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Submission to the Committee of Inquiry in response to the National Cultural Policy released on 30 January 2023

I am a professional independent musician, oral historian and folklorist who has worked in a part-time capacity as a recording, performing and touring artist for nearly thirty years. I have also worked in the independent, traditional, and folk music sectors as a touring agent and in events management.

My response to the National Cultural Policy in general is one of great joy and relief after many years of wilful neglect and erosion under former governments. I applaud the emphasis on First Nations, the celebration of culture for culture's sake, storytelling and recognising the centrality of the artist as both worker and a cultural asset.

I write endorsing the response to this inquiry from MEAA (Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance) as a member of Federal Council (Music Section), though this submission is an individual response and does not necessarily represent the views of MEAA.

My submission is in response to policy sections outlining the establishment and aims of Music Australia and the premise behind the notion of 'centrality of the artist'.

I was greatly concerned after attending an online forum hosted by Australia Council "In Conversation with The Music Network" Feb 9 at the lack of representation (or understanding) of the broader music ecosystem that exists in Australia today, the stark and deliberate push for Music Australia to be an entity primarily concerned with commercial endeavours, music organisations, music managers and industry - all discussed without the voice of a SINGLE working musician on the panel and without extensive consultation with musicians working at a professional level.

A situation has developed in Australia over the past 30 years where state and federal music and arts bodies have drifted further and further from understanding the breadth and depth of wider music culture in Australia – much of which is connected to music education, community music, community-led music events and the professional independent music sector. There is very little cultural or economic support for domestic music and the communities that foster and nurture Australian cultural expression, who also play a vital role in Australia's regional and tourism economies.

The Australian music ecosystem is rich with niche market genres and boasts a strong culture of independent music-making (directly linked with community music-making) that has been long neglected. I believe that Music Australia needs to begin by auditing and creating an accurate picture of our music culture across a wide spectrum to understand our national cultural music assets better – as outlined in the key objectives, page 69 of the policy report.

I have been deeply troubled at the historic top-down approach Australian governance has embraced regarding music culture in Australia in my lifetime. I believe that wider

consultation with music communities and independent music professionals is the key to getting this right and working to the core values that this policy represents.

The nurture and safeguarding of culture does not, and CANNOT, simply equate to commercial viability. If Music Australia begins operations on this premise, I believe we will have lost a very rare and precious opportunity. In comparison to governments around the world who prioritise culture for culture's sake, we are embarrassingly behind and sadly lacking in Australia.

I'd like to reiterate, too, that the concept of 'centrality of the artist' MUST translate to the involvement of music professionals throughout industry (including community music leaders, independent professionals, freelancers and educators) in consultation and decision-making at ALL levels.

As outlined in the policy, workplace conditions and remuneration (including the difficulties inherent for music workers who are not 'employees' and do not currently attract the security of minimum fees, superannuation or any job security as contractors) are paramount to the health of Australian culture and music economy.

One issue not discussed in this policy is the lack of quotas for Australian music content on commercial radio in Australia. Commercial radio rarely gives significant time to Australian independent music particularly. Our community radio sector is vibrant and strong but does not give artists access to wide audiences or provide musicians with royalties.

Positive externalities that illustrate the success of cultural policy implementation would include measuring public engagement with music and music events, a quantifiable increase in financial security for community-driven music events, growth in the health of the music market post-covid, better working conditions and remuneration for musicians working professionally, an increase in public appreciation of, and participation IN, music activities, and a significant shift in the way arts organisations and state music bodies view and engage with the wider spectrum of music culture in Australia.

Musicians (not just luminaries whose careers have been tailored by record companies) need to be represented at every level of policy and decision-making, and a general cultural shift regarding respect for music workers needs to be fostered and nurtured.

While I applaud and celebrate the ideals outlined in this policy, its development and implementation will be very closely watched and scrutinised. The Australian independent music sector – my workplace for most of my adult life so far – is in serious decline and cannot afford to tolerate a 'business-as-usual' approach going forward.