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Tuesday 30 April 2024

Attention: Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts

Re: Inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry. This is a submission from MusicNSW, the state body for contemporary music in NSW. We are a not-for-profit organisation that empowers and connects artists and industry. We do this through a range of programs and services, including Sound Advice and First Nations and regional music development, which are focused on providing professional and skill development opportunities, access to best practice information and resources, assistance and information related to funding opportunities, networking events and bringing industry together for facilitated consultation.

Our submission is intended to give a brief overview of a few of the challenges facing the live music industry based on our on-going consultation with artists and industry in NSW.

We would warmly welcome the opportunity to elaborate on these observations if required.

Regards



Joe Muller,
Managing Director, MusicNSW



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Summary of recommendations

- Music Australia to develop and release a Contemporary Music Strategy
- Creative Australia to undertake research into live music audience/consumer insights, especially focussed around young people
- All levels of government to commit to an urgent transition towards net zero carbon emissions
- Develop on-going funding opportunities which support live music activity in venues especially in all ages and U18 contexts and sees benefits flowing to artists
- Expansion of the MusicNSW Regional Touring Network (RTN)
- National audit of music education opportunities in Australian High Schools
- Funding for organisations to deliver capacity building and professional development to meet skills gap in sector, focussed towards young people and regional communities
- Music Australia to lead Nation-wide campaign, highlighting the cultural and social value of live music experiences in our community

Sustainability and climate change

It is impossible to discuss the many issues impacting the live music sector in Australia without first acknowledging the catastrophic impacts of climate change which are highly visible in NSW and playing out in real time. Festivals and event operators face the threat of cancellation caused by the impacts of floods and bushfires which have accelerated over the last few years and will continue until there are system changes around energy emissions.

MusicNSW calls on all levels of government to undertake urgent steps towards net zero carbon emissions, diversify investments from fossil fuels and build safe and renewable energy infrastructure.

We are committed to working with government and other organisations such as Green Music Australia to partner towards implementation of climate responsible touring practices and will support both artists and audiences to support much needed action and cultural change.

Sustainability and growth of the industry

MusicNSW welcomes the creation of Music Australia and would support the development of a multi year contemporary music plan, driven by Music Australia after extensive research and consultation with artists, audiences and industry.

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Suitability and location of venues for organisers, participants, and attendees

Outside of large scale, government funded cultural institutions, the majority of contemporary music venues in Australia, sustain themselves by acting first as hospitality venues.

While their primary purpose is to support the existence of live music, for many venues, income and financial viability relies primarily on food and beverage sales. This poses systemic problems around the engagement, inclusivity, accessibility and cultural safety for a range of community groups for whom licensed premises are not appropriate (including young people, faith communities and others).

Support for the many and varied live music venues that have long sustained their support of music, culture and the arts by operating as food and beverage businesses needs to address changing consumer behaviours and reduce the tether between the success of a venue and alcohol sales.

Sustained regulatory reform is also required to enable live music experiences to happen outside of traditional venue spaces. This will both encourage and support participation from a more diverse range of community groups (most notably young people) but also shift community awareness of the value of live music by more closely weaving it into public spaces and community life.

Live venue businesses need sustained support to make the capital works and other changes needed to ensure accessibility and inclusion for both audiences (front of house) and artists (back of house). Many live music venues in the contemporary music space lack the government support and access to government best practices to guide this important work.

Regional renaissance

Contemporary music touring in regional Australia has the potential to drive regional economic development, build creative communities, drive regional participation in music and the arts and give a voice to a more diverse array of Australian experiences.

Our vision for regional music development is to increase contemporary music touring activity, expand networks, and build on existing industry knowledge in regional NSW by supporting capacity-building of artists and industry professionals living and working in regional areas.

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The MusicNSW Regional Touring Network is an online tool which spotlights live music venues across the state and allows artists, managers and agents to easily plan their way through regional NSW. This is a valuable resource with incredible scalability which could be rolled out Nationally as a way for artists to plan and deliver live music activity.

Artist development, career pathways and capacity building

Accessible music and arts education in highschoools is vital as we work towards developing new generations of Australian grown export music talent. Music education in highschoools also acts to inspire young people who may aspire to working in the many and varied career options available to them in the music industry more broadly.

Private instrument tuition is prohibitively expensive for many families and in NSW where classroom music is not offered at every high school, this means a lack of diversity in emerging artists and industry coming through the school system and a bias towards metro, private and selective schools. Regional Australia is underrepresented in the music industry and it is essential that we recognize the vital place that public schools can and should play in providing music education, career awareness and opportunities for young artists and industry.

Due to the instability of the sector post-pandemic, there are significant skills shortages in a number of key parts of the industry and a pronounced need for professional development and capacity building, especially in regional areas. MusicNSW joins each of the state and territory music bodies (forming the Australian Music Industry Network) in our shared acknowledgement of the need for this critical capacity building. Organisations like ours have the remit to deliver this important work in collaboration with key stakeholders and community groups. MusicNSW employs five Regional Music Coordinators, industry experts, positioned in strategic locations across the state to support artist, industry and audience development. With increased investment, there is a significant opportunity to deliver meaningful and nuanced local outcomes across regional Australia.

Funding for industry to provide diverse opportunities for training and professional development is crucial to support live performance. This includes support for accessible, informal capacity-building and networking opportunities, as well as formal qualifications and training.

Audience development and consumer behaviours

In Soundcheck: Insights into Australia's music festival sector, the recent research released by Creative Australia, the data shows a reduction in the number of 18-24 year olds attending festivals in 2023 as compared to pre-pandemic years.

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This strongly confirms the need for additional research and consultation, which gathers audience/consumer insights which inform this trend.

There is no evidence that suggests that 18-24 year olds have become completely disengaged in this post pandemic world. Anecdotally, they still scan as culturally interested, culturally curious, seekers of connection and community. Recent international touring successes in Australia indicate that there are indeed audience members who will pay high ticket prices for live music experiences. So this research is vital in understanding the cultural levers that motivate all audience members, specifically younger audiences.

In addition to research, MusicNSW can see an immense value in a sustained Australia wide campaign that extolls the social, cultural and economic benefits of participating in live music experiences. We would welcome a campaign to this end led by Music Australia.