

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

Mark Woods



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

My name is Mark Woods. I have worked in the Australian music and live events industry for more than fifty years as a live sound engineer and audio producer. Over that time I have worked alongside artists and acts of every scale — from intimate grassroots performances to major international productions — and have travelled the world in service of live music. I have been fortunate to be recognised by my peers as someone who has given their life to this industry. That life has given me a clear and long view of what live music and community events mean to Australian culture, and what is now at serious risk of being lost.

Over five decades I have watched Australian live music rise, adapt, and in recent years face pressures unlike anything I have seen before. The COVID-19 pandemic was a catastrophic disruption — the live events industry was the first to shut down and the last to recover, with enormous financial and personal cost to artists, technicians, producers, and the communities that depend on live culture. Many never came back.

But the crisis did not begin with COVID, and it will not end without structural change. Festivals and community events — particularly those run by volunteers in regional and rural Australia — are being strangled by a combination of regulatory burden and prohibitive insurance costs. What was once a manageable process for a small, passionate team of community members has become a complex, expensive, and often demoralising exercise in navigating government red tape. For many grassroots organisers, the paperwork alone now requires professional assistance that their budgets simply cannot absorb.

Festivals and live music gatherings are not entertainment — they are cultural infrastructure. They are where local identity is expressed, where emerging artists find their first real audiences, and where communities come together in ways that no other format replicates. The smaller and more regional the event, the more acutely it reflects the unique character of the place and people who created it. When these events fold, something irreplaceable disappears. Future generations will have no memory of what existed, no record of the local traditions, talent, and creative energy that once defined a community. That is not a small loss. It is a cultural erasure happening quietly, event by event, across the country.

I urge the government to take three concrete steps. First, establish a dedicated grants program for grassroots and regional live events that is genuinely accessible — with streamlined applications, plain-English guidance, and support for volunteer-run organisations with no administrative infrastructure. Second, reform the insurance and licensing frameworks that currently make small community events financially unviable; government-backed event insurance schemes or subsidy arrangements should be explored urgently. Third, recognise live music and community festivals explicitly in the National Cultural Policy as foundational to Australian cultural life — not as a commercial sector, but as a public good deserving of sustained investment.