

## TOWARDS A NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CRA SUBMISSION

### Introduction

Commercial Radio & Audio (**CRA**) is the peak industry body representing 259 commercial radio stations throughout Australia, including 220 in regional and remote areas. Every one of those 259 stations is 100% Australian-owned and operated — making commercial radio Australia’s only wholly domestically owned commercial media channel.

CRA welcomes the opportunity to respond to *Towards a new National Cultural Policy Public Consultation Paper* dated March 2026, and to contribute to the development of the next National Cultural Policy.

This submission focuses on the pillars most directly relevant to commercial radio’s cultural contribution: Pillar 4 (Strong Cultural Infrastructure), and Pillar 5 (Engaging the Audience).

Through our substantial support for Australian music, we believe that commercial radio already delivers on the National Cultural Policy’s core commitment that Australian stories are seen and heard, regardless of platform.

As outlined in this submission, CRA urges the Government to ensure that the next National Cultural policy cements that commitment, including by addressing the technological barriers that increasingly prevent Australians from accessing their local radio services.

### Commercial Radio’s Cultural Contribution

Commercial radio is one of Australia’s most significant cultural delivery mechanisms.

Each week, 15 million Australians listen to Australian commercial radio.<sup>1</sup> No subscription, no algorithm, and no data connection is required — just free, live, local Australian content.

Some of commercial radio’s key cultural contributions include the following:

- **Australian music:** Commercial radio broadcasts more than 160,000 hours of Australian music annually.<sup>2</sup> Under the Commercial Radio Code of Practice AM and FM stations are required to broadcast up to 25% Australian music content, with dedicated obligations for new and emerging Australian artists. No such obligation, let alone a comparable one, applies to digital music platforms.
- **Local stories:** Regional commercial radio stations (other than small licences) must broadcast a minimum of three hours of local content per day during peak listening times.<sup>3</sup> ‘Local content’ means content specific to the licence area — there are 104 licence areas in Australia. No other platform is required to or provides this level of hyperlocal community engagement. For many regional and remote communities, the local commercial radio station is their primary commercial source of local news and information.

<sup>1</sup> Edison Research and Commercial Radio & Audio, *The Infinite Dial Australia 2025* (June 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, *Connecting Communities: The Economic and Social Contribution of Commercial Radio & Audio in Australia (2023)* (**Connecting Communities Report**).

<sup>3</sup> Broadcasting (Hours of Local Content) Declaration No 1 of 2017.

- **Community connection:** Commercial radio broadcasters produce 1.1 million hours of local content annually across broadcast, streaming and podcasts.<sup>4</sup> Nearly three in four Australians believe commercial radio builds a sense of community.<sup>5</sup>
- **Emergency information:** Radio is often the last communication channel still functioning during natural disasters. Nearly three in five Australians rely on commercial radio during crises, and commercial radio broadcasts approximately 2,200 hours of emergency content each year.<sup>6</sup>

This contribution is made possible by commercial investment in local infrastructure, talent and journalism. It is delivered entirely by Australian-owned businesses with deep ties to their communities.

### Strong Cultural Infrastructure: Commercial Radio and Australian Music

Under Pillar 4 (Strong Cultural Infrastructure), CRA submits that commercial radio represents an important piece of cultural infrastructure for Australian music — one that the next National Cultural Policy should explicitly recognise, protect and strengthen.

Australians are among the world's most significant consumers of music. According to Deloitte's Media & Entertainment Consumer Insights 2023, Australians spend on average over nine hours each week listening to audio content, with the majority of that time (seven hours and 20 minutes) spent listening to music and radio.<sup>7</sup>

#### How commercial radio supports Australian music

As Music Australia has recognised, Australian commercial radio stations have long maintained a responsibility for supporting and promoting Australian culture, a responsibility given effect through Australian music quota obligations in the Commercial Radio Code of Practice.<sup>8</sup>

Commercial radio provides Australian artists with a discovery platform that streaming algorithms cannot replicate. Listeners are exposed to Australian music passively, without needing to seek it out, reaching audiences who may never have found those artists on a streaming service. This is particularly significant for emerging local artists who may lack the profile to attract algorithmic promotion on international platforms.

Regional stations are especially important in this regard, often actively championing artists from their own communities alongside nationally known acts.

The importance of commercial radio as a music discovery platform is directly supported by Music Australia's own research. Music Australia's *Listening In* series (June 2025) cites survey data showing that one in five Australians aged 16 and over identify commercial radio as their primary method for discovering new music — the second most popular discovery method overall, ahead of music streaming services.<sup>9</sup>

Commercial radio's Australian music quota obligations in the Commercial Radio Code of Practice are the regulatory mechanism that ensures a guaranteed share of that discovery reach is directed to Australian artists. These obligations apply to AM and FM commercial broadcasters, who together reach a mass audience that international streaming services do

<sup>4</sup> Connecting Communities Report, above n 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Deloitte, Media & Entertainment Consumer Insights 2023, cited in Creative Australia, *Listening In: Insights on music discovery and engagement* (Music Australia, June 2025) (**Listening In**), p 15.

<sup>8</sup> Creative Australia, *Listening In*, p 24.

<sup>9</sup> VMDO, *Music Consumer Insights Survey (2022)*, cited in Creative Australia, *Listening In*, p 55.

not. Digital streaming platforms carry no equivalent Australian music obligations, creating an asymmetry that will continue to grow as more listening migrates to digital devices, and as the platforms that bear the heaviest Australian music obligations face increasing competitive pressure from those that bear none.

Beyond mandatory obligations, commercial radio provides substantial support for Australian music through interviews, live performances and promotional activities that extend well beyond simple airplay requirements. Recent examples include:

- AusMusic T-Shirt Day in November 2025, championed for the first time as an industry across five major commercial radio networks — SCA, Nova Entertainment, ARN, ACE Radio Network and Nine Radio — with stations dedicating airtime, advertising inventory and on-air talent to raise funds for Support Act, the music industry's welfare charity;
- The major music networks have dedicated Australian music programs, including:
  - Triple M's *Homegrown*, hosted by Matty O'Gorman of British India and airing nationally five nights a week, features exclusively Australian music with a focus on emerging and regional artists — from King Stingray in the Northern Territory to Pacific Avenue from Wollongong.
  - The Hit Network's national night show features a nightly dedicated Australian song segment, *The Local List*, with Australian artists interviewed almost every night.<sup>10</sup>
  - Nova Entertainment has hosted the *Maddy Rowe Aus Music Show* since March 2023 — a dedicated Australian music program that has expanded significantly since its launch, giving Australian artists and emerging acts a consistent platform across the Nova network.
- ARN's iHeartLIVE concert series has featured Australian artists including Guy Sebastian, Birds of Tokyo and Keith Urban in major live events broadcast across radio, streaming and social platforms. Emerging artists such as Rachael Fahim have also been featured.
- Tapt Media's news/talk stations 2GB, 3AW, 4BC and 6PR all dedicate regular airtime to Australian music through interviews, live studio performances, and dedicated music features. 4BC's weekly Friday afternoon segment, co-hosted with music journalist Sean Sennett, profiled a different Australian artist every week throughout 2025, while other stations frequently host live studio performances and artist features across a wide range of Australian talent.

This broader contribution, which is not captured in quota calculations, represents significant additional value to Australian artists and the music industry workforce, and reflects a genuine cultural commitment that extends well beyond regulatory compliance.

### Sustainability of Australian Commercial Radio

The sustainability of commercial radio as a cultural delivery mechanism depends on maintaining a regulatory and fiscal environment that allows Australian-owned broadcasters to not only survive, but to thrive in the face of ongoing competition from the global platforms.

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<sup>10</sup> In 2026 alone, *The Hot Hits with Nic & Loren* has delivered interviews spanning both emerging and established talent. These include: Mariae Cassandra, Hugo Basclain, The Kid LAROI, Hazlett, The Temper Trap, Zipporah, Mia Wray, Delta Goodrem, Keli Holiday, MAY-A, Meg Mac, Yes Boone, Peach PRC, Vanessa Amorosi, Salty, Amy Shark, The Jungle Giants, DEVAURA, Pacific Avenue, Gia Darcy, Budjerah, Sonny Fodera, PNAU, Dami Im, Peking Duk, Kyle Charles Hall, Liam Conner, CYRIL, Lucky, Ruel, Kita Alexander, Chloe Parche, Erica Padilla, Jett Blyton, Young Franco, Rachael Fahim, Angus & Julia Stone, Ecce Vandal, Oliver Cronin, Illy, Lara Buchanan and Larissa Lambert.

In the context of the National Cultural Policy, the financial viability of Australian-owned radio stations is a prerequisite for preserving the substantial support that Australian commercial radio provides for Australian music.

In this context, CRA welcomes the Government's announcement of a two-year extension of the Commercial Broadcasting Tax suspension (to 8 June 2028) as a positive step in recognising the cost pressures facing commercial broadcasters.<sup>11</sup>

However, the case for permanent abolition of the CBT for commercial radio is straightforward: the CBT generates approximately \$3 million annually from radio broadcasters — a negligible contribution to government revenue that nonetheless represents a disproportionate burden on an industry already competing against unregulated global platforms that bear no equivalent cultural obligations. CRA encourages the Government to consider the longer-term case for permanent abolition of the commercial broadcasting tax as part of the next policy's support for sustainable cultural infrastructure.

We also believe that the Government should demonstrate its support for the sustainability of the sector by ensuring that a meaningful amount of its advertising spend is directed towards Australian commercial radio and audio services.

### Radio Prominence: Ensuring Australians Can Access Their Radio

Under Pillar 5 (Engaging the Audience), we believe that the next National Cultural Policy should address the growing risk that Australians are being prevented from accessing their local radio services by the technology platforms that sit between them and Australian radio content.

Amazon, Google and Apple now control two key gateways through which Australians access their radio — smart speakers and connected car entertainment systems. Their devices and operating systems increasingly determine which services are accessible, how easily they can be found, and which content is prioritised. In practice, these platforms often deprioritise Australian content in favour of international services optimised for subscription and advertising revenue.

84% of Australians who travelled in a car in the past month listened to radio while on the road, with more than one in four now streaming radio in their vehicles.<sup>12</sup> Yet in vehicles, each manufacturer uses a different interface and software updates can push radio into generic 'Media' or 'Entertainment' menus, while global streaming apps receive prominent placement. Finding local Australian radio in a new car can require navigating multiple steps.

This is not merely an inconvenience; given the important role that commercial radio plays in the promotion and discovery of Australian music, this is a direct threat to the cultural accessibility goals that sit at the heart of the National Cultural Policy.

If Australians cannot find and access Australian radio, they will lose access to Australian music, local stories, community news and emergency information. The NCP's commitment that '*Australian stories are seen and heard, regardless of platform*' will continue to be at risk if the platforms through which Australians' access commercial radio are not required to make local content prominent and easily accessible.

As such, CRA urges the next National Cultural Policy to expressly identify radio prominence as a cultural access priority, and to commit to urgently legislating a prominence framework

<sup>11</sup>Communications Minister Anika Wells, announcement of two-year extension of Commercial Broadcasting Tax suspension (4 May 2026); suspension extended until 8 June 2028 as part of the 2026-27 Federal Budget.

<sup>12</sup>Edison Research and Commercial Radio & Audio, *The Infinite Dial Australia 2025*, above n 1.

for radio within the policy's term. We submit that protecting access to local Australian commercial radio is a key lever through which the policy's cultural access goals are either delivered (if enacted), or otherwise undermined.

## Conclusion

Australia's commercial radio sector is uniquely placed to help deliver the next National Cultural Policy's goals: it is free, universally accessible, wholly Australian-owned, and subject to Australian music content obligations that no other platform bears. It reaches 15 million Australians every week with local stories, Australian music and trusted news.

To preserve and strengthen that contribution, we submit that the next National Cultural Policy should:

- Recognise commercial radio as important cultural infrastructure and support the long-term sustainability of Australia's commercial radio sector; and
- Identify radio prominence as a cultural access priority and commit to urgently legislating a prominence framework.

## COMMERCIAL RADIO & AUDIO

24 May 2026

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