

## PRESS RELEASE

Each year during the Greek Festival of Sydney (GFoS), we see the resurrection of “Zografos Zappas”, an opinion columnist, who has published an article venting their antipathy for the Greek Festival of Sydney (GFoS), the Greek Orthodox Community of New South Wales (GOC), and its Board of Directors.

The writer (he/she) hides behind their obvious pseudonym presenting opinions which are not based in truth, and without any input or comment from the organisation (GOC) being criticised. Reporting of this type lacks balance and fairness.

The article (published by The Greek Herald on Wednesday 26 May, 2021) includes falsehoods, distortions and lies, which further display the newspaper’s longstanding animosity towards the GFoS, the GOC and its Board of Directors, ever since the Community commenced the negotiations to resolve the Ecclesiastical problem.

We and they know what motivates them to publish such a false distorted article and to always publish negative articles about the Greek Festival of Sydney, the Greek Orthodox Community of NSW and its Board, and it is certainly not out of concern for the members of the Community. This statement aims to correct all falsehoods, distortions and exaggerations that are included in the opinion piece. The suggestion that the GFoS’ apology was “tongue in-cheek” is outlandish. We have taken accountability for the errors that occurred at Greek Fest in the Hunter and the apology was issued with complete sincerity.

## Falsehood 1

“The food vendors, the musicians, the venues, find doing business with the Festival Committee challenging.”

Our organization has existed for more than 120 years, and the GFoS has run for nearly 40 years. In that time, we have forged strong partnerships with the Sydney Opera House, Parliament of NSW, City Recital Hall, Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority among many, many others.

The GFoS has engaged many local and international musicians (George Dalaras, Haris Alexiou, Glykeria, Michalis Hatzigiannis, to name a few) over the years and has maintained excellent relationships with them.

These collaborations with vendors, artists and venues are often repeated, owing to the positive experiences for both parties. The writer fails to name even one vendor, musician or venue who is prepared to go on the record with their “challenging” experience.

## Falsehood 2

The Board of Directors are “Servicing their needs, and not the community”.

This is an outrageous and defamatory statement. The GOC is controlled by a committee of 20 people who devote their time to the service of the Greek community, without any payment or recompense and, on occasion, to the detriment of their families, businesses, employment, and personal lives.

## Falsehood 3

“The event was delayed as many dignitaries proceeded to the Opera House”

Of the more than 1000 people in attendance at the concert at Sydney Town Hall, only Mr Harry Danalis (President of the GOC) and the Consul General The Hon Christos Karras attended the official lighting. A representative for each attended the concert and spoke on their behalf as they were unable to be at the venue in time for the event’s beginning.

The concert commenced in their absence and they arrived at Sydney Town Hall well after the event had started. The delay in patrons’ entry was a result of strict protocols and last minute access changes implemented by the venue to ensure a Covid safe event.

## Falsehood 4

The GFoS “tried to change the date of the lighting at the last minute”.

The GOC initiated the lighting of the Sydney Opera House

in December 2020 and made continuous efforts to ensure this request materialised. We were the first to call for it and continued pushing for it with the NSW Government, even when it seemed futile. Our preferred date was always Thursday 25 March, 2021.

## Falsehood 5

“5000 people at \$35 is \$175,000”

The event’s general admission price was \$29. A visit to our on-line booking site would have revealed this information if the “columnist” was interested in the truth. Of these 5000 tickets, approximately 500 were issued to children under 12 who had free entry. Presales, group bookings, family passes, and children’s tickets (13-17) were all sold at a lower rate than \$29. The figure of \$175,000 is wildly inflated. The GFoS receives a minority split (30%) of the revenue generated by ticket sales. This amount is insufficient in covering the associated costs of staging, sound, musicians, furniture and equipment hire, and the event will incur a loss for the GFoS.

## Falsehood 6

“The Festival were given a Government grant, as it was a “regional event.”

Funding received by the GFoS from the NSW Government is a contribution to the dozens of events produced and delivered by the GFoS annually. The government funding did not apply to this particular project, and the event’s geographical location is inconsequential.

## Falsehood 7

The GFoS was responsible for the queues to enter the event.

The entry and access requirements, and any subsequent delays caused by them, were all the responsibility of Hope Estate. Traffic management and people movement was coordinated and enforced by Hope Estate.

## Falsehood 8

“The Festival Committee is not transparent on the multiple Government Grants it receives.”

The GOC provides full transparency on all income received, issuing all members with annual statements which outline how all money received is spent. These accounts are reviewed by an external auditor who is not an employee of the GOC and they are lodged with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. They are a public record available to be accessed by any person who should like to. Government grants all require acquittals and submissions must include detailed breakdowns of spending and receipts. Transparency is not optional, but necessary. Finally, we would once again like to acknowledge that there were operational issues with food at the event in the Hunter Valley, and we have apologised for this. Despite this, we have received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback from patrons who were glad to see an event of this kind delivered in the Hunter region with an international artist from Greece, dance performances and Greek food. Most patrons were not deterred by queues and enjoyed the event from the beginning until the very end.



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