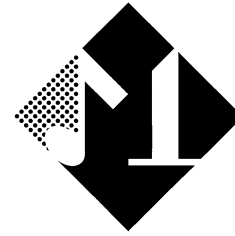


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Australia's representative to the International Music Council



Music Council of Australia

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January 21, 2010

Dear Minister

I write on behalf of the national music council concerning the recent closures of live music venues in Melbourne.

The Music Council of Australia is the national peak music organisation. The membership of the Council itself represents interests across the breadth of the music sector, which has an annual value as a satellite account of about \$7 billion. The Music Council is the Australian representative to the International Music Council, based in UNESCO, Paris.

As these issues swirl through the media, it is difficult to know exactly the factual situation, as you can appreciate. I can tell you that an inference that was widely disseminated is that music venues are being closed because of an assumption that music will lead a crowd or individuals within it to become violent or unruly and a problem to the law. From my

understanding, this is not the official reason invoking closures. But in case it is a factor, I do not believe that there is any evidence of such a phenomenon. I hope that you can confirm that music venues are not being targeted in any way.

It seems, rather, that music venues are being caught up in rather broad brush-stroke regulations intended for crowd control and to curb violence. If that is so, why not, as someone on the recent 7.30 Report suggested, place constraints on the venues that are the sites of violence or can be imputed somehow to be responsible. This is the approach taken recently in NSW, apparently to good effect. Then the venues that are blameless are left alone, and this issue becomes much less of a problem for you and your government.

Because of its rational licensing laws, Melbourne some years ago took away from Sydney the reputation as Australia's liveliest city in music. This has resulted in a flow of artists, tourists, business to Victoria. Sydney has traditionally been the host to important national music organisations but fairly recently the Association of Independent Record Labels moved its office in Melbourne; these are the labels that are the most innovative and most committed to Australian artists and Melbourne was a rational choice.

The new regulations have begun to reverse that trend. Live music venues have been closing or terminating their musical programs, not because of any identified problems with crowd control or violence but because they cannot afford to meet the costs of new regulations which are irrelevant to their situation. This, naturally enough, brings media coverage sympathetic to the venues and strongly critical of your government. Where is the advantage in that?

Meanwhile, the state government in NSW, and the City of Sydney, have lightened the regulations and costs associated with presenting live music and there is the beginning of a live music renaissance in Sydney hotels, clubs, bars, restaurants. Melbourne will gradually find itself with much more serious competition. It is a bad time for self-imposed handicaps.

The Music Council of Australia is of course interested in the vitality of musical life everywhere in the country. It would be a matter of great regret if the new regulations caused a decline of this key element in the music economy of one of our two largest cities, the moreso if this is an inadvertent and avoidable outcome. It perhaps was not foreseen, but now it is clear: the regulations are harming Melbourne's musical life and its reputation as a musical city, a city worth visiting.

We do urge you to review the regulations and ensure that they are accurately targeted to combat the identified problems.

Yours sincerely

Dr Richard Letts AM
Executive Director