



musicNT
your music office

Northern Territory Live Music Strategy

2021

Vision

To support the growth of a live music sector across the Northern Territory that fosters community engagement and celebration, supports artists to tell our stories through music, and builds on the economic contribution of the industry.



Image by Duane Preston

Music is at the heart of who we are

The Northern Territory (NT) is home to one of the most diverse music sectors in the country – culturally and geographically.

Music has been at the centre of life in the NT for centuries. It has helped define our identity and has maintained vital cultural and community traditions.

Today music provides an invaluable opportunity for community connection and celebration, cultural collaboration and helps define our identity on both a national and global stage.

The NT music scene has a long history of producing nationally significant artists and develop major music events with a national profile, such as the National Indigenous Music Awards, Darwin Festival, Bush Bands Bash, and BASSINTHEGRASS. Our performers – from Yothu Yindi to Baker Boy to Jess Mauboy – have blazed a trail for artists nationally and created a sound that is truly unique.

The live music industry is also an important economic contributor to the Territory economy – creating jobs, supporting small business and becoming a key plank in the Territory's tourism offering.

This strategy must acknowledge that throughout 2020 though, the music industry – specifically the live performance sector – has been heavily impacted by policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. With venues forced to close for an extended period, the backbone of the industry was dealt a major blow with venues not able to operate and artists unable to perform locally or tour outside the NT to support their careers.

The result has been a need to reassess the nature of how the industry operates and better understand threats to its viability.

More generally though, the aim of this strategy is to build on what we have to strengthen the sector, support our artists, and provide even more opportunity for the community to enjoy the power of music.

Music - making an impact

We will support the growth of a live music sector across the Northern Territory that fosters community engagement and celebration, supports artists to tell our stories through music, and builds on the economic contribution of the industry.

The NT contemporary music sector provides more than creative and cultural impacts – it is a growing and important part of the Territory economy providing jobs, opportunities for business, and a powerful contribution to the tourism economy.

The Economic and Cultural Value of Live Music in the Northern Territory study showed significant economic and social returns from music. The report shows the live music sector is worth over \$74 million to the NT economy and provides a return on investment of over \$4 for every \$1 invested. And the most recent MusicNT Live Music Census showed more than 530 shows were presented across 106 venues in the NT in just one month.

Nationally, the impact of a thriving music sector has been well captured and documented through a host of comprehensive research projects.

Key findings

- Over 8 million Australians attended contemporary music performances in 2017 (versus 5.6 million in 2016) with the live music sector nationally worth approximately \$987million (PwC Australia)
- Music Improves our health, well-being and social capital, and contributes to quality of life. 99% of Australians listen to music and attend a music event in any one year. 32% of young people make music and 14% of Australians play a musical instrument (Australia Council Art Facts)
- The Australia Council's Domestic Arts Tourism Report (2020) demonstrated that music events were a major driver of arts tourism revenue
- With more than 50 million attendances annually, contemporary music is by far the most popular of all Australian performing arts, and the most accessible to a diverse range of people (Live Performance Australia)
- Individuals place a high value on the social benefits of live music and they are at least as important as other social outings for 86% of patrons (Deloitte)
- Music sales nationally generated \$526 million in revenue in 2018, representing 12.26% annual growth (ARIA)



Image by Amy Hetherington



Image by Jeff Tan

Music is valued across the Territory

A key component of the development of this strategy was comprehensive consultation across the Territory – focused on community meetings and direct conversations with artists and industry. The initial consultation was rolled out through 2019 with follow up meetings in 2020 providing industry the opportunity to comment directly on an initial draft of this strategy – with care taken to ensure a broad cross-section of the NT was involved.

Key findings from that survey included:

Industry Feedback

- Most – almost 80 per cent – of respondents were artists
- That same amount – 80 per cent – said they were unable to sustain a music career in the NT
- Almost 50 per cent earned less than \$5000 per year from music
- Live performance was the key income source for more than 80 per cent of respondents
- The most common performance schedule was one show per month – 30 per cent
- More than 50 per cent of respondents said lack of venues was a major barrier to shows
- More respondents said they had toured interstate than had toured in the NT with more than 50 per cent having never toured
- Almost 50 per cent reported they ‘usually’ felt safe at venues, more than those that said they ‘always’ do
- Personal safety and feeling welcomed at venues were high priorities
- Other stand out priorities included: quality of sound a lighting production at venues, skills and professionalism of venue staff, promotion and marketing by venues, options for all ages shows, and support for new and emerging artists

Other consultative activities – including the research phase of a new plan to support NT women in music – were examined to provide additional context for this strategy. Additionally, a major online survey was launched offering both the sector and the broader community to have input and identify both challenges and opportunities around issues like accessing music in the Territory, to building a career as an artist.

Community Feedback

- The largest group – 40 per cent – saw live music once a month
- More than 60 per cent would attend live music shows on their own with more than 50 per cent saying they ‘usually’ felt safe at shows – 40 per cent said ‘always’
- The largest group – 45 per cent – preferred to see music in a dedicated live music venue
- 35 per cent of respondents are prepared to travel interstate to see live music, while just over 30 per cent said it had to be presented locally
- Cost – 50 per cent of respondents – was the most represented barrier to seeing live music
- Other areas rated as ‘very important’ included: personal safety and security at venues; diverse audiences; and a commitment by venues to support new and emerging artists



Image by Amy Hetherington



Image by Anneke Rose

A roadmap for the future

From the Central Desert to the Far North, the NT is home to a diverse music industry driven by passionate artists and industry. This Strategy provides a clear framework to develop operational activity to build the sector by harnessing that enthusiasm and drive and creating a stronger scene through collaboration, communication and smart investment.

This Strategy reflects the views of a broad cross-section of the NT music industry and broader community. Community forums, one-on-one discussions and a major online survey have all informed its development.

That consultation has demonstrated a deep connection between music and the broader community, along with a desire by those working within the industry to create a sector that offers artists sustainable careers and opportunities to perform in a range of environments – from community centres to major festivals and events.

A live music scene does not exist, grow or thrive in isolation. There is a broad range of factors and components, each of which are interdependent and support the growth of the live music sector. It is an 'ecosystem' that must be broadly supported to thrive – this includes supporting artists, venues and developing a cohort of industry professionals – including managers and artists – who all play individual roles.

If nothing else, the pandemic crisis of 2020 demonstrated the connected nature of the live music ecosystem. Remove one key element – in this case performance opportunities – and the impacts are felt across a broad section of the community from artists to production suppliers and other professional services.

The clear theme has been the community wants access to live music in a safe and welcoming environment with performers showcasing the diversity of music currently being performed and released across the NT. Input shows that music is a key component of the Territory's identity and plays a central role in what makes us unique.

Collectively, there is a long-term desire to see the NT recognised globally as a major music centre, with live performance at the heart of that. However, consultation and research demonstrates that we face a range of unique challenges to meet that goal, and this Strategy aims to present a roadmap forward to address those challenges.

Music by everyone for everyone

This Strategy is built on an aim to meet the needs of a diverse set of groups within the community – each of which has its own unique connection to NT music. Opportunity abounds, but this Strategy offers responses to a range of unique challenges faced – even before the events of 2020.

A key motivation behind the strategy is to better coordinate and guide new and existing activity in a way that meets clear goals and provides cost-effective outcomes across the sector, and for the broader community.

A careful balance must also be struck to ensure positive outcomes are prioritised given groups may, at times, have competing interests – for example, artists requesting higher fees that may not initially be sustainable for venues.

Those key groups are:

Community

Providing an environment where everyone has access to live music in a safe environment.

Artists

Giving artists the support to continue making music and celebrating the unique-ness of the NT.

Industry and Venues

Building a stronger music business sector that will support and retain artists and professionals across the NT

Government Sector

Creating an environment that encourages investment and creativity



Image by Paz Tassone



Image by Nico Liengme

Community

“I love getting my kids and wife out to live music. The best and easiest way for this to happen is for live music to be in a nice family friendly space where food is available, and the night is still young.”

Survey Respondent

The NT community continues to access and support live music with a passion. Music is valued as an important reflection of the NT’s diverse community and provides a unique opportunity for cross-cultural exchange.

Consultation has shown that there is a deep desire to access live music across the Territory on a regular basis. Meeting that desire though means offering a broad range of music types and experiences in safe environments that can be accessed by all. The focus cannot be solely on licensed ‘pubs and clubs’ that traditional dominate the live sector.

Deepening the connection with the community is also key to introducing young people to music, who currently have limiting opportunity to do so through the education system. NT patrons do not generally travel to see music, unless for major events, meaning it is important to ensure access across in all NT communities noting the changing nature of our communities. This is most apparent in the greater Darwin community where continued suburban spread is drawing people from the CBD and presenting new challenges in terms of providing access to music.



Issues and Action

Ensure patrons can access live music in a safe environment where they are welcomed and feel comfortable.

Work with venues to ensure best-practice management is in place to ensure the safety of patrons when attending live music performances. This can be delivered through venue staff and broader industry training, along with a deeper investment in presenting performances in community-focussed environments.

Access to a diverse range of venues from established live music venues to community centres.

Develop and deliver initiatives that encourage broader investment in live music venues, while also creating an environment through regulation and training that fosters the use of ‘non-traditional’ venues for present live music such as community centres, Government-owned buildings, parks, and other small businesses. This is particularly relevant to more remote communities that may not have traditional venue infrastructure.

Providing access to a wide range of genres of music – with a particular focus on original music.

As detailed elsewhere in the Strategy, creating an environment in which NT artists are encouraged to explore and create a diverse range of musical styles that meet the listening habits of the community. This includes ensuring venues are encouraged to curate their live music offering with a focus on diversity ensuring all artists have the opportunity to perform.

Offering family-friendly and cost-sensitive opportunities to access music.

Explore opportunities to present more community-focused free and outdoor events across the Territory, including developing a regulatory environment that reduces any barriers to presenting all-ages shows. This will increase the visible presence of music in the community while also offering an alternative environment in which it can be experienced on a regular basis – outside traditional pub and club venues. Opportunity further exists to explore the establishment of a network of regional and remote community ‘touring festivals’ that provide opportunity for people to experience live music without the need to significant investment in infrastructure at a local level.

Recommended activity includes:

- Ongoing support for the ‘All Good Project’ (Safer venues program) that addresses issues of safety within venues ensuring broad community access.
- Develop and deliver a venue development program that assists existing venues deal with practical constraints – noise attenuation; amenity for patrons, COVID safety – to encourage wider investment in the presentation of music.
- Develop industry and community led strategies to address legislative and compliance barriers that restrict the use of public spaces and non-traditional venues for live performance while also facilitating more all-ages performance opportunities.
- Support projects aimed at promoting live music as an important community activity through varied government agencies – including education and health – while working more closely with local governments to encourage activation of open spaces for performance opportunities in major centres and more remote communities.



Image by Steve Kelk

Artists

“There is a great community of musicians here, I think there could be more networking and support between musicians, bands and industry people to work together.”

Survey Respondent

Artists will always remain at the core of the music industry – whether that be live performance or recording and releasing music. Without a cohort of supported, respected and inspired artists the industry will be limited in its development and the effectiveness with which music can connect to, and represent the experience of, the community.

NT artists have a deep tradition of resilience and passion and play a vital role in the maintenance and celebration of the NT’s unique culture by writing music and telling stories that reflect ‘the Territory experience’. Their music presents a unique opportunity for cultural exchange with many recognised globally for their work.

NT artists also continue to develop careers despite facing an already established range of challenges – many of those are unique to the Territory. These challenges have been further heightened through 2020 with the pandemic response limiting performance opportunities locally while effectively shutting down the national touring circuit many rely on for career development and sustainable incomes.

Key challenges identified across the Strategy consultation process have included limited income potential for artists, geographically difficult touring opportunities and associated costs, isolation from other major music centres, and limited support networks through a lack of professional services and associated industry businesses – professionally run venues, labels, management, agents, publicists.



Image by Paz Tassone

Issues and Action

Ensuring artists can perform in an environment in which they feel safe and are respected by venues and patrons.

Consultation unearthed a pattern where many artists – particularly women – felt uncomfortable performing in traditional licensed live music venues, impacting on their ability to build a career. To respond this, collaboration between local and national agencies can be encouraged to develop best-practice guides for venues with a focus on creating a safe work environment for artists that sees them treated professionally, paid reasonable fees, and comfortably able to perform without harassment from patrons or staff.

Providing opportunities to better connect with other artists and industry to foster a spirit of collaboration and exchange.

Creating a sense of community and collaboration is key to growing the sector and artists across the NT have expressed a clear desire to engage more closely with each other. This is to be achieved through an investment in more regular networking events that foster knowledge sharing and collaboration alongside the presentation of major Territory industry gatherings aimed at connecting local artists with the national and international industry.

Building skills and knowledge base that will assist them in establishing and maintaining careers.

With limited industry around them, artists must take a ‘DIY’ approach to managing their careers. Investing in increased levels of professional development activities and training will lead to more sustainable careers. Additionally, more proactive artists will drive greater outcomes for the broader industry – for example, better promotion of shows and tours to ensure increased patronage at venues.

Developing a more established touring circuit within the NT through infrastructure investment with venues and music centres, while continuing to access interstate and international touring opportunities.

Touring is critical to audience development and generation of income. To meet that need a Territory-wide touring circuit can be developed by working closely with identified venues, local governments, communities, and a centralised coordination body to create necessary infrastructure. This initiative also addresses the desire of Territorians to access new music on a regular basis. Additionally, NT artists should be encouraged and supported in developing national and global opportunities through touring outside of the NT.

Recommended activity includes:

- Investigation of a regular NT touring circuit – including festivals in remote regions – through collaboration with identified venues and music workers and managed by a centralised agency providing guidance and support to artists
- Partnering with national agencies to develop and launch a best-practice guide for venues which includes principles for the respectful and professional engagement of artists
- Delivery of events that encourage information sharing, collaboration and professional development for artists while building local and interstate networks that support creative and career growth
- Identify and address knowledge and skills gaps within the artist community through training and professional development activities aimed at supporting career development and delivered in partnership with other agencies and professional bodies



Industry and Venues

“Understanding that venues are work environments also and working to make them a safe working environment for people.”

Survey Respondent

The local music industry – including venues that present live music – plays a critical role in sustaining and growing the NT music sector as it invests in and supports the broader environment in which artists emerge and work to maintain careers.

The ‘nightlife economy’ also presents a significant opportunity to make a major contribution to the NT economy generally, particularly in larger centres with a focus on tourism experiences. Investment in strategy to support this industry across Australia and globally continues to deliver outcomes across in terms of economic growth and creative output – which can be replicated in the NT.

It has been identified through consultation that the NT faces challenges due to a lack of industry workers and

businesses including managers, record labels, agents, publishers and other associated industry professionals.

This is not an issue unique to the Territory, but must be addressed to support growth of the broader industry.

Meanwhile, the NT is home to a diverse range of venues – many of which continue to be supportive of local artists. However, consultations show many venues are reluctant to support live music – particularly original music – while others are not providing a safe and respectful environment for artists to perform.

Whether it be providing professional development for music businesses or assisting venues address barriers to presenting live music, building these components of the industry is crucial to its overall growth.

Issues and Action

Develop a support program that offers guidance to venues around best-practice operation to encourage and support live music.

Work with local and national agencies to develop and deliver a best-practice guide for venue management. This would include program of training activities that not only encourages a deeper investment by venues in local music, but ensure presenting live music is sustainable – this would focus on management, marketing, understanding the needs of their communities, and the role artists can play in supporting the venue’s viability.

Deliver a suite of activities that assists in supporting the emergence of new industry professionals and businesses, while investing in the growth of established businesses ensuring they remain in the NT.

Examine the delivery of targeted training and professional development activities for local industry professionals, developed in partnership with local and national industry agencies. These activities will build critical skills while fostering business resilience and sustainability. With the emergence of more local industry professionals will come increased support for NT artists, furthering the opportunities to build and maintain a career in the NT.

Encourage deeper collaboration between industry, venues and artists to deliver better outcomes while strengthening connections with the national sector.

As with artists, fostering a sense of communication and collaboration between business will deliver broad outcomes for all. This will be extended to enhanced relationships with national industry bodies while additionally fostering collaboration with interstate and international industry, building opportunities for business growth and artist development.

Ensure connection between the industry ‘hot spots’ of Darwin and Alice Springs with the many communities across the Territory that support music making and live performance.

While much focus is on major centres, music is prevalent across all NT communities. Providing capacity for communication and collaboration across communities will build opportunities for information sharing, professional development, and the establishment of regular touring circuits identified as key to industry growth.

Recommended activity includes:

- Development of a “Business of Music” program focused on training and development in music industry skills.
- Partnering with national agencies to develop and launch a best-practice guide for venues which includes guidance around venue management, marketing, and encourages sustainable and expanded investment in live music by venues.
- Support the ongoing work of a NT Music Industry Council that represents interests of the sector from across the Territory – fostering collaboration and strategic guidance for sector growth with a focus on supporting the growth of the night time economy.
- Facilitation of a more collaborative approach to information sharing and industry partnerships through regular meetings, events, and engagement with the national sector through an annual major music industry event.



Image by Paz Tassone



Image by Milly Hooper

Maintaining Growth

While this document provides a cohesive roadmap for industry development, its implementation will be a multi-phase approach.

1

Development and delivery of a detailed operational plan that provides a clear framework for rolling out identified projects including budgetary considerations.

2

Maintenance of open communication with the sector through formalised engagement processes.

3

Commitment to annual surveys of industry and community to gauge project impact and identify emerging issues and opportunities.

4

Continued investment in data collection and analysis to ensure a clear picture of the health of the sector is available.

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MusicNT is the non-profit music organisation for the Northern Territory, representing, developing and servicing the Territory's original music industry.

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