

NIMBIN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE Inc

ABN: 49 142 400 194

✉ PO Nimbin, NSW 2480

🌐 www.nimbinaustralia.com.au

@ chamber@nimbinaustralia.com.au

Sgt Renee Ashcroft, Officer-in-Charge
Police Station
Cullen Street
NIMBIN NSW 2480

07 June 2021

Dear Sergeant Ashcroft:

Policing of Nimbin Mardi Grass Festival, May 01-04 2021

Nimbin Chamber of Commerce Inc. ["NCOC"] wishes to congratulate the local police, under your administration, for doing such an excellent job in managing attendance at this event. The local police were distinguished by their avoidance of aggression & discrimination and by their friendly cheerfulness. It was obvious that your officers respected the personal integrity of those attending, even if they followed quite a different lifestyle & values. This was excellent community policing, earning the trust, respect & co-operation of local populace – a great asset in managing & reporting threats to community peace & stability.

In sharp contrast was the presence & behaviour of the non-local police who staffed the roadblocks & RDT stations on all entries to the village. Whilst no doubt a legal rationale could be asserted, the very presence of these testing stations was outside usual requirements or patrolling and at best over-zealous. It is not credible that some random impulse to strictly impose technical laws erupted at this precise time. Rather, obviously this campaign was ordered into place artificially, as a deliberate attempt to interfere with, or perhaps to profiteer (revenue-wise) from, the natural local community. There are even suggestions that the motivation may also come from conservative politicians who see "beating up hippies" as a vote-winner. Such an attempt upsets individuals and is invariably seen as insulting & inflammatory. No unusual behaviour or motor vehicle driving was likely, and with a mere 29 detections from 1500 tests, evidently none occurred. Thus, the police command elements who ordered this testing regime appear to have done so in a malevolent attempt to suppress citizens of different lifestyle persuasions, or as a cynical revenue-raising impost, or to curry favour with their intolerant political masters. This is impolitic within our broader society, and one would have thought the police had more important things to do with our limited resources.

We have heard various personal complaints about this high-handed imposition. These concerns involve innocent citizens who have never smoked marijuana in their lives in a tight-timed schedule to attend work or social commitments quite irrelevant to Mardi Grass, the frightening of small children, the insulting comments made by officers at the posts (who obviously had no comprehension of alternative lifestyle) – detail could be supplied -- , and the poor Covid-precautions displayed by the officers (such as presentation of oral equipment without wearing protective gloves). These police did not present a "badge you can trust".

We realize that police command will assert that the law sets it duties. However, it is doubtful that this law was originally aimed at marijuana smokers, and police command has a wide degree of discretion; wise give-and-take flexibility is essential for cooperative community policing. (At least the command did not send in SWOT squads in Humvees, which it did two years ago -- as if there has ever been a riot in Nimbin)! We respectfully suggest that police intelligence send a delegation to Nimbin, to discuss with village elders the nature of this community, before repeating this sort of exercise. This should especially be so given the undoubted medical benefits cannabis can supply, the tolerant legislation in comparable advanced countries, the adverse impact of the current RBT legislation (imposing loss of driving licence on workers) and the articulate disdain stated by the NSW magistracy for the current RDT laws where cannabis is involved.

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The village of Nimbin is set amongst the rolling hills & mountains on the southern rim of the Mt. Warning volcanic caldera in north-eastern NSW. The soil is fertile and well-watered. Much of the forest has been cut & cleared for timber & farming, but pockets of rainforest survive. This area is well known since it became a focus for “counter-cultural” activities in 1973, at the end of Australian involvement in the Vietnam war, but often meets shallow preconceptions of drug usage.

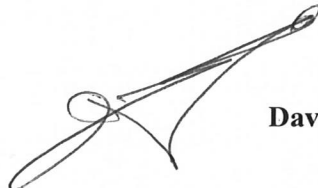
In fact, Nimbin stands for far more. A generation of young adults, raised in the post-war peace & prosperity of Australia, set out to build a low-impact, low-demand way of life based on self-managing co-operative communities, permaculture, local food production, home birthing, indigenous cultural respect, sustainable technology, quality arts & crafts and other cutting-edge approaches that have become more mainstream today. The Nimbin population, although living humbly close to nature, is saturated with persons having tertiary & post-graduate degrees. Potentially, the lifestyle being explored here, quietly over the past half-century, has much to offer in solving global problems such as mass unemployment, welfare-dependency, high taxation, pollution and governmental complexity. The people of Nimbin, and NCOC, are dedicated to quality public education on such aspirational endeavours. They deserve police respect.

The Nimbin area is rural, low-income and struggling economically. In the last two years it has been struck by a substantial drought, a bushfire that destroyed some homes, a flood, then Covid. It needs all the economic activity it can get. Urban-based police command is probably quite insulated from most of these impacts. Nimbin is the major tourist attraction in the Lismore area, and for reasons that go far beyond cannabis. Whilst Mardi Grass is an important event in the commercial & cultural functioning of Nimbin, there are several equivalent events which have no direct relationship to cannabis usage. These include Roots Music Festival, the Nimbin Poetry Cup, the Nimbin Fashion Show, the Nimbin Spring Arts Exhibition and Nimbin Blue Moon Cabaret. Police Command should be clearly aware that their unpredictable conducting of blanket offensives against any form of Nimbin expression has severe economic implications for locals. Visitors hesitate to attend and even stay away in droves. In all such cases, we respectfully request that Police Command refrain from interfering and accept that normal local community policing is all that is required. Artificial or high-handed technical law enforcement should be rejected by act of discretion at Police Command.

NCOC supports open research into the medical & industrial applications of cannabis. It does not give blanket endorsement to the psychoactive ingestion of THC (which may be helpful artistically or in times of great stress, but in extreme cases s can induce delusion, schizophrenia & psychological addiction), but it opposes attempts to control same by legislation. Such legislation, and associated legalistic attempts to commercialize & tax a natural herb by licencing growers, distorts economies, fosters a black market & mafia, and causes far more trouble & damage to lives than benefit. Tolerance, and balanced education about potential dangers (starting with young teenagers), must be the only solution. We ask that Police Command itself advise government along these lines.

NCOC gratefully accepts & respects the necessity for executive police functioning in difficult circumstances, but with respect we submit that there is a need for Police Command to strategize by making purposeful attempts to engage & dialogue at appropriate & co-operative levels. Thus, we would appreciate it if you, as officer-in-charge of local police, during liaison meetings were to pass these comments higher up your command chain, so that Police District Commanders and their senior staff can better plan their community engagement activities and the efforts of local police are not undermined again in such an insensitive & counter-productive way.

Yours Faithfully,



David Spain, B.A; LL.B. (Hons); LL.M.
Secretary

Copy: Janelle Saffin, MP , State member for Lismore, lismore@parliament.nsw.gov.au
Kevin Hogan MP, Federal Member for Page, kevin.hogan.mp@aph.gov.au
Commissioner of Police (NSW) Locked Bag 5102, Parramatta 2124
Deputy Commissioner of Police (NSW) – Regional NSW Field Operations
customerassistance@police.nsw.gov.au