



PRESENTING:



Australasian Bluegrass and Old Time Music Association

ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERSHIP

2015



PRESENTING:



President's report for 2014/15

The ABOTMA Executive committee has had a very busy but also productive year with much of our effort directed at improving the way we do our business and the way we organize the MountainGrass festival.

At the commencement of 2015 the incoming Executive committee and I set some (ambitious) goals for the 2015 Executive Committee to continue to improve our processes and what ABOTMA can do as an organisation for the bluegrass and old-time music community, as well as continue to develop the MountainGrass festival as a peak event in Australia for bluegrass and old-time music.

These goals were:

To have both old time and a bluegrass band from the US at MountainGrass in 2015

Early in 2015 Lachlan Davidson, who has served on our Programming Sub-committee this year started discussions with Laurie Lewis and the result of this is that we have Laurie and her band the Right Hands performing at MountainGrass 2015. While we had not planned to have a second US Bluegrass band, because we did not feel that we had enough in our budget to do this, during the year we also learned that Chris Henry was returning to Australia to play at the Dorrigo Bluegrass and Folk Festival in October. Chris Henry & The Hardcore Grass had been a real hit at MountainGrass in 2014 and many members had lobbied me to see if we could get Chris Henry back this year. Seeing this as an opportunity we could not pass up, given that we'd be unlikely to get Chris back again for a long time, we couldn't say no! We are also very lucky to have the old time band the Orpheous Supertones playing at MountainGrass and we are very grateful to the sponsor who has enabled the Supertones to play at MountainGrass this year.

To have a performer policy and guidelines and a committee of three people to select and manage performers for the festival

I also wanted to improve how we selected performers and manage the selection process. To do this I dropped the role of Artistic Director, (because it puts too much responsibility and work on one person), and instead established a Programming Sub-committee to be comprised of three people who ideally have differing experience and backgrounds in the bluegrass and old-time music scene. This year's committee comprised Lachlan Davidson, Mick O'Neill and George Jackson. Having a group of people to make what is often very difficult selection decisions meant that selecting around 20 acts from over 50 performer applications was a shared responsibility. This structure for selecting performers worked very well and I think the result is an excellent program for MountainGrass 2015.

I also recognised that we needed to develop a policy and some guidelines for performers applying for MountainGrass to provide them with information about what we are looking for stylistically, how we select our performers, and what we can afford to contribute towards their costs. The entire ABOTMA Executive committee worked together to achieve this. We had our performer policy and guidelines up on our website ahead of opening for performer applications in March. [Guidelines for Performers.](#)

Better and more frequent communication with members

We continue to be very conscious that we need to communicate more frequently with our members throughout the year and have tried to do this over the past year via faceBook, the website as well as through email newsletters to our members and supporters. However, we recognise that more can always be done in this area.



Supporting other bluegrass and old time events and performers

One of the aims of ABOTMA since it was established was to try and assist other groups wanting to put on bluegrass and old-time festivals, and also to support musicians who are performing bluegrass and old time music. However, the decision to either pay or contribute financially to bands playing at MountainGrass means that a large proportion of our budget is expended on our performer budget. As a result we have not as yet been able to produce a large enough surplus to fund other activities.

This area of our policy was tested early in the year when a small group interested in putting the Redlands Festival back on again in 2015 approached us for financial support. After several weeks of negotiations and discussions we decided that we were simply not yet in a strong enough financial position to provide the amount of financial support that the group were wanting. This was a very difficult decision for the Executive committee to arrive at but we all felt that we were not serving the membership well by taking such a big financial risk.

As part of supporting our members who are also performers better I wanted to investigate how ABOTMA might be able to include other organisations and performers under our Public Liability Insurance. Unfortunately I did not make any significant progress on this, largely due to a lack of time on my part.

Improving our financial accountability

The first thing I did on assuming this role was to apply for an account at the local Bright Community Branch of the Bendigo Bank which offers accounts for not-for-profit organisations where the rule of two to sign for payments can be enforced via internet banking. This account also attracts much lower fees than our previous bank and aligns with our policy of using local services where possible. The Bright Community Bank also offers us the use of an EFTPOS machine for free, as well as the possibility of some sponsorship MountainGrass in future. We also operate with a highly granular budget where each item of revenue and expenses is clearly described so that it is easily understood by all Executive committee members so that in practice financial responsibility sits with the entire committee.

Continuing to develop and improve our websites

We are indebted to Greg McGrath, ABOTMA's secretary for our first two years, for putting together the ABOTMA and MountainGrass websites in record time in order for us to have an online presence. He very generously hosted and maintained these websites for the first two years and has continued to host these websites via Comstar Services. As anyone who manages a website knows, they cannot be left alone because they require constant development and timely updating of information if the public are to trust them as a reliable source of information. With Greg stepping back to concentrate on the Australian Bluegrass Blog, this year Jenine Abarbanel, Kim Wheeler and John Hilvert have worked very hard to update both websites and keep the information there up to date. I am very grateful to Greg, Jenine, Kim and John and everyone who has contributed content and assistance for keeping our websites going.

To look at obtaining visas for any future US acts to enable them to get other gigs while in Australia

Early in the year the Executive committee agreed that we wanted to avoid the problems we'd had for the past two festivals with our US performers being questioned at the airport regarding not having the appropriate visa to enter Australia as performers. We also wanted our visiting performers to have the option of either touring Australia or doing a few extra gigs while they were here. To this end Lachlan Davidson, with the help of Donal Baylor and Andrew Pattison, has worked very hard to obtain visas for the Laurie Lewis band. As part of doing this ABOTMA is now set up as a sponsor for visiting acts for this year and for next year and the year after that. Because ABOTMA is a not-for-profit organisation we are also able to avoid some of the fees associated with



the visas. This has been a great achievement and will great assist us with the process of having acts come from the US for future festivals. Very special thanks to Donal and Andrew for their assistance.

Conclusion

While we did not achieve everything we set out to do this year, the 2015 Executive committee has I believe made considerable progress towards improving the staging of the Mountaingrass festival in order to help establish and build a solid foundation for the event for the future. Along the way we have also hope we've made improvements to the degree of professionalism in the organization of the festival and the way ABOTMA conducts its business.

However, more work needs to be done. Challenges for the incoming President and Executive committee in 2016 include continuing to separate the finances of ABOTMA from the Mountaingrass festival, and to develop a business model for the festival to ensure a reliable and regular revenue stream given that opportunities for funding from grants is expected to reduce in future.

The other major challenge is continuing to attract and retain the people with the necessary skills required to stage the Mountaingrass festival each year. While we have been lucky to have some more people helping out to stage the festival, we still need more people in key roles, e.g. publicity, artwork, fund raising and seeking sponsorship, grant writing, and liaison with the local community.

I sincerely thank the current Executive Committee for their commitment, co-operation and endless hard work this year for being integral to what we've achieved. I would also like to thank all of our sponsors and supporters in both the music community and local community of Harrietville and surrounding region who have helped with publicity, fund raising, and in so many other ways this year including providing me with sound advice and wise counsel.

Helen Ludellen,

President of ABOTMA, 2015

Secretaries' report for 2014/15

Memberships:

At the time of this writing, we have 88 individual members, 56 dual memberships, and 2 band memberships. In addition, we acknowledge and thank our 8 lifetime members.

Committee meetings:

The greatest challenge facing the Executive committee remains that of geographical distance and the fact that committee members live in three different time zones, from Western Australia to New Zealand, which amounts to time different of either 4 or 5 hours in all, depending on the time of year. We appreciate the committee's patience and goodwill in coping with the time difference. Despite these challenges we have met every month via an online teleconference, and where possible we meet up at other festivals we are attending. We have created a Slack group for team collaboration and sharing of ABOTMA records. We post the minutes of the monthly Executive Committee meetings on the ABOTMA website, www.abotma.org.au so that members can see what we are discussing and what decisions are being made.

Other work undertaken on top of our membership/meeting duties included:



Website and communication with members:

Aside from our secretarial duties, we have focused on improving communication with members. As part of this we have spent a lot of time updating the ABOTMA (www.abotma.org.au) and MountainGrass (www.mountaingrass.com.au) websites. We have also focused on streamlining e-mail communications with members. The co-secretaries would like to acknowledge the assistance of John Hilvert and his contributions to re-developing our websites.

Publicity:

We have also both been involved in working on publicity for MountainGrass by putting newsletters together, posting on Facebook, doing radio interviews and managing radio sponsorship on PBS-FM in Melbourne.

Ticketing service:

We managed the online ticketing service for MountainGrass tickets. We continued to use an online ticketing provider who uses a QR code for MountainGrass this year to make it quicker and easier for both us and the buyer. We have also worked on simplifying the process required to sign up as a member of ABOTMA, and to improve record keeping in relation to memberships we are setting up an easy-to-use system for managing ABOTMA memberships in future.

Future

The Executive committee and our co-opted committee members, have worked tirelessly throughout the year and various members have been somewhat overstretched, taking on more than the one role they signed up for. Of note is Helen Ludellen who has done the lion's share of work as ABOTMA President and Production Manager for the MountainGrass festival. Everything that works, works because of her. We hope she shares her expertise and knowledge with the incoming committee.

In 2013/14 there were numerous Ordinary Members elected to the committee. This caused some problems with having enough separation between Executive and Festival committees and made Committee meetings long and difficult. In 2014, we went in the opposite direction and only co-opted three additional people to the committee: George Jackson and Mick O'Neill for programming and Kimberley Wheeler as a co-secretary. For 2016 we would like to establish a Festival organising committee to separate the work of the Executive committee from that of organising MountainGrass.

Our hope with the 2015 AGM elections is that sufficient members will volunteer to be part of the 2016 Festival organising committee. As co-secretaries we hope that we have helped set up communications and team-work systems to make work of both the Executive and future the Festival committees easier.

We look forward to working with the new Secretary and new festival committee, and intend to continue helping out in other ways.

Jenine Abarbanel and Kimberley Wheeler

Co-Secretaries, ABOTMA Inc.

Treasurer's report for 2014/15

STATEMENT BY THE TREASURER

In my opinion:

- (a) The accompanying statement of receipts and payments is drawn up so as to give a true and fair view of the results of the Association for the last financial year;
- (b) Note that as Treasurer, and not being part of the 2014-15 Executive Committee, I have had to rely on Bank Statements of the National Australia Bank as well as extracts of NAB transaction pertaining to the organisation to construct this Profit and Loss Statement for the 2014-15 financial year; and
- (b) At the date of this statement there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Association will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due; and

The financial statements of the Association have been made out in accordance with the basis of accounting described in the **Notes** to the financials.

Dated this 23rd day of October 2015

Alan L W Abraham BBus CPA
(Honorary Treasurer)

ABOTMA
ABN 79 143 681 867
STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS
FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2015

	2014-15
	\$
RECEIPTS	
Box Office Income	38,675.36
Fees	10,490.00
Grants	9,000.00
Sponsorships	600.00
Other Income	73.65
TOTAL REVENUE FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	58,839.01
PAYMENTS	
Artists International	
- Performance Fees	8,877.72
- Air Travel	876.00
- Accommodation and Meals	
Artists National and Local	
- Performance Fees	18,455.02
Site and Venue	
- Marquee and Stage	8,283.50
- Lighting	148.57
- Venues Seating	230.00
- Sound Engineers	3,050.00
- Portable Toilets	450.00
Sound Services	
- PA Hire	3,300.00
Festival Merchandise	
- T-Shirts and Caps	1,837.00
- Artwork	60.00
Media and Marketing	
- Printing	411.94
- Advertising	675.00
- Design	512.34
- Raffle	
- Festival Program	522.00
Ticketing Services	
- Online Ticketing Service Fees	
- Wristbands	
- Machine and Cash Handling	
ABOTMA Administration	
- AGM Costs	143.95
- Donations to HCF	300.00
- Public Liability Insurances	390.00
- Telephone and Conference Call Charges	354.81
- Office Supplies	120.00
- Postage and Stationary	156.40
- Committee Costs	282.74
- Bank and Merchant Fees	447.73
- Other Miscellaneous Expenses	3,879.72
TOTAL EXPENSES FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	53,764.44
SURPLUS(+)/ DEFICIT (-) FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	5,074.57
MOVEMENT IN BANK ACCOUNT	2014-15
	\$
Cash at Bank - Closing Balance 30 June 2014	30,346.01
Cash at Bank - Current Balance as at 30 June 2015	35,420.58
Net Movement in Bank Account	5,074.57

Alan LW Abraham *BBus CPA*
Treasurer
24-October-2015

Note: The Statements have been solely prepared from Banking reports and cash transactions of the National Australia Bank. As Treasurer I had limited knowledge and no involvement of the running of the 2014 ABOTMA Event.

**NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2015**

1 ACCOUNTING POLICIES

(a) Basis of Accounting

These financial statements are special purpose financial statements prepared in order to satisfy the requirements of the rules of association to prepare accounts. The Committee has determined that the Association is not a reporting entity as defined in Statement of Accounting Concepts 1 "Definition of the Reporting Entity" and therefore, there is no requirement to apply accounting standards in the preparation and presentation of these statements. No attempt has been made to comply with all accounting standards or other mandatory professional reporting requirements (Urgent Issues Association Consensus Views). The method of accounting used is on a cash basis. The entity has no capital (fixed) assets, employees or contracted staff.

(b) Income Tax

The Association is exempt from income tax.

2. ACCUMULATED SURPLUS

Accumulated Surplus at beginning of Year (\$30,346.01)

Accumulated Surplus at end of Year (\$35,420.58)

Movement in Accumulated Surplus (\$5,074.57)



PRESENTING:



2014 MountainGrass festival report

After the success of the 2013 event the incoming Executive for 2014 had the following specific aims in relation to MountainGrass 2014 in order to make improvements and continue building a solid foundation for MountainGrass festivals in future.

These included:

1. *To put on concerts and workshops and increase the number of US acts playing at the event*
2. *To increase the attendance and audience reach, and specifically to increase the attendance of younger people, people from the local region; and New Zealand and states of Australia other than Victoria.*
3. *To increase the educational side of the event and to create opportunities for beginners and emerging players of bluegrass and old time music to gain tuition from professional musicians via dedicated 'slow Jam' space;*
4. *To continue working and engaging with the community of Harrietville in staging the event;*
5. *To make enough money each year from the event to provide seed funding for the 2015 festival.*
6. *To stage an enjoyable event with good amenities (venues, food, comfortable places to pick and jam, inclusive atmosphere etc) and address some of the teething problems of the inaugural festival in 2013.*

While we didn't achieve everything we wanted to do, we did make considerable progress against most of our aims, as follows:

1. Concerts

We held concerts of bluegrass and old-time music on Friday night, Saturday afternoon and evening, Sunday afternoon and evening, at Feathertop Chalet in the main venue (marquee), The Snowline Hotel, the Harrietville Hotel Motel and the Mountain View Retreat Hall. Workshops were conducted on Saturday morning and Sunday morning at Feathertop Chalet. Informal jams and picks were held continuously throughout the festival with The Avalon hosting a welcome gathering and session on Thursday evening.

We had two US acts for 2014, *Special Consensus* and *Chris Henry and the Hardcore Grass*. Both bands were of a very high standard and were very well received by the audience.

2. Audience numbers:

In 2014 the ticket sales breakdown was:

319 season passes

135 day and evening tickets

Total: 454.

Adding to this about 150 non ticket buyers (performers, volunteers and stakeholders from the town) we estimate the total attendance to be closer to 650. With an estimated attendance of around 650 we increased our audience by around 20% on the 2013 event.

We tried to appeal more to younger people by increasing the number of old-time music bands, which are generally more popular with the 20-40 age group than bluegrass music. While we didn't record the ages of our attendees, we do believe we did attract more under 40s in 2014.

Analysis of the postcodes of ticket buyers showed that the majority of our ticket buyers do come from Victoria and Melbourne in particular, which is not surprising given the geographic proximity of Melbourne to the event, but we are increasingly attracting visitors from further afar as the reputation of the event improves.

We also attracted more people from the town of Harrietville in 2014 than 2013. We invited our key local stakeholders and accommodation providers to come and attend our finale concert on Sunday night. We hope to keep growing our attendance from the local area and that locals view the event as something that they are welcome to be a part of.

3. Educational opportunities including workshops

At MountainGrass 2014 we continued the tradition of having an educational side to the event by providing workshops for those learning to play bluegrass instruments and who are starting to perform on stage. While this is a major drawcard with beginner players, workshops are also well attended by more experienced players wanting to pick up tips on technique from more accomplished players. Instrument workshops continue to be an important drawcard for our attendees.

We also instituted a 'Slow Jam' space in one of the lodge lounge rooms at Feathertop Chalet where beginners and emerging musicians could join with others in sessions where simple tunes are played at a slower pace in order to allow beginners to participate and gain confidence.

Educational opportunities were not confined to playing and performance of bluegrass and old-time music. In 2014 we had 3 students from RMIT attend and gain experience that went towards a practical component in their Sound Production courses.

We recognise that much more can be done to expand the educational side of MountainGrass and this is something that we hope we can continue to expand and work on in future.

4. Community engagement

In 2014 we continued to work closely with the community and (hopefully) continued to build goodwill regarding the running of the event. We continued to involve our key stakeholders in our planning of the event by obtaining input into the overall event plan for the event, the revised Risk Management Plan, and planning of food availability.

At the community's request in 2013 we did not bring in food vendors from outside the town. We maintained the embargo on bringing in food stalls from outside Harrietville in 2014 and found that local businesses were able to cope with the extra demand for takeaway and café style food. We did involve local businesses as much as we could in staging the event, giving preference to local suppliers for our major infrastructure requirements, including the marquee (24 Seven Events in Wangaratta), our PA system (PAS services in Wodonga), our sound techs from central Victoria and Albury, and porta loos from Pacific Hire in Myrtleford. We also moved our banking to the Bright Community Bank branch of the Bendigo Bank. With the bank open on Saturday morning in nearby Bright we have the ability to undertake banking during the festival and get support for the EFTPOS machine that we use at the festival.

5. Financial sustainability:

Our aim with the event is to become less reliant on grant funding and to generate enough revenue each year to provide enough money to put the festival on in the following year. In 2014 we were careful not to overextend ourselves financially, and therefore we did not commit to the expense of bringing out two overseas acts, settling instead for one. This was because we were committed to the expense of hiring a marquee and extra seating and toilets, which resulted in a considerable increase in expenses. However, we were unexpectedly able to have an additional US act on our bill because a US act that was touring Australia at the time, Chris Henry & The Hardcore Grass was able to fit our event into their Australian tour. Not surprisingly, acts from the United States, the origin of Bluegrass and Old Time Music, are a major drawcard for our ticket buyers, and we learned from the 2014 event that having at least two US acts is the key to attracting an audience large enough to cover the cost of obtaining these bands.

As part of maximising the economic benefit to the region and promoting it as a tourist destination we also decided to continue holding the festival on the third weekend in November for 2014 so that it coincides with the Bright markets, a big attraction for many of our visitors.

Revenue and funds raised in 2014:

Ticket sales: \$38,675

Grants: we received two very welcome grants of \$5000 from Regional Development Victoria and \$3000 from the local Alpine Shire Council.

Donations: we also received several donations and sponsorship to the value of \$2,600 including one from Feathertop Chalet. We are very grateful to these donors.

In kind sponsorship: our suppliers and the Harrietville business community very generously gave us \$2,667 worth of in-kind sponsorship for accommodation, meals, advertising and printing costs.

Merchandise: Other fundraising activities that were successful were the sale of branded T-shirts and caps which netted us \$1188¹.

Raffle: another very successful fundraiser in 2014 was our first instrument raffle. From this we generated a net profit of \$1,680². If we can continue to obtain desirable prizes then this raffle should continue to be a good source of revenue for the event in coming years.

After expenses we came out with a surplus of \$5,074.

6. Staging an enjoyable event and improving our amenities.

Problems with overcrowding of the main venue, the Feathertop Conference room, in 2013 were addressed in 2014 with a marquee that seated 400 comfortably. The larger venue also allowed our sound technician, Mark Woods, to put in a more powerful PA so that the sound was improved. Feathertop Chalet added great value to the festival site by providing a bar, takeaway food and café – style seating and fire drums at night in the covered drive way area which greatly enhanced the atmosphere of the festival. Patrons really loved this change and the return of a marquee. The response to the 2014 festival was overwhelmingly positive with many people saying that they would

¹ Not endorsed by the Treasurer

² As above



PRESENTING:



be back! Hopefully our audience numbers for 2015 will reflect that. The main negative point from 2014 was the fact that we did not restrict the entry of dogs into the marquee and patrons complained about dogs barking, wandering across the main stage and being a nuisance generally so we will ban them from the venues in 2015.

Problems with the 2013 festival that we addressed in 2014 included:

- Overcoming overcrowding in the main venue by bringing back a marquee with a seating capacity of 400 as the main venue
- Overcoming sound quality problems by employing more experienced sound technicians and a better PA for the marquee.
- Better signage with directional signs along the main street of Harrietville and at Feathertop Chalet.
- More toilets with three port-a-loos
- Better publicity of the event: we extended our reach on social media and radio and print media in 2014. However, we recognise that still more needs to be done to raise awareness of the event in the local region in particular, as it is an obvious source of revenue through day tickets, as well as internationally.
- Improved preparedness for an emergency: by improving our Risk Management Plan and Emergency Procedures prior to the festival we were better prepared in event of a major problem or medical emergency.

Overall, the success of the 2014 MountainGrass festival would not have happened without a huge amount of work, assistance and advice from our volunteers, performers and patrons. Thank you to all of you!

ABOTMA Executive and MountainGrass organisers for 2014