

To the Secretariat of,

**“The challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry Inquiry”,**

Parliament Of Australia

Please find herein my submission regarding the challenges and opportunities within the Australian Live Music Industry.

As a musician, performer, booking agent, manager and band leader **for over 20 years**, I have seen a decline in the quality and quantity of performance opportunities for local musicians and bands/artists in Australia.

My humble beginnings (like most) were in the garage of a local friend and in the music room of my local state school in Melbourne – playing drums and dabbling on the bass guitar through the mid to late 1990s. My mother (a musician throughout the 70s and early 80’s before starting a family) would share stories of the many “ball nights”, “town hall performances”, “wedding and function gigs” and “restaurant floor-shows” that were available to her and her family-band of continental musicians (performing mainly German/Austrian/Dutch music mixed with ABBA & Boney M covers to a wide audience). These shows paid enough to supplement a part-time income in a local music shop to afford a decent lifestyle commensurate with that of a tradesman or entry-level administrative assistant.

When I started working in my local music shop as a teen, the proprietor (who played accordion at a now-defunct mountainside Bavarian themed restaurant) made the comment that the pay rate for the Sunday matinee floorshow was “\$70 plus drinks in 1978 and hasn’t changed since”. This was in 1998. A sad sign of the times as the Pokie Machine industry had nearly completed its sweep through Victorian venues that had begun in 1991, deflating the already non-existent inflation in rates of pay for working musicians beyond the few fortunate enough to have label support and a small revenue stream from royalties.

Oblivious to all of this, I completed my studies in VCE music and proceeded to undertake a Bachelor of Music/ Bachelor of Education Double Degree at Monash University and in 2003, walked out with a Distinction Average and a modest HECS debt. Throughout this time I got a taste for the live music scene performing in outer suburban and regional pubs working for one of the two main “band agencies” that ruled most of Melbourne’s pubs/clubs (and certainly ALL of the ALH owned venues). The old trope that existed then still exists now for the industry:

*“A Musician loads \$5000 worth of equipment into a \$500 car to play a gig paying \$50”.*

These days its actually:

*“A musician loaded up with a \$50000 HECS/HELP debt and 10,000hrs practice/experience, loads \$10000 worth of equipment into a \$5000 car for a \$300 gig that is in danger of being replaced by a DJ, or in a venue that closed due to it’s Public Liability increasing from \$5000 per annum to \$75,000 per annum”* This trope is backed up by the “musicians make \$6000 per year” articles recently trotted out in lamenting media clickbait.

The eyes of those with the funding unfortunately are not looking in the right direction and this has wide-ranging implications for the Live Music Industry in Australia.

Long before the removal of a Federal Minister for Arts in 2019, there has been a focus away from grass-roots musicians, music education and small scale live performance which had been (up until the early 2000s at least) the backbone and sandpit for up-and-coming musicians, ensembles, artists and even promoters, agents and managers.

One could easily argue that we will never again in our lifetimes see a Michael Gudinski, Michael Coppel, Michael Chugg or Glenn Wheatley in the industry – there is no room for a rags-to-riches tale that hasn’t been squeezed out of pre-conception by the likes of Spotify, Ticketmaster or Live Nation. Let alone pokies, public liability insurance and noise restrictions.

Funding doesn’t go to the squeaky wheels in the Live Music Sector – it goes to the shiniest squeaky wheels and those with professional grant writers in their ranks. This is why the 2020 failure of watching Guy Sebastian stand next to PM Scott Morrison was so visceral to those of us longstanding contemporary musicians who were without an income in Victoria for 2020 and most of 2021 – the Emergency Support and RISE funds did not make their way at ALL into the hands of grass-roots musicians and venues/promoters who just needed a little help to kick-start some local shows at local venues. Some money did help struggling musicians stay afloat via Support Act.

The Queensland Symphony Orchestra, the MSO and Opera Australia did not need Live Music/Arts Grants and arguably still do not in 2024 and beyond. They are flushed with corporate sponsors and wealthy benefactors willing to take a tax-deductible name on a concert series or capital expenditure. Universities are much the same – the big 8 all have wonderful conservatoriums and concert halls due to bequests and wealthy patrons, yet few true scholarships for budding pop musicians.

In short, my submission is a recommendation for policy change that will ensure that future generations of musicians will not be relegated to bedroom studios and orchestra/theatre pits and that musicians can and will have a stage to perform for audiences that are currently only subjected large scale international touring artists and “legacy Aussie acts” where the average age of a musician is 55 and 95% are male.

- 1) **Large scale investment in music education in state schools** and public kindergartens – whilst most private schools have quite large and involved instrumental and ensemble music programs, state schools suffer in sub-standard, ill-equipped or run down music spaces with little to no access to instruments, equipment or programs designed to promote the creation, rehearsal and performance of live music. (if prompted I can share a personal experience in the electorate of a former State Premier that sent his children to the local elite Catholic School whilst his education department rushed through a terribly designed state school renovation of music areas lacking basic sound-proofing and enough spaces to meet growing school enrolments despite protestations from stakeholders)
- 2) **Reduced HECS/HELP fees** and more **authentic government scholarships** for Music Students who wish to undertake tertiary study in contemporary live music performance. Whilst the Fine Arts sector is flourishing with musicians moving into orchestras and ensembles overseas, the era of local bands launching into stardom (and financial viability) via pubs and small stages (such as AC/DC, INXS, Midnight Oil and later JET) is long-gone but not impossible to resurrect. Young bands having a path to creative and financial success begins with Government support for their craft, ensuring that a quality product can be created to begin with. This should be coupled with existing initiatives such as those from DFAT that promote local musicians into global markets.
- 3) Funding be **moved away from large touring bodies** (for example – Cairns Regional Council donating \$50,000 to host Red Hot Summer Tour in Cairns – Live Nation receiving \$16 MILLION in taxpayer funds since 2021 to host overseas artists and the VIC Government announcing \$50,000 “bail-outs” to large tour operators) and **directed straight towards a fund that ensures local venues can continue to host weekly bands** – coverbands, tribute bands and original bands employ far more musicians, crew, promoters, agents, staff, technicians, hire companies on an on-going basis than these one-off events ever could and would promote social cohesion and affordable experiences for Australian audiences who are unable to pay \$190-500 for a ticket. (I can provide evidence via business modelling that \$50,000 spent across Cairns ensuring several live music venues could provide local musicians a stage to perform on for decent wages across the whole year would provide greater ROI than throwing rate-payer’s money at a one-off event ever could).
- 4) Legislation introduced that **compels insurance companies to underwrite smaller, local venues** collectively in a pool and/or reduces premiums to pre-pandemic levels based on the frequency of live music events that are hosted. Initiatives that REDUCE risk whilst allowing live music to be performed by musicians (eg – plastic tumblers, more security, ID scanners and serving alcohol only directly prior to and during a live music performance) SHOULD incentivise venues with the promise of risk-mitigation reducing premiums. Take note that “live music” in this instance does not and SHOULD NOT include DJs playing pre-recorded music in place of music that is created live on a stage/platform by trained musicians.
- 5) **Priority funding given to bands/musicians/promoters under the age of 40** who are willing to take a risk on hosting live music concerts and on-going “gigs” at smaller venues and regional venues. Funding towards advertising/marketing, venue hire and A/V supply to ensure new players can enter the industry and introduce new Australian music to younger audiences. Caveats such as inclusivity and gender quotas against this funding will ensure that all youth feel able to participate and develop careers in the Live Music Industry (on and off stage).

- 6) **Government Bodies develop the profile of the local live music industry** and collaborate with bodies (such as the Musicians Union arm of the MEAA) to enhance the quality and quantity of local, live music performances. This can be through advertising campaigns and incentives to local venues that have capacity to host live music. As venues become aware of grants and government support to reduce insurances and imposts/red tape, local artists, agents and promoters will align their ideas and musicians will be able to perform against minimum industry standard rates (like the \$250 min. standard introduced for Government contracts for live music).
  
- 7) Royalties and Mechanical Rights bodies such as **APRA and AMCOS to be bolstered or even administered under legislation that enforces fees be distributed away from large international acts/touring companies and into the hands of grass-roots artists and independent musicians and content creators.** Platforms such as Spotify and other streaming services that operate in Australia should be compelled under such legislation to contribute MORE to local independent artists/creators and algorithms on these platforms/apps should be mandated to curate and recommend content from local artists to local audiences. This will ensure that local musicians will receive fair compensation for their works and sustain Australia's cultural output into the future.

I thank you for taking the time to consider my submission and some of my many recommendations which I am happy to share with Minister Tony Burke or his secretaries/staff.

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