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The role of festivals in drought-affected Australian communities

Abstract

Event management research increasingly recognizes place embeddedness as critical to success. Less well understood is the significance of the festivals and events sector in places suffering from environmental crises. A major empirical survey of 480 festivals in rural Australia, conducted in 2008 at the height of the Millennium Drought, elucidates the role and significance of festivals under conditions of extreme environmental stress. It centers on a qualitative analysis of responses to open-ended questions on the impacts of that drought. Over 70% of participating festival and event managers indicated that their community had suffered from drought, while 43% cited drought as adversely affecting the organization and management of their event. Impacts varied geographically and by event type (with inland agricultural shows especially hard hit). Nearly half of event managers also explained how their festival played a constructive role in helping their community cope with drought. Festivals stimulated much-needed economic activity and encouraged "creative frugality" in difficult times. Festivals also fulfilled an important civic emotional and psychological role in lifting community spirits and bringing communities together in otherwise adverse circumstances. Biophysical extremity is thus both a constrainer and a catalyst for the festivals and events sector in trying social circumstances.

Keywords

festivals, role, affected, communities, australian, drought

Disciplines

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

Gibson, C. & Connell, J. (2015). The role of festivals in drought-affected Australian communities. *Event Management: an international journal*, 19 (4), 445-459.

THE ROLE OF FESTIVALS IN DROUGHT-AFFECTED AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES

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Event management research increasingly recognizes place embeddedness as critical to success. Less well understood is the significance of the festivals and events sector in places suffering from environmental crises. A major empirical survey of 480 festivals in rural Australia, conducted in 2008 at the height of the Millennium Drought, elucidates the role and significance of festivals under conditions of extreme environmental stress. It centers on a qualitative analysis of responses to open-ended questions on the impacts of that drought. Over 70% of participating festival and event managers indicated that their community had suffered from drought, while 43% cited drought as adversely affecting the organization and management of their event. Impacts varied geographically and by event type (with inland agricultural shows especially hard hit). Nearly half of event managers also explained how their festival played a constructive role in helping their community cope with drought. Festivals stimulated much-needed economic activity and encouraged “creative frugality” in difficult times. Festivals also fulfilled an important civic emotional and psychological role in lifting community spirits and bringing communities together in otherwise adverse circumstances. Biophysical extremity is thus both a constrainer and a catalyst for the festivals and events sector in trying social circumstances.

Key words: Festivals; Events; Disaster; Adaptation; Resilience; Emotional work;
Rural communities

Introduction

Festivals and events are frequently staged to invigorate and reinvigorate community and stimulate economic development—especially in rural and remote places suffering from general decline. In

such circumstances festivals and events contribute far more beyond their singular purpose, and event managers are increasingly ushered into de facto roles promoting regional development and community cohesion (Derrett, 2003; Ziakas & Costa, 2011). In small rural and remote places seemingly

prosaic issues of traffic, waste management, leadership, and awarding of supply contracts have heightened the meaning and visibility of events, often catalyzing intense debate that can even divide communities (Davies, 2011; Gibson & Connell, 2012). More significantly festivals can bring communities together, and become a means to cope during difficult times (Derrett, 2008). This article seeks to explore a seldom-explored aspect of festival and event management: the significance of events in contexts of extended extreme environmental stress. We draw on a major empirical survey of festival managers conducted in rural Australia in 2008, at the peak of the infamous Millennium Drought, to illustrate how environmental conditions both impacted on the viability and staging of events and catalyzed new kinds of community responses. From this, we argue, key insights can be gleaned into the role of events in society, beyond the immediate economic significance.

Literature Review: Festivals, Society, and Natural Disasters

The full significance of festivals and events must be understood in place—recognizing iterative relationships between events and their broader social and biophysical contexts (Cudny, 2014). Festivals contribute to regional development socially, economically, culturally, and environmentally (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006). Such contributions evolve in complex ways in place, as social networks and relationships are established and deepened, and as reputation grows around an event (Edwards, 2012). At Parkes, in rural Australia, an annual Elvis Presley Festival struggled to gain community support until its significance in keeping local family businesses viable became clearer (Brennan-Horley, Connell, & Gibson, 2007). In Girgarre, Victoria, a seemingly small and insignificant music festival had many roles in an otherwise tiny settlement, from stimulating local retail trade to teaching children new performance skills and lifting the spirits of local people (Gibson & Connell 2012).

Often the degree of place embeddedness extends much further than economic relationships. In the folk festival circuit commercialism may be eschewed entirely and credibility accrues gradually in certain iconic places, via “ideals of collectivism,

egalitarianism and a general suspicion of dominant systems” (Begg, 2011, p. 260). A Water Carnival in rural Texas proved successful from a regional development perspective because of its wider role as a “symbolic social space” promoting cooperation and including a diverse range of community stakeholders (Ziakas & Costa, 2012). By contrast, in Byron Bay, a major music festival that, on paper, catalyzed significant commercial returns was instead met with social resistance due to unwanted noise, traffic, ecological impacts, and perceived disruption to quality of life (Barrett, 2011). Meanwhile, in examples as diverse as a Scottish Highland Gathering and a rural gay and lesbian festival, success has depended on marrying place and changing demographics with music, emotion, and ambience: combining “spine-tingling” music (from disco to bagpipes) with the right audience and physical setting (Duffy & Waitt, 2011; Ruting & Li, 2011). In diffuse and often unpredictable ways, festivals and events become deeply embedded in local communities.

Event management research has increasingly recognized such place-embedded factors as important to staging festivals, along with the need for interdisciplinary approaches that encompass social, economic, and environmental dimensions (Getz, 2012). Event managers are acknowledging social impacts and embracing roles as catalyzers for social participation (Anwar-McHenry, 2011). They have also developed sophisticated systems to manage the environmental impacts of events, leading to innovations in waste management, recycling, and transport to and from events (Mair & Laing, 2012). Through such efforts the recognition of broad benefits, the importance of community support, and the multiple human impacts of festivals on the local environment are increasingly acknowledged. However, less well understood is the social role played by festivals in places suffering from environmental stress. Although “green” values have permeated event management, little is known of the extent to which short-term environmental shocks, as well as long-term biophysical forces (e.g., climate, geophysical instability) impact events in other directions: shaping for instance the staging and success of festivals and events, and transforming their potential social and economic roles and benefits.

Such questions are becoming more pertinent, with escalating climate change, as rural communities

become increasingly affected by hazards, and as festivals and events become themselves more common in rural places. A relatively new field of study has in recent years emerged around rural vulnerability and resilience to ecological risk—most notably climate change and natural disasters including fire, flood, and drought (Beer, Tually, Kroehn, & Law, 2012; Head, Atchison, Gates, & Muir, 2011; Prior & Eriksen, 2013; Whittaker, Handmer, & Mercer, 2012).¹ Resilience is itself a concept with varying and contested definitions, understood as resourcefulness and the capacity to cope and respond to unseen environmental shocks (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013), stemming from knowledge of the surrounding biophysical environment, a sense of place and belonging, and stable employment (McManus et al., 2012). Most studies of rural resilience, however, say little of the contributions made by festivals and events (Derrett 2008) and, as yet, the potential for rural festivals and events to contribute to social resilience and resourcefulness amid environmental crisis has not been subject to detailed empirical inquiry. Instead of viewing festivals only in terms of environmental *impacts*—as impositions on a seemingly inert, passive biophysical landscape—how do environmental and social factors *interact* in a more dynamic fashion, in the staging of festivals and events? This hitherto unexplored element of place is especially pertinent for drought, where events take place in communities affected deeply by environmental stresses across the whole gamut of social, economic, and cultural life. At stake is how an environmental crisis such as drought impacts directly on the staging of events, and refracts the social and other roles played by events in host places.

Thus far, festivals and events research has barely begun to theorize or document the relationships between environmental change and festivals (beyond the obvious impacts of floods or heavy rain on participation and profitability). Mayes (2011) provides one example and partial precedent, examining a wildflower festival in rural Western Australia where an event deeply embedded in the local community, ecology, and landscape contributed to a sense of community, but also to the “revitalisation of diverse local senses, experiences and knowledge of a place” (p. 169). The wildflower event catalyzed “ongoing rural negotiation of a place as formed in and through human and non-human interaction” (p. 169). Mayes

provides an important conceptual framework, developing a more iterative approach that acknowledges culture–nature interactions. Nevertheless, little has been said in event management research about significant environmental changes or biophysical extremities: the often unpredictable forces of climate that can much more severely impact human activities. This article accordingly focuses on one such extremity—drought—frequently experienced in rural areas of Australia, and predicted to inflict many other parts of the world more frequently given the onset of human-induced climate change.

Unfolding and unpredictable events led us to realize the importance of such an approach. From 2005 to 2009 we were part of a major research team and project funded by the Australian Research Council (Reinventing Rural Places) examining the significance and extent of rural festivals in Australia (Gibson, Waitt, Walmsley, & Connell, 2010). As part of this project we compiled an events database and conducted survey and ethnographic research with a wide variety of festivals and events across rural Australia. Our survey of festival managers (explained in more detail below) took place in 2007–2008, at the height of the Millennium Drought.

Described as “the worst drought on record for southeast Australia” (van Dijk et al., 2013, p. 1040), the Millennium Drought stretched from 2001 to 2009, leading to enforcement of water restrictions in major cities, intensification of bushfire events in 2003 and 2009, and widespread rural economic hardship. So severe and persistent was the drought, on a continental scale, that scientists credited it with reversing global trends in water-cycle intensification (Huntington, 2006). Two thirds of Australia’s total agricultural land was declared drought affected to the extent that farmers qualified for government relief payments and income support, indicating an environmental catastrophe of rare severity (National Rural Advisory Council 2007–2008 annual report, available upon request from: NRACsecretariat@agriculture.gov.au). By 2008 some 30,000 farmers had taken up such financial support, at a cost of AU\$1 billion (Productivity Commission, 2009). Irrigation-intensive agricultural industries such as rice and cotton collapsed (production fell by 99% and 84%, respectively, between 2002 and 2009) and even harvests of dry land crops such as wheat repeatedly failed (Head et al., 2011).

Tourism and related industries across Australia were severely impacted, although such impacts were “diffuse and not well quantified” (van Dijk et al., 2013, p. 1040). Vivid media reports circulated of farmers having to slaughter stock as well as of rising depression, substance abuse, and suicide rates. Yet, “causative pathways from physical drought to the degradation of ecological, economic, and social health remain poorly understood and quantified” (van Dijk et al., 2013, p. 1040). A prominent study in the earlier years of the drought (2004) listed among its diverse social impacts: loss of income, greater workloads, higher rates of divorce, deteriorating access to education, rising debts on farms and in the small business sector, impacts on health and emotional well-being, delayed retirement, unequal burdens for women within households, loss of young people through higher rates of out migration, a worsening sense of isolation, political alienation, and mistrust (Alston & Kent, 2004). Drought (and government drought policy) refracted already problematic axes of social and gender inequality in rural Australia (Alston, 2006; Stehlik, Lawrence, & Gray 2000). Making matters worse was that, in contrast to short-term natural disasters (where mental health impacts are generally better understood), in the case of drought the long-term effects on feelings of loss, grief, and hopelessness accumulated slowly, worsened over time, and were diffuse and difficult to track (Dean & Stain, 2010; Sartore, Kelly, Stain, Albrecht, & Higginbotham, 2008). Our rural festivals project, though not originally conceived as a drought resilience study, became a timely vehicle to contribute insights on how communities were coping with drought via the festivals and events sector. A whole section of the survey was subsequently dedicated to exploring impacts of, and responses to, the long drought, and data from that part of the survey are analyzed and interpreted here, for the first time.

Method

As part of our rural festivals project, festival managers were surveyed outside the metropolitan areas of three Australian states: New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania. After clearing the University of Wollongong’s Human Research Ethics review process, a detailed 8-page survey was sent to over

1,600 festival organizers. Demarcation was drawn between infrequent, usually annual, public events, which were included (pending other criteria), and regular, recurrent, and/or industry-only events held throughout the year (such as markets, conferences, and conventions). Generally, festivals had to meet at least one (and preferably more than one) of the following criteria: use of the word “festival” in the event name; being an irregular, one-off, annual, or biennial event; emphasize celebrating, promoting, or exploring some aspect of culture; or being an unusual point of convergence for people with a given cultural activity, or of a specific subcultural identification. Festivals then were understood, following Getz (2007), as “themed, public celebrations” (p. 31).

Managers of such events were asked a wide range of questions on their event’s aims, history, crowd size, stalls and stages, sponsorship and advertising, the geography of attendees and inputs, target markets, organizational structure, employment, volunteerism, community attitudes, and estimated economic impacts. The survey’s final page was dedicated to gleaning views regarding drought and its impacts. Three open-ended questions were asked: (1) “Has the drought impacted on your host community? If so, how?” (2) “Has the drought impacted on the organization of your festival? If so, how?” (3) “Has your event helped the community respond to drought? If so, how?” Where postal addresses were available (in 1,027 identifiable cases), organizers were sent a paper copy of the survey, with explanations, and a return prepaid envelope. Where only e-mail addresses were available for organizers (691 identifiable cases), they were sent an e-mail explanation letter, requesting that the survey be completed online (with identical questions and format). Reminder letters were sent via both means to festival organizers after 4 weeks. A total of 480 completed surveys were received from festival organizers (Table 1): a 28% response rate (38% for paper surveys sent vs. 13% for e-mail requests). Survey responses were subsequently entered digitally in FileMakerPro and analyzed statistically in SPSS software. Text-based answers to the three open-ended questions on drought were subsequently coded according to common themes, and where initial coding categories overlapped, ensuing categories were amalgamated iteratively

Table 1

Festivals Surveyed, 2007–2008, by State, and Whether Their Event Was Affected by Drought

Type of Festival	No. of Returned Surveys				% of Total Returned Surveys	No. Affected by Drought	% Affected by Drought	% of all Affected by Drought
	NSW	Victoria	Tasmania	Total				
Sport	63	52	13	128	17.8	51	39.8	16.4
Community	66	50	12	128	17.8	53	41.4	17.0
Agricultural shows	71	35	5	111	15.5	77	69.4	24.8
Music	54	31	7	92	12.8	27	29.3	8.7
Arts	44	25	14	83	11.6	19	22.9	6.1
Food	19	19	6	44	6.1	18	40.9	5.8
Other	15	18	3	36	5.0	23	63.9	7.4
Gardening	12	16	5	33	4.6	22	66.7	7.1
Wine	14	13	4	31	4.3	10	32.3	3.2
Environment	8	3	1	12	1.7	4	33.3	1.3
Heritage	3	4	2	9	1.3	3	33.3	1.0
Culture/ethnicity	4	2	0	6	0.8	2	33.3	0.6
Children/youth	0	3	0	3	0.4	2	66.7	0.6
Christmas/New Year	0	2	0	2	0.3	0	0.0	0.0
Total	373	273	72	718	100.0	311	43.3	100.0

after a first pass of the raw data. Final lists of coded responses were then cross-tabulated by festival type (see Table 1). Quantitative results of the survey relating to economic impact, festival size, attendees, and local multiplier effects were analyzed statistically (and are published elsewhere—see Gibson et al., 2010). The bulk of the analysis below stems from the hitherto unexamined open-ended questions on drought.

Outcomes

By 2007–2008 in the three states covered by our research (New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania), over 90% of the total land area was declared Exceptional Circumstances (indicating an environmental catastrophe of rare severity), with the other 10% (mainly the normally wet subtropical coastal strip of north coast New South Wales) declared an Interim Assistance area (meaning only slightly less drought stricken) (National Rural Advisory Council 2007–2008 annual report, available upon request from: NRACsecretariat@agriculture.gov.au). Unsurprisingly, some 76% of the 480 participating festival managers indicated that their community had been impacted by drought in some way, while 43% cited drought as adversely affecting the organization and management of their event. Those indicating negative impacts of drought were

located widely across the three states, but especially in inland Victoria and New South Wales. Those not impacted by the drought were predominantly in north coast New South Wales or in larger regional centers such as Wollongong, Bendigo, and Port Macquarie, where agricultural livelihoods and industries are not so prominent.

Agricultural festivals, community festivals, sports festivals, and music festivals were the most commonly affected by drought in terms of their direct operation and management (Table 1). These were, however, also the most numerous festivals in the overall sample. When gauged against overall frequency of event type, agricultural shows were clearly the most adversely affected group, with 77 of a total of 111 events (69%) affected across the three states. Whereas agricultural shows made up 15% of our overall sample of returned surveys, they constituted 25% of all festivals reporting being negatively affected by drought. Similarly overrepresented among those affected by drought were gardening festivals, 67% of which were affected by drought, and “other,” which contained a diverse mix of events including rodeos and campdrafting competitions, bush poetry festivals, car shows, and game fishing events. When viewed as a proportion of the total sample, arts and music festivals were the least likely to be affected directly by drought (23% and 29%, respectively), perhaps through having more tenuous

connections with the land. Responding to the gap in existing literature on festivals and events amid environmental extremity (cf. Getz, 2012), such data illustrate how drought impacted the content, size, and duration of festivals and, in some rare cases, their cancellation or postponement.

Community Impacts of Drought

Half of the more than 300 event managers, whose host community had been affected by the extended drought, provided further details in an open-ended question on how the community had been affected (Table 2). As expected, the most common impacts were declines in farming activities and incomes and thus a wider economic downturn in the region. Direct impacts of water restrictions on farming, irrigation, tourism, and the local economy were

recorded. Accompanying social impacts, including out migration, low morale, a sense of isolation, and depression were less commonly reported, though were present.

Typical was the response of an organizer of an arts and heritage festival in Deniliquin, NSW:

We are a rural town that relies almost completely on agriculture. There has been little income over the past summer as very few crops were grown and the coming summer looks even worse. Morale is low, farms are being sold and communities are starting to break down. It has affected everyone in town and district, economically, financially and emotionally.

Stories abounded of completely dry lakes and dams, failed harvests and reduced crops, financial hardships, job losses and families limiting or foregoing expenditure on petrol, children’s music lessons, and

Table 2
Impacts of Drought on Host Communities

Impact	No.	%	Examples
Decline in farming activities and incomes	70	33.2	“This area [Bribbaree, NSW] has been devastated. Many farmers have been and are forced to sell their stock and almost without exception, crops have failed.” “Lack of grass, less milk, less money, less spending capacity.”
Economic downturn in the region	57	27.0	“Worst area in Victoria—local economy low.” “Many farmers did not have an income, or lost money last year, over the 9 dry year period. At least 6 businesses have closed in the past year.” “Millions of dollars lost. No other industries.”
Economic decline & negative social impacts	27	12.8	“It’s dry! Locals are pushed for money.” “No money to spend, depression issues.” “Sale of historic farming and irrigation properties, lack of crops due to limited or no water allocations, family hardship.” “Dairy community doesn’t spend—on flow to the entire community.”
Water restrictions	25	11.8	“Worst drought in my lifetime, harsh water restrictions apply, many local farmers selling stock and land.” “Severe water restrictions; low or dry dams; low morale; lower productivity from both farming/private communities.” “Stage 4 water restrictions. Lake is 30% full and has been as low as 8% for years thus reducing tourism and income for businesses.”
Major community impact	17	8.1	“Large bush fires throughout the Grampians and local areas. Loss of 26 homes, loads of livestock, and loss of 2 lives was devastating and had a huge impact on the local community”
Low morale	11	5.2	“Low morale; no finances; feeling of helplessness; stress on families; need of understanding.” “Lowered self-esteem and lowered spirits.” “Lack of feed, water, and cash and enthusiasm to continue.” “Not only the drought, but on top of this, a large proportion of the community [Illabo, NSW] was devastated by bushfires on 1/1/06. They are finding it difficult to feel positive about anything at the moment.”
Loss of people/out migration	4	1.9	“Business going under, population migrating out.” “Farms and businesses are going broke—hence move from town to the city.” “Younger people having to move for jobs.”

entertainment. In Narrandera, NSW, a traditionally dry, wheat growing area, with more recently developed rice irrigation farming, "drought means lay-offs in irrigation area as there will be no rice grown this year. Less spent in town, less sponsorship available for events, three shops closed recently." A fishing festival event manager in Mathoura, NSW, reported that "farmers are struggling, local businesses are struggling, over 100 people have been put out of work in the last couple of months; this will be very difficult for our townships to absorb." According to the organizer of the Bemboka Agricultural Show (NSW),

We are a dairy farming community in the Bega Valley—there is no part of our life that has not been affected by the drought from the general mental health/happiness of people to income, and ability to feed the family.

Social impacts of drought were all encompassing.

Impacts of Drought on Event Management

Understandably, such impacts flowed through directly to those who organized events in drought-affected communities. Of the 206 event managers who indicated that their festival organization had been negatively affected by drought, the most common impacts were reduced numbers of entries, stalls, and exhibitors, difficulties attracting sponsorship from cash-strapped local family businesses, a general decline in audiences and gate takings, and environmental management problems associated with water, deteriorating grounds, and dust (Table 3).

A range of specific impacts were recorded, many of which reveal the "nitty gritty" manner in which events are entangled materially in the biophysical environment (cf. Mayes, 2011), and subject to the whims of ecological volatility. Events dependent on water in lakes, rivers, and dams (fishing, yachting, kayaking, etc.) were cancelled or moved to nearby towns and regions. Many reported that in order for their event to function at the most basic level, water had to be purchased commercially and carted in from other regions. Fire bans were enforced in campsites because of heightened bushfire risk, detracting from convivial ambience. Exhibitors at agricultural shows found it difficult to obtain suitable straw for bedding for sheep (the straw being needed as emergency fodder elsewhere to keep stock alive).

A widespread problem was that agricultural showgrounds could not be regularly watered because of water restrictions, and they became hard, dusty, and unattractive. At Dalgety Show (NSW), "the showground has become very hard for the horse events. The arena where the horse events are held is too hard on the horses' legs through lack of water." In Echuca, Victoria, "speedway tracks were affected by drought, making running expenses of tyres higher to our competitors." The Spring Horseracing Carnival in Alexandra, Victoria, recorded that "there has been conflict between the golf club and race club about sharing water in the reserve." Meanwhile, a steam train festival in Red Cliffs, in western NSW, had received a government grant to install water tanks, but were waiting for rain to fall, for the tanks to fill: "we can only hope it rains as we need water to operate." According to the organizer of the Kilmore Agricultural Show (Victoria): "Farmers have cut back stock due to the cost of feed and many have water (or lack of it) problems. Farmers are unable to justify the cost of bringing stock to show due to financial hardship." After necessary mass slaughter of stock, campdrafting competitions (a traditional rural Australian sport that involves accurate rounding up and navigating of stock through a series of obstacles) were cancelled everywhere due to the sheer lack of cattle.

In terms of financial operation, many event managers described a "perfect storm" of declining audiences, revenue, sponsorships, and volunteer labor. As described by the manager of a Garden Show in Donald: "we live in the wheat belt of Victoria. With the drought, there are no crops, no income means no attendance at events such as ours." A bush tucker and music festival in Trundle, NSW, reported "Loss of committee members, businesses closing and therefore losing local sponsorship. Lack of money for people to travel and visit our festival, leakage of employment opportunities." In Gilgandra, NSW, the manager of the annual agricultural show said that there had been:

No crops again this year. Local farmers are being forced to sell stock due to no rain. This is then impacting the shops in Gilgandra (clothes, rural hardware shops, car dealers, etc.). They are all our sponsors; therefore it's hard to ask again for sponsorship due to their financial loss.

Table 3
Impacts of Drought on Festival and Event Management

Impact	No.	%	Examples
Reduced entries, stalls, exhibitors, sideshows	71	28.9	<p>"Water is our community. Last year entries down 70%."</p> <p>"Hesitancy to enter exhibits, unsure if pavilion will be full."</p> <p>"Farmers are reluctant to bring stock to the show that are not 'ready.'"</p> <p>"We have had reduced entries in some sections (e.g., cattle, fruit, veggies and horses), because people haven't had the water to grow veggies, and feed is low or expensive to buy for cattle and horses."</p> <p>"Low entry numbers in livestock competitions, less local produce grown and exhibited."</p>
Less sponsorship	54	22.0	<p>"Very much harder to find sponsorship."</p> <p>"No one has money to advertise or sponsor."</p> <p>"Crop production down—livestock sale prices down—less spending money by rural community, less money for businesses whom we rely on for monetary support—means less in donations/sponsorship."</p> <p>"Drought makes it difficult for our organisation to raise funds for basic costs."</p>
Attendance decline	50	20.3	<p>"Our region has been in severe drought for 10 years, this has had major impact on audience numbers across all events and economically generally."</p>
Environmental management problems (e.g., water, dust)	18	7.3	<p>"Water supply dam is almost dry—will have to cart water for track and surrounds."</p> <p>"Lack of water and devastation of the grounds."</p> <p>"Dust is a huge issue and bare ground. Our site is 120 acres especially when we have 18,000 people and loads of utes and vehicles. Affects the trade and catering stalls too."</p> <p>"Water restrictions on the maintenance of the track and surrounds."</p>
Event cancelled/postponed	15	6.1	<p>"Campdraft has been cancelled for last 3 years."</p> <p>"Some events may need to be cancelled or we have fewer entrants due to produce and stock being adversely affected."</p> <p>"Some events have been discontinued (e.g., campdrafting—no cattle available)."</p> <p>"We have changed the event date (from January to November) due to the heat and is more moderate temperature wise."</p>
Difficulties recruiting volunteers	15	6.1	<p>"Everything just becomes harder for some of our key people on their farms has meant less time for volunteers."</p> <p>"Economic constraints on farmers impinge on their ability to volunteer time and assist with the staging of the show."</p> <p>"Volunteer who own farms have reduced their input at times due to additional farm duties."</p> <p>"Committee members are hand feeding stock and don't have much time as they'd like to work on the show."</p>
Venue change	12	4.9	<p>"Event was transferred to another town using recycled water 70 km away."</p> <p>"The location that has previously been utilised up until the 2007 season was affected by the drought and was decided that the location should be changed."</p>
Reduced revenues	11	4.5	<p>"Fewer leisure dollars."</p> <p>"Less people through the gate, no money to spend."</p> <p>"People watch what and how much they spend."</p> <p>"Loss of expendable income means lower ticket sales in local community (and elsewhere)."</p>

Some people could not afford the petrol costs to travel to events, whether as audiences or volunteers, or to pay admission. Put simply by the manager of a heritage and arts festival in Cobden, Victoria: "Locals do not have the money to spend—we have noticed a large fall this festival. Petrol costs stop people travelling far from home." A youth cultural

festival in Ararat, Victoria, recorded that "people do not have money to spend or the fuel to drive to the events. Depression is a major factor in parents not wanting to leave home and socialize." Compounding this was how perceptions of drought-stricken rural communities impacted on potential tourist visitation from metropolitan centers. According to

a cycling event in Coonabarabran, NSW, "media images of drought we think is deterring some people from the coast from attending." Indirect impacts of drought thus extended to the coasts and cities: part of the festivals' usual market.

Meanwhile, especially for agricultural shows, the vital ingredient of volunteer labor—upon which festivals and events utterly depend (see Baum & Lockstone, 2007)—became scarcer. For volunteers there was an opportunity cost and financial burden to spending time away from farms. Time normally spent assisting with organizing and staging an event needed to be spent hand feeding stock, carting water, or diversifying crops and income streams. The manager of the annual agricultural show in Young, NSW, reported that "Persons are not travelling with live-stock for showing. Horse exhibitors only come for 1 day, not camp for 7 days as previously. Patrons are only coming one day, not for the full period." Event managers and organizing committees thus had to become more flexible in how they recruited and managed volunteers (cf. Lockstone, Smith, & Baum, 2007). Committee members fighting to save their farms simply let go of helping with the annual agricultural show for more immediate priorities.

Event managers themselves were juggling multiple roles—with drought compounding difficulties managing time and competing responsibilities. Of those affected by drought, only 14% had full-time, year-round event managers. The remaining event managers were working part time or fixed term for part of the year. Over half the event managers surveyed had second jobs (or other jobs as their main source of income) as diverse as TAFE teachers, shop assistants, farm hands, physiotherapists, music teachers, clerks, graziers, youth arts workers, aged care nurses, park rangers, kindergarten teachers, freelance editors, book keepers, and a basketball coach. According to a music festival in Coolah, NSW, "As it gets harder to meet everyday commitments people have more work and let go of volunteer work. Stress levels rise generally and conflicts seem to arise more frequently making it less enjoyable to put in all the effort." Quite simply people had less time or energy to divert to non-income-generating activities.

A garden show in Penshurst, Victoria, captured the widespread mood of interacting environmental and socioeconomic hardship:

Decreased capital, increase petrol costs—people can't afford to attend or spend as much as normal. Decreased economic spending; decreased availability of water for use at the event; decreased effect on community members—depression, feeling isolated and forgotten, and decreased capital to spend—there is not enough money to go round.

Over time, as the drought persisted, the "perfect storm" intensified.

Events as Community Adaptation and Resilience

Against this almost entirely negative backdrop of environmental crisis and social distress, the events surveyed clearly also played a role in communities coping with drought. Some 43% of all surveyed festival managers agreed that their event played a role in helping their community to adapt. A further 181 festival managers subsequently provided qualitative detail in the open-ended question on the sorts of constructive roles their event played in drought adaptation (Table 4), though the focus on festival managers may have introduced some bias given that they were more likely to stress the positive value of festivals.

Perceived contributions to community resilience and drought adaptation were diverse. The most common contributions to drought adaptation included bringing people together (64 events, or 35%), strengthening community (45 events, 25%), lifting morale and community spirit (36 events, 20%), providing an "escape" from the depressing circumstances and hard work of dealing with drought (29 events, 16%), and providing fun and entertainment so that people could have a good time as a "break" from drought hardship (26 festivals, 14%). A further 60 festivals suggested that their event provided a means for communities to come together for support and guidance and to give advice, to help the community cope with trauma, and to add to the culture of perseverance in their community.

Infusing qualitative responses were a variety of phrases hinting at the intangible, but important, emotional role played by festivals: "lifting community spirit," "helps people's connectedness and emotional well-being," "a day of interaction and happiness," "joy for the family," "people were able to join together and talk and commiserate with one another." The capacity of special events to elicit

Table 4
How Events Helped Communities Respond Constructively to Drought

	No.	%
Brought people together	64	35.4
Strengthened community	45	24.9
Boosted morale—sustained/lifted community spirit	36	19.9
Provided an escape	29	16.0
Provided fun—people had a positive/good time	26	14.4
A mechanism for support and guidance	25	13.8
A means to cope	24	13.3
Spurred resourcefulness/creative frugality	23	12.7
A space to share information	22	12.2
Promoted resource conservation	15	8.3
Overcoming isolation	13	7.2
Enhanced perseverance—a sense of endurance	10	5.5
Fulfilled emotional needs	9	5.0
Raised funds for local charities	9	5.0
Economic boost	8	4.4
Provided education	8	4.4
Helped overcome the city/country divide	7	3.9
Direct drought relief	7	3.9
Improved cooperation	6	3.3
Gave people something to look forward to	6	3.3
Enhanced local pride	5	2.8
A place for people to share common interests	3	1.7
Improved health and well-being	3	1.7
Improved adaptability	1	0.6
Created a positive image	1	0.6
Spurred creativity	1	0.6
Strengthened a sense of defiance	1	0.6
Helped gel shared identity	1	0.6
Enhanced inclusiveness	1	0.6
Deepened intergenerational relationships	1	0.6
People learned new skills	1	0.6
A place to meet new people	1	0.6
Offered the community something new	1	0.6
Put our place on the map	1	0.6
Promoted pooling of resources	1	0.6
A place to share memories of previous disasters	1	0.6
Enhanced social capital	1	0.6
Promote a sense of unity	1	0.6
Total	418	

emotions and trigger conversations about everyday struggles was particularly important given difficulties generally experienced in rural Australia—especially among men—where normative (masculine) stoicism prevails (cf. Alston & Kent, 2008). At Cardross, in Victoria, a “Scarecrow Spectacular” was “great for morale,” while at the Horticultural Spring Show in the same town: “people had other things to talk about (pleasant) instead of irrigation or rain. It was a day of smiles.” A Celtic music and cultural festival in Gundagai, NSW, “certainly helped to sustain community spirit. The local population became heavily involved in the annual festival and

the lift in community spirit was palpable.” According to a women’s comedy festival in Armidale, NSW: “Some local farmers have stated they need their annual dose of comedy to cheer them up.” Similarly, at a bush poetry festival in Tenterfield, NSW, “we have fun—bush poets make laughter and tears—we make fun of ourselves and our concerns.” Oberon’s (NSW) annual agricultural show whose stated aims were to “showcase rural life and community unity, to continue the tradition and historical value of Rural Shows” said that “The Show has always played a part in getting our community together—to have a good time, to talk with others

who have the same concerns and worries." The Yarrowonga Agricultural Show (Victoria) was "the only community festival for all people left in the community. Everyone supports the show because it is our way of life and local heritage."

Similarly, in Scottsdale, NSW: "The coming together of communities in times of stress is always beneficial." At the Picton Rodeo, NSW, "Most of the competitors are off the land and it's a time for them to get together and share their ups and downs on their property and discuss the price of fodder." A Picnic Race Meeting in Tottenham, NSW, "gave people a chance to forget their problems for a day." while the Morongla District Agricultural Show (NSW) was "a place to get together and 'chat,' taking minds off shooting stock, banks calling and other drought issues." Festivals evidently create spaces within which drought-affected communities can formally and informally share ideas, information, experiences, and provide support and guidance. Events fuel perseverance ("it helps our community manage to keep going"), and, for a day or two at least, help rural people overcome isolation and frustration.

In contrast to struggles experienced by some events in keeping their volunteers, a Triathlon hosted in Hillston, NSW, said that "in tough times rural communities pull together. Always plenty of volunteers!" For the organizers of the Yea Agricultural Show (Victoria), the drought:

Actually benefited us. Our show is held on the last Saturday of November each year and local farmers and farming families are usually in the peak of the hay season. Drought in 2006 meant no hay so farmers had the time to assist at the show and the opportunity to attend.

Bombala's (NSW) annual agricultural show "is a social get-together excuse, and helps the community maintain its 'we can do it' attitude. Bugger the drought."

The Dalgety Agricultural Show (NSW), "Brought people together to talk and share information. It provides a day out and away from the worries of the drought. A meeting place for the local community. A lot of reminiscing goes on about other droughts (and flooding rain!)."

Typical was the response of one event manager from a Victorian garden show: "Our event helps

sustain community spirit; it gives farmers something to work for and be interested in; makes people feel less isolated and not the only ones [suffering]. It brings the community together." A community festival in Falls Creek, Victoria, said that "during the worst drought in however many years it was fantastic to still be able to hold the event. The community would have been devastated if low water levels caused cancellation." In Dean, Victoria, the manager of a sports and cultural festival for people with disabilities said that "Our hall committee runs many events all of which help to maintain community spirit in various ways—a big spud and bonfire night, 50s to 70s dance, daffodil show, rose show, despite the drought, art shows, kids, art and craft, farmers meetings about water pipelines, etc." At a music and cultural festival in Mount Beauty, Victoria, a "sense of identity as 'survival against the odds' is reinforced by community getting together as usual for the festival. It raises spirits."

Where urban audiences were sustained, events also contributed to breaking down barriers between city and country, important in a time of drought. According to a food and wine festival in the Grampians, Victoria: "The event brings people in the region to see first-hand the effect of drought in regional areas. Through the event there are a number of opportunities created in raising awareness of smaller places and what they have to offer." Nevertheless, at the music festival in Coolah, NSW, "Originally in 2003 it was put on as a drought breaker and everyone came to 'forget' the drought—it rained! But the drought has worn everyone down by 2007 and the committee is struggling." Sometimes simply keeping events going was a satisfying achievement. Even in the most adverse circumstances festivals proved beneficial.

In Goulburn, NSW—which was by 2008 arguably the most prominent of drought affected rural towns in terms of negative media reporting—"the city has been on level 5 water restrictions for more than 2 years. The drought is having a negative impact on tourism/visitor perceptions and preventing visitation." Yet, according to the manager of the annual national Blues Music Festival held there, "On the upside, when it rained during most of this year's festival, no one complained!" In Goulburn, events had become "even more important as there is less disposable income in the local farming community

as a result of the drought. New money is much needed." The successful staging of the Blues Festival "boosts local business, lifts spirits and provided 'normalization' by continuing with annual event in extreme times." Exactly what contribution festivals have made and might make to drought-affected towns, in terms of sustaining community, reducing frustrations and tensions, and enhancing health and resilience, is however necessarily qualitative and relative, and impossible to calculate numerically.

Events as Catalyst for Vernacular and Creative Responses to Drought

Beyond their roles in bringing people together and lifting community spirits (Derrett, 2008), events themselves responded to drought by adapting management practices, introducing new ideas, and promoting "creative frugality" in tough times. Many noted their own efforts at raising funds for drought relief and affected farming families. The Mulumby Agricultural Show (NSW) "organised a drought relief programme to deliver donated food, including cattle fodder, to drought areas." Facilities owned by the regional horseracing carnival organization in Bairnsdale, Victoria, were used as a drought and bushfire emergency relief center. Signs were put up around agricultural showgrounds indicating water shortages and on the whole, "competitors and patrons respected the problem and drew down their water usage." To lift spirits organizers enrolled local schools and charities to put on free barbeques for tradespeople and volunteers.

Skills in "creative frugality" (Gibson & Connell, 2012) were especially honed by drought and accompanying financial hardship. The Beaufort Agricultural Show (Victoria), one of Australia's oldest (having been hosted annually since 1870), secured \$4,000 in the form of a government drought relief grant and thence halved their entry fee. The Yarrawonga Agricultural Show (Victoria) offered free entry tickets to families in financial need. A music and cultural festival in Crookwell, NSW, "raised money for the drought and because we have free entry it is affordable for all the community," while a Bush Heritage Festival in Corryong, Victoria "organised free street activities to improve general well-being of the community." At the agricultural

show in Young, NSW: "the free entertainment helps the household dollar go further." Yass' (NSW) film festival also put on free cultural events and entertainment to provide low-cost fun, and the major sponsors funded water usage educational programs via the event. Several agricultural show committees elected to lower or waive their rental fees on facilities, to enable other events to continue, in otherwise cash-strapped circumstances.

Events played an important role not just in deepening a sense of connection with nonhuman nature (Mayes, 2011), but also in making sense of natural disasters and catalyzing social responses. Agricultural shows especially set up marquees on sustainability, water reuse, and efficiency; trade stands were established providing goods and services to best deal with water restrictions. Not only were events becoming "greener" in their own management practices (Mair & Laing, 2012), they became important conduits for disseminating ideas about responding to environmental volatility throughout surrounding communities. Agricultural shows were vital points of information flow from government to rural communities, hosting exhibitors aiming to "make growers aware of impending water shortages for the 2007–2008 irrigation season." A big music festival in Lorne, Victoria, and Marion Bay, Tasmania, that professed "a strong environmental ethos" responded to the drought by introducing composting toilets, thus saving 100 kl of water annually. Similarly, those showgrounds and racetracks that reported having recently invested in recycled water technology reported smoother planning for staging events, highlighted that they could better manage drought-related environmental impacts such as increased dust and contributed to superior long-term environmental management.

Meanwhile, events became a locus of initiatives to improve mental health (cf. Sartore et al., 2008). At Griffith's (NSW) La Festa wine and music festivals, "we asked for gold coin donations for Griffith Suicide Awareness who do a lot of work with both local youth and local families, in particular farming families." A community music festival in Deniliquin,

Brings people together to have fun and also talk about their situation. Morale improves—mateship also. Helps people get through it. The town's morale

improves due to visitors' spending money in town. We introduced Movember [charity competition promoting men's health] this year—300 people/farmers talked to them at the Festival about mental health, and called afterwards.

A music festival in Mungindi, NSW that aimed "to promote quality live music in a rural setting and to provide an economic boost during the drought" simply said that it "boosted town morale, was something positive to plan and look forward to and puts our town on the map in a positive way." Such experiences, repeated across an incredible diversity of place and types of events, highlight the importance and contribution of rural festivals and events, not just through their immediate economic value (Gibson et al., 2010), but beyond, towards their social role as occasions for community building, bonding, and emotional support, while contributing to enhanced environmental awareness and sustainability. In circumstances where suicide and mental health were recurrent themes such social and economic contributions, however small, were invaluable, engendering a degree of pride in local creativity and resilience.

Conclusions

We have sought to qualitatively document festivals as dynamic responses to drought among rural communities—extending the literature on festivals and society beyond anthropocentric concerns towards societal entanglements with biophysical, climatic forces. Festivals and events are, in short, an important means to cope with environmental extremity. That resilience has diverse aspects, beyond those previously identified in the general rural resilience literature (Hystad & Keller 2006; McManus et al., 2012). Recurrent, long-term drought unquestionably brings devastating impacts, socially and economically. Yet, via festivals, observed community responses to drought were dynamic and creative. Drought interrupted regular affairs, and made life difficult for event managers, but it also catalyzed a sense of attachment to community events, brought people together, and spurred interdependence and cooperation amid hardship. Festivals are part of the lived experience of enduring drought (cf. Anderson,

2008) and provide catalytic times and spaces for performing the "emotional work" of responding to and recovering from such natural disasters (cf. Whittle, Walker, Medd, & Mort, 2012). In responding to crisis in ways that "strengthen communal bonds, resources and the community's capacity to cope" (Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2001, p. 47), festivals and events contribute tangibly and collectively to resourcefulness. The importance of bringing communities together, face to face, especially when times are more than hard, cannot be overstated.

Impacts of drought varied geographically, and with type of festivals. Music and arts festivals were less negatively affected and brought important emotional release and fun—a means to escape for a day or a weekend. Agricultural shows were particularly hard hit, especially in inland communities, but played a pivotal role as points of dissemination for technical and policy information, as social occasions that enabled struggling farmers to gain support and guidance and, for entire communities, as emotional emblems of endurance. Festivals stimulated much needed economic activity and encouraged "creative frugality." Festivals also fulfilled an important civic and psychological role in lifting community spirits and bringing communities together in otherwise adverse circumstances. Biophysical extremes, in this case a prolonged drought, are thus both a constrainer and a catalyst for the festivals and events sector, but in most cases have enhanced community resilience and creativity, and even contributed to establishing a basis for long-term environmental sustainability.

The Millennium Drought was a distinctive event, unlike droughts in other places and for different durations, hence its impacts were specific and are analyzed here for just three eastern Australian states. Nonetheless, the study adds to the very limited literature on the impact of external shocks on rural communities and festivals (e.g., Sartore et al., 2008). Beyond the specific case of drought, we advocate for a more integrated and dynamic analysis of festivals and events in place, one that recognizes the increasingly volatile biophysical context within which festivals and events are managed, but that is also attuned to how human communities can adapt to climatic variability in vernacular fashion, in largely unheralded ways. Festivals and events are an ideal locus of community activity

through which to gain insight into vernacular adaptation capacities, agency, resilience, and creativity.

Note

¹In related fashion, the present analysis also contributes in some ways to a wider literature on tourism, and local capacities to adapt and respond to external shocks, including social-ecological disasters (Faulkner, 2001; Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001; Hystad & Keller, 2006). Increasingly, tourism researchers are acknowledging not just the manner in which tourism impacts upon the environment, but the ways in which tourism industries and destinations respond and contribute to local adaptation capacities to severe shocks. Moderating our contribution to this literature is the finding observed in our wider survey that, other than in a minority of cases, most rural festivals and events are not tourism focused, do not espouse tourism development goals in their stated aims, and do not attract significant numbers of outside visitors (Gibson et al., 2010). Conflating festivals and events and the tourism sector is fraught. Rather, the vast majority of festivals that participated in our research were community events, embedded and almost wholly contained in local places with aims connected to place celebration, shared passions, and pursuits. Nevertheless, parallels do exist with the tourism industry in the need for a broader conceptual shift towards a more dynamic framing attuned to vernacular responses to biophysical extremity.

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