

**Submission
No 322**

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

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NSW Inquiry into Music

My name is Allon Silove. I am the Director of the 90Degree Studio Academy

at Musos Corner (www.90deg.com.au - www.musoscorner.com.au) in Newcastle, NSW – a music and music production school.

I am 40 years old and have been learning, playing, teaching, performing, writing, recording, producing, staging, touring, supporting, sponsoring, mentoring and contributing to, music and the music industry in Australia for over 30 years.

I am not a rock-star, nor a superstar, nor am I a titan of the music industry.

But I have succeeded and survived as a musician, music producer and music educator in NSW.

Musos Corner is one of Australia's largest music retailers, in business for over 50 years.

We sell instruments and just about everything else that musicians (of all ages and skill levels) may require for their journey or career.

I say journey because that's what music is to musicians; a lifelong artistic endeavour that allows us to create and collaborate with each other in ways most people (non-musicians) will never understand. Music is our story.

I only use the term 'journey' as opposed to 'career' as a means to highlight to you the importance of understanding the vast difference between Music and the Music Industry; Music is a distinctly human endeavour that brings us joy and connects us to each other; The Music Industry is an overlaid paradigm of modern Free Market economic principles that forces artistic people to justify and define their creativity as some form of marketable commodity, thereby reducing an art-form down to something that conforms to economic rationalism.

In order to understand the current state of the music ecosystem in NSW 2018, it is vitally important that you understand this difference between Music and Music Industry.

An ecosystem is defined as either

“ a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.”

or

“a complex network or interconnected system.”

The ecosystem of music in NSW exists as both of these.

But how you (Music NSW) choose to define this ecosystem – and the inherent hierarchy of its constituent parts - will inevitably affect your findings (see Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle). If you are focussing only on the ‘fiscal’ or ‘financial impact’ of music, your entire attempt to derive good policy based on the public feedback you have requested will be skewed towards a false model.

To put it simply, music in NSW isn’t just about the money. It is a vital part of our identity and our culture.

It is with this potential for inaccuracy in mind that I implore you to begin your assessment by justly weighting your definition of the ‘music ecosystem’ with the cultural and sociological significance of music itself as the key and base factor (greatest contributor), followed the by an Education policy, a Social Support policy and then Civic Planning.

It would be in the following hierarchy:

1. Cultural Policy >
2. Education Policy >
3. Social Support Policy >
4. Civic Planning and Infrastructure Policy

What does this mean?

1. Start with writing a Cultural Policy.

You have to codify and write policy that enshrines the cultural and sociological value of music to us, as Australians, living in NSW in 2018.

It is vital that we acknowledge the history and affect music has had in shaping our identity

(Sydney is home to the Opera House, an icon for our entire nation to the world; Major Acts tour through Sydney and across our state constantly; Great artists, bands and composers have been born here and constantly tour this broad country and even internationally; Hundreds of venues still stage or present music today).

Music speaks to us in a way no other art form can. It is a means of expressing ourselves that connects us as players, creators and listeners. Take away music from the world and life would be – in my opinion – unbearable.

There are two key cultural signifiers in Australia:

1. The value of music as an art-form to our society and daily lives
2. The value of original Australian music to our cultural identity

Music, as identified separately from other art-forms such as theatre or visual arts, has become an inherent part of daily life in Australia as a society. From music as a consumable product to the personal listening tastes of each individual to its prolific exploitation in everything from film through to online advertising and your shopping experience at the local supermarket, music has pervaded every aspect of our lives. Remove music from our lives for one day and the world would be a very quiet and boring place.

Australian music has itself played a huge part in forming our cultural identity, for ourselves and the broader world. We love our own music, particularly when it symbolises ideals like the aussie rock mythology of being 'working class' music with pub-born roots. Our musical story has always been one born out of an urban culture rather than a metropolitan one.

It is for this reason that your first recommendation must be to ratify the recognition of the role music has played in the creation of our culture and the broader impacts of this recognition; that the value of music in NSW in 2018 is inherently part of how we define our lives and therefore cannot be valued as anything less than part of our identity.

2. Next, acknowledge the role education plays in the future of music.

There are three types of education to mention:

- a) Traditional
- b) Self Directed
- c) Public Awareness

A. Traditional Education:

Whether you're listening to music on a streaming service, watching your favourite Netflix show or walking past one of those innocuous signs outside a pub that says 'Live Music' – despite the fact that the venue is brimming with pokies and 80" LCD screens for the TAB - we are generally still aware that it is people (artists) who are creating the music for all of those platforms.

The writing of that music didn't happen over night. No one woke up of a morning only to miraculously discover they can suddenly and un-explicably play an instrument and compose music - let alone good music!

It takes years to learn how to play and even longer (a lifetime?) to learn how to compose or create great music.

Neurological science has already proven that the study or practice of music is one of the most mentally beneficial activities a person can participate in. Music Therapy is a massively growing industry.

Music makes us better.

That we have an entire multi-billion dollar sector of Australian business known as the Music Industry (as separate from the Live Entertainment and Media Industries) is not evidence of a healthy musical culture in Australia but rather evidence of only how the market – business - exploits music for its own need ie. profit.

Fact: Music instrument sales worldwide are on the decline.

Prediction: In the not so distant future we may not have any new musicians!

The future of music may just be that it is something that anyone can create on an app, the great bands, singers and composers of yester-year becoming nothing more than footnote in history.

No Mozarts. No Beethovens. No Beatles. No Rock n Roll. No Beyonce.

A possible future where we are doomed to be entertained by online CG pop-stars fabricated by a music industry devoid of musicians and dictated by corporations using focussed-group demographics based on Youtube's latest algorithm of 'what's popular' (possibly a CG hybrid of Justin Beiber and the cutest cat videos?!)

If you don't write policy that supports ongoing funding for meaningful music education – in schools, music institutions and academies, public programs, etc. – we will not have any musicians for the future. Many musicians supplement their income by delivering music education too.

B. Self Directed: Get Them While They Are Young

Please note: In 2018, more young people are producing recorded music than performing live music. My use of the term 'Youth Venue' precludes the concept that these spaces are live venues AND studios and need to facilitate both sides of this equation. (Thanks to digital technology, we don't need million dollar studios, just laptops and some basic equipment.)

The ability for young, under-age people to present their own music in a self-directed way by having access to Youth oriented venues or studios is directly related to the future of NSW music. Plant the seeds and the flowers will eventually grow. This shouldn't be a difficult concept to understand yet we have seen the closure of nearly every youth venue in NSW over the last 15 years!

It is unacceptable!

Youth venues/studios create opportunities for young people to contribute to music and the music industry that is nearly without quotient. Youth venues are an invaluable resource to the music industry!

If you want music in NSW to grow, create policy that funds the opening and long-term maintenance of more Youth venues/studios or access to venues/studios for the staging and production of music.

Also, the value inherent in giving government support to empower young people through Youth music venues/studios (a self directed approach as opposed to the anachronistic approach of 'I know what young people need!') will only aid in creating a future generation of NSW citizens who are keen to contribute to their society. Remember, at the heart of music is collaboration. Music connects people and leads to greater social harmony. Again, music can make us better.

C. Public Awareness: Help Educate Pub Owners

Venues need to be educated on the value of having a diverse live music scene as part of their business.

The cover band culture currently prevalent in NSW is a very large problem in this regard as it presents very little music or genre diversity to the public.

Great Aussie (original) music has always stemmed from a music 'scene' or venue that supported and allowed local resident musicians to stage events and music that appeals to their sub-culture, not the mainstream.

In other words, allowing local music sub-cultures to present their music in a self-directed way.

Once upon a time in Australia, many publicans across the country acted as the curators of their own local music scene; they took a keen interest in who played on their stage and whom they invited back. Now days, there are less career 'publicans' and more business consortium pub owners. They have handed over the power of live music curating to the booking agents (an area of the NSW music industry that also is in desperate need of regulation. The amount of conflict-of-interest arrangements that occur with booking agents who simultaneously represent both the Acts – and their fees - and manage the Venues' entertainment budgets is ridiculous!)

This act of cultural 'curation' is one that cannot be under-valued.

In an online world where we are now bombarded with more advertising pollution than ever, our local music content is being lost beneath a deluge of world-wide content. There is a false sense of democratisation that stems concurrently from the ideals of 'freedom information' on the internet and the free-market economic philosophy that 'the market will sort itself out' and therefore the 'cream will rise to the top' in terms of which music acts succeed in not only grabbing our attention but also our dollar.

The truth is, all this really does is add to the overall confusion and ignorance of the general public as to what it actually means to be a musician in 2018.

We need curators of our local and original music scenes. Our local and original music scenes need more platforms and opportunities to be heard.

And money is a poor curator. It is no replacement for our aesthetic.

We therefore need a policy that could:

- help venues identify to the public as supporting original Australian music by
- recognising NSW official Original Music Venues (OMV)
- provide financial, funded or tax incentive support to the venues for identifying as an OMV and hosting regular original music events.
- possibly create 'Local Music Quotient' Cultural Officers or the like – people who act on behalf of a local music content quota and monitor the amount of local music present at these venues – the frequency and diversity of music.

By identifying venues as being official Original Music Venues, this will aid in educating the public as to the difference between a cover band venue and a pub that clearly supports local original music and advertises the acts.

Let the public decide which has greater value.

Without this type of support, we will see further proliferation of the types of 'homogenised' style pubs, clubs and venues where the only point of difference is their geographical location or which night of the week they do half price schnitzels!

3. Social Support Policy

This is where things get difficult and politics really enters into the equation.

Being a musician in NSW in 2018 is really hard.

We are generally looked down upon as indulgent ideological layabouts who have had it easy some how – because we are creative? – and should just get a 'real job'.

Our inability to all be Ed Sheerans, Adeles or pop-superstar sensations overnight tends to be seen as a personal failure on our part by most of society. Even from our own families. The bar is set very high for musicians in terms of the common perception of what success in our industry looks like, at least from the outside.

The truth is that most musicians struggle to find work and draw a steady income from playing, writing or recording music alone. Most musicians either teach music or will inevitably work in other non-music related industries to support themselves.

This is where the problem lies in the conflict between music and music industry.

There are more people with full-time well-paid employment in the Music Industry and its services in NSW than there are full-time employed (self or otherwise) musicians. The system is against us.

Yet, at the heart of the music industry is the music. Without it, the industry would not exist.

So here we have an industry that receives all the government support inherent in being an industry while the source of said industry, creative musicians / artists, receives almost no support at all.

This must change.

Please help us. Present to our government a definition of who are that we have them stop treating us like we are unrealistic and ungrateful children when we ask for government support to be musicians.

We need to be recognised.

Our skills deserve recognition.

The time it takes to become a musician and create as a musician needs to be recognised.

The essential value of our music and our cultural contribution to the identity of Australia deserves to be recognised.

The government is happy to provide support to the music industry that exploits our creative fruit yet for some reason, they don't want to give us any of the basic sustenance we require to grow that fruit in the first place.

It is almost as if they don't want us – artists – to exist at all.

The reason music still exists is only because we, as musicians are almost compelled by our passion for music to create it, regardless of the barriers.

We are essentially tied to a wheel of exploitation.

Help us.

A. Recognise Musicians

Write policy that recognises a 'Musician' as a legitimate career and a business who requires government support to thrive.

If you register as a musician today with Centrelink, you will be told to select a 'real' job interest instead.

But how can you track the success of a musician, you might say? Where are the KPI's?

It's easy to see veritable success for musicians; We have websites; We collaborate; We work from contract to contract, project to project; We are some of the greatest networkers in this country.

If you need checks and balances in order to ascertain who is being productive and who is skimming the system, simply follow the online social media campaigns and read the reviews.

Unfortunately, we also hit periods of low employment or opportunity.

Support us through these periods with welfare assistance and we will continue to thrive and supply the NSW music industry with the music it requires to sustain itself and grow into the future.

This is basic economics. Support the means of production and production will increase. We will all grow together.

Or you can say goodbye to the Music Industry.

B. Provide Social Services – mental health

Having read the previous point, it should come as no surprise then that our industry has one of the highest rates of suicide, stress related illness and depression.

Give us policy that recognises we require government subsidised, easy access to health services if we identify as a Musician.

4. Civic Planning and Infrastructure Policy

If you have followed the proposed hierarchy of policy writing, by the time you arrive at Civic Planning and Infrastructure, the solutions are relatively simple.

If music is now recognised as a part of NSW culture, any civic planning will have to factor in the protection and support of this culture for all projects.

- building codes will need to reflect the protection of already established music venues

- civic planning will need to consider either the protection of existing music culture in a given precinct or the advent of music supportive performance spaces be they venues, youth centres, studios or otherwise.

Summary

In short, this all comes down to a prioritising for the protection of culture over business and politics. Our politicians come and go in four year cycles; music has been around since the birth of humanity. It will hopefully outlive anyone who reads this and it will certainly out live the short-sighted policies of those who do not value the power of our imagination and creativity.

We do not remember civilizations for their politics, budget forecasts or tax laws. Civilization is measured by how much import that civilization places upon that which truly makes us human; our compassion; our knowledge: and our art.

Music makes us better. Lets make things better for everyone in NSW.