

The Inaugural Music Producer and Engineers' Guild of Australia Survey Report

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Introduction

The recording sector is a critical driving engine of the Australian music industry. In many aspects, the roles and work conditions of music producers have changed dramatically since Edison first inscribed “Mary had a little Lamb” on a wax cylinder in 1887. Music producers and engineers work closely with musicians to help them achieve their artistic goals in the recording studio. Alternatively, engineering and production may be a critical skill as part of a musician's practice. Engineers and Producers might work in well-established purpose-built recording facilities worth millions of dollars and/or on a laptop with a pair of headphones while their housemates sleep.

The members of MPEG make up only part of the recording sector in Australia. Regardless, it is the music producers and engineers of Australia that are responsible for shaping the sound of recordings, ensuring that the final product meets technical standards, ready for distribution, and documenting the cultural artefacts of the Australian and in many cases global music industry.

The Music Producer and Engineers’ Guild of Australia (MPEG) has been established to represent the commercial interests and community development of music producers and sound engineers throughout Australia via advocacy and engagement. Music Producers are seen as a small part of the Australian music ecosystem and often forgotten in government legislation, tax law, funding opportunities and general institutional support. MPEG's goal is to support our members in their careers, campaign for the rights of music producers, engineers and participants of the recording sector, and promote diversity and inclusion within the Australian recording industry.

MPEG launched a survey between March and April of 2023 to give us a better understanding of who we are, how we work, what our needs are, and the economic landscape of the recording industry in Australia. The results of this report represent the composition of the MPEG members in its inaugural stages. A total of 106 members completed the survey. The survey results provide insights into the demographics, work and financial conditions, physical and mental health and aspirations of the recording sector in Australia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, to all First Nations Peoples, and to their lands, waters and cultures.

This research was commissioned by the MPEG board with assistance from Dr Lachlan Gool (Magoo) from the University of the Sunshine Coast.

Key Findings

- Almost one third (31.1%) of respondents are under employed and 13.3% work more than 60 hours a week.
- Diversity is an issue for music producers and engineers in Australia, much like other places internationally. 85.8% of respondents are male, 11.3% female (97.1%), 2 respondents chose non-binary (1.9%). No one specifically identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander with 2.8% preferring not to say or don't know.
- Recording studios, no-longer operate from exclusively commercial purpose-built studios in Australia. 72.4% of respondents have their own studio facilities on their own property (whether rented or owned) used for all or part or completing a recording.
- 50% of MPEG respondents sometimes, or often, work for free. Another 17% may work on spec to get a large job. Only 17.9% refuse to work for free.
- Financial instability is a frequent concern from respondents to this survey. 47.2% of respondents cite their music production or engineering work as their primary source of income with another 23.5% of respondents making up their income with audio related work (70.7% of respondents in total). 17.5% earn between \$30 000 to \$50 000 per year and 43.7% earn under \$30 000 per year.
- The work force is highly skilled with 50% of respondents reporting at least six different services in their fee with tasks such as engineering, mixing, mix revisions, production, pre-production, stems for various purposes and mastering.
- Only 20.2% of respondents account for Super, Holiday Pay, sick leave, etc. into their fee.
- 26.4% of respondents are struggling with their tax.
- The recording studio in Australia is moving beyond the assistant/apprentice model with 29.2% of respondents with a bachelor's degree and 38.8% have an accredited (below AQF 7) or non-accredited education. Many remain to choose the assistant pathway (to augment their formal education) with 44.3% of respondents having assisted in an established studio
- 43.3% of respondents believe they are fairly credited for their work.
- Mental health is an issue for MPEG respondents with 51% rating their mental health as average to poor.
- Music production is a largely sedentary job with 40.6% of respondent reporting average (30.2%) to poor (10.4%) physical health. Two respondents have a workplace-based injury.
- Twenty-one (19.8%) respondents mention some kind of financial stress contributing to poor mental health. The self-employed unregulated working conditions is a major contributor to this stress.
- A large amount of MPEG members have international experience with 40 respondents detailing international work, whether by remote access, international residences or international successes.

Findings

The following sections summarise the findings from our 2023 inaugural MPEG survey.

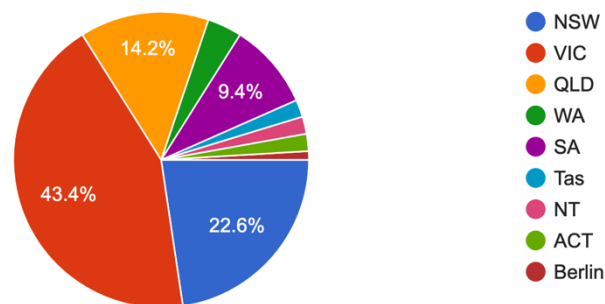
Demographics

We are mostly white middle-aged males.

- Of the survey respondents, 33% are aged between 25 to 34, with the largest age band being 34% of respondents aged between 35 and 44. That's 67% aged between 25 and 44.
 - 17% of respondents are aged between 45 to 54.
- 85.8% of respondents are male, 11.3% female (97.1%), 2 respondents chose non-binary (1.9%)
- No one specifically identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander with 2.8% preferring not to say or don't know.
- 9.4% of respondents identify as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse.
- 94.3% of respondents are Caucasian.
- The largest state representation in the group is from Victoria

In what state and territory are you based?

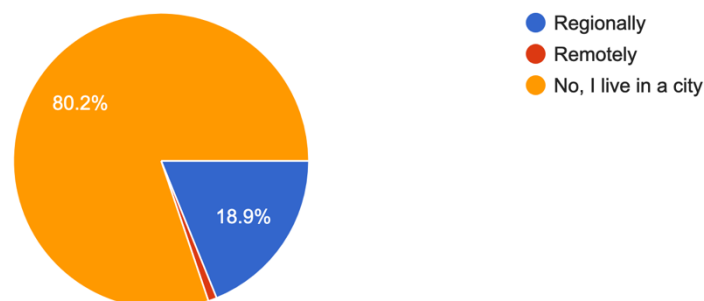
106 responses



- 80.2% live in cities.

Do you live regionally or remotely?

106 responses



- 1 respondent is deaf and/or disabled.

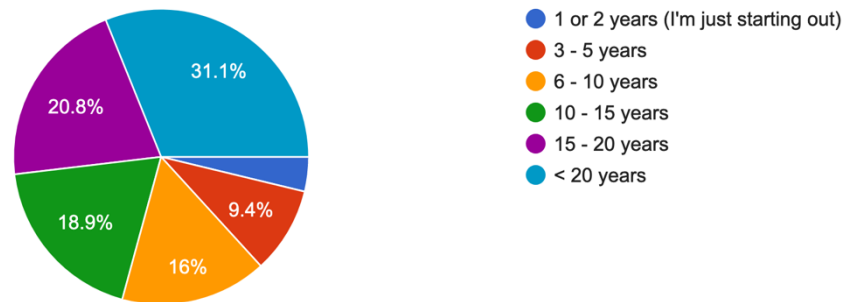
Work conditions

MPEG membership consists of a wide range of experience and work under varied conditions.

- The largest group (31%) have over 20 years' experience in the recording industry.

How many years have you worked as a sound engineer or producer?

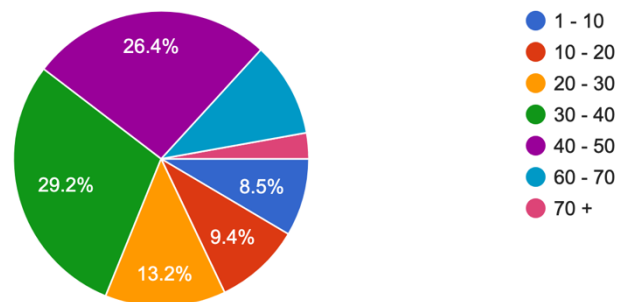
106 responses



- Generally, most respondents work a normal working week (55.6% work between 30 – 50 hours per week). However, 31.1% are under employed and 13.3% work 60 or more hours per week.

On average how many hours do you work per week?

106 responses



MPEG respondents work in a diverse range of scenarios.

- 72.4% have their own studio facilities on their own property (whether rented or owned).
- 43.8% of respondents use commercial facilities for either some or all of their recordings.
- 29.5% of respondents have their own studio on a commercial lease.
- And 16.2% of respondents share a commercial studio facility (not available for dry hire).
- Other respondents record in educational facilities, live venues, use remote set ups and other configurations.
- 2.9% chose more than 3 scenarios
- 13.3% chose 3 scenarios

- 36.2% chose 2 scenarios (one other in combination to a privately owned studio (domestic or commercial)).

50% of MPEG members sometimes or often work for free. Another 17% may work on spec to get a large job. Only 17.9% refuse to work for free. The remaining 15.1% of respondents are:

- working on their own music
- doing some free work as part of a larger project
- assistants that may engineer or produce and not be recognised or paid extra for their work
- working for fun, charity, or donation
- researching or part of a prize
- reducing their overall fee to get a gig

Producer management

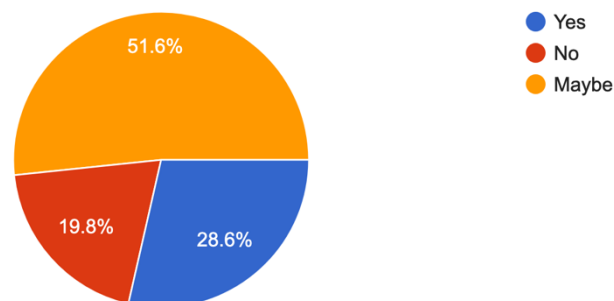
13.3% of MPEG members have management and an additional 10.5% have had management in the past.

Of those that have management, 64.3% have had management for more than 6 years.

80.2% of respondents are interested in producer management.

Do you want producer management?

91 responses



80.2% of respondents are not actively pursuing management, with 7.7% looking for management for more than 2 years.

96.7% of respondents that don't have management would be either somewhat or very interested in a DIY management panel.

Finances

Recording studio is the primary source of income for 47.2% of respondents with another 23.5% of respondents making up their income with audio related work (70.7% of respondents in total). Other respondents said:

- 13.2% of respondents would like more work in music production.

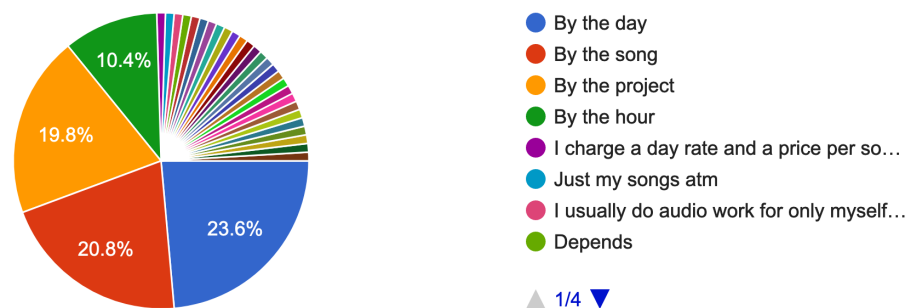
- 4.7% do non-related audio work to supplement their income
- 6.6% of respondents, where audio is not their main income, are happy with the amount of music production they do.

How do we all charge for our work? In a lot of different ways. However,

- The largest group 23.6% charge by the day.
- 20.8% charge per song, and
- 19.8% charge per project.
- 20.6% use a combination of all methods.
- 3.8% are either working on their own work or not in a position to charge.

How do you charge for your work?

106 responses



*Additional responses are the members own words and should be considered 'Other'

How much do MPEG members earn?

The largest band (17.5) earn between \$30 000 & \$50 000 per year.

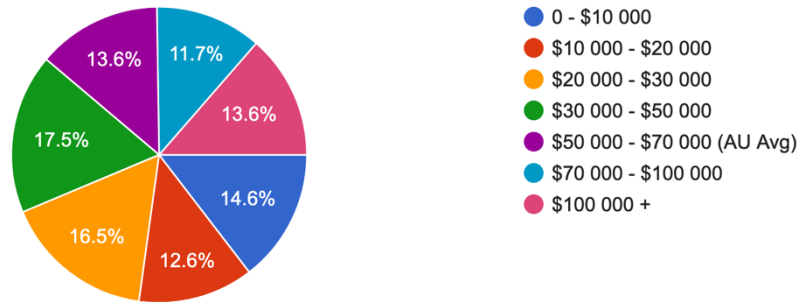
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics cites a median personal income of \$52,338 for the 2019-2020 financial year. ¹
- Other sources claim a much higher median Australian wage of \$79 800 per year for 2023.²
- 43.7% earn under \$30 000 per year (below the poverty line although they may supplement their income with other work).
- 38.9% earn over \$50 000 per year

¹ ABS, 2022. *Personal Income in Australia*. Accessed on 31st of May, 2023 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/personal-income-australia/2015-16-2019-20>

² SalaryExplorer n.d. *Average Salary in Australia*. Accessed on 31st of May, 2023 <http://www.salaryexplorer.com/salary-survey.php?loc=13&loctype=1>

From last financial year, how much do you earn for your recording work (gross/pre tax)?

103 responses



What does the client get for this fee? We seem to supply a lot of skills for our fee. While respondents could select multiple answers, these were the most supplied skills:

- 66% include mixing, 50.9% include mix revisions
- 64.2% include production
- 61.3% include tracking (engineering), 49.1% include additional overdubs
- 51.9% include preproduction fees
- Other inclusions include Stems for remixes (27.4%), Live stems (19.8%).
- Some bill for everything separately, or only work on their own songs.
- 11.3% of respondents chose 2 or 3 tasks.
- 20.8% chose between 4 or 5 tasks.
- 50% chose 6 or more tasks (including those that suggested they bill for everything separately).

How well do we look after ourselves long term?

- Only 20.2% account for Super, Holiday Pay, sick leave, etc into their fee.

Do you account for additional life expenses in your rate (such as Super, Holiday pay, Sick leave, etc)?

104 responses



One respondent left a pragmatic response around how they charge their clients:

I don't specifically account for extra life expenses - eg., I don't quote a project fee then add 9/10/13% on top for super. I just get the best fee possible, which tends to be 'the amount the client can pay', and those costs come out of it on an ad hoc basis. I pay super at tax time IF circumstances mean that it makes sense. Similar for holiday pay and sick leave. Sick leave is hard to factor in because work is oriented around deadlines. Likewise if artists have travelled a long way to work with me it is difficult to tell them I can't work on a given day. The only time I've taken 'sick leave' is when I had COVID. It's a bit like working in hospitality - a chef just can't call in sick unless it's really really severe (Survey respondent).

TAX

- 73.6% of respondents are up to date with their tax.
- The other 26.4% are either struggling, behind (22.6%) or have recently paid a fine.

Many respondents left comments on the volatile financial circumstances of being a music producer:

I have spoken for years with older producers, engineers, and financial wizards about the need to solve the common issues with income and taxes in this industry. It is a big big issue. Bigger than it seems because people mostly keep their issues to themselves (Survey respondent).

I would be interested to know how many self-employed producers and audio (sic) approach business planning like a business, projecting income and year on year growth, calculating overheads, and general mid to long term business planning (Survey respondent).

The amount I would like to get paid and the amount I can get paid (for the hours I work) are often incompatible unfortunately. I'm more than happy to go above and beyond for my clients but it essentially means that most of the time I earn minimum wage for working more than full time hours (if I'm lucky!). I recognise most freelance creative professionals are probably in a similar position. Diversifying income streams and utilising passive income seem to be key, but that is easier said than done (Survey respondent).

I'd like to have better measures and understanding in place so as that invoices can be paid in a timely fashion. It isn't really possible (deadline-wise) and often creates a negative energy if I withhold files until invoices are paid. I'd like a culture where it is understood that invoices must/should

be paid by their due date. Similarly I would like a better (cultural) understanding that mix revisions take time and some better communication around that. Guidelines for how to communicate, perhaps (Survey respondent).

Discussions surrounding finances with producers often stops at making money, not handling it. So many audio people I know are on a knife's edge financially as we're all told "once you get a successful record, then your fee goes up and you're sweet" which is pretty inaccurate. Would love disclosure from financially stable producers on the how/what/where/why etc of how they reached that stability (could be presented anonymously to protect any participants) (Survey respondent).

[It's] [b]een quite hard [as] often studios asking (sic) you to work for free for a certain amount of time and pay well below minimum wage, it's not sustainable, very taxing on mental health and stressful. Particularly when at a point of up skilling or levelling up (Survey respondent).

Education and Mentoring

The respondents are mostly well educated. However, education and mentorships are sourced from non-traditional places in the industry.

- 29.2% have a bachelor's degree
- 38.8% have some sort of accredited or non-accredited education
- 32% have had no formal education and have learned by doing or observing in a studio.

Mentorships

- 44.3% of respondents have assisted in an established studio.
- Whereas 35.8% have had no mentoring whatsoever.
- Other sites for mentorship include: SAE, JMC, etc (8.5%), non-affiliated provider (such as Mix with the Masters) (9.4%), Public University (micro credentialing) (5.7%), a Peak Body (such as, APRA, AIR, AMIN) (4.7%).

Those that completed a non-formal education or mentorship rated the quality fairly high and were given realistic outcomes with most realising they will learn more in the industry.

- 45.9% rated the quality positively.
- Only 2% felt like they wasted their money.

Many respondents commented on Mentorships and are keen to take on many practical learning experiences possible:

[A] [s]ubsidised intern/ studio assistant would be awesome! Like employing a up and coming talent and the subsidy pays for half their time. This would provide concrete career pathways and education for the assistant as well as enhance the output of the working producer ... win win.

As a small independent operator, it would be fantastic to have any opportunity to take an assistant's role within a major production, or with a seasoned producer, for single projects or sessions as a mentee (like undergrad doctors do at hospitals) to increase my knowledge base. Here in little ol' Perth, we don't have access to the big Studio 301's of the world and our production community is a relatively small one in comparison to the rest of the world.

It's one thing to watch and learn from a technique tutorial on YouTube, but a whole other level of understanding when seeing and hearing it take place in the room, you're standing in with the engineer talking you through it. And there's not many of us here who could afford the \$14k outlay to enrol in a MWTM course at La Fabrique :(one day though...

Many respondents are still craving “big studio” experience despite domestic studios being so prevalent:

Even after 10 years I feel I have way more to learn and have reached out to successful producers and engineers asking for paid private mentorship. I feel like the schools and academy's are solid but WAY too expensive for what they offer compared to what you can learn in the studio... In saying that I do feel that a lot of studio internship programs are very basic and simple (which they often need to be I guess) so there is a big gap between what I feel the universities lack and what you can learn through internships and mentorships. Assisting in studios is easily the best way if you can learn under producers and I was fortunate enough to do so and try and do the same for other young producers, but those opportunities are limited.

Regarding the quality of education, I have learned/am learning a lot more from mentorship, assisting at an established studio, rather than formal education.

Nothing will ever beat industry experience, but mentorship is one of the most important aspects of education and learning within that industry to help bolster experience and build confidence/networking etc.

I've got it worked out that I best perform as a song producer in a company of a good engineer. I've got a Conservatorium diploma and years of performing live, it's just that I'm a mum of two and don't see how I can perfect my engineering skills and run anything at a more professional level in my regional area. I do my own engineering only out of necessity as I work with regional artists who can't afford to travel to metro areas to record.

I am appalled at the poor regulation of "work experience" and that is required by universities and that both the student/intern and the engineer/producer/studio are expected to do this for free. It is widespread but still appalling.

It would be great to see more of these opportunities made accessible, particularly for minority groups and underprivileged communities. Sometimes \$100 for a course/education may not seem like a huge investment into education to some but might mean the difference of feeding yourself or family for others. Internships need to be included when it comes to engaging in accessibility. One may not be privileged enough to rely on Centrelink or family support to pay for the basics whilst working for free to gain the necessary experience it takes to enter this industry. Particularly as an audio engineer.

Credits

The survey questions on credits caused a lot of consternation.

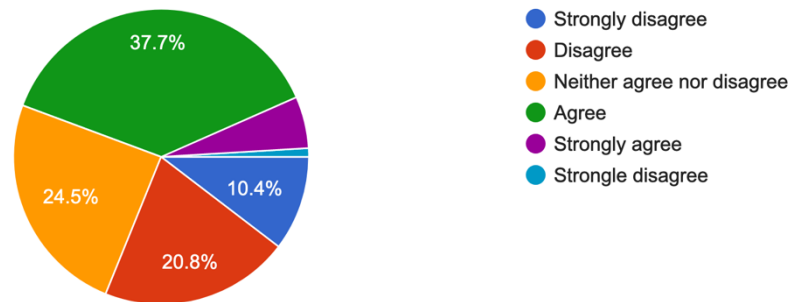
- 61.3% of respondents use social media and their personal websites to promote their work
- Other sources include Jaxsta (10.4%) and Discogs (12.3%).
- 53.8% admitted to not doing much to promote their work.
- Other places of promotion include Spotify, word of mouth and Allmusic.

How many respondents believe they are fairly credited?:

- 37.7% agree they are properly credited for their work and 6.6% strongly agree (44.3% in total)
- 24.5% are neutral

In general are you credited properly for your work?

106 responses



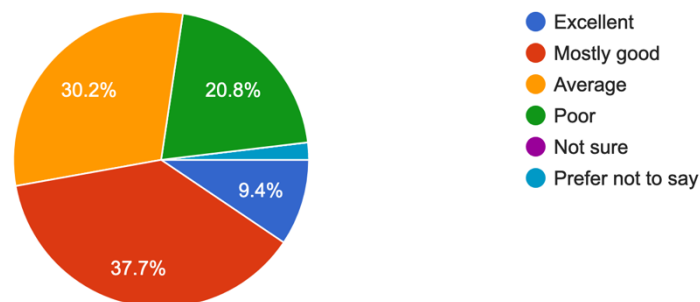
Mental and Physical health

While mental health statistics are concerning, they are not as alarming as other surveys focusing on music.

- 47.1% of respondents rated their mental health as mostly good to excellent.
- 51% of respondents rated their mental health as average to poor.
- 1.9% preferred not to answer the question.
- A rigorous Support act survey from May 2022 (of which 3.7% of respondents were sound engineers or producers) reported 66.1% had high or very high levels of psychological distress. ³

Overall, how would you rate your mental health?

106 responses



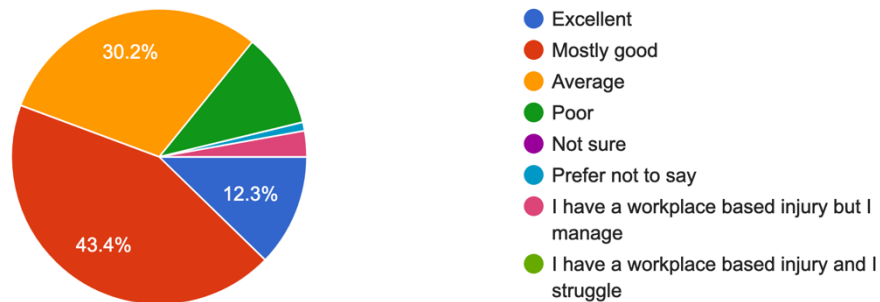
Studio music production and engineering is a sedentary job.

- 55.7% rated their physical health at mostly good to excellent.
- 30.2% rated their physical health as average
- 2 respondents (1.9%) have a workplace based injury.
- 10.4% of respondents have poor physical health.

³ Elmes, A. & Knox, J. (2022). *Mental health and wellbeing in music and live performing arts Australia: 2022*. Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University of Technology: Hawthorn, Australia. Accessed on May 31st at <https://supportact.org.au/mental-health-survey/>

Overall, how would you rate your physical health?

106 responses



57 respondents chose to elaborate on their responses to both mental and physical health adding:

Being self-employed in the music industry here in Australia and having a family that I support financially work can dry up pretty quickly for weeks on end, then suddenly an influx of work comes in that I actually can't keep up with.

Continued long hours on sessions, easy to get carried away but there is almost a "hangover effect" afterwards where you come back to reality (I don't ever drink on sessions btw). Although the quality I get of artists is also usually quite high, and I would never not give my best on a session, but sometimes when I get music that is not really inspiring me or unfortunately just boring me, I do find it taxing to remain upbeat and positive about the music for the client when internally I feel like I am not being authentic.

Probably working too many hours. Mixing and mastering kind of exacerbate my ADHD/OCD but that is one of my superpowers.

Stress of being a freelancer, working with loads of different people/studios/universities, everyone wanting the extra mile but it's like 5 different jobs wanting extra, not making a yearly salary that reflects the amount of work I do, my salary looks like part-time work but I'm working at least 6 days a week, covid was very hard living overseas with no support and studios being closed, still feel the impact of it.

I think as someone who struggles with imposter syndrome and depression. It's hard having to spend a lot of energy chasing crediting for past work and especially hard seeing people celebrate and boast about projects that you were a part of and haven't been recognised for.

Job security. I have worked for a large studio for 10 plus years but over the last couple of years that work has dried up due to internal politics at the studio, this has meant about 15-20% of my annual income has slowly gone in the last 2 years. Along with impacts from Covid and now loss of job seeker and govt support, this is a really tough time.

Right now, my mental health is largely impacted by struggle to find work as an audio, engineer or producer that is stable and sustainable. I feel that my self worth is largely impacted by how I am recognised by my work as an audio, engineer or producer. I feel that in order to be accepted into the industry, I need to already have an established catalogue of artist that I've worked with, otherwise I won't be looked at or chosen for projects. It is also proving difficult to connect to local studios in Melbourne where I'm located and be successful in them offering to mentor or provide assistance or leading opportunities at their studios.

- Nine respondents mention some kind of stress, anxiety or sleep deprivation affecting their mental health.
- Twenty-one (19.8%) respondents (including some of those above) mention some kind of financial stress contributing to poor mental health.

Suggestions for mental health support:

This question drew many different responses. 24 of those responses were related to proper remuneration for the amount of work done and general financial instability.

If someone could tell me my worth so I could charge an appropriate amount for my work, rather than constantly undercutting myself. Some sort of larger cultural shift that could get society to stop undervaluing art and music.

Some standardisation of work practices for studios and engineers. Some of the issues mention[ed] before have arisen out of me having issue with not being paid super and being requested to do additional unpaid administrative work. Pretty much since I raised these issues, I have been on the out with the studio with work being offered to younger and cheaper engineers. Support within this process would have been a great asset. it

can often feel like there is nowhere really to turn. Even if not advocacy just a space to talk and get advice.

Some sort of mentoring was also a common theme:

Something that could improve my mental health would be a platform, where fellow producers audio engineers can connect together and network/ assist one another in the preliminary stages of starting out in the industry. It would also be helpful to be able to connect with senior engineers and have the opportunity to learn underneath them to not only gain more skills, but to feel supported in the industry.

- Some respondents (three) are seeking their own professional counselling with one more wishing to.
- Lack of sleep is a common theme with four respondents wishing to sleep more.
- Five respondents would like to exercise more.
- Six respondents would like to see more community development among Sound engineers and Producers.

Support Services

[Beyond Blue](#): 1300 224 636 (24 hours, 7 days)

[Lifeline](#): 13 11 14 (24 hours, 7 days)

[QLife \(LGBTIQ+\)](#): 1800 184 527 (3pm - midnight, 7 days)

Global Pathways and Aspirations

- 22.6% are happy working solely in Australia
- 19.8% have plans to travel overseas and work.
- 32.1% would like to but don't know how.
- 17.9% have done or are already working regularly overseas.

Do you have aspirations of an international career?

106 responses



*Additional responses are the members own words and should be considered 'Other'

40 respondents detailed international recording experiences, whether by remote access, international residences or international successes.

44 respondents detailed their career aspirations. From the pragmatic:

Make a stable income and be paid fairly for my work and level of experience

To establishing a stable career:

To progress from being an assistant and have engineering/producing be the primary, or a primary, source of income for me. And to make music that I think is good.

Some wanted to write hit songs and live comfortably from the royalties. Many sought financial stability; some were seeking to augment their income with teaching and mentoring. Some just wanted to get better at their craft:

I just want to become a better (and faster) producer, and work with others to produce their work. Want to become a better performer as well.

Closing

Our final question before closing comments asked if establishing MPEG awards would be of interest. Out of all 106 respondents:

- 75.5% agreed
- 19.8% responded “maybe”
- 4.7% said no.

One respondent when answering a mental health question mentioned that awards contribute to their anxieties:

Less of a feeling of online competition might be nice but that's hard to achieve given the mechanics of social media. Frankly, less formal competitions/accolades - ARIAs, AMPs, hottest 100, APRAs, so many comps - might be nice. Music shouldn't be a comp.

Concluding comments:

Panel topics:

- Many suggestions touched on the themes of the survey:
 - self-management approaches (including legal and contract advice);
 - overwhelming requests for financial advice (including what to charge for service);
 - overwhelming requests for mental health advice;

- proper credits
- forums for emerging producers
- high-level forums for more established producers
- New technologies (immersive audio)
- Building a stronger community
- Studio soft skills

Other comments included:

A strong presence for woman / LGBTIQQ (sic) & POC! You can be what you see!

Maybe a myth busting panel could be fun. Could go through a number of common myths mistakes (especially about technical subjects) and help elucidate them.

Real life experiences of people working in the industry. Useful work habits for freelance professionals. I've learnt a lot from doing this for 20 years, but I'm still pretty bad at the business side of things; invoices, bookings, credits, promotion etc. I've had to pick those things up along the way, but the reality is this is quite a lonely industry these days. With online remote work picking up and lots of big studios closing down most of us work alone these days. This means that we don't get as much of the usual experience of learning from colleagues at work or picking up skills (such as business skills). These factors (hardships and learning gaps) would be very valuable for the community for you to cover, talk about and present at panels in my opinion.

I think proper accreditation for work and mental health in our work force.

Definitely a diverse panel. This industry is so male oriented, and there's so many incredible non males doing amazing stuff to inspire generations to come.

Expectations for MPEG:

Respondents were generally very encouraging for the work and advocacy that MPEG is already doing. Other comments were:

Opportunities for networking and building community between like minded people

proposal of rate cards

a place for audio engineers and producers to share information and good practice, to grow their network, and find opportunities to mentor and be mentored.

One respondent is aware that people hiring engineers or producers aren't entirely clear on the difference in roles:

Lobby for awareness about services. Producing is not engineering as such although it may involve that and other things. When charging for work there could be more awareness around the role of the producer separate to the engineer or mix engineer.

Promote greater awareness of the work we do. Set and uphold quality standards. Provide non fear based support for female artists.

To be more of a union. I see everyone working independently but I feel we can break some of the protective layers between us all and realise that if we work together it can be beneficial for all.

This was a common theme:

Representation for our interests in royalties, contracting, and education about fees.

While there are real high level tasks that MPEG can achieve, it strikes me as having a unique position in connecting producers and engineers as we are often engaging in the industry while isolated and competing against our peers. Would love to see a focus on lifting up members with potential for growth.

The below respondent touches on many themes in the survey:

Diversity. Perhaps chats on mental health in the industry. Perhaps some spotlights on incredible Australian producers/ engineers – there's tons of US / international representation everywhere like YouTube etc, but none in Aus has that same level of notoriety. Perhaps a blog that shines a light on new releases / gear / studios. I feel like publications like sound on sound

have died since the mass loss of physical publications, there's definitely a production & recording culture in Au that could be celebrated.

Government engagement on major issues such as creating and enforcing content quotas, superannuation legislation, workplace entitlements, paid apprenticeships rather than "internships", reducing government funded competition that warps the public/private sector.

Social gatherings, union like bargaining power, job listings, education, sharing of information, product demos, mpeg awards show

- Many suggested an annual conference.

What did we miss:

There were a lot of positive responses:

I think you've covered a lot of important topics! I think a big one is the environments we tend to work in. I have personally worked very very hard to maintain a high level of physical and mental health. We work long hours, little sunlight, usually a seated position with little movement and around a lot of alcohol and drugs at times. It is clear to see without awareness why so many people burn out.

Themes regarding workloads continued:

Another thing is the demand on producers and engineers from clients for things like stems, last minute revisions and unrealistic timelines. I am not really sure of exactly where I am going with this but the amount of unpaid time I lose on tasks like this is why I have hired an assistant to cover this type of work.

Themes regarding financial pressured continued:

My rate now can just cover having an assistant but once you add the above with needing sick days, super, holidays, saving for equipment, studio rent, insurance etc we really would struggle on anything less than \$400 a day and when you quote that rate to clients, they probably assume you are well off earning that kind of money.

I would like a little MPEG badge to put on my website :) I like being part of it being overseas, I like the connection to Aus.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study which should be considered when assessing the findings. In its inaugural year so far MPEG has a membership of 296 and 106 members completed this survey. Therefore the findings may not be representative of the whole population of people who work in the recording sector in Australia. While these numbers are not significant they provide information never gathered on the recording sector in Australia. Additionally:

- The survey was conducted in English limiting the participation to only English speakers.
- The survey was conducted online limiting the respondents to those with access to stable internet and a computer.

Conclusion

This inaugural report is designed to help steer MPEG toward appropriate strategic goals as the only peak body acting on behalf of music producers and engineers in Australia.

The participants of the recording sector in Australia are passionate and highly skilled. Despite this, many of the respondents to this survey feel that they are not properly remunerated or credited for their work. This has resulted in a high number of respondents to this survey reporting high levels of financial stress and generalised anxiety.

While the proportion of respondents reporting average to poor mental health is 51%, this number is lower than recent surveys on the Australian music and live performing arts industry with 66.1% reporting high or very high levels of psychological distress (Elmes & Knox, 2022).

Recording studio is the primary source of income for 47.2% of respondents with another 23.5% of respondents making up their income with audio related work (70.7% of respondents in total). 43.7% earn under \$30 000 per year (below the poverty line although they may supplement their income with other work). Low income affects wellbeing and inhibits the ability to afford the necessities of life. ⁴

The working conditions are becoming more unstable for MPEG respondents as many are operating their own studios in an effort to reduce costs and maintain a stable income.

Diversity is an issue for music producers and engineers globally. 85.8% of respondents to this survey are male, 11.3% female (97.1%), and 2 respondents are non-binary (1.9%). No one specifically identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander with 2.8% preferring not to say or don't know. Notions of democracy of recording studio practice have been discussed since the advent of cheaper digital technology in the 1990s, however, 'the lack of gender and racial diversity shows there is still some way to go'.⁵

43.3% of respondents believe they are fairly credited for their work leaving the majority (56.7%) unhappy with how their work is credited. Credits in music production is more than simply acknowledgment for work completed but doubles as a reference for future work.

This report will help guide the MPEG board toward appropriate advocacy and support as the only peak body representing the recording sector in Australia.

⁴ Capic, T., Hutchinson, D., Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, M., Richardson, B., Hartley-Clark, L., Khor, S., Olsson, C. and Cummins, R.A. (2017). *Australian Unity Wellbeing Index Survey 34: Summary Report August 2017. The Wellbeing of Australians: Financial Wellbeing*. Melbourne, Australia. Accessed on May 31st, 2023.

<http://www.acqol.com.au/uploads/surveys/survey-034-report.pdf>

⁵ Goold, L., 2023. The Creative Music Networks of Regional Recording Studios: A Case Study of the Sunshine Coast and Gympie. In *Popular Music Scenes: Regional and Rural Perspectives* (pp. 99-114). Cham: Springer International Publishing.