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Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts – Inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry

Dear Chair and Committee members,

We are an interdisciplinary group of academic researchers with combined expertise in climate change adaptation and the Australian music industries. Our submission concerns the impacts and risks of climate change on the Australian live music sector, which continues to be an important aspect of Australia's cultural and social lives, and which also contributes significantly to the economy. In preparing this submission we have consulted with the Australian Festival Association.

In summary, we submit that:

1. the climate emergency poses an immediate and growing threat to the Australian live music sector;
2. there are significant gaps in knowledge, action and policy regarding climate change risks, impacts and adaptation in the live music sector;
3. government policy and action to support the Australian live music industry should include specific consideration of climate change risks, impacts, and support for adaptation; and
4. government should consider how climate impacts on live music can be a pathway to wider discussions on the challenges of a changing climate and action needed to meet these threats. As a source of social connection and creativity, live music helps enable positive adaptation responses to climate change, and should be recognised and supported as such.

Impacts of climate change on live music

The impacts of climate change on live music are already being felt. They are especially obvious in music festivals, which are typically large-scale, outdoor events in greenfield locations. Our peer-reviewed research established that:

- between 2013 and 2023, at least 41 Australian music festivals were cancelled, evacuated, postponed or relocated due to extreme weather events including heat, fires, rain, and floods;
- there was a dramatic increase in such disruptions from 2019, with more than half of those counted occurring after the COVID-19 pandemic;
- the impacted festivals spanned ACT, NSW, Queensland, SA, Victoria, Tasmania and WA, with capacities from 500 to 50,000.¹

¹ Green B & Strong C (2023) 'What if it rains? What if there are bushfires?': Extreme weather, climate change and music festivals in Australia. *Media International Australia*, OnlineFirst (open access), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X231184913>

Since our research was published, further high-profile disruptions include the evacuation of 17,000 patrons from west Victoria's Pitch Music & Arts Festival due to heat and fire danger in March 2024; the evacuation of 20,000 patrons from Sydney's Good Things festival due to a thunderstorm in December 2023; and storm-related disruptions to stadium concerts by Taylor Swift and Post Malone. This research also sets out the industry's calls for action on climate risk, including from the Australian Festival Association, Live Music Australia and ARPA AMCOS. In a 2023 survey of 51 music festival organisers by Creative Australia, 49% identified extreme weather events as having a moderate to severe impact on their festival. Such events also contribute to rising insurance costs, which were found to impact a majority of festivals.² These disruptions affect the wider live music sector because festivals are a key source of income and business/career development for: artists and management; backline, production and infrastructure providers; and other contributing businesses. Risks and costs are distributed unequally, according to resources and relative bargaining power, contributing to market concentration and threatening diversity and innovation.

Extreme weather events are projected to become more frequent and severe under climate change. Risks include concurrent weather and climate-related disruptions across large geographic areas, and far-reaching flow-on effects over the near and long-term. The latest Assessment Report about impacts and adaptation by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concludes that one of the Key Risks for Australia is 'cascading, compounding and aggregate impacts on cities, settlements, infrastructure, supply-chains and services'.³

These risks are especially significant for the live music industry because it is exposed and sensitive to climate change stresses and disruptions across the diverse domains it relies on. To function effectively, the industry requires many interdependent and diffuse parts to work in sync, from musicians to the wider public, from music instruments to wider electricity systems, from music venues to general transport networks and settlement patterns. The live music industry is also susceptible to the additional pressure of climate change because many aspects of it are already precarious.

These risks are of significance for more than the professional members of the live music industry. As a source of sociality, creativity and incomes, live music helps build the interpersonal relationships, skills, capital and thus adaptive capacity that society needs to manage climate change well, underlining the value of helping the industry adapt. Therefore, finding ways to insulate the live music sector from climate impacts has the potential to strengthen climate resilience elsewhere in the community.

Preparedness for climate change

There is an urgent need to help the live music industry understand and reduce climate change impacts and risks, in order to protect and retain the value it generates for Australian society. At present, the industry is vulnerable and ill-prepared. Across the live music ecosystem, adaptation is needed at multiple scales, from individual musicians and bands, to organisations, to government departments, to enabling networks and systems. The capacity of various industry stakeholders to adapt is, like their ability to navigate existing risks, constrained by the overall insecurity of the sector

² Creative Australia (2024) Soundcheck: Insights into Australia's music festival sector. <https://creative.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/soundcheck-insights-into-australias-music-festival-sector/>

³ Lawrence, J., Wreford, A. and Allan, S., 2022. Adapting to avoidable and unavoidable climate change: what must Aotearoa New Zealand do?. Policy Quarterly, 18(2), pp.51-60.

(giving rise to this inquiry), and subject to unequal resources and market relations. In light of these impediments and the societal value of live music, there is a need for policy intervention.

With the current development of the National Climate Risk Assessment and National Climate Adaptation Plan, there is a particular need and opportunity to ensure that the live music industry is included in adaptation efforts. At present the above draft documents, like other adaptation strategies, overlook music and the arts more generally, or only include them as tools rather than recognising that they themselves require protection from climate breakdown. Similarly, existing cultural policy does not acknowledge climate risks and the need to adapt. There is a need and opportunity to integrate these matters into policy concerning live music, along with other cultural industries, just as *Revive* incorporates policy objectives of workplace safety, anti-discrimination, and employment standards. This recognition of the reality of an already changing climate and the way that it will impact all aspects of Australian life, cultural or otherwise, is an important step in raising overall awareness of this issue and the urgency with which it needs to be addressed.

To build the adaptive capacity of the live music industry, programs to build awareness and understanding of climate change impacts, risks and adaptation are needed, combined with practical tools. There is a real opportunity to link the live music industry to adaptation initiatives in other domains, however research is needed to understand the specific character of climate change challenges in the live music industry.

Recommendations

Based on the matters above, we offer the following recommendations:

1. Prioritise research into climate change impacts and risks in the live music sector in order to inform strategies for adaptation.
2. Ensure that live music policy fully incorporates climate change impacts and risks, and supports effective and equitable adaptation.
3. Ensure that climate change risk assessments and adaptation plans from the national to local scales explicitly include the live music sector and the need to protect and retain the value it generates for communities and Australian society in general.
4. Support effective and equitable climate adaptation within the live music sector, by providing funding and information resources, as well as by incorporating climate adaptation objectives into wider industry support measures.

We would be delighted to provide the Commission with further information on this submission in writing or in person.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Ben Green, Associate Professor Catherine Strong, Professor Lauren Rickards, Dr Todd Denham