

MUSIC VICTORIA

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation 2027-2032

Prepared May 2026

INTRODUCTION

Music Victoria

Peak body for contemporary music in Victoria

Music Victoria welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next phase of Australia's National Cultural Policy.

As the peak body for contemporary music in Victoria, Music Victoria represents one of the country's most productive and economically significant music ecosystems. Victoria has more live music venues than any other Australian state and is home to 40% of Australia's music labels. The state has produced some of the nation's most internationally recognised artists: Amyl and the Sniffers, Dom Dolla, Briggs, The Teskey Brothers, Tones and I, Vance Joy, Kylie Minogue, 2023 ARIA Hall of Fame inductee Jet, 2024 ARIA Hall of Fame inductee Missy Higgins, 2025 ARIA Hall of Fame inductee You Am I, and 2026 ARIA Hall of Fame inductees Spiderbait, The Living End, Kate Ceberano and Vika and Linda. These are not just successful artists – they are artists who have shaped global music culture. The state is also home to most of the country's leading promoters, including Destroy All Lines, Untitled Group and the Frontier/Mushroom Group. This submission is made on behalf of that ecosystem and in the spirit of building the national conditions that allow it and every other state's music economy to grow.

This submission reflects ongoing consultation and engagement with Victorian artists, venues, festivals, promoters and music businesses throughout 2025 and 2026, including structured roundtable processes with artists and venue operators, direct consultation with festival operators and a major national touring company, and Music Victoria's 2025 Live Music Venues Audit.

VICTORIA'S MUSIC ECOSYSTEM

An ecosystem under threat but vital to Australia's creative and economic future

Victoria is home to Australia's independent industry, consumer infrastructure and the country's most active music audiences

INDUSTRY STRENGTHS

120+ independent recorded music labels
66% of Australia's vinyl pressing plants
40% of Australia's music managers

THREATS TO THE ECOSYSTEM

Declining viability of live careers
The impact of algorithms on local music consumption

2,100+ live music venues
150+ music festivals
56% of artists on the ARIA Vinyl Chart are Victorian
34% of APRA AMCOS membership, including 40% of screen and game composers
Home of Always Live, MESS, ACMI and the Australian Music Vault
Most vinyl retail stores per capita in the world
A highly skilled, market-ready creative workforce

The need for skilled, portfolio careers with no clear pathways
Competition from other states for investment and talent
Challenges with liquidity and cash flow across the sector
Incomplete industry mapping limiting targeted investment
A lack of business confidence affecting forward planning
The impact of AI and new technology on creator rights and revenue

This is the ecosystem the next national cultural policy must be designed to sustain.

The foundation Revive built

The Australian Government's Revive policy marked a significant and historic shift in how government partners with and invests in contemporary music. Music Victoria strongly acknowledges and supports the work of Music Australia as a genuinely groundbreaking national investment in the sector. Music Australia's 2025 Bass Line report established for the first time a rigorous, nationally consistent evidence base for the industry's scale and contribution. The Australian music industry is worth \$8.7 billion. Live music alone drew 12 million attendees in 2023, the highest in 15 years, and generated \$4.83 billion in revenue. Every dollar invested in live music returns three dollars to the community.

Music Australia's strategic, evidence-led approach to industry investment represents exactly the model this submission builds on. The First Nations First framework, Creative Workplaces, Revive Live, and Australia's decision to reject text and data mining exceptions for AI have each addressed structural gaps that the sector identified. These are not small wins. They are the foundation for what comes next.

The next phase of national cultural policy presents an opportunity to move from stabilisation to long-term structural investment across the full ecosystem that produces, presents and sustains Australian music.

What our consultation found

Across Music Victoria's direct engagement with artists, venue operators, festival organisers and touring companies in 2025 and 2026, the same themes emerge consistently:

- Escalating touring and operational costs pushing festivals, venues and artists toward breaking point
- Venue and festival sustainability under structural, not cyclical, pressure
- Workforce shortages and burnout across the live music workforce
- Declining artist sustainability, particularly for those in the 'missing middle'
- Reduced regional touring viability as cost increases make regional markets uneconomic for promoters and artists

- Insurance market failure creating existential risk for venues and events
- Youth audience disengagement and collapsing discovery pathways for Australian music
- Uneven state investment levels that federal policy must account for rather than assume away

Australian music continues to demonstrate extraordinary creative output, audience demand and international potential. The challenge is not a lack of talent or ambition. It is the weakening of the infrastructure, pathways and investment systems that allow artists, workers and music communities to build sustainable futures. The decisions made through this policy cycle will determine whether the next generation of Australian creators has the conditions to match the ambition we all share.

Pillar 1 - First Nations First

Supporting First Nations Leadership and Cultural Authority

Music Victoria strongly supports the continuation and expansion of First Nations-led cultural investment and decision-making. The First Nations First framework established under Revive has been one of the most important structural reforms within current policy settings and should remain central to future cultural policy.

Music Victoria's Artist Roundtable highlighted that current funding and support frameworks do not adequately reach First Nations artists, who face compounding barriers to funding, safety, visibility and career development. Investment in First Nations music infrastructure must be self-determined, not consulted upon after decisions are made.

Music Victoria supports:

- Expansion of First Nations music infrastructure, including investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music centres, recording facilities and cultural spaces
 - Stronger pathways for First Nations leadership across the music industry
 - Protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
 - Stand-alone legislation protecting First Nations traditional knowledge and cultural expression within digital and AI environments - an urgent gap where AI systems are generating Aboriginal-style content without consent, compensation or cultural authority
 - First Nations-led governance and funding structures with genuine decision-making authority
 - Ongoing recognition of music and cultural participation as contributors to wellbeing, language preservation, community connection and cultural continuity for First Peoples communities
-

Pillar 2 - A Place for Every Story

Strengthening Local Music Communities and Participation

Australia's music ecosystem is built through local communities, grassroots participation and place-based music cultures. Behind every Australian artist who has broken internationally is a local audience that believed in them first, a grassroots venue where they developed, a community that formed around their music. The strength of that local ecosystem is what produces national and international success.

Across Music Victoria's engagement with artists, venues, festivals and regional communities, there is increasing concern about the weakening of the local ecosystems that support participation, development and creative expression. Victoria's experience is instructive for the national picture.

What the evidence shows

Music Victoria's 2025 Live Music Venues Audit documented the scale of the challenge in Victoria, one of Australia's most active live music economies. Victoria has 2,441 spaces that host live music, of which 655 program live music regularly. Since 2019, 19% of regular live music venues have closed. In metropolitan Melbourne the decline was 25.8%. Regional impacts are more severe: the Grampians region lost 86.2% of regular presenters; Gippsland lost 47.6%.

These figures reflect a national pattern. The venues where artists develop, where workers train, where audiences form habits and where communities gather are disappearing faster than they are being replaced. The sector is producing more music creators than ever - APRA AMCOS songwriter membership is growing - while the spaces where those creators develop and perform are shrinking.

2,441

spaces hosting live music
(Victoria)

655

regular live music venues
(Victoria)

19%

venue closure rate since 2019

Regional and outer metropolitan communities are disproportionately affected by rising touring and freight costs, reduced touring routes, limited infrastructure, workforce shortages and reduced access to all-ages and community-based live music experiences. These communities are not peripheral to Australia's music story - they are where much of it begins.

What venue operators told us

- Insurance is the single most acute structural issue: premiums rising dramatically, provider competition limited, live music categorised as inherently high-risk regardless of scale or programming history
- Noise regulation continues to expose venues to excessive compliance costs even after Agent of Change reforms. The Night Cat in Fitzroy incurred approximately \$100,000 in compliance costs in a single year following a dispute initiated by a nearby developer
- Most venues do not own their buildings. There are no legislative protections for venue tenants facing sudden rent increases or redevelopment eviction

- Dedicated live music spaces are increasingly being used for private hire and events rather than programmed music, as operators respond to financial pressure by prioritising income certainty over cultural mission

Music Victoria supports:

- Investment in regional touring and audience development
- Support for grassroots venues and local live music ecosystems, including formal recognition as cultural infrastructure
- Investment in multicultural and community-led music initiatives
- Support for all-ages and youth participation, including recommendations from The Push's 10 Year Plan
- Stronger support for local music discovery pathways

Pillar 3 - Centrality of the Artist

Supporting Sustainable Creative Careers

Artists are central to Australia's cultural and economic future, yet many are working within increasingly unsustainable conditions. The Bass Line found Australian artists earned \$860 million from their work across the industry in 2023-24, with 48% of that income earned through live music. That income is under pressure at every point in the system.

What artists told us

Music Victoria's Artist Roundtable brought together 20 Victorian musicians and artists across diverse genres, career stages and regions. Their experience reflects conditions reported consistently across the national sector. These findings are offered as direct evidence for national policy design.

Career sustainability and the missing middle

- Victorian musicians face deep structural precarity. Few have access to superannuation, paid leave or portable entitlements. Gigs are frequently underpaid or dependent on door deals that transfer all financial risk to the artist
- Artists in the 'missing middle' - too established for entry-level grants, without the scale or networks to access major commercial opportunities - are consistently overlooked and many are considering leaving the industry
- A recurring theme was the loss of what artists called 'muscle memory': post-pandemic, habits and spending priorities have shifted, grassroots energy has declined, and rebuilding that vitality requires deliberate cultural investment
- Most artists operate across multiple short-term engagements and self-employed income streams. Many reach mid- and late-career with little or no retirement savings despite decades of professional practice. The system assumes a stable, single-employer career model that has never reflected how musicians work

Funding: not fit for purpose

- Participants expressed strong, consistent frustration with funding frameworks that prioritise measurable outputs over creative development
- The absence of Music Works was raised repeatedly and with urgency - described as having provided a critical layer of strategic music funding whose loss has left a significant gap
- Application processes are complex and effectively reward grant-writing skill rather than artistic quality or potential, creating structural inequity that privileges those who already know how to navigate bureaucratic systems
- Artists described spending so much time applying for grants they have no time to make music

AI, copyright and digital rights

- Artists described AI systems being trained on their work without consent, credit or compensation as a current and urgent harm, not a future risk
- Existing copyright frameworks offer no meaningful protection. Artists feel exposed and want federal intervention through enforceable consent and remuneration frameworks
- Australia's rejection of text and data mining exceptions for AI is strongly supported - it should now be the foundation for a broader cultural economy plan that keeps creators protected and properly remunerated

Mental health and burnout

- Near-universal burnout was reported, driven by relentless self-management across artistic, administrative, financial and promotional functions
- The erosion of industry infrastructure - labels, management, media, mentorship - that once supported career development has left artists more isolated and more exposed
- Mid-career artists are identified as the most vulnerable group, with the least access to support

Music Victoria strongly supports:

- Continued investment in fair, safe and respectful workplaces through Creative Workplaces
- Expanded wellbeing and mental health initiatives, including continued investment in Support Act
- Superannuation reform that addresses the structural challenges facing artists and music workers. Superannuation continues to emerge as a key issue impacting the long-term sustainability of careers in music. The challenges are not simple: they span how artists are engaged and paid, how superannuation applies or does not apply across different types of work, and how a framework built around stable employment has never matched the reality of a sector built on short-term contracts, door deals, freelance arrangements, casual shifts and self-generated income streams - often held simultaneously. Many artists and music workers reach mid- and late-career with little or no retirement savings despite decades of professional practice. Music Victoria encourages the Federal Government to examine these structural mismatches and develop a response that reflects how the creative workforce actually operates

- Exploration of a living wage test case for professional musicians and music workers, drawing on international models including the Basic Income for the Arts pilot currently underway in Ireland. The Irish model provides government-supported income to professional artists to enable sustained creative practice, reduce the financial precarity that forces artists out of the industry, and recognise the social and cultural value of artistic work. Australia has an opportunity to learn from that pilot and develop a comparable framework suited to the Australian context. Music Victoria encourages the Federal Government to explore this in partnership with the sector
- Workforce development, training, apprenticeships and traineeships linked to the live music sector
- Stronger protections for copyright and creator rights within AI and digital environments
- Support for independent artists and small music businesses, including recognition that the costs of making and releasing music have outpaced what the industry returns. From recording to touring to navigating an increasingly complex release landscape, the financial risk of making music has increased sharply while the return has declined. Artists are delaying releases because the rules keep shifting and the economics do not stack up. Policy that supports artist development must account for the full cost of bringing music to market, not just the performance or recording in isolation
- Music education investment, including the recommendations in the Music Education: Right From The Start report: a dedicated Creative Arts Education pillar, nationally coordinated music education policy, stronger investment in music teacher training and a minimum 60 minutes per week of music education in primary schools

Pillar 4 - Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Building a Sustainable Live Music Ecology

Music Victoria strongly encourages the National Cultural Policy to explicitly recognise live music venues, festivals and touring networks as cultural infrastructure. The Bass Line confirmed that live music generated \$4.83 billion in revenue and supported over 40,000 workers nationally. These spaces are artist development pipelines, workforce training grounds, audience development spaces, community hubs, tourism and night-time economy drivers, and the incubators of Australia's cultural exports. Grassroots and mid-tier venues are the R&D infrastructure of the industry.

The live cost crisis: direct sector evidence

In May 2026, Music Victoria conducted direct consultation with seven festival operators and a major national touring company to document the real-time impact of rising costs on sector delivery. The findings are consistent with concerns raised across the national sector and are offered here as current, primary evidence.

SECTOR PULSE CHECK**Victorian Festival and Touring Operator Consultation**

May 2026 - 7 festival operators and one major national touring company (de-identified)

15-30%

Increase in national trucking costs

75-100%

Increase in some international
artist fees

8-10%

Increase in site services costs

Transport and logistics

- Arena-scale productions require 12 to 17 trucks on the road; stadium productions involve 40 to 50. Perth routing compounds costs substantially and is determining whether those markets remain viable at all
- Fuel levies are now standard in most supplier quotes. Some suppliers are delaying quoting until closer to the event to manage pricing uncertainty, which makes early budget planning unreliable
- Site services including fencing, staging, power and waste are up 8 to 10% across the board

Financial viability

- Tours already on sale are no longer financially viable even when selling well. Budgets that were sound at execution have been overtaken by cost movements since booking
- Overall delivery costs have effectively doubled across multiple categories since 2024 for some operators
- Several festival operators indicated their 2026 event may be their last if it ends in a loss
- Slower ticket sales due to cost of living pressures and reduced consumer confidence are compressing margins from the revenue side at the same time costs are rising

International acts and the Australian dollar

- International acts are limiting Australian appearances to Sydney and Melbourne only, cutting regional markets to manage risk and cost
- A soft Australian dollar is compounding this: international acts bear USD and GBP-denominated costs while earning AUD income, making Australia a progressively less attractive destination
- Some UK and European touring routes are now considered unviable, with promoters shifting toward US and North American artists where flight paths are more stable

Regional markets

- Regional festivals face compounding disadvantage: higher baseline transport costs, per-kilometre delivery charges, and the growing risk of being cut from national touring schedules entirely
- Even relatively short-distance regional travel is now creating financial pressure for both artists and presenters
- Some festivals are questioning whether certain regional programming remains viable under current conditions

What operators are doing

Across respondents, the consistent response is to prioritise local artists, reduce touring complexity, move to leaner production models, shorten event durations and plan more conservatively. The sector is not retreating from delivery - it is narrowing it. The loss of programming diversity and international reach is a direct cultural cost the sector is currently absorbing.

"Most events are already operating on extremely tight margins and continued increases across transport, accommodation, freight and artist touring costs will inevitably force events to scale back programming, infrastructure or staffing, or push ticket prices higher. The overall effect will be the sector becoming far more conservative and risk averse, particularly around international programming."

Festival operator, May 2026

Festivals as touring anchors: a system under threat

Major festivals have historically been anchor points for artist touring circuits in Australia. A festival appearance justifies the economics of a broader tour - it underwrites the flights, the freight, the crew costs. As festivals come under financial pressure, that anchor function is weakening. The risk of a festival collapsing before it runs is already changing how artists, agents and promoters plan ahead. Tours that would once have been built around a festival slot are not being booked. The damage when a festival does collapse - to artists, to crews, to suppliers, to audiences, and to the forward confidence of the sector - is enormous and long-lasting. Sustaining the festival sector is not just about the events themselves. It is about sustaining the touring architecture that depends on them.

Insurance market failure

The single most acute structural issue identified by venue operators is public liability insurance. Premiums are rising dramatically with limited provider competition. Increases are frequently disconnected from individual claims history. Live music is broadly categorised as inherently high-risk regardless of venue type, scale or programming. Music Victoria calls for a formal government investigation into market failure in public liability insurance for live music venues, with exploration of government-backed or pooled insurance models.

CASE STUDY**Victorian Music Trust**

A state-level reinvestment model for a sustainable music ecosystem

The problem

Current music funding in Victoria is delivered through short-term, competitive grant programs that cannot support long-term career development or respond flexibly to emerging sector needs. Victoria invests \$0.48 per capita in contemporary music - South Australia invests three times that. NSW invests six times that.

That is the gap we need to close. This structural underfunding has allowed gaps in venue sustainability, artist development, touring infrastructure and workforce capability to widen over several years, even as Victoria generates a disproportionate share of Australia's music output and cultural value.

The model

- Stream 1 - Statutory ticketing levy: a 1% levy on commercial ticket sales at Victoria's major live music venues managed by the Victorian Government, estimated to yield \$4.5 to \$9 million per year. Collected at point of sale via existing ticketing infrastructure with minimal administrative burden
- Stream 2 - Deductible Gift Recipient entity: a companion DGR entity enables tax-deductible donations from individuals, corporations and foundations, opening the sector to charitable capital it currently cannot access. This is the kind of philanthropic investment that flows routinely to visual arts, theatre and screen
- Government seed funding to establish the Trust prior to full levy activation

Funds are directed to four priority investment areas: , artist and career development, grassroots venue sustainability, touring and live circuit support, and workforce and education.

Relevance to national policy

Music Victoria's position is that ticketing levies should be state-based, not national. The principle is straightforward: ticket sales generated in each state by the music ecosystem of that state should be reinvested back into that state's grassroots pipeline. The venues, artists, festivals and communities that make major commercial live music possible in Victoria are Victorian. The economic activity they generate should flow back into sustaining them.

A national levy pooled and redistributed centrally risks decoupling revenue from the ecosystems generating it. The VMT demonstrates that state-based implementation is feasible, that sector alignment is achievable, and that a levy-plus-philanthropy architecture can reduce grant dependency and diversify the sector's funding base. The national policy ask is not for a single federal mechanism - it is for a federal framework that enables and supports each state to develop and operate its own levy model, with national coordination to ensure consistency, integrity and coverage across jurisdictions.

State peak bodies as delivery partners

National cultural policy goals will not be achieved without the organisations that translate policy into practice at a sector level. State and territory contemporary music peak bodies - the members of the Australian Music Industry Network (AMIN) - are the direct connection between federal investment and local artists, venues, festivals and communities. They hold the relationships, the data, the trust and the delivery capability that no national agency can replicate from the centre.

State peak bodies are also the primary generators of state-specific industry data. National bodies, including Music Australia, can establish the aggregate picture - as the Bass Line has done powerfully - but targeted federal investment requires an understanding of where the industry actually sits at a state and regional level: where artists are concentrated, where venues are closing, where workforce gaps are sharpest, and where touring routes are becoming unviable. Without state-specific data infrastructure, national funding risks flowing to the most visible markets rather than to where the need and opportunity are greatest. Resourcing state peak bodies to generate and maintain this data is not an administrative cost - it is the evidence base that makes national policy work.

Music Victoria recommends that the next phase of national cultural policy explicitly recognise state and territory peak bodies as strategic delivery partners, with direct investment that reflects their role as infrastructure, not as optional intermediaries.

The state investment inequity

National policy must account for the fact that state governments invest in contemporary music at vastly different levels. Federal investment designed to complement state funding - or that assumes a broadly level baseline across jurisdictions - will systematically disadvantage the states and territories where artists and communities need support most.

- NSW: approximately \$3.10 per capita investment in contemporary music
- South Australia: approximately \$1.46 per capita
- Victoria: approximately \$0.48 per capita

Victoria is one of Australia's largest and most productive live music economies - home to 40% of the country's labels, the majority of its major promoters, and a disproportionate share of its most successful artists. Yet it receives the lowest per capita state government investment in contemporary music of any major jurisdiction.

This is not an argument for matched funding requirements, which create barriers to access and reward states already operating from a position of strength. It is an argument for federal investment that is explicitly designed to reach the places where the deficit is greatest, with Music Australia's allocation methodology accounting for per capita investment gaps rather than defaulting to population or activity-based distribution alone.

Music Victoria supports:

- Ongoing and indexed Revive Live funding, with strategic refinement to prioritise activity delivering long-term impact for artists, audiences, venues and communities
- Stronger regional touring support mechanisms and protections for regional market access

- Targeted venue sustainability investment and formal recognition of grassroots venues as cultural infrastructure
- National coordination around venue protection, planning and noise regulation frameworks
- A formal government investigation into public liability insurance market failure for the live music sector
- Targeted infrastructure investment in live music venues of all sizes to make meaningful accessibility improvements - addressing physical access, sensory barriers and participation pathways for audiences with disability, as well as broader participation barriers including cost, all-ages access and regional distance. The public consultation paper acknowledges that expectations around access, discoverability and participation continue to evolve; venue infrastructure investment is the practical mechanism for meeting those expectations in a live music context
- Exploration of live performance and festival tax offset mechanisms similar to those used in the screen sector
- Direct federal investment in state and territory peak bodies as strategic delivery partners for national cultural policy, through AMIN and direct resourcing arrangements
- Investment in state-specific industry data infrastructure, generated and maintained by state peak bodies, to ensure national funding bodies can identify where the industry is concentrated, where it is under pressure, and where targeted investment will have the greatest impact
- Music Australia funding allocation methodology that accounts for per capita state investment gaps, so federal investment lifts capacity across all jurisdictions rather than reinforcing existing disparities
- A federal framework enabling and supporting state-based ticketing levy models, so that ticket sales generated in each state are reinvested back into the grassroots pipeline of that state - the venues, artists, festivals and communities that make major commercial live music possible. National coordination should ensure consistency and coverage across jurisdictions without pooling or redistributing revenue centrally

Pillar 5 - Engaging the Audience

Connecting Australian Music with Audiences

Australian music faces increasing discoverability challenges across streaming and digital platforms. The Bass Line documented that Australian music's share of streaming listening continues to decline even as global music revenues grow. The extraordinary creative output of Australian artists deserves platforms and pathways proportionate to its quality and cultural value.

Music Victoria acknowledges and strongly supports Music Australia's Ausify campaign as an important and welcome initiative to address streaming discoverability at a national level. Ausify represents exactly the kind of strategic, sector-wide response that a properly resourced national agency can drive - bringing industry, government and platforms to the same table around a shared goal. Music Australia's role as a convener of these strategic conversations is one of the most important things it does. The next phase of its mandate should build on that capacity.

What artists told us about discovery

Artists contributing to Music Victoria's roundtable process described radio quota arrangements that concentrate Australian music into lower audience timeslots, and streaming algorithms that systematically deprioritise local content. Australian artists report difficulty achieving visibility without significant marketing budgets or label support, and domestic discovery pathways have collapsed at exactly the moment artists need them most.

What artists and sector consultation found on discoverability

- Commercial radio quotas are no longer delivering meaningful outcomes. Australian music is concentrated in low-audience timeslots in ways that limit genuine audience reach and long-term artist development
- Streaming algorithms systematically deprioritise local content. Independent artists cannot achieve visibility without the marketing budgets that major label artists have, widening the gap between major and independent careers
- Community radio remains one of the most important discovery pathways for Australian artists - often the first meaningful route to audience development, live performance and broader industry recognition
- The loss of discovery infrastructure has contributed to a breakdown of what artists describe as the 'muscle memory' between artists and audiences. Habits of live attendance and active listening, built over decades, are being lost faster than they are being replaced

Music Victoria supports:

- A review of Australian music quota frameworks to ensure they deliver meaningful audience exposure, apply across peak listening periods, support emerging and independent artists, and apply to digital radio
 - Stronger Australian music discoverability mechanisms across digital platforms, including transparency around recommendation systems and algorithms, and mandatory local content reporting obligations for streaming platforms operating in Australia
 - A minimum 25% Australian music quota on commercial radio with a sub-quota for emerging and independent artists
 - Continued and expanded investment in community broadcasting as a critical contributor to Australian music discovery, audience development and cultural participation. Victoria's community radio sector is a genuine and distinctive national strength. It is unlike anywhere else in the country - a dense, active network of stations that has historically been a key pipeline for emerging artists and a genuine space for music discovery and community building. As streaming algorithms narrow what audiences hear and commercial radio concentrates Australian music into low-audience timeslots, community radio becomes more important, not less. Investment in community broadcasting infrastructure, licensing and support is investment in the discovery ecosystem that commercial and streaming platforms are not providing
 - Universal access to quality music education and youth participation opportunities, recognising that the future audience for Australian music must be actively developed from an early age
 - Support for independent Australian artists within digital ecosystems, including export and international market development pathways
-

Conclusion

Music is not a nice-to-have. It is a central part of human existence - how we celebrate, grieve, connect, protest, remember and imagine. It is how cultures define themselves and how communities hold together. Policy that treats music as decoration rather than infrastructure misunderstands what it is and what it does.

Music needs to be respected, valued and celebrated in the decisions government makes - about funding, about planning, about education, about technology, about trade. The case for investment in music is not just economic, though the economics are compelling. It is a case about what kind of society we want to be and what we want to pass on.

Australia has an opportunity to become a global contemporary music leader, but this will require sustained investment in the full ecosystem that supports artists, audiences, workers and music communities.

The sector does not need short-term intervention alone. It needs long-term structural support. The evidence Music Victoria has gathered through direct consultation with artists, venue operators, festival organisers and touring companies tells a consistent story that reflects conditions across the national sector: the infrastructure, pathways and investment systems that allow sustainable careers are under pressure at every level simultaneously.

The next phase of national cultural policy should recognise that:

- Music is cultural infrastructure
- Live music is economic infrastructure
- Artists generate national intellectual property and export value
- Venues and festivals are critical development platforms - the R&D infrastructure of the sector
- Regional communities must remain connected to live music experiences, and that connection is actively narrowing
- State and territory peak bodies are essential delivery infrastructure and must be resourced as such
- Federal investment must account for uneven state investment levels, not assume a level playing field that does not exist
- Contemporary music requires sustainable reinvestment and long-term policy commitment, not grant cycles

Music Victoria welcomes the opportunity to continue contributing to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy and is available to provide further evidence, data or consultation support to the process.