



ARTS NORTHERN RIVERS

Introduction

ANR is the peak body for the arts and cultural sector in the Northern Rivers region of NSW.

We are the largest body in the state-wide Regional Arts Network, and we are dedicated to building positive futures for regional communities in NSW through arts and cultural development.

Economic value

Arts Northern Rivers partnered with Patternmakers to build a profile of the Northern Rivers creative sector, with support from Create NSW.

New analysis of workers and businesses was commissioned from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

678 people across the region were surveyed, including 480 creative practitioners.



Economic value

The Northern Rivers has over 5,200 cultural and creative workers. We are home to the largest concentration of cultural workers in NSW outside Sydney.

According to the 2021 Census, there were 5,296 people employed in a cultural or creative occupation as their main job, representing 4% of the workforce.

The region's cultural and creative workforce grew 2x faster than the national creative workforce, and 4x faster than the total Australian workforce from 2016 to 2021.



Economic value

Turnover of the region's cultural and creative businesses reached almost \$900 million in 2021, up from \$662 million in 2016.



Image: Photograph from the 2021 Art on Bundjalung market, Lismore, by Kate Holmes

Economic value

The Northern Rivers is a hub for independents and small creative businesses:

60% of all creative businesses in the region are sole traders, compared to 56% of creative businesses nationally.

	Northern Rivers creative businesses	National creative businesses	National – all businesses
20 or more employees	1%	2%	3%
1-19 Employees	40%	42%	39%
Non employing (i.e. sole traders and partnerships)	60%	56%	59%

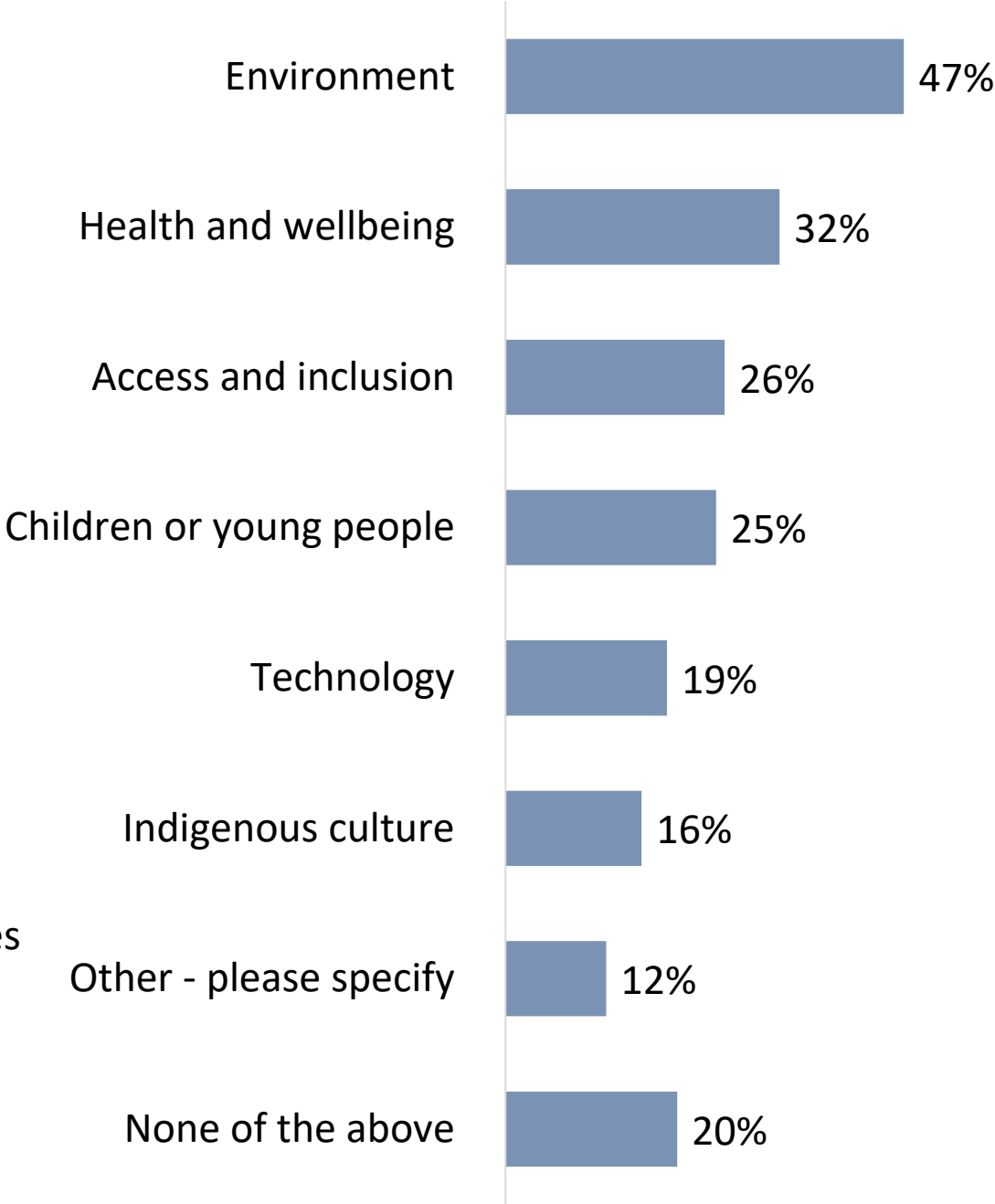
Figure: Counts of Australian Businesses, Northern Rivers and nationally, creative businesses and all businesses, by number of employees (ABS 2021)

Workforce

8 in 10 artists in the region are intersecting with another industry – using their skills to contribute fields like environment, health and education.

- Examples of how artists intersect with other sectors:
- Working as teachers, facilitators or designers
 - Volunteering their time or skills to support creative processes in other industries
 - Making work about key issues and ideas.

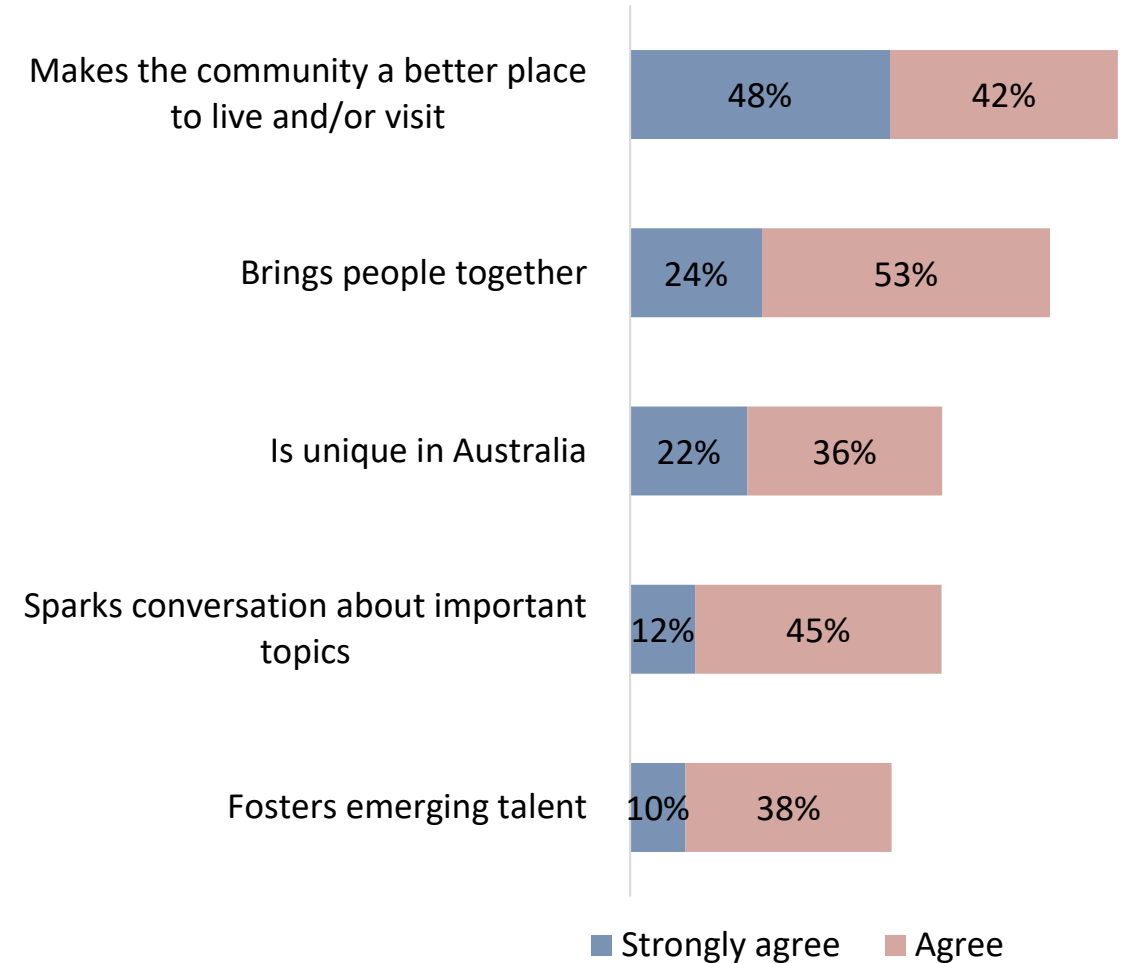
Figure: Does your practice intersect with any of the following areas?
Please select only those which are integral to your practice. (n=437)



Liveability

Locally, 9 out of 10 respondents to the Who We Are survey agreed that the creative sector makes the Northern Rivers a better place to live and visit.

A majority also agree that it brings people together, sparks conversation about important topics, and that it is unique in Australia.



Liveability

Artists are contributing to community recovery and resilience.



Lismore CBD public artwork by Holly Ahern and Eden Crawford-Harriman as it appeared after the city's March 2022 flood event.
Photo by Brendan Beirne.

Liveability

There are many examples of how the arts strengthens our region.



Cultural artwork and murals help create cultural safety at the Women's Care Unit at Lismore Base Hospital, improving patient outcomes.



Art provides a different way to talk about environmental issues, such as Karla Dickens' work Rise and Fall, as part of Byron's Climate Conversations initiative.



Arts events like the Lismore Lantern Parade bring people together and promote community spirit and resilience, as well as economic activation.



Performing arts help young people grow into confident, healthy adults, such as Spaghetti Circus's classes and professional productions.

“Arts, culture and creativity
assists populations to live well –
with prosperity, cohesion,
security, health and
sustainability...but it is currently
underutilised in Australia.”

-Think tank ***A New Approach***

Opportunities

Creatives want to access space and activate venues with residencies, pop-ups, creative retail activations and partnerships.

What kind of spaces?

- 90% of creative sector workers want access to **creative hubs** and **semi-commercial spaces** for studios, arts spaces and creative retail in each LGA
 - 84% are interested in premises to host artist residencies, with making/performance space and accommodation
 - 82% want to see **blak-owned and led spaces** for cultural practice and gatherings on Country.
- 

Opportunities

First Nations artists have experienced some of the most intense disruption yet are poised for growth and development.

Image: Art on Bundjalung 2024, Dirruwung | Evans Head,
photo Bek Hatfield



Opportunities

The region has highly engaged audiences, who want to experience even more.

In 2021, ABS data shows that 65% of the region's population attended cultural events, which is higher than the average for rural electorates in NSW (53%).

100% of respondents who attend creative experiences in the region are interested in attending more.

Audiences say the main barrier to attending is awareness of what's on (55%).

Image: NORPA production of FLOW Maclean, image by Kurt Petersen



Opportunities

Our creative sector is a vital drawcard for travellers to the North Coast, and can help rebuild visitor expenditure.

More and more, *experiences* have become powerful decision drivers for travelers: the possibility of a life-changing travel moment motivates people to book a trip ([McKinsey](#)).

Tourists who participate in cultural activities are known to stay longer and travel further from major cities. They are a high-value segment, who spent \$6.2bn in regional NSW in '23.

More cultural offerings can bring competitive advantages for our region: “What differentiates the Northern Rivers from other coastal communities is our cultural communities and alternative lifestyles” – Michael Thurston, DNC



Image: Clarence Valley Gallery visitors in 2023 CVIAA. Image by Simon Hughes Media.

Opportunities

Who We Are evidences the need for new initiatives and partnerships.

We're eager to hear from you!

Partnerships

Arts Northern Rivers is partnering with Ingrained Foundation on a new opportunity for artists to make work related to climate within community.

Activating vacant spaces

Arts Northern Rivers is working with councils and businesses to advise on new uses of vacant space. It is facilitating partnerships and exchanges nationally and internationally to bring artists to the region to activate key spaces.

Other work

- Working with independents on expansion into adjacent sectors, e.g. Tropical Fruit World and M Arts
- **Sector gatherings** across the region to connect independent practitioners, with the next event on **4 December**
- **Northern Rivers Creative**, a database of 450+ local artists available for work.



read the
who we are
report online



ARTS
NORTHERN
RIVERS

