

# Live Music and Entertainment Noise

Planning Practice Note | 81

SEPTEMBER 2015

This practice note gives guidance about the operation of Clause 52.43 – Live Music and Entertainment Noise

Live music is an important part of the state's rich culture. Melbourne has a long established and highly regarded live music scene, making it the leading music city in Australia. Live music makes a significant contribution to the state's economy, drawing visitors from near and far and provides vital opportunities for emerging and established local musicians.

Settlement trends, particularly in inner urban areas, are increasing the level of residential development in mixed use environments. While this creates more efficient and vibrant communities, close proximity between residential and entertainment uses can sometimes cause conflict about noise emissions.

A balanced approach is essential to support the viability of our valued live music entertainment scene and to ensure *live music entertainment venues* co-exist amicably with their residential neighbours. Planning seeks to achieve a balance between supporting live music and protecting residents from unreasonable noise disturbance.

## Managing noise in the planning system

Clause 13.04-1 of the State Planning Policy Framework in the *Victoria Planning Provisions* sets out the overarching policy basis for planning decisions about noise:

### ***Objective***

*To assist the control of noise effects on sensitive land uses.*

### ***Strategy***

*Ensure that development is not prejudiced and community amenity is not reduced by noise emissions, using a range of building design, urban design and land use separation techniques as appropriate to the land use functions and character of the area.*

Everybody living and working in an area has a role in maintaining a healthy level of noise amenity for that area, including taking responsibility for their own noise outputs or sensitivities. While a new use or development should include design measures to minimise noise impacts, existing residents and venues should also take action to prevent noise conflict.

This can mean ongoing compliance with noise-related planning permit conditions or it can mean simple measures such as cooperation between neighbours to manage noise attenuation with practical responses like residents or venues closing windows or doors at noisy or late times. However, noise management is not always straightforward.

## Clause 52.43 – Live Music and Entertainment Noise

Clause 52.43 applies to a planning permit application for a *live music entertainment venue* or a *noise sensitive residential use* within 50 metres of a live music entertainment venue.

In this clause, live music entertainment venue means:

- a food and drink premises, nightclub, function centre or residential hotel that includes live music entertainment
- a rehearsal studio
- any other venue used for the performance of music and specified in clause 2.0 of the schedule to this clause, subject to any specified condition or limitation

noise sensitive residential use means:

- a boarding house, dependent person's unit, dwelling, nursing home, residential aged care facility, residential village or retirement village.

This clause does not apply to:

- the extension of an existing dwelling
- a *noise sensitive residential use* that is in an area specified in clause 1.0 of the schedule to this clause.

The schedule to Clause 52.43 can be used to specify:

- areas to which Clause 52.43 does not apply: this may be necessary where alternative noise control requirements are already in place for a *noise sensitive residential use* through the planning scheme or SEPP N-2
- other venues to which Clause 52.43 applies.

Where a different venue may warrant the same protection as the defined venues, clause 2.0 of the schedule can include the venue. For example, a public hall or similar venue that is regularly used for the performance of live music.

## The agent of change principle

The agent of change principle has been introduced into Clause 52.43 to manage the relationship between live music venues and residential uses.

By introducing the agent of change principle responsibility for noise attenuation measures required in order to obtain planning approval now rest with the 'agent of change'.

In practical terms this means that if a new or an existing live music venue seeks to establish or expand, they will be responsible for attenuating any noise effects that are caused by that change on nearby residential properties.

Similarly, a new residential development close to an existing live music venue will be responsible for noise attenuation of its building to protect future residents from the live music venue.

This does not mean however that any other person living or working in an area is free of any responsibility for noise management.

Everyone has a role in noise management, including existing permit holders and live music entertainment venues who must ensure they comply with *State Environment Protection Policy (Control of Music Noise from Public Premises) No. N-2* (SEPP N-2) and any relevant permits or other obligations.

## Information to be submitted with an application

Clause 52.43-3 sets out what information needs to be submitted with an application and the requirements for noise attenuation:

- A permit application for a *live music entertainment venue* must be designed, constructed and managed to minimise noise emissions from the premises and provide noise control measures that will protect a *noise sensitive residential use* within 50 metres of the venue.
- A permit application for a *noise sensitive residential use* must be designed and constructed to include noise control measures that will reduce noise levels from any:
  - indoor *live music entertainment venue* (including an outdoor space of a substantially indoor venue) to below the noise limits specified in SEPP N-2

- outdoor *live music entertainment venue* (a public premises where music is played in the open air, such as a major sports and recreation facility) to below 45 dB(A), assessed as an Leq over 15 minutes.

An applicant must ensure the application is accompanied by the information required in Clause 52.43-4 or any alternative requirements of the council.

## Meeting the requirements

Normally, the requirements of Clause 52.43-3 must be met. However, a council may reduce or waive these requirements if it is satisfied that an alternative measure meets the purpose of the clause.

In some instances, the most practical and effective outcome will involve treatment to both the noise making and noise receiving premises.

This allows for alternative approaches such as a residential developer improving the noise attenuation in the venue as an alternative to, or in combination with, attenuation measures in the proposed residential development. In some situations, this may be more cost effective than undertaking noise attenuation of multiple new dwellings.

It also provides for a residential or venue developer to implement established building and urban design techniques for noise attenuation without commissioning a detailed acoustic assessment, where the council considers this approach is warranted.

Some techniques used to address music noise can be easy to achieve and be low-cost. These measures can also result in other benefits. For example installing insulation, sealing draughts and effective window coverings will not only help address noise, but will also reduce the need for supplementary cooling or heating and will provide passive energy gains. Attenuating against music noise will also help address other noise nuisances such as waste collection and traffic noise.

While SEPP N-2 does not prescribe noise limits for noise associated with the arrival and departure of people attending the premises, an applicant should still identify how they propose to manage the behaviour of patrons coming and going from the venue so that nuisance impacts on neighbours are minimised. This information can be explained in a venue management plan.

### ATTENUATING A LIVE MUSIC VENUE

One or more of the following measures may be considered to help achieve the requirements of Clause 52.43, as appropriate:

- implementing a venue management plan focussed on minimising noise
- positioning entertainment rooms, the stage and loudspeakers to increase the distance between the noise source and any *noise sensitive residential use*
- orienting the stage or loudspeakers of external entertainment spaces to direct noise away from any *noise sensitive residential use*
- incorporating measures such as acoustic glazing, wall, ceiling and roof construction
- sealing gaps, joints and service penetrations and using acoustic insulation
- using setbacks and acoustic fencing
- limiting noise leakage through the use of vestibule / sound-lock entry arrangements
- installing a sound limiter to cap the volume of any amplified sound to an appropriate level.

While all of the above measures will be helpful, some may have a limited overall effect on noise emissions in different circumstances. An acoustic engineer can advise on measures that are capable of achieving the requirements of Clause 52.43.

## ATTENUATING A NOISE SENSITIVE RESIDENTIAL USE

Measures that may help meet the requirements of Clause 52.43 include:

- locating noise-sensitive rooms (particularly bedrooms) away from significant noise exposure by using spaces like walkways, laundries and storage as a buffer
- using acoustic glazing, wall, ceiling and roof construction
- sealing gaps, joints and service penetrations and using acoustic insulation
- using setbacks and acoustic fencing
- using a noise masking system (by relying on heating, ventilation or air-conditioning noise (HVAC) or by installing an electronic noise masking system. The noise levels provided by the masking system should be appropriate for the relevant space, based on AS2107 recommended internal sound level).

## Understanding the noise limits specified in Clause 52.43-3

The Australian Standard for Acoustics – Recommended Design Sound Levels and Reverberation Times for Building Interiors – AS 2107:2000 (AS2107) recommends noise limits such as 40dB(A)Leq for bedrooms in dwellings near major roads. Noise limits typically ranging from 35dB(A)Leq to 45dB(A)Leq are often specified in local planning scheme provisions and permit conditions for new dwellings in locations with a high level of external noise. While these measures may be suitable in some environments, they do not properly address music noise.

The AS2107 Standard is primarily intended to be applied to steady noise sources, such as road traffic and mechanical plant noise. This standardised measure does not acknowledge that music noise presents variable noise characteristics – specifically low frequency and rhythmic qualities that can interrupt sleep.

The SEPP N-2 noise standards were developed specifically to protect residents from potential music noise impacts. The policy recognised that music noise can have a more significant effect on residents than other urban noises.

It prescribes separate noise limits for the late evening period and for the night period for an indoor venue, taking into consideration the particular characteristics of music noise which need to be assessed differently to more broadband noise sources. The standards in Clause 52.43-3 for a *noise sensitive residential use* are based on the SEPP N-2 model, but with an adjusted measurement point.

The normal SEPP N-2 standards are applied to a new or modified *live music entertainment venue* to help achieve the Clause 52.43 requirement.

The 45dB(A)Leq specified for outdoor venues in Clause 52.43-3 is equivalent to the standard in place for the Docklands Scheduled Area in SEPP N-2.

SEPP N-2 – Schedule B1, which generally specifies an outdoor measurement point, does not apply in Clause 52.43. The measurement point is modified in Clause 52.43 to allow noise to be measured inside a habitable room of a *noise sensitive residential use*, with the windows and doors closed.

This approach protects the amenity of residents inside, when windows and external doors are closed.

## Is a professional acoustic assessment always required?

A report from a suitably qualified acoustic engineer will normally also be required with an application. The report should detail recommended mechanisms to mitigate noise impacts and should verify that the proposed mitigation measures will be satisfactory to meet Clause 52.43-3.

To avoid imposing the cost burden of a professional acoustic assessment (to demonstrate compliance with Clause 52.43-3) on small residential developments or for minor changes to an existing live music venue, a council could also consider requiring established design measures for acoustic attenuation, such as locating bedrooms of a new dwelling away from a low-impact venue.

An acoustic report should not be necessary if the context of the site, surrounds and proposal present clear options for straightforward remedies and a professional assessment and report is unlikely to improve outcomes.

## What if an existing venue does not comply with SEPP N-2?

Responsibility for noise attenuation of a new *noise sensitive residential use* is based on a venue meeting SEPP N-2 noise limits. A new residential developer is not expected to remediate noise levels of an existing venue that does not comply with SEPP N-2.

Where a venue is non-compliant with SEPP N-2 in an existing *noise sensitive area* (as defined in SEPP N-2) the design of the new *noise sensitive residential use* need only attenuate noise levels by an amount equal to the additional noise obligation that the new residential development imposes. This recognises that it is the responsibility of venues to meet their existing noise obligations under SEPP N-2.

## Enforcement of noise complaints

Neighbours and *live music entertainment venues* should be encouraged to cooperatively solve noise issues by communicating directly to achieve a balanced solution. A collaborative approach is often the most effective and quickest means of solving noise conflict.

Where SEPP N-2 or relevant planning permit conditions are breached and a workable solution is not established between parties, a council may take formal enforcement action to achieve compliance.

A decision under Clause 52.43 of the planning scheme is based on the requirements set out in Clause 52.43-3. Enforcement will therefore generally be to ensure compliance with conditions specified in the planning permit.

Despite Clause 52.43, venues continue to be obligated to meet specified noise limits in SEPP N-2. Regardless of the establishment of a new *noise sensitive residential development*, a venue that is in breach of SEPP N-2 is still capable of being separately enforced under the policy.

Enforcement action against noise complaints can be taken by:

- Local government planning enforcement officers, who can enforce against planning permit conditions pursuant to the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.
- EPA officers, who can issue a remedial notice under section 31A of the *Environment Protection Act 1970* for breach of SEPP N-2.

- Liquor licence compliance inspectors, who can enforce liquor licence conditions under the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*.
- Police officers, who can enforce liquor licence conditions, as well as direct a venue to take action to abate noise under section 48AB of the *Environment Protection Act 1970*.
- Local government environmental health officers, who can take action under the nuisance provisions of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.

## Some useful contacts

### Local Government

Find contact details for all Victorian councils at:

[www.delwp.vic.gov.au/localgovernment](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/localgovernment)

### Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria

[www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au)

### Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)

[www.delwp.vic.gov.au/planning](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/planning)

### Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation (VCGLR)

[www.vcglr.vic.gov.au](http://www.vcglr.vic.gov.au)

### Music Victoria

[www.musicvictoria.com.au](http://www.musicvictoria.com.au)

# Appendix 1

## Writing permit conditions

Conditions to attenuate noise in buildings are best established on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the site context and surrounding land uses. A suitably qualified acoustic engineer can provide advice to inform the drafting of effective noise attenuation conditions. In some instances, local circumstances may warrant conditions requiring verification testing by a suitably qualified acoustic engineer at a specified stage.

However, the following model conditions are useful in addressing noise issues that are typically generated from a *live music entertainment venue* or for a *noise sensitive residential use* near a *live music entertainment venue*.

## Permit conditions for a live music entertainment venue

### SEPP N-2 compliance

Noise levels emanating from the premises must not exceed those required to be met under *State Environment Protection Policy (Control of Music Noise from Public Premises) No. N-2*.

A report from a suitably qualified acoustic engineer should set out appropriate noise mitigation measures that are relevant to the subject site and its surrounds. These may include requirements for airlock entrances, sound limiters and other building design measures that can be translated as planning permit conditions. Further examples of permit conditions include:

### Acoustic report

The use must not detrimentally affect the amenity of the area or the amenity of persons living in proximity to the site by reason of the emission of noise. The responsible authority may at any time require an acoustic report, prepared by a suitably qualified acoustic engineer. The report must be to the satisfaction of the responsible authority and identify all potential noise sources and noise attenuation work required to address any noise issues to comply with *State Environment Protection Policy (Control of Music Noise from Public Premises) No. N-2*. The recommendations of the report must be implemented and complied with to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

The above condition can be used if an acoustic report is not considered essential for the initial assessment.

### Acoustic report – required before use or development commences

Before the use and/or development commences, an acoustic report must be prepared by a suitably qualified acoustic engineer and must be submitted to and approved by the responsible authority. When approved, the acoustic report will be endorsed and will form part of this permit. The acoustic report must assess the noise impact resulting from the proposed use and/or development and must make recommendations to limit the noise impacts in accordance with *State Environment Protection Policy (Control of Music Noise from Public Premises) No. N-2* or any other requirement to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

The provisions, recommendations and requirements of the endorsed acoustic report must be implemented and complied with to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

The above condition can be used to demonstrate that the constructed development meets the approval requirement.

### Management details sign

Prior to the commencement of the use, a clearly legible sign must be placed directly outside the entrance to the premises, providing a telephone number for contacting the designated manager at all hours during which the premises is operating. The design, lighting and maintenance of the sign must be to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

### Window and door closure

Any external openable walls, windows, glazing systems or doors shown on the endorsed plans must be closed at [insert time] except for access and egress to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

## Timeframe for music / entertainment

Amplified music or entertainment (other than background music or entertainment played at background music levels) must cease by [insert time] to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

## Background music

Except with the prior written consent of the responsible authority, the provision of music and entertainment on the land must be at a background noise level.

Background music only is permitted in the [insert room name] to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

A condition specifying background music levels would typically be used in situations where music would be ancillary to the main use. It can also be used for a room in a venue that is in close proximity to a *noise sensitive residential use*, to help buffer impacts from a main performance room of a *live music entertainment venue*.

An accepted measure of what constitutes ‘background music’ is that the music is played at a level that enables patrons to conduct a conversation at a distance of 600mm without having to raise their voice to a substantial degree. The meaning of background music is discussed in detail in the VCAT decision *Whiting v Hosier Bar Pty Ltd (Occupational and Business)* [2005] VCAT 814.

## Noise limiter

Prior to commencement of the use, a noise limiter must be installed on the land. The noise limiter must:

- be set at a level specified by a qualified acoustic engineer,
- ensure the emission of noise from amplified music does not exceed the levels specified in the *State Environment Protection Policy (Control of Music Noise from Public Premises) No. N-2*, and
- be maintained and operated at all times music is played
- be to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

## No sound amplification

No external sound amplification equipment or loud speakers may be used for the purpose of announcement, broadcast, playing of music or similar purpose, to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

## No external speakers

Speakers external to the building must not be erected or used without the prior written consent of the responsible authority.

Other conditions that may be useful in the context of a *live music entertainment venue* include conditions seeking to address patron behaviour outside a premises and potential noise caused by those patrons arriving and leaving the venue. This could be set out in a venue management plan. Separately, a liquor licence will address matters of community safety, setting out obligations such as trading hours, responsible serving of alcohol and crowd control.

## Permit conditions for a noise sensitive residential use

When drafting permit conditions for a *noise sensitive residential use* near a *live music entertainment venue*, it is important to note that:

- Specifying SEPP N-2 noise limits in a permit for a *noise sensitive residential use* does not preclude a venue from having to comply with SEPP N-2. Compliance with SEPP N-2 remains mandatory for all public premises emitting music noise.
- While a *noise sensitive residential use* may be built with a suitable level of noise protection, openable windows may still render a nearby previously compliant venue as non-compliant with SEPP N-2. A balance needs to be struck between attenuating noise and ventilating a habitable room. Living near a *live music entertainment venue* means that both ventilation and noise attenuation at optimal levels may not be capable of being achieved at all times. A SEPP N-2 compliant venue will provide a reasonable balance between the requirements of the noise maker and the nearby *noise sensitive residential use*.
- Addressing low frequency noise can be challenging, as individual contexts will present different noise resonance conditions. The advice of an acoustic engineer will usually be needed to establish the most appropriate requirements for a development proposal.

In keeping with Clause 52.43, council may specify a standard noise limit for a *noise sensitive residential use* near a *live music entertainment venue*. The limit can focus on habitable rooms, allowing non-habitable rooms such as walkways and laundries to be less attenuated. An example permit condition could read:

### Noise attenuation of habitable rooms

Habitable rooms must be designed and constructed to include acoustic attenuation measures that will reduce noise levels from any indoor live music entertainment venue to below the noise limits specified in *State Environment Protection Policy (Control of Music Noise from Public Premises) No. N-2* to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

For the purpose of assessing whether the above noise standard is met, the noise measurement point may be located inside a habitable room with windows and doors closed (Schedule B1 of SEPP N-2 does not apply).

Where a less stringent approach is being used for a *noise sensitive residential use* near a low-impact *live music entertainment venue* (such as a venue with daytime performances, background music only, performances of non-amplified music only or a modern, highly attenuated venue) the following permit condition may be sufficient:

### Noise attenuation to protect sleep

The development must be designed and constructed to include noise attenuation measures capable of protecting occupants from levels of music noise that may affect sleep in the night period in habitable rooms with windows and external doors closed, to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

To supplement the above condition, the council may consider including a permit condition that provides for a later requirement for an acoustic report and remedial action, if needed. This would help address any situation where an occupant complains about music noise from an unchanged, pre-existing *live music entertainment venue*, recognising that the new *noise sensitive residential use* is the agent of change and is therefore responsible for addressing the noise issue.

### Request for acoustic report

The responsible authority may at any time require an acoustic report, prepared by a suitably qualified acoustic engineer. The report must be to the satisfaction of the responsible authority and identify all potential noise sources and noise attenuation work required to address any noise issues to comply with *State Environment Protection Policy (Control of Music Noise from Public Premises) No. N-2*. The recommendations of the report must be implemented and complied with to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

The building and urban design techniques suggested for *noise sensitive residential uses* in this practice note, could also inform the drafting of relevant permit conditions. For example:

### Glazing, doors and ventilation

The development must include external glazing and doors and an air conditioning or ventilation system designed by a suitably qualified acoustic engineer to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

The examples proposed in this practice note are provided as a guide only. Councils may have their own standard permit conditions and an acoustic engineer may suggest further alternatives.

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ISBN 978-1-922250-44-5 (pdf)

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