



Frequently Asked Questions

SCHOOLIES WEEK

In order to understand the challenges faced in relation to Schoolies Week it is necessary to consider a range of factors.

1. Why do Schoolies come to Victor Harbor?

- It is central to all parts of the State.
- It is close to Adelaide.
- It is the place where the students have previously been on holiday with their families.
- There is plenty of accommodation (free lodgings in the many holiday homes and plenty of commercial accommodation).
- Additional accommodation at Port Elliott, Middleton and Goolwa is located within easy commuting distance.
- There are many things to do in and around Victor Harbor.
- Victor Harbor has many regional facilities – eg. shopping, food outlets, medical facilities (although hopefully they are not needed), public transport, taxis.
- Schoolies in Victor Harbor has become established as tradition – “the place to be seen” (important to teenagers).

2. Why doesn't the event establish elsewhere?

- Others have tried to establish events in Adelaide and near Murray Bridge but have failed.
- No other venue has met the schoolies expectations within a location as outlined in question 1 above.

3. Why isn't the event encouraged to establish on an oval or out of town?

- There is no incentive for the schoolies to ‘move out of town’. They would be forfeiting their accommodation choices (particularly the free accommodation), they would be removed from entertainment options and they would not have the same access to shopping and food outlets. There would also be major challenges and costs which our community would have difficulty meeting – eg. Services such as portable toilets, power, water, showering facilities, security, accommodation, transport, food provision, etc.

4. Why is the event being encouraged?

- The event is **not** being encouraged. It is being **managed**. It will happen irrespective of whether or not some attempt is made to manage it. The community was approached by Encounter Youth in 1999 to offer assistance in response to what was considered to be a major problem in the community. The Schoolies celebrations were completely out of hand and impacting more and more on the community each year. The opportunity of using Encounter Youth's resources to help ‘tame’ the event through a more organised and co-ordinated approach was seized.
- Rather than encouraging the event, the Victor Harbor Schoolies Working Group is more focussed on encouraging greater responsibility and safety amongst those who attend and participate.

5. Why is the event being hosted or convened by an outside body?

- It must be re-iterated that the Schoolies celebrations are being managed rather than being hosted or convened. The event informally existed for many years before Encounter Youth became involved. Encounter Youth saw an opportunity to make a positive contribution towards 'taming' the event and assisting the community in the process. They approached Council and the community to discuss their objectives and strategies at an open meeting some 9 years ago. Prior to that time the strategies were largely re-active (i.e. bring in extra police resources on a crisis management basis and clean up the community after the Schoolies had left). What Encounter Youth proposed was considered to be substantially better than the 'do nothing' approach. No individual or group in the local community was putting up their hand with strategies or solutions and Encounter Youth felt that they could bridge that gap. The Council had neither the resources nor the necessary authority to deal with the many aspects of Schoolies impact on the community. The police and health services were also looking for some better co-ordination and support. Many in the community could offer nothing but complaint with the expectation that someone would hear their complaints and the Schoolies celebrations would magically disappear.

6. What if the event wasn't managed?

- In the early 1990's, prior to the engagement of Encounter Youth, the community impact of 'Schoolies' was enormous. The community experienced the following:-
 - An influx of youth over a much longer period of time (2 ½ to 3 weeks) therefore having a longer term impact on the community.
 - Many hundreds (if not thousands) of schoolies sleeping in reserves, on streets and around ovals. While this still happens there is a notable decline.
 - Major parties of up to 500 to 600 schoolies each night in the residential streets of the city and at private residences.
 - Much more widespread damage and littering than currently occurs (one year a private party of 400 schoolies had to be moved onto the beach at Hayborough by the police in response to community concerns about safety and security. Front-end loaders and tip trucks were required to clean up the beach the following day).
 - No services would be provided to support the event (eg. toilets, security, health, supervised entertainment).
 - Increased offending and danger to schoolies and the community.
- The financial expenditure to Council would be used in a less positive way. Rather than providing for things like security and additional public conveniences, Council would simply be spending the same money on more widespread repairs, maintenance and clean up.

7. What benefits have come from a managed event?

- The benefits of a managed event are clearly evident and Victor Harbor is now being used as a model by other States in endeavours to achieve the same outcomes. These benefits include:-
 - A significant reduction in the number and size of parties occurring in residential areas.

- Centralisation of most of the celebrations on Warland Reserve, in the form of the even, (*Schoolies Festival*), managed by Encounter Youth.
- A reduction in the length of the event (from 2 ½ weeks now down to 3 nights).
- A greater acceptance of Schoolies bookings in commercial accommodation establishments. Where once only 1 caravan park in town would accept Schoolies, there has become a wider acceptance by caravan parks and motels across the southern Fleurieu Peninsula. This has occurred as a result of operators having a forum to discuss management and security issues thereby enabling them to learn from each other. Most operators have concluded that the income from Schoolies far exceeds the cost of security. As they have been unable to attract other occupants during Schoolies Week due to the negativity surrounding the event, they have been able to achieve revenue from the Schoolies that they would otherwise not have been able to achieve. The consequences for the community of a greater use being made of commercial accommodation is a reduction in the number of Schoolies sleeping in the streets and parks and a greater level of supervision being provided through the commercial accommodation operators.
- Support of in excess of 400 Encounter Youth volunteers to help the community and service providers manage the event.
- A significant increase in the police and security resources deployed to Victor Harbor during Schoolies celebrations. The incidences of assault have reduced significantly and messages about acceptable behaviour and underage drinking offences are being more strongly reinforced.
- Access to specialist policing resources such as the police helicopter service, speed cameras, breath testing units, the mounted police division, CCTV, sniffer dogs and crowd surveillance initiatives. There surely must be some comfort taken in the fact that these additional resources contribute to a greater level of safety for the community and the event.
- The presence of a range of health services which were not visibly present in the past. These include SA Ambulance Services, Southern Fleurieu Health Service, St Johns, Red Cross Save-a-Mate, Drug Arm and Drug and Alcohol Services SA.
- The presence of youth services who cover a range of issues from counselling (some students find the transition their life is about to take emotionally difficult to deal with / relationship counselling / sexual assault counselling / etc.) to employment.
- The introduction of public transport, not only to improve safety of travelling around our community, but also to ferry Schoolies between Victor Harbor and Adelaide. These services are strongly supported by the Motor Accident Commission and the RAA.
- Better co-ordination and cooperation with medical and hospital services. Victor Harbor has also been fortunate in the past in securing additional doctors from Adelaide.
- Improvements in the co-ordination of rubbish clean up and removal, as well as improved response mechanisms to vandalism and damage.

- Greater financial support from Government Agencies which ensures that the community doesn't pick up the entire bill for a better co-ordinated event.
- A strong Encounter Youth Education program conducted in Schools, covering issues such as safe party practice, sensible approach to alcohol consumption, transport safety, etc. Over 7,000 students participate each year.
- Ever increasing number of students pre-purchasing event passes and accommodation packages. This results in less students finding themselves without a place to stay (i.e. less students on the streets and in the parks).
- The stakeholders have developed formal emergency response plans which can be applied to a range of different circumstances and events.
- A greater parental awareness about the positive and negative aspects of Schoolies celebrations.

8. Why don't the authorities apply a greater level of enforcement?

- The majority of Schoolies are here to celebrate the end of their secondary education and to have some harmless fun. Unfortunately, they are all tarnished by the actions of a few. The authorities do have to make a judgement as to what is an appropriate level of enforcement in these circumstances.
- The Council has very limited inspectorial resources which has two implications. Firstly, they are not able to observe by-law and legislative breaches 24 hours per day, and secondly, they do not have the back up resources to ensure the security of staff. Council has a health and safety obligation to all staff and will not knowingly put them in a position where those obligations will be compromised. The approach during Schoolies Week is to seek co-operation rather than hard-line enforcement – Council does not wish to incite a riot and place council officers in danger. Having said this, continuing breaches are subject to appropriate enforcement.
- Despite the huge police presence they are not adequately resourced to enforce every breach they observe, nor are they able to be everywhere at once. Their approach is one of education (eg. encouraging alcohol to be tipped out rather than issue a fine in the first instance). Like the Council, the police are mindful that an inflexible hard-line approach has the potential to inflame hostility which could then deteriorate into a much larger problem to manage. The police do not always move persons on who may be 'sleeping it off' in a public place as it would be irresponsible to be potentially encouraging an intoxicated person to operate a motor vehicle. Policing relies heavily upon public feedback. Some offences, such as urinating in public, while objectionable to the general public, are difficult to address unless the perpetrator is 'caught in the act'. The seriousness of breaches is taken into account and there is no tolerance to offences that compromise public safety, such as assault and various driving offences.

9. What do the Schoolies Operation Working Group do?

- The various stakeholders on the Schoolies Operation Working Group meet regularly to discuss and develop strategies with the objective of continuous improvement in the management of the event. It would be unrealistic to expect that all problems will be solved by the Working Group or that everyone's concerns and complaints will have an answer or acceptable

response. Schoolies celebrations attract between 5,000 and 10,000 youth to the South Coast. Any crowd of that size will have disruptive people within it and the Working Group sees it's role as trying to minimise the opportunities for those disruptive people to impact upon or influence others.

10. Does 'Schoolies' bring any benefits to our community?

- It is difficult for some to see any benefits for the community arising out of schoolies week. Some individuals experience broken picket fences, stolen letter boxes, up turned rubbish bins, graffiti, discarded rubbish, etc. which may be personally traumatic, offensive and/or costly. There are also less tangible effects for some such as loss of sleep and fear. For the broader community there is an economic benefit derived from Schoolies Festival. A survey conducted several years ago indicated that the Schoolies spend on the south coast during their celebrations was conservatively around \$1.8 million. Even when this income is discounted by the hosting costs and damage bill, the economic benefit is significant.
- Our youth also benefit through education and counselling services which they may not otherwise have access to or actively pursue.
- Our community is strengthened through collaborative partnerships and stronger networks.
- Our young people grow in leadership through volunteering, specific training and experience in event management/team building.

11. Who is involved in the management of Schoolies Operation?

- Encounter Youth
- City of Victor Harbor (Council)
- Alexandrina Council
- SA Police
- SA Ambulance Services
- St. John's Ambulance
- Metropolitan Fire Service
- South Coast District Hospital
- Motor Accident Commission
- Consumer and Business Affairs (Liquor and Gambling Commissioner)
- Business Victor Harbor

Summary

Encounter Youth and Schoolies Operation Working Group are aware of the many community concerns regarding Schoolies Festival. These include but are not limited to:-

- Vandalism of public and private property
- Graffiti
- Noise
- Discarded rubbish
- Abuse of rubbish bins and shopping trolleys
- Disregard for road closures and road rules
- Intimidation and assault
- Excessive and underage drinking
- Urinating in public places
- Illegal camping in public areas

It is a sad fact that these anti social activities occur regularly in our society and it is only the frequency that varies during Schoolies Festival.

Schoolies celebrations attract many who are not genuine School leavers 'Toolies', however it cannot be presumed that Schoolies are the perpetrators of all that is not socially acceptable. In fact, experience has shown that the non-schoolies who associate with the celebrations are more likely to offend than the genuine schoolies.

Through the hard work of Encounter Youth and the Schoolies Operation Working Group, the attendance of 'Toolies' has significantly declined in recent years.

Debriefing after each year's event is important, however the 'hard yards' need to be expended on positive strategies to reduce, or at least minimise, the negative aspects of the celebrations. After all, the celebrations will occur again whether we like it or not.

There are some Schoolies that could demonstrate greater responsibility. The City of Victor Harbor (Council) believes there is strong leadership being shown by the Schoolies Operation Working Group with a focus on minimising community impact.

With somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 Schoolies visiting the South Coast each November the size of the task is enormous. The challenge is to maintain the commitment and enthusiasm of the many services and volunteers that contribute each year, for without them, we could revert to the completely uncontrolled, intimidating and frightening Schoolies events of the past.

Encounter Youth and the Schoolies Operation Working Group are open to receipt from the public of concerns about Schoolies Festival, however the greatest contribution that the community can make is the contribution of achievable strategies and initiatives that may reduce the unacceptable aspects of the event.