

**Submission
No 693**

SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

Name: Mr Matthew McMahon

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To the Joint Select Committee on Sydney's night time economy,

I am a musician and educator and have been performing, recording and teaching professionally since 1993. I appear on ninety albums of original creative music including ten as a leader or co-leader and have conducted thousands of public performances here and abroad during this time.

Sydney is an international embarrassment when it comes to its night life. When I travel overseas to perform in major cities like Tokyo, New York or Dublin I become immersed in a thriving world of concerts, events, bands in bars, etc. In Sydney it has become harder and harder for musicians to survive in an environment where the industry is beset with many challenges.

When the guitarist John Wardle returned from overseas a few years ago he was horrified at what had become of Sydney. Venues were closed or had exchanged live entertainment for poker machines. This was a tragic period which saw many musicians, venue operators, and presenters with many years of dedication and knowledge simply cease their operations, to the great diminishment of the whole community. Many musicians resorted to performances in homes or underground spaces in the face of a prohibitive legislative environment. John's ceaseless advocacy has helped shine the path for some sensible legislative improvements that benefit not just the creators of culture but the whole community. Sydney really felt the effects of this as small venues like 505, Lazybones and Foundry 616 were able to emerge in the ensuing years

Knee-jerk policy making since has had terrible consequences. As soon as the lock-out laws were enacted I lost a weekly late-night gig at the Spice Cellar in Elizabeth St in Sydney. This was a jazz trio where we encouraged the young musicians of Sydney to join in – providing a great opportunity of inter-generational exchange and expression. Fans, students, and professionals were all drawn together by our love of music. We were informed that the lock out laws made this unviable and we lost the gig as soon as the laws came in.

No doubt there are many similar stories. It takes many years to foster the environment of expression, learning and sharing that allows art and culture to develop and thrive. Sydney is underperforming in this space. We have chosen to support gambling over culture.

I have never allowed obstacles to deter me in my pursuit of playing music. I have sat on the committees of various presenting organisations, a community radio station etc and continued to remain positive in the face of apathy from those in power. In my own case my life in music has exceeded any of my expectations. But I don't rely on Sydney's economy. Some artists with whom I perform play much more in Melbourne than Sydney – even with the cost of flights and hotel rooms it make more sense than banging one's head against the wall of Sydney.

The discussion of Sydney's "night time economy" infers financial exchange. Improvements to Sydney's laws would not only help the dollars and cents of cultural industries. A more important "economy" is the exchange between people of their ideas, feelings and deepest expressions. The joy of listening to and participating in music is not supplementary to a good life. It is the essence of life. For thousands of years people have gathered to celebrate life in all its complexity with music and culture. This needs to be supported, encouraged and fostered. It brings joy, expresses sadness and creates communities. Sydney, a major international city, is really lagging here but it can be turned around to become a much more vibrant, alive and thriving hub of culture with some sensible reform of some clumsy laws.

Yours Faithfully

Matt McMahon.