

MUSIC VICTORIA

Regional Live Music Action Plan

Music Victoria's commitment to Regional Live Music

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Introduction

Victoria's arts and cultural sector is recognised as an important strength of the state economy, with the Victorian Government's strategy *Securing Victoria's Economy* positioning Victoria as Australia's arts and cultural capitalⁱ. While the sector is relatively small, it is growing strongly and represents an important source of job creation as Victoria continues its transition to a knowledge economy.

Victoria's music industry is an important part of the broader arts and cultural sector. It is a billion dollar business with an estimated \$1.04 billion spent in small venues, concerts and festivals in 2012ⁱⁱ. The sector directly employs over 30,000 full time equivalent employeesⁱⁱⁱ, as well as supporting employment in related industries.

Music Victoria is the independent, non-for-profit, non-partisan peak body for contemporary music with the mission to champion Victorian music. One of its key objectives is to support development of Victoria's regional music scene to improve economic and social outcomes in the regions.

To support the objective of regional development, Music Victoria recently conducted the first comprehensive *Regional Live Music Census* (2013) in Victoria. The Census aimed to collect data on annual live music performance from venues in non-metropolitan Victoria. The findings of the study estimated that there are:

- 200 venues in regional Victoria that host regular live music
- 500 gigs per week
- three million annual patrons plus one million additional patrons at regional festivals.

While the figures appear strong, the regional music scene is underdeveloped compared to Melbourne's. While the festival scene is generally strong over summer, gig attendances drop off during the rest of the year, putting financial pressure on many small venues. Music Victoria would like to note the recent success of the Groovin' the Moo Festival held in The City of Greater Bendigo, that sold out in just ten days, but fails to have a small to medium size venue catering for the same national/international profile touring acts.

There is a particular opportunity to establish a regional touring circuit to attract a stronger and higher quality music offering and support local musicians. Developing the regional music scene and industry has the potential to:

- Deliver more dynamic regional communities
- Provide cultural choices and a diversified lifestyle for residents, including young people
- Complement regional tourism initiatives
- Foster skills, knowledge and innovation transfers between the regions and Melbourne's recording and music industry, including in the area of intellectual property
- Support local economic development, including through job creation.

Supporting Victoria's music sector generates positive economic, social and cultural outcomes for the state. The Victorian Government can support the music sector in direct and indirect ways through partnership arrangements with industry, advocacy, regulatory reform, and targeted financial assistance. Ultimately, the development of the regional music sector requires the coordinated action of the music industry and government, including local government.

Regional Live Music Plan

To foster a long term and self-sustaining regional music scene a Regional Live Music Plan (the Plan) should be developed that aims to:

- Re-build Victoria's regional touring circuit and demonstrating the circuit as a viable and profitable focus for industry investment, including applying learnings from the comparatively successful New South Wales Regional tour circuit
- Establish industry networks across the regions and with the industry decision-makers in Melbourne
- Foster better coordination between industry and regional local government, and with the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres
- Support local musicians and local music scenes
- Promote the Best Practice Guidelines for Live Music Venues (a joint initiative between Music Victoria and the Victorian Government) in the regions
- Roll out professional development and capacity building, and supporting micro-business in the regional music industry.
- Conduct ongoing research / a census every 1 or 2 years etc to monitor health of the regional music scene etc

The Plan should examine and build upon the issues identified in the Regional Live Music Census, and outline a way forward to promote and advance Victoria's regional live music scene. The results of the Census can also serve as a benchmark to measure performance.

The Plan would be prepared, owned and delivered as a joint initiative between Music Victoria and the music industry, the Victorian Government, and participating local governments.

As a first step, the Victorian Government can assist by promoting an outcomes logic map and/or investment logic map process to better focus the allocation of resources and ensure a long-term economic and social dividend.

Initiatives and Victorian Government support

Music Victoria proposes a series of initiatives and structures to support the development and implementation of the Regional Live Music Plan.

This initiative seeks to establish a regional touring reference group comprised of some of the state's most experienced regional touring acts, bookers, managers and venue operators - akin to WAM's Regional Touring Circuit Development Reference Group (RTCDFG).

Collectively, these initiatives would require investment by the Victorian Government of \$150,000 to \$250,000 per annum. Music Victoria considers a funding commitment of at least three years would be required to establish a self-sustaining regional music tour.

1. Regional Live Music Office/Officer

To administer and implement the Regional Live Music Action Plan, a dedicated office/officer should be established. The office would operate under the governance of Music Victoria (as a fully registered incorporated entity), with representation in both Melbourne and the regions.

2. Regional Live Music Touring Assistance Program

Funding to develop and establish a Regional Live Music Touring Assistance Program supporting existing venues and reinvigorating the regional live music touring circuit.

A Regional Music Officer will run the Regional Live Music Touring Assistance Program and act as Tour Manager/Coordinator on the road. This continuity will strengthen existing networks and create new opportunities as well as facilitate first hand reporting of program impact and outcomes, sector concerns and long term sustainability.

In recent years, tour promoters and bands alike have shied away from the risks of regional touring. This is due to a broad range of issues, from unreliable venues and operators, to low audience numbers, and the sheer expense of travelling such distances to perform. Developing a solid regional touring circuit holds

inherent and invaluable gains, not only for artists in the earlier stages of their performance development, but also in creating a consistent and sustainable live music scene in the regions.

Current examples of a Regional Touring Program in Victoria exist such as the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC) and Regional Arts Victoria's (RAV) 'Showcase' program, presently these are heavily performing arts and theatre based shows with minimal to no contemporary music content. Music Victoria seeks to rectify this inequality in line with the Regional Growth Fund's aim to create new prosperity, more opportunities and a better quality of life for all regional Victorians.

The Regional Live Music Touring Assistance Program could consist of a high profile act (currently touring metro centers) supported by an emerging, regionally based opening act - the support act will preferably hail from an alternate region, aiding their fan-base development. The acts will be broad and respond to specific criteria, with performances to be held initially in the major regional centres - Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong – then rolled out to smaller regional centres.

Music Victoria proposes the following three possible touring assistance programs:

- An all-ages tour held in licensed venues to promote the recent reforms by the Victorian Coalition Government on all-ages gigs.
- An established, high profile act tour through the VAPAC venues with strong promotion, to prove the viability of a music touring circuit and promote the use of these multipurpose venues throughout the regions.
- A high profile tour through RSL's and Clubs using existing multipurpose venues and infrastructure to reinvigorate and highlight the viability of live music as a healthy revenue stream.

In 2012, West Australian contemporary music peak body affiliate WAM conducted 18 shows across six tours to audiences over 2,700 in the Wheatbelt region, this project also offered 22 paid performance opportunities for local, original Wheatbelt acts. On the success of these touring initiatives, Music Victoria will develop and expand the program to reach further into the regions and access more remote corners of the state.

3. Development of a Regional Touring Kit

The Regional Touring Kit will consist of key tools for success including the Best Practice Live Music Guidelines (which were developed by the music industry and Government on the Live Music Roundtable) a regional gig guide and information on current policies and reforms. The kit will be available through the Music Victoria website and promoted by the Regional Music Officer at every opportunity, such as at the Regional Live Music workshops (below).

4. Regional Live Music Workshops and Seminars

Music Victoria will run Regional Live Music Workshops to develop relevant skills and connect key stakeholders in regional centres. The workshops will include opportunities for ongoing professional development for the music industry, promotion of the Regional Touring Kit, and providing ongoing advice and updates on current policies and reforms, such as the recent All Ages gig deregulation and Agent of Change. The workshop content will range from venue Best Practice and marketing strategies to artist run song-writing workshops.

5. Annual Regional Live Music Summit

Music Victoria seeks to establish an annual Regional Live Music Summit bringing together key industry professionals and providing the opportunity to network, resource share and promote best practice.

The summit would promote cooperation, the exchange of ideas and experiences between stakeholders and encourage collaborations and creation of touring concepts between regional and metropolitan based. Existing models currently in place in other states such as the WAM Regional Roundtable in Western Australia and Sound Summit New South Wales are presently held in major state capitals. The summit could take place in a major Victorian regional centre (potentially a different location every year), bringing the knowledge base to the regions.

6. Music Victoria Live Music Action Plan Consultation

An ongoing or periodic program of consultation should be undertaken with all stakeholders including local councils.

Music Victoria is currently engaged with three major regional councils with a commitment to develop a Live Music Action Plan and strategy, The City of Ballarat, The City of Greater Geelong and the City of Greater Bendigo all with a vision to enhance and develop the cities Live Music offerings.

It will conduct ongoing engagement to monitor progress of regional live music plan and new issues.

Tangible benefits

In its 2010 report, *Economic, Social and Cultural Contribution of Live Music in Victoria*¹, Deloitte Access Economics noted the many economic and social benefits that live music provides to young communities across the state.

Some of the noted benefits to the community included enhanced social networks and social engagement for performers and patrons, including the provision of a welcoming and safe environment; and community identity and pride.

“Live music performances provide an opportunity for both performers and patrons to develop their social networks and expand their friendship groups,” it states.

“These benefits associated with enhanced social networks are privately accrued. However, the sense of belonging that is generated through improved social networks also has a spillover effect to the wider community, as the positive feelings experienced by patrons are likely to influence their interactions with other community members. For example, through their involvement in the live music scene, young people may feel less isolated and may therefore be less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour.”

As noted by one consultation participant, live music performances draw together a “like-minded tribe of a disparate age” – patrons are music-lovers and this unites them and helps to provide a safe environment with minimal conflict. The social engagement of patrons is also described by Shane Homan², who notes that audiences often develop ties with particular venues, “where regulars make passionate connections with musicians, music genres, venue owners and a local community”

“I’ve been going to under age gigs since I was 13 and I’ve met a lot of friends through it,” said another young music fan. “Music really means something to us we get excited beforehand, meet our friends and afterwards get some food and talk about who played the best. It’s kept me from just hanging around malls or train stations.”

General benefits to regional communities:

- Through artistic and creative expression, the Music Victoria Regional Action Plan aims to provide experiences, opportunities and social connections for regional musicians and music fans.
- Participants connecting artistically and socially with their local industry and community
- Participants feeling empowered, motivated and skilled in moving forward as emerging music industry workers and performers
- A focus on young people seeking more advocacy and support to participate in music programs and integrate with the industry
- Promote positive youth development
- Break down barriers that lead to and impact on the mental health and well being of young people - in particular young people from culturally and linguistically diverse, low-socio-economic and regionally isolated backgrounds
- Empower young people to participate in arts activities that are culturally appropriate and lead to high profile public outcomes that are valued by the community and industry

¹ *The economic, social and cultural contribution of venue-based live music in Victoria* – Deloitte Access Economics, 2011: http://www.musicvictoria.com.au/assets/Documents/DAE_Live_music_report_2011.pdf

² 2003b, ‘Youth, live music and urban leisure: Geographies of noise’, *Youth Studies Australia*, 22(2): 12-18.

- Provide opportunities that encourage personal development, build self-esteem and promote healthy lifestyles through music cultures
- Challenge the attitudes of young people and the community in relation to enjoying live music without the use of drugs, alcohol or tobacco
- Developing and implementing positive youth music programs that motivate young people to enhance health and assist in the reduction of risk factors

Specific benefits of the Regional Action Plan:

Tours: 3,000 regional music fans gaining access to major Australian talent such as Dan Sultan and the Jezebels touring 'on cycle' on six tours in up to 18 regional centres.

Local artist exposure: By offering local artists support slots at shows, the best up and coming local artists will get an opportunity to play in front of large audiences and be featured in mass advertising campaigns and local media.

Young people: All-ages shows will provide a positive cultural experience for young people and their siblings and parents in a safe, supervised environment, and a creative outlet for young people who aren't necessarily engaged with sport.

New venues / audiences: The tours will take place not just in traditional venues for all ages and over 18 audiences, but university campuses, RSLs (providing them with a new younger audience/membership), community halls and Victorian Performing Arts Centres.

Economic benefit: More shows means more jobs not just for artists, but for caterers, technical crew, roadies, production companies, food and beverage, and venue staff, building on the \$280 million contribution music already makes to the regional economy.

Social cohesion: By teaming up with government agencies such as TAC and the Drug Foundation, and providing input into the new Vic Health Active Arts Strategy, sending positive messages to the community around drug use and drink driving.

Co-ordination: Regional Officer will provide a central hub of information to promote the Live Music Best Practice Guide and link up networks around the state.

ⁱⁱ Victorian Government (2012) *Securing Victoria's Economy*

ⁱⁱ Victorian Live Music Census (2012) Music Victoria, City of Melbourne, NMIT, RMIT, Box Hill Institute, Victoria University, JMC Academy

ⁱⁱⁱ Deloitte Access Economics (2011); Ernst & Young / Live Performance Australia (2010) *Size and scope of the live entertainment industry*, for Live Performance Australia; Newton, D (2012) *Popular music funding – It's time*, Conference paper at Policy notes: Popular music, industry and the state.