



## **Submission to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government on the Licensing of Outdoor Music Events – Review of Legislative Framework - Public Consultation**

Following the cancellation of five Garth Brooks concerts in July 2014, Dublin Chamber of Commerce believes that a review of the legislative framework for the licensing of outdoor music and entertainment events is timely, and welcomes the opportunity to submit its thoughts on how the framework can be improved.

In this submission, Dublin Chamber puts forward a number of suggestions which would improve the legislative framework for the licensing of outdoor music and entertainment events:

- The removal of the current three concert limit on Aviva Stadium and Croke Park,
- The time taken to decide on whether a concert should be granted a licence must be compressed,
- A traffic light system should be introduced for the licencing of all outdoor music events.
- No tickets should be sold for an event before certain reasonable assurances are given that a licence will be granted,
- Room for manoeuvre (i.e. the right to appeal) must be included when any licencing decision is made.

### **The Importance of Events**

Similar to exports, large outdoor music and entertainment events have the capacity to generate much-needed growth in Ireland's economy. Tourism is hugely important to Dublin and Ireland, both in terms of revenue from visitors and the jobs it creates.

The tourism sector is a vital component of the Dublin economy, and contributes in a unique and dynamic way to the city's cultural mix and vibrancy. Given the world class infrastructural and service offering we have at our disposal, Dublin should aspire to become a leading destination for event tourism.

An emphasis should be placed on maximising the use of our stadiums and venues at key times of the year. For example, the lack of a major festival in Dublin during the summer months, when attention is focused on Galway, Tralee and Kilkenny for other major festivals, is a loss to the city. Major events such as concerts are a good way in which Dublin can counter this problem.

### **The Importance of Tourism**

The Destination Dublin report, published in February 2014 by the Grow Dublin Taskforce, states that Dublin is underperforming against its potential in terms of tourism. Tourism numbers in Ireland peaked in 2007 and since then Dublin has slipped behind its main city competitors in Europe. Accelerating growth in visitor numbers is an urgent priority.

The Destination Dublin report highlighted the importance of events in attracting visitors. The market for events tourism is hugely competitive, but the rewards are significant. As well as generating immediate revenue, major events help to promote Dublin and Ireland to an international audience. Visitors who leave with a positive impression are likely to become ambassadors for the city and country.

A significant programme of high profile events takes place each year on a one-off basis. We have shown that we are capable of hosting big events such as the Croke Park Classic, the Europa League Final and the Giro d'Italia Big Start, as well as a large number of big musical acts over the years including U2, One Direction, Take That etc. Other, lower profile and niche events also play their part in attracting overseas visitors on a regular basis.

### **Garth Brooks Concert Series – July 2014**

The Garth Brooks concerts were a huge missed opportunity for Dublin and Ireland. Few artists/performers can attract such a high level of overseas visitors and it is important that Ireland is able to capitalise on such opportunities when they arise.

Dublin Chamber gave a conservative estimate that the five Garth Brooks concerts would have been worth a minimum of €50m to the Irish economy had they taken place. Following consultation with our members, it is clear that the loss to the economy as a result of the cancellation of the concerts was much greater. For example, given how late the Garth Brooks concerts were cancelled, hotels in the Greater Dublin Area the window for the resale of cancelled hotel rooms was closed - resulting in huge lost revenues. Other businesses in the city centre, notably retailers, also suffered substantial losses in general sales as well as being unable to sell Garth Brooks-related merchandise etc. Dublin's hospitality sector relies on major events and a strong events programme is key to growing tourism numbers. Ireland is known worldwide as a place that can stage world class events but the uncertainty around the Garth Brooks concerts threatens that reputation.

The Garth Brooks debacle created negative headlines around the world for Dublin and Ireland. While the Garth Brooks episode in isolation is unlikely to have any lasting impact on Ireland's ability to attract major events, it is vital that we ensure there is no repeat by demonstrating that we have taken corrective action to change the legislative framework. Major artists and performers, as well as ticket buyers, require certainty and comfort.

Dublin Chamber believes that the cancellation of the Garth Brooks concert series was primarily the result of a lack of flexibility in the licencing system – i.e. once the initial decision to reject the licence for the concerts had been made by Dublin City Council, there was no mechanism in place that would allow the decision to be re-evaluated, even if key issues were addressed.

### **Maximising Our Infrastructure**

Dublin boasts world class infrastructure, capable of hosting large events with a global appeal. Large venues such as Croke Park, the RDS and Aviva Stadium are expensive to run and it is important that they are utilised. Dublin Chamber would like to see the current three concert limit at both venues removed. One possibility would be to put limits in place on the number of consecutive nights that concerts can take place. For example, where the total number of concerts is four or more, a break of at least one night could be taken after the second concert. Consideration should also be given to establishing windows during which concerts can be hosted. This would mean that the same areas of the city are not repeatedly burdened by events/concerts in a short period of time.

**Traffic Light System**

It would be beneficial if a traffic light system were put in place which would require an agreement in principle regarding the awarding of a licence before tickets are sold. A traffic light system would allow for an event licence to be agreed in principle, with the option for certain details to be finalised between the date of tickets going on sale and the event itself. It is imperative that the licencing system should provide any ticket buyer with reasonable confidence that the event will go ahead. When any decision on licencing is made, the promoter must be allowed the right of appeal.