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canberra musicians club

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Canberra Musicians Club submission to the:

Inquiry into elements impacting on the Future of the ACT Clubs Sector

13 May 2015

The Canberra Musicians Club (CMC) was established in 2008 to support musicians and lovers of live music. We are a not for profit organisation that hosts live music events in a range of venues, including Clubs such as the Polish White Eagle Club, The Turner Bowling Club and the Croatia Australia Club.

We have a growing reputation from putting on hundreds of events each year and have developed an audience for live original music. We regularly put on shows that showcase Canberra musicians, and also host touring musicians from around Australia and the World.

Our activities not only provide economic opportunities for musicians, they also provide financial support to the Clubs in which we operate. This income stream assists clubs to become less dependent on gambling revenue. Our favourite venue, the Polish White Eagle Club has no Poker machines and has a sound business model based on hall hire and bar sales. In addition there is a restaurant which is run as an independent restaurant, and the CMC distributes income from the cover charge to the performers. This is a great example of economic diversification.

However, the live music scene in Canberra is facing a number of immediate challenges, particularly the growing conflict between live music and encroaching residential development, and a lack of suitable venues.

We have demonstrated that previously underutilised clubs can be brought to life and into economic viability. A good initiative would be to identify and make information available about club facilities that may be available for greater community use.

A key issue in relation to Clubs is that many were granted leases to public land for community purposes at low upfront costs. Over time some Clubs then claim that they cannot remain financially viable without entering into some sort of residential or commercial development. If Clubs claim they are no longer financially viable, there is a question as to whether they should be able to convert the lease to allow for commercial development on the site – or should they be required to hand the lease back to the Government? The Government could then seek expressions of interest for alternative Community group to make a go of it, so that the land remains a community asset.

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Even if development on the site of an unviable club was viewed as an appropriate use for that particular site, perhaps the site should return to the Government. Any income would then go to the benefit of the wider community, rather than the profits going to particular club because it happens to have the lease over community land at that particular time.

There is a current trend where large sporting clubs (eg Brumbies, Raiders, Ainslie Group) are swooping on small Clubs only to later claim they are not viable, apply for deconcessionalisation and put in a development proposals. Is the windfall profit going to particular clubs fair? and are we losing valuable community facilities, (halls, open space and sport facilities) which will only become more valuable as urban infill intensifies.

Indeed it is the very sites that are most valuable (eg inner north and inner south) and where developer pressure is greatest, that these facilities are most valuable to the community as urban development intensifies.

Conflict around noise can also emerge where residential development occurs on Club sites in precincts where there are a number of Clubs. Some of these Clubs may have traditionally hosted live music or parties and then face complaints from new neighbours.

The value of live music should be considered when decisions on land use, planning and building controls are being made. Noise complaints have impacted on many live music venues in Canberra over a number of years and that is potentially set to get worse as we see more residential development taking place in areas where clubs and venues exist.

People move in because they want to be in a vibrant area, but then once they move in, some start to complain about noise. Zoning should be considered for night life or entertainment precincts.

Soundproofing can help block much of the noise from music venues. Best-practice soundproofing should become a requirement in all new residential developments in commercial areas and adjacent to clubs.

Liquor licensing is an issue that impacts on small Clubs and venues and on clubs and other organisations putting on one-off events. While supporting efforts to tackle the issues of antisocial behaviour around alcohol, changes to the Liquor Act have impacted disproportionately on small (low risk) venues and one off events. There is a need to review the impact and see whether we can reduce some of the red tape.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the issues raised in this submission in more detail if required

Nigel McRae
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