

**Submission
No 303**

**INQUIRY INTO THE MUSIC AND ARTS ECONOMY IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Mrs Jessica Knaus

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Jess Knaus, Newcastle NSW

ABOUT MYSELF

Thank you for opening this opportunity to share ideas and thoughts on our music industry! My name is Jess Knaus – I'm a musician, producer and vocal/piano coach. I'm from Sydney originally so I'm involved in the music scene in Sydney, but also moved to Newcastle around 4 years ago so have some local experience to speak from as well.

I perform in a number of covers bands across The Hunter and Newcastle region – bars, pubs, function rooms, weddings, festivals and other events. I'm a singer and a keyboardist. I'm also an original artist writing, recording, releasing and performing my own music (independently). Alongside this performance throughout the week I tutor vocals and piano to around 30 students. I'm also consistently doing studio work for other individuals and for my own projects – helping record EP's, help write/perform on new songs or creating tracks for different projects. For all of my work I am sub-contracted, so all administration around my performance/production/tuition I also manage.

For ease of understanding I'll group my issues/thoughts under a few key headlines as you'll see below. I've highlighted my suggestions or ideas for tackling issues in bold and underline.

COVERS

Creating More Varied Music Venues

The music scene in Newcastle is predominantly owned and dictated to by pub life and culture. Musically this means no original music (or very, very little) in local pubs. I make the majority of my income performing by doing covers gigs, as do many of my close friends. Venue owners and punters don't want to hear anything but the same songs they've listened to for a very long time – so essentially there is no original music in pubs and every band needs to have a somewhat similar list of songs. If you don't provide the kinds of songs they want – you never get booked again. If you don't provide this list of songs from the beginning, you won't have the opportunity to be booked from the start.

Private venues owners are looking to provide services to their patrons that ensure consistent business – I completely understand this. **Potentially a good way to tackle this is to provide further venue opportunities outside of these covers-driven pubs/venues where more variety of styles and songs can be played.** This may potentially encourage individuals to listen to more varieties of music, not just 'Horses' every time you go down to the pub on a Friday night. It would be great to have at least one venue where musical creativity is encouraged and people come to see variety, not the same songs again and again. This could become quite an

attractive project where in each town or city the State Government funds a small venue to encourage creativity and new music to come from that city – what a great marketing campaign for the NSW Government supporting the arts! New music pouring from these venues could advertise each city/town and its talents – another way to bring people to these areas but also continue to encourage creative activities across the State. Turn it into a competition if you want and showcase the talent across each area – what an amazing showcase of talent you would see!

Gambling/Pokies Facility Placement

Likewise these venues have prioritised gambling and pokies – this reflects on where bands are placed and the space they have to perform (which sometimes is within view of blokes yelling for their horse to win on the TV). This results with bands being just another expense that gets setup in the back corner and basically ignored until they play ‘Horses’. **It would be helpful to establish a minimum distance between gambling/pokies facilities and music performance areas to ensure music is not just another “thing” happening in a very noisy/already occupied room.** The way I’ve seen this work really well is where all gambling/pokies facilities are placed in a walled room, out of sight of the bands – this does work well to keep these activities separate and avoid frustrating overlap.

Payment Minimums

Venues also prioritise the service of food and drinks as the main money-maker for their businesses (understandably). This creates an overall attitude that music is just an expense for the venue, not something that “makes” them money or should be treated with more value. Thus in some venues (not all) bands are paid very little. **It would be great to establish a state-wide minimum payment for booking artists/bands to perform, and my suggestion would be to base it on a per band member basis.** Reason being is that most venues set their own budget and will not change their rate whether they have a duo performing, or a 5-piece band. This budget does not budge and is expected to stretch across all band members. As an example, a venue may pay \$700 for a band on a Friday night – for a duo they each make \$350, but for a 5-piece band each individual walks away with \$140 – and that’s before their booking agency takes out their fee as well so this amount becomes less.

ORIGINAL MUSIC

Original music in Australia is a tough scene for independent acts – in comparison to Europe and America, Australia really falls behind in this area – especially in a live sense. The music scene for original music falls under 3 main categories – the major commercial scene (major label acts from Sony etc), the minor commercial scene (Triple J etc) and independent acts (who run/fund everything themselves).

As a fully independent original artist it is incredibly hard to get your music out there, especially to perform it. I’m working on this all the time and with very little support. As an example I recently tried to perform at a live local music night where 3 artists were booked to perform (I was the main act). The night was cancelled (sadly by

email – not even a phone call) as the venue owner didn't think enough individuals had booked tickets to come along (without taking into consideration that most Newcastle music lovers don't book tickets ahead of time, they simply turn up at the door). The focus was on how much money could be made even before the event had taken place, not on the fact that 3 artists were about to share their music.

Since this cancellation I've been organizing an original music performance on my own in place of this cancelled gig and getting ready for when my new album is released (which I've funded and organised myself). To book an appropriate venue I'm looking at roughly \$1,450.00 to book the venue, pay my musicians and hire sound equipment minimum. This cost is outlaid before ticket sales and given my previous gig booking experience for my original music this cost will be my own expense to bear (as per my EP release in Sydney in 2013). My options are thus either to trust a venue to run it for me and hope they don't cancel it (as experienced above) or front up a big sum of money and do it myself. Imagine looking at these options and being a young musician trying to share your music with the world! This cost is far beyond the reach of many musicians and performers, which is why so many just don't do anything live – they simply can't afford it, or know that venues just won't have them without a huge crowd in attendance.

My recommendation is to offer reduced but consistent booking fee rates for musicians. This could fall under the State Funded music venue idea mentioned above. Again the music that is released in these venues could be promoted as a great thing for State Government, showing the support given to local musicians and burgeoning artists from each town. Essentially you'd be creating a music program across the state – it would be brilliant.

Underage Venues – Encourage More Young Musicians

As a piano and vocal tutor I work with a number of young people who are learning to craft, write and perform their own music. I'm in the process of organizing an original music event for 2 of my students to perform their own music (one of whom is underage) and there really is not a venue locally offering them the chance to start performing their music publically, thus I'm helping them organise it in a local space for hire. Without the support for local young musicians there will be no future of music – which is why I'm so determined to help them do this. I'm volunteering my time to do this as there simply is no one to help guide them. **I'd love to see an encouragement of underage venues/venues that encourage new young musicians to perform their music.**

When I book venues for my original music the expectation is that I've already been performing and have "a following", but if no venues allow me to perform because of cancellation or too much expense, how can I have this? How can young people have this experience as well without opportunities through venues to do so? Without these windows of experience music is basically seen as a dead end for young people, thus so many are encouraged not to pursue it or they try and it simply leads nowhere.

The “Netflix” Effect

With the surge of home video and music content through streaming services such as Netflix/Stan/Amazon/Apple TV etc more and more people are choosing to stay home, sit on the couch and watch TV. This has greatly impacted on the live scene for all areas of the arts, not just music. **Some kind of marketing campaign could really help encourage people to yes enjoy these at-home streaming services, but also get out of the house and watch something live!** Even in small towns like Newcastle there is so much live music and musicians ready to perform, but every potential audience member is sitting at home watching the newest season of an 8-series TV show.

It’s also a major health priority that we don’t just go to work, come home and sit on the couch all night!

More Public Events to Build A Culture of Music

In some country towns something like a music festival can really boost a culture of music. E.g. the country music festival in Tamworth. **A really great way to encourage a splurge of music is to provide funding for 1-3 day music festivals where musicians of all styles and genres are showcased to locals (along with food and other activities) to help create a love and enjoyment of music.**

In a town like Newcastle if you can build support for local activities like this you create such a passion to support fellow locals – there’s a real drive towards this kind of supportive community in towns like this (and big cities as well). Aussie’s love to say that an artist came from their town (as locals here consistently talk about the band ‘Silverchair’ which came from Newcastle). This is a really great opportunity to spark a love of live music in some towns where it’s being run by private venues, or worst case, simply dying out.

Residential Development and Music Venues

This is a major problem in Newcastle at the moment, but is also an issue Australia wide. There is a surge of residential and private development taking place in the city at the moment and the track record has shown that as soon as these developments are occupied, complaints about music venues next door pour and venues are being forced to limit their sound considerably, and in the worst cases, shut down. I have played in a local venue here where the venue owner expects you to provide a good dance floor for patrons, but not by using a drumkit (which is near impossible) as local apartment resident complaints restrict him to using a sound measuring app on his phone, and limit the amount of music played in his venue.

In the search for money a lot of developers are being enabled to build apartments on top of or next to music venues that have been operating for years. Once these apartments go up the usual process is people move in, make a complaint, and the venue has all the responsibility. This should not be the expectation. **Developers must make clients aware BEFORE selling/renting that a venue is in the vicinity and that noise is expected. Likewise sound proofing a venue to provide for these new**

development is VERY expensive and should be financially supported by developers, not the venue owner. Running a venue is already very costly, especially in regards to the licensing and service of alcohol which is already stretching the budget of what venues can afford. Requiring them to then also pay for the sound proofing of a venue that is by no means their own fault, but rather the fault of developers, is just not right. Financial support needs to be given whether by the developers themselves, or by State Government. These venues will not be able to cope financially, and will either shut down due to complaints, or take on HUGE loans to accommodate this. This really is not supporting small business at a local level – it's simply increasing financial and operating pressures. I would really encourage taking on advice and consultation from venue owners in this area.

THANK YOU!

Thanks so much for reading through my experience and ideas! I really value that State Government has come to those of us in the industry already – that alone shows focus and attention is given to this industry at a critical time. Thank you!