

14 February 2019

The Hon. Paul Toole MP
Minister for Racing
GPO Box 5341
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Minister

Music Festival Licences

I write to ask that you urgently withdraw the new Music Festival Licence category set to apply on 1 March and commence meaningful engagement with the live music sector and festival organisers to ensure any new licence category protects the industry's long term viability.

Music festivals contribute significantly to the state's cultural life. They provide punters with opportunities to see live music, socialise and dance, and local aspiring musicians with opportunities to play against bigger acts and get exposure. Festivals have become more important places for cultural and sub-cultural experiences as a result of the lockout laws which have left Sydney's inner city and cultural hubs closed to patrons after 1.30am or 2am for live music venues.

It has been widely reported that four music festivals have cancelled operations in New South Wales and an additional festival is considering leaving due to significant additional costs under the new licensing system, particularly from a massive increase – up to 15 times – in user pays police costs. This is an alarming revelation and impost, adding to Sydney's eroding reputation as a global city and cultural capital.

While I share the government's concern about recent deaths at music festivals, saturating festivals with police and drug dogs and making music festivals too costly to run will shut down some safe festivals and potentially make others unsafe.

Over the last year I have heard from large numbers of constituents who say that policing at festivals has become excessive, making the atmosphere more punitive than welcoming. I am especially concerned that drug detection operations prevent harm minimisation by encouraging people to ingest all their drugs at once or to buy from strangers at a festival. While I welcome the replacement of convictions for drug possession with on-the-spot fines at music festivals, fines are high and people will still act to avoid detection.



Experts say that pill testing and creating an environment where drug users are not afraid to report medical problems will improve safety at music festivals. We urgently need a new approach to drug use based on harm minimisation including the decriminalisation of personal use and as a member of the NSW Cross Party Harm Minimisation Roundtable I have called for a drug summit to bring together experts and stakeholders to make recommendations for a way forward.

I have heard from a large number of constituents who are concerned about this issue, including people who don't go to festivals but see the new licence category as another attempt to make the state less vibrant and more socially conservative. The massive investment to replace existing and functioning sport stadiums is in stark contrast to the government's approach allowing local music, arts and cultural scenes to deteriorate.

We must protect the cultural life of the state and help it expand and this involves ensuring music festivals can continue to operate and run safe events.

Could you please urgently withdraw the planned Music Festival Licence and work with stakeholders to establish an appropriate licence category that keeps people safe while ensuring music festivals are financially viable?

Could you please inform me what action you will take?

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AG', written in a cursive style.

Alex Greenwich
Member for Sydney