



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Economics,
Industry and Recreation

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Canberra's Night-Time Economy

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Submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly

Inquiry into the Night-Time Economy in Canberra's CBD and Town Centres

Submitted by Gang Gang Café

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Executive Summary

Gang Gang Café is a 200-capacity, community-oriented venue in Canberra's inner north, operated by three musician brothers. Alongside our daytime café operations, we present a year-round program of original live music across alternative, indie, experimental and electronic genres.

Since taking over the venue, we have developed it into one of Canberra's most active mid-sized music spaces, regularly hosting local, national and international touring artists.

Higher-attendance live music events are often what determine whether a month of trade is profitable or unprofitable. At the same time, insurance costs and regulatory pressures are increasing. Without practical structural support — particularly for venues operating outside the CBD — small-to-mid-sized venues will find it increasingly difficult to operate sustainably.

Canberra has the scale and structure to build a vibrant, distributed and inclusive night-time economy. The following comments respond to the Committee's Terms of Reference.

1. Economic Performance, Employment and Business Sustainability

Independent live music venues operate on extremely tight margins.

For Gang Gang, larger concerts with strong attendance are often what make the difference between a profitable and unprofitable month. These events involve higher staffing and production costs and risk of noise complaints, but they generate the revenue necessary to offset quieter periods.

Without the ability to host well-attended events, financial sustainability becomes fragile.

Live music supports:

- Employment for venue and production staff
- Income for artists
- Increased food and beverage turnover

Its economic impact extends well beyond ticket sales and contributes directly to the vitality of town centres.

2. Regulatory Environment (Licensing, Planning, Noise, Entertainment Precincts, Safety and Public Transport)

Insurance

Our insurance premiums have increased significantly year-on-year due to our live music operations, despite strong safety management.

For independent venues, these increases can eliminate already narrow margins. Without structural solutions, such as pooled insurance schemes or government-supported underwriting, venues may be forced to reduce programming or exit the sector.

Entertainment Precincts and Protection Beyond the CBD

We recognise the value of a designated Entertainment Precinct in the CBD, concentrated activity in Civic makes sense.

However, if the ACT is serious about being an arts capital, protections should not be limited to the city.

COVID shifted behaviour. Many patrons now prefer attending events within their local communities rather than travelling into Civic. Canberra's town-centre structure provides a unique opportunity to support distributed cultural hubs.

Existing venues outside the CBD, particularly those established prior to surrounding residential development, should be formally recognised and protected through satellite entertainment precinct zones. Without similar planning recognition, these venues remain vulnerable to new nearby developments and a lack of sound protection, despite their contribution to economic and cultural life.

Safety and Public Transport

If night-time activity is to be distributed beyond Civic, transport planning must support it. Improved late-night services across town centres would enhance safety and accessibility.

3. The Role of Live Music, Special Events and Hospitality

Gang Gang presents artists performing original material, contributing directly to Canberra's music ecosystem and its integration into national touring circuits.

Through sustained programming and industry engagement, we now regularly host interstate touring artists and receive direct approaches from national and international booking agents seeking to include Canberra on tour schedules.

This:

- Retains local spending
- Attracts visitors

- Strengthens pathways for emerging artists
- Builds Canberra's cultural profile

Mid-sized venues are critical infrastructure in this system. They bridge grassroots scenes and larger commercial stages, making Canberra a viable and respected touring destination.

4. Opportunities to Diversify and Enhance Canberra's Night-Time Economy

Canberra's night-time economy should not be defined solely by CBD-based activity.

There is a strong opportunity in supporting neighbourhood-based venues that reflect evolving audience preferences. Many younger patrons now seek curated, experience-driven events rather than traditional late-night drinking environments.

Distributed cultural spaces:

- Diversify economic activity
- Strengthen local identity
- Create inclusive environments

Our Effulgent events, recently featured in an ABC article; about several cities, including Canberra, losing their dedicated queer bars/clubs, illustrate this. These highly attended celebrations of the trans community often raise over \$10,000 per event for community initiatives.

Attendees wear elaborate and revealing costumes as acts of creative expression. Hosting these events outside the CBD, within a contained community setting, contributes significantly to participants' sense of safety. Attendees feel comfortable expressing themselves without navigating multiple nightlife environments.

Location and venue context matter. Supporting event spaces beyond Civic strengthens both inclusion and cohesion.

5. Governance and a Night-Time Economy Coordinator

We support establishing a dedicated Night-Time Economy Coordinator within the ACT Public Service.

Night-time operators currently navigate planning, licensing, compliance and arts policy across multiple agencies. A central coordinating role could:

- Reduce regulatory friction
- Improve cross-agency communication
- Support distributed activation across town centres
- Advocate for practical reforms

To be effective, this role should include genuine industry experience.

6. International and Domestic Best Practice

Successful night-time economies internationally share common features:

- Recognition of cultural venues as civic infrastructure
- Distributed activation across central and neighbourhood precincts
- Planning certainty for established venue
- Establish satellite Entertainment precinct zones to protect preexisting venues outside of the city
- Dedicated night-time leadership

Canberra's multi-centre design positions it well to adopt this model. Formalising satellite cultural zones alongside the CBD Entertainment Precinct would align with best practice while reflecting Canberra's structure.

7. Other Issues

Independent live music venues nationally are under increasing financial pressure. Rising insurance costs and compliance burdens are narrowing margins and reducing viability.

If Canberra aims to retain creative talent and build a strong cultural identity, small and mid-sized venues must be recognised as foundational infrastructure within the night-time economy.

Deliberate policy settings will determine whether Canberra's night-time economy becomes more diverse and resilient, or increasingly centralised and commercially narrow.

Recommendations

1. Investigate insurance reform or pooled underwriting models for live music venues.
2. Develop satellite cultural or entertainment protection zones in established town centres to safeguard pre-existing venues and support distributed night-time activity beyond the CBD.
3. Improve late-night public transport servicing multiple town centres.
4. Establish a Night-Time Economy Coordinator with relevant industry expertise.
5. Recognise mid-sized live music venues as cultural infrastructure within planning and economic policy frameworks