

# Flotsam Festival Closes Two Weeks of City-Wide Events, Homegrown Culture and Community Impact

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Final postponed Homegrown closing event to take place May 24 at Burleigh Heads

After two rain-soaked but wildly attended weeks of exhibitions, screenings, talks, workshops and outdoor activations, Flotsam Festival wraps its 2026 program with record attendance, sold-out indoor events and one final celebration still to come.

While severe weather impacted some outdoor programming across the Gold Coast during the festival period, Flotsam's city-wide arts trail continued to activate galleries, hotels, cafes, cultural spaces and beachfront locations across the coast, proving the resilience and appetite for independent arts and surf culture on the Gold Coast.

Most indoor ticketed events sold out across the two-week program, including crowd favourites Surf Girls On Film and A Living Ocean with Evie Wilderness, alongside packed exhibitions, artist talks, workshops and screenings spanning from Coolangatta to Burleigh Heads. The festival's postponed closing event, Flotsam Homegrown, will now take place Sunday May 24 at John Laws Park, Burleigh Heads, extending the life of the festival while giving audiences one final open-air celebration of Australian surf culture, film, photography and music. The rescheduled event will also extend the Homegrown surf film and photography competition outcomes, with emerging creators continuing to exhibit work through the extended program window.

"Despite the weather, audiences showed up in huge numbers for artists, filmmakers, photographers and community spaces across the coast," said Flotsam Festival Director Carolyn Emge. "That support matters. Every packed screening, every exhibition visit and every artist showcase inside these venues feeds back into the creative ecosystem."

Founded by Gold Coast artists, photographers, filmmakers and small businesses, Flotsam Festival has positioned itself as a distinctly Australian cultural event: grassroots by design and independent by intent. "Flotsam wasn't imported. It was built here," Emge said. "The festival exists to reflect Australia's surf culture back to itself through the lens of local creatives. It's shaped by people who actually live on this coastline year-round, with different curators, different venue

partners and different creative voices contributing at all touchpoints across the program. That diversity is what keeps culture alive.”

Presented as a decentralised arts trail rather than a single fenced precinct, Flotsam transformed the Gold Coast itself into a living gallery over the past two weeks. Parklands became screening rooms, rooftops became cinemas, hotel facades became exhibitions and public spaces became gathering points for artists and audiences alike. This year’s program intentionally expanded the frame of surf culture, platforming women in film, First Nations voices, youth creators, analogue photographers, underground filmmakers, environmental storytelling and emerging artists alongside internationally recognised names.

“Surf culture isn’t one story and the Gold Coast isn’t one story,” Emge said. “Flotsam embraces that contradiction; archival and future-facing, underground and accessible, emerging and iconic. We want the festival to feel layered and authentic.” A major focus of the 2026 program was investing directly into future creative infrastructure through workshops, mentorships, artist talks and youth programming including Flotsam Next Wave, supported by Community Bank Tugun, which creates performance, exhibition and screening opportunities for emerging artists alongside established practitioners.

“The Next Wave showcase exists because young creators deserve a runway,” said Emge. “Supporting local artists isn’t charity, it’s city building. Every photographer, filmmaker, designer or musician who gets backed is another reason creative people stay creative, and continue shaping cultural identity.” The not-for-profit structure of the festival also remained central to its philosophy and operation, with revenue returning directly into artists, venues, exhibitions, workshops and community partnerships.

“There’s a difference between a community festival and a commercial activation,” Emge said. “One extracts attention. The other builds belonging. Success for us isn’t measured purely in ticket sales, it’s artist outcomes, community participation, mentorship, cultural preservation and whether people leave events feeling more deeply connected to community.”

Across the program, Flotsam partnered with independent galleries, cafes, bar venues, cultural organisations and community spaces, intentionally spreading audiences and economic activity across the city rather than concentrating them in a single site. “Independent venues give the festival its personality,” Emge said. “Small business partnerships

keep culture human-scale. Flotsam doesn't parachute into the city, it collaborates with venues and people that shape the Gold Coast year-round."

The final chapter of the festival will unfold at Flotsam Homegrown on Sunday May 24, with surf film finalists, photography awards, live music and large-scale outdoor screenings bringing the community together one last time on the Burleigh foreshore. Para surfing film Saltwater Dreaming will premiere alongside the very best Australian homegrown talent at an open air screening on Burleigh Headland, supported by City of Gold Coast Cr Josh Martin.

"Independent festivals create cultural resilience," Emge said. "They leave behind networks, opportunities, skills and collaborations that continue long after the event ends. That's the real outcome of Flotsam."

#### FLOTSAM HOMEGROWN

Saturday May 24, 3.30pm John Laws Park, Burleigh Heads

Free Entry

## About Flotsam Arts

Flotsam Arts Inc is a not-for-profit arts organisation that curates experiences at the intersection of surf culture, visual storytelling and contemporary art. Through exhibitions, workshops, residencies and its flagship annual festival, Flotsam champions creators who see the ocean not only as a subject but as a studio. Based on the southern Gold Coast, Flotsam connects local and global talent, grows creative careers, and builds cultural experiences shaped by community, coastline and creative exchange.

The fifth annual Flotsam Festival will take place 1-15 May, 2026.

Flotsam Festival is supported by the City of Gold Coast and Experience Gold Coast.

Flotsam Arts Inc are Art Partners of the City of Gold Coast. The Arts Development Fund is a City of Gold Coast fund that supports the Gold Coast's creative community by fostering professional pathways and skills development, contributing to our city's vibrant lifestyle.

Media room: <https://flotsamarts.pr.co/>

Festival website: <https://www.flotsamfestival.com.au>

Film Freeway: <https://filmfreeway.com/FlotsamSurfFilmAndPhotogra...>

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