



## SLAM: the Music City and Cultural Activism

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### ABSTRACT

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As recording and related publishing revenues have declined, live performance has assumed increasing importance within the popular music industries. Global competition for the status of 'live music capital' has increased as cities recognise the various cultural and economic benefits, including tourism and heritage opportunities. In 2010, licensing changes to many music venues in Melbourne, Victoria, threatened the city's self-proclaimed status as Australia's 'music city', with collateral damage to its wider claim as the nation's 'cultural capital'. This article examines the subsequent protest by the city's musicians against government labelling of music venues as 'high risk' sites of alcohol-fuelled violence. The SLAM (Save Live Australian Music) rally to State parliament on 23 February, 2010 provoked wider industrial and legislative change. Beyond its affirmation of the cultural and social importance of the local music venue, the protest is interesting in successfully challenging dominant law and order discourses relating to local music subcultures. The article also examines the ways in which the SLAM event provoked more informed engagement by the state in popular music.

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## Introduction

Popular music studies scholars have contributed a strong body of work in the last few decades, which examine the relationships between popular music and politics. Much of the earlier work in this new field was preoccupied with the role of music in wider political movements, and, more explicitly, within specific protests (Denisoff, 1972; Denselow, 1989; Garofalo, 1997). Since the 1980s, 'politics and music' research has examined other instances and contexts. This has encompassed the role of politics in forms of censorship and related debates (e.g. Cloonan and Garofalo, 2002), how the state deals with what it deems to be "unpopular" music (Redhead 1995), or the particular discourses at play in decisions about what music activities are funded by the state (e.g. Shuker, 1998; Stanbridge, 2007). Equally, attention is now being paid to city policies and the urban contexts of the music industries, particularly live performance (Chevigny, 1991; Shank, 1994; Homan, 2003; Cohen, 2007).

Such work has, of course, been complicated by understandings of popular music as a key site of identity-formation and politics (Frith, 1996; Grossberg, 1992), and as expressions and formations of communities (e.g. Mattern, 1998; Marcus, 1997). This requires further delineation between music's role as *communication* (as

expressive forms and messages), and its industrial roles as part of *cultural policy*. In terms of communication, Mattern (1998: 25-32) identifies three modes of political action relating to music communities: *deliberative* (internal forms of debate around shared interests and actions); *pragmatic* (promotion of shared interests in goals of increased awareness); and *confrontational* (uses of music in resistance or opposition). While these modes are useful categories, they remain limited to music's textual functions as message, where it primarily "serves to communicate or convey what the political context requires" (Street, Hague and Sevigny, 2007: 6).

In contrast to the performance of popular music as texts within political and social contexts, this article examines the "performance of participation" (Ibid: 15) by musicians and other interested music industry workers in *contesting policies governing local music venues*. In this case study, both instances of pragmatic and confrontational action are apparent in the formation of a music community opposed to their state government. While this is much more of a case of "the politics of music" rather than the "music of politics" (Street, 2012: 8), it nonetheless invoked a series of political rights from participants (state and industry) in relation to live music venues. In this sense it is in keeping



Figure 1: Save Live Australian Music rally, Melbourne, 23 February, 2010. Photograph courtesy of Quincy McLean and Helen Marcou (SLAM. org)



Figure 2: *Save Live Australian Music* rally, Melbourne, 23 February, 2010. Photograph courtesy of Quincy McLean and Helen Marcou (SLAM. org)

with Street's assertion that music and politics are "not to be seen as separate entities whose worlds collide only occasionally, but rather are extensions of each other ... music *embodies* political values and experiences, and *organizes* our response to society as political thought and action" (2012: 1). Within the contested terrain of state cultural policy, what is at stake is the assertion of cultural power and its consequences.

The state, then, remains an important actor in not only constructing policies that inhibit or enhance activity, but in the setting of discursive frameworks that shape debates and outcomes (Homan, Cloonan and Cattermole, 2015). I am equally interested here in the construction of the *cultural citizen* (Miller and Yiduce, 2002; Miller, 2006) and the extent to which musicians and related industry sectors become engaged with music/cultural policy. The case study that animates this paper is also useful for the ways in which the initial forms of protest reached out to other constituencies, and engaged broader issues and meanings of music and culture.

### **Popular music, politics and culture: Australian contexts**

Arts and cultural policy has never played a prominent role in daily Australian political life, and this has been reflected in various ways. Firstly, the Arts ministerial portfolio, at both federal and state government levels, is usually attached to other responsibilities, including communications, regional development and the like.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the cultural policies of the two dominant political parties (the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal Party of Australia) barely feature in election campaigns.<sup>2</sup> In the 2013 federal election, the Liberal-National Party Coalition – the incoming government – did not produce an arts policy at all, instead believing that a few newspaper interviews and a public speech would suffice. Thirdly, the rare instances of fully developed cultural policies, have failed

<sup>1</sup> Australia has a tripartite system of government, with local councils, state governments and a national federal government. 'Arts' ministries exist at the state and federal levels (in contrast to 'Culture' ministries evident in Europe).

<sup>2</sup> 'Labor' is a spelling anomaly in the context of the Australian Labor Party, where the British use of 'Labour' is not used.



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politically. *Creative Nation* (1994) and *Creative Australia* (2013) both died with their respective Labour governments.

While cultural policy debates usually remain on the fringes of mainstream political debate the world over, the arrival of the conservative federal government in 2013 (under Tony Abbott) has provoked eruptions from the arts and cultural sector. In 2014, nine artists boycotted the Biennale of Sydney in 2014 to highlight that its major sponsor Transfield was a company that was also involved in the operation of the Australian migrant detention centres on Nauru and Manus Islands (Taylor and Gruber, 2014). In response, new Arts Minister George Brandis requested that the national arts funding body, the Australia Council, draft a policy that denied state funding to arts organisations who refused private sponsorships (Cox, 2014). In 2015, Arts Minister Brandis diverted \$104.7m from the Australia Council to establish the National Programme for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA). This decision has unified much of the arts and cultural sector in protests, with criticism based on several factors: the establishment of a program that will duplicate existing Australia Council funding structures; evaluation structures to be determined by the Minister's office; and the rhetorical deployment of 'excellence' to justify additional support to the already considerable funding of the high arts sector, driven by the Minister's funding preferences (Mendelssohn, 2015; Letts, 2015; Eltham and Verhoeven, 2015).

For the popular music industries, growing disquiet at classical and art music gaining the majority of arts funding at state and federal government levels was further fuelled by the restoration of \$275,000 to Melba Recordings (ABC Radio 2014), a classical music company who had previously received funding outside the purview of the Australia Council through Ministerial directives (Eltham, 2012).

The funding contexts outlined above are important in noting the 'proper' place for popular music in Australia, viewed as a series of commercial enterprises, and so not deemed worthy of greater state support, or part of the 'market failure' arguments mounted by the

classical music and opera sectors. Live music, then, has assumed greater significance to musicians and their peak representative bodies in terms of livelihoods, state structures and meanings of cultural nationalism. Apart from increased support for export music schemes (the Sounds Australia program), the establishment of a national Live Music Office is the most notable evidence of federal government support for popular music in the last decade. This is in keeping with Australian capital cities – particularly Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane – investing greater funding and regulatory resources to live music ecosystems, as part of intrastate competition to brand themselves 'music cities'. Thus, despite calls for Australian rock, pop and hip hop musicians to engage more deeply in "complaint rock" (see Giuffre, 2008), political activism is most often engaged through industrial structures, rather than broader causes and movements.

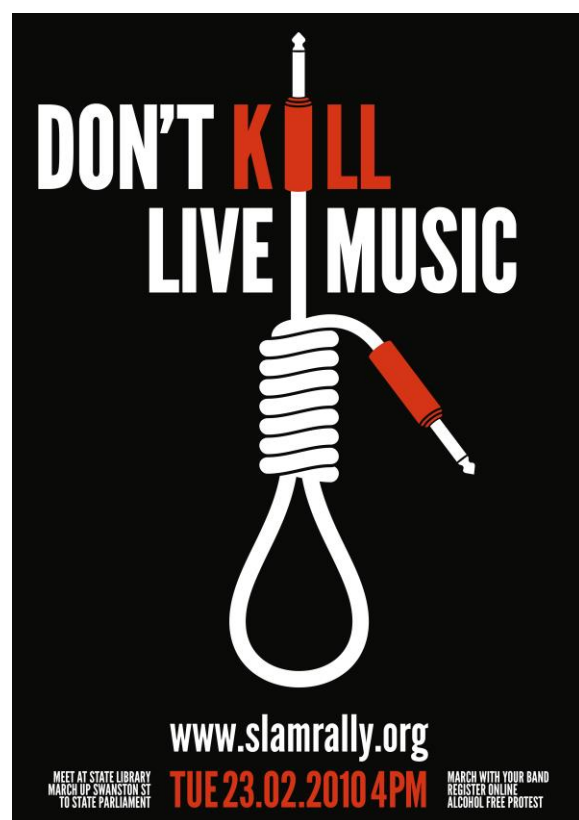


Figure 3 Save Live Australian Music rally, Melbourne, 23 February, 2010. Photograph courtesy of Quincy McLean and Helen Marcou (SLAM. org)

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Indeed, the case study here is one that combined the threat to very localised industry structures – live music circuits – with calls for a state government to properly recognise and fund popular music for a range of cultural, social and economic reasons. The SLAM (Save Live Australian Music) rally in February 2010 has been described as the largest cultural protest in Australian history (Levin, 2011); yet it is useful to assess not simply for the size and depth of feeling, but, to return to Mattern, the “pragmatic” and “confrontational” modes of activism at work. In this case, the live music sector in Victoria is an interesting example in the mix of interactions between a state government, the professional music lobbyists, musicians, fans and the media.

### **SLAM (Save Live Australian Music)**

Australian live performance continues to be a significant sector of its popular music industries. In 2014, live performances contributed \$1.51b to the Australian economy (Live Performance Australia 2015). For Melbourne (and the wider southern State of Victoria), its live music venues remains an important part of its claims to ‘cultural capital’ status, with an estimated 550 venues. It has provided an industrial base for local and national music economies; and foundational sites for micro-communities and scenes, with a range of aesthetic, political and social experiences valued by musicians and fans. Beyond its tourism potential as a marker of inter-city difference, Melbourne venues have played their part in the city’s distinct sense of its cultural identity:

It is important to remember that musical Melbourne has evolved neither by design nor from one particular set of circumstances but by a combination of fortitude, generosity, creativity and continuity. But it is not just the music that makes Melbourne special: the invisible support system that enables it to happen is just as essential to its being (*The Age* editorial, 7 July, 2007).

The “invisible” support system – and Melbourne’s reputation for diverse live music

scenes – was threatened by a series of events in late 2009 and early 2010. Several venues were told that licensing conditions were to change (this was preceded by attempts by the State government to introduce a 2 a.m. lockout for all entertainment venues across the CBD). For the first time, the presence of live music seemed to be a catalyst for the Director of Licensing to instigate compliance changes. Many venues were deemed ‘high risk’ because of the presence of music, and thus required to hire ‘crowd controllers’ (security guards) at a ratio of two for the first 100 patrons, with one additional controller for every further 100 patrons, in addition to the installation of CCTV cameras.

This was asked of all music venues operating beyond 1 a.m. The effects were particularly felt by owners/managers of small venues who hired musicians once or twice a week, and with small audience capacities. For example, the Railway Hotel in North Fitzroy, six kilometres north of the Central Business District, hired blues, jazz or Irish music bands on Friday nights and Sunday afternoons, who share the small central lounge with its audiences of 20 to 40 people. The hotel was asked to comply with the new security provisions:

Our crowd were mostly regulars, people who had been turning up week after week, year after year, to eat, drink, talk and dance. It was a wonderful atmosphere. Most of the customers were aged between forty and seventy-odd (our drummer, by the way, is seventy three, and has been playing in bands since 1957). The pub played no canned music during the band breaks; all you could hear was the sound of talk, laughter, eating and drinking ... Well, our ‘welcome back Aubrey’ night turned into our ‘farewell Brunwsick Blues Shooters’ night. [Pub owner] Peter [Negrelli] had had the inspectors in, and with no security staff on, he was given a hefty fine, and our cosy little gig came to an end. (musician Rick Dempster, SLAM 2015).

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Querying the need for two crowd controllers for a small pub with established entertainment and audiences of an average age of 50-60 years, lobby group Fair Go 4 Live Music was initially informed by the Licensing Director that the Railway Hotel had been the basis of various noise complaint.<sup>3</sup> This explanation caused unrest -- in acting upon a venue without providing a proper or true assessment of the scale of its entertainment, the nature of the music performed or the behaviour of its audiences. To many musicians, this seemed the reverse of usual government emphases, in the construction of 'policy-based evidence'. More importantly, the government was explicitly linking noise complaints to issues of patron and licensee behaviour. Further, the Tote hotel, a famous venue that had hosted 'indie' bands for the last 25 years, was also subjected to the new compliance orders (although its story is more complex, given the mix of financial, legal and police narratives related to the venue and its owner, Bruce Milne). Yet the Tote's battles to stay open after 1 a.m. served to galvanise Melbourne's rock communities, with a rally outside the pub on 17 January 2010 gaining front page attention from several state and national newspapers.

SLAM and Fair Go 4 Live Music also challenged the State government's evidence that venues were a source of public order and alcohol-related violence. The government's *Liquor Control Reform Regulations: Regulatory Impact Statement* (Department of Justice, 2009) argued that there was insufficient data to firmly conclude that live music was a high risk factor in venue anti-social behaviour. At the same time, a spokeswoman for the Director of Liquor Licensing, Sue McLellan, argued that live music:

...can cause problems for local residents in terms of the impact on local amenity ... [staff are unable to hear] verbal cues of intoxication and aggression ... and more crowded areas of a venue, or queues outside a venue, which also increases the risk of anti-social behaviour and violence (spokeswoman

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<sup>3</sup> FairGo4Live Music is a group of musicians, venue owners, music industry workers, academics, lawyers and managers formed by venue owner Jon Perring in the early 2000s.

Sam Parkinson cited in Hall, 2010: 11).

A further issue here was the lack of detailed research into different forms of venues, audiences, locations, trading hours and music genres. While the Central Business District continued to experience weekend policing problems with the larger nightclub venues and strip clubs, the small music pub or bar did not register as a first-order behavioural problem: "most venues [I] work with were well managed and co-operative ... the majority of licensees are quite actively seeking to improve the overall perceptions surrounding the city" (regional licensing unit's Senior Sergeant Michelle Young cited in Cooke, 2010). Feelings within live music scenes can be summarized by one Australian cultural commentator who argued that "If the government can't spot the difference between the Tote and a King Street nightclub, perhaps people will let them know at the polls" (Westbury, 2010: 15).

Beyond the re-activation of Fair Go 4 Live Music, the owners of Bakehouse Recording Studio, Quincy McLean and Helen Marcou, formed SLAM (Save Live Australian Music). Both groups met almost weekly at the Railway Hotel throughout 2010 and into 2011.<sup>4</sup> The combined group then worked on various related issues: to ascertain the number of venues who had experienced changed conditions to their licences in relation to live performance; to explore the rationale behind the State government's links between venues and 'alcohol-fuelled violence'; and to begin to formally engage the government in discussions about the licensing changes on the live music sector. Meetings were held with the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Tony Robinson, as the State government became increasingly concerned with the media coverage of the 'high risk' venue issue, particularly in an election year.

Despite the ongoing negotiations for a proposed Live Music Accord, SLAM devised a march by the local music industries to State parliament for 23 February 2010. This visible protest at the lack of government action to

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<sup>4</sup> The author attended most meetings and was involved in the groups' strategies.

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withdraw the onerous licensing conditions provided the central narrative of the campaign. On 23 February, 2010 shoppers and café patrons in Swanston Street in Melbourne's Central Business District were confronted by the sight of an estimated 20,000 musicians, fans, publicans, school children, parents and music industry workers marching to State parliament to protest the branding of music venues as part of the city's problems relating to alcohol consumption and law and order. While a Live Music Accord was signed between representative groups and the State government on the day before the march, the SLAM rally served its purpose in ensuring the issues remained prominent in the media (the State Premier John Brumby had argued that the march was a "celebration of Melbourne music" in a transparent attempt to dilute the political contexts of the event).

The march to parliament was a successful combination of street theatre and political intent. The carnival atmosphere was underpinned by a band of famous musicians on a flatbed truck performing AC/DC's 'Long Way to the Top (If You Wanna Rock and Roll)', with a procession of well known Victorian and Australian musicians delivering short speeches in front of parliament at the end of the march. On 7 April 2010, SLAM, Fair Go 4 Live Music and Music Victoria presented a petition to the Legislative Council of Victoria calling for the 'high risk' conditions to be uncoupled from venues.

The Live Music Accord had several components, including promises to undertake music industries research and the formation of an industries policy as part of a broader reconstructed State cultural policy; and the formation of Music Victoria, a taxpayer funded advisory body. But it contained the crucial government concession that music venues were not the primary cause of alcohol-fuelled violence.<sup>5</sup> The government also undertook to remove related onerous conditions placed on affected venues – although rather than a

blanket removal, it was contingent on the venues to submit the state paperwork required.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the Director of Licensing had been removed and replaced with Mark Brennan, a former Commissioner of Small Business who was viewed to be more amenable to viewing venues as primarily small businesses. 18 months later, on 9 August 2011, the new conservative Premier of Victoria, Ted Baillieu, launched a live venue study at the Tote hotel, which had also re-opened under new management. In December 2011, the cultural role of live music venues was noted and inserted as one of the 'Objectives' within the State's Liquor Act.

### Further reform

The success of the rally prompted SLAM founders Marcou and McLean to engage in wider circles of activity. 'SLAM Day' has become a national strategic day to celebrate live music, and to recognise ongoing problems within live music economies. Its website contains a list of national and State issues about popular music, urging readers to address these with their local MP. The site also contains a large number of endorsements from famous musicians (including Elvis Costello, Neil Finn) stating why they support live venues. Run on a volunteer basis, SLAM is also active at state and federal elections, in asking party candidates for their views on popular music policy.

SLAM also precipitated other reform work undertaken by Music Victoria and other organisations beyond the rally. Two local Melbourne councils, Port Phillip and Yarra, established live music taskforces and subsequent policies for venues in their areas. The Victorian Live Music Roundtable conducted its first meeting in July 2012, and has proved to be a useful means to bring together Music Victoria, Fair Go 4 Live Music and SLAM with key government departments and resident groups. The Roundtable has provided the forum for the activist groups to examine lasting noise law reform. The 'agent of change' proposal first

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<sup>5</sup> The Accord stated that "the parties agree that live music does not cause violence ... A flexible, common-sense approach to crowd controller licence conditions for live music venues is appropriate" (Live Music Accord, 2010).

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<sup>6</sup> The Accord document included an undertaking from the Labor government that it had "created a help desk with dedicated licensing officers to assist licensees who provide live music to navigate the liquor licensing system".

proposed in 2003 – that whoever is the agent of change (resident or venue) must conform to existing conditions – is designed to protect music venues from residents or developers seeking changes to existing trading/performance conditions. This legislative change was made in September 2014, and depending upon individual case interpretations, may provide venues with cover against unfair noise objections. How this principle will work in practice is viewed by the lobby groups as the true test of the state's ability to value and preserve local music subcultures.

SLAM can arguably lay claim in influencing other Australian States to review live music's role in local cultural economies. A 2013 New South Wales Live Music Taskforce again reviewed licensing, noise and planning regulation in its *Live Music and Performance Action Plan* (City of Sydney, 2014). The agenda in August 2015 of the national Contemporary Music Roundtable included ways to nationalise many of the recent Victorian reforms, including the agent of change law.

After its strategic troubles in 2010, the new Labor State government has made considerable efforts to include popular music as part of a more considered cultural policy over the next four years. In terms of regulation, it has removed the restrictions upon small venues to trade after midnight, accompanied by the new Consumer Affairs Minister's commitment to supporting the city's "vibrant nightlife" (Garrett, 2015). In terms of funding, it has committed to a generous popular music funding platform over four years. Its \$22.2m Music Works package includes plans for a music hub/headquarters for local industries; a music Hall of Fame; export, mentoring and tourism/heritage programs. The package also includes the Good Music Neighbours program, designed to assist venues in better operating their local environments, through the funding of acoustic, soundproofing or PA improvements. While fine-tuning continues by the relatively new government, the package represents a governmental view that popular music must be provided with proper support within the newly created Creative Industries portfolio. Future funding of this scale is

contingent upon popular music's ability to build employment and revenue capacities.

### Reflections

Several interrelated factors were at play in successfully changing the licensing policy. Firstly, the impact of an organised protest of this size and scale cannot be underestimated in an election year for Victoria. The essential message of the SLAM rally, 'Don't kill live music', emblazoned on t-shirts and placards, was highlighted in a series of media, including six o'clock TV news bulletins and front page articles in state and national newspapers (e.g. 'They're marching, not dancing, in the streets for live music', *The Age*, 24 February, 2010). This provided the sitting Labor administration with more than a distraction to their efforts to address the more usual elements of policy debates (such as transport, health, the economy) prior to the election, particularly when Labor was considered the 'natural' party for the arts and cultural communities. With an election scheduled for November 2010, both SLAM and Fair Go 4 Live Music skilfully built upon the February rally to maintain pressure upon the Labor government on live music policy throughout the year. The Liberal-National Party coalition, who narrowly won the November election, argued strongly against the 'high risk' licensing label, with protection of local venues sitting comfortably within its pro-small business themes and associated policies. Despite its minority status in both houses of parliament, the Green Party also played an important role in legislative change; and in ensuring the conditions of the Accord were observed. The Greens' Sue Pennicuk tabled a petition of 22,000 signatures on 13 April in the Victorian Legislative Council seeking the removal of 'live and amplified music' from amenity clauses in venue licences (the trigger for changed venue conditions) (Donovan, 2010a).<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, despite the messy detail and density of state licensing laws, and the triggers within local legislation for acting upon anti-social behaviour, both SLAM and Fair Go 4 Live

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<sup>7</sup> Greens' Councillor Cathy Oke was also influential in ensuring live music policies were addressed by the City of Melbourne Council.



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Music were successful in distilling the complexity of different venue histories and contexts to a simpler theme of government heavy-handedness against small music sites. Indeed, the role of the local music venue was broadened into more fundamental themes. The founder of Fair Go 4 Live Music's Jon Perring argued that the 'high risk' venue debate was essentially one of human rights. In letters to the government, and in private and public meetings, Perring believed that the current policies and regulations breached the Human Rights Charter, which guarantees the right for people to participate in their own culture and the right to assemble freely (Schaefer, 2010). While this was regarded by the government as semantic exaggeration, it nonetheless reinforced the belief in some local circles that the ability to hear local, live performances was not an 'optional add-on', but fundamental to life in a cosmopolitan city. In this sense, the SLAM rally and its aftermath was in accord with United Nations' declarations on the rights and needs for cultural expression for individual, city and national growth (e.g. see United Nations 2013), at least implicitly.

Thirdly, the protest represents an interesting debate in notions of 'risk' within contemporary western societies. Earlier attempts by the State government in 2008 to establish a 2 a.m. lockout for all CBD entertainment premises (see Homan 2011) were halted by successful court objections by the venues, amidst growing concern at weekend violence in the city. However, the subsequent crackdown on venue liquor licences linking behavioural problems to live music ignored the government's own policing statistics, which revealed the larger CBD nightclubs to be the dominant problem in the city's night-time economy. In effect, greater surveillance (chiefly through bureaucratic means) was directed towards the least of the city's problems – the small suburban music pub. The diversity of members' (particularly legal) expertise of SLAM and Fair Go 4 Live Music provided the collective knowledge to challenge the prevailing discourses of risk, and more importantly, the evidence upon which the government based its licensing actions. In contrast, in 2014 the New South Wales

government established a 1.30 a.m. lockout and 3 a.m. 'last drinks' law for Sydney's entertainment precinct, which encompasses much of the city's CBD and pub/club strips. Here, the contexts of the moral panic about alcohol consumption and night-time economies were very different. The NSW licensing changes stemmed from public and media concern at the growing number of deaths from 'one hit' or 'coward punches' derived from street fights, and medical workers' calls to reduce the number of alcohol-related hospital treatments in the Sydney CBD on weekends (Hasham 2015a).<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the protest became an effective means by which to call out the state's *bona fides* in its use of popular music (and culture, both high and low, in a more general sense) in furthering Victorians' sense of themselves. Beyond querying the basis of claims of popular music as the source of night-time law and order problems, the SLAM rally also succeeded in shifting the debate to themes of economic and social benefit. It is instructive that the Live Music Accord not only dealt with the licensing minutiae required to ease individual publican concerns, but also called upon the State government to conduct more precise research of its local music industries. The subsequent release of the government-commissioned report, *The economic, social and cultural contribution of venue-based live music in Victoria* (Arts Victoria, 2011) by Premier Ted Baillieu and Consumer Affairs Minister Michael O'Brien in August 2011, partly fulfilled the (new) government's commitment to properly recognising the value of the live music ecosystem to the State. The choice of venue for the launch – the resurrected Tote hotel under new ownership – was also symbolic for a government keen to establish a working relationship with music communities. As outlined above, the Arts Victoria report and the establishment of the Live Music Roundtable did much to ensure that future governments could not proceed with traditional law and order

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<sup>8</sup> While the NSW government has committed to a review of the lockout laws, its Premier Mike Baird has stated no intention to change them, despite pressure from venue owners citing loss of patrons and profits in the CBD (see Hasham, 2015b).

discourses about the local live bar, pub or club, where these sites had to be also considered within cultural and economic frameworks.

### **Conclusion: local protest, translocal action**

...the complexity of cultural infrastructures around the world means that the best policy responses are not always obvious or straightforward. Where a great deal of creative activity occurs under informal conditions, targeting specific actors for subsidy or promotion may have an unwelcome “museumization” effect, converting embedded aesthetic traditions into officially sanctioned spectacle. For all these reasons, then, informal creative activities require a different kind of policy thinking. Appropriate responses and interventions will vary widely from locality to locality (UNDP/UNESCO, 2013: 28).

It is rare for Australian arts or cultural policy to insert itself into the mainstream of political debate. The SLAM rally not only achieved unity amongst Victoria’s music industries and communities in presenting a coherent force for change; it succeeded in linking particular policy decisions to the *realpolitik* of the election cycle, ensuring popular music policy was part of individual MPs’ considerations. The right for a band to set up in their local pub and play was accepted and supported by the wider cultural communities in Melbourne and elsewhere, and found significant levels of support outside cultural interests. This was also a rare case of a populist deconstruction of traditional law and order discourses – the traditional rights of the state to make licensing changes under the cover of a crackdown on ‘anti-social’ behaviour was ultimately viewed to be without foundation.

The SLAM actions also fed into pre-existing debates about cultural value(s). While the case was strongly made for the live music venue as a source of community cohesion, wider governmental change (increased funding, fine-tuning of regulation and better knowledge of industrial practices) was based on economic discourses. The Arts Victoria 2011 report findings that the live music sector contributed

\$500m annually to the economy, with more patrons than the State’s favourite sport, Australian Rules, was significant in achieving government attention beyond the Live Music Accord. SLAM also succeeded in arguing for the local music venue as the incubator of national, regional and global success, as the foundational base for future recording and publishing achievements. Part of the rally speech on parliament house steps by Australian musician Paul Kelly is often quoted: “I didn’t learn to write a song at school – these places were my university” (Donovan 2010b: 1).

The SLAM rally was included as a case study in the recent global report on music cities prepared by Music Canada’s Amy Terril, *The Mastering of a Music City* (IFPI/Music Canada, 2015). This is appropriate, given that the rally and its subsequent interactions with the State government sought to address many of the issues facing music venues globally, particularly noise laws and land use changes and values.<sup>9</sup> *The Mastering of a Music City* emphasises the need for collaboration and a unified strategy, and this was one of the rally’s greatest strengths. The high level of co-operation between APRA (Australasian Performing Right Association), the PCCA (Phonographic Performance Company of Australia), The Push, Music Victoria, Fair Go 4 Live Music and SLAM ensured a thick network of complementary activity, where the gathering of evidence on the individual and collective health of the live sector was equally important to protest strategies.

While the SLAM case study can be seen to fit within an emerging broader theme of ‘music city’ problems and discourses (e.g. Holt and Carsten, 2013), it also reinforces the very localised nature of cultural and governmental interaction. The SLAM participants agreed with the historic and relentless promotion of Melbourne’s status as ‘cultural capital’, which provided considerable cover for change.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The continuing pressures of property development upon land use policy was confirmed by a Melbourne City Councillor who argued that Melbourne rates were “\$8500 a square metre, and \$11-13,000 per square metre for apartments” (Ong 2014).

<sup>10</sup> In March 2015 SLAM founders Quincy McLean and Helen Marcou received the \$20,000 Facilitators Prize in the 2014 Sidney Myer Performing Arts Awards.

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Equally, the threat to Melbourne's global claims as a live music city did not require the usual corrections through state subsidy, but via regulatory reform. The rally and its aftermath continue to influence global conditions; for example, other 'music cities' are seeking to establish equivalents of the 'agent of change' principle in relation to local noise laws. More broadly, in terms of a critical cultural policy studies (Lewis and Miler, 2003), it offers an interesting study in a localised politics of culture, where the usual contexts for who has a say in what is produced, funded and consumed were refashioned.

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