

Bushland festival poses a huge risk

Dear Editor,

As the date for the music festival proposed for Mount View draws closer, it seems like an appropriate moment to ask the various authorities, emergency services and all the other people with a vested interest:

“Are you really prepared for this?”

And of course the answer will undoubtedly be something similar to: “Yes of course we are. This will just be people camping for the weekend to listen to music”.

So to Cessnock City Council, the NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW Police, the NSW Ambulance Service and last but not least the proponents of the concert themselves, please consider the following:

January 18, 2014 (The Herald): Six ambulances and a rescue helicopter were needed to treat at least 16 people at a camp and concert held on a remote property near Karuah. Police said 1300 teenagers had spent four days at the Tahlee property as part of the “wildlife summer camp” being run by Hillsong Australia. But emergency services were “stretched to breaking point” when paramedics, police and the Hunter Westpac rescue helicopter sped to the property following reports that people had been crushed in a “mosh pit” incident. An Ambulance Service of NSW spokeswoman said four people were taken to hospital, including two in the helicopter, with head and back injuries after being trampled on. One girl remained in John Hunter Children’s Hospital in a stable condition.

June 12, 2014 (The West Australian): A 21-year-old found disoriented and suffering hypothermia after spending two days missing in freezing, wet conditions wearing just tracksuit pants. He had wandered off during a three-day bush party south-east of Perth. Cold, dehydrated and confused, the man was found by State Emergency Service volunteers about 11.15am. He was about 2km from where he had disappeared. “He asked us if it was the first time we’d found him because he’d been having some very odd dreams,” an SES searcher said. The man wandered away from the party about 3am on Sunday but an official search was not launched for several hours until friends realised later in the day he was missing and called police. The injured man was flown to Royal Perth Hospital where he was in a stable condition last night.

June 22, 2014 (The Herald): Experienced rescue crews remain baffled at how a 17-year-old youth had survived an 80-metre cliff fall in the Watagan State Forest followed by a delicate 12-hour overnight operation to get him out of the bush and into hospital. He suffered fractures and internal injuries and was listed as being in a serious condition in John Hunter Children’s Hospital on Sunday night. After being refused entry to the Solstium Shadows, a three-day festival promoted to have partygoers dance the chills away, the youth and his two mates tried to bypass the normal entry and slip in another way. It unwittingly led them to a rock shelf and the teenager’s mates watched on in horror as they saw him stumble and fall before hearing what they thought was a splash.

All of the above emergencies occurred in the last six months, and there are a number of other common factors:

- They all involved large gatherings of young people.
- They all involved people ignoring the consequences of their actions for various reasons.
- They all involved large scale rescue efforts by multiple emergency services.

But the most obvious common denominator was of course the fact that all of these events were held in remote bush settings where the control of participants’ actions (or those of people attempting illegal entry) is impossible and where emergency services access was severely restricted.

It is a known and recognised fact in the investigation of any accident by HSE professionals that:

“Serious accidents have the same root causes as minor accidents. It is these root causes that bring about the accident, the severity is often a matter of chance”.

So how can Cessnock City Council, the NSW Rural Fire Service, the NSW Police, the NSW Ambulance Service and the organisers of the Mount View concert allow this event to be staged in the knowledge that, given the record of other events of the last six months described above, this could possibly be the one which results in one or more fatalities as a matter of chance?

Just ask the question, is it worth the risk?

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