



Submission to the Public Consultations for the new National Cultural Policy
by the Band Association of NSW endorsed by
the National Band Council of Australia

4 June 2026

General Introduction to the Community Music Sector:

The community music sector in Australia is large and vibrant, with approximately 1760 not-for-profit community-lead wholly volunteer incorporated community performing arts organisations (Community Brass and Concert Bands, Orchestras, Pipe Bands, Choirs and community theatres).

This involves approximately 71,500 individual volunteers, freely giving approximately 1.3 million volunteer hours a year along with their unbridled passion to teach, rehearse, perform and share their love of music to bring joy and meaning to the lives of the citizens of this great nation.

We live, rehearse and perform in all sectors of the community in all cities and towns across the nation. We are made up of people from all demographics, from all cultural backgrounds and with all levels of ability. Our organisations are safe places for all people.

We perform, teach and create great music, providing a supportive community network which is available to all where everyone is valued for who they are and the contribution they can make to something much larger than they could create alone.

The impact of the community music sector is vast !! The sector makes approximately 28,200 individual performances per year across the nation, reaching an estimated audience of 13 million Australians per year.

Community music organisations are true grass roots organisations where all members are unpaid volunteers. The time spent learning, rehearsing at home, in rehearsal and performing at concerts for a community music organisation are all extra to their usual family, work and life activities.

A community music organisations purpose is to be accessible to all, to teach the love and joy of making and listening to great music and to be an important part of the local community.

The Community Banding Sector:

Across Australia, the Band Association of NSW, Queensland Band Association, Victorian Bands League, South Australian Band Association, Western Australian Band Association and Tasmanian Bands League represents a total of 550 community Brass and Concert Bands representing 30,250 volunteer musicians.

These bands are in every town and city across Australia. We perform at approx. 7,900 concerts and parades to an audience of approximately 5.5 million people across Australia. Most of this audience will have been at free to the public performances at such events as:

- Anzac day ceremonies and parades,
- Civic festivals and parades,
- local council events,
- Cultural festivals,
- Weekend afternoon Concerts in local parks and shopping centres,
- Aged care centres, retirement villages, hospitals and schools,

- School and church fetes,
- local markets and other community events; and
- Christmas events, playing carols to bring the Christmas spirit to everyone in our communities.

Only a relatively small number of this audience will have been at a ticketed concert. This means that a community bands income comes mainly from membership fees, community donations, Bunnings BBQ's and a small amount from ticketed concerts. Bands make learning to play an instrument, playing, and listening to live music, accessible. They make it possible for all in the community to have access to quality live music which:

- introduces new audiences to the joys of seeing and hearing live music,
- creates a passion in new audience members to see more live concerts and shows.

Community Bands Make More Than Just Music

Making music is a lifelong pursuit, and community and school bands play a crucial role in this journey. By collaborating with schools and conservatoriums, they create pathways from childhood music education to a lifelong involvement. Being in a community band ensures that individuals can continue to develop and share their passion for music making throughout their lives.

Many professional musicians begin their journeys in community bands and bands continue to nurture future generations of music educators, conductors, composers, brass, wind, and percussion professional musicians.

Community and school bands positively impact people's lives, often serving as the first and last encounter with live music. They provide entertainment for all occasions, celebrating life's moments and enriching peoples lives through music.

Bands are so much more than just sitting next to someone in a group of strangers. In a band, the relationship shared between all members is as equals, regardless of cultural background, economic background, age, gender, sexuality, ability or disability, occupation, educational or other personal achievements. In bands, all are equal and all share an equal responsibility to play their part to the best of their ability. Each member makes an equal contribution to create something so much greater, more exciting, more emotional, more beautiful, more engaging on every level than anything an individual could create alone.

Whilst it is wonderful to go to a concert and hear an orchestra or jazz band or professional ensemble perform, not everyone has the opportunity to actually be a part of that performance. Community bands make that opportunity. Through a community band, everyone has the opportunity to learn to make music and to be an integral part of making that music.

Music is for everyone, not just for the professional organisations, and community music organisations such as our NSW community bands makes that possible.

Bands are integral to the mental health of the members of the band and so many others as well. When you play music in a band, you are in a constant state of learning, keeping minds active, improving cognition, increasing attention spans, and engaging all the senses.

They provide an outlet where the members can come together with a group of people, leave all their troubles at the door and, for a few hours each week, have an absolute focus on making music.

They are inclusive spaces where every member is important. They form a supportive community that encourages collaboration and growth. They are connected to a broader national and worldwide network of bands, sharing stories, creating, learning, and building connections.

NSW community bands welcome members from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. They instil cross-generational and cross-cultural respect, a positive work ethic, self-respect, resilience, and self-discipline. They teach teamwork, and community values through music making.

Bands bring families together, often being a place where couples first meet. Bands are the family that we grow into. Band members care about everyone in the band. If one member hits hard times, other band members will rally to help. That's what bands are about.

They are safe places for at-risk individuals, offering support networks and fostering social connections. For too many in our communities, band rehearsals and performances are their only social contacts. For some, they are the only break from the loneliness and depression of grief the only place where that grief can be shared.

As social welfare and mental health organisations, community bands provide a vital service, helping to keep minds active and bring meaning to peoples lives through the creation of a music making community which is genuinely accessible to all.

Young people are the future of our community bands with many bands re-starting their youth programs which suffered hugely as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. Many bands are actively working with their local school bands recruiting and complementing the formal school music education program with the community youth band.

Many regional bands may not have a formal school band program and, in those areas, community bands are filling that space entirely.

When bands teach our young people how to play an instrument, they also teach tenacity and perseverance. They teach the importance of sharing, or respecting our elders and our youth alike. They teach the importance of following rules, of honesty and integrity, of giving, of volunteerism and of making a contribution to society which is outside of the individuals own life without an expectation of a return. In doing this, bands strengthen our communities by moulding our young people to be better citizens.

Bands teach a life skill. When you learn to make music, you will always know how to make music. When you become a part of a band, you know that there will always be a place, regardless of where you are in the world, where you can go and be welcomed, accepted and respected for who you are because you play an instrument and are a part of a band.

Our community bands are pillars of our communities, particularly in regional areas. Many of our community bands have continuing histories dating back over one hundred years, such as the Waratah Brass Newcastle, Nowra Town Band, Parramatta City Band, Armidale City Band, Lithgow City Band, Temora Town Band, City of Orange Brass Band, Maitland City Brass, manly Brass, Albury City Band, Parkes Town Band, Young Concert Band. The Bathurst City RSL Concert Band is celebrating its 140th anniversaries this year

The community band has always and still does play a vital role in the fabric of our society.

Who is a Band?

Community bands are a diverse collection of individuals. All of whom come together at least once a week, sometimes twice to rehearse and make great music. Those same people freely give their time and passion on weekends to perform at the many various concerts and performances to any and everyone in our communities.

Band members come from all walks of life, all socioeconomic situations, all occupations, unemployed people, and people with disabilities and carers. Community bands are inclusive organisations who treasure the diversity of our membership with every member regardless of age, cultural background, religion, gender identification and sexuality. All are respected and valued for who they are and their contribution to making great music.

There are many members of the LGBTQIA community who play in community bands. The Band Association President is an openly gay man who has been elected as President for the past 18 years. The Secretary of Parles Concert Band is a Trans man.

The BANSW have Tongan bands as members of the Association and the Sydney Korean Orchestra Wind Ensemble who participate regularly and all bands have a culturally diverse membership.

Our community bands are genuinely representative of the communities in which they play and are always looking for ways to involve more people to come and learn to play and make music.

Community Bands are safe places for all, with every community band having a number of mandatory reporters as a part of their regular membership and management and all necessary policies and procedures and structures in place to ensure the safety of all members.

Bands are places of refuge for those marginalised in our communities, they provide a safe place for those at risk in our communities,

Kids learn so much of who they are as adults from playing in a community band, benefiting them throughout their entire lives whether they continue to play in bands, leave and go in to other music spheres or stop playing altogether, their experience in a band has a positive impact on their whole life.

Bands are a place where the uncoordinated, the “uncool” kids and kids on the “fringe”, where the kids who haven’t found their tribe discover that its Ok to be a nerd, where every kid is accepted for who they are. Bands have a hugely positive impact on the mental health for kids that are not the cool kids, for kids that are not sporty, for kids that are often made to feel worthless because they aren’t any good at sports.

The Australian focus on sport places so much pressure on those of us who aren’t and the mental health effects of that can have a huge impact. Bands provide an alternative space where the nerdy kids and the cool sports kids, where every kid can have an opportunity to shine, where every kid can express themselves through music.

Bands as a community are a place for everybody. People who don’t find their place will most likely find a place in a band.

Builds self confidence, cross generational social connections, self-discipline, and an opportunity for emotional development and expression through making and sharing music. They encourage self reflection and personal growth.

We have kids who are just amazing. Kids who are otherwise non-verbal, require support animals, etc... all have a place. Kids with behavioural difficulties find a place of calm and understanding in bands, where they are treated as adults with the same expectations as adults. So many kids and adults in bands who are on the spectrum but who find their place in bands.

Bands are a life-long pursuit, life-long learning, and not just musical learning but social learning as well. They provide the opportunity to travel and see the world beyond their local community, to share experiences, learn about other cultures and grow as balanced people with a wider world view.

Bands build tolerance and compassion and understanding. Everyone who plays in a Band, you freely give something of yourself to be a part of that larger ensemble. Choirs, Orchestras and to a large extent Musical Theatre Companies all have the same benefits to their members.

All are treated equal in bands, the expectations of all are the same regardless of age and experience. In bands you are in a constant state of learning.

People Come together to create something far greater than they could by themselves.

Engaging Our Communities

Much more than the group of musicians who march and play at ANZAC Day commemorations, or play Christmas carols at Christmas, bands perform everywhere in our communities all year around.

Bands bring joy to people's lives and relief from the stresses of the everyday and create a moment where people can stop and forget about the mundane and listen and relax, bop along, maybe sing, have a dance, or just smile while they listen and enjoy live music for free.

We bring joy and brightness to those in nursing homes and hospitals. We add a festive atmosphere to markets, play in local parks, march in parades, community fairs and festivals, the Royal Easter Show and regional agricultural shows, Saturday or Sunday afternoon concerts at shopping malls, car rallies, sporting events, concerts in RSL clubs, in churches, and at their own ticketed concerts.

We play at all types of cultural festivals such as the Sydney Greek Festival, the Camden Multicultural Festival, Chinese New Year celebrations, at Ramadan Iftars and Diwali festivities and at LGBTQIA Rainbow Festivals.

Bands add gravitas to ANZAC day and other national and community commemorations, Citizenship ceremonies and other ceremonial events, Australia Day commemorations and festivities, and to funerals

When bands perform, they will source, rehearse, and play music appropriate to the occasion and their audience. And they will do all of this, often for free or for a small donation. We entertain millions of people across NSW greatly contribute to the welfare of our communities.

For almost all community bands and their members, the month of December means working a few extra hours every evening out carolling around the streets, in nursing homes, hospitals, shopping centres, at homeless shelters, other people's parties and carols by candlelight events to bring joy and the Christmas spirit to the lives of everyone.

Christmas is the busiest time of year. It is spent serving our communities, without payment, without question or hesitation. We do this because that's just what we do.

Importantly.... All of the above applies to all Community Music Organisations whether they be a community brass band, concert band, choir, orchestra, jazz band, pipe band, or community theatre.

We are the sector that is discovering, teaching and nurturing young musicians whose Australian and International professional careers began in a community music setting, through performing at regional, State and National Band Championships, local Eisteddfods, and through the encouragement of their music group peers to push realise the great potential that these wonderful musicians have.

Bands have deeply personal impacts

One very recent example from the Band Association of NSW is Trumpet player Lachlan Day whose career includes:

- principal trumpet for the international tour of Miss Saigon
- Guest Artist with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra; and
- lead trumpet for Robbie Williams at the Sydney Opera House Board Walk party, New Years Eve 2024/2025.

Lachlan grew up in community bands, learnt to play in the Castle Hill RSL Youth Wind Orchestra- a community band. Lachlan grew up in the band both as a musician and as a person and attributes his success to the training and support he received from his local band and the BANSW. Lachlan is just of the thousands of professional Australian musicians who have a life-long career in music who owe that career to starting, learning and growing through their local community music organisation.

In the Castle Hill RSL Band Group, there is a family who have a child who, when the family first came to the band, was non-communicative. The child started learning to play an instrument and with a lot of patience, support and encouragement from the bands conductor, the volunteer tutors in the band and his fellow musicians, the child blossomed, through music. Within band he communicates. He has started communicating with family, but outside band he is still non-communicative. Band is his only social outlet, the only place where he feels safe enough to be who he needs to be.

In the Camden Community Band, their conductor is a former ambulance medic who suffers from PTSD. Band has saved his life many times over. His band is his family. Band is his social release. It's the place where he finds relief from the terrors, where he is safe, and supported, and important. Music has been his life and without music and his band family, he would not be with us today.

For many in our banding community, the band family is the only social network we have. It is our social release, the place where we can come together and be a part of community. It is the place where we "Fit-in"

There are many kids in the community who are branded "Trouble makers", kids on the spectrum who have learning difficulties, and those who just "don't fit in". For these kids, Bands are their Tribe, Their people. Bands are a place where they find equality, where they are respected, and where they learn respect. They are safe places where they are welcomed regardless of who they are, what their economic or social background is, regardless of where they live, they are welcomed, treated as an equal with the kids and adults around them and where their contribution is valued, and where it is valued for life.

We are vital and integral parts of the cultural fabric of Australian society..... and yet.... There is NO Government policy at any level to support the sector.

Challenges facing the Community Music Sector:

Recognition of the sector

It is an unfortunate reality that our Australian Federal and State Governments do not regard the community music sector to be a part of the Nationals Music Industry. This entire sector is typically omitted from any policy consultations, from funding opportunities, and from anything to do with the Arts and Music Industry. We don't have big budget TV programs, we don't have the budget to buy a significant media presence, nor do we have the staffing, resources or the profile to secure impactful funding from sponsors that other large professional organisations have.

Our Federal Government has almost always ignored the community music sector in its policy settings and funding models. Community lead performing arts aren't "trendy" to fund.

Government neglect of this sector ignores the fact that in order to have a vibrant professional music sector you need a vibrant, healthy and strong grassroots community sector. It also ignored the fact that there is more to music than just contemporary music made up of the small rock band playing simple songs based on 4 chords in a pub, or rock bands at rock and folk style festivals such as those that get all the media attention. I.e: The bands and music that the ARIA Awards and other similar "Industry" awards are all focussed on.

When Government and ARIA and so on talk about the Music Industry, unfortunately they are NOT talking about any part of the community-lead performing arts sector.

Always, this sector, whether that be Brass Bands, Concert Bands, Orchestras, Choirs, Pipe Bands and community theatres, misses out. Yet, when there's an official ceremony or ANZAC Day, etc... local councils, RSL clubs, Local, State and Federal politicians all want us to come and perform, and they usually expect us to perform for free.

The politicians, media and the "Music Industry" professionals have always taken the community music sector for granted and have never included the community music sector in their "industry research" or "industry policy consultations".

Our Federal and State Governments across this country have never approached the sector service organisations and asked "what do you and your sector need and how can we support you?"

Community Music has NEVER been celebrated or considered as a part of the Australian Music Industry. BUT we have always been here, doing what we do, teaching and performing and sharing the joy and love of music in our communities, just always underappreciated and ignored.

Unequal access to funding

Interestingly, our Federal and State Governments spend so much money on the “contemporary music industry” yet when it comes to the music that’s being played on sound systems in shopping malls, elevators, radio stations, on hold to Government, etc... are all mostly international artists and NOT mostly local Australian artists. We also spend a lot on Indigenous arts and music artists yet that doesn’t get any airtime either when it absolutely should.

Community music organisations actively celebrate our indigenous culture. We actively celebrate our cultural diversity, our people with a disability and our LGBTQI+ people. We are out in our communities every week of the year bring the joy and love of music to all and providing a safe place to all where, for a few hours a week, the trials and tribulations of daily life are set aside to share of ourselves to contribute to and experience creating something that is bigger than we could create by ourselves.

At the Federal and State Government levels, funding opportunities for community not-for-profit volunteer-lead organisations is non-existent. The entire funding regime of the Federal Government and Creative Australia (including its previous for being The Australia Council) has been designed to freeze out the community volunteer-lead sector and community volunteer-lead service organisations.

Unfortunately this has always been the case. In previous conversations with executives from the Australian Council for the Arts, then the Australia Council and now Creative Australia, they have clearly stated that they do not support the community music sector. They have never celebrated our sector, have never reached out to work with us, or valued the sector as culturally, or socially significant with a profound impact. Seeing your words in your email reply is the first time I have seen anyone who works with the Federal Government use these words, quite refreshing actually.

On the back of the Federal Governments long held approach, State Governments have finally taken this same approach, as are many local councils, meaning that the State based Service Organisations for the sector and our nations community music organisations are frozen out of Government support at all levels. In NSW, our Arts Minister and the executives at Create NSW have stated quite clearly that there is no plan or place for support for the Community lead music sector. They all say that the sector is “Vital” and “makes invaluable a contribution to society” blah blah blah.... But at the same time withdrawing all support.

One of the biggest challenges for any community music organisation is funding.

The largest expenses are rent for rehearsal and performance venues and the cost of equipment. Below is an outline of the funding challenges and costs involved in running a community band:

- All community bands in NSW, particularly in regional areas, will try to provide their members with a band-owned instrument. The majority of these instruments are over 50 years old, and in poor condition. Bands generally do not have the funds to purchase new instruments or the resources to search and apply for funding. Repair costs of existing instruments can range from \$150 to \$1500 per repair.
- New music costs up to \$300 for a concert style work and up to \$800 for a major work for the full score and parts.
- Commissioning new works cost anywhere from \$3,000 for a 4-minute concert style work to \$9,000 - \$12,000 for a 12 – 15-minute major (work depending on the complexity and difficulty).
- To purchase new instruments, the price of quality smaller instruments such as flutes and clarinets, starts at around \$1,000 and can go up to \$20,000 for a new tuba;
- To purchase a new set of percussion, this can cost anywhere up to \$100,000. Individual items can cost anywhere from \$300 for a new cymbal to \$13,000 for a new 4.3 octave marimba.
- To replace a bands aging music stands costs between \$6,000 and \$10,000 depending on the size of the band and the number required. Performance standard music stand prices start at approx. \$160 per stand;
- New uniforms can cost from \$250 to \$400 per person. If a whole band needs new jackets, then they are looking at between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Most bands cannot afford this luxury and simply wear black pants and a black or white collared or polo shirt with an embroidered logo. These start at \$60 per shirt, so a cost of about \$3000 for a band.
- Venue hire for an indoor concert can range from \$500 for a school or church hall (school staff member or security guard being present is extra) to \$10,000 for an afternoon in a Town or concert hall with venue staff and ticketing costs.

The above does not include the normal weekly ongoing costs of rent, building maintenance, and other items (such as music stand banners, utilities, honorariums and payments for conductors, tutors, and other expenses which all bands experience).

To cover the above expenses, community bands rely on band membership fees, the rare performance fee charged for a private or corporate function, Bunnings BBQ’s, Christmas carolling, donations, chocolate drives, cake stores, etc...

What we need as a Sector

The Not-For-Profit Community-lead volunteer music sector needs genuine support and recognition from our Federal and State Governments. The nice words are nice but at the end of the day they are meaningless unless backed up by actions.

We need a National Community Music Grants Program with \$17.5 mil annually allocated to the Community Volunteer-lead Not-For-Profit Music Sector. This funding to be protected under legislation, increasing each year in accordance with the inflation rate for a minimum of 10 years.

We propose that \$15 mil be set aside for a devolved grants program where Incorporated Not-for-profit volunteer-lead community music organisations can apply for a grant of up to \$10,000 per organisation per year, and a total of \$2.5 mil set aside as a management fee paid to the various State and Nation-wide service organisations to manage a devolved program for their relevant sector of the Community Music industry.

The primary devolved program fund of \$15 to be allocated to each relevant sector and divided on a proportional basis based on membership numbers of each sector segment.

Across the board, the grant funding must NOT BE PROJECT BASED but able to be used for admin or projects or both. It is to be a grant made on a yearly basis to support an annual program, covering things such as rehearsal and storage space rent, insurances, music commissions, equipment purchases, honoraria payments for conductors and administrators, other administration expenses, and project costs, concert venue hire etc...

We need a Federal approach to support the community volunteer-lead not-for-profit sector, which then is better placed to support the professional sector.

Throwing money at the professional sector is all good and well, but it's like watering a tree. If you only spray the leaves and branches and ignore watering the roots, the tree will die both from a lack of water and from mould and other rot setting in because of too much water in the canopy. Water the roots and the whole tree will thrive !!

Community volunteer-lead music is the root of the Music Industry sector. Almost all music educators and music professionals get their start in a Community Music organisations. They may not mention this in their bios – in Australia, mentioning that you started your musical life journey in a community music organisation is pretty taboo, BUT almost all our “stars” and professionals have been a member of a community music organisation at some stage.

Unfortunately, the current approach of our Federal and State Governments is to “water and fertilise the leaves, flowers and the branches and ignore the health of the roots and still expect the tree to thrive.

We focus on the professional sector only when it comes to Government funding at all levels. This must change to secure the future of our nations greater performing arts industry beyond contemporary music.

This submission is approved to be made public.

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