AUSTRALIAN LIVE MUSIC BUSINESS COUNCIL

Submission to the

New National Cultural Policy

Public Consultation Paper 2026

May 2026

[redacted] | almbc.org.au | [redacted]

Executive Summary

Australia's live music sector is at a critical inflection point. The progress made under *Revive* program was welcome, but the structural conditions facing grassroots live music have become materially worse since 2022. The new policy must recognise that the performance of live music creates social infrastructure that enhances community wellbeing, belonging and cohesion.

We identify four converging crises:

- The traditional live music economic model is broken.
- The regulatory environment around noise abatement, planning, insurance and venue classification remains fractured.
- Consumer and business confidence has been hit by high-profile cancellations and the dominance of large international promoting / ticketing operators.
- Community cultural fracture points are making live music spaces feel less safe and stable.

Recommendations across the five pillars:

- **First Nations First:** shift from “recognise and strengthen” to “invest, implement and sustain”. Fund a First Nations Music Commissioning Fund, embed self-determination, and make cultural consultation costs explicitly grant-eligible
- **A Place for Every Story:** recognise grassroots live music venues as cultural institutions in planning, regulatory and funding structures. Support for not-for-profit transitions, support for a national grass roots ticket levy, and create dedicated venue support with a focus on regional venues.

- **Centrality of the Artist:** address the emerging artist pipeline directly through incentives for venues programming emerging acts, business and superannuation supports for artists and workers
- **Strong Cultural Infrastructure:** most 2022 venue requests are still unmet. Develop National best practice in planning frameworks, deliver concrete insurance reform, legislate to enact mandatory ticket trust arrangements and introduce a federal live music tax offset.
- **Engaging the Audience:** extend local content obligations to digital delivery provides using algorithmic curation. Pursue ticketing transparency reform, back the Live Music Pass, and review licensing barriers to all-ages events.

The ALMBC is asking for a policy framework that recognises live music for what it is: an economic driver and employer, a creator of community infrastructure and cultural identity that is deserving of the same protections and funding as the performing or visual arts (theatres, opera, ballet, galleries and museums).

About the Australian Live Music Business Council

The Australian Live Music Business Council (ALMBC) is the peak national body representing the interests of Australia's live music businesses. We advocate for sustainable policy, fair commercial practices, and a thriving live music industry across Australia.

The ALMBC represents thousands of Australian-owned small businesses and sole traders supporting Australian music in public performance settings, including concert and festival promoters, event presenters, venues, booking agents, artists, DJs, technical crew, show crew, venue workers, ticketing companies, merchandise companies and catering operators.

The live music sector is the most critical component of the overall music supply chain. It provides a creative proving ground for artists, sustains the platforms and infrastructure required to develop and commercialise an artist's creative work, and generates substantial economic activity across the hospitality, tourism, transport and events industries.

ALMBC Board Members

Name	Board Role	Company	Sector
Howard Adams	Chair & Secretary	Corner Soul	Legal
Angie Dunbavan	Deputy Chair	Red Chair	Promoter
Kylie Thompson	Treasurer	Sorrento Strategic	Accounting
Sharlene Harris	Director	ALH Group	Venues
Brian Chladil	Director	Oztix	Ticketing & Promoters
Stephen Wade	Director	Select Music	Artist Booking Agents
Jarrad Thessman	Director	Midnight Assembly	Events & Production
Andrew Bassingthwaighte	Director	Xcelerate	Insurance & Risk
Hayley Ayres	Director	360 Artist Logistics	Promoters & Events
Larissa Jane Ryan	Director	Hutch Collective	Artist Development

Rod Smith	Director	Corner Group	Venues
Ben Tillman	Director	Yours & Owls	Agents & Promoters
Letisha Ackland	Director	Balya Productions	Logistics & Production

Introduction

Australia's live music sector stands at a critical inflection point. The progress achieved through the Revive cultural policy, including the establishment of Music Australia, streaming content requirements, and strengthened arts worker support, is genuinely welcome. However, the structural conditions facing grassroots live music businesses have materially worsened in ways that require urgent and specific attention in the next National Cultural Policy. Live music is not only a commercial sector but social infrastructure: a proven tool for young people's and general community wellbeing, belonging and cohesion. The next policy must reflect this by connecting live music investment to public health, education and youth development frameworks.

Four converging crises define the current landscape:

- The traditional economic model underpinning grassroots live music venues is breaking down, driven by fundamental shifts in audience behaviour and declining alcohol revenue that have historically cross-subsidised local artist programming.
- The regulatory environment, particularly around noise, planning, insurance, and venue classification, remains complex, inconsistent and often hostile to live music operations, with Victoria's ongoing EPA review exposing deep systemic failings.
- Consumer and business confidence in the live events market has been damaged by high-profile cancellations, inadequate financial protections, and the dominance of large international operators in ticketing and promotion.
- Global community fracture points are becoming more of an issue in Australia - disrespect towards Elders at Welcome to Country ceremonies; incidents of political violence at live events; the pricing out of economically marginal communities; vertical integration in the music industry, agriculture and grocery retail, are all is converging in ways that make the live music space feel less safe, less inclusive and less stable.

This submission calls for the new National Cultural Policy to address these challenges through the following areas of reform, mapped to the five enduring pillars:

1. A strengthened First Nations commitment that moves from recognition to genuine resource investment and self-determination, backing the vital importance of First Nations protocol and capacity building.
2. Recognition that live music venues are cultural infrastructure, not merely hospitality businesses, and the planning and regulatory frameworks that govern them must reflect this.

3. Support for a new mixed-model for grassroots venue sustainability, including charitable structures, ticket levies, and access to philanthropic funding.
4. National coordination of Special Entertainment Precinct frameworks across all states and territories.
5. Mandatory ticket trust arrangements and anti-monopoly measures to protect consumers and small businesses.

Communities across the continent are struggling and fractured – live music is a vital community development and engagement tool as well as an important doorway for people from lower economic status to gain independence and economic stability.

The Structural Economic Shift Facing Live Music

When the ALMBC last made a substantive submission to a National Cultural Policy process in 2022, our primary concern was pandemic recovery: rebuilding a sector that had been devastated by closures, cancellations, and the loss of skilled workers to other industries. That framing, while still partially relevant, is no longer adequate.

The sector faces a deeper and more durable challenge: the fundamental economic model that sustained grassroots live music for fifty years is no longer working. The cross-subsidy between alcohol sales and live music programming, where bars and pubs underwrote the cost of presenting live acts through food and beverage revenue, has eroded drastically.

> Recent ALMBC panel discussions revealed that soft drink sales now outpace alcohol sales 3-to-1 at some venues featuring emerging artists. Two-thirds of audiences at youth-oriented shows purchased no drinks at all. Venues that previously relied on a 4 or 5-times bar multiple for particular acts now face highly unpredictable revenue. One venue group reports that "A $25-$30 per head spend was bankable for the last 20 years, now its lucky if we are hitting $12-$15."

Changing audience behaviour compounds this: later arrivals, earlier departures, and a preference for headline acts over support acts is directly damaging the emerging artist pipeline. (See Pillar 5 for detail and data.)

At the same time, regional venues continue to close. Two key live music venues in regional Queensland closed within two months of each other in early 2026. The cancellation of Bluesfest, a cornerstone of the Australian live music calendar for more than three decades, sent a shockwave through the supply chain, directly affecting thousands of workers, small businesses and ticket holders who had committed in good faith.[1] The cancellation of the Birdsville Big Red Bash showed how exposed the industry is to extreme weather events, with unprecedented flooding across outback Queensland inundating the festival site and making it unusable.[2]

This is compounded by the built environment: most venues are old buildings in mixed-use precincts that leak sound, generating the noise vs amenity friction (detailed under Pillar 4).

The new National Cultural Policy must grapple with these structural issues. The ALMBC's 2022 call for "Music Australia" has been answered; now the challenge is to ensure that the infrastructure built by *Revive* is deployed to address a changed landscape, not just to consolidate gains already made.

One concrete win from the previous policy cycle: ALMBC advocacy was pivotal in securing the non-eligibility of internationally owned entities from *Revive Live*, unlocking funding for dozens of additional regional and remote venues and festivals. Smaller venues and festivals such as Desert Harmony Festival Tennant Creek, River Sounds Festival Bellingen, West Best Bloc Festival Dubbo along with smaller independent venues such as the Cave Inn Brisbane, Avoca Beach Theatre Central Coast NSW, Bakehouse Studios Darwin. None of these are names that would typically be competitive in funding rounds against large international promoters.

Pillar 1 - First Nations First

The ALMBC maintains a First Nations First approach as a guiding principle across all our work. We welcome the government's commitment to continuing this pillar and strengthening it in the next policy cycle.

Our core position remains that cultural policy must move beyond the language of 'recognition' to the language of investment, implementation, and sustained resourcing. Consultation with First Nations communities is a cultural process that takes time and requires the involvement of many voices across Australia's diverse communities of traditional owners and language groups. This process has a cost, and that cost must be funded.

The ALMBC has maintained a goal to increase the inclusion of First Nations Board Members and this has been recently realised, with two of the thirteen strong board members, or fifteen percent, identifying as First Nations.

Key Recommendations

[1] **Bluesfest Byron Bay: Official Statement on Cancellation**, Noise11.com / 2026. https://www.noise11.com/news/bluesfest-cancellation-official-statement-20260313
[2] **Birdsville Big Red Bash 2026 Cancelled Due to Flooding**, Rolling Stone AU / 2026. https://au.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/big-red-bash-2026-cancelled-92978/

- Strengthen the First Nations pillar from ‘recognise and strengthen’ to ‘invest, implement and sustain’, with multi-year funding commitments.
- Embed self-determination as a non-negotiable principle in all First Nations programs and initiatives, including those delivered through Music Australia and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music Office (NATSIMO) which already articulates this principle).
- Fund a dedicated First Nations Music Commissioning Fund for First Nations artists and First Nations-led organisations, prioritising on-country, in the regions, based on the success of the NATSIMO Lifecycle existing grants
- Develop a First Nations staffed and governed Music Skills and Workforce Capacity Building Plan for the next decade, including pathways into the industry beyond performance, for producers, promoters, technical crew, and administrators, completing work already underway.
- Acknowledge the importance of appropriate cultural consultation, and make consultation costs explicitly eligible in all project grant budgets.
- Pilot regionally based, on-Country, First Nations producer and presenter professional development and showcasing programs, drawing on the ALMBC’s existing regional network including recent engagement in Far North Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Pillar 2 - A Place for Every Story

Grassroots live music venues are an important part of the physical infrastructure through which communities share their stories. They are the places where First Nations artists perform, where migrants find their cultural voices, where young people discover who they are, where regional communities come together and where suburban communities hum.

The ALMBC has consistently argued that cultural policy must treat live music venues as cultural institutions, not merely hospitality businesses. This framing has significant practical implications for planning, regulation, funding eligibility, and public investment.

Venue Closures and the Regional Crisis

As outlined in the structural context above, the early 2026 closure of two key Queensland regional venues broke vital touring circuits and put workers out of work. These are not isolated incidents: regional venues face the same cost pressures as metropolitan counterparts, but without the same audience density or alternative revenue streams, and under planning classifications designed for restaurants or nightclubs rather than cultural institutions.

The cultural policy must explicitly address the particular vulnerability of regional and remote grassroots live music venues, who face the same cost pressures as metropolitan venues without the same density of audience or access to alternative revenue streams.

Grassroots Venue Ownership Models

The ALMBC's recent Expert Panel on Grassroots Live Music Venue Ownership Models (March 2026), conducted in partnership with QMusic, surfaced growing evidence that the sector needs to explore and support new operational models:

- Not-for-profit and charitable structures: Venues like Lazy Thinking in Sydney now operate through a combination of their own income, philanthropic donations and government grants, effectively functioning as cultural institutions even before they officially transitioned away from being classified as a business to a not-for-profit entity. There is a strong case for cultural policy to facilitate this transition, including by streamlining access to charitable status for venues whose primary purpose is presenting live music.
- The Australian Cultural Fund (ACF): ACF has proven effective for venues seeking philanthropic support, including for capital purposes such as building purchase. Cultural policy should expand awareness and access to these mechanisms across the sector.
- Ticket levies: Several international models, including the UK's voluntary levy system and the French model, demonstrate how small per-ticket contributions at larger venues can be redistributed to grassroots music infrastructure. The ALMBC supports exploration of an Australian equivalent, keeping in mind that live music occurs mostly outside government owned infrastructure and that the system to support it, must also be retained outside of government.

Key Recommendations

- Explicitly recognise grassroots live music venues as cultural institutions in the national cultural policy framework, and ensure planning, regulatory and funding systems reflect this status.
- Support at-risk landmark venues to transition to not-for-profit structures where primary purpose is live music presentation, including streamlined access to the Australian Cultural Fund and ACNC charitable status.
- Explore a national live music ticket levy mechanism, redistributing a portion of revenue from major venue and festival tickets to grassroots venue infrastructure.
- Develop dedicated support programs for regional and remote live music venues, recognising their unique challenges and community importance.

Pillar 3 - Centrality of the Artist

The ALMBC has long argued that musicians are small business operators as well as creatives, and that cultural policy must recognise and support both dimensions of their working lives. This remains true, but the 2026 context adds new urgency around the artist development pipeline and the impact of structural changes on emerging artists specifically.

The Emerging Artist Pipeline

The breakdown of the traditional venue business model, driven by changing audience behaviour, has a direct and underappreciated effect on artist development. When audiences arrive only for headline acts and bar revenue has declined, venues face growing pressure to reduce or eliminate support act programming. Support acts are not a luxury; they are the mechanism through which emerging artists build audiences, develop stagecraft, and enter professional careers.

> If the policy settings that allowed a generation of Australian artists to develop their craft, small venues, regular programming, support slots, are no longer economically viable, we face a generational gap in the artist development pipeline that will be felt for a decade or more.

Cultural policy must address this pipeline threat directly, rather than leaving it as a consequence of market forces. This means creating incentives for venues that programme emerging acts, and supporting the development of new business models that can sustain this programming even as alcohol revenue declines. The pipeline challenge also extends beyond the stage. The live music sector depends on a skilled workforce of producers, promoters, technical crew, administrators and event managers, and young people need work-integrated learning pathways into these roles too. During Covid, many sound and lighting techs left the live music industry to go work in films and never returned. A National Plan for Young Australians and Music 2026-2036, launched at Parliament House in 2026 and endorsed by the Minister for the Arts, calls directly for structured career pathways across creative, business and technical roles. Cultural policy should align with and support this framework.[3]

Artists as Small Businesses

The ALMBC reiterates our 2022 position that artists require the same business support infrastructure as any small business: financial literacy programs, business

[3] **A National Plan for Young Australians and Music 2026-2036**, The Push / 2026. https://www.billboard.com/pro/young-australians-10-year-national-plan-parliament-house/

accelerator pathways, mentoring, superannuation support, and access to legal and accounting services tailored to the creative industries.

We note that market concentration in the live music sector, including the aggregation of management, booking, promotion and venue operations by large international operators, continues to create conditions that are not always favourable to Australian artists and the Australian businesses that represent them. The government has a role in monitoring and, where necessary, acting on these conditions.

Key Recommendations

- Create incentives specifically for venues that programme emerging artists, potentially through the proposed live music tax offset mechanism, with higher offset rates for venues demonstrating meaningful emerging artist programming.
- Fund business accelerator, mentoring and financial literacy programs for artists as music businesses, delivered through Music Australia and state-based music organisations.
- Maintain and strengthen monitoring of market concentration in the live music sector, with particular attention to the impact of international operator consolidation on Australian artists and businesses.
- Invest in superannuation literacy and portable superannuation infrastructure for gig economy workers in the live music sector.
- Support work-integrated learning pathways for young people entering the music workforce across production, promotion, technical and administrative roles, in alignment with the National Plan for Young Australians and Music 2026-2036.[3]

Pillar 4 - Strong Cultural Infrastructure

The 2022 ALMBC submission called for the establishment of Music Australia as a national contemporary music development agency. That call was answered through *Revive*. The task now is to ensure that Music Australia and the broader cultural infrastructure funding mechanisms are directed at the sector's most pressing structural challenges, not just the continuation of existing programs.

The ALMBC's 2022 venue-specific calls were largely unmet, with venue pressures intensifying since. The following scorecard tells the story:

2022 Request Delivered?	2022 ALMBC Recommendation	Government Action / Delivery Notes
✗ Not Delivered	Coordinated reform of legislation to deliver more affordable public liability insurance for venues.	Not resolved. Crisis persists.
✗ Not Delivered	Implementation of a National Touring Network connecting regional, remote and metropolitan communities.	National touring infrastructure still under-resourced; Revive Live delivered some regional support but a comprehensive network not established.
✗ Not Delivered	Business interruption support to stabilise the live and events sector.	No standalone business interruption support scheme established post-pandemic emergency measures.
✗ Not Delivered	Tax offsets to incentivise new and existing live music offerings.	Not implemented; recommendation was based on BIS Oxford Economics report via APRA AMCOS. Cross-party interest from Greens in Apr 2025.[5,6]
✗ Not Delivered	Accessible spaces and programs to integrate music into everyday lives of Australian people; consumer confidence measures.	No specific accessible spaces policy implemented.
⚠ Partial	Business skills development and mentoring across the music ecosystem.	Music Australia ($70m, confirmed by Joint Statement Jan 2023) provides a vehicle for delivery. Specific national music business skills program not yet established as a standalone initiative.[4]
✗ Not Delivered	Commonwealth-backed business interruption insurance for live music investments.	Not implemented.

[4] **Australian Music Industry Joint Statement - National Cultural Policy (Revive)**, APRA AMCOS / 2023. https://www.apraamcos.com.au/about-us/news-and-events/music-industry-statement-national-cultural-policy

✗ Not Delivered	Support live music venues as cultural infrastructure with planning protections.	Not embedded in planning law nationally; Victoria EPA review (2026) exposed ongoing failures.

Grassroots live music venues are now almost unsustainable. Further reticence to offer substantial support will see significantly more venues close in the coming months and years.

The federal government must act now – and the ALMBC has a strategy.

Grassroots Live Music Venues as Cultural Infrastructure

The ALMBC is proposing that government recognises the cultural significance of grassroots live music venues committing funding support for opportunities such as artist programming fees, sound attenuation, production upgrades, all ages show development and more. Funding needs to be tied to the number of hours of live original music presented within the venue. This funding could be delivered through an updated Revive Live program, or through disseminated funding allocated by organisations such as the ALMBC with clear guidelines and processes, as are utilised in the current Music Australia International Conference Contribution program that the ALMBC oversees to send booking agents, festival bookers and publicists to international conferences.

The NSW Government's recent funding investment directly into venues, precincts and economic vibrancy reforms, have proven highly successful in sustaining venues. The federal government must undertake national action in partnership with state governments.

Regulatory Reform: Noise, Planning and Special Entertainment Precincts

One of the most significant ongoing structural threats to live music venues is the regulatory environment: noise rules, planning classifications, liquor licensing, trading hours, and building standards that were not designed with live music in mind and frequently create compliance uncertainty, costly disputes, and venue closures.

The ALMBC has been closely engaged with the Victorian EPA's Live Music Precinct Noise Regulation Review (2026), which has highlighted both the severity of the problem and the limitations of piecemeal regulatory approaches. Our analysis of the Victorian situation is directly relevant to national cultural policy:

- Victoria's current live music noise regulation system is overly complex, expensive, and unclear, venues often do not know whether they are compliant until enforcement action occurs.
- The Agent of Change principle, while valuable for managing day-to-day complaints, fails to protect venues from developers, litigation, legacy permits, and high-stakes

enforcement, as illustrated by the ongoing venue dispute with Melbourne venue "Night Cat".

- Live music precincts in Victoria are poorly defined and weakly implemented, with only St Kilda formally recognised and no meaningful change to EPA noise limits or enforcement processes.
- By contrast, Special Entertainment Precincts (SEPs) in NSW and Queensland provide clear statutory sound rules, planning certainty, and consistent enforcement that allow live music and residential amenity to coexist.

> The ALMBC's position is that the Victorian EPA review should be used as a catalyst for whole-of-government structural reform in Victoria, and that national cultural policy should actively encourage all states and territories to adopt SEP-style frameworks. Live music venues must be treated as priority land uses in mixed-use urban environments, with planning systems that embed their cultural importance rather than treating them as nuisances to be managed.

The national cultural policy provides the ideal umbrella rationale to drive this reform: if live music venues are cultural infrastructure, they deserve the same planning protections as theatres, galleries, museums and opera houses.

Insurance Reform

The insurance crisis identified in our 2022 submission has not been resolved. The ALMBC has continued to advocate strongly on this issue through 2025 and 2026, including through the Federal Inquiry into Insurance for Small Business, an Insurance Reform Report launched in October 2025, and participation on the Queensland Tourism Insurance Panel in March 2026.

Public liability insurance remains either unavailable or commercially unviable for many live music venues and events. The new cultural policy must commit to concrete insurance reform outcomes, not merely further review processes.

Ticket Trust Arrangements and Financial Protections

The cancellation of Byron Bluesfest in March 2026 exposed a critical gap in the financial protection framework for live music businesses and consumers. When a major festival is cancelled (or a venue is closed) thousands of small businesses, artists, crew, staging companies, caterers, transport operators, local traders and casual staff, face immediate financial loss, often having already committed significant resources.[1]

The ALMBC has called for the introduction of mandatory trust arrangements for ticket revenue, modelled on existing requirements in the real estate and travel industries.

This would:

- Protect consumers by ensuring ticket funds are available for refund in the event of cancellation.
- Protect workers and small businesses by reducing the risk of promoter insolvency cascading through the supply chain.
- Discourage unsustainable or high risk speculative event promotion.
- Create incentive for ticketing companies to compete on service rather than on cash advances drawn from ticket revenue.
- Build long-term consumer and business confidence in the live events market.

The new National Cultural Policy should commit to legislative reform in this area, working with state and territory governments to create a nationally consistent framework.

Live Music Tax Offset

The ALMBC continues to strongly support the introduction of a federal live music tax offset, as recommended by the BIS Oxford Economics report commissioned by APRA AMCOS and referenced in our 2022 submission. This policy has received cross-party political interest, including explicit support from the Australian Greens in April 2025.[5][6]

The economic case remains compelling: a combined venue tax offset could generate more than 200,000 additional gigs (events) per year, boost artist income by $205 million annually, and support more than 7,400 direct and indirect jobs. This is not a subsidy for a marginal cultural activity; it is an investment in the economic and cultural foundation of the Australian music sector.[5]

Key Recommendations

- Partner with the ALMBC to disseminate funding to grassroots live music venues, linked to live original music outcomes.
- Use the new National Cultural Policy to actively encourage all states and territories to adopt Special Entertainment Precinct frameworks, with national guidelines on minimum standards.
- Commit to concrete insurance reform outcomes for live music venues within the policy period, including exploration of a Commonwealth-backed public liability insurance scheme.

---

[5] **Economic Impact of Tax Offsets on Australia's Live Music Industry**, BIS Oxford Economics / APRA AMCOS / 2022. https://www.apraamcos.com.au/about/supporting-the-industry/research-papers/economic-impact-of-tax-offsets-on-the-live-music-industry

[6] **Greens Launch Plan for Live Performance Tax Offsets**, Australian Greens / 2025. https://greens.org.au/news/media-release/greens-launch-plan-live-performance-tax-offsets-touring-artists-live-performance

- Legislate mandatory trust arrangements for ticket revenue, working with states and territories toward a nationally consistent framework, with interest from the trust utilised to seed fund new emerging festivals
- Introduce a federal live music tax offset for venues, structured as per the BIS Oxford Economics optimal policy scenario (5% offset for existing venues; $12,000 for non-live venues).[5]
- Continue and expand the Revive Live program, with multi-year funding certainty for live music venue support.
- Make "all-ages events" grants available to music venues, festivals, artists and promoters, and review compliance and licensing settings to ensure that alcohol-free, all-ages events can operate viably within existing venue infrastructure.

Pillar 5 - Engaging the Audience

The 2022 ALMBC submission called for review of broadcast quotas and local content benchmarks for digital streaming platforms. Both have since been partially addressed through Revive. The challenge in 2026 is to ensure that these measures actually change outcomes for Australian artists and the businesses that support them, rather than simply achieving technical compliance.

Algorithmic Discovery and the 'Ausify' Campaign

Music Australia's 'Ausify Your Algorithm' campaign (2025) highlighted a critical gap in the current approach to local content on streaming platforms: technical content quotas do not translate into audience discovery if recommendation algorithms continue to route listeners toward international content.

The consultation paper's reference to 'discovery pathways' and 'innovation in presentation and discovery' is directly relevant here. Australian music content obligations must extend to algorithmic curation, not merely catalogue requirements. A platform can technically comply with a local content requirement while its recommendation engine systematically disadvantages Australian artists in what audiences actually hear.

The ALMBC recommends that Music Australia be resourced to monitor and publicly report on algorithmic treatment of Australian music across major streaming platforms, with the results informing future policy settings.

Market Concentration and Ticketing Transparency

The Live Nation/Ticketmaster antitrust proceedings in the United States reached a milestone in March 2026 when the Department of Justice settled its case, though the trial continued with 39 state attorneys general. In April 2026, a jury found that Live Nation and Ticketmaster had operated as a monopoly. These findings have global implications for the Australian market.[7] The ALMBC has been actively engaged on the domestic dimension of this issue, including through our submission on the Federal Draft Legislation on Unfair Trading Practices (February 2026) and our ongoing advocacy on ticketing transparency and consumer protection.

The concentration of ticketing and promotion in the hands of a small number of large international operators reduces competition, limits consumer choice, and creates structural disadvantages for Australian-owned venues, promoters and artists. High and opaque service fees, as demonstrated by the Lady Gaga ticket controversy in April 2025, undermine consumer confidence and willingness to engage with the live music market.[8]

Cultural policy has a role to play in ensuring that the market structures enabling Australian audiences to access live music are competitive, transparent and fair.

Changing Audience Behaviour and Youth Engagement

The fundamental shift in how audiences, particularly younger audiences, engage with live music requires a policy response. People are arriving later, leaving earlier, consuming less alcohol, and engaging with acts they already know rather than discovering new artists through live performance. This changes the economic calculus for venues, the development pathway for artists, and the nature of the live experience itself. National data from The Push's 2025 Young Australian Music Audiences Report gives this picture quantitative weight: 59% of young Australians aged 16 to 25 identify cost as a barrier to attending live music events, yet 63% agree that attending live music events is important to them. Cost is the primary structural barrier, not disinterest. At the same time, 68% of young Australians aged 16 to 25 would like to listen to more Australian music, pointing to an appetite that current market conditions are failing to meet.[9]

The ALMBC does not suggest that these shifts can or should be reversed. Rather, cultural policy should support the sector in adapting to them: through support for new programming models, investment in all-ages and non-alcohol-centred live music venues, and recognition that the live music audience of 2030 will engage with the sector very differently from the audience of 2010. The ALMBC supports the Live Music Pass model proposed in A National Plan for Young Australians and Music 2026-2036 as a mechanism to reduce cost barriers for young audiences at all-ages events. This approach is directly complementary to the ALMBC's proposed ticket levy mechanism: a portion of levy revenue collected from major events could be

[7] **Live Nation Settles Antitrust Case with DOJ, Avoids Ticketmaster Breakup**, NBC News / 2026. https://www.nbcnews.com/business/consumer/ticketmaster-live-nation-settles-antitrust-case-rcna262392
[8] **Lady Gaga Fans Rocked by Ticket Prices**, Australian Business Journal / 2025. https://theabj.com.au/2025/04/14/lady-gaga/
[9] **Young Australian Music Audiences Report 2025**, The Push / YouGov / 2025. https://www.thepush.com.au/s/The-Push-Young-Australian-Music-Audiences-Report-2025-gs8f.pdf

used to fund concession access for young people, creating a sustainable, industry-led model rather than one dependent on ongoing government subsidy.[3]

Key Recommendations

- Extend local content obligations for streaming platforms to include algorithmic curation and recommendation systems, not merely catalogue content requirements.
- Resource Music Australia to monitor and publicly report on the algorithmic treatment of Australian music by major streaming platforms.
- Pursue ticketing transparency reform through trade practice legislation, requiring full disclosure of all fees at point of first display.
- Support exploration of independent ticketing infrastructure as a competitive counterweight to market concentration.
- Invest in all-ages / under-18 and non-alcohol-centred live music programming, recognising changing audience demographics and behaviours.
- Review local content arrangements to ensure they are achieving genuine audience reach outcomes, not merely technical compliance.
- Support the development of a Live Music Pass scheme, funded through a portion of the proposed live music ticket levy, to reduce the cost of all-ages events for young people aged 12 to 25.
- Review licensing and planning classification settings to explicitly enable safe, commercially viable all-ages events in existing licensed venues, removing the regulatory barriers that currently make under-18 attendance legally complex for venue operators.

Conclusion

The Australian live music sector has proven its resilience and its cultural and economic significance repeatedly. It survived the collapse of digital music revenues, the devastation of the pandemic, and the slow post-COVID recovery. It now faces a set of structural challenges that are in some ways more difficult to address than any of these, because they are not caused by a single shock but by the gradual erosion of the societal, economic and regulatory conditions that made grassroots live music viable.

The previous National Cultural Policy provided excellent first steps, however the unmet previous needs have escalated structural issues, particularly for venues, that the new National Cultural Policy must respond to with ambition and specificity.

The ALMBC is not asking for the music sector to be treated as a charity requiring subsidy. We are asking for a policy framework that recognises live music for what it is: a major economic driver, a critical component of community wellbeing and cultural identity, and a sector whose grassroots infrastructure deserves the same planning, regulatory and investment protections as other recognised cultural institutions.

The ALMBC stands ready to work constructively with the government, with Music Australia, and with all relevant stakeholders to shape a policy that delivers for Australian artists, live music businesses, communities and audiences.

The launch of A National Plan for Young Australians and Music 2026-2036, developed by The Push and endorsed by the Minister for the Arts, signals growing cross-sector consensus around the same core argument this submission makes: that music is essential infrastructure for the nation, not a peripheral cultural amenity.[3]

The ALMBC welcomes this alignment and urges the government to treat both documents as complementary inputs to the next National Cultural Policy, drawing on the commercial and regulatory expertise of the ALMBC alongside the youth participation and wellbeing evidence base provided by The Push.

Australian Live Music Business Council
[redacted] | almbc.org.au | [redacted]
May 2026