CrewCare™
For ALL Live Music Crew

ISSUES FACING CREW WORKERS IN AUSTRALIA:

INDUSTRY CONDITIONS & RESULTS OF CREWCARE'S SURVEY

A REPORT PREPARED FOR CREWCARE MEMBERS BY BEN ELTHAM

DR BEN ELTHAM
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All cultural workers deserve a living wage and a safe and dignified workplace, but not all workers enjoy them. This is a report for the cultural organisation CrewCare on the current state of working conditions for crew workers in Australia. Staging, events and performing arts workers in Australia face difficult working conditions. Their industry is still adjusting from a historic shock, and while wages are growing, workplace conditions remain insecure and precarious. The report canvasses the available industry data, and the key findings of a survey of CrewCare members. Finally, some ideas are discussed to improve the working conditions of crew in Australia. Organisations that support and advocate for cultural workers can play a small but significant role in helping crew in their working lives.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This is a report prepared for CrewCare by Ben Eltham.

The report is written for CrewCare members and proudly sponsored by Winarch Live seeking to better understand the issues facing their industry. It is the second of two reports prepared for CrewCare's board. The first report examined CrewCare's strategy and operations, and made recommendations to improve the sustainability and professionalism of CrewCare as an organisation.

This report is for members of CrewCare, and performing ats workers in Australia more generally. The report draws on a survey of nearly 300 CrewCare members carried out by the organisation in 2023, and interviews conducted with CrewCare members and board in 2024. The author has also drawn from the available academic literature and Census data to present evidence about the current situation for crew workers in Australia.

The report has been independently researched and written by academic and journalist Ben Eltham. The findings and analysis presented here are those of the author. While the report draws from survey responses and interviews with CrewCare members, it does not reflect the views of CrewCare, or its board.

Enquiries about this report can be addressed to the author at survey@crewcare.org.au

INTRODUCTION: WE DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT PERFORMING ARTS WORK

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the role and importance of performing arts workers to public attention, making them the subject of national policy attention for perhaps the first time. When announcing a pandemic stimulus package to assist the cultural sector in 2020, then-Prime Minister Scott Morrison made specific reference to performing arts crew, comparing them to "tradies" while pledging $250 million in pandemic support for the sector.

Scholars and researchers have been studying cultural and artist workers for some time. Historians and sociologists have long recognised the socioeconomic importance of associated labour in the arts, such as gallery workers, stage crew, printers and printmakers, and film crew. Artists clearly understand this, as they need to work with crew to produce and perform. Many music workers will work for or alongside artists in a direct employment or contractual relationship, for instance when providing tour or production services, as this report will explore. Backstage cultural workers are essential to the cultural supply chain.

Workers in cultural industries, and their social scenes, have also frequently inspired the subject matter of art itself, from Balzac's famous exploration of the Parisian magazine scene in Lost Illusions, to the 2024 Hollywood comedy about stunt performers, Fall Guy. This literature emphasises the importance of cultural workers as essential to the creation and production of art: the people without whom the show would literally not go on. A significant body of research has also looked at cultural workers such as managers, promoters, agents and other "cultural intermediaries", who catalyse and connect these industries through personal networks and by making deals.

However, there has not been the same depth of academic research specifically into performing arts support workers. The academic Sergio Pisfil observed in 2020 that, at that time, there had been "no serious work on road crews and their place in rock practices." Researcher Adam Behr and his co-authors argued in 2016 that there was a need for more specialist academic research "to see that people and activities carefully kept backstage to ensure that the

performances themselves seem magical are brought into the glare of the academic spotlight." Some high-quality research has started to be published in other countries: in Canada, for instance, Gabrielle Kielich has recently written an excellent academic book on road crew.

Music writer Stuart Coupe wrote what is generally considered to be the first dedicated book on road crew in this country in 2018, but his work has not yet been taken up and expanded on by academic researchers here. We don't know enough about cultural workers in this sector, and there is a great need for more serious academic research into the working lives of backstage and production workers in Australia. Specifically, there isn't a lot of high-quality recent research on the work and conditions of crew in the Australian context.

This report is an attempt to bring together available information about Australian performing arts crews, and their conditions. We do have some statistical data, available and the report will also present qualitative evidence gathered from CrewCare members. But because there isn't as strong an evidence base to draw on as we would like, the report will need to make some observations of a more speculative nature, in order to draw some conclusions based on a critical analysis of the Australian cultural sector.

WHAT THE ABS CENSUS DATA TELLS US ABOUT PERFORMING ARTS WORKERS

The Australian Bureau of Statistics captures detailed data about the employment of Australians across a range of variables, most notably through its labour force survey and the Census held every five years. Data about where Australians work and in what sort of job they do is collected for categories that include workers' industry of employment, as well as their occupation.

The ABS has two main ways of recording data about workers: industries and occupations. It is important to understand the difference. Industries are defined as a coherent set of economic activities producing a particular set of goods or services – for example, primary school education, sheep farming, or housing construction. Occupations are defined by the employment role of the worker -- for example, primary school teacher, grazier, or bricklayer.

Cultural employment can also be thought of in this way. It is possible to use the ABS industries data to define a set of "cultural" industries, such as cinema exhibition, motion picture production, or newspaper publishing. It is also possible to use the ABS occupations data to define a set of "cultural" occupations, such as motion picture projectionist, director of photography, or newspaper journalist. Not every cultural worker works in a cultural industry. There are accountants who work for television companies, and there are musicians who play in the marching bands of the Australian Defence Force.

The ABS has two key categories for performing arts industries: "performing arts operation" and "performing arts venue operation". These are useful and we will examine some data for them below. However, there are of course other industries which employ crew, including museums, galleries, sporting facilities, screen production, broadcasters, and government venues. For this reason, it makes sense to use occupation data to look specifically at workers who could be considered to meet the definition of "crew".

We have identified the following "6-digit" ANZSIC occupations relevant to performing arts crew. Of course, these are not all the occupations that contribute to performing arts events. However, there is no easy way to measure non-cultural occupations, when they are employed in cultural industries, such as drivers or riggers. As a result, not all the occupations that play a role in the performance sector are included. Some cultural occupations that are not directly classified as part of the performing arts (such as photographers and ticket sellers) are also excluded.

The table below sets out the number of employed persons in seven roles at the 2021 Census: stage managers, technical directors, production assistants, lighting and sound technicians, and performing arts technicians not otherwise defined or classified. There was a total of 8,164 workers employed in these roles. The figure is likely to be a significant undercount, owing to the timing of the 2021 Census, which took place in August 2021 during public health restrictions and "lockdowns" in some states and territories.

SELECTED 6-DIGIT LEVEL ANZSIC OCCUPATION	EMPLOYED PERSONS 2021
STAGE MANAGER	305
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR	476
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT (FILM, TELEVISION, RADIO OR STAGE)	1,423
LIGHT TECHNICIAN	918
SOUND TECHNICIAN	3,182
PERFORMING ARTS TECHNICIANS NOT ELSEWHERE CLASSIFIED	1,571
PERFORMING ARTS TECHNICIANS NOT FURTHER DEFINED	289
TOTAL	**8,164**

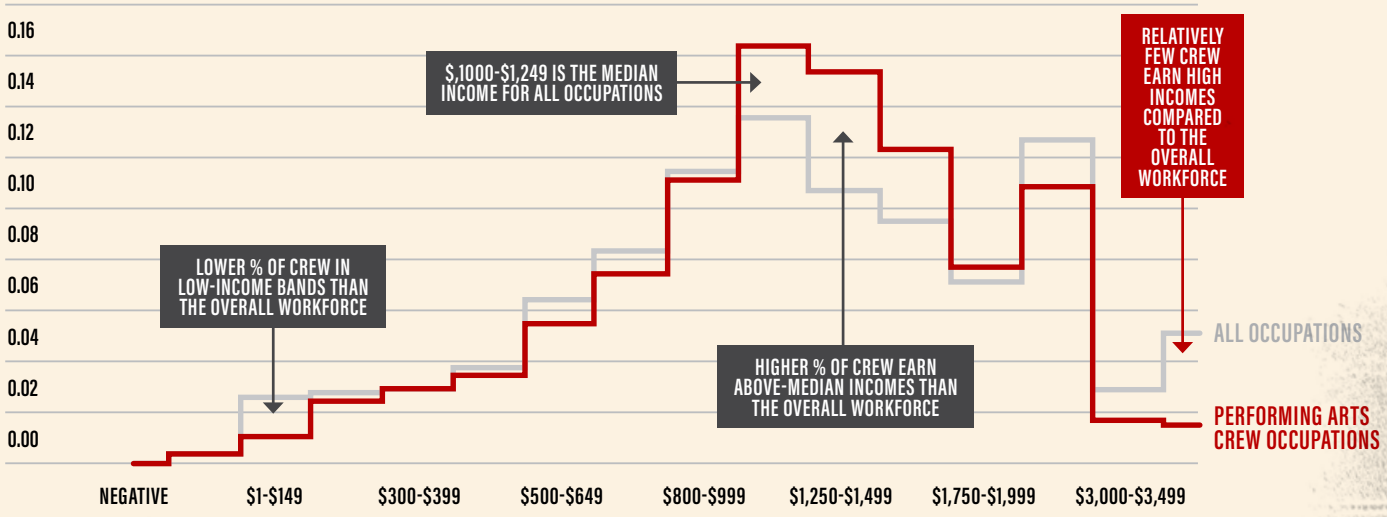
More can be done with the data. The ABS Census microdata allows us to investigate performing arts crew at the level of their age, gender and income.

On income, the ABS data allows us to chart performing arts workers by their weekly income band. The graph below compares the percentage of workers in each income band of crew occupations to those of the general workforce. The median income band for both crew and for the overall workforce is $1,000-$1,249 a week. However, there are some interesting differences. A number of points can be made.

Firstly, the income curve of performing arts workers is reasonably healthy compared to the overall workforce (perhaps surprisingly). There are proportionally fewer crew earning low incomes and proportionally more crew earning median and above-median incomes. At the bottom end, the percentage of workers in low-income bands is lower than that of the overall workforce, while at the middle and upper-middle, the percentage of crew earning above-median incomes is higher than the overall workforce.

WEEKLY INCOME BANDS, PERFORMING ARTS CREW OCCUPATIONS, 2021

% OF WORKERS BY WEEKLY INCOME BAND, PERFORMING ARTS CREW VS ALL OCCUPATIONS, 2021 CENSUS. SOUCE ABS CENSUS MICRODATA

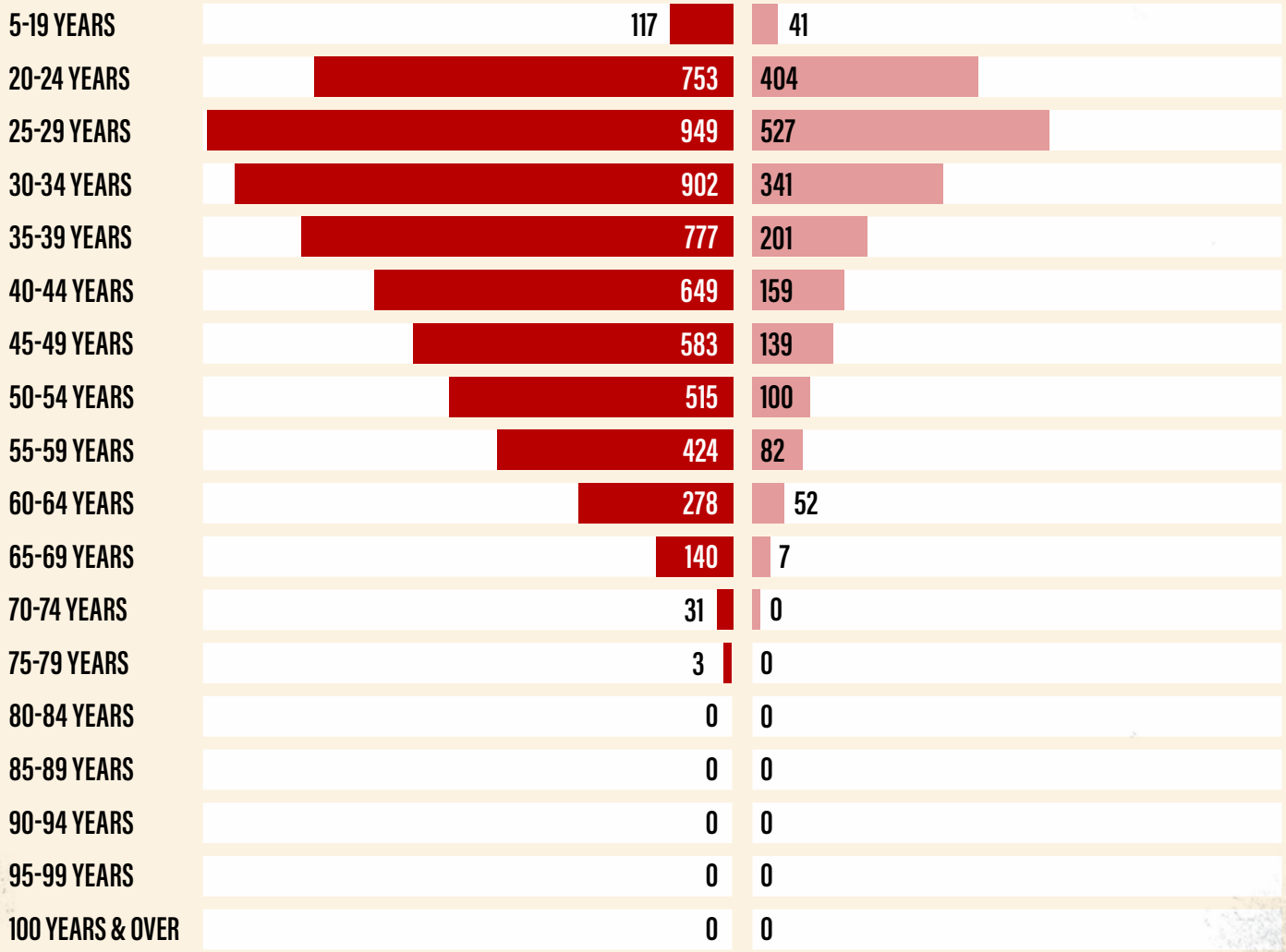


Secondly, there is an income ceiling for crew. Far fewer crew earn high incomes than the overall workforce. The overall shape of crew earnings, therefore, is what might be called “middle income”. These are quite different income figures to other cultural workers, such as artists, who notoriously have far lower incomes on average.

Census data also allows demographic analysis. A common analysis is the so-called “age-sex pyramid”, which charts populations by age and gender. The pyramid chart below shows the age and gender breakdown for the performing arts crew cultural occupations analysed, in 5-year age bands.

PERFORMING ARTS CREW EMPLOYMENTS, BY AGE AND SEX, 2021

EMPLOYED PERSONS IN SELECTED 6-DIGIT CREW OCCUPATIONS, BY SEX, IN 5-YEAR BANDS, 2021. SOURCE ABS CENSUS MICRODATA.



As can be seen, performing arts workers in this population are majority male, with a markedly skewed male demographic right down the pyramid. The median worker in crew occupations at the 2021 Census was a man aged 35-39 years. Women made up just a quarter (25.3%) of workers in these crew occupations on Census night.

The male skew comes despite anecdotal evidence that more women are taking up jobs in technical and crew roles. There is evidence elsewhere that women are entering cultural labour force in record numbers (women comprised a majority of workers in the cultural industries as a whole for the first time at the 2021 Census). But the figures in the Census for this cohort of workers are unmistakeable. In summary, performing arts occupations have a long way to go before gender parity in employment is reached.

The age demographics also have a younger skew than the broader labour force. There are comparatively large cohorts of younger workers showing up in the data: more than a third of performing arts crew workers (34.0%) are 29 and younger, and the age band with the most number of jobs is 25-29 years. In comparison, the median age of the broader labour force is 41.

Other parts of the broader labour force have very different demographics. For example, the single largest category of Australian workers is the healthcare and social assistance sector. There are more than 1.7 million workers in this sector, and they are majority female. In comparison, performing arts workers resemble age and gender patterns seen in the construction sector.

There is much more analysis worth doing on the statistics about cultural workers. Academic researchers and industry bodies continue to do research on this workforce, and we hope to see more detailed data coming out in coming months.

WHAT THE CREWCARE SURVEY TELLS US

CREWCARE CARRIED OUT A SURVEY OF ITS MEMBERS IN JULY 2023

This was a valuable survey that yielded important insights into the experiences of CrewCare members working in the Australian production sector. The survey brought in 299 responses, which provided a detailed quantitative evidence about the organisation's membership base.

Survey respondents told CrewCare that there were many aspects of the industry and their jobs that they wished would improve. Some key findings are summarised below.

Survey respondents said they face significant issues in their workplace, and that they want more support in their working lives:

57% of respondents said there were obstacles to finding more work in the industry; of these, the majority nominated the obstacles as "lack of training" and "lack of opportunity".

52% of respondents said there weren't adequate resources available to support them in their career progression.

50% of respondents said there were "blockages" to advancing their career or finding further work, with **24%** saying the main blockage was lack of training or experience.

45% of respondents said they were working excessive hours.

53% of respondents said that their working hours prevented a healthy work-life balance (one respondent wrote that "16 hour days, 6 days a week means I don't get to see my family as often as I would like").

29% of respondents said they were considering leaving their job for a different role or industry, with many respondents citing low wages, work-life balance, and family commitments as reasons.

30% of respondents said they did not feel they were able to raise issues or concerns with their employer.

Qualitative feedback to the CrewCare survey was also rich and informative. Many respondents nominated the industry's excessive hours, poor work-life balance, lack of training and career progression, poor management, and poor workplace culture as significant issues they wished to see change. Low pay in the context of a cost-of-living crisis was another recurring concern raised in the survey.

Workforce diversity and the discrimination faced by workers was another recurring theme of qualitative feedback. Some quotes from qualitative feedback in response to a question about how working conditions could improve in the sector are presented here:

"A union would be fantastic."

"Better regulation to ensure promoters and employers were forced to address fatigue management."

"Better expectation of workload by employer and time frames. Managing industry time frames vs. Award requirements for staff vs. Local government requirements which are all very different."

"Better training for new people and more support for new people starting."

"Cancellation policies. Tired of tours being rescheduled or cancelled at the last minute and receiving no payment for the work already done. I understand that everyone loses money when this happens, but for freelancers who are relying on that income and can't replace the work when it happens, it is too easy to be set back financially. Also so many employers still aren't paying superannuation when they should be."

"Get more consistent work as opposed to "feast or famine", find resources to compare my rates to other professionals so I can negotiate fair pay for my jobs. My university degree didn't prepare me for the "real world"."

"Get paid more. Work less unpaid hours. Better training for newcomers. Courses that teach real world knowledge."

"Higher rates for labour across the board. Recognition of skills, qualifications/certificate and appropriate renumeration."

"I would like to see a basic living wage for all crew, available when they have no other income. A simple system for crew to cover time between gigs without the humiliating dole demands."

"I wish the company I worked for would acknowledge and rewards my experience and dedication. So if I could change their attitude toward me that would be great."

"I think the way we schedule shifts should be better planned. Sometimes it can be emotional and financially frustrating to plan yourself for big shifts and realise in the middle of the job that due to poor planning, shifts are going to be cut in half."

"I'd like there to be a body that calls out bad promotors or assists when clients don't pay as when this happens there is generally not a lot anyone can do. Whether you're a sole trader, company it's all the same. The promotor can liquidate and no-one receives funds."

"Industry wide- fatigue management, sexual harassment and harassment in general."

"I wouldn't change my job for anything else in the world. The industry itself needs to be more inclusive; it's currently really easy for straight white blokes to get a foot in, but difficult for anyone else."

"I think there's still very much an underlying belief in the industry that young women and non-binary people don't belong and aren't good enough. I think it's slowly changing and progress has definitely been made but there's still a "the old days when there were less women and sensitivities around were better" vibe."

COMPARING CREWCARE SURVEY WITH ABS CENSUS DATA

CrewCare's demographic data accords with the Census data. There is a strong male skew amongst survey respondents, with 73% indicating a male gender. Age demographics were also relatively young, however with an older pattern than the Census figures. While the largest age band is 30-39 years, there is an identifiable over-60 year old cohort (21.6% over 60 years). Membership appears concentrated in Victoria, with 45% of respondents.

Survey responses to the occupation question in the questionnaire showed a good coherence with the occupations showing up in the ABS data, with the exception of a large number of drivers, who are likely not showing up in the Census data (because they are classified outside of the cultural industries).

The survey question about what respondents would like CrewCare to "do more of" was very revealing. There was a clear preference for skills training and advocacy, with catch-ups, self-help workshops and mental health first aid training also prominent in top responses. Given that workshops and first-aid training are also types of training, we can infer a significant preference for enhanced training opportunities amongst respondents.

"WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE US DO MORE OF?"	% RESPONSES
SKILLS TRAINING	23
GREATER ADVOCACY FOR CREW	21
CREW CATCH-UPS	16
ONLINE SELF HELP WORKSHOPS	14
MHFA REFRESHER COURSES	10
REGULAR NEWSLETTERS	9
MORE FUNDRAISING OPPORTUNITIES	6
OTHER	2

Another theme of the survey was a desire for "support", variously referred to in the survey questionnaire. For instance, in answer to the multiple choice question as to what should be "CrewCare's most important mission", the number one response was "support". This is a key finding of the survey: CrewCare members see a need for support for workers in their sector.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS BEING CREWCARE'S MOST IMPORTANT MISSION?	% RESPONSES (MULTIPLE CHOICES)
SUPPORT	62
ADVOCACY	45
EDUCATION	36
FUNDRAISING	17
OTHER	3

Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list of all the responses to the survey. CrewCare has gathered rich evidence about performing arts workers in Australia. The survey is a very informative document and would benefit from further exploration.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CREW WORKING CONDITIONS IN 2024

By bringing together and examining the available data, including the ABS data, Live Performance Australia data, responses to CrewCare's survey and other available information such as media stories and industry reports, we can try and sketch a picture of working conditions for crew workers in Australia in 2024.

The following are some broader observations about the working conditions for crew in Australian 2024.

AN INDUSTRY ADJUSTING FROM AN HISTORIC SHOCK

2020 saw a near-total shutdown of the Australian live sector due to pandemic health restrictions, crippling business and throwing thousands of crew out of work. Veteran staff faced some of the toughest circumstances of their working lives.

As time passes, the depth of the downturn risks being forgotten. But we should not forget just how big a shock these industries experienced. In Victoria, business activity in the live sector dropped to essentially zero. Census figures for creative employment in the City of Melbourne local government area in 2021 showed jobs down an astonishing 80% on 2016 levels.

The industry has bounced back from the dark days of 2020 and 2021. The recent release of the authoritative Live Performance Australia data for the 2023 performing year – the best available industry data – shows a top-line increase of both ticket revenue and attendance above 2019 figures. LPA says ticket sales were $3.1b in 2023, a 59.7% increase from 2019 (although these figures are not adjusted for inflation). Overall attendance was also up to 30.1 million, a 26% increase over 2019 levels. Some aspects of the live sector, including touring of big-name international artists and acts like Taylor Swift and Cirque de Soleil, are doing well.

Despite these superficially positive numbers, the industry has yet to return to full health. Many venues and festivals folded either during the pandemic or in the immediate aftermath. The worldwide inflation surge that started after the invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 has flowed in to many industries in surprising ways, notably in terms of higher costs for transport, logistics, insurance and certain specialist goods (such as chips and circuit boards). For the live sector, rising fees for headline international artists have also posed serious challenges to the profit margins of promoters and touring companies. These rising input costs have resulted in some business failures, particularly in the festivals industry.

On the demand side, the cost-of-living crisis has hurt the spending power of audience members, especially in younger demographics. While so-called "true fans" are still prepared to shell out big dollars for "once in a lifetime" tours such as Taylor Swift, mid-tier acts and festivals are seeing much softer ticket sales. Smaller venues are struggling, with patchy demand and high costs leading to the closure of significant numbers of small music venues in recent years, as recent figures from APRA have revealed.

A recent IBISWorld report on music and theatre production highlighted some of the live performance sector's strengths and weaknesses. The report noted that there is growing audience demand for international performances, particularly in contemporary music, which is driving positive revenue growth. There has also been improved government funding for the funded arts sector through the Albanese government's new national cultural policy, Revive. The report argues that as the sector has returned to operations after the pandemic has led "many consumers to increase their spending on music and live performances to make up for lost time." The report also highlighted sectoral competitive weaknesses, including low barriers to entry for new competitors, volatile revenue, low profit margins and low revenue per employee. It noted that consumers in Australia's struggling household sector are delaying or postponing discretionary spending, as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

INDUSTRY CONDITIONS WILL REMAIN CHALLENGING IN THE MEDIUM TERM

Crew experience quite difficult working conditions. The performing arts industry is dynamic and even at times chaotic, and industry conditions can fluctuate quickly. There are seasonal periods of high work demand, and fallow periods where there is less work available, or even no work at all. Compounding this, conditions of employment for crew are often insecure, temporary and precarious. Very few workers have stable and secure ongoing jobs. Some are paid as employees, but many are paid as contractors or ABN-holding sole trading. Many workplace entitlements available to other working Australians are not always honoured for crew: sick leave, for instance, does not apply to contractors under Australian law. Workplace health and safety is a clear and ongoing concern for many crew, for obvious reasons: their workplaces can be hazardous and workplace injuries remain troublingly frequent. Workplace health and safety concerns also include psycho-social risks, such as depression, burnout and workplace bullying and harassment.

Industry structures are also a problem for workers. The people working performing arts venues and events would benefit from an industry which is healthy and competitive. Although industry conditions have improved markedly from the period immediately after the pandemic, there are still significant supply chain challenges and skills shortages that are affecting industry operations.

Australia's live performance industry is consolidating, with larger companies gaining more market share. In the short-term, this is not necessarily a bad thing for workers, as larger companies tend to be better managed and have better policies and procedures, including stronger safety protections. In the medium-term, however, a consolidated industry will place downward pressure on wages. As we've seen in other parts of Australia's economy, when a few large firms come to dominate a sector, this tends to reduce competition, allowing firms to extract higher profits in the form of higher prices from consumers and lower wages from workers. Workers (and indeed, artists and audiences) would be best served by an industry in which there is healthy competition between live performance companies.

CREW ARE IN DEMAND, BUT WE DON'T KNOW HOW LONG THAT WILL LAST

Current industry conditions clearly see a robust demand for skilled workers, especially in roles such as rigging, sound, specialist lighting and VJs, specialist staging, and logistics. At various stages of 2022, as the industry returned from lockdown, these skills shortages extended to roles such as ticketing, general backstage, front-of-house and security.

It's not clear how long these positive drivers for labour demand will endure. Classical microeconomics would suggest that the industry will move closer to equilibrium, including in labour demand, as the industry moves further away from the pandemic shock and the cultural labour market gradually adjusts. Anecdotally, fewer skilled workers appear to be leaving the industry for other sectors, a pressing problem during 2020-22. More skilled workers are also entering the labour force, from universities and training providers, and also organically as the industry has somewhat improved capacity for on-the-job training. Again anecdotally, wages appear to have risen in the post-pandemic years, although there is no robust ABS data with the granularity to quantitatively test this.

As a result, we should not expect that the current skills shortage will necessarily continue. If labour conditions slacken, vacancies would be expected to fall and would also be expected to place downward pressure on wages. Historically, this sector has generally seen low wages and relatively insecure working conditions. As a result, even though wages and conditions have been improving in recent years, a return to more "normal" conditions may also mean more "normal" levels of stagnant wages and workplace insecurity. The sector is not particularly unionised, there aren't a lot of workers covered by enterprise negotiations to collectively bargain (see below), and so there are fewer checks and stabilisers to market conditions.

IDEAS TO HELP CULTURAL WORKERS

CREW WORKERS NEED MORE SUPPORT

Pulling it all together, Australia's performing arts workers deliver their events despite tough challenges. They face difficult and sometimes dangerous working conditions, and they've got to get it done on time, or the show won't go on. We often hear clichés about how music and live events are "the original gig economy", but the grain of truth in this conjecture is that working conditions for crew remain structurally insecure and precarious.

Not surprisingly, crew workers want better conditions in their workplaces, and they want there to be a voice for workers in their sector. Crew are intelligent and articulate in their understanding of the sector's challenges. However, workers are less clear about how better conditions could be achieved, what a voice for their sector would articulate, or what messages might be stated. But there is a common theme of desiring greater advocacy for workers and for desiring more avenues for support and assistance.

From the CrewCare survey, interviews with CrewCare members, and also what we know more generally about the status of cultural workers, it's clear that performing arts workers need and deserve greater support, advocacy and representation in their working lives. This will require more help than any single small cultural organisation can provide. CrewCare, and other cultural organisations, therefore have to make choices about what they choose to focus on, knowing that they cannot deliver on the entirety of the program of goals hoped for by workers and members.

Crew workers could manifestly benefit from more training, career development, workplace support, and policy advocacy. There are a range of organisations in Australian culture who are currently playing an important (although constrained) role in supporting artists. Some examples include the National Association for the Visual Arts, Theatre Network Australia, the Australian Society of Authors and the Australian Writers Guild. These organisations, while small, do a great deal of important work advocating and lobbying for better funding and policy frameworks for artists. Charities such as Support Act are also fulfilling an important role supporting cultural workers in crisis.

Organisations looking to support cultural workers can provide critical help by providing training programs, for instance. A lot of CrewCare members nominated training as an important aspect of what they wanted from industry bodies. It's clear that some of the industry training programs currently being delivered are making very valuable contributions. CrewCare should keep developing its training programs, as they are demonstrably delivering for participants.

CREW WORKERS NEED MORE ADVOCACY

One area in which cultural non-profits can deliver for members is by publicly advocating for them to industry and policymakers. Effective advocacy requires a mix of policy knowledge and campaign savvy. It is not enough to propose policy solutions that could help members: organisations must be willing and able to campaign publicly in members' interests. This could involve speaking to the media, developing public campaigns in partnership with other industry bodies, as well as traditional lobbying to parliamentarians.

Effective advocacy can act as an "influence multiplier", by reaching policymakers with messages that can help influence policy outcomes and improve the conditions for workers and firms in the entire industry. Unlike organisations representing artists, there is a lack of comparable advocacy for cultural workers (notwithstanding the policy advocacy of MEAA). Ultimately, cultural workers would benefit most from a stronger social safety net, such as higher unemployment benefit payment rates and relaxed mutual obligations; it's no surprise that many artists are now starting to campaign for a universal basic income as a specific response to the insecurity of the cultural working life. If it can find the resources to do so, CrewCare has a real opportunity to enhance its advocacy on behalf of working crew.

Advocating for workers is about more than just government policy. CrewCare members also expressed a need for better advocacy to improve the diversity of their workplaces, and to reduce perceived levels of stigma, bias and discrimination against some of their colleagues. The performing arts sector

remains relatively "pale and male" in its demographic composition, although it has been feminising in recent years; some members said they felt the industry was not welcoming enough to diversity and to new talent. Crew have also said they want better advocacy around mental health and the psycho-social impacts of their working conditions. This is an area in which CrewCare can keep making a difference.

CREW WORKERS NEED MORE COLLECTIVE ACTION

Cultural workers also need better collective organisation, ideally through a stronger and more active cultural union. A number of CrewCare members said that they wanted a union, or a stronger union presence, in their workplaces. This was nominated in qualitative feedback in particular, as highlighted above. As one member said, "A union would be fantastic."

Cultural workers in Australia are relatively poorly unionised. Only 9% of workers in the cultural industries were union members in 2022. This figure is a lower union density figure than the (already low) national union density figures of 12%. Low union density means workers are not collectively organised and are unlikely to be covered by enterprise agreements, in which unions and corporations negotiate wages and conditions.

Industry structures and the workplace culture of crew work in Australia also mitigate against union organisation and collective representation. Many staging, lighting and production companies are relatively small or mid-sized, with relatively little union presence, while larger touring companies often sub-contract to smaller production and staging firms. These are difficult conditions in which for workers to bargain with employers.

There are green shoots of industrial organisation, in a number of other industries and other countries, such as bookstore retail workers in Australia, or Amazon warehouses in the United States. The relevant union for performing arts workers in Australia is the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance ("MEAA"). Although is highly active, the MEAA is a relatively small union compared to larger unions in industries like construction, education and health. Relatively few cultural workers are members of MEAA, although it does have some niche strengths in certain workforces, such as symphony orchestras, funded arts companies, broadcasters and newspapers. The MEAA is in the process of attempting to reinvigorate its efforts, with an organising drive amongst contemporary musicians, under its Musicians Australia local. However, this is a relatively small-scale initiative, and density will likely remain low for some time. CrewCare members spoken to as part of this research said that the MEAA was not an active presence in their workplace, and some expressed reservations about whether a unionised workplace would be less productive and flexible. Greater union density will also bring consequences, including possibly industrial action.

In summary, performing arts workers don't have a lot of labour power under current industry structures. Ultimately, cultural workers themselves have it within their compass to get together and collective improve their bargaining position, but it will take hard work and patience to build such a movement. Without stronger collective organisation, crew will remain at a disadvantage when it comes to negotiating their wages and conditions.

CrewCare is not a union and has the legal structure of a cultural not-for-profit. It's not legally entitled to bargain with enterprises, and shouldn't take on this task.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Albanese government has taken an unusually positive attitude to cultural policy, and funding increases delivered as part of the Revive policy are some of the best new funding injunctions at the federal level for a generation. The current government has also shown a willingness to support live music, both through better funding and also through improved policy settings through the implementation of a new policy body, Music Australia.

These positive developments in the national cultural policy framework are not guaranteed to last. Historically, federal governments have often been neglectful of cultural policy, and it's not clear that the current framework would remain should the federal Liberal-National Coalition take office in 2025.

This uncertain future should be no surprise to performing arts workers, who have just been through the most profound disruption in their industries in a century. One advantage that crew do have is their amazing flexibility and agility while working in a constantly-changing sector. More than nearly any other workers, Australian crew are well placed to deal with the challenges that future disruptions are likely to bring.

October 2024.

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[3] Balzac, 2020; Leitch, 2024.

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[5] Pisfil, Sergio. (2020). "Rock Live Performance." In *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Rock Music Research*, eds. Allan Moore and Paul Carr [eds], pp. 381–394. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

[6] Adam Behr, Matt Brennan, Martin Cloonan, Simon Frith & Emma Webster (2016) Live Concert Performance: An Ecological Approach, *Rock Music Studies*, 3:1, 5-23, DOI:10.1080/19401159.2015.1125633

[7] Kielich, G. (2023). *The Road Crew: Live Music and Touring*. CRC Press.

[8] Coupe's book has been cited by Sergio Pifsil, however: Pisfil, S. (2023). British Rock Roadies: Doing sound in the late 1960s. *IASPM Journal,* 13(1), 122-139.

[9] The ABS data is the best (and in this case, the only) available data on Australian employment patterns. However, it is important to understand the limitations of the data. Employment is captured by way of the Census questionnaire, which asks respondents to record their "main job" in the week of the Census. As a result, it is reliant on what citizens write down in their Census form. The "main job" question is likely to under-report many types of cultural employment, such as freelancers, workers in insecure or temporary jobs, or artists who work a "day job" while pursuing a creative career outside their chief source of employment. The problem is particularly acute for cultural workers, who have transient and dynamic work patterns. For example, a crew worker who tours frequently, but in the week of the Census was working at a bar or a café , would be recorded as a hospitality worker. The 2021 Census occurred during a period of "lockdown" public health restrictions in some states of Australia; as a result, some performing arts workers were stood down or unemployed from these occupations.

[10] These industries and occupations are classified by the ABS in a master list, called the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification. There are more than 100 industries and more than 1,000 occupations categorised across the economy. See: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013). *Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC).* Canberra: ABS. https://www.abs.gov.au/ statistics/classifications/australian-and-new-zealand-standard-industrial-classification-anzsic/latestrelease

[11] This list excludes crew classified in the screen sector, such as gaffers, camera operators, clapper loaders, foley operators, etc, even though of course some workers move frequently across different industries according to their skillset.

[12] See Throsby and Petetskaya (2024), referenced previously.

[13] The ABS Census data has begun to collect non-binary gender data, but most important time series are still cross-tabbed to a binary category that the ABS names "sex".

[14] Source: ABS Census microdata analysis for 367,300 workers in the 4-digit cultural industries.

[15] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022). A caring nation – 15 per cent of Australia's workforce in Health Care and Social Assistance industry. Media release, 12 October 2022. https://www.abs.gov.au/mediacentre/media-releases/caring-nation-15-cent-australias-workforce-health-care-and-social-assistanceindustry

[16] See: Ben Eltham and Justin O'Connor (2024). Australian Cultural Employment: An analysis of the Australian Census and Labour Force Survey Data, Reset Working Paper no. 4, Creative People, Products and Places (CP3), Adelaide: University of South Australia. https://unisa.edu.au/contentassets/0ed6be61dba440078c3632204554be73/cp3-wp-04.pdf

[17] All survey data here is drawn from the CrewCare members survey of 2023, n=292. This is not an exhaustive list of all responses or all questions.

[18] Dan Condon, Al Newstead, Nicola Heath, Jared Richards and Allison Jess (2023). Australian live music venues 'firmly in crisis' as gig goers shift behaviours post-lockdown. ABC News, 4 December 2023. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-12-04/australian-live-music-venues-struggling-closing-down/103161974. Accessed 30 October 2024.

[19] Levi Duane-Davis (2024). Music and Theatre Productions in Australia - Market Research Report (2014-2029), ANZSIC R9001. IBISWorld.

[19] In recent years, the Republic of Ireland has run a fascinating pilot program providing a basic income for artists. See the interim report: Nadia Feldkircher and Brian O'Donnell (2024). Basic Income for the Arts: Impact Assessment (First year). Dublin: IGEES, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media.

[21] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024). "Trade union membership". https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/trade-union-membership/latest-release Accessed 30 October 2024.

[22] Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (2024). 'Musicians Australia'. https://www.meaa.org/meaamusicians/musicians-australia/ Accessed 30 October 2024.