



Australian Music Venue Foundation

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Review

Protecting and Sustaining Grassroots Music Venues in Australia

Executive Summary

The Australian Music Venue Foundation (AMVF) is a national organisation dedicated to advocacy, support and sustainability for live music venues across the country.

Live music venues are foundational to Australia's cultural ecosystem. They are not only stages for performance but incubators of artistic development, community connection, and local economic activity. From grassroots rooms hosting emerging acts to mid-sized venues sustaining touring circuits, these spaces enable artists to build careers, experiment creatively, and connect directly with audiences. Any national cultural policy that seeks to strengthen Australia's creative identity must recognise and support live music venues as essential cultural infrastructure.

In recent years, venues have faced compounding challenges. Rising operational costs, including rent, insurance, utilities, and staffing, have significantly outpaced revenue growth. At the same time, regulatory pressures—such as licensing constraints, noise restrictions, and compliance requirements—have increased complexity and risk. While these frameworks often serve important community and safety purposes, they can disproportionately impact smaller venues that lack the administrative capacity to navigate them effectively.

Changing audience behaviours also play a role. Post-pandemic shifts toward earlier attendance patterns, reduced discretionary spending, decline in alcohol consumption and competition from digital entertainment have altered traditional revenue models. Venues are increasingly required to diversify income streams while maintaining affordability for audiences and fair pay for artists. This balancing act is becoming more difficult without targeted support.

Live music venues also carry a unique cultural responsibility. They are often the first platform for new voices, including underrepresented artists and communities. They foster local scenes that contribute to the distinct cultural identities of cities and regions. When venues close, the loss is not only economic but cultural—eroding pathways for artistic development and diminishing community vibrancy.

A national cultural policy should address these challenges through a combination of recognition, protection, and investment. First, live music venues should be formally recognised as cultural assets, not solely as hospitality businesses. This distinction can inform more appropriate regulatory treatment and eligibility for arts funding.

Second, planning and regulatory frameworks should incorporate “agent of change” principles nationwide, ensuring that new developments take responsibility for managing sound impacts rather than placing the burden on existing venues. Consistent, transparent, and proportionate licensing processes would also reduce uncertainty and administrative strain.

Third, targeted financial support is critical. This could include operational grants for small and independent venues, tax incentives tied to cultural programming, and subsidies to offset rising insurance and compliance costs. Investment in venue infrastructure—such as soundproofing and accessibility upgrades—would improve sustainability and inclusivity.

Finally, policy should support audience development and participation. Initiatives that encourage live music attendance, particularly among younger and diverse audiences, will strengthen the entire ecosystem. Partnerships between government, industry, and education sectors can help embed live music as a vital part of Australia’s cultural life.

In summary, live music venues are indispensable to a thriving cultural sector. With strategic support, they can continue to nurture talent, animate communities, and contribute to a resilient and dynamic national culture. Without it, the risk is a gradual erosion of the very spaces that make Australian music possible.

This submission calls for the National Cultural Policy Review to formally recognise grassroots music venues as essential cultural infrastructure and implement coordinated national measures to protect, sustain, and grow the sector.

Key recommendations include:

- Establishing a nationally recognised definition and classification framework for grassroots music venues. The Australian Music Venue Foundation has developed an initial set of guidelines and is undertaking consultation with the broader music industry to lead the development of a widely supported national framework for recognition and classification.
- Introducing direct operational funding and tax incentives for venues presenting original Australian music.
- Embedding “agent of change” protections nationally.
- Reforming planning, licensing, and compliance frameworks.
- Supporting audience development and artist pathways.
- Creating a national live music venue sustainability fund, supported in part through contributions from large-scale commercial live entertainment activity.

The Importance of Grassroots Music Venues

Grassroots music venues are the first stage for emerging artists and the primary point of cultural participation for many communities. They support:

- Artist development and career pathways.
- Cultural diversity and local identity.
- Night-time economies and tourism.
- Employment across creative and hospitality sectors.
- Community cohesion and social connection.

Nearly every successful Australian artist has developed through small and mid-sized venues before progressing to larger stages. Without a healthy grassroots ecosystem, the broader music industry cannot sustainably function.

These venues also play a significant role in regional and suburban cultural life, often operating as the only accessible live performance spaces for local communities.

Current Challenges Facing the Sector

1. Financial Instability

Live music venues, particularly grassroots music venues (GMVs), are facing a fundamental shift in consumer behaviour and revenue sustainability. Traditionally, venue business models have relied heavily on bar sales to subsidise live performance activity. However, declining alcohol consumption — particularly among younger demographics — combined with ongoing cost-of-living pressures has significantly reduced spending at venues. Audiences are attending fewer events, spending less when they do attend, and often making more selective choices about where they allocate limited discretionary income.

This shift has created a structural challenge for GMVs. While venues continue to absorb rising operational costs including wages, insurance, utilities, compliance, security and artist fees, their primary revenue source has weakened considerably. For many venues, ticket sales alone are insufficient to sustain operations, particularly in a market where consumers are already financially stretched. Increasing ticket prices or programming volume is not a viable long-term solution, as it risks further reducing accessibility and audience participation.

At the same time, the live music economy has become increasingly concentrated around high-end touring events and stadium-scale concerts. Consumers who may previously have attended multiple local gigs each month are now more likely to spend a significant portion of their entertainment budget on one or two major international tours each year. While these events are important to the broader music ecosystem, they are only possible because of the underlying infrastructure provided by grassroots venues.

Grassroots music venues are the research and development arm of the contemporary music industry. They are where artists develop their craft, build

audiences, test new material, and establish sustainable careers. They also provide the training ground for sound engineers, lighting operators, production crews, promoters, venue managers and hospitality workers who ultimately support major touring productions and arena events. Despite this, the economic value created by GMVs is rarely captured or redistributed back into the sector that enabled it.

Without intervention, Australia risks losing the foundational infrastructure that underpins its entire live music pipeline. The closure or weakening of grassroots venues does not only affect local communities and emerging artists — it undermines the long-term sustainability of the national music industry itself.

2. Planning and Noise Conflicts

Encroaching residential development continues to threaten established music venues through noise complaints and restrictive planning conditions.

While some jurisdictions have implemented “agent of change” principles, protections remain inconsistent nationally and are often weakly enforced.

3. Regulatory Burden

Licensing, security requirements, development approvals, and compliance obligations are frequently designed around high-risk entertainment models rather than small cultural venues.

This creates disproportionate costs for grassroots operators.

4. Declining Artist and Audience Sustainability

Artists face increasing touring costs and declining income opportunities. At the same time, audiences are experiencing cost-of-living pressures that reduce participation in live music.

Without intervention, audience habits and local music ecosystems will continue to weaken.

Recommendations

1. Recognise Grassroots Music Venues as Cultural Infrastructure

The Federal Government should formally recognise grassroots music venues as cultural infrastructure within national cultural policy.

This recognition should:

- Include venues within arts and cultural funding frameworks.
- Position venues alongside museums, theatres, galleries, and libraries as essential cultural assets.

- Support long-term policy coordination across federal, state, and local government.

The AMVF is currently developing a national definition of a “Grassroots Music Venue” in consultation with industry stakeholders.

2. Establish a National Grassroots Venue Sustainability Fund

The National Cultural Policy should recognise that grassroots venues provide a public cultural function that extends beyond commercial entertainment. New funding and revenue mechanisms are needed to support GMVs in ways that are not dependent on alcohol sales or continual increases in ticket prices.

A dedicated national fund should support:

- Venue operations.
- Acoustic treatment and infrastructure upgrades.
- Accessibility improvements.
- Regional touring and programming.
- Youth engagement
- Workforce development and venue viability initiatives.

Funding should prioritise venues that demonstrably support original Australian music and artist development.

The fund could be supported through:

- Federal arts investment.
- Matched state contributions.
- Industry partnerships.
- Tax incentives
- A modest levy on large-scale commercial live entertainment activity.

This approach would recognise the vital role grassroots venues play in developing the talent, workforce and cultural capital that larger commercial sectors ultimately rely upon.

3. Implement National Agent of Change Protections

The Federal Government should work with states and territories to establish nationally consistent “agent of change” protections.

These reforms should:

- Protect existing venues from unreasonable impacts caused by new residential developments.
- Require new developments to manage their own acoustic mitigation.
- Prevent the displacement of long-standing cultural activity.

Clear national guidance and model planning provisions should be developed.

4. Reduce Regulatory and Compliance Burdens

Grassroots music venues are also evolving in ways that deliver clear public benefit and should be recognised through more proportionate licensing frameworks and regulatory settings. Declining alcohol consumption, the growth of all-ages events, and the increasing prevalence of earlier show times have contributed to improved patron behaviour and reduced venue-related risk. Many contemporary live music events now conclude earlier in the evening, attract more diverse audiences, and place less emphasis on alcohol consumption as the core driver of attendance. Despite this shift, licensing fees, compliance costs and regulatory approaches often continue to reflect outdated assumptions about late-night entertainment and alcohol-related harm. Governments should recognise these changing operating conditions by introducing reduced licensing fees, risk-based regulation, and streamlined compliance pathways for live music venues that demonstrate lower-risk operating models, including all-ages programming, earlier trading hours, and strong safety outcomes. Such reforms would reduce financial pressure on grassroots venues while encouraging healthier, safer and more inclusive live music environments.

Reforms should include:

- Risk-based licensing models.
- Reduced fees for venues presenting original music.
- Reduced fees for venues hosting regular all ages events.
- Simplified temporary event approvals.
- Harmonised regulations across jurisdictions where possible.

Small venues should not face the same compliance burden as large-scale entertainment facilities.

5. Support Audience Development

Audience participation is essential to sector sustainability.

Government initiatives should support:

- Youth access to live music, including funding for venues to host all ages shows
- Regional touring and all-ages events.
- Public campaigns promoting Australian live music.
- Affordable ticketing initiatives.
- Integration of live music into tourism and night-time economy strategies.

Investment in audience growth is an investment in cultural participation.

6. Strengthen Artist Pathways Through Venue Support

Supporting venues directly supports artists.

Policy settings should incentivise:

- Fair artist payment practices.
- Original Australian programming.
- Diverse and inclusive lineups.
- Development opportunities for emerging artists.

Venues that actively contribute to artist development should receive targeted support and recognition.

7. Improve National Data Collection and Sector Measurement

There is currently limited national data regarding:

- Venue closures.
- Programming levels.
- Audience participation.
- Economic contribution.
- Workforce conditions.

The Federal Government should establish a national live music observatory or reporting framework to improve evidence-based policy development.

Conclusion

Grassroots music venues are essential to Australia's cultural future. They are places of artistic experimentation, social connection, and community identity. They nurture emerging talent, sustain local scenes, and underpin the success of the broader music industry.

Without meaningful policy intervention, Australia risks losing a generation of cultural spaces and the creative ecosystems they support.

The National Cultural Policy Review presents an opportunity to recognise grassroots music venues as vital cultural infrastructure and implement long-term reforms that ensure their sustainability.

A healthy live music ecosystem requires more than successful major events and international touring acts. It requires investment in the small rooms, independent operators, and local communities where Australian culture begins. "Big music starts in small spaces".

The Australian Music Venue Foundation recognises the important pillars that help form the Cultural Policy.

PILLAR 1 – First Nations First

From a live music venues perspective, the intent of a “First Nations First” pillar is both essential and overdue. However, without addressing the structural and operational barriers that First Nations artists and the venues that present them face, this principal risks remaining aspirational rather than actionable.

For First Nations artists, access to live performance opportunities is uneven and often constrained by geography, cost, and industry networks. Many artists are based in regional or remote communities, where touring infrastructure is limited and travel costs are prohibitively high. Even when opportunities exist in metropolitan centres, the financial risk of touring—particularly without guaranteed fees or support—can be a significant deterrent. This is compounded by a lack of consistent pathways from community practice to professional circuits, meaning many artists are underrepresented in venue programming pipelines.

Cultural safety is another critical barrier. Not all venues are equipped with the knowledge, relationships, or internal practices required to appropriately host First Nations artists and stories. This can include a lack of understanding around cultural protocols, language, storytelling ownership, and community consultation. Where this knowledge is absent, artists may be asked to shoulder the burden of education or may avoid engaging with certain venues altogether. Building culturally safe environments requires time, trust, and resourcing—elements that are often in short supply for independent operators.

For venues, there are practical and financial challenges in meaningfully supporting First Nations programming. Presenting First Nations artists in a respectful and culturally appropriate way may require additional investment in consultation, staffing, or community engagement. Smaller venues, already operating on narrow margins, may struggle to absorb these costs without dedicated support. There is also a lack of clear frameworks or incentives that encourage sustained engagement, rather than one-off or symbolic programming.

Language and cultural expression present further complexities. While the recognition of language as central to culture is vital, there are limited mechanisms within the live music ecosystem to support multilingual performance, interpretation, or promotion. This can create barriers for artists working in language, and for venues seeking to engage broader audiences in meaningful ways.

Importantly, there is also a leadership gap. First Nations representation in venue ownership, management, booking, and decision-making roles remains limited. Without greater inclusion at these levels, programming decisions and organisational priorities may not fully reflect First Nations perspectives or community needs.

To address these barriers, policy must move beyond recognition toward practical support. This includes targeted funding for First Nations-led touring and venue partnerships; investment in cultural competency training and resources for venues;

and support for First Nations leadership across all levels of the live music ecosystem. Long-term, relationship-based funding models—rather than short-term project grants—will be key to building trust and continuity.

In addition, policies should support the development of local and regional circuits that enable First Nations artists to perform on Country, as well as in urban centres, without disproportionate financial burden. Mechanisms that embed cultural protocols into industry standards, while respecting the diversity of First Nations communities, would also provide greater clarity and confidence for venues.

A “First Nations First” approach must be grounded in the realities of how live music operates. By addressing the structural barriers faced by both artists and venues, cultural policy can help create a more equitable, sustainable, and genuinely representative sector.

PILLAR 2 – A Place for Every Story

Live music venues are uniquely positioned to realise the goals of “A Place for Every Story.” As accessible, place-based cultural spaces, they are often the first point of contact between artists and audiences, and a critical platform for diverse voices to be heard in real time. However, enabling this pillar in practice requires intentional design, resourcing, and structural support.

At their best, venues already reflect the diversity of their communities. They host emerging artists, multicultural programming, genre-specific scenes, and hybrid forms that blend music with visual art, spoken word, and digital performance. This kind of programming is inherently responsive to changing patterns of participation—particularly among younger audiences who value authenticity, local identity, and inclusive spaces. Policy can strengthen this by recognising venues as cultural producers, not just presenters, and supporting their role in curating diverse and experimental work.

A key mechanism is investment in local and place-based programming. Smaller venues are often deeply embedded in their communities and well-positioned to platform underrepresented artists, but they operate with limited financial capacity. Targeted funding for curated programs—especially those led by culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTQIA+ artists, and artists with disability—would enable venues to take creative risks and build sustained audiences for diverse work. Importantly, this support should prioritise continuity over one-off events, allowing scenes to develop over time.

Accessibility is central to inclusion. This includes physical access, but also affordability, cultural safety, and programming relevance. Rising ticket prices and cost-of-living pressures are already impacting participation, particularly for younger and marginalised audiences. Policy interventions such as ticket subsidies, all-ages programming support, and incentives for accessible infrastructure upgrades would help ensure that venues remain open and welcoming to a broad cross-section of the community.

Changing modes of expression also present both opportunities and challenges. Artists are increasingly working across disciplines and platforms, integrating live performance with digital elements, immersive experiences, and community participation. Venues can support this evolution but often lack the technical infrastructure or capital to do so. Investment in adaptable venue infrastructure—such as AV capabilities, streaming technology, and flexible staging—would allow venues to accommodate new forms of creative expression and reach wider audiences.

Inclusion also depends on who is making decisions. Diverse programming is more sustainable when it is driven by diverse leadership. Encouraging pathways into venue management, booking, and production roles for underrepresented groups will have a direct impact on the stories that are told. This could be supported through industry traineeships, mentorship programs, and partnerships with community organisations.

Finally, policy should recognise the importance of informal and grassroots participation. Not all cultural expression fits within traditional funding or presentation models. Open mic nights, community-run events, and DIY shows are vital entry points for many artists and audiences. Supporting these low-barrier formats—through simplified compliance, micro-grants, and reduced regulatory burden—will help ensure that the live music ecosystem remains open, dynamic, and reflective of Australia’s full cultural diversity.

“A Place for Every Story” can be realised in live music venues by empowering them to do what they already do best—connect people through shared cultural experiences—while removing the barriers that limit who gets to participate. With the right support, venues can continue to evolve as inclusive spaces where all Australians see their stories reflected and valued.

PILLAR 3 – Centrality of the Artist

From the perspective of live music venues, the “Centrality of the Artist” pillar can only be realised if artists are treated not just as performers, but as workers whose labour underpins the entire ecosystem. Venues are one of the primary interfaces between artists and audiences, and as such, they play a critical role in shaping working conditions, income stability, and professional development.

A central challenge is financial precarity. For many artists, live performance income is inconsistent and often insufficient, particularly at the emerging and mid-career levels. Venue deals can vary widely, from door splits to guarantees, and are often influenced by a venue’s own financial constraints. Smaller venues, while vital for artist development, frequently operate on narrow margins and cannot absorb the risk of higher guarantees without support. Policy can address this by incentivising fair pay standards—such as minimum performance fees or matched funding models that reduce risk for venues while ensuring artists are compensated appropriately.

Workplace safety and wellbeing are also critical. Live music environments can involve late hours, informal working arrangements, and varying levels of oversight. Clear, sector-specific standards around safety, harassment, and working conditions are needed, alongside accessible mechanisms for reporting and accountability.

Venues want to provide safe environments for artists and audiences alike but often lack the resources or guidance to implement best-practice frameworks consistently. Investment in training, accreditation, and industry-wide codes of conduct would strengthen this area.

The digital environment presents both opportunity and disruption. While online platforms have expanded audience reach, they have also shifted revenue away from live performance in some cases and raised concerns around intellectual property and fair remuneration. Venues increasingly engage with digital tools—through ticketing platforms, live streaming, and promotion—but artists' rights and earnings within these systems are not always clear or equitable. Cultural policy should support transparent digital practices, protect artists' rights, and encourage models where digital engagement complements, rather than replaces, live performance income.

Education and skills development are another key component. Live venues are informal training grounds where artists develop performance skills, build audiences, and learn the practicalities of working in the industry. However, there is often a disconnect between formal arts education and the realities of live performance work. Strengthening partnerships between venues, education providers, and industry bodies would help bridge this gap, providing clearer pathways from training to professional practice. This includes not only artistic development, but also business skills, technical knowledge, and understanding of rights and contracts.

Recognition of artists across the broader economy is also essential. Live music contributes significantly to local economies through hospitality, tourism, and employment, yet artists themselves often remain undervalued within this system. Policy should recognise the economic and cultural contribution of artists by embedding them more clearly within funding frameworks, employment definitions, and data collection. This recognition can help unlock broader support mechanisms, from social protections to access to finance.

Ultimately, placing artists at the centre of live music requires a balanced approach that supports both creators and the venues that present them. Sustainable outcomes will come from policies that acknowledge their interdependence—ensuring that venues are equipped to pay fairly, operate safely, and invest in artist development, while artists are empowered to build viable, long-term careers. Without this balance, the system risks placing unsustainable pressure on one side or the other.

By aligning cultural policy with the realities of live music, the “Centrality of the Artist” pillar can move beyond principle and become embedded in everyday practice across the sector.

PILLAR 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Live music venues are a critical yet often under-recognised component of Australia's cultural infrastructure. They provide the physical and social spaces where culture is created, shared, and sustained in real time. From small grassroots rooms to established mid-sized venues, they form a national network that supports touring, audience development, and the long-term viability of the music sector. For the “Strong Cultural Infrastructure” pillar to be effective, live music venues must be

explicitly recognised, protected, and supported as essential infrastructure—not treated solely as commercial hospitality businesses.

A key issue is fragility. Many venues operate on tight margins and are highly sensitive to external pressures, including rising rents, insurance costs, regulatory compliance, and shifts in consumer behaviour. Unlike larger institutions, most venues lack access to capital reserves or long-term funding, making them vulnerable to closure. When venues are lost, the impact is immediate and difficult to reverse—eroding local scenes, reducing touring capacity, and limiting opportunities for artists. Cultural policy should prioritise the retention of existing venues as much as the development of new infrastructure.

Planning and regulatory frameworks are central to resilience. Inconsistent zoning, noise restrictions, and licensing requirements can create uncertainty and discourage investment. National leadership in promoting principles such as “agent of change,” along with streamlined and consistent regulatory processes, would provide greater stability. Protecting venues within planning systems—through mechanisms like cultural overlays or dedicated entertainment precincts—can help safeguard them from incompatible development and land-use conflict.

Investment in infrastructure must also extend to upgrades and maintenance. Many venues operate in older buildings that require ongoing investment to meet safety, accessibility, and technical standards. Targeted capital funding for soundproofing, accessibility improvements, and energy efficiency would not only improve compliance but also enhance audience experience and long-term sustainability. These upgrades are often beyond the reach of independent operators without external support, and many operators are not the landlords of their dwellings.

Partnerships are another underutilised opportunity. Stronger collaboration between government, industry, and community organisations can unlock more effective use of existing infrastructure. This could include shared use of public spaces for live performance, partnerships between venues and educational institutions, and integration with local tourism and night-time economy strategies. Recognising venues as cultural partners—rather than solely as private businesses—would enable more coordinated and strategic investment.

Data and recognition also play a role. Live music venues are often excluded from cultural infrastructure mapping and funding frameworks, which tend to focus on major institutions. Improving data collection and classification would help ensure that venues are visible within policy settings and eligible for appropriate support. This includes recognising their contribution to employment, local economies, and cultural participation.

Finally, long-term sustainability requires a shift from reactive to proactive policy. Rather than responding to crises after venues close, cultural policy should embed ongoing support mechanisms that stabilise the sector. This could include operational funding streams, tax incentives linked to cultural activity, and insurance or risk-pooling schemes tailored to live performance.

A strong cultural infrastructure is not only defined by flagship institutions, but by the everyday spaces where culture is actively produced and experienced. Live music venues are central to this ecosystem. By recognising their value and addressing the structural challenges they face, policy can ensure that this infrastructure remains resilient, adaptable, and capable of supporting Australia's cultural life into the future.

PILLAR 5 – Engaging The Audience

Live music venues sit at the frontline of audience engagement. They are where discovery happens in real time, where audiences form lasting connections with artists, and where cultural participation becomes a shared, social experience. Delivering on the “Engaging the Audience” pillar within live music requires recognising how audience behaviours have shifted, and equipping venues with the tools to respond.

In recent years, venues have observed significant changes in how audiences discover and attend live music. Digital platforms now dominate discovery, with social media and streaming shaping awareness and taste long before an artist steps on stage. At the same time, audiences are attending fewer shows, making more selective choices, and increasingly favouring earlier event times and shorter experiences. Cost-of-living pressures are also impacting participation, particularly for younger audiences who have historically been the backbone of live music scenes.

Venues are adapting by diversifying programming, experimenting with formats, and investing in digital promotion. However, these shifts come with added costs and complexity. Marketing has become more fragmented and resource-intensive, often requiring paid digital campaigns to reach audiences who were once accessible through organic channels. Smaller venues, in particular, struggle to compete for attention in an increasingly crowded and algorithm-driven landscape.

Cultural policy can support audience engagement by strengthening discovery pathways and reducing barriers to participation. This includes investment in national and local campaigns that promote live music attendance, as well as support for collaborative marketing initiatives that allow venues and artists to pool resources and reach wider audiences. Platforms that highlight local gigs and emerging artists—particularly those that are publicly supported and not purely commercial—can play an important role in reconnecting audiences with live performance.

Affordability is another critical factor. Ticket prices must remain accessible if participation is to be sustained, yet rising costs are pushing prices upward. Policy interventions such as ticket subsidies, targeted audience incentives, or support for free and low-cost programming can help maintain access without placing the financial burden solely on venues or artists.

Innovation in presentation is also key. Audiences are increasingly seeking experiences that go beyond traditional formats, including immersive shows, cross-disciplinary events, and hybrid digital-live performances. Venues are well placed to deliver these experiences but often lack the infrastructure or capital to experiment at scale. Investment in adaptable technical infrastructure and pilot programs would enable venues to test new formats and respond to evolving audience expectations.

Engagement also extends beyond the event itself. The post-show experience—opportunities to connect with artists, purchase merchandise, and participate in community—remains a vital part of the live music ecosystem. Earlier show times and changing behaviours have impacted this, reducing dwell time and secondary spending. Supporting venues to create environments that encourage longer engagement—through programming, licensing flexibility, and venue design—can help rebuild these connections.

Finally, connecting Australian stories to audiences abroad relies on strong domestic engagement. Live music venues are the proving ground where artists develop their craft and build audiences before touring internationally. Supporting venues to sustain vibrant local scenes is therefore an investment in Australia’s global cultural presence.

To realise this pillar, policy must recognise that audience engagement is not a passive outcome, but an active process shaped by venues, artists, and broader systems. By supporting discovery, affordability, innovation, and participation, cultural policy can ensure that live music venues continue to connect Australian stories with audiences at home and beyond.