



**AUSTRALIAN  
FESTIVAL  
ASSOCIATION**



**NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY SUBMISSION**

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# 1. Executive Summary

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The Australian Festival Association (AFA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Revive 2028–2032. The AFA is the national peak body representing Australia’s festival sector. Founded in 2018, the AFA represents approximately 90 festival promoters, suppliers and industry professionals operating across every state and territory.

Festivals are one of the most visible, participatory and publicly accessible forms of cultural expression in Australia. They are where audiences gather, artists develop careers, regional communities connect, tourism and hospitality sectors activate, and Australian stories are experienced collectively and in real time.

This submission focuses specifically on the role festivals play within Australia’s cultural ecosystem and the policy settings required to ensure the sector remains sustainable, accessible and internationally competitive over the next decade.

The AFA recommends that Revive 2028–2032:

1. Make Revive Live a permanent federal arts funding program at current funding levels.
2. Ensure any future live performance tax offset framework includes eligible music festivals that employ Australian artists and Australian small business contractors.
3. Prioritise funding for smaller and mid sized festivals as critical development pipelines for emerging Australian artists and audiences.
4. Lead national regulatory harmonisation, addressing significant inconsistencies between state and territory jurisdictions in areas such as user-pays policing and event-related government imposed costs.
5. Fund the national roll out industry-led event guide, the Festival Blueprint.
6. The AFA supports the Australian Contemporary Music Industry Joint Submission.



## 2. The role of festivals in Australia's cultural life

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Festivals occupy a distinct position within Australia's cultural landscape. Unlike many other cultural formats, festivals simultaneously:

- Support artists
- Develop audiences
- Activate public space
- Generate tourism
- Create workforce pathways
- Strengthen regional and remote economies
- Provide intergenerational cultural participation

The [Soundcheck](#) report by Creative Australia, a result of the AFA submission to the 2023 National Cultural Policy, found festival audiences are often more diverse, more regional and more intergenerational than traditional arts audiences. It also found festivals engage young audiences at scale while also creating family and community participation opportunities that extend beyond music alone.

For many Australians, particularly younger Australians and regional communities, festivals represent their most direct engagement with live performance.

Importantly, festivals support artists across all career stages simultaneously. Few formats place emerging artists, mid-career artists and internationally recognised acts on the same platform in front of the same audience. Festivals also generate significant employment opportunities for suppliers, contractors and technical workers across the live music ecosystem. This creates a uniquely interconnected job market for Australian music workers and businesses.



### 3. The cross-portfolio case for festivals

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The AFA supports the framing of culture as a whole-of-government issue.

Festivals intersect directly with:

- Arts and Culture
- Tourism
- Trade and Exports
- Regional Development
- Education and Workforce
- Health
- Social Cohesion
- Infrastructure and Night-Time Economy Policy

A successful festival policy framework therefore delivers outcomes far beyond the arts portfolio alone. Regional festivals, in particular, often function as cornerstone economic and social infrastructure for their communities. In many regional centres, festivals are the largest annual public events and key drivers of:

- Accommodation demand
- Hospitality activity
- Visitor economy growth
- Local employment
- Place, identity and civic pride

At a national level, festivals also contribute to Australia's global cultural profile and export economy by attracting international visitors, showcasing Australian artists and supporting international touring pathways. Soundcheck found that we have 535 music festivals nationally, and more per head of population than the United Kingdom

The next National Cultural Policy should explicitly recognise festivals as a cross-portfolio investment opportunity.

## PILLAR 1 — FIRST NATIONS FIRST

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The AFA supports the continued positioning of First Nations cultures at the centre of cultural policy.

Festivals play an important role in:

- Supporting First Nations artists and performers
- Creating opportunities for language, storytelling and cultural exchange
- Enabling large-scale public engagement with First Nations culture
- Supporting regional and community-led cultural participation

Many festivals already provide significant platforms for First Nations programming, including through:

- Dedicated First Nations stages and curatorial programs
- Welcome to Country and ceremonial practice
- Cultural workshops and storytelling
- Commissioning opportunities
- First Nations-led festivals and events

The AFA supports:

- Prioritising investment in First Nations-led festivals and programming
- Funded pathways for First Nations producers, technical crew and festival workers
- Stand-alone protections for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)
- Recognition of cultural consultation as an eligible project cost
- Support for on-Country cultural and creative development programs

The AFA also supports continued work toward culturally safe and respectful operational standards across the festival sector.



## PILLAR 2 — A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

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Festivals are one of the most effective platforms for cultural participation and inclusion in Australia. They provide:

- Low-barrier audience access
- Geographically distributed participation
- Cross-cultural engagement
- Opportunities for regional and local storytelling
- Public gathering spaces that strengthen social connection

Importantly, festivals support cultural participation at scale. As Australian audiences music discovery fragment across digital platforms, festivals remain one of the few spaces where Australians gather physically for collective cultural experiences.

Festivals also play an ever critical role in enabling Australian artists to develop their audiences, with the prioritising of US and UK music on streaming platforms and commercial radio not adhering to their Australian music quotas to benefit local artists.

The AFA submits that future cultural policy should recognise festivals as:

- Audience development infrastructure
- Local artist professional development opportunities
- Regional cultural infrastructure

The AFA also supports measures that improve discoverability and access to Australian content and artists across digital and broadcast platforms in submissions made by APRA AMCOS, AAM and ARIA PPCA.



## PILLAR 3 – CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

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Festivals are one of the primary economic engines supporting Australian artists.

Festivals:

- Commission and book artists at scale
- Support national touring circuits
- Provide income opportunities across multiple career stages
- Expose artists to new audiences
- Create pathways into international touring opportunities

For many artists, festival income is critical to sustaining broader touring and creative practice. Festivals also support the broader creative workforce including:

- Sound engineers
- Lighting technicians
- Production managers
- Stage managers
- Technical crew
- Event producers
- Creative contractors and suppliers

The AFA supports broader recognition of the full live performance workforce within future cultural policy settings.

The AFA recommends:

- Continuation and expansion of Revive Live as a permanent funding mechanism
- Stronger workforce development pathways for live event and production workers
- Faster and more efficient international touring and visa processes
- Recognition of festivals as artist development infrastructure
- Continued support for fair and safe workplaces across the sector



## PILLAR 3 – CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

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### Live Performance Tax Offset

The AFA supports the development of a live performance tax offset framework that recognises the central role festivals play within Australia’s contemporary cultural ecosystem.

Music festivals are major commissioners of Australian creative work and significant employers of Australian small businesses operating across staging, production, logistics, transport, hospitality, audio, lighting, creative services and event operations.

Any future live performance tax offset should therefore explicitly include eligible festival organisers where festivals:

- Employ Australian artists and creative workers
- Engage Australian-owned contractors and suppliers
- Contribute to Australian touring circuits and audience development
- Deliver measurable economic and cultural benefit domestically

Festivals are uniquely efficient cultural investment platforms because they simultaneously support:

- Artists
- Audiences
- Regional economies
- Tourism outcomes
- Creative workforce development
- Australian small businesses

Excluding festivals from any future live performance tax offset framework would significantly limit the policy’s effectiveness across the broader live music ecosystem.

The AFA also supports the Government’s continued commitment to protecting creators’ rights in the digital environment, particularly in relation to AI and copyright protections.



## PILLAR 4 – STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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The AFA’s central recommendation is that festivals should be formally recognised within national cultural policy as essential cultural infrastructure.

Festivals are:

- workforce infrastructure
- tourism infrastructure
- audience infrastructure
- artist development infrastructure
- regional infrastructure
- social infrastructure

Despite their cultural and economic importance, festivals remain highly exposed to:

- rising insurance costs
- increasing compliance burdens
- workforce shortages
- fragmented regulatory systems
- infrastructure limitations
- climate and weather impacts
- cost-of-living pressures affecting audiences

Cultural infrastructure must extend beyond buildings and institutions to include:

- touring circuits
- festival ecosystems
- live performance networks
- temporary cultural infrastructure
- workforce capability systems
- operational standards frameworks



## PILLAR 4 – STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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### Revive Live

The AFA recommends Revive Live transition from a temporary post-covid intervention measure into a permanent ongoing federal cultural investment program funded at existing levels, like Festivals Australia. Revive Live has become one of the most effective targeted interventions supporting Australia’s live music ecosystem during a period of significant market contraction, festival closures and rising operational costs.

Over the past two years, Revive Live has delivered more than \$21 million in support to 217 live music businesses, including 119 music festival activities and 98 live music venues. A final \$12.5 million has been committed for 2026–27. Permanent investment certainty would help stabilise the live performance pipeline through which Australian artists develop careers, regional communities access culture, and creative SMEs generate employment. Festival investment within Revive Live delivers benefits across multiple layers of the music and cultural ecosystem simultaneously.

Festivals generate substantial spillover benefits for hospitality, accommodation, transport and regional economies. In regional Australia, festivals are often among the most significant annual cultural and economic events within a community.

Future Revive Live investment should prioritise smaller and emerging festivals and venues. These operators face:

- The highest cost pressures
- The thinnest operating margins
- The greatest exposure to regulatory and market volatility
- Difficulty developing relationships with state regulatory agencies during their infancy

Yet they often take the greatest creative risks on early-career artists and emerging audiences. Targeted support for smaller and mid-sized festivals is therefore an investment in Australia’s artist pipeline, audience development and cultural diversity.

The AFA also recommends:

- Commonwealth leadership on national regulatory harmonisation in the events sector like is occurring in the building and construction sectors
- Support for industry-led operational standards frameworks such as the Festival Blueprint. AFA has developed a NSW version and will soon expand this to Victoria. Federal funding is the likely only avenue to develop a truly national Blueprint
- Investment in live event workforce development
- Stronger coordination between cultural policy and tourism policy
- Consideration of long-term venue and festival site protections



## PILLAR 5 — ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE

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Festivals are one of Australia’s strongest audience development mechanisms.

They:

- engage younger audiences at scale
- create pathways into lifelong cultural participation
- support family and intergenerational attendance
- connect regional communities with national cultural experiences
- provide high-value cultural experiences across multiple artforms

Festivals deliver multi-day, multi-artist cultural participation at a lower per-experience cost than equivalent standalone ticketed events.

They also create powerful emotional and social experiences that strengthen belonging, connection and community resilience.

The AFA supports:

- investment in audience development initiatives
- support for all-ages cultural participation
- stronger integration between cultural policy and education policy
- investment in regional touring and accessibility
- policies that improve affordability and access for younger audiences

The AFA also supports stronger coordination between:

- Music Australia
- Tourism Australia
- Sounds Australia
- export and trade agencies to better leverage festivals as both audience and export development infrastructure

### **Support for the Australian Contemporary Music Industry Joint Submissions**

The AFA supports the Australian Contemporary Music Industry Joint Submissions and their recommendations to strengthen Australia’s contemporary music ecosystem through long-term investment, workforce sustainability, touring support, audience development and regulatory reform.



## CONCLUSION AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Without targeted policy intervention, the festival sector faces continued contraction.

Festival closures over the past four years have reduced touring opportunities for Australian artists, weakened regional visitor economies, narrowed audience pathways into live culture and had a huge hit on industry confidence in our longevity.

The cost of not making Revive Live permanent and not supporting a live performance tax offset is the gradual erosion of the infrastructure underpinning Australia's live cultural sector.

The AFA recommends that the next National Cultural Policy:

1. Make Revive Live permanent through ongoing federal funding commitments at current funding levels.
2. Ensure any future live performance tax offset framework includes eligible music festivals that employ Australian artists and Australian small business contractors.
3. Prioritise smaller and mid-sized festivals as critical development pipelines for emerging Australian artists and audiences in funding programs.
4. Support national regulatory harmonisation and improved consistency across jurisdictions.
5. Support industry-led operational capability initiatives such as the Festival Blueprint to ease the above regulatory burden.
6. The AFA supports the Australian Contemporary Music Industry Joint Submissions.

