

This strategy should be considered in parallel with Council's *Events Toolkit*, *Economic Development Strategy 2019-29*, *Creative Wollongong 2019-24* and *Wollongong Cycling Strategy 2030*. It should complement Council's work across events, community and cultural services and property use and acquisition, and leverage any opportunities presented by Invest Wollongong, the Sports Infrastructure Advisory Group and Cycling Australia/UCI initiatives.



City/Regional Approach

Securing events specifically for Wollongong's LGA remains the key focus under the funding arrangements and branding imperatives. However, some events – and avenues for funding – lend themselves to a broader, regional approach. Unique events, opportunities associated with the 2022 World Road Cycling Championships and the need for natural asset linkages should evoke a whole-of-Illawarra response.

Appetite & Acceptance

Events inevitably draw complaints about noise, disruption and the spending of public money – and this will intensify when we host the UCI World Road Cycling Championships. The ability to constantly address – but look beyond – these concerns to the proven economic, social and reputational benefits is crucial. Transparency of process, illustrating an 'events-friendly' culture, and celebrating the wins (both economic and social) must be encouraged.

Event Infrastructure

The sustainability of event sites needs addressing. Council currently has nine DA-approved event sites, with an additional seven sites awaiting approval. The concentrated foot traffic of events cause wear and tear, and while a park bond covers overt damage (e.g. to a gate or tap) there is no formal process or funding for the deterioration and damage that events inevitably contribute to.

Stuart Park, one of Wollongong's most popular event sites, suffers from poor drainage. This impacts event footprints and potentially leads to damage. Conversely, large cracks appear during dry weather, creating potential trip hazards. Ongoing investment and proactive maintenance is required to remediate these issues and ensure the site is handed over to event organisers in good condition.

It is also worth considering strategies that spread the use of Council sites more evenly. Stuart Park and the foreshore are highly sought after event sites, while McCabe Park – a good Tier 2 event venue – receives far fewer requests. Adjusting the fee structure, so that 'premium sites' attract a premium rate as opposed to less utilised sites, may help balance demand and usage.

Council's recommended actions to address this are:

- an audit of event sites to document opportunities and upgrades required
- work with relevant stakeholders to provide input into the Stuart Park Masterplan
- continue to identify and develop opportunities for a designated multi-day festival site (*Creative Wollongong 2019-2024*)
- review the fee structure of event sites to spread use more evenly and help fund site improvements.



Brand

Destination Wollongong launched a new brand in November, 2019.

'Press Play' speaks to our three brand pillars of coastal lifestyle, adventure and the arts and technology sector. It promotes a sense of adventure and 'can-do' attitude. The brand's tone of voice is playful, bold and creative. Our colours represent our region, with the blues and teal synonymous with our beautiful beaches, waterfalls and escarpment, while the grey represents our coastal cliffs and mining heritage.

The brand complements this strategy's aims (p18) and priority sectors (p20), promoting a single and consistent narrative in-market for events-related messaging and collateral. In this way, playful, bold and creative events effectively become an extension of the brand.

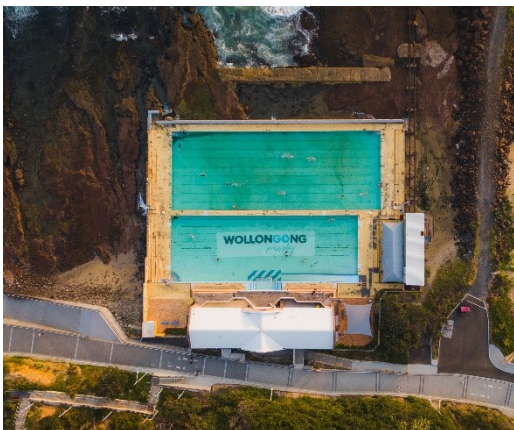
Importantly, it also allows for flexible execution across multiple sectors, to complement existing entities and brands. Under guidance, it can be used by third parties, including council, Destination Wollongong's partners, representative bodies and event organisers.

Market research evaluating the brand was overwhelmingly positive (Edentify, 2019). Of those surveyed, 77% liked the advertisements (travel category average is 68%), while 68% saw them as relevant (average is 57%), and 70% said it made them consider visiting (average is 56%).

WOLLONGONG
press play



PRESS PLAY HERE





Legacy & Leverage



State and Federal government leverage remains an issue, with Wollongong often caught in the “twilight zone” between metropolitan and regional definitions. Current ineligibility for regional sports infrastructure grants remains an impediment for potential projects.



Master planning and business modelling of Beaton Park and the WIN Stadium precinct must maximize the potential for elite sport and community use (especially women’s sport), event acquisition, and commercial activation. Potential public and private sector partnerships exist with hotels, health entities and national sporting teams.



Leverage opportunities exist with the UCI World Road Championships across infrastructure, research, education programs and further event acquisition. Dedicated infrastructure across multiple disciplines can deliver market opportunities, health benefits and embed cultural change. Temporary accommodation solutions can be invoked for future large-scale events.



Small-scale legacy projects have been achieved, with upgrades to Beaton Park, Unanderra Hockey Stadium and North Dalton Park on the back of major events. The Cringila Hills precinct is another step up, supported by Destination Wollongong advocacy. Leverage opportunities of national significance exist in both cycling and baseball at this site, pending funding priorities. Infrastructure improvements at the DA-approved major events sites around the city requires attention as use increases.



The six-year struggle to have mountain biking approved on the escarpment continues. It remains an outstanding opportunity for the region, with undisputed community, health and tourism benefits. The red tape and cultural and environmental sensitives raised have been overcome and incorporated elsewhere, so leadership, funding and market awareness will determine whether a global offering or compromised model is delivered. It is noted that government agencies and the private sector heavily influence outcomes in this space.



Legacy does not always mean infrastructure and, while economic impact is the most common measure applied to events, some provide rich ‘social capital’ by promoting belonging, addressing marginalisation, or improving sustainability. Events such as the Homeless World Cup or World Choir Games do so on a grand scale. Room in the portfolio for a major event of significant social capital should be considered.



Strategy

Mission

To host major events that showcase the region's strengths, drive the visitor economy and enhance Wollongong's reputation.



Actions

Industry imperatives highlight the need to implement a number of market-responsive action items, which Destination Wollongong's charter accommodates. These include:

- Flattening the summer spike by targeting shoulder season events to spread accommodation occupancy and sustain year-round income for local businesses
- Focusing on multi-day events, and/or those that provide significant exposure
- Maintaining a mobile, flexible model that responds to market with alacrity
- Strengthening partnerships with governing bodies, State government entities and Venues Live to explore global opportunities and improve event asset utilisation
- Aligning with market trends by considering opportunities outside the traditional events market, including social media "stunts", the film industry and eSports



Strategic Aims

Strategic aims have been identified across four pillars: global vision, portfolio growth, legacy and leverage, and event capacity building. These aims include stretch targets and extrinsic enablers in which Destination Wollongong does not have control over processes or priorities, exemplifying the need for a shared vision and inter-agency collaboration. The following page acts as a stand-alone snapshot of the strategy's key aims and outcomes.



Measures of Success

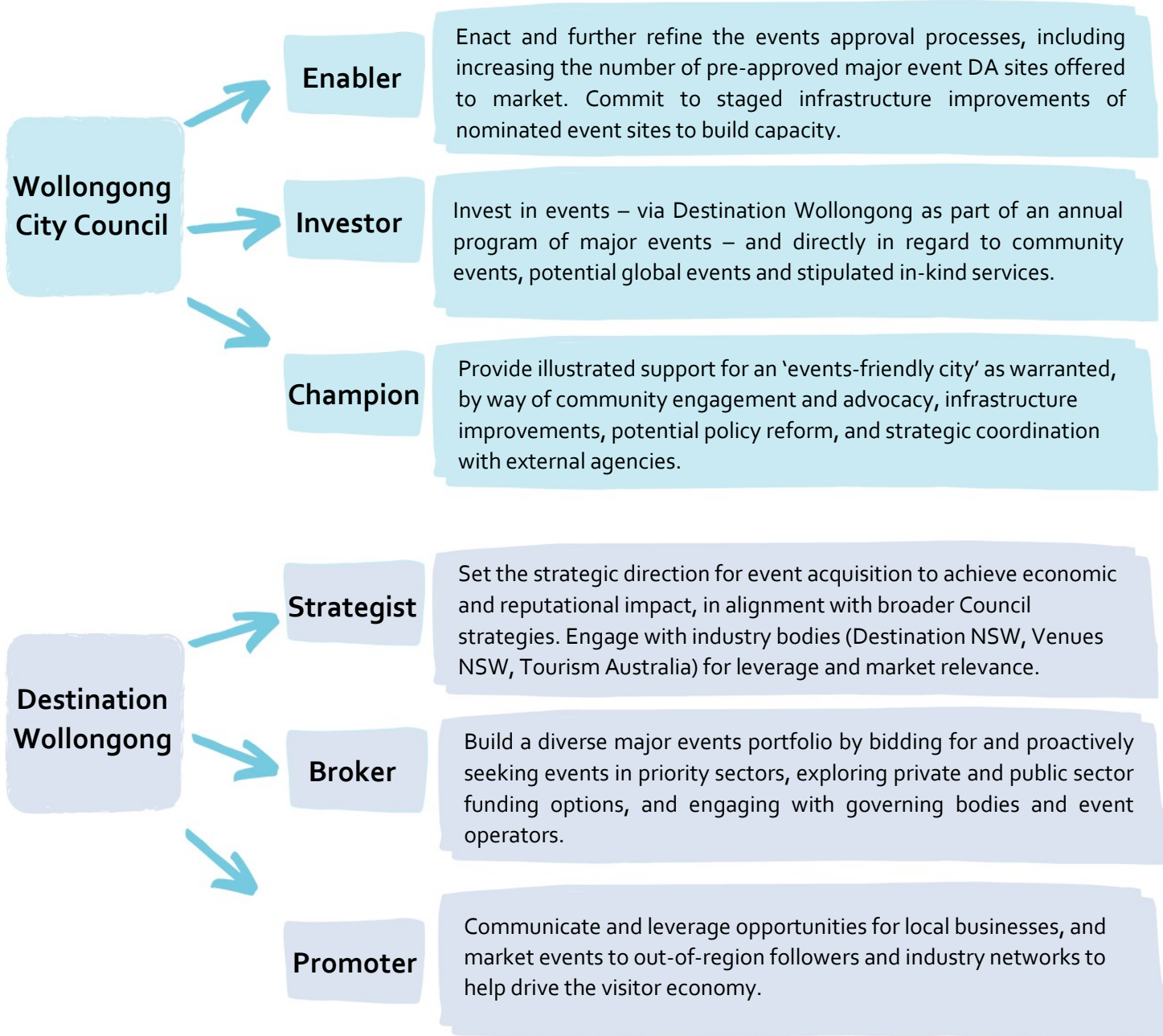
Aim	Outcome
<i>Global Vision</i>	
Global Event Status	→ Hosting rights secured for a global event by 2026
Global Recognition	→ 'UCI Bike Friendly City' status achieved
<i>Portfolio Growth</i>	
Content Management	→ 20+ events contracted annually (as per 'event classification' guide)
Sector Curation	→ Major events secured across all five priority sectors
Measurable Exposure	→ 3 x events secured annually with TV broadcast, or projected reach of a combined 1 million views
Increased Investment	→ Minimum \$1 million annual budget for major events
<i>Legacy & Leverage</i>	
Catalyst Event	→ 1 x event acts as a catalyst for a \$1 million legacy project
Cycling Infrastructure	→ New designated precincts and infrastructure totalling \$20 million, 50km+ mountain bike trail network
Strategic Partnering	→ 3 x multi-year content agreements with industry agencies or sports' governing bodies
National Presence	→ Advent of a new Wollongong-based national sporting franchise
<i>Event Building Capacity</i>	
Accommodation Capacity	→ Approvals secured to increase hotel capacity by 20%, temporary camping clause created
Streamlined Approvals	→ Additional major event site DAs approved, response-time policy, tiered in-kind contributions and infrastructure improvements
Unique Site Offering	→ North Wollongong Beach hosts a select major event annually



Delivery

Delineation of Roles

Clear delineation of roles between Destination Wollongong and Wollongong City Council ensures efficient servicing and minimal confusion in the market.





Priority Sectors

The aim is to curate a diverse calendar of events that stimulate the visitor economy year-round. Further to this broad edict, there is merit in targeting specific sectors to ensure the city plays to its strengths, aligns with brand and strategies, and heeds market trends.

The Great Outdoors

Wollongong's stunning natural assets and outdoor tourism offerings provide the perfect platform to pitch for adventure-based and surfing events. Similarly, the visual appeal of Sea Cliff Bridge and leverage garnered by Grand Pacific Drive is an attractor for motoring events. Crucially, this sector complements – and helps drive – our 'Press Play' brand.



Tribal Clash

Arts & Technology

The Illawarra Performing Arts Centre, Wollongong Entertainment Centre, Yours and Owls, Wonderwalls and various touring acts ensure this remains a strong sector in a traditional sense. Add Wollongong's burgeoning reputation in IT, start-ups, media arts and innovation – along with a growing market in technology events – and the lines between these two sectors intertwine.



Yours & Owls

Sport

Wollongong boasts a strong sporting culture and significant infrastructure, providing a happy marriage between appetite and capacity. Our proximity to Sydney's airports is a strong selling point for mass participation events, while sport leads the way in multi-day events and can facilitate legacy projects. The city leaders' survey rated this sector as most popular category to pursue.



Ocean 6



Cycling

The 2022 UCI World Road Championships will be the biggest event this city has seen, and the course itself will act as a legacy piece that encourages repeat visitation. National cycling events are already being added to the portfolio, there is serious potential for mountain biking events once trails are formalised, along with niche events that utilise criterium and pump tracks. Further opportunities will arise if we attain 'UCI Bike City' status.



MS Sydney to Gong

Food & Beverage

Wollongong's thriving small bar and café scene deserves an anchor event. An emerging craft beer industry, award-winning cider, farmers' markets, specialist bars and baristas, and a diverse cultural restaurant scene, including indigenous product, provide gravitas. This was the key sector identified as an attractor (68%) by surrounding region visitors (IRIS study, 2020).



Crafted Live



Event Classification

Global

A world-renowned event in terms of scale, reach and profile that requires significant investment and a step change in outlook. A stretch target to secure a one-off event, possibly every three to eight years.

Signature

Ideally, an annual event that is a market leader in its sector and displays the potential to become synonymous with the region. One or two events per year.

Major

Large-scale or elite events that reflect our priority sectors and provide proven economic impact and/or perception-enhancing exposure. Three to five events per year.

Regional

A suite of lower profile events that typically engage both locals and a strong intrastate market to illustrate value to the visitor economy. Eight to twelve events per year.

Community

An undefined number of events supported by Council as part of its community and cultural program that essentially engages locals.



Implementation

Selection Framework

Economic Impact...

Economic impact is a long-standing key measurable in the decision-making framework for major event acquisition. Return on investment for the city is undoubtedly a leading factor.

Reputational Impact...

Reputational impact is of equal importance, given the brand-defining power events boast. An event of significant profile can enhance the perception of Wollongong overnight.

and also...

Major events can deliver one, or both. A mass-participation under-age event will boost the economy, while a niche elite sporting event may be a reputation builder. A broader decision-making matrix is also employed, with consideration given to the following:

Sector: Does the genre align with one of our six identified priority sectors? If not, does it complement them, or offer a compelling new narrative?

Seasonality: Does it contribute to a year-round calendar? Does it sit outside the seasonal spike? Does it encourage mid-week, or pre/post-event visitation?

Reach: Will it generate substantial exposure across digital platforms and traditional media? Is it broadcast or streamed? Can destination messaging be incorporated?

Appeal: What demographic will it attract? What private or public sector partnerships can be explored? Do we want to be associated with the brands it will attract?

Engagement: Will it appeal to locals? Does it celebrate our identity and culture? Does it provide opportunities for local businesses?

Legacy: Will it leave a legacy for the community, be it infrastructure improvements, research or education, partnering opportunities, or contribute to a cultural shift?



Funding

Accepted industry figures and economic modelling allow us to calculate the worth of events (Australian Tourism Research estimates a domestic sporting tourist spends \$269 per person, per day).

Demographics, seasonality, event genre, local business engagement and generated exposure paint a more detailed picture as to an event's level of impact.

Destination Wollongong currently allocates \$350,000 annually for major event acquisition, inclusive of Council 'top-ups' for select signature events. Destination NSW funding and limited private sector support bolsters this commitment by 15-20% annually. As yet, there is no on-going commitment for further Council contributions in this space. However, its significant financial and strategic investment in the 2022 UCI World Road Championships and associated cycling infrastructure is acknowledged.

While 2020 has been affected by bushfires and COVID-19, the 2018-19 financial year saw major events contribute \$38.8 million in economic impact, representing a return on investment of \$110 for every dollar Destination Wollongong spent in market. This ROI figure rises to \$133 in calculating the last three financial years, on the back of the Wigan tour and Elton John concert.

While this figure is impressive, maturation of the portfolio has seen a ceiling for economic return reached in recent years. Potential collapse of the voluntary Major Events Acquisition Scheme due to COVID-19 raises fears of further stagnation.

Event acquisition investment of \$1 million – the minimum already achieved by like regional cities – would see immediate economic impact rise to in excess of \$100 million based on current figures. A staged strategy to hit this target is crucial to the recovery of an image-challenged city that boasts enviable connectivity, suitable infrastructure and established partnerships.

Controls

Governance

Parameters are outlined in the Funding Agreement between Wollongong City Council and Destination Wollongong, notably section 3 "Provision of funding" and section 6 "Performance of the services".

The Major Events Advisory Group, made up of representatives from council, Destination Wollongong and industry, meets quarterly to provide advice and feedback.

Contingency Planning

Externally, Wollongong City Council can intervene, as outlined in the Funding Agreement, notably section 3.4 "Right to withhold funding", upon compliance failure or a reasonable basis for belief.



The Final Word...

"I never thought I'd say this but 'Good Evening, Wollongong!"

Sir Elton John, on-stage at WIN Stadium

"It's hard not to love this place."

Wigan Warriors player Willie Isa

"The communication and support was outstanding, the event site is stunning and we're now proudly promoting Wollongong to the world"

Heidi Clover, Tribal Clash

"We've been lucky enough to perform at some great festivals, but this place is f###king amazing!"

Boo Seeka, on-stage at Corona Sunsets





Appendix

Data Collection Summary

Research referred to in 2021 - 26 Wollongong Major Events Strategy

Report: Wollongong City Council Events Survey

Date: June 2020

Conducted By: IRIS Research

Description: Wollongong City Council commissioned IRIS Research to conduct a short online survey to measure the perceptions of Wollongong, along with the attractions and event sectors that drive past or potential visitation.

Sample Profile: The target population was residents of the Sydney metropolitan area, southern Sydney, south western Sydney and Canberra aged 18 years and over. A total of 304 completed responses were collected.

Full Report: <https://bit.ly/WollongongCityEventsSurvey>

Report: City Leaders' Survey

Date: June 2020

Conducted By: Destination Wollongong

Description: Destination Wollongong conducted a survey with key city leaders, seeking feedback on what event sectors they thought Destination Wollongong should pursue. The survey also helped determine the perceived importance of economic impact, reputational impact and legacy projects linked to major events.

Sample Profile: The sample profile included Wollongong councillors, the Destination Wollongong Board and Major Events Advisory Group, along with leading tourism and business executives in Wollongong. The survey was sent to 62 people, with a response rate of 65%.

Full Report: <https://bit.ly/CityLeadersSurvey>



Appendix

Report: 'Press Play' Brand - Market Research

Date: March 2019

Conducted By: Edentify

Description: Destination Wollongong worked with research company, Edentify, to conduct market feedback on the 'Wollongong Press Play' brand. Collateral, including logos and advertisements were well received.

Sample profile: This was conducted as an online quantitative survey, with 208 respondents, aged 18 and over in the Greater Sydney region. Sample sources were from Edentify's established 'Caféstudy' research community.

Full Report: <https://bit.ly/edentifyresearch>

Report: Post-Event Survey Analysis

Date: May 2020

Conducted By: Destination Wollongong

Description: Destination Wollongong conducted an in-depth analysis of all post-event reports provided by event operators from 2016 – 2019. All event operators fill out this survey after an event, with questions revolving around the issues they encountered, how informed they felt during the event process by Wollongong City Council and how helpful Destination Wollongong was. The survey also tracked multi-year event operators and how their perception of the city's event process tracked over time.

Sample profile: Closed-answer questions within 94 post-event surveys from event operators were collated and analysed for the purpose of this report.

Full Report: <https://bit.ly/PostEventSurveyAnalysis>