




“Pay Up”

The case for Equitable Remuneration

APRIL 2026



Tech companies
must pay up —
and Equitable
Remuneration is
the answer.

The Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) is calling upon the Federal Government to introduce Equitable Remuneration (ER) provisions into copyright law to provide a practical and enforceable pathway to fair payment for creative and media workers.

With the rapid emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), massive datasets of books, images, songs, films, and voices have been — and continue to be — scraped to train commercial AI systems, which are now being used to displace the very workers whose creations they are founded upon.

This is costing livelihoods and will see a significant contraction of the creative and media industries in Australia if action is not taken to protect them.

Workers have a basic right to the value they create through work, in all things, including in works subject to copyright law.

Under Australian copyright law this right has been eroded because it can be contracted away. ER will restore this fundamental right for creative workers.

While AI industries have the potential to provide economic benefits, this must not come at the expense of workers and creative industries.

ER offers a once-in-a-generation chance to update our laws, protect creators and creative industries, and ensure the benefits of AI are shared with all Australians — not just technology giants and major corporations.

Two urgent legislative changes are needed:

- 1. Tech companies must license training data and pay creators for all uses of their work, past and future.**
- 2. Workers must be given a secure, inalienable right to be paid when the works they create are licensed, traded and used in any way, including by AI companies or in AI processes generally.**

The problem, in plain terms

AI companies train their systems on creative works without consent, credit, or compensation

Many creators only discover their work has been used when they see AI output mimicking their style or reproducing material “near verbatim.” Commercial models are not public goods; they’re built for profit and should pay for training data just like any other business using someone else’s intellectual property.

Workers are already being displaced or undercut

AI voice tools are taking work from actors and voice artists; AI music is flooding streaming platforms; newsrooms are piloting AI for headlines and copy; visual tools trained on First Nations artwork are producing “fake” Indigenous art and merchandise. Each example shifts income away from human creators toward platforms and intermediaries.

Journalism and trust are at risk

When content is generated or altered by AI without clear labelling, audiences struggle to tell what’s authentic. That’s particularly dangerous for news content, where accuracy, fairness, ethical journalism and transparency are the bedrock of public trust.

Market power is concentrating

The same tech giants controlling supply chains in digital media are driving AI adoption, increasing bargaining asymmetries with creators and workers, even as productivity gains accrue to platforms and large rightsholders.

When you pay to stream music, watch a movie, or read a book, you expect your money goes to the people who made it — the musicians, performers, writers, and technicians. Yet, in Australia, our laws don’t guarantee creators a share when their work is reproduced, broadcast, or streamed. While a tiny few might receive royalties, most skilled professionals will only get a one-off fee from the ongoing revenue their work earns, while tech companies and rightsholders, including record labels, publishers, and screen producers, continue to make record profits.

AI companies are now making deals with rightsholders to license human-made content to create synthetic music, fake actors, and machine-written stories, while the original creators are often left uncompensated.

Australia’s creative life — our stories, journalism, music, film, dance, visual art, and performance — relies on human imagination, skill, and years of training. Massive datasets of books, images, songs, films, and voices have been scraped to train commercial AI systems, and those systems are now being used to displace the very workers whose creations were taken. That’s theft — of culture, livelihoods, and the economic and cultural foundations that sustain a vibrant creative and media sector.

That’s why MEAA is saying it’s time to “pay up”.

The introduction of ER provisions into Australian copyright law will provide a practical, enforceable path to fair payment for creative and media workers.

What Australians are saying

A 2025 survey of more than 700 MEAA members has highlighted overwhelming concern about AI.

87% are moderately or extremely concerned about theft of intellectual or creative work

89% are moderately or extremely concerned about the spread of misinformation

86% are moderately or extremely concerned about the loss of human led creativity

84% are extremely concerned about lack of transparency

82% are moderately or extremely concerned about job losses



“There’s a real danger of AI devaluing artistic output... We need strong legislation and regulations around AI to protect the work of artists and creatives.”

AARON WYATT
MUSICIAN AND COMPOSER



“AI systems have used my voice and my expertise to train their models... I haven’t been informed or remunerated, simply replaced.”

JACQUI DUNCAN
ACTOR AND VOICE ARTIST



“We are, as journalists, bound by the Code of Ethics; AI is not... It not only undermines our work but also undermines public trust in journalism.”

TAWAR RAZAGHI
JOURNALIST

The economics: what's being lost and who's gaining



Creative incomes are fragile

According to MEAA's Musicians Survey, nearly half of Australia's musicians earned less than \$15,000 in 2025, whereas global tech companies report billions in annual revenues.



Streaming platforms are primed for AI content

Industry studies foresee AI generated music accounting for around 20% of streaming revenue by 2028, putting billions of dollars and human livelihoods at risk unless compensation rules are fixed.



AI intensifies exploitation risks

AI companies are signing lucrative licensing deals with rightsholders, but most authors, journalists, and non featured performers see none of the proceeds.



Macro level impacts are significant

The International Monetary Fund estimates around 60% of jobs in advanced economies will be affected by AI, with roughly half negatively affected. This will worsen inequality unless safeguards shift value back to workers.

Why 'Pay Up' is the right answer

There are two legislative gaps to fill:

1. **Tech companies (AI developers and platforms) must license training data and pay creators** (directly or via collective mechanisms) for the use of their works — past and future. They should also watermark and label all AI generated content; provide transparent training data disclosures; and accept accountability for misuse and harm, including deepfakes.
2. **AI licensing revenue must pass through to original creators** — the authors, artists, performers, journalists, and technicians — whose work is being monetised. When AI companies cut deals with rightsholders but leave creators out, they entrench historic inequities in copyright contracting and accelerate displacement.

Equitable Remuneration: What it is and why it works

A practical way to get money into creators' hands is through ER — an inalienable, non waivable right to payment for the broadcast or public communication of one's work, extended to digital and AI uses.

Originating in the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty (WPPT, Article 15), ER guarantees that all performers (including non-featured performers hired for backing vocals or instrumental parts) receive equitable payment whenever recordings are broadcast or publicly communicated.

Crucially, ER is non recoupable and cannot be waived, making it one of the only income streams creators retain even when bargaining power is weak. While this example applies to the music industry, ER applies in principle to all workers who make a material contribution to relevant works (sound recordings, movies, TV and other similar products).

What Australia did — and didn't do

Australia has implemented many WPPT obligations but reserved Article 15, effectively denying ER domestically. That made Australia one of only a few countries without ER, alongside a small set of outliers, and has resulted in a situation where domestic performers receive ER from most foreign countries, but not from Australia.

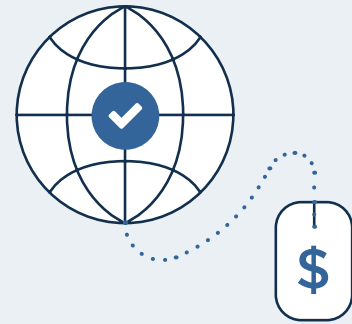
The financial cost to Australian creators

Case study evidence shows ER can be worth tens of thousands annually.

When reciprocal payments with the UK temporarily ceased, one featured performer's annual income from ER plummeted from \$A76,000 to less than a dollar.

While a separate non featured performer's income fell from \$A25,000 to just 2c.

The bottom line is ER delivers real money to the creators of the work that underpin extremely profitable industries.



How other countries are doing it successfully

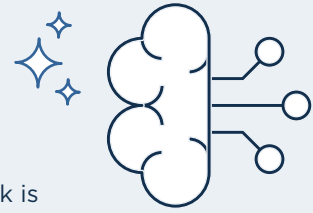
In the UK, ER has operated for the past 30 years in the music industry. Performers receive 50% of royalties arising from broadcast/public communication (within that share, featured performers get 65% and non featured performers get 35%).

Collection societies negotiate rates and distribute funds, with the Copyright Tribunal arbitrating disputes.

The result? A stable system where major labels continue to grow while creators receive meaningful ongoing payments.

Across the world, variants of ER apply, including non-transferable rights to remuneration for performers on digital platforms. Some models collect from the user (platform or broadcaster) and split proceeds between producers and performers.

Extending ER to the AI era



ER wasn't designed for AI but its principle applies perfectly: when your work is exploited to generate value, you should be paid — automatically, fairly, and in a manner that cannot be contracted away.

Here's how that can look in Australia:

1. Adopt Article 15 ER domestically for broadcast and public communication and extend ER to AI licensing and on demand digital uses - This should include any outputs using an artist's work to ensure original creators are paid when catalogues are licenced by AI firms.

2. Mandate public disclosure of training datasets - Creators need to know if their works are used and should have the ability to opt out of future training. Transparency is the precondition for consent and compensation.

3. Require licencing for AI training, including secondary infringements (e.g., data scraped abroad but exploited in Australia) - There should be no text and data mining loopholes that sidestep fair payment. Licences will create the initial cash flows that ER can then distribute to creators.

4. Create an AI levy or fund for unlicensed uses by developers abroad - As a condition of doing business in Australia, firms that used unlicensed copyrighted content abroad should contribute to a compensation fund that pays creators directly, not siphoned by intermediaries.

5. Protect moral rights and biometric likeness - Legislating non transferable rights over image, voice, movement, and likeness will prevent unauthorised digital replicas and ensure informed consent, with fast, low cost avenues for redress.

6. Watermark and label all AI generated content - Audiences deserve clarity. Labelling protects consumers, supports journalists' ethics obligations, and helps combat misinformation and deepfakes. Responsibility must sit with developers and companies deploying AI, with human oversight required for news and high risk content.

7. Protect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) - Recognise Indigenous data sovereignty and enact enforceable ICIP protocols to stop AI facilitated imitation of First Nations art and cultural knowledge.



“I want to talk about theft – because that’s what it is... For these machines, it’s not just about replacing the work and disregarding our workforce... they have to first steal human-made creative work.”

ERIN MADELEY
MEAA CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Why we all should care

Authenticity matters

When you read a story, listen to a song, or watch a performance, you value the human craft behind it. Unpaid training and synthetic replacements erode the incentives that encourage human creativity.

Democracy depends on trustworthy journalism

AI generated and manipulated content without clear labelling fuels misinformation and disinformation, undermining public debate and the accountability journalism provides. Labelling and oversight protect the information commons.

Local culture needs sustainable jobs

If creators can’t earn, they may leave the field. ER channels money back to the people making the work, keeping Australia’s cultural ecosystem alive.

A fair deal: what “pay up” looks like in practice



Tech companies →

- License training data from rightsholders; pay creators via ER and collective mechanisms.
- Publish training dataset disclosures; provide opt out tools; watermark and label AI content.
- Accept accountability for misuse, including deepfakes and synthetic impersonations.



Rightsholders (labels, publishers, producers) →

- Work with creative workers through ER to share AI and digital licensing revenue with original creators.
- Work with collecting societies and unions to implement ER cleanly and transparently.



Government

- Adopt ER (WPPT Article 15) and extend it to digital and AI uses.
- Mandate transparency, consent, and licensing for AI training; continue to rule out text and data mining exemptions for tech companies.
- Legislate moral rights for image/voice/likeness; mandatory watermarking and labelling; ICIP protections.
- Include workers in AI policy; update industrial laws for consultation on AI use; consider an AI levy where unlicensed training occurred.



What you can do

- **Value, and choose human made culture, news, music, and art from sources that respect human creators and disclose AI use.**
- **Support policies and organisations advocating for ER, transparency, and ICIP protections.**
- **Call on platforms to label AI content and pay original creators.**

Protect our cultural and economic future

AI can augment creativity — but only if it respects creators.

Today's commercial AI systems were trained using data without consent and compensation, and are being deployed to replace the workers whose works they ingested. That's not innovation — it's blatant theft.

Equitable Remuneration is a practical, globally tested way to ensure that when creative work is broadcast, communicated, streamed, or used to power AI, the people who made that work get paid — automatically, fairly, and beyond the reach of loophole ridden contracts.

Combine ER with transparency, licensing, mandatory labelling, ICIP protections, and moral rights for image and voice, and you have a blueprint for an AI future that benefits society without sacrificing the humans at its heart.

It's time for tech companies to pay up – and for Australia to adopt ER into law.

For more information → www.meaa.org





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