



National Cultural Policy Submission

Submitted by Jeff Markham on behalf of the Band Association of NSW (BANSW), its membership, and the brass and wind banding community across NSW.

BANSW is one of Australia's oldest continuously operating Peak Arts Service Organisations. As a wholly volunteer not-for-profit organisation, we have served our Banding movement continuously since our establishment in 1895.

The aims and objectives of the BANSW are:

- * The promotion of musical knowledge and fellowship within all bands in the State, especially in community bands.
- * To co-ordinate banding activities and represent bands for the protection of their interests, both individually and collectively with other organisations and in other States.
- * To facilitate workshops, seminars, master-classes, festivals and competitions with other activities to generally improve and develop musical performance within bands in the State.
- * To encourage, foster and develop community interest and appreciation of bands, band music and other related interests.

Our current membership extends to approximately 4600 individual musicians across 115 bands in regional and metropolitan centres around NSW. Our membership demographic ranges from 7 years through to 90 years, from all walks of life, occupations and is as diverse as the communities we are a part of and make music in.

The BANSW is also a member of the National Band Council of Australia, which is made up of representatives from our sister organisations from Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, and Tasmania.

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

Strong Institutions

Community Bands are and have been central to the fabric of our societies, particularly in regional towns. The local community band is a safe place where diverse members of a community can come together with a single purpose – to make great music.

In being a part of a community band, its members become a part of a family of equals where the expectation on all members is that they rehearse and contribute to the best of their individual abilities, support each other's development, share experiences and knowledge all in with the aim of creating something as a collective that is beautiful. It is a shared emotional response, a shared learning and creative experience in a supportive environment where community is central.

Our community bands have taken a significant hit through the Covid experience. There is great tenacity and strength in the movement. The need for people to come together and be a part of community, the need to experience that feeling of fellowship and the need to make music has proven to be strong, but our bands are struggling, particularly financially as support from local councils has tightened and after two and a half years of almost no income but continuing ongoing expenses. This has left many band organisations in a very dire financial situation.

Historically, as community-based volunteer not-for-profit organisations, community music organisations have relied on membership fees, donations and proceeds from busking and the occasional Bunnings BBQ and the goodwill of its members for the funds required just to cover the required bills to keep the lights on.

This leaves very little in reserve for the purchase of equipment, new music, instrument repairs or new instruments and uniforms or venue hire for concerts. More often than not, there is little, or no funds left available to engage tutors and other music professionals who could be engaged as mentors or to establish a youth program or relationships with schools, etc...

For most volunteer not-for-profit community music organisations, these last items only happen when there is a member of the band and community who has the time available to volunteer to make these things happen, or at the added expense of the membership of the band.

A strong community music sector would require funding being made available to community bands, orchestras, and incorporated not-for-profit, volunteer music organisations to assist with covering the basic expenses of rent, rates, electricity, etc... which would allow the bands to focus on performances and adding more value and contributions to their local communities, focus on establishing relationships with music programs in the education system, and, to plan for a future rather than worrying about how they get through to next month.

A strong community music sector is necessary to create a strong professional sector. Community is the audience for the Professional, Community is the nursery for the future of the Professional, and, in many cases, those in professional musical careers owe their start and all they know to what they learned in a community band or music group.

A Place for Every Story

All people have a place in a community music organisation. They are safe places for all, whether you are a person of determination, a person of indigenous background, a person from a cultural and linguistically diverse background, or a person who is from a mainstream sector of the community, your story adds to the richness of the shared experience of making great music.

Music making and the language of music is a shared experience which does not discriminate. The contributions from all members of a volunteer not-for-profit community music organisations are the same regardless of your cultural background, physical abilities or sexual or gender orientation.

The music we perform is often reflective of the stories in our lives. The emotional experiences we all share are borne out in the music we make and as we learn and master new skills, we support further growth in others and share the excitement and achievement in performing new works, learning, and enhancing new skills and enjoying that shared experience.

As safe places, community music organisations teach respect, equality, and self-discipline. They are places of family where life-long friendships are established and maintained. As a result, they are places where high moral and community values are evident, with very low instances of anti-social and criminal behaviour, low instances of drug abuse, better self-esteem, a reduction in depression and mental illness, enhanced social cohesion, better social interactions and cross generational interactions, compassion and cooperation and improved emotional wellbeing.

One of the main challenges faced by volunteer not-for-profit community music organisations is securing our futures. The largest issue is the relationship (or lack there-of) between School and Education system-based music programs with community music organisations.

The youth in our movement is vital to the survival of community music and it is a great tragedy that so often, the cycle is broken. There are thousands and thousands of kids learning and growing into great musicians who experience and share the love and joy of music making through their school years, then at the end of their education, that is all set away. Some may return later in life, which is wonderful to see when that occurs, but the tragedy is when that connection is broken at the end of school and the great musician stops making music.

The opportunity is always there for all to continue to be a part of a music community, to continue to enjoy and share their love of making music and to continue to contribute but for some reason, there is a very real barrier between Education and Community which exists. Sometimes that barrier is successfully breached by some amazing passionate people, but so often it is not, representing so many missed opportunities.

Changes in education where School Music Programs and their success are not just measured by the size of the program and exam results but where they are also measured by their engagement with community organisations are necessary to see both an improvement in the contribution to society from those School Music Programs and would ensure the success and future of the Community organisation.

Reaching the Audience

Brass, Wind and Pipe Bands have a great place in our wider community as we perform in public in parks, at fairs and shows, markets, parades, events, and commemorations and at a myriad of concerts and performances to a general public audience, often for free and at no charge to the public.

All the above speaks to audiences, reaching existing and new audiences, engaging and musically educating audiences, sharing musical experiences and improving the mental, physical and emotional health of our communities.

The statement above about “A healthy community music sector is vital to the success and health of a Professional music sector” applies to our audiences as well.

Community Bands and orchestras provide a local experience. They provide a general public audience with an opportunity to experience and enjoy locally an artform which they may not otherwise experience. Community provides the opportunity for audiences to hear new music, to become engaged and to grow in their knowledge of works and professionals. It provides an opportunity for the general listening public to better understand and appreciate a higher musical artform which then translates into a stronger and larger audience pool for the professional sector to engage with.

Access to social media has seen promotional opportunities increase, but all promotional opportunities come with a cost, which, as described above, is often outside the purview of the community sector. Increasing audiences would help to make community music organisations audiences more viable and increase their relevance and value to their local communities.

Again, Federal funding to this sector is needed. Funding would mean that community music organisations would be able to afford advertising and promotional opportunities for concerts and performances, establish and maintain Youth and other developmental and outreach programs, venues, etc...

Funding to Peake bodies would mean that we could create training and guidance programs for such things as: How to create, manage and sustain Youth programs and relationships with the school systems, how to create and “do” media and promotion of events, provide real guidance on how to manage relationships between the community organisation and Local Government as well as provide governance and policy guidance.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

Our National Cultural Policy needs to ensure that the volunteer not-for-profit community music sector is seen and supported equally and in line with the professional sector. There is an opportunity now where Community Music Organisations can truly become the glue that binds together the wide and various aspects of our Australian society, but to do that successfully, Volunteer Not-for-profit Community Music Organisations can no longer be locked out from Federal support as it currently is.

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