

**National Cultural Policy Submission**

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Organisation

Australian Women in Music



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Office for the Arts  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

## **SUBMISSION FOR INCLUSION OF GENDER EQUALITY AS A CORE STRATEGIC PRIORITY**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Australian Women in Music is formally advocating for the explicit integration of Gender Equality as a central pillar within the implementation of the National Cultural Policy.

While the current five pillars provide a strong foundation, the systemic barriers facing women and gender-diverse practitioners who now make up 65% of the arts workforce require a dedicated, structural response to ensure the policy's long-term success.

By embedding gender equality in cultural policy, the government can challenge the rigid stereotypes that drive broader social issues, such as gender-based violence.

The Australian Music Industry remains one of the most gender - segregated sectors in the creative economy. Integrating specific prohibitions against sexism and misogyny within the music industry is essential to dismantle the "boys' club" culture and systemic barriers that have historically favoured men in decision-making, pay and visibility and sidelined women and gender-diverse creators.

To move beyond token representation, the National Cultural policy must treat gender equality as a safety and economic issue, not just a programming one. The right to participate in cultural life is a universal human right that cannot be fully realised while half the population faces systemic barriers and only truly occurs when it reflects the experience of all of its citizens.

To achieve the vision of a "place for every story," the following priorities should be formalised within the policy framework:

#### **Structural Economic Reform:**

With female artists currently earning significantly less than their male counterparts, we recommend the introduction of Gender Equality Criteria for all public cultural funding. Grant recipients should be required to demonstrate pay equity and inclusive leadership practices.

#### **Creative Safety and Standards:**

The National Cultural Policy must provide the mandate to specifically address the high rates of gender-based harassment and toxic work cultures identified in the music and arts sectors.

#### **Intersectional Representation:**

Gender equality initiatives must be intersectional by design, ensuring that the "triple penalty" faced by First Nations women, women of colour and those with disabilities is addressed through targeted investment and leadership pathways.

#### **Legislative Allignment:**

Policy recommendations must ensure that arts organisations of all sizes are held to modern standards of transparency and reporting.



**The Right to Culture:**

As a universal human right, the right to participate in cultural life cannot be fully realised while half the population faces systemic barriers. A cultural policy that does not explicitly prioritise gender equity fails to reflect the lived experience of all its citizens.

**INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC DATA: THE STATE OF PLAY**

**The Technical & Creative Gap:**

Women represent only one-fifth of songwriters registered with APRA AMCOS. The disparity is even more stark in production; internationally, female producers comprised just 5.9% of chart-topping credits in 2024, a figure reflected in the domestic market.

**The Radio & Festival Glass Ceiling:**

Airplay: In a study of the top 100 songs on Australian radio, solo male artists outnumbered solo female artists 55 to 24.

**Music Festivals:**

Major festival line-ups continue to be dominated by male-led acts, with some line-ups featuring zero female or gender-diverse artists in headline slots.

**Current example : Bluesfest Music Festival 2026**

*Despite receiving over \$722,000 in taxpayer-funded grants this past year, Bluesfest 2026 delivered a lineup where nearly 90% of programmed artists were male. Even more concerning is the "bottom of the bill" placement for the few female acts included in the initial media announcement. For a festival that justifies its funding through "community gain" and "economic impact," this blatant lack of diversity is a step backward for the Australian music industry.*

**Workplace Safety & Harassment:**

According to the Raising Their Voices report, 72% of women in the contemporary music industry have experienced workplace sexual harassment. Alarming, 45% of these incidents occurred at music venues, yet only 3% of victims made a formal report due to fears of career repercussions.

**Economic Inequality:**

For self-employed music creators, women creative artists earn significantly less than their male counterparts, with many citing unpaid care responsibilities (affecting 35.7% of women vs 7.3% of men) as a primary barrier to touring.

**STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MUSIC INDUSTRY**

**Safety as a Funding Condition:**

Implement a "Positive Duty" requirement for all venues and festivals receiving government grants. Funding must be contingent on having a public-facing Sexual Harassment Prevention & Response Policy and staff trained in active bystander intervention.

**The '40:40:20' Airplay and Line-up Target:**

Encourage public broadcasters (like ABC/Triple J) and government-funded festivals to adopt a 40% women, 40% men, and 20% flexible/non-binary gender balance for playlists and programming.

**Technical Production Grants:**

Create a dedicated funding stream for women and gender-diverse people in non-performance roles, specifically targeting audio engineering, music production, and tour management to break the 6% producer ceiling.



**Mentorship for Leadership:**

Expand Mentoring Programs through federal subsidies to ensure women move from entry-level roles into the "upper echelons" of record labels and streaming services, where men currently hold 86.8% of leadership roles.

**Parental & Child Care Support for Touring:**

Introduce "Carer Support Grants" within the Creative Australia framework to cover childcare costs for touring musicians, acknowledging that the "irregular seasonality" of music work often forces women out of the industry during early parenthood.

**Structural Solution:**

Move beyond "head-counting" to create structural change, such as gender equality criteria for all public funding and providing appropriate resources for Australian Women in Music as an independent gender equality advocacy body.

**CONCLUSION**

A National Cultural Policy that ignores gendered economic disparities is a policy that ignores the majority of its creators. By adopting these structural reforms, the Australian Government can ensure that "a place for every story" includes equal opportunity for the women and gender diverse creatives who sustain our culture.

The inclusion of gender equality as a core pillar will not only rectify historic imbalances but will also drive economic growth and innovation across the creative industries.

We urge the government to ensure that Music Australia and other emerging bodies are governed by clear gender-equity mandates from their inception.

We look forward to the opportunity to contribute further to this vital national conversation.

Warm regards



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