

Hottest or not? Government support for Australian music

The Triple J Hottest 100 featured fewer Australian songs in 2024 than in any year since 1996. Australians are spending more on music than ever before, but less is going to Australian artists with revenue going instead to the USA. The example of Taiwan shows that policy support matters. Taiwanese artists are successful both within Taiwan and in mainland China. Taiwan's funding for musicians is nearly double Australia's, as a portion of the economy.

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INTRODUCTION

For a long time, Triple J's annual Hottest 100 was considered the most important barometer of trendsetting music in Australia. Often billed as the "world's biggest musical democracy," the countdown offers all listeners an opportunity to vote on their favourite song released in the previous 12-months. In this wide-open playing field, the success of Australian artists is especially celebrated. As a youth-focused public radio station, Triple J's Hottest 100 has launched many Australian artists who have gone onto broader success.

But streaming has changed everything. The playlists presented to listeners of streaming services work on algorithms that filter for language, but not for geography

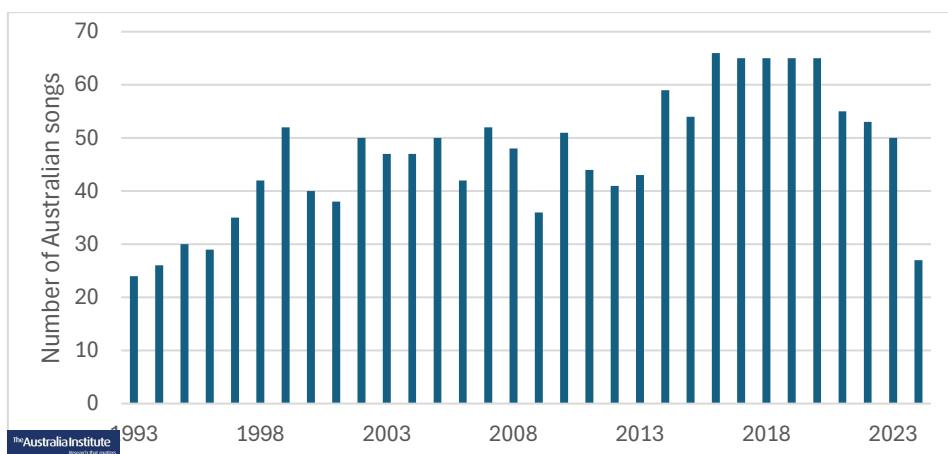
or culture. This can work one of two ways. Bigger European countries like Italy, Germany, and France have each seen *more* domestic artists reach the top of the charts because of streaming.¹ This is because algorithms give people listening to music in a particular language more of the same, and since most German speakers are in Germany, more German artists get heard.

Australian artists, however, get clumped together with everyone else who sings in English, which means they must compete for an audience with the UK, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada and, most significantly, the huge number of Americans listening to American artists. Artists from Australia now compete against everyone else on the same handful of streaming services. Far from creating a free, global market for music, algorithms are handicapping Australian artists.

AUSTRALIANS IN THE HOTTEST 100

Although the number of voters increased,² the 2024 Hottest 100 featured the fewest Australian songs of any year since 1996. Perhaps this should not be surprising given that people – especially younger people – are more likely to hear new music on streaming services or social media sites like TikTok than on any radio station. In this radically different media environment, policies are needed so that Australia's newest best artists continue to be supported.

Figure 1: Australian songs in the Triple J Hottest 100



Source: ABC (2025) *The Hottest 100 Archive*, www.abc.net.au/triplej/hottest100/archive/

¹ Page and Dalla Riva (2023) 'Glocalisation' of Music Streaming within and across Europe, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/european-institute/Assets/Documents/LEQS-Discussion-Papers/EIQPaper182.pdf>

² ABC (2025) *Triple j starts their 50th year strong*, <https://www.abc.net.au/about/media-centre/press-releases/triple-j-strong-at-50/105103746>

In the first 10 years of the Hottest 100, the number of Australian songs featured in the countdown almost doubled, from 24 in 1993 to 47 in 2003. The 1996 Hottest 100 became a watershed moment for Australian music, when ‘Buy Me A Pony’ by Australian band Spiderbait became the first Australian song to be voted into the number one position of the countdown.

1999 was the first year in which Australian songs held the majority of positions in the countdown, a feat that was been repeated in multiple years since. The countdowns for all of the years between 2016 and 2020 featured record high numbers of between 65 and 66 Australian songs. Since 2021, however, the number of Australian songs has declined with each passing year – from 55 in 2021, to 53 in 2022, and 50 in 2023. In the most recent countdown (for songs released in 2024) the number of Australian artists was just 27 - and many of these were from older acts. It is hard to believe that Australians have simply lost interest in Australian music.

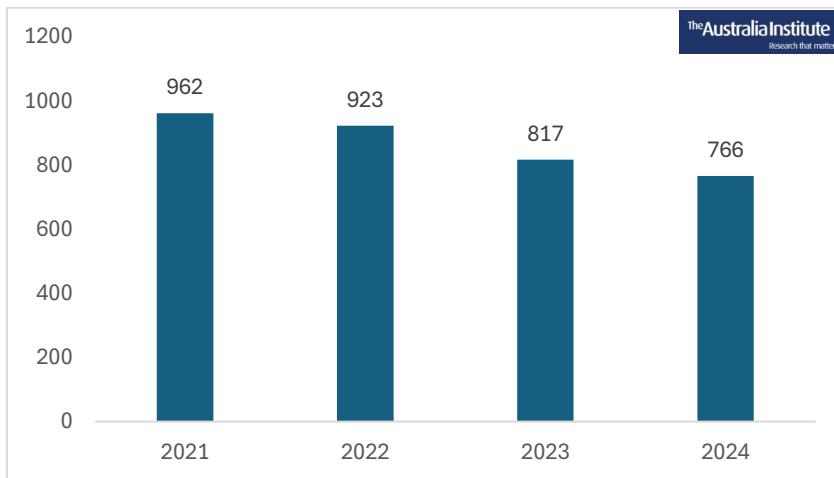
Australia’s national youth radio station operates in a vastly different environment than it did when the Hottest 100 started. The decline in the presence of Australian songs in the Hottest 100 correlates to a decline in the amount of Australian music streamed by Australian listeners across the major streaming services. As this is where music discovery is more likely to happen, this is where policy intervention is needed.

STREAMING SERVICES

Using data from top streaming services, which captured almost 90% of all demand for music within Australia, the Australia Institute analyzed Australia’s top 10,000 most streamed songs and artists between 2021 to 2024.³ In that period, the number of Australian artists appearing in the 10,000 has declined by about one-third, from 962 in 2021 to 776 in 2024. Streamshare – the number of *times* those Australian artists inside the top 10,000 have been streamed – also declined, from 12% to 8% (a 30% drop off).

³ Page and Harrington (2025) *Reversing the decline of Australian music*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/australian-music-streaming/>

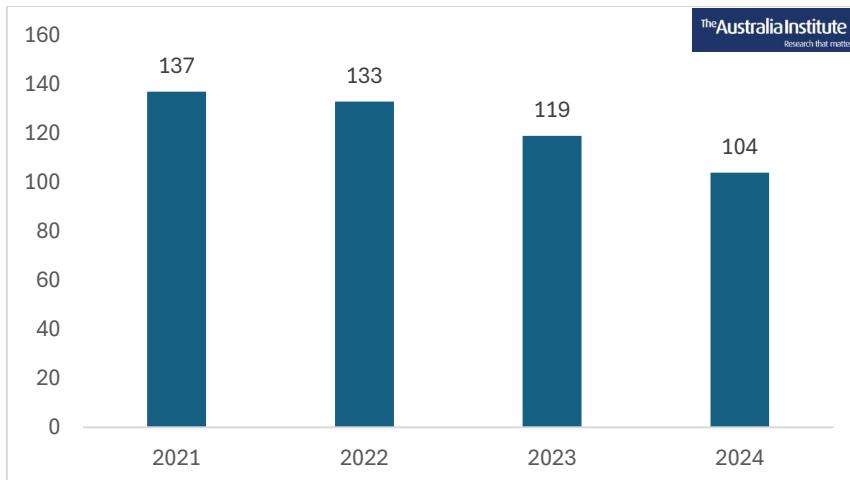
Figure 2: Number of Australian artists in top 10,000 most streamed artists



Source: Page and Harrington (2025) *Reversing the decline of Australian music*

The same downward trend can be seen in the top 1000 streams – the number of Australian artists declined from 137 in 2021 to 104 in 2024.

Figure 3: Number of Australian artists in top 1,000 most streamed artists



Source: Page and Harrington (2025) *Reversing the decline of Australian music*

This analysis shows that Australians are streaming less Australian music less often. Of the top 100 artists streamed in Australia in 2024, just five were Australian: The Wiggles (41st), The Kid LAROI (43rd), AC/DC (65th), Vance joy (77th), Hilltop Hoods (95th).

As a result, less money is going to Australian artists. Between 2021 and 2024, spending by Australians on music *increased* by 25% but the share going to artist *shrank* by almost one-third.

But there is hope. Other countries show that with the right policies, funding and regulation, local artists can not only get heard locally, but can cut through into much larger international markets. Taiwan provides an interesting example.

TURNING TAIWANESE

Musicians in Australia and Taiwan face a similar challenge – they compete with all the singers from a much larger global superpower with which they share a language. But while Australian musicians are losing listeners to acts from the USA, Taiwan's popular music is thriving. Not only is Taiwanese music thriving in Taiwan, it is also popular in Mainland China, where Taiwanese artists like Jay Chou are superstars.

Taiwanese bands sing in Chinese and compete with Chinese acts just like Australian bands compete with Americans singing in English. Taiwan is at an even steeper disadvantage from a population standpoint – it has about three million fewer people than Australia, while China has over one billion more people than the USA.

Despite the competition from the larger neighbour, in 2023, local artists accounted for about 35% of what appeared on the top charts of Taiwan's YouTube Music – more than Mainland China's share of 31.5%.⁴

In fact, in 2024, three of the top ten selling live performing musicians or bands in mainland China were from Taiwan.⁵ Their success comes despite the reality that Taiwan's population is only about 1.6% that of Mainland China.

So what can Australia learn from Taiwan?

Arts funding in Taiwan and Australia

Taiwan's musicians receive considerably more support from the Taiwanese Government than Australia's musicians do. In 2024, Taiwan's Bureau of Audiovisual and Music Industry Development, which administers grant funding for music production, performance and distribution invested at least 490 million New Taiwanese

⁴ Industry Research Database (2023) *Taiwan Cultural Content Industry Survey Report - Pop Music, Radio, Podcasts*, <https://research.taicca.tw/pdf/2d2bf755-7a71-3123-8443-256be5819e57>

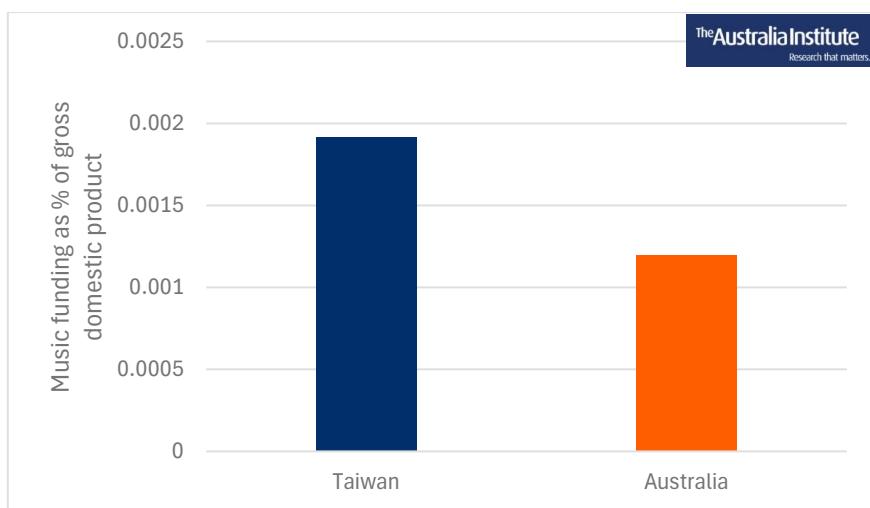
⁵ Weibo.com (2025) *TOP Music Chart*, <https://weibo.com/1695976033/5127563001464147>

Dollar (NTD) of public funding in its contemporary music industry⁶ – this is about \$23.1 million Australian dollars.

In Australia, funding for contemporary music is mostly made through Creative Australia's \$24.6 million annual budget⁷ (this was an improvement from the \$17.1 million it got in financial year 2023-24) and the \$8.6 million⁸ given to Revive Live, which supports live music venues and music festivals showcasing Australian performers.

While these figures appear similar in dollar terms, Taiwan's population and economy are smaller than Australia's. As a proportion of each country's economy the Taiwanese Government spends nearly twice as much on contemporary music as Australia's Commonwealth Government does, as shown in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4: Public funding of contemporary music, Australia vs Taiwan



Sources: Data from Bureau of Audiovisual and Music Industry Development, Ministry of Culture (2024), 113年度文化部影視及流行音樂產業局單位決算審定本 (Audited final budget for the Bureau of Audiovisual and Music Industry Development, Ministry of Culture, for calendar year 2024) https://www.bamid.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=3662&s=241759; (Taiwan) Ministry of Economic Affairs (n.d.), 國內生產毛額(名目金額)-按支出分 (Gross Domestic Product, current prices) <https://service.moea.gov.tw/EE521/common/Common.aspx?code=A&no=2>; Creative

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<https://file.moc.gov.tw/Download.ashx?u=LzAwMS9VcGxvYWQvNTEwL3JlbGZpbGUvMTMwMjlvMjQxNzU5L2QyMmE0MTU0LTvhNjEtNDNiYy1iMjlwLTMxMDhmZDAxNTM5Yi5wZGY%3d&n=MTEz5bm05bqm5paH5YyW6YOo5b2x6KaW5Y%2bK5rWB6KGM6Z%2bz5qiC55Si5qWt5bGA5Zau5L2N5rG6566XLeWvqeWumuacrC5wZGY%3d>

⁷ Creative Australia (2025) *Connected by creativity: Annual report 2024-25*, <https://creative.gov.au/annual-reports>

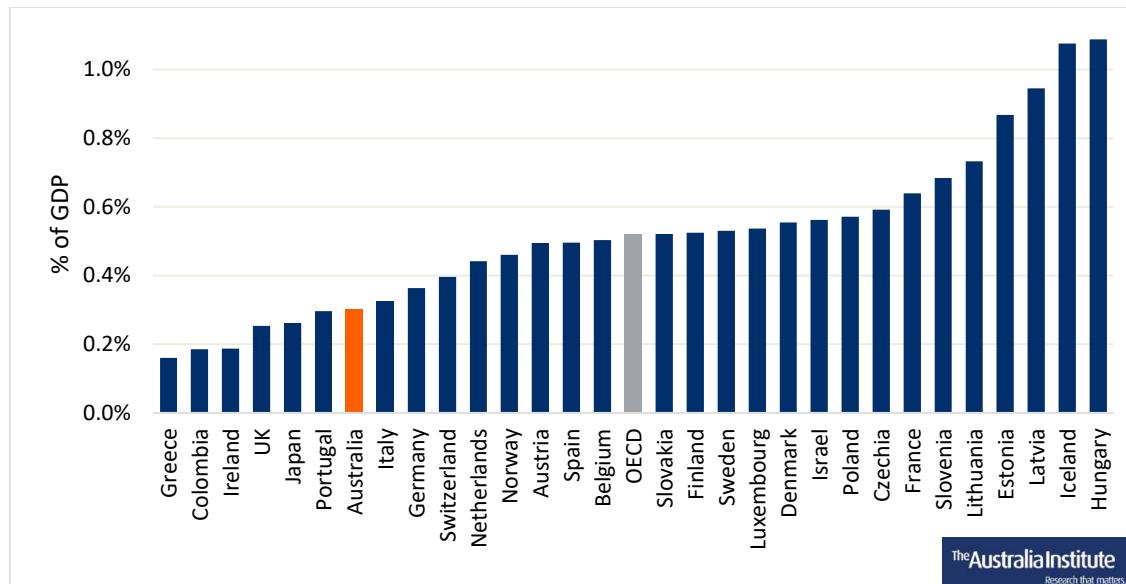
⁸ Commonwealth of Australia (2024) *Budget 2024-25 Budget paper No. 2*, p 151, https://archive.budget.gov.au/2024-25/bp2/download/bp2_2024-25.pdf

Australia (2025) Connected by creativity (Annual report 2024-25),
<https://creative.gov.au/annual-reports>; Commonwealth of Australia (2024) Budget 2024-25,
<https://archive.budget.gov.au/>; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2025) Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product,
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/national-accounts/australian-national-accounts-national-income-expenditure-and-product/jun-2025>

As shown in Figure 4 above, Taiwan's music funding-to-GDP ratio was just over 19 dollars per million, whereas Australia's is about \$12 per million. If Australia's Commonwealth government funded contemporary music on the same scale as Taiwan does, it would have spent about \$52.7 million last year, or roughly an additional \$20 million.

The dearth of arts funding given by the Australian Government is not limited to music. Australia's arts funding is well below the OECD average.⁹

Figure 5: Arts spending in OECD countries



Source: OECD (2025) *Annual government expenditure by function (COFOG)*, <https://data-explorer.oecd.org/>

Australian arts are so underfunded that just to fund at the OECD average, governments would need to increase funding by over \$5 billion per year. Creative Australia, the flagship federal arts program, has a budget of just \$318 million for 2025-26.¹⁰

⁹ Grundy et al. (2025) *Funding creativity in NSW – Submission to the NSW Government Art of Tax Reform consultation*, p6, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/funding-creativity-in-nsw-submission-to-the-nsw-government-art-of-tax-reform-consultation/>

¹⁰ Theatre Network Australia (2025) “Federal Budget 2025–26 – What It Means for the Arts”, <https://tna.org.au/federal-budget-2025-26-what-it-means-for-the-arts/>

Internet regulation

In addition to public funding, Taiwan's musicians may gain some benefit from China's regulation of the Internet, which means that listeners on the Chinese mainland use different streaming services to the rest of the world. Mainland listeners largely use different streaming apps from Taiwan where Apple Music, Spotify, Youtube Music are common. This helps insulate Taiwan's domestic music market. But the same music content is available in both markets, which means Taiwanese artists still compete with other Mandarin-speaking artists for listeners. This incidental separation of content hints at what might be possible with greater regulation of online content.

Australian Governments have shown that they can regulate the internet, and the tech giants that dominate it, for the benefit of the Australian community. Examples include the Morrison Government's News Media Bargaining Code,¹¹ and the Albanese Government's ban on social media use for Australians under 16 years old.

These examples show that the Australian Government has the power to regulate big tech, and this power could be used to ensure more Australians listen to more Australian music. Options include local content quotas on streaming services, or better resourcing Australian streaming services, perhaps via ABC Listen, and better resourcing and technical assistance for community radio.

CONCLUSION

If Australians want a robust local music and arts scene, investment and regulation is needed. In the streaming era, Australian artists are not getting the support necessary to break through the torrents of online content.

The example of Taiwan makes it clear that government choices make a difference to the music that we hear and the musicians that make it.

Basic economics is to subsidise things you want more of and tax the things you want less of. Australian governments are choosing to have fewer successful Australian artists through low arts funding and other policies that limit the success of Australian artists.

¹¹ Australia Institute (2020) *Big Tech Media Code Good News for Democracy*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/statement-on-news-media-bargaining-code-big-tech-media-code-good-news-for-democracy/>