

Monday, 16 March 2020

ATTN: Vida Barrett
Chairperson
Blazing Swan Committee
38 Amherst Street
Fremantle WA

Mass Gatherings in the context of COVID-19

Dear Madam Chairperson,

These are exceptional times. The novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), causing the severe disease COVID-19, has swept the world and has finally made its way to Australia. As a nation we passed our first hundred cases on 10 March 2020 and our trajectory lies somewhere between Japan and Italy, suggesting a doubling of cases every 3-5 days. Our first case-doubling occurred in 3 days and though it is early, reasonable predictions suggest this may continue unless strict social isolation policies are adopted by all.

In Italy, Intensive Care Units are overwhelmed, people are being left to die because there are simply not enough resources to treat them. Not enough beds, not enough staff unaffected by the virus, and not enough equipment such as ventilators. SARS-CoV-2 has been discovered to be carried and transmitted by people who have no symptoms, and as such can spread undetected through parts of the community, particularly where there is prolonged closeness and physical contact. If the virus spreads in a similar manner in Australia, the health system will become overwhelmed in 6 weeks or so.

DeployED has supported Blazing Swan Festival since 2015. I have worked as the Medical Lead each year (and volunteered as a doctor in 2014) and have given over a thousand hours of my time directly working at Blazing Swan over the last 6 years. I have given thousands more hours in development of the best medical service that a festival of this size has seen. I have experienced the highs, the lows and everything in-between, working for, and loving, the Blazing Swan community. I, and my staff, have treated people in the most serious of conditions, and we have also dived into the cuddle puddles. We have been a beacon that anyone can come to for help, and we have wandered the Playa with the tribes.

I, and my team, love Blazing Swan. We want Blazing Swan to continue, we believe in the capacity of the Blazing Swan Community to continue, but it would breach our medical duty of care, our duty to the health of the country, and our commitment to the 11 principles, if we did not contain the spread of COVID-19 by cancelling the Blazing Swan Festival this year.

Therefore I must recommend, in the strongest possible terms, that we cancel Blazing Swan Festival 2020, scheduled 8 – 14 April 2020.

I and my team care for the Blazing Swan community too much to allow them to be infected with SARS-CoV-2 by gathering together in this time. The Community shall persist, and Blazing Swan Festival will return stronger than ever in the future.

Kind Regards



Dr Stuart McLay ("Care Bear")
Medical Lead | Blazing Swan
Director | DeployED