

27 February, 2026

To: Chair, Standing Committee on Social Issues

Submission: Inquiry into the state of live music in NSW

This inquiry into the state of live music in NSW is an opportunity to build on the potential created by five years of policy and program reform and deliver a truly fantastic live music scene for Sydney and the state.

Beneath the surface of Sydney's busy program of major touring acts, music and street festivals, established and grassroots talent, our live music sector remains under enormous pressure. Key factors driving this include the residual effects of lockdowns and lockouts on a generation of would-be music fans, the chronically unaffordable cost of housing and living for music workers and their audiences, the net loss of nearly 1000 live music venues since 2014 and sharply declining access to affordable rehearsal and recording space, along with a breakdown in the business model underpinning recorded music.

The NSW Government has been clear on its ambition to turn this around – abolishing the lockout laws, appointing the first ever Minister for the Night-time Economy and Music, establishing the 24 Hour Economy and Sound NSW agencies, supported by a wave of pioneering policy and program reform. This inquiry can help shape the next stage of work to build on that platform for the makings of a truly viable live music scene.

Who we are

The Committee for Sydney is an independent urban policy think tank. We are advocates for the whole of Sydney, focused on developing solutions to the most important problems our city faces. We are backed by 160 members representing key business, academic and civic organisations across Sydney. We advocate for policy and investment outcomes that shape the future of Greater Sydney. We work across six distinct and connected program areas, which include planning, mobility, resilience, economy, culture, and equity and fairness.

The Committee has a strong track record of research and advocacy on Sydney's night-time economy and creative culture, and views a thriving live music scene as being essential to our city's vibrancy, social connection and economic growth. This submission builds on key Committee for Sydney policy reports and submissions, including:

- [Submission on the Art of Tax Reform](#) (2025)
- [Making It In Sydney: Actions to provide more creative production space](#) (2024)
- [Gig Economy: Making Sydney a great city for live music](#) (2023)
- [A new look at culture: Submission on the NSW Culture Review](#) (2023)
- [Everyday Culture](#) (2023)
- [Western Sydney Progress and Prospects](#) (2023)
- [Sydney as a 24 Hour City](#) (2018).

In this submission, we address the inquiry's terms of reference by considering progress on recent government initiatives and outlining recommendations for supporting a sustainable live music sector.

Implementation progress and impact

The NSW Government has led transformative policy and program reform for the state's night-time economy, enacting most recommendations resulting from the 2017 Parliamentary Inquiry, commencing delivery of the 2024 Contemporary Music Strategy, and implementing several major tranches of 'vibrancy reforms,' many of which directly support live music. Together, these elements have moved NSW's policy landscape out of the crisis phase

and laid a foundation for renewed trust in government's capacity to deliver structural reform for the benefit of citizens.

The Committee for Sydney is proud to have supported this process with sustained policy research and advocacy related to major reforms, including repealing the lockout laws, new champion agencies (24 Hour Economy NSW, Sound NSW), support for a network of nightlife precincts through the Uptown program, venue protections, and a long tail of improvements on cost barriers, grants, local tour supports and industry skills development among others. These reforms reflect a decisive shift in the approach taken by government, from restrictive to enabling.

However, some important actions remain only partially fulfilled or yet to begin. Stark issues to resolve include housing affordability, access to recording and rehearsal space, loss of venues, and the financial precarity faced by music workers.

Our vision is for a fantastic live music scene

The following recommendations are framed against a central question:

How do we create a city with a fantastic live music scene that's loved by Sydneysiders and people across the state, and draws people from around the world?

The aim is not to simply replicate the old system of live music, which despite its energy could be unwelcoming and unsafe for some audiences. Reform should be geared to the huge potential created as Sydney's cultural life flexes and grows – sellout shows by Indian singer-songwriters and club DJs, obsessed fans mobbing K-pop stars, rising talent from southwest Sydney's drill and R&B scenes, Americana, ballroom, hardcore and the many other scenes and subcultures taking flight at any one time.

We should also be clear that some parts of this system will be independently commercially viable, but it's not always evident which:

- A case in point is the Enmore Theatre. This 1600 seat venue is booked solidly most of the year, with a 2021 study finding it generated \$39 million per annum for surrounding businesses – likely far more now, given its catalytic role in the development of Sydney's first Special Entertainment Precinct. But for all its success, the venue itself rarely makes a reasonable rate of return on its capital. It survives because the cost of its construction was financed generations ago. If it didn't already exist, it would never be built today. The problematic economics of live performance explain why the private sector hasn't built a large new venue in decades. It's why most existing theatres are either in government ownership, are incentivised by planning and land use concessions, or, like the Enmore, are legacies of previous generations.
- Another is the aspirations of music makers – while some are expected to become stars and never deliver on that ambition, others emerge from the obscurity of local scenes to major success.

The point is, we need to think about what we are supporting. The highest aspiration for a great live music scene is not just the potential of a bid for global stardom, though some of our music makers will and always have gone on to big global careers. A fantastic live music scene's true power is giving us the opportunity to hear our stories, our talent, the irresistible electricity in a buzzing local scene that draws us in and brings us together. The foundations of this kind of culture are in the many music makers, venues, labels, reviewers, promoters and others that make up local scenes and subcultures. And, importantly, the foundations are in the cultural infrastructure of venues, recording and rehearsal spaces, which whether they are held by governments, not-for-profits or private owners, clearly serve a significant public benefit – an important shift in perspective that should help shape policy considerations. That's where government policy can truly make a difference.

To realise this vision, the Committee for Sydney encourages this inquiry to consider these questions through five key domains:

- Fantastic live music venues
- Audiences turn out for live music

- Musicians can afford to live and make music
- A scene that is safe, welcoming and represents the community at large
- An economically strong music sector.

Recommendations:

1. A city with fantastic live venues: protect and expand the number of live music venues

Priorities:

1.1 Recognise live music venues as essential social infrastructure and ensure they are prioritised in strategic and statutory planning.

- Enable councils to expand development incentives and contributions mechanisms to include live music venues in new projects. Using the City of Sydney's Oxford Street cultural floor space bonus model as a precedent, develop a model LEP clause councils can use to allow use of developer contributions or planning bonuses when cultural or performance spaces are incorporated into developments. With a particular focus on priority targets, particularly addressing the current gap in small-to-medium sized venues.
- Introduce 'no net loss' of cultural space as a planning principle, meaning redevelopment of live music venues, rehearsal or recording spaces must replace them with an equivalent music or cultural space, preserving critical infrastructure for live music.

1.2 Support the establishment of more live music venues, with targeted programs to enable technical or compliance upgrades and other process requirements.

- Utilise public assets for music use – providing support to expand successful programs activating town halls, libraries, and other civic buildings as evening or weekend music venues. Libraries, youth centres, town halls – All ages. This could extend to targeted programs, such as funding for recording or rehearsal spaces in libraries and other community facilities.
- Create a venues future fund offering low-interest loans and grants for venue creation and upgrades. While some support exists, a comprehensive ring-fenced fund is still needed. An annual allocation of \$10 million could modernise dozens of venues and support projects such as mobile stages for outer suburbs, in partnership with local government and philanthropy.
- Pilot tax incentives to stimulate live music with a federal Live Music Tax Offset for venue costs, modelled after film and television offsets, and a state rebate for venue soundproofing.
- Create a standardised live music toolkit and ensure every council adopts core elements. This should include model DCP clauses (e.g. exempting small gigs from approval, raising objection thresholds, etc), standard noise management approaches, and guidance on supporting venue operators. People in key roles should take a 'yes' approach to enabling.
- Ongoing 'single window' support: ensuring there are no gaps between the successful rollout of the Hospitality Concierge in June 2025, and the more recent actions around a comparable cultural concierge, to ensure live music venues are explicitly supported. People in these key roles should take a 'yes' approach to enabling third party spaces and activations.

2. A city where big audiences turn out for live music: support audience development and growth

Priorities:

2.1 Roll out a coordinated campaign to rebuild the culture of attending live music after the serial disruption of lockouts followed by pandemic lockdowns.

- Back products that support audience growth – there is no one listings platform that will solve for the many different subcultures in live music, but emerging startups and targeted media, such as MyGigPass, Tixel, SydneyMusic.net, FBi Radio and Limelight magazine, are doing the job of making it easier to find out about music you like, and should be supported.
- Create live music vouchers using the Dine & Discover scheme as a precedent, to boost audience numbers among cost-sensitive groups. Delivering this via the Service NSW app would keep administration cost low. We recommend NSW Treasury to conduct a targeted trial in the next budget cycle.
- Mandate local content on music discovery platforms, particularly streaming services such as Spotify, Tidal and Apple Music, to serve up local music – as with domestic content requirements of broadcasters – using their granular understanding of listeners to serve up music they will like and live performance alerts when relevant.
- Targeted support for all ages events – is a crucial way to rebuild the culture of attending live music after the profound disruption of pandemic lockdowns on a generation of would-be fans.

2.2 Ensure systems are in place so that fans can get to venues.

- Responsive transport scheduling to support access to provide safe, efficient, reliable and frequent links to key precincts, with trains, light rail, buses, rideshare and bike share.

2.3 Build a culture of music through music education in NSW schools.

- Require 60 minutes of weekly, quality and sequential music education in all public primary schools, with increasing targets through to 100% coverage by 2031, backed by specialised accreditation and support for primary music teachers.

3. A city where musicians can afford to live and make music: address chronic affordability issues facing music workers

Priorities:

3.1 Provide targeted support to music makers and workers to afford to live in Sydney.

- Affordable living for creatives: Advocate and implement measures to reduce cost-of-living pressures on artists and music workers enabling them to remain in the industry, including recognising creative workers whose incomes align with affordable housing thresholds as eligible for affordable and key-worker housing programs.

3.2 Ensure music makers and workers can access affordable workspace.

- Establish co-located music hubs in strategic locations to provide affordable rehearsal, recording, office and performance space. By clustering resources and industry players, music hubs can foster collaboration and expand the geographic spread of Sydney's music scene. A pilot hub could be funded through the cultural infrastructure budget or in partnership with relevant third parties.
- Establish a Creative Land Trust with seed properties/capital, and support its engagement with philanthropists, developers and other governments to grow by acquiring or leasing properties for music and arts creative production. This Trust would secure affordable, long-term spaces for recording and rehearsal studios, among other creative practices, insulating them from commercial rent pressures.

4. A city that is safe, welcoming and represents the community at large

Priorities:

4.1 Ensure government programs, policies and outreach are tailored to ensure broad take-up, supporting the growth of Sydney's many diverse scenes and to develop those with potential.

- Clear and easy to follow communication – policy and programs, toolkits and guides translated into locally used languages, with a clear, applied focus and replicable case studies for non-technical audiences, supported by effective community outreach
- Targeted access programs – initiatives to support measures (such as cultural awareness or disability access programs) that feel welcomed and included.

4.2 Reduce pressures on people of colour, those from marginalised groups and broader music scenes through improved policing.

- Live music liaison officers: Designate specialised Police liaison officers (modelled on LGBTIQ+ liaison program) to work with music venues and event promoters on safety and compliance.

5. A city with an economically strong music sector: with career development, financial and other support

Priorities:

5.1 Provide financial and other support for music workers to be financially viable.

- Encourage private sector support by making music donations more attractive. A 150% tax deduction for cultural donations up to \$10,000 should be delivered federally. In the interim, a Matching Fund could match major private donations to music charities or venues dollar for dollar, leveraging untapped community goodwill.
- Tax exemption on arts prizes and grants from personal income tax, improving financial fairness and stability for individual artists.
- Explore a levy to fund live music support – different models could direct a small amount from large event tickets or hotel bed nights to fund live music support. If feasible, revenue could support small community events or emergency grants, filling gaps not covered by normal budgets.
- Pilot tax incentives¹ to stimulate live music with a federal Live Music Tax Offset for touring costs, modelled after film and television offsets, and a state rebate for regional tours. Advocacy should extend to creative project incentives and income averaging for artists.

5.2 Support thriving careers in music.

- Scale up training and mentorship, including industry-led programs such as Sound NSW's upskilling grants and TAFE/Skills NSW traineeships in live production. Support structured mentorships for emerging artists, venue managers, and music entrepreneurs to build a stronger, more diverse talent pipeline.
- Establish a music careers concierge (potentially within Sound NSW) to guide music professionals through funding, career transitions, mental health resources and business development. This fills a critical gap for freelancers and early-career workers navigating the sector.

Conclusion

We recognise the NSW Government's demonstrated commitment to live music, which has transformed a policy landscape that once stifled live music into one that has the settings in place to nurture it. However, Sydney's live music scene remains under enormous pressure. Countless venues have closed. Live music is less and less viable as a professional career. More work is needed to fully realise this sector's huge potential.

At a time when so many of the structures that once supported live music are gone, part of the job to be done here is simply convincing music makers that government has their back and that Sydney is a place of opportunity, where you can hope to make it as a musician.

We deeply appreciate this inquiry's focus on that important job, and encourage the government to maintain its reform momentum and address the remaining gaps in planning, audience development, workforce support, funding and regulation. By establishing enduring infrastructure protections, actively building audiences, securing

careers in music, unlocking new funding, and entrenching light-touch regulation – NSW can cement a legacy as Australia’s live music capital.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss or collaborate further on support for this crucial sector. If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me via matt@sydney.org.au.

Kind regards,



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