

Clubs Australia Submission: Economic Reform Roundtable

Clubs Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Economic Reform Roundtable. Representing more than 5,000 licensed clubs nationwide, Clubs Australia speaks on behalf of community-owned organisations that are deeply embedded in the social and economic fabric of Australian life. This is especially true in regional and rural areas, where clubs are instrumental in employing people, leading disaster responses, developing and maintaining sporting infrastructure, and hosting free entertainment events.

As not-for-profit employers, clubs consistently provide above-award wages, offer high levels of permanency, and invest in structured training and apprenticeships. The club industry's commitment to workforce development not only benefits local communities but also contributes to national productivity, particularly by creating skilled, job-ready workers.

Clubs are also essential contributors to Australia's disaster response network. During times of crisis, clubs are among the first to act, providing shelter, food, and resource coordination. Due to their infrastructure, local trust, and operational capacity, clubs are reliable partners in emergency relief and recovery.

Clubs also play a central role in Australian sport. They fund grassroots teams, maintain sporting facilities, and support young athletes on their journey from community sport to national competition. Across the country, clubs provide the people, places, and pathways that keep Australian sport strong.

Clubs are leading venues for live entertainment. Every year, they host thousands of music, comedy, and cultural events, offering affordable and accessible spaces for both emerging and established talent. In doing so, clubs contribute to the vibrancy of Australian cultural life.

Together, these contributions underscore the importance of clubs to Australia's economic and social prosperity. This submission outlines the ways in which clubs strengthen local economies, support inclusive employment, and deliver essential community services. It also highlights opportunities to harness the unique capacity of clubs to support national economic reform objectives.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Clubs Australia submits that supporting club industry workforce development can increase labour force participation, reduce long-term unemployment and boost overall productivity.

Nationally the licensed club industry directly employs more than 130,000 people.

Clubs are proud to offer stable, community-focused employment. Clubs operate under a dedicated industry award and many clubs negotiate enterprise agreements that reflect the long-term nature of their workforce and their strong commitment to employee retention. Through these arrangements, clubs commonly pay above-award wages and maintain high levels of permanent staffing.

Clubs prioritise workforce development by investing in structured training, apprenticeships, and career pathways, often delivered in partnership with local TAFEs and training providers. These initiatives foster long-term employment and support stronger regional economies.

We encourage the government to expand support for apprenticeships, particularly for small businesses in regional areas. Incentivising small business in regional areas to engage apprenticeships at above-award wages would have the following economic benefits:

- Increase workforce participation among low participation groups (e.g. women, First Nations people, mature-aged workers, people with disability, and long-term unemployed)
- Strengthen small business capacity in regional Australia
- Support regional economic development and reduce skills shortages.

Subsidising apprenticeships would enable clubs to grow the local hospitality workforce and build the next generation of chefs, tradespeople, and frontline service workers. While skilled migration remains an important supplement in periods of shortage, clubs remain firmly committed to prioritising local employment wherever possible.

With structured training, mentorship, and a deep community presence, clubs offer young Australians more than a job – they offer a career.

To ensure this measure remains budget neutral we recommend reallocating funds from underperforming existing employment programs.

Recommendation: Expand subsidised apprenticeship support for small businesses in regional areas that offer apprenticeships at above-award wages.

DISASTER RELIEF AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Natural disasters currently cost the Australian economy approximately \$38 billion per year.

The ability for communities to respond to natural disasters and other emergencies can have a profound impact on the speed of economic recovery and reduce the requirement for ongoing government support.

Clubs play a frontline role in community disaster response. In times of crisis, they act swiftly to open their doors and provide meals, shelter, and coordinate much needed support.

During the 2019 bushfires, Club Taree became a vital hub for the local community, offering refuge for displaced residents, delivering meals to emergency workers, and working closely with local councils and the RFS to support response operations.

This same commitment has been displayed in Queensland. In December 2023, as Cyclone Jasper swept through far north Queensland and closed Cairns Airport, Cazalys Club served as a helicopter landing site for emergency rescues and later funded 400 Christmas meals for affected locals. Meanwhile, Holloways Beach Sports Club operated as a crisis hub for three weeks, offering toilet, shower, and laundry facilities to residents and coordinating the distribution of donated meals.

These actions are not isolated; they reflect the deep-rooted community role clubs play. With infrastructure, trained staff, and long-standing public trust, clubs are uniquely positioned to respond quickly and effectively during emergencies, reducing reliance on government-funded services.

To harness this capacity, clubs should be formally integrated into emergency management frameworks at both local and national levels. Partnering with clubs enables government to deliver fast, coordinated responses and improve Australia's overall disaster resilience.

Recommendation: Formally integrate clubs into local and national emergency management frameworks to enhance disaster response coordination and resilience.

COMMUNITY SPORT

In Australia, sport-related activity contributes around \$50 billion to the economy annually, with community sport making up about 30% of that total.

Community sport supports over 220,000 jobs, including coaches, officials, admin roles, and support services.

Every \$1 invested in community sport generates an average \$7 in economic and social benefits, including improved health, productivity, education, and social cohesion (KPMG for Sport Australia, 2018).

Community sport encourages regular physical activity, reducing public health costs by an estimated \$2.1 billion annually in Australia (AIHW & VicHealth studies).

Clubs are among the largest investors in Australia's grassroots sport. Thousands of junior and amateur sporting teams – from rugby league and netball to cricket and swimming – receive funding, facilities, and logistical support from their local club.

Penrith Panthers, for example, supports dozens of junior rugby league teams across Western Sydney, maintaining training grounds, covering transport costs, and employing coaching staff. Norths Leagues and Service Club in Brisbane backs a wide range of local sports, helping thousands of young athletes stay active and connected to their communities. These contributions do more than support weekend sport. They promote healthy lifestyles, foster social inclusion, and instil local pride. Clubs also create clear pathways from grassroots participation to elite sporting outcomes, helping develop the next generation of Australian athletes.

Community sport is a nation-building endeavour – and clubs are its foundation.

Clubs Australia believes that partnering with the Australian Sport Commission could maximise the licensed club infrastructure (indoor courts, playing fields, function spaces, gyms, change rooms) to meet rising demand for community sport venues—especially in urban growth corridors and regional areas—without major capital expenditure by government.

Recommendation: Establish a National Community Sport Infrastructure Access Partnership between Clubs Australia and the Australian Sports Commission, aimed at unlocking under-utilised licensed club facilities for broader community and grassroots sport use.

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT AND SOCIAL CONNECTION

In 2023, licensed clubs staged over 10,000 free entertainment events annually, generating approximately \$167 million in economic value across NSW alone.

Clubs are leading venues for live entertainment across Australia. Each year, they host thousands of performances by musicians, comedians, cultural groups, and community theatre companies.

In regional communities, clubs like C.ex Coffs in Coffs Harbour are often the only places offering live entertainment on a regular basis.

These events create more than cultural value – they help combat social isolation, support mental wellbeing, and offer safe, inclusive spaces for people to come together. Whether it is a band on a Friday night, a multicultural celebration, or a fundraiser, clubs bring people together and strengthen the social fabric of our communities.

At a time when social connection is more important than ever, clubs continue to be trusted spaces for belonging, celebration, and cultural vibrancy.

Clubs Australia recommends establishing a standing advisory group within the Office for the Arts to represent the interests of licensed clubs as live entertainment providers. The purpose of the advisory group would be to provide input on regulatory changes (copyright, tax insurance), digital innovations and access to funding to boost live entertainment in clubs.

Establishing this advisory group would give clubs a voice in shaping Commonwealth entertainment and cultural policy.

Recommendation: Create a standing advisory group within the Office for the Arts to represent the interests of licensed clubs as live entertainment providers, recognising their role in fostering inclusion, mental wellbeing, and cultural vibrancy in communities across Australia.

CONCLUSION

Clubs Australia welcomes continued dialogue with government on how best to leverage the capacity of clubs to support Australia's economic future. With the right policy settings and support, clubs can continue to play a central role in delivering the productivity, participation, and community outcomes that underpin long-term national growth.

Should you wish to discuss this submission further, please contact Simon Sawday, Director of Government Affairs, [REDACTED]