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Landmark live music inquiry backs protection for musos

Musicians Australia, part of the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) welcomes the NSW Parliament's music and arts economy inquiry's adoption of a code of conduct for the music industry.

The inquiry's recommendation follows MEAA's call for a workable code to protect live performers from exploitation and abuse.

In its submission to the inquiry, MEAA had called for the code to ensure fair, proper and respectful treatment of musicians that would include information and arrangements for performance fees and conditions, reciprocal standards and obligations of performers, protocols for performance contractors, and agreements including no cost dispute resolution procedures.

The inquiry has recognised while there are substantial economic benefits provided by the industry, live music is in the midst of a crisis, and it report recommends the code be adopted with the inclusion of an outline of minimum hourly rate requirements.

Paul Davies, director MEAA's Musicians section said: "Most musicians lead precarious working lives. The decline of recorded music sales forces them to rely increasingly on live performance as their main source of income. This precariousness has also led to growing exploitation of musicians.

"Music is our most popular and productive art form, yet most musicians are struggling to survive. Low performance fees, unreliable contracts, undercutting of pay, and obstacles to enforcing fair and equitable treatment of musicians are signs of a poorly regulated and dysfunctional sector.

"The inquiry's recommendation of professional code of conduct is very welcome," he said.

A recent national musicians' survey by MEAA, which had 560 respondents, found that a quarter of the gigs musicians perform are unpaid, and the average hourly rate received for commercial music practice is \$7.38 – less than half the minimum wage. Most musicians have no choice but to work other jobs, but even then, their average annual income is just \$55,000. Just 12% of their income comes from broadcasting, streaming, publishing and sales.

"The recognition by NSW of the need for a code of conduct will hopefully encourage lawmakers in other jurisdictions to follow the NSW and adopt the code across the country," Davies said.

Musicians Australia will soon be a new campaign for respect and better working conditions for the live music industry.

Media contact: Paul Davies – ph: 0404 090 938; paul.davies@meaa.org

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance - the people who inform and entertain

📍 PO Box 723 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 ☎ 1300 656 513

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