

Canberra Blues Society Incorporated

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25th June 2009

Ms Mary Porter AM MLA,
Chair,
Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works,
And Territory and Municipal Services,
Civic Square,
London Circuit,
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Porter,

Inquiry into Live Community Events

As President of the Canberra Blues Society Incorporated (CBS), I wish to make the following submission on behalf of the Society and its members.

Formed in 2004, the CBS currently has 80 members (single, family and band) and its monthly jams attract between 110 – 160 patrons. Its primary Aims and Objectives are:

- a) The promotion of blues music throughout the Canberra region;
- b) The organisation of regular CBS music activities in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the CBS;
- c) The organisation of social gatherings for members of the CBS; and
- d) The promotion and encouragement of youth in blues.

Preamble

In order for the CBS to conduct its live music activities, it is reliant on the availability of suitable community or commercial venues. Finding such facilities is becoming increasingly more difficult in recent times with many restrictions being imposed on the management of those facilities.

Dedicated to the Blues

Live music engenders a real sense of community by bringing together people with similar interests and providing an outlet for the creative talents of musicians. In the case of the CBS, our activities also involve the encouragement of young musicians who have limited opportunities to further their musical interests once they leave their school environments.

The CBS provides regular opportunities for students participating in school-based music programs to develop their musical talent and gain valuable experience by providing ongoing tutoring and mentoring, a performance venue and an appreciative and supportive audience. Through its monthly jams, the Society also nurtures the social inclusion of community members with disabilities who gain a lot from their inter-action with those live music performances. It has also participated in a number of Canberra multi-cultural and community events over the years.

Community Bollards/Wall Space

As a non-profit organisation, the Society has limited funds with which to promote its activities or to hire community venues on a regular basis, and, in the main, has to rely on the largesse of commercial venues. These venues expect that the CBS actively promote its activities (and therefore the venues) as a condition of any 'Memorandum of Understanding' associated with that relationship. **The availability of Community Bollards or clearly sign-posted and prominent wall space on which to promote such events would significantly increase the opportunities for community-based non-profit groups like the Society to reach out to, and engage with, the broader community.**

As another obvious community benefit, the provision of such accessible community space would confine or contain what some in the community would regard as visual pollution to specific areas which could be more easily maintained and controlled, similar to the practice of providing wall space for graffiti artists to showcase their artistic talents.

Building Codes

Of particular concern to the CBS and its members is the need to closely examine existing building codes for residential and business development in commercial zones. As briefly mentioned earlier in this submission, live music venues are at a premium and due consideration should be given to how these venues can co-exist with other businesses, but more particularly with future residential developments. **Suitable sound insulation such as double glazing or some other sound attenuation materials/technology must be mandated in future building code amendments,** particularly for future residential developments within a designated radius from an existing live music venue.

A case in point is the noise issues surrounding the **Old Canberra Inn** in Lyneham. This 100 + year-old heritage-listed building is a very popular live music venue which now finds itself surrounded by residential development where apparently no consideration was given to the impact that live music would have on those residents. Noise complaints are now a real ongoing threat to the future of this venue.

The **National Press Club** in Barton also has similar problems. Both residential and office developments in recent times have now encircled the NPC and resulted in noise complaints and therefore noise restrictions on its live music activities. Similarly, community venues such as the **Corroboree Park Community Hall** in Ainslie are subject to the same sort of objections by local residents which severely limits the number of music-related activities hosted at these types of venues.

Commercial Venues

Those venues located in primarily residential areas will continue to come under continuing pressure to limit their live music activities. Many of these venues will find it increasing more difficult to meet strict noise guidelines and therefore their financial viability will be at risk and may force many to cease operating. This will obviously make it more difficult for community-based organizations like the CBS to find suitable venues in which to conduct their activities.

In order to ensure their financial viability, consideration should be given to reviewing the current impositions placed on commercial venues with a view to reducing them to enable existing venues to continue providing commercial live music.

Community Venues

If reducing the current impositions on commercial venues is not an option, then in order to compensate for the decreasing availability of these venues, **the ACT Government must ensure that sufficient community venues are provided for live music events. Due consideration must be given to the provision of suitable facilities in the current Canberra CBD and existing town centres, as well as being incorporated into the design of all future town centres.**

By centralising these community venues in the CBD and town centres, the major issue surrounding adherence to noise restrictions would be minimised. Any future residential developments would not be impacted to the same degree as is the case at present with live music venues being co-located in residential areas.

The availability of a suitable number of community venues, accessible by non-profit community organisations like the CBS, will ensure that live music and events remain an integral part of our culture and continue to contribute to the maintenance of a vibrant, culturally diverse community.

However, the provision of cheap or free community venues to enable non-profit organisations like the CBS, may not guarantee their viability in the future. Audiences supporting such activities have an expectation that these types of events are fully catered, which includes the serving on alcohol.

Whether these community venues should be licensed may not be covered by the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry, however if it is not, it is an issue that should be referred to the appropriate part of the ACT Government for due consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Russ Lawrence

Russ Lawrence

CBS President