NSW ROUNDTABLE REPORT

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Sound NSW

The NSW Roundtable was held as part of the 2025 Regional & Remote Music Summit on 23 July at Byron Community Centre, in Byron Bay on Bundjalung Country. The Roundtable and Summit were hosted by MusicNSW with support from Music Australia and Sound NSW, along with sponsorship by Byron Shire Council and Moshtix.

MusicNSW is the peak body for contemporary music in NSW and works to develop and strengthen the critical skills, knowledge, imagination, and industry infrastructure needed for NSW music communities to thrive. As a non-government, not-for-profit organisation, MusicNSW has proudly delivered impact for NSW artists and industry since 1998. MusicNSW employs a network of artist and industry development coordinators based across the state, who use their expert local knowledge, experience and networks to deliver support and professional development activities relevant to their local regional communities.

A key supporter and funder of the Regional & Remote Music Summit, Music Australia, plays an essential role in the national policy landscape. Its ongoing investment in the Summit, together with its commitment to the national roll-out of the Regional Touring Network (RTN), developed by MusicNSW to strengthen regional touring, will further increase connectivity and visibility for regional artists, venues, and audiences. This alignment demonstrates that the insights gathered in regional NSW are not only locally grounded but nationally strategic, reinforcing the value of regional voices in shaping future policy and investment.

Sound NSW also provided funding and support to the 2025 Regional & Remote Summit and NSW Roundtable. Sound NSW is a dedicated office within the NSW Government committed to the growth, development and promotion of contemporary music in NSW. Sound NSW is responsible for delivering the state's 10-year Contemporary Music Strategy, which includes key pillars focused on building a better, more viable music industry, growing audiences for NSW music, and strengthening our communities with music, including music communities in regional NSW.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NSW Roundtable was convened on 23 July 2025 at the Byron Community Centre as part of the Regional & Remote Music Summit, a national gathering presented by MusicNSW focused on strengthening regional and remote music communities.

Facilitated by Leanne de Souza (On The Table Facilitation), the Roundtable brought together more than 80 participants from across regional NSW, including artists, industry leaders, First Nations representatives, community organisers, and government observers. This diversity of perspectives and lived experience ensured that the discussion reflected the realities, challenges and opportunities for musicians and music businesses living and working in regional NSW.

The NSW Roundtable, although grounded in local knowledge, is situated within a broader policy framework that both informs and impacts the discussion and outcomes. NSW is the only Australian state with a dedicated 10-Year Contemporary Music Strategy, delivered through Sound NSW, which prioritises First Nations investment, infrastructure, skills, audience development and sector resilience, with a clear commitment to supporting regional NSW music communities. At the national level, the Roundtable priorities reflect the pillars of the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy Revive: placing First Nations first, supporting artists, strengthening cultural infrastructure and engaging audiences.

This report identifies key themes developed through a collaborative process, along with priorities shared by participants in the room across five focus areas: **First Nations Development, Artist Development, Audience Development, Industry Development, and Regional Development**.

It synthesises them into **six priority areas** where policy and advocacy can have the greatest sector-wide impact, offering a map for action across government, industry and community.

MusicNSW will share these insights and continue to build partnerships across government, industry and community. The findings from this Roundtable will inform future submissions to state and national strategies, guide advocacy priorities and support the design of programs that reflect and respond to the lived realities of music communities across regional NSW.

1

Invest in culturally safe, affordable and sustainable spaces for creation, rehearsal and performance.

2

Develop affordable and accessible touring networks that connect artists with communities.

3

Build 'Do-It-Together (DIT)' alliances that support collaboration and cross-sector partnerships across councils, health, education, tourism and sport.

4

Expand mentorship, training and producer pipelines, including youth, peer-to-peer and intergenerational models.

5

Recognise and resource grassroots organisers and local champions as essential contributors to sustainable local music ecosystems.

6

Provide long-term, flexible funding that redistributes resources from metro to regional NSW, embeds cultural and social value, advances diversity in leadership and supports First Nations self-determination.

PRIORITIES & OPPORTUNITIES

Artists and communities need safe, inclusive and sustainable spaces to create, rehearse, perform and connect

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish culturally safe spaces supported by accreditation frameworks.
- Expand access to affordable rehearsal spaces and recording studios across regions.
- Develop multi-purpose venues with technical staff and production capability.
- Support the sustainability of these spaces through long-term local engagement and by reducing the burden on individual organisers and volunteers.

Affordable, accessible and multi-function touring networks are vital to connect artists with communities and grow audiences

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Introduce travel and freight subsidies to reduce cost barriers.
- Develop multi-function touring models that combine performances with workshops, community events or professional development.
- Establish regional touring circuits and statewide discoverability tools (e.g. the Regional Touring Network or gig guides).
- Create youth pipelines through schools, all-ages events and youth-led programming that connect young people as audiences and participants.
- Invest in digital connectivity to enable live-streaming to extend reach.

Stronger alliances, shared resources and partnerships within and beyond the music sector underpin resilience, economic opportunity and social cohesion

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Build peer networks and ‘Do-It-Together (DIT)’ models.
- Strengthen cross-sector collaboration with health, education, tourism and sport.
- Support local councils to act as enablers through cultural planning, strategy and reduced red tape.
- Resource people, not just projects, to prevent burnout and ensure those driving local scenes are supported.

Mentorship, training and intergenerational opportunities are essential to build the next generation of artists, industry workers and leaders

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop peer-to-peer, youth and intergenerational mentorship models.
- Deliver practical business and leadership training tailored to regional contexts.
- Address shortages in technical and production staff through training and incentives.
- Training should address wellbeing, financial sustainability and workload management to support long-term careers.
- Support succession planning by embedding youth pathways into schools, festivals and community programs to prepare the next generation of artists, industry leaders, producers and community organisers.

Grassroots organisers and local champions are essential to sustaining local music scenes

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Fund local leadership roles within grassroots organisations, venues and festivals.
- Resource succession planning through mentorship and skills development programs.
- Recognise and celebrate local champions through awards and grants.
- Develop shared staffing models (e.g. producer pools or regional coordinator roles) that can be jointly resourced by councils, festivals and venues.

Long-term, flexible funding and policy design must recognise music's cultural, social, and economic value, including First Nations self-determination

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide sustainable, multi-year funding that recognises music as essential cultural infrastructure.
- Embed cultural and social value in funding frameworks and reporting.
- Advance diversity and representation in leadership and programming.
- Explore alternative funding models including philanthropy, redirection of gambling revenue and tourism-linked funding streams.
- Support trials of community-led and alternative funding models (e.g. Pay the Rent, artist-led collectives, social enterprise models).

FOCUS AREA: FIRST NATIONS DEVELOPMENT

First Nations Development is centred on the growth, visibility and sustainability of First Nations music across NSW. Participants emphasised the need for cultural leadership, mentorship and self-determined pathways, alongside equitable access to resources and platforms that amplify First Nations voices.

However, a lack of cultural safety, recognition and sustained investment continues to create barriers. Venues and programs are often culturally unsafe, systemic racism and tokenism persist, and short-term funding cycles limit organisational capacity.

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist to build a stronger, more self-determined future through cultural leadership, investment in community-led initiatives, and expanded youth and intergenerational mentorship opportunities.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- **Safe spaces & cultural safety**

  Many venues and programs remain culturally unsafe, leading to exclusion and harm. Training and accreditation for culturally safe spaces, alongside investment in artist-first venues where wellbeing and representation are prioritised, were identified as critical.

- **Relationship building**

  Trust and collaboration must be developed through genuine engagement with communities over time. This includes asking communities how they want to be involved, building relationships with local contacts and supporting leadership.

- **Embedding First Nations creatives**

  Embedding First Nations creatives in decision-making roles and mainstream programming, along with access to safe spaces, can address inequities and ensure cultural leadership is visible and valued.

- **Youth mentorship & engagement**

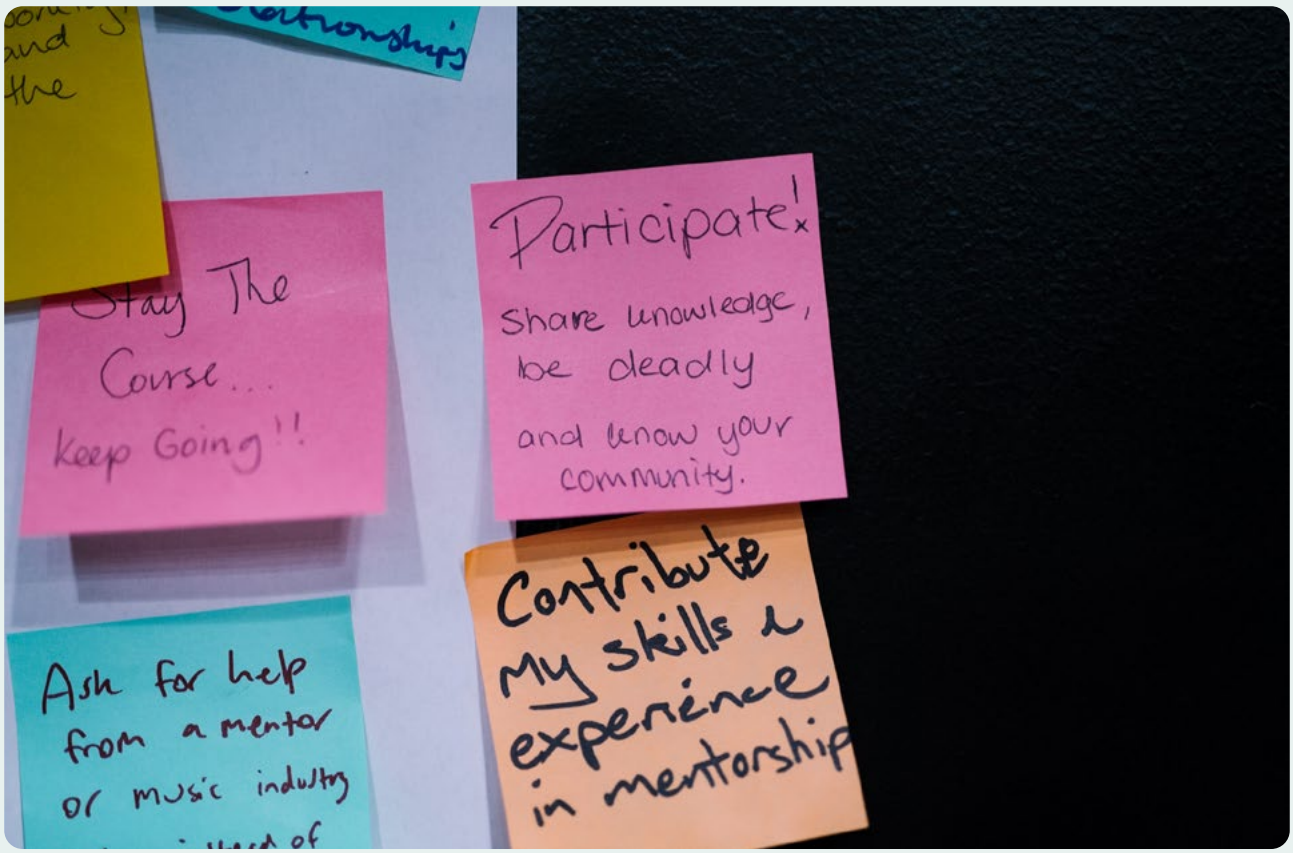
  Mentorship must go beyond music skills to include holistic cultural and personal development. Schools, festivals and community programs can empower young people, provide role models and create clear pathways into the industry.

- **Visibility & marketing**

  First Nations music is under-represented in mainstream promotion. Tailored campaigns that use culturally relevant language, amplify local stories and centre First Nations creatives can grow audiences and visibility.

- **Capacity & capability building**

  Short-term funding cycles and limited cultural literacy undermine sustainability. Flexible, long-term investment that supports self-determined organisations, protects Indigenous Cultural & Intellectual Property (ICIP) and trials initiatives such as Pay the Rent or not-for-profit labels can build capacity and reduce burnout.



PARTICIPANT INSIGHTS

"Is 'First Nations First' more than a slogan and statement or is it systemic change?"

"How can culturally safe spaces be accredited?"

"The MusicNSW Roundtable provided a platform for further deep knowledge sharing to ensure that the more difficult and unique challenges faced by First Nations artists and music organisations in regional and remote Australia can be acknowledged, identified and addressed".

"Pathways for mob to participate outside of their own community"

"Mob teaching mob"

"More opportunities for collaboration between FN and non-mob to understand what can work and how to work together"

"Performance opportunities not on First Nations stages"

"Pathways for larger organisations to support First Nations music"

"The stories are tough but they heal"

"Targeted funding beyond government programs"

FOCUS AREA: ARTIST DEVELOPMENT

Artist development encompasses the skills, support and resources needed at every stage of a career to create, present and sustain work. Financial precarity was a recurring theme, with many artists juggling multiple roles to make ends meet. Geographic isolation, limited access to markets, audiences and professional networks, along with the high costs and logistics of touring, further constrain career growth and contribute to burnout. These pressures are compounded by the challenges of navigating industry systems with limited support, as well as the lack of affordable, safe and inclusive environments.

Opportunities include providing regionally relevant training and mentorship, expanding live performance pathways, investing in safe and accessible spaces and reforming financial supports to better reflect the value of music. Collectively, these measures would ease pressure on individual artists and strengthen the long-term sustainability of music careers across regional NSW.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- **Skill development & mentorship**

  Delivering practical, regionally-grounded music business training and structured mentorship models (including peer-to-peer, youth-focused and industry-led approaches) can build capacity and create the networks artists need to develop careers.

- **Touring & market development**

  Expanding performance opportunities through festivals, venues and council partnerships, alongside coordinated touring networks and stronger digital promotion, can raise artist profiles, grow markets and increase visibility for underrepresented genres and voices.

- **Safe & supportive spaces**

  Investing in safe, affordable and adaptable artist-first spaces would support creativity and wellbeing, while integrating accessibility and sustainability into regional infrastructure.

- **The value of culture**

  Reforms to tax and funding policy, coupled with greater direct investment in artists and collective infrastructure models, supported by frameworks that recognise the cultural and social value of music, can create the stability and recognition artists need to build sustainable careers.

PARTICIPANT INSIGHTS

"Travel bursaries & support that are regional specific to ensure equity of access"

"Encourage local heroes to pass the torch"

"Partnerships with aligned festivals, venues and touring networks"

"Continue to evolve what safe spaces for artists 'look' like"

"Ask 'What does the artist need'?"

"Music business development that is artist business specific"

"Resource training pathways and full range of skills/opportunities in the music industry"

"Access for teachers to education resources and curriculum that reflects local artists and value to/for audiences"

"Place-based development programs"

"State government supported entrepreneurial environment for creative industry"

"Mentors need to be paid more and have more/better education"

"Continue to evolve what safe spaces for artists 'look' like"

"DIY (do it yourself) vs DIT (DO IT TOGETHER)"

FOCUS AREA: AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Audience Development explored strategies to grow and sustain audiences across NSW. Many communities reported feeling disconnected from events intended for them, with affordability, limited discoverability platforms and fragmented local engagement identified as common barriers. Young people, in particular, expressed a desire to move beyond being spectators and to actively participate in their local scenes.

Opportunities identified included building loyalty through participatory programming, investing in youth pipelines and leadership roles, and strengthening collaborations between venues and promoters. Developing more accessible and diversified revenue models was also recognised as a key priority.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- **Make music sticky**

  Interactive opportunities, including workshops and participatory programming that connect audiences with artists and events, can build engagement and loyalty. Partnerships with community radio and local media can increase awareness, while creative tourism vouchers and streamed or online content were seen as ways to extend reach and connection beyond the experience.

- **Youth engagement**

  Schools, youth advisory groups and all-ages events were highlighted as pathways to build long-term engagement. Including young people in roles as organisers and decision-makers (not only as audiences) creates opportunities for leadership and participation.

- **Do-It-Together (DIT)**

  Collaborative approaches, such as venue and promoter alliances, shared programming, joint promotion and resource pooling were identified as ways to reduce costs, coordinate efforts across regions for greater impact, and grow music audiences within and between communities.

- **Revenue & accessibility**

  High ticket prices, travel costs and buyer behavior were cited as barriers to audience participation. Suggested solutions included flexible ticketing, matched funding and travel subsidies (e.g. regional or statewide live music passes, or tourism vouchers that bundle discounted access to multiple events). Sponsorship and local investment were also proposed as strategies to diversify income and reduce reliance on single revenue streams.

PARTICIPANT INSIGHTS

"Explore ways to engage with, and include audiences in the music experience"

"Increased opportunities and engagement with local music by local radio"

"Local supports on bigger shows"

"Create a culture by training the audience, building trust, offering an experience"

"Vouchers – creative tourism vouchers to attend music events & to use on public transport"

"All ages are part of the solution - matinee shows"

"Making events family friendly with under 13s free tickets – biggest demographic is families"

"Encourage artists to come in and connect with community to be more than a FIFO"

"Building audiences takes time so need to be able to commit to it financially"

"Subscription models for venues (taking lessons from theatres)"

FOCUS AREA: INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Industry Development considers the structures, networks and resources that support a sustainable music industry in NSW. Discussions highlighted the need for stronger collaboration, more equitable distribution of resources and investment in skills, infrastructure and leadership to build long-term sustainability. The central challenge for industry development is precarity: insecure work, underfunded organisations and limited infrastructure weaken sustainability and growth.

Opportunities lie in developing touring models to deliver community impact, investing in workforce development, diversifying revenue and partnerships, activating more accessible and sustainable spaces and incentivising cross-sector collaboration. Together, these measures can strengthen resilience, expand opportunities across NSW and reduce inequities between metropolitan and regional industries.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- **Multi-function touring**

  Designing touring models that deliver multiple outcomes beyond live performance (such as school workshops, community events and professional development) can increase both the viability of tours and their impact for local communities. These approaches are particularly valuable in regional areas where costs are high and markets smaller.

- **Alternative revenue streams**

  Reliance on traditional ticket sales and project grants is unsustainable. Stronger links with tourism, philanthropy, and local sponsorship, along with advocacy to redirect gambling revenue (e.g. pokies) into live music, could help. Expanding philanthropic support and developing community-focused investment models were also identified as strategies to diversify income and reduce risk.

- **Spaces & places**

  Access to affordable, fit-for-purpose venues remains central to industry sustainability. Repurposing underused community facilities, activating outdoor or non-traditional spaces, and reducing red tape for small venues were all highlighted as opportunities. Incentivising pubs and licensed venues to reinvest in local music was also proposed as a practical way to increase opportunities and strengthen resilience.

- **Do It Together (DIT)**

  Collaboration is essential to address industry fragmentation and resource limitations. Shared programming, joint promotion and resource pooling between artists, venues, promoters, and service providers can reduce costs and increase reach. Coordinated alliances or ‘cluster models’ offer further potential to improve efficiency and amplify advocacy across the state.

PARTICIPANT INSIGHTS

"Artists on tour could hold workshops with young people in different areas"

"Venue residencies – well-known artists with different local supports and ensure opportunities for local soundies etc"

"Bring industry short courses that introduction people to roles and events that exist"

"Partnerships and Sponsorships with non-arts industries in regional areas"

"To take 'safe risks' the infrastructure needs to there, and be in solid condition"

"Identify and support those who are already doing the work"

"Support for crew, production and festival director skills development & training"

"Music Collectives – hubs of different skilled professionals"

FOCUS AREA: REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Regional Development examined the role of music in strengthening regional and remote communities across NSW. Participants highlighted inequities compared with metropolitan areas, with high costs, poor connectivity, limited local capacity and inconsistent council support all undermining sustainability. Heavy reliance on volunteers adds further fragility, contributing to burnout and delivery challenges.

At the same time, music was recognised as a vital driver of social cohesion and local economies. Opportunities identified include increasing collaboration between councils, communities and industry, investing in leadership and governance skills, reducing reliance on volunteers through paid roles and providing targeted support for venues and digital connectivity.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- **Connection & collaboration**

  Regional music ecosystems thrive when artists, venues, promoters, councils and non-traditional partners (such as schools, health, tourism, and sport) work together. Mentorship, recognition of local champions and more coordinated activity across regions were highlighted as priorities. Councils can act as both enablers and barriers: cultural planning and reduced red tape create opportunities, while lack of strategy and high staff turnover undermine growth.

- **Building cultural capacity**

  Sustaining music in regional areas requires investing in greater local capacity. Priorities include developing skills in leadership, governance, production and event management; embedding artists in schools and communities; and reducing reliance on volunteers to prevent burnout and plan for succession. Statewide strategies linking councils, MusicNSW, Regional Arts Development Organisations (RADOs), and state-level organisations can help drive consistent cultural development across regions.

- **Economic investment**

  Regional music communities face disproportionately high costs for touring, production, freight, insurance and compliance. Redistribution of resources from metropolitan areas, targeted investment in venues and infrastructure, and recognition of music's role in cultural tourism and local economies are vital levers. Potential solutions include underwriting insurance, providing travel and freight subsidies, and investing in digital infrastructure to support hybrid and online access.

PARTICIPANT INSIGHTS

"Strong regional collaborations with health organisations and social enterprise"

"Strength in collaboration between traditional music industry (venues, promoters, artists, alcohol etc) and non-traditional eg rodeos, community sporting clubs and halls"

"Improved information networks"

"Artist is Residency programs at primary and high schools"

"Grassroots ethos fostered – a self-sustainability that doesn't rely on government funding and structured support"

"Find ways to support and promote regional venues & champions"

"Take profit generated in metro areas and redistribute to regional areas"

"Fuel excise for regional areas"

"De-risking country venues – costs, insurance, compliance, community understanding"

"More data needed on impact of Regional Cultural Tourism"

"Succession planning for the 1 local champion – what happens if they fall down?"

CONCLUSION

Across more than 80 participants, there was strong consensus on the need for safe and inclusive spaces, stronger touring networks, sustained investment and pathways that champion young people and First Nations leadership. The Roundtable reflected a clear commitment to a Do-It-Together (DIT) approach, recognising that collaboration and shared responsibility are integral to building a thriving and connected music ecosystem.

The Roundtable highlighted that while challenges remain, including inequity between metropolitan and regional areas, cultural safety gaps and financial precarity, it also provided significant insights to guide future action in supporting regional artists, music communities and the NSW industry at large.

With a coordinated approach, music can serve as an anchor of regional development, delivering cultural, social and economic benefits to artists, audiences and communities across NSW and beyond.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

- **Safe Spaces & Infrastructure**

  Invest in culturally safe, affordable and sustainable spaces for creation, rehearsal and performance.

- **Touring Networks & Audience Engagement**

  Develop affordable and accessible touring networks that connect artists with communities through regional circuits, travel subsidies and innovative models (e.g. live music passes, tourism vouchers). Touring should be multi-function, combining performance with workshops, youth engagement and digital access to grow audiences and sustain careers.

- **Collaboration & Cross-Sector Partnerships**

  Build alliances across councils, health, education, tourism and sport, with councils supported to act as enablers. Encourage 'Do-It-Together (DIT)' approaches and shared resources to strengthen resilience and reduce fragmentation.

- **Skills, Capacity & Youth Pathways**

  Expand mentorship, training and producer pipelines, including youth, peer-to-peer and intergenerational models, to address workforce gaps, build leadership and support sustainable careers.

- **Grassroots Scenes & Local Champions**

  Resource grassroots organisers and local champions through succession planning, leadership development, paid roles and shared staffing models, recognising their essential role in sustaining local music ecosystems.

- **Funding, Policy & Investment**

  Provide long-term, flexible funding that redistributes resources from metro to regional NSW, embeds cultural and social value, advances diversity in leadership and supports First Nations self-determination. Encourage innovative approaches such as philanthropy, tourism-linked funding and community-led, social enterprise approaches.

NEXT STEPS FOR MUSICNSW

MusicNSW will share these insights and continue to build partnerships across government, industry, and community. The findings of this Roundtable will inform future submissions to state and national strategies, guide advocacy priorities, and support the design of programs that reflect and respond to the lived realities of music communities across regional NSW.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MusicNSW acknowledges the contributions of all those who participated in the NSW Roundtable. We are deeply grateful to the more than 80 artists, industry leaders, First Nations representatives, community organisers and government observers who shared their lived experience and insights.

Special thanks to Leanne de Souza (On The Table Facilitation) for skillfully guiding the discussion and ensuring all voices were heard, and to the table hosts and notetakers who supported the conversations.

We recognise the Bundjalung people, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the Roundtable took place, and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the ongoing contribution of First Nations artists and communities to NSW.

This report was authored by Laura Harper (Happenstance Projects), who also served as Executive Producer of the Regional & Remote Music Summit 2025.

The Roundtable was a central part of the Regional & Remote Music Summit 2025, presented by MusicNSW, with support from Sound NSW, Music Australia and Byron Shire Council, and was sponsored by Moshtix.

All photos by Emily Cherie Read

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REGIONAL & REMOTE MUSIC SUMMIT

23-25 JULY 2025

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