

24 May 2026

Dear Minister Burke,

Thank you for considering this submission to the public consultation on Australia's new National Cultural Policy.

I am an academic from RMIT University's Music Industry programme and a founding member of the Music Industry Research Collective based at this institution. My expertise covers music workplaces and inequalities in access to music making and music work, particularly as related to gender. I have worked extensively with industry bodies such as the Victorian Music Development Office, APRA AMCOS and the Australian Music Centre on these issues.

Research done with these organisations, and that of others working in this area, has pointed to continued entrenched gender-based inequalities in music in Australia. Specifically in response to the Pillars established in *Revive*, gender-based inequality and its impacts are related to Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story, and Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist.

This submission contends that the place of women and gender diverse people's stories in Australian music can only be secured if they are safe and valued as artists.

Evidence shows that women and gender diverse people are marginalized and excluded from music spaces; they are not safe in these spaces; they are not taken seriously in these spaces; they are sexualized, reduced to their bodies; they are assumed to be technically inept; the roles they can take on are limited; having children or caring responsibilities is all but career suicide. The 'boys club', which hoards knowledge and opportunities and keeps others shut out, appears repeatedly as a central factor in the difficulties women and gender diverse people face in building music careers. While numerous studies¹ have demonstrated these issues, the *Raising Their Voices* report² published in 2022 represents the most comprehensive account of how gendered harms pay out in music spaces. It found 'unacceptable levels of sexual harm, sexual harassment and systemic discrimination

¹ For example, see: Fileborn, B., Wadds, P. and Barnes, A. (2019) Setting the stage for sexual assault: the dynamics of gender, culture, space and sexual violence at live music events, in Strong, C. and Raine, S. (eds) *Towards Gender Equality in the Music Industry*, Bloomsbury; Strong, C., Brunt, S. and Cannizzo, F. (2023) *Encore Project Final Report*, National Careers Institute & RMIT; Crabtree, J. (2020), *Tunesmiths and Toxicity: Workplace Harassment in the Contemporary Music Industries of Australia and New Zealand*, PhD Thesis, University of Technology Sydney; Fairlamb, H. and B. Fileborn (2020), 'Experiences and Perceptions of Gender in the Australian Music Industry', *Perfect Beat* 20(1): 8–39; Hill, R., B. Fileborn and C. Strong (2025), *Unsilenced: Women Musicians, Gender-Based Violence, and the Popular Music Industry*, Bloomsbury; McCarry, M., E. Käkälä, C. Jones and K. Manoussaki (2023), 'The Sound of Misogyny: Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in the Music Industry', *Journal of Gender-Based Violence* 7(2): 220–236.

² See MAPN Consulting (2022) *Raising Their Voices*. Online at <https://apo.org.au/node/319350>

in the contemporary music industry in Australia', with 'widespread risk, inequality and discrimination for many', but more likely women and marginalised people (p1).

The challenges that block women's full participation in music-making represent a limitation on the sustainability and size of the music industry. Talented and skilled women are abandoning music careers (both as performers and as behind-the-scenes contributors) or not starting in the industry to begin with because of the factors listed above. This is borne out in the stagnation in women's membership of the royalty collection agency APRA AMCOS, where the proportion of women members changed only from 21.7% to 23.2% between 2017 and 2025. While this is an increase, at this rate women would not reach 50% of members before the year 2110.

Increasing the diversity of voices heard in live Australian music has the potential to expand markets and increase the overall health of the sector. The music industry thrives on having a large pool of innovative ideas and creativity to draw from. The contributions that women and gender diverse people could make if access to music making was made easier, and if they were actively encouraged to move into this area, would be of benefit to all Australians, as well as to these artists themselves. This includes participating as creative artists, music business managers, technical and backstage crew, and as audience members.

Attempts at change

There have been many attempts to level the playing field in music. Organisations such as APRA, various State music offices and Support Act run programs that include mentoring, training, information panels and networking sessions aimed at women and gender-diverse people in all areas of music.³ Best Practice Guidelines that address the prevention of sexual harassment are available through organisations such as Music Victoria, and Support Act delivers industry specific bystander intervention training. There are also grassroots campaigns and initiatives including artist-led activist efforts such as the #MeNoMore Open Letter⁴ and Camp Cope's #ItTakesOne campaign which have aimed to tackle sexism and sexual violence in the industry. Programs such as Girls Rock foster the skills and confidence of women and gender-diverse musicians.

The limitations of these attempts are their piecemeal and ad hoc nature, and a lack of robust tracking and assessment. Gender equality initiatives in music tend to come and go depending on the availability of funding and the amount of attention being paid to the issue at any given point. The music industry is an industry marked by rolling crises, where commitments to tackle gender inequality and gender-based violence can be quickly forgotten when other issues arise. The response to the *Raising Their Voices* report mentioned above exemplifies this. Upon the release of the report over 100 industry bodies signed a letter committing to implementing the recommendations of this report. To date, almost no further action has been taken, as a 'crisis for live music' and concern over the impacts of AI have become the focus of attention. Importantly in grassroots spaces in particular, the energy and resources of individuals drive activist groups and campaigns, and these people are susceptible to burnout. Without them, the industry's attention is even more likely to move elsewhere.

³ An overview of these is found in Cannizzo, F., Strong, C. and Brunt, S. (2023) Career reconstruction: mid-career transformations in the Australian music industries, *Creative Industries Journal*, published online 15 June 2023.

⁴ Bracken, C. and A. Newstead (2017), 'Nearly 400 Women Call Out Sexual Harassment in Open Letter to Australian Music Industry', *Triple j Online*, 12 December. <https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/news/menomore:-400-women-call-out-sexual-harassment-in-australian-m/9249616>

Finally, a lack of thorough assessment of the impact of all of these strategies, in combination with a lack of longitudinal data on women's participation and experiences in music, means our understanding of the best ways to bring about change is lacking.

Conclusions

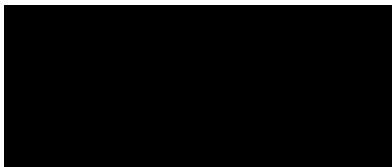
Issues relating to gender inequality play out in specific ways in music, but are documented across the creative industries and arts to varying extents. The precarity of creative workers, who often find themselves in highly competitive, poorly remunerated positions that leave them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, is a significant factor in how gendered inequalities manifest. Strengthening the bargaining power of artists, and giving them more secure pathways to seek redress for issues in the workplace, are therefore essential changes.

The recommendations of the *Raising Their Voices* report point the way to much of what is needed. This includes systemic change rather than (or in addition to) fragmented policies, programs and campaigns; robust, ongoing documentation and research to track change over time; mechanisms for real accountability for abusers and protectors of abusers, including through the withholding of public funds as appropriate; and for gender equality, diversity and safety to be embedded as core principles in everything that happens in the creative sector.

For too long the success of many in music has been gained at the expense of the careers and wellbeing of others. A National Cultural Policy that recognises and works to mitigate this will set the scene for Australian music scenes to thrive in ways that they never have before.

I would welcome the opportunity to provide further information on this topic for the Review, in person or in writing.

Yours sincerely,



Associate Professor Catherine Strong

