



1–10 May
2026

Horizon

Arts Festival
Impact Report

Sunshine Coast
Kabi Kabi – Jinibara Country



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Traditional acknowledgement

Sunshine Coast Council acknowledges the Sunshine Coast Country, home of the Kabi Kabi peoples and the Jinibara peoples, the Traditional Custodians, whose lands and waters we all now share.

We recognise that these have always been places of cultural, spiritual, social and economic significance. The Traditional Custodians' unique values, and ancient and enduring cultures, deepen and enrich the life of our community.

We commit to working in partnership with the Traditional Custodians and the broader First Nations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) communities to support self-determination through economic and community development.

Truth telling is a significant part of our journey. We are committed to better understanding the collective histories of the Sunshine Coast and the experiences of First Nations peoples. Legacy issues resulting from colonisation are still experienced by Traditional Custodians and First Nations peoples.

We recognise our shared history and will continue to work in partnership to provide a foundation for building a shared future with the Kabi Kabi peoples and the Jinibara peoples.

We wish to pay respect to their Elders – past, present and emerging, and acknowledge the important role First Nations peoples continue to play within the Sunshine Coast community.

Together, we are all stronger.

Introduction

From **1–10 May 2026**, Horizon Festival brought colour, creativity and unforgettable moments to the Sunshine Coast, celebrating **10 years** of the Festival.

With **51 events** in **19 venues** across **13 locations**, familiar and unexpected places came alive with live music, performance, visual art, workshops and more. The Festival welcomed **almost 23,000 attendees** to iconic beaches, urban streets, ancient rainforest, galleries and theatres, all transformed into places of discovery and connection, marking a **13% increase in attendance**.

‘People Connecting in Place’ guided the curatorial vision of Horizon 2026, foregrounding diverse voices, shared experiences and a strong sense of belonging. Embedded throughout the program, this approach prioritised First Nations leadership and place-based storytelling, strengthening cultural pride, exchange and deepening community connection with the arts on the Sunshine Coast.

Grounded in the landscapes and stories of Kabi Kabi and Jinibara Country, the Festival invited audiences to engage with art that is both locally rooted and globally resonant.



Image: Danny Widdicombe & The Wand'rin' Stars, 2026.
Photo by Luna Productions.

2026 program

The program prioritised accessibility, meeting audiences where they are and embracing curiosity.

With **2.2 events attended on average per person**, an increase on **1.8 events** in 2025, Horizon Festival 2026 received an **audience satisfaction rating of 93%**, an increase of **4.5%** on 2025.

Horizon also achieved a **Net Promoter Score of 60.7**, reflecting the level of excellence of the Festival.

‘Horizon’s relationship to place is a thread that runs through every aspect of the festival. Set against the striking landscapes of the Sunshine Coast, the festival feels inseparable from its surroundings. The environment is not a backdrop, it’s a collaborator and co-conspirator.’ – scenestr Magazine



Festival snapshot



10 days



13 locations



51 events

19 free



28 partners



764 artists

71% local artists

22% First Nations artists



22,857 attendees

13% increase in attendance



93%

satisfaction rating



37%

increase in
participating artists



\$1,791,156

gross economic stimulus



501 media mentions



7.44m+ media reach

\$136.9k+ advertising value



145,645

website page views



171,776

social reach



13,947

email subscribers

First Nations- embedded



Horizon Festival demonstrates a clear trajectory in First Nations programming, embedding First Nations leadership, artist development pathways, cross-disciplinary practice and place-based storytelling, with **171 First Nations artists and contributors** across **nine events** in 2026.

Horizon's flagship cultural event, Yauar Warai Wandî – Sing, Dance, Gather, was a large-scale cultural gathering in Coolumb led by Gubbi Gubbi Elder Lyndon Davis and Deline Briscoe. Featuring **85 dancers and musicians**, the event attracted **1,500 attendees** in a celebration of Country, culture and community.

‘Horizon Festival offers more than just entertainment; it provides a vital bridge to the Kabi Kabi and Jinibara peoples’ stories and traditions.’ – **Festival attendee**



‘The meal served at Bonyi Bounty far surpassed any other meal I have ever had. It was sublime and the explanations were insightful. All the chefs and staff were clearly very proud of what they had achieved, as they absolutely should be. Their generosity in sharing their stories and food demonstrate the beautiful culture of Indigenous people. Please hold many more of these experiences.’ – **Festival attendee**

Horizon 2026 also introduced artistic development pathways through mentorships, workshops and in-progress presentations. Boundaries at Bankfoot, in the Glass House Mountains, featured new works by five emerging First Nations playwrights and was the outcome of a six-month mentorship program.

Burnt Earth: Bonyi Bounty was an immersive dining experience led by First Nations chefs, exploring native ingredients, food traditions and cultural knowledge with 100 diners across Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve and Tranquil Park, Maleny.

Linking marine environments and cultural knowledge, SALTWATER – Connections of Land and Sea partnered with Saltwater Eco Tours to present a river cruise through Mooloolaba with dance performances on the shoreline.

Visual art exhibitions, including Medicinal Plants and BLAK OUT, were grounded in plant knowledge, cultural practice and contemporary First Nations perspectives.



Acclaimed performances

Bringing exemplary talent to the Sunshine Coast, Horizon Festival connected local audiences with nationally and internationally acclaimed artists across dance, theatre and music.

Dance

The Butterfly Who Flew Into The Rave travelled from Auckland to captivate audiences with a work condensing three days of raving into one hour of power. Choreographer Oli Mathiesen was recently selected to represent New Zealand at the Venice Biennale Danza 2026.

‘There is always a distinctive world class offering at Horizon that is just as good as anything you could experience in the capital cities and we love that it’s local!’ – Festival attendee



Horizon also presented a powerful double bill exploring Black masculine identity: Kuramanunya by Thomas E.S. Kelly (Minjungbal, Wiradjuri and Ni-Vanuatu), and Exoticism by Vishnu Arunasalam and Lucky Lartey, performed to **150 audience members** across two nights at the Black Box Theatre in Nambour.

Theatre

Award-winning production company Wright&Granger brought HELIOS from the UK, while Umbilical Brothers delighted audiences with their internationally recognised blend of comedy, theatre and physical performance, selling out all **248 tickets**.

‘No bells and whistles, no dramatics, just good story telling that leaves you thinking deeply about ‘daring greatly.’ – The Pineapple review on HELIOS

Live music

Just two weeks before appearing at Horizon, First Nations singer Gem Cassar-Daley won both the Queensland Music Awards Pop Award and Song of the Year. Similarly, Danny Widdicombe & The Wand’rin’ Stars had their latest album named ABC Country Spotlight Album of the Week immediately following their Horizon performance.

Both artists performed at The MET, Maroochydore, to a combined attendance of **322 people**.

Local and diverse voices

Horizon Festival provided platforms for Sunshine Coast audiences to hear stories often left unheard while championing local voices already making a significant impact within their communities.

The Sunshine Troupe, an inclusive dance group of all abilities, appeared across three events and opened the Horizon program launch at Cotton Tree. Their infectious energy secured the Festival's first feature on Channel 7. Nearby, Icons at Equity Works in Sunshine Plaza showcased artworks by people living with disability, inviting audiences to engage with diverse lived experiences and perspectives.

Montville Timber Trail celebrated the woodworking heritage of the hinterland through demonstrations, workshops and exhibitions throughout the township, attracting approximately **5000 attendees**.

At the Sunshine Coast Hinterland Writers Festival, over **2000 audience members** gathered to hear some of the nation's leading writers, including leading First Nations author Bruce Pascoe discussing his latest book on the night sky.

'It was a very successful weekend and surpassed all my expectations. It's clear the range was calling out for an event like this, and the stallholders gave constant positive feedback thought the event.' – Director of Montville Timber Trail





Community authorship

Horizon's 2026 program created opportunities for audiences to contribute directly to cultural experiences and storytelling. Through participatory works and targeted community engagement, Horizon deepened its connection with the diverse communities that shape the region.

Picture Culture: Here & Now invited photography submissions exploring culture, identity and lived experience of migration on the Sunshine Coast. Of **58 submissions**, the resulting exhibition featured works by **20 local photographers**, curated by Jo-Anne Driessens and presented at The Old Ambulance Station.



'I took part in the dancing with 'Bring A Plate' Flashmob on Opening Night – excellent fun with highly skilled facilitators who were able to encourage and engage the community to join in the dance, as well as perform at a professional level to entertain the crowd.'

– Festival attendee

The Namba Day Out brought the Nambour creative community together through spoken word, street art, live music and artists' markets, celebrating the town's distinctive identity and creative energy.

At both Horizon Festival Opening Night and Horizon Dance Hall, participatory dance works by Bring a Plate and Common People Dance Project invited community members to rehearse and perform alongside professional artists.

Featuring **10 dance groups** from Queensland and interstate, Dance Hall brought together styles including Bollywood, Brazilian samba, line dancing and rock'n'roll, attracting **approximately 700 attendees** and bringing the Festival to a memorable close.

'Dance Hall was a beautifully organised event. I loved the programming of all the workshops and performances. I loved the food offerings of tea and scones on Mother's Day and the food trucks. The hall was a great space to hold the event. It was well attended and had a beautiful community vibe.' – Festival attendee

Family experiences

Families and people of all ages were central to Horizon 2026, with accessible programming and welcoming venues across the region.

Horizon Hangouts provided a dedicated family basecamp beside Sunshine Coast City Hall in Maroochydore, complete with face painting, balloon artists and informal gathering spaces.

Horizon's outdoor screening of *Babe* attracted **1,907 attendees** to Family Film Night in Baringa Forest Park in Aura, many of whom were within walking distance of the event.

Radical Hope Machine 2 transformed Library+ Caloundra into a space of creativity and discovery. Stories of hope were developed through workshops including local children and shared through sound, textiles and interactive installations, attracting **1,213 attendees**.

Secret Garden sold out, bringing audiences together on Mother's Day for live music, flower arranging and local food within the Maroochy Regional Bushland Botanic Garden.

'Secret Garden was a nice calm environment, beautiful location, just the right amount of people.'
– Festival attendee



Image: Family Film Night, 2026.
Photo by Luna Productions.

Sector engagement

Horizon strengthened engagement with the creative sector through professional development opportunities, support for new work development and the amplification of local artistic practice. The 2026 program saw a **37% increase in participating artists on 2025** (from 557 artists to 764 artists in 2026).

Sector workshops

The sold-out Song Shed brought together acclaimed songwriters and industry mentors with **20 musicians** for a collaborative songwriting experience.

Jo-Anne Driessens led The Business of Photography Workshop, while the artists of The Butterfly Who Flew Into The Rave delivered a contemporary dance masterclass to another **20 participants**. Theatre maker Nancy Denis also presented a Watchable Theatre Workshop.

Development of new work

Through a residency at the Makerspace, Library+ Caloundra, artist Shaye Hardisty developed new textile works for Radical Hope Machine 2, expanding her practice through access to specialised equipment and technology.

‘My residency at Library+ has been a dream. It has given the project space to spread and take up space! And make a mess. The biggest surprise so far has been learning about the audio technology. Having never worked this way with technology before, I expected it to be a much bigger process and have more equipment involved, but the tech pieces that I am incorporating in the garment creation are very manageable and exciting to work with.’ – Festival artist Shaye Hardisty

Amplifying local artists

Horizon continued to champion local visual arts practice through exhibitions including the Local Contemporary Art Prize 2026 Finalists Exhibition at Caloundra Regional Gallery, featuring 40 finalists, and solo exhibitions by Amanda Bennetts and Natalya Hughes at UniSC Art Gallery.

Image (hero): BLAK OUT, 2026. Photo by Georgia Haupt; Image (middle 1 and 2): Radical Hope Machine 2, 2026. Photo by Georgia Haupt; Image (middle 3): BLAK OUT, 2026. Photo by Daniel Fewquandle; Image (bottom 1): Natalya Hughes: The Interior, 2026. Photo by Georgia Haupt; Image (bottom 2): Amanda Bennetts: Fragmented, divided—yet whole, 2026; Photo by Georgia Haupt; Image (bottom 3): Picture Culture: Here & Now, 2026. Photo by Georgia Haupt.

Marketing reach

A comprehensive marketing campaign spanned national and local media, generating **501 media mentions** and a **potential audience reach of more than 7.44 million** across print, digital and broadcast channels. This reflects a significant increase on 2025, which garnered **169 mentions** and a **4.04 million reach**.

A key component of the campaign was the printed program and poster distribution strategy, with almost **15,000 Horizon Festival program guides** distributed throughout the Sunshine Coast and greater Brisbane.

The campaign was supported by key media partners including VAULT Magazine, The Weekend Edition, scenestr, Peppermint Magazine and 4ZZZ.



Media coverage

From program launch on 26 February to the final day of the Festival on 10 May, Horizon secured **339 radio mentions, 87 online and social media features, 42 print and magazine features, and 35 broadcast segments**, generating an advertising value equivalent of approximately **\$137,000**.

Highlights included coverage on ABC Queensland Radio, Channel 7 Sunshine Coast, RACQ Online, My Weekly Preview and The Hinterland Times.

‘What Horizon captures so successfully is the emotional texture of a place through its people. Not just through headline acts or polished programming, but through the conversations unfolding between events, the artists reshaping public space, the cultural knowledge being shared openly, and the reminder that creativity on the Sunshine Coast extends far beyond galleries or tourism campaigns.’ – Paper Mâché Magazine





Digital

The Horizon Festival website recorded **145,645 page views** during the campaign period, while social media content reached **171,776 people**.

The Festival also communicated directly with audiences through an email database of more than **13,947 subscribers**, and saw a **15% increase in Instagram followers** on 2025.



‘Thank you SOOOOO much for the incredible event!!!
I absolutely LOVED it!!! 🤩🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏 I will DEFINITELY
be back next year!!!’ – Festival attendee



Ticketing and accessibility

Horizon Festival **outsold the 2026 ticket forecast by 40%.**

Sell out shows included *Burnt Earth: Bonyi Bounty* (with 150 attendees at \$150 per ticket), *The Umbilical Brothers* and *Secret Garden*, as well as *The Song Shed* and *The Butterfly Who Flew Into The Rave* industry workshops.

From live music to contemporary performance, the majority of tickets were priced at \$30–40. On top of free community engagement workshops ahead of the festival, there were **19 free events** supporting financial accessibility and encouraging participation from diverse audiences.

In 2026, Horizon refreshed its accessibility framework to provide clearer information and support for audiences living with disability. The Festival also continued its MobTix initiative, supporting First Nations audience attendance through discounted ticket access.

‘The events are affordable and accessible.
Performances outstanding.’ – Festival attendee

Partner support

Horizon Festival was made possible through the generous and collaborative support of Strategic, Program, Media and Philanthropic Partners.

This year’s partners aligned around a shared vision for inclusive experiences that celebrated the unique identity of the Sunshine Coast. Their support enabled the Festival to connect with audiences through tailored funding, expertise, activations and advocacy.

Presented by



Strategic partners



Program partners



Media partners



Philanthropic partners





Social and community impacts

Attendees reported strong perceptions of the Festival's social and destination impact, feeling engaged, moved and inspired. Over 80% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that they felt **engaged in the experience (82.4%)** or felt **moved or inspired by their experience (80.2%)**.

Others reported an increased understanding of and **empathy towards other cultures as a result of attending Horizon Festival (51%)** and an **increased level of social activity within my group (49.2%)**.

Most attendees agreed that the Council's arts and cultural programs deliver a wide range of benefits to the community, individuals and local economy. Attendees reported an **increase in the appreciation of the value of arts, culture and heritage as part of community life in the region (94.2%)**, **contribution to individual wellbeing (93.1%)**, and a **sense of community pride (92.6%)** based on Horizon Festival and other Council arts and cultural programs.

'Never seen culture presented like this here, reminded me of my family back Home' – Maori Elder



Economic impact

Horizon 2026 delivered a significant ongoing economic impact to the Sunshine Coast region, demonstrating the value of the local arts sector and cultural tourism.

This year, a strong focus was placed on local community attendance with **80% of all unique attendees local to the region** – a 10% increase on Horizon 2025 – as well as on the three-hour drive market. The gross economic stimulus, or total spending in the region by attendees and the Festival, was **\$1,791,156** across hospitality, retail, transport and accommodation.

‘Overall Horizon is a great festival. I look forward to attending it again. The Sunshine Coast is also such a beautiful place to be and I definitely feel encouraged to visit again’. – **Festival attendee**

In total, **\$618,589 direct spending for the Sunshine Coast region** was generated, and intrastate visitors contributed the largest portion of this spending (\$464,755), signaling the interest in regional tourism amongst Queenslanders.

Horizon 2026 attracted **938 overnight visitors** with an **\$506,774 overnight visitor expenditure**, increasing their daily spend from \$203 in 2025 to \$223.81 per person per day. **Three-quarters (75.8%)** of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that their visit to this event has **enhanced their image of the Sunshine Coast as a destination**.

Through continued growth of audiences, and contribution to the arts sector and the regional economy, Horizon demonstrates the value of culture as a key pillar in the Sunshine Coast economy, community and long-term regional development.

Horizon