

February 23, 2026

Ekka's Country Music Showdown hits a high note with massive prize pool and career-boosting workshops

The Royal Queensland Show's (Ekka) Country Music Showdown is turning up the volume in 2026, offering more than \$80,000 in prizes, along with new career-shaping professional development workshops.

Entries close 30 June 2026, with the national competition designed to discover and support rising country music stars. Finalists will compete live during the Ekka across two categories - Junior (ages 12 to 17 years) and Open (18 years and over) - on Saturday 15 August at XXXX Stockmen's Bar and Grill.

This year, the competition is offering cash and prizes valued at more than \$80,000. Prizes include a scholarship to the Academy of Country Music in Tamworth for the Junior Category winner and new in 2026, the opportunity for the Open Category winner to perform at the final concert of the Queensland Music Trail.

In partnership with Queensland Music Trail, the Ekka will also offer a Country Music Showdown wildcard entry to an artist living in remote Queensland, discovered during the 2026 Outback Trail. This unique opportunity will provide the artist with a platform to showcase their talent to industry professionals.

As part of the Ekka's 150th anniversary milestone this year, the competition is also introducing new professional development opportunities to support artists beyond their on-stage performance.

For the first time, all finalists will participate in an exclusive pre-competition workshop presented in partnership with Performance Studios and featuring acclaimed country artist Tania Kernaghan as guest mentor. The session will provide professional performance guidance, industry insights and advice to help emerging artists in their careers.

Following the competition, I Heart Songwriting will also deliver a dedicated songwriting workshop for the seven winners. The workshop will focus on practical songwriting skills, including collaborative writing as a duo, breakout group sessions and insight into the professional songwriting process.

Head of Ekka Entertainment and Education Tony Laffan said the competition was a launchpad for emerging country artists.

"For more than a decade, the Country Music Showdown has given up-and-coming country artists a platform to shine, grow and take the next big step in their careers," he said.

“We’ve seen many of our winners go on to achieve national success, including Felicity Kircher and Jarrad Wrigley who both went on to win the prestigious Toyota Star Maker in Tamworth.

“In 2026, we’re proud to be introducing more career-boosting opportunities - not just through prizes, but by providing meaningful industry workshops that can genuinely shape an artist’s future.”

Country Music Showdown finalists are selected based on a submitted video featuring two live performances. The competition is open to amateur and semi-professional artists only.

The Ekka extends its thanks to our valued Country Music Showdown supporting prize partners: QMF Queensland Music Trails, Country Town, Performance Studios, Akubra, Deeper Look, Academy Country Music, I Heart Songwriting, Riffs and Licks, Renee Brazel Photography, Gympie Muster, Capital Radio, Guitar Brothers, Chattahoochies, and Mike Vee Management.

Entries for the Country Music Showdown close 30 June 2026. Enter now at <https://www.ekka.com.au/entertainment-program/entertainment/country-music-showdown/#iwanttoenter>

The 2026 Royal Queensland Show presented by the Bank of Queensland (BOQ) is celebrating a remarkable milestone this year – the 150th anniversary of the state’s biggest and most loved event. For generations of Queenslanders, the Show is an iconic and cherished tradition that epitomises a true sense of community spirit. Since the first show in 1876, the Ekka has been proudly revered for bringing the country to the city each year and forms a rich part of Queensland’s social and cultural heritage.

Follow us on socials for exciting updates on what’s planned for the Ekka’s 150th celebrations.



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