Submission No 43

INQUIRY INTO STRUCTURE AND FUNDING OF THE ARTS, MUSIC, NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY, AND TRANSPORT PORTFOLIOS

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PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 6 – TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

Inquiry into the structure and funding of the arts, music, night-time economy, and transport portfolios

Dear Committee members,

As a professional musician of good standing and 40 years of experience, I write to address terms of reference items **d** (i), (ii), **h** & **k**.

Given the size of the arts and music sector, its cultural importance, and its huge contribution to the economy of NSW, firstly, can we be reassured that under the current ministerial arrangements, the music portfolio in particular is given the appropriate focus to ensure that the greater participation and contribution of *both* the artform and the industry are reflected in the return on investment from the state budget.

By this, I mean being directly relevant to the people who play musical instruments, and I draw the Committee's focus to this as you traverse this process currently.

There is never any consultation between Sound NSW and the vast number of working musicians in this state. As a result, the NSW Government is mainly unaware of the needs of musicians.

For example, the consultation on the Sound NSW Contemporary Music Strategy[1] was conducted in-house, with direct input only from the board at that time and invitation-only focus groups organised by the agency, and no public engagement, despite the website strongly referencing collaboration narratives.

The strategy guides a $103 million investment from the NSW Government this term; therefore, an analysis of transparency and inclusion in how this policy was implemented would be insightful here. In 2023, there was extensive open consultation on the Creative Communities policy for Create NSW; however, to the best of the sector's knowledge, no open consultation was conducted with musicians like me or my many colleagues on the actual content of the Sound NSW Contemporary Music Strategy before it was released.

And it was the Opposition and the Greens who amended the NSW Government's Sound NSW board legislation earlier this year to include a definition of a musician and require three musicians now on the board, from the Government's single artist-only in its tabled bill.

As you can see, the actual players making the music have not received the broader inclusion that other sectors in the music industry enjoy through long-established networks and relationships with the current makeup of Sound NSW and the NSW Government.

[1] https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/sound-nsw/contemporary-music-strategy

But this is our career. Our community. Our art form. Our culture. Our income.

Every one of these musicians is a small business owner, and recent surveys show they are *not* thriving.

Consider the following statistics[2]:

- Nearly half earn less than $15,000 p/a
- 59% of gigs don't include superannuation
- 73% have tertiary-level musical qualifications
- 53% have more than 25 years of experience

Additionally:

- 57% are male
- 40% are female
- 3% Non-binary and others categories
- 84% of professional musicians are over the age of 35
- 3% are Indigenous Australians
- 15% identify as LGBTQIA+

The first 3 points above should be alarming to this Committee and to the agencies in question.

We have a music sector where the majority of professional musicians are tertiary-educated, yet they cannot earn anything near the minimum wage from their skills. So, how is this cohort a) being supported and b) not being undermined by NSW Government programs?

Instead of programs that focus on genuine needs or aim to foster audience development that leads to something akin to full employment for musicians, Sound NSW appear to run programs that actively discriminate against many musicians in favour of a social justice agenda that acts as a barrier to inclusion unless they fall in under a small list of boxes to tick.

Grant applications request details about an applicant's sexuality ("Do you identify as LGBTQIA+?") and gender identity. Applicants to the Sound NSW Board have been asked the same questions about declaring their sexuality publicly previously, which the Committee can also verify.

These details are neither relevant to nor an indicator of the quality of the applicant's work or their need.

The question for the Committee is whether the NSW Government is pushing professional musicians to the bottom of the list through these grant programs if they don't comply with these conditions. My concern is that these questions can be used to exclude people based on sexuality, age, ethnicity, race, and gender, if they don't tick the boxes.

The Committee could look at this by comparing the actual demographics of the music industry, as determined by research, with the budget allocation across NSW Government priority areas disbursed through Sound NSW programs.

Behind this agenda are assumptions around discrimination within the music industry towards women, musicians who identify as LGBTQIA+ and Indigenous Australians. The research tells us that bullying *on no particular basis*, and *age-based discrimination* are the most prevalent forms of unfair treatment in the Australian music sector[3].

It is my direct experience that musicians are among the least discriminatory people in society. Personally, when hiring other musicians, I care about the following details only:

- Can the musician play their instrument at the level required?
- Are they reliable?
- Are they easy to be around for long periods of time?

[2] Musicians Australia 2025 Survey Report
[3] Ibid, 78

For myself, and most musicians, race, gender, and sexuality don't come into the decision-making process. Therefore, it is problematic to primarily tailor grant programs that seek to fix a problem that doesn't exist at anything like the levels of alarm that these grant programs assume.

Unfortunately, many musicians in NSW are also unaware of the existence of Sound NSW, as the programs run by these agencies rarely enhance their professional activities.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no open public events or online forums where musicians can engage. There are no entry points unless you are in the know and are an associate of the agency, and no inclusive outreach programs directly targeting diverse genre instrumental musicians to be involved.

In a recent financial year, Sound NSW underspent their budget by an incredible $13.2 million. If they really wanted to support the working musicians of NSW, they could have spent that amount on a grass-roots program that got live music into many bars/clubs/pubs/retail/small bars etc across the state.

Consider this simple example:

> 4 musicians @ $350 each = $1400
> Production and advertising = $600
> Total = $2000

This would result in a staggering 6,600 paid performances across the state, providing an incredible boost to working musicians, the cultural landscape, and the economy. Instead, we have the grant programs described above *and* Sound NSW giving significant money to majority foreign-owned music festivals.

These festivals *do not* provide musicians with ongoing or regular work.

The Committee might reflect on this, especially in terms of value for money/return on investment, as well as the equitable allocation of state budget music investment to residents across demographics in this state.

Surveys reveal only 9% of musicians receive any support from State government agencies[4] – this is simply too low a figure given the data surrounding musicians' incomes.

However, as perplexing as this might seem, *the vast majority of musicians do not regularly interact with the music industry*[5]. Of musicians surveyed, only 4% have a recording contract and 8% have a publishing contract[6]. So, even if the government is consulting with the music industry, it is not consulting with the majority of musicians.

Government, quite understandably, has found it easier to deal with organised business structures, but since 2023 the state government has dramatically expanded the public service to deploy the $103M allocation to the sector.

Therefore, alongside an evaluation of the return on investment from the Sound NSW $103M budget for musicians in NSW, we must establish policies and programs that are genuinely and more inclusive of people who play musical instruments, and reflect the diverse participation across a broad range of contemporary music genres and demographics.

We could start with the following:

1. The Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner (NSW) has previously conducted online stakeholder engagement sessions, such as "Open Mike Night", billed as a virtual forum where the Commissioner provides an update and listens to ideas from stakeholders. Sound NSW could follow this model and be more accessible to the broader sector than just to established industry associates and insiders by holding quarterly listening sessions focused on hearing from sector demographics that haven't been included, and where feedback is sought and will be followed up on.

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[4] Ibid, 62
[5] a heterogenous group of Record Labels, Music Publishers, Music Festivals, Touring Companies, Royalty Collection agencies and Artist Managers.
[6] Musicians Australia 2025 Survey Report, 35

2. Unlike VIC, WA, and QLD, NSW doesn't have a music sector awards event. By establishing the NSW Music Awards event, this could be a significant initiative to acknowledge both musicians and the industry, and by being inclusive, it would recognise the outstanding instrumentalists in the state.

Yours Sincerely,

Darren Heinrich