

# VIRTUAL FESTIVAL BEAMS THE BURDEKIN TO THE WORLD

When it became apparent that three major annual events to mark the launch of the sugar cane crushing season: First Fire, the Burdekin Cultural Fair, and the Australian Hand Cane Cutting Championships, had to be cancelled in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Burdekin Shire Council were quick to come up with an alternative and the virtual *Sweet Days Hot Nights* Festival was born.

Run throughout July 2020, the event provided the community with a more in-depth look at each event than had ever been seen before. With history given by local farmers, cooking lessons by local families, entertainment by local artists and dance groups, chats with cane cutting champions and the popular councillor cane cutting showdown, the virtual festival was a huge success.

In prior years, the festival attracted a maximum in-person audience attendance of roughly 2,500 people; whereas the virtual festival's three weeks of content reached more than 120,000 viewers and brought more attention to the Shire and the festival than ever before.

Special mention must be made of the virtual First Fire. Using drone technology the first fire was showcased from more angles than any one person could ever experience. This was witnessed all over the world, with over five thousand views and people watching from not only different states such as Victoria but other countries such as Canada, Alaska and the Netherlands.

Despite not costing anything apart from the time of several Council employees, the virtual festival was a huge success, demonstrating that with minimal resources and budget, small Councils are still able to produce innovative content not yet attempted by larger Councils to improve community wellbeing in times of hardship.

Burdekin Shire Council is proud to nominate this event as an exemplar of 'Doing more with less' in the Local Government Awards for Excellence.



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