

vMDO
Presents:

FOR THE RECORD

Part 1: Victoria's Vinyl Renaissance

 AUDIENCE STRATEGIES

Executive Summary

This report examines Victoria's vinyl ecosystem—119 independent stores, pressing plants, distributors, labels, artists, and community infrastructure—providing VMDO with the first comprehensive intelligence for policy support.

Key Findings

Globally exceptional density. Melbourne's 5.9 stores per 100,000 residents exceeds Tokyo (2.3), London (4.9), and Berlin (2.9). Geographic concentration—19 stores within 2.5 square kilometres alongside pressing plants and distributors—enables artists to press locally and distribute efficiently, making 300-unit pressings viable where dispersed markets cannot.

Growth paradox with local economic impact. Victoria's store count grew 18% since 2023, whilst national vinyl sales increased 5.6% to \$44.5 million. Yet no surveyed store describes itself as financially strong—growth masks individual fragility. Physical sales create multiplier effects: transactions employ workers across manufacturing, distribution, labels, and retail whilst circulating money in the local music economy.

Australian music championing. Victorian stores stock Australian music at 25–50% of their inventory, substantially exceeding streaming consumption where Australian artists account for only 8.4% of top tracks. Record stores address this through active curation, dedicated sections, and in-store events.

Systemic barriers constrain equitable participation. Regional VIC faces access disadvantage (one store per 150,000–200,000 residents versus one per 62,000 in Melbourne), ownership homogeneity reflects capital requirements (\$50,000–\$75,000) and vinyl pricing threatens youth access.

What this means:

Victoria's concentration creates unique policy opportunities. Artist grants activate entire value chains, positioning intervention for outsized impact. Well-targeted support could build sustainability whilst addressing regional inequity, ownership barriers, and price premiumisation.

Recommendations

Direct Support: Advocate for expanded manufacturing grants; fund youth all-ages programming; support ownership diversity; strengthen regional infrastructure; develop promotion tools.

Information Infrastructure: Facilitate data partnerships with ARIA, AIR, Bandcamp, and Discogs; commission operational guides; build business capability partnerships.

Research and Innovation: Conduct annual ecosystem updates and expand nationally including direct sales channels; explore resale royalty scheme feasibility.

Victoria's Vinyl Ecosystem in Numbers

Data presented derives from multiple sources: industry reports, published media, and original research conducted for this study. Where exact figures are unavailable, conservative estimates informed by survey data and stakeholder interviews are provided. See Appendix C for expanded data and complete source citations, and Appendix A for full methodology.

Store Infrastructure

- **119 independent stores** (2025) – ~50% of Australia's 239 stores, up 18% since 2023
- **88 metro Melbourne, 31 regional Victoria**
- **43 JB Hi-Fi, 3 Readings, 19 QBD Books** also stock vinyl
- **Two pressing plants** (Zenith, Program Records)
- **5.9 stores per 100,000 residents** in Melbourne – exceeding London (4.9), Berlin (2.9), Paris (4.7), more than double Tokyo (2.3)

Market Scale

- **\$44.5M** national wholesale vinyl sales (2024, +5.6%)
- **\$75–90M** estimated national retail
- **\$25–32M** Victorian retail (33–36% of national market, 26% of population)
- **72.8%** of physical music revenue is vinyl

Store Characteristics

- **Revenue:** One-third under \$75K; one-third \$75K–\$300K; one-third \$300K–\$500K
- **Employment:** Most operate with 2–5 people; 8 solo, 4 with 5+ with over 500 people employed
- **Business models:** Half combine vinyl with cafés, bars, or labels
- **Longevity:** 15 trading 10+ years; 15 opened since 2020

Cultural Infrastructure

- **14,000 Victorian artists** actively releasing, selling, or receiving airplay
- **93+ record labels** in Victoria (likely significantly more)
- **17 of 39 stores** host monthly events
- **25–50% Australian content** stocked vs 8.4% of top streaming tracks

Economic Realities

- **Zero stores** financially strong; two-thirds "doing OK"
- **25 of 39 stores** optimistic about next 2–3 years despite challenges

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Foreword

Kirsty Rivers, General Manager at Victorian Music Development Office

Vinyl has re-emerged as one of the most dynamic segments of the Victorian music ecosystem, blending nostalgia, craft, and contemporary cultural relevance. Far from being a niche revival, the format has become a thriving cornerstone of music discovery, delivering local culture and creative expression. Across the state, independent record stores, pressing facilities, artists, and collectors are contributing to an interconnected community that is both culturally significant and economically valuable.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of Victoria's vinyl landscape in 2025, examining the forces driving its growth and the opportunities it presents for industry development. It highlights the resilience and innovation of retailers and creators, who continue to adapt to shifting consumer behaviours whilst preserving the distinctive physical and social experiences that define vinyl culture. From boutique regional outlets serving as community hubs to Melbourne's renowned Smith Street corridor, the sector demonstrates strong potential to support local talent, strengthen cultural tourism, and deepen audience engagement.

The VMDO is proud to shine a light on this ecosystem and the fascinating data it reveals. Not only can Victoria boast one of the best record stores in the world (Greville Records), but we can also claim the world's highest per capita concentration of stores and better understand the vital place that the vinyl ecosystem plays in our local culture. Stores operate as cultural hubs and vital spaces for young people and music lovers to discover music. Not all is rosy; there is much work to be done to build equitable participation and to ensure stores remain viable and accessible.

As global interest in physical music formats continues to rise, understanding Victoria's position in this evolving market is essential. *For the Record: Victoria's Vinyl Renaissance* aims to inform policy, support investment, and highlight the unique value of vinyl within the state's broader music industry.

I encourage you all to explore your local stores and experience a very special part of Victorian music culture.

Kirsty Rivers, General Manager of Victoria Music Development Office – December 2025

Introduction: Why Vinyl Matters

There are around 119 independent record stores alongside two pressing plants, countless labels, and multiple distributors in Victoria—representing approximately 50% of Australia's independent retail infrastructure in 26% of the national population. The sector has experienced substantial recent expansion, yet comprehensive intelligence on how this ecosystem functions, who participates, what barriers constrain equitable growth, and what role it plays in supporting local music culture has remained unavailable.

The Victorian Music Development Office commissioned this research to provide evidence-based understanding for Victorian policy and strategic support, with insights applicable to music infrastructure development nationally. The study examines what infrastructure exists, how economics shape viability, what cultural functions vinyl provides beyond commerce, and what barriers prevent broader participation. This research covers infrastructure across Victoria from July–October 2025, examining metropolitan Melbourne and regional operations.

This research employed a comprehensive methodology: complete census of 119 stores, survey of 39 retailers, interviews with 29 participants across retailers, labels, distributors, pressing plants, artists, and customers, plus desk research positioning findings within national and international context. This represents the first comprehensive mapping of Victoria's vinyl ecosystem, revealing both current dynamics and opportunities for deeper investigation particularly into direct to customer sales.

Victoria's vinyl ecosystem matters because it provides cultural infrastructure beyond transactions. Stores function as community spaces, discovery pathways where Australian artists receive substantially higher visibility than in streaming consumption,¹ youth access points that licensed venues cannot offer, and development infrastructure distributing revenue locally whilst building artist careers. For artists pressing 300 units, local manufacturing and retail concentration enables viable pathways—reducing logistics barriers whilst coordinating launches that build community and generate income.

Yet this infrastructure operates with economic fragility despite format growth. The research documents tensions between industry expansion and participant precarity,² geographic inequity, ownership barriers, and price premiumisation—dynamics requiring strategic intervention.

This report proceeds through five parts: mapping the ecosystem (Part One), economic realities (Part Two), cultural infrastructure (Part Three), challenges and barriers (Part Four), and recommendations (Part Five).

Ethan Holben, Music Researcher at Audience Strategies – December 2025

¹ Victorian stores stock Australian music at 25–50% of inventory (survey data, this study) versus streaming where Australian artists account for 8.4% of top 10,000 tracks. The Push, *Young Australian Music Audiences Research Report 2025*, The Push, Melbourne, 2025.

² Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA), *2024 Wholesale Music Report*, ARIA, Sydney, 2024. National vinyl sales grew 5.6% to \$44.5 million wholesale in 2024.

Part One: Mapping the Ecosystem

The Retail Landscape

Victoria has 119 active independent record stores representing approximately 50% of Australia's 239 independent stores.³ The ecosystem also includes a substantial chain retail presence: 43 JB Hi-Fi stores, three Readings locations, and 14 QBD Books stores stocking vinyl.⁴

The census represents the most comprehensive accounting of the state's physical music retail infrastructure undertaken to date. The numbers tell a story of concentrated recent growth: at least 30 Victorian stores opened since 2020, including Blacksound (2024), Urban World Australia (2024), Bar Open's vinyl retail addition (2024), Old Plates (2023), and Daylesford Records (2023). Foundation operations like Greville Records (1978), Dixon's Recycled (1976), and Heartland Records (1992) anchor the ecosystem, yet the post-2020 growth cohort now rivals the foundation cohort in scale—a profound shift from the 2000–2014 period when few stores opened and fewer persisted.

Victoria's dominance reflects Melbourne's exceptional density and cultural infrastructure. Geographic distribution within the state proves striking: 88 independently owned stores cluster in metropolitan Melbourne, whilst 31 serve regional Victoria—a 74/26 split shaping access patterns profoundly.

The Geography of Vinyl

Melbourne's inner core concentrates record store activity at a scale unmatched globally. The city supports 5.9 record stores per 100,000 residents—more than double Tokyo (2.3), exceeding London (4.9), Berlin (2.9), and Paris (4.7), and more than triple Toronto (1.8).⁵

³ National independent store estimate from industry consultation and previous research. See Appendix A for methodology.

⁴ Chain store counts from company consultation and physical verification, October 2025.

⁵ Store density calculations based on Victorian store census (Audience Strategies, 2025) and international comparisons. Population figures: ABS (Melbourne), ONS (London), Statistics Bureau of Japan (Tokyo), respective city statistical offices. See Table 1 for detailed methodology.

Table 1: Record Store Density: Melbourne vs Global Cities

Record Store Density: Melbourne vs Global Cities Independent stores per 100,000 residents in comparable urban cores

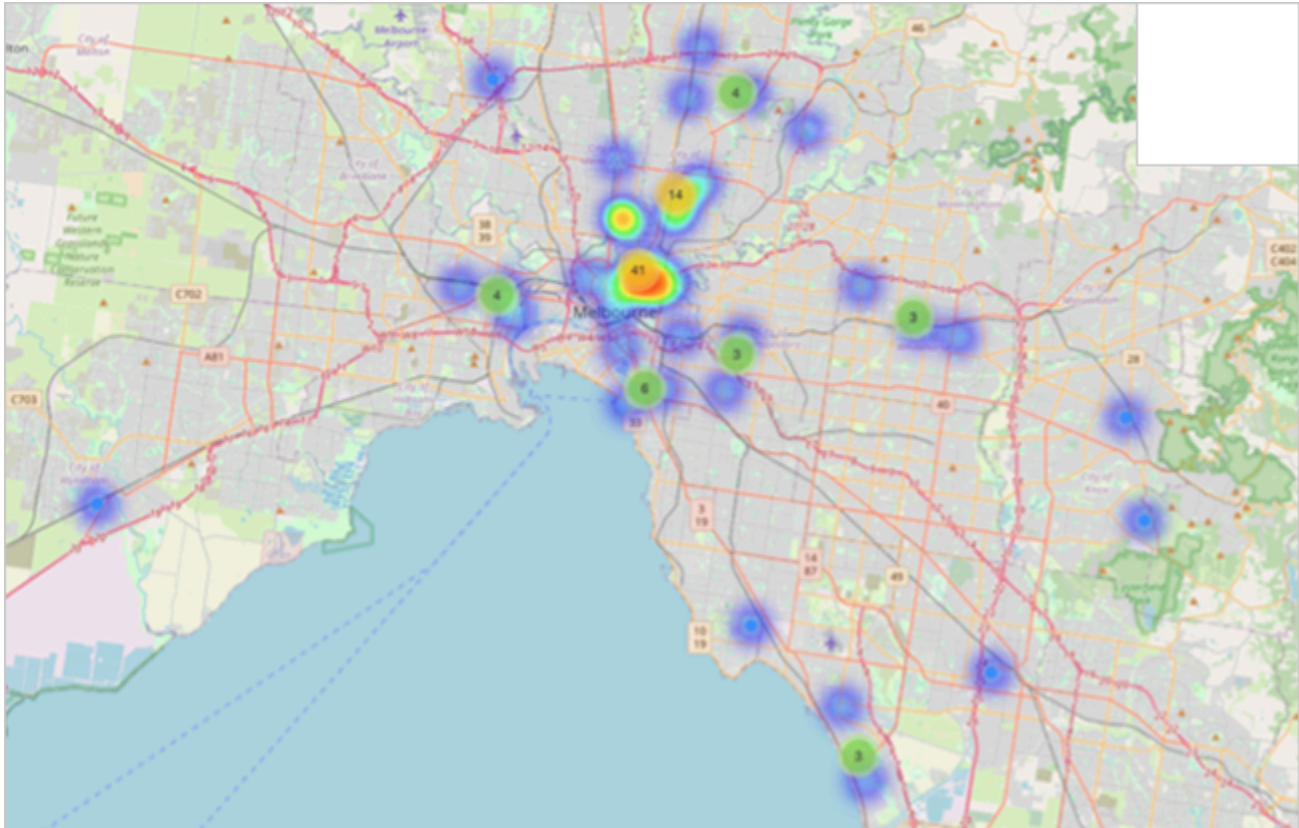
City	Total Stores	Population (Urban Core)	Stores per 100,000
Melbourne	88	1,504,605	5.9
London	170	3,478,000	4.9
Paris	99	2,102,650*	4.7
Berlin	107	3,677,472*	2.9
Tokyo	232	10,118,119	2.3
Toronto	58	3,025,647*	1.8

Note: Comparison uses comparable inner urban cores rather than arbitrary metropolitan boundaries to ensure fair analysis across vastly different city structures. Melbourne: 11 inner and middle-ring Local Government Areas (ABS 2023–24); London: Inner London (ONS 2024); Tokyo: 23 Special Wards (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2020/2024); Paris: City of Paris; Berlin: City of Berlin; Toronto: City of Toronto core.

Source: Audience Strategies store census and international comparison (2025). Population figures from ABS (2023–24), ONS (2024), Statistics Bureau of Japan (2020/2024), and respective city statistical offices.

The Collingwood–Fitzroy corridor represents what may be the world's densest record store cluster—19 operations compressed into 2.5 square kilometres, averaging one store every 350 metres. Smith Street hosts The Searchers, Happy Valley, and Wah Wah; Johnston Street adds Vinyl Space, Licorice Pie, and Dutch Vinyl; whilst Gertrude Street is anchored by Northside. Each carves specialised niches that complement rather than compete—Northside's funk and soul versus Licorice Pie's secondhand depth, Wah Wah's new releases versus The Searchers' collector focus. Customers "do the rounds," visiting multiple stores sequentially for different discovery experiences.

Figure 1: Metropolitan Melbourne Record Store Concentration:
Heat map showing store distribution



Source: Audience Strategies store census and geospatial analysis (2025)

Regional Victoria

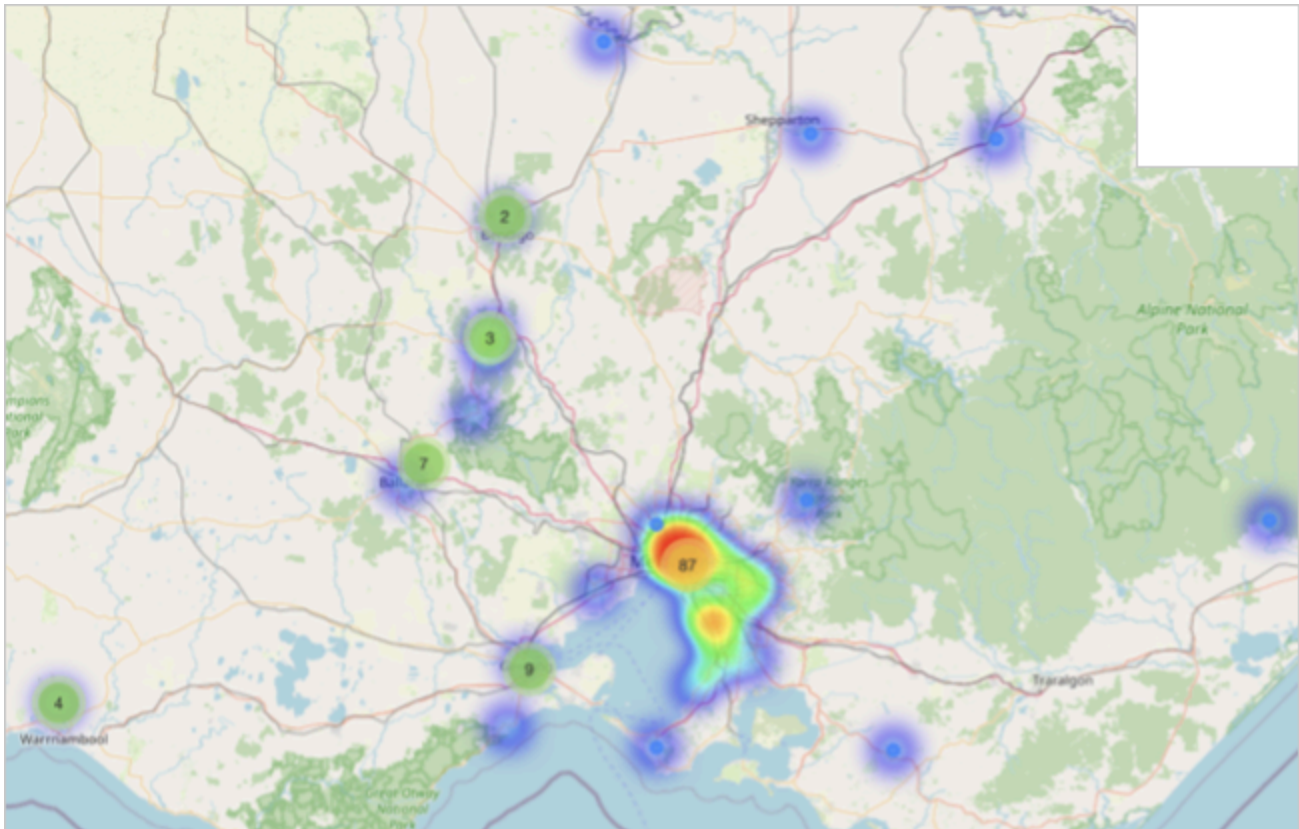
Regional Victoria's 31 independent stores operate under different conditions entirely. Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, and coastal towns support persistent retail operations that are often the sole physical music access points across vast catchment areas. These business models are often hybrid, combining vinyl with cafés, bookshops, or community spaces. Approximately one store serves every 150,000–200,000 non-Melbourne Victorians versus one per 62,000 in metropolitan Melbourne—a threefold physical access disadvantage.⁶

The metro-regional divide results in structural inequities: regional customers face limited genre diversity, reduced inventory depth, and longer travel distances, likely supplemented by online ordering from Melbourne stores or international platforms.

⁶ Calculation based on Victorian store census (31 regional, 88 metropolitan) and population data. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Regional Population, 2023–24*, ABS, Canberra, 2024.

Figure 2: Victorian Record Store Concentration: Heat map showing store distribution

Heat map showing store distribution



Source: Audience Strategies store census and geospatial analysis (2025)

Store Typology

Victoria's retail ecosystem comprises four functional categories, each serving distinct market segments. Many stores span multiple categories such as specialist curation combined with hybrid revenue models.

Independent specialists represent pure music retail—stores operating as standalone businesses focused exclusively on vinyl and related music products. These 19 surveyed operations range from solo ventures like JJ's Vinyl (2017, Chelsea Heights) to larger-format stores like Heartland Records (1992, North Melbourne) employing multiple staff. Genre specialists like Wax Museum (hip-hop) and Northside Records (funk/soul) contrast with broad-catalogue stores like Goldmine Records' two locations.

Chain retailers operate through corporate structures fundamentally different from independent models. JB Hi-Fi's 43 Victorian stores represent a scaled presence serving customers across metropolitan and regional markets through centralised buying. Selected larger stores maintain staff

empowered to request titles for local markets—an old-school model where, as one JB Hi-Fi representative noted, 'there's somebody in the store who knows their customers'—though this practice is 'not as big as it used to be,' suggesting local buyer discretion is gradually diminishing. Readings stocks vinyl at three of its nine Victorian stores; QBD Books at 14 of its 19 Victorian locations—both treating music as category extension within primarily book/gift retail operations.

Hybrid independents combine music retail with complementary businesses to achieve viability where pure vinyl margins prove insufficient. Twenty of 39 surveyed stores maintain additional revenue streams—the majority among respondents. Café-retail combinations prove most common: Alley Tunes (1994) exemplifies Melbourne's enduring café-record store model. Venue-retail operations like Soundmerch integrate retail with distribution and merchandise manufacturing, whilst Bar Open (Fitzroy) recently added record retail (2024) to existing venue operations.

Online-only operations eliminate physical storefront costs whilst maintaining music retail presence. Stores like Grudge Match Records (2022), Ballarat Disco (2010), and Dr Diggins (2019) operate without permanent premises, reducing overhead. Many maintain occasional physical presence through pop-ups at community events, enabling tactile discovery experiences without ongoing rent commitments.

Store Operations

Vinyl retail remains fundamentally a small-business enterprise regardless of longevity or success. This staffing reality shapes operational capacity across inventory management, e-commerce adoption, and event programming. Most stores operate with minimal staff—eight run as solo operations, whilst 27 employ between two and five people. Only four employ more than five people, with three exceeding 10 employees.

Business longevity demonstrates resilience despite economic pressures. Among the 39 stores surveyed, 15 have operated over 10 years, whilst 15 opened within the past five years. The equilibrium between foundation and new formation suggests healthy ecosystem turnover.

Just two surveyed stores sell exclusively new vinyl; 26 either balance new and used equally or emphasise secondhand stock. This used-vinyl dominance reflects higher margins on secondhand sales, growing collector demand for out-of-print titles, and sustainable inventory acquisition through customer trade-ins.

Part Two: Economic Realities

Following the Money

Victoria's store count expanded from 101 (identified in 2023 research) to 119, representing 18% growth.⁷ National vinyl sales grew 5.6% to approximately \$44.5 million in 2024, representing 72.8% of physical music revenue.⁸ Yet despite this growth, not a single surveyed Victorian store describes itself as financially strong. Two-thirds report "doing OK"—covering costs with modest profit—whilst 12 struggle to varying degrees.

This gap between format growth, ecosystem expansion, and retail precarity reveals vinyl's economic complexity: thriving at industry level whilst individual stores, labels, and artists navigate razor-thin margins, inventory risk, and structural cost pressures that growth statistics mask. Cash flow constraints impose constant trade-offs—most stores cannot stock deeply across catalogue, forcing choices about which releases warrant investment. Slow-moving stock ties up capital preventing purchases of proven sellers.

Trish Hayes from Feminista Vinyl articulates this reality: "We can only place new inventory orders after generating sufficient sales revenue, sometimes resulting in six-week to two-month gaps. None of us are super philanthropists with cash behind us.

Despite present precarity, optimism persists. Twenty-five of 39 stores feel at least somewhat optimistic about the next two to three years, 11 remain neutral, and only three lean pessimistic. This confidence despite present precarity suggests owners perceive vinyl's durability as format—belief that cultural resurgence represents sustained shift rather than temporary fashion.

Revenue and Scale

Twenty-nine of 39 surveyed stores disclosed annual revenue distributed across three bands: a third earn below \$75,000 annually, a third between \$75,000 and \$300,000, and a third between \$300,000 and \$500,000. Just two stores exceed \$500,000. Victorian vinyl retail operates predominantly at small-business scale—the vast majority generating revenue comparable to single-person or micro-enterprise operations.

Hybrid revenue models dominate current operations. As noted in Part One, only 19 of 39 stores operate solely as music retailers; 20 maintain additional revenue streams. Among hybrid operators, roughly half derive majority revenue from music, three split evenly, and eight generate more from non-music sources. This diversification pattern indicates vinyl margins alone may not sustain rising rents and

⁷ Benjamin Wiesner, *Investigation into the Victorian Music Industry*, Victorian Music Development Office, Melbourne, 2023.

⁸ Creative Australia, *Listening In: A summary and synthesis of insights on music consumption*, Australian Government, Canberra, 2025, p. 16, citing ARIA data.

operating costs—complementary revenue streams enable physical space monetisation throughout trading hours whilst building cross-customer bases.

Chain retailers substantially alter market dynamics. JB Hi-Fi operates 43 Victorian stores stocking vinyl—far exceeding the independent sector's scale. The company's top-selling titles reflect mainstream commercial focus, contrasting with independents' specialist curation.

Table 2: JB Hi-Fi Top 5 Locations for Vinyl Sales

Victorian stores with highest vinyl revenue

Rank	Location	Postcode
1	Melbourne Central	3000
2	The Glen	3150
3	Chadstone	3148
4	Bourke Street Courtyard	3000
5	Fountain Gate	3805

Source: JB Hi-Fi internal data, October 2025.

JB Hi-Fi's regional presence addresses access gaps where independent retail cannot achieve viability. Mike Glynn, JB Hi-Fi's Music Product Manager, notes the company operates in locations completely lacking independent stores: 'When you go out to far-flung regional locations or outer suburban locations, we are the local music retail.' This positions chain retailers as serving a complementary access function, providing mainstream catalogue and new releases to communities otherwise dependent on online ordering or travel to metropolitan centres. However, regional JB stores typically stock narrower ranges than flagship metropolitan locations and lack the specialist curation, local artist championing, and community embedding that characterise independent operations.

Table 3: Contrasting Chain Customer Preferences: 2024 Bestsellers

Top-selling titles at JB Hi-Fi versus Readings

Rank	JB Hi-Fi	Rank	Readings
1	Taylor Swift - Tortured Poets Anthology	1	Laufey - Bewitched
2	Cold Chisel - 50 Years Best Of	2	Chappell Roan - Midwest Princess
3	Sabrina Carpenter - Short n' Sweet	3	Mort Garson - Plantasia / Air - Moon Safari (Tie)

Source: JB Hi-Fi and Readings sales data, 2024.

Readings stocks vinyl at three of its nine Victorian stores, with customer behaviour aligning more closely to independent stores than chains. Luc Yong, Readings' Vinyl Buyer, actively sources from local artists and labels—through Bandcamp outreach, live show attendance, and relationships with Victoria distributors—dedicating 15–20% of stock to **Australian content**. QBD Books stocks vinyl at 14 of 19 Victorian locations. Both serve niche urban markets where vinyl complements core book retail, unlike JB Hi-Fi's broad regional penetration.

The Value Chain and Multiplier Effect

Physical music sales distribute revenue across multiple ecosystem participants—each transaction employs workers and funds operations at manufacturers, distributors, labels, stores, and artist teams. This **value chain**—the connected series of businesses adding value as products move from creation to consumer—creates **multiplier effects** where a single purchase generates economic activity at multiple points.

Table 2: Vinyl Value Chain Revenue Distribution

How a \$45 retail record distributes revenue across the ecosystem

Party	Receives From Transaction	Margin Captured	At 300 Units
Manufacturer	<--- Artist pays \$15.00	\$15.00 (100%)	\$4,500
Artist/Label	<--- Distributor pays \$22.50	\$7.50 (33%)	\$2,250
Distributor	<--- Store pays \$30.00	\$7.50 (25%)	\$2,250
Retail Store	<--- Customer pays \$45.00	\$15.00 (50%)	\$4,500
TOTAL DISTRIBUTED		\$45.00	\$13,500

Source: Audience Strategies analysis based on survey data, distributor interviews, and industry consultation (2025). Figures represent typical transactions; actual margins vary by format, relationship terms, and market positioning.

Note: Mechanical royalties (composition rights paid to songwriters through APRA AMCOS, calculated as a percentage of wholesale) are excluded. These flow directly from manufacturers to APRA AMCOS rather than through the retail chain. For independent artist-songwriters, this represents additional income.

Revenue from a single transaction flows to four to five entities, employing workers and funding operations at each stage. In Melbourne's concentrated ecosystem, money circulates within the local music economy: pressing plant workers earn wages, store employees get paid, label staff receive income, artists capture returns—physical sales sustain manufacturing, distribution, and retail infrastructure that exists alongside digital music's reach.

Victoria's ecosystem uniquely allows artists to maximise returns through multi-channel distribution strategies. An artist pressing 300 units can simultaneously move inventory at gigs (immediate cash flow), sell via Bandcamp (capturing dedicated fans), place directly with key stores (building relationships), and sell through distributors (broad reach, retail credibility). Each channel serves distinct purposes whilst the margin hierarchy reveals strategic trade-offs:

Table 3: Vinyl Revenue Across Physical Sales Channels

Artist revenue per unit and at scale

Sales Channel	Per Unit	Per 300 Units	% of Retail Price
Direct at Gig	\$45.00	\$13,500	100%
Direct via Bandcamp	\$39.36	\$11,808	87%
Direct to Retail Store	\$30.00	\$9,000	67%
Via Distributor	\$22.50	\$6,750	50%

Source: Audience Strategies analysis (2025). Standard \$45 retail price with typical distribution margins. Artists maximize returns through multi-channel strategy: gigs for immediate cash, Bandcamp for dedicated fans, direct-to-stores for relationships, distributors for broad reach.

In practice, artists diversify across channels. An artist pressing 300 units who sells 75 through each channel—gigs, Bandcamp, direct-to-stores, and distributors—generates approximately \$8,841 gross revenue. For context, equivalent income from streaming would require approximately 2.3 million streams—a threshold only 12% of artists on Spotify ever reach in their entire career.⁹ Physical sales offer distinct local economic benefits: these transactions employ Victorian pressing plant workers, pay Melbourne store staff, sustain local distributors, and fund subsequent pressing runs, creating multiplier effects within the local music economy.

This multiplier effect clarifies the opening paradox: vinyl sales grow nationally whilst individual retailers struggle financially. The format thrives because value distributes across the ecosystem rather than concentrating profitably in single layers. Infrastructure concentration enables what Allysha Joy from the 30/70 Collective describes: 'You can make a record, press it here, and sell most of it here.' This localized model supports artistic practice through modest-scale sales where 100–300 unit pressings can sustain careers without requiring national breakthrough."

The Cost Structure For Artists and Labels

Manufacturing costs establish the foundation. Pressing plants like Zenith Records and Program Records charge artists approximately \$12–15 per unit for runs of 300–500 copies, with a typical 300-unit pressing costing around \$5,000 total. This represents significant commitment—requiring either capital reserves or confidence in selling sufficient copies to recoup investment.

⁹ Streaming payout calculation based on industry-standard \$0.0038 per-stream rate. Artist reach statistics from various industry reports on streaming economics.

Table 4: Typical Short-Run Vinyl Manufacturing Costs Compared

How pressing larger runs reduces costs per unit

Quantity	300 Units	500 Units	1,000 Units
Total Manufacturing Cost	\$4,485	\$5,560	\$8,435
Cost Per Unit	\$14.95	\$11.92	\$8.44

Program Records (2025), pricing checked 3 November 2025

Based on typical configuration of standard weight, black vinyl, test pressing approval, printed center labels, standard printed jacket, plain inner sleeve, no extra inserted materials or stickers, no shrinkwrap

Artists and labels often consider the targeted price on retail store shelves to determine the **Published Price to Dealer (PPD)** and then work backwards to set the unit cost for distributors—typically \$20–\$30 for locally manufactured Australian single LPs, adding margin to cover manufacturing plus design, mastering, artwork, and labour costs.

What artists actually net proves modest despite \$40–60 retail prices. A record with \$20 unit cost for distributors minus \$15 manufacturing cost leaves approximately \$5 per unit before accounting for recording, mastering, design, or promotional costs. However, artists selling directly at gigs or through Bandcamp can capture full retail value, potentially netting \$15–\$30 or more per unit after manufacturing costs—the economic logic behind direct-to-consumer strategies.

Physical format economics create accessible revenue pathways for artists working at modest scale. A single vinyl sale generates artist income equivalent to approximately 2,600–3,900 streams (using industry-standard \$0.0038 per-stream Spotify payout),¹⁰ making physical releases viable for artists still building streaming audiences. For the 81% of artists on Spotify with fewer than 1,000 monthly listeners,¹¹ vinyl provides tangible income from 100–300 unit pressings—a scale that supports artistic practice alongside digital presence.

Local pressing infrastructure provides crucial advantages beyond pure economics. Program Records and Zenith Records' Melbourne locations facilitate easy artist visits to facilities, discuss specifications face-to-face, collect records for launches, and receive guidance from staff who "regularly attend shows by bands whose records they've pressed."

However, vinyl still represents a significant economic barrier for emerging artists. The \$5,000–\$10,000 investment required for 300-unit pressing proves prohibitive for artists lacking capital reserves or established audiences guaranteeing sales.

The Cost Structure For Distribution

Distribution sits between artists/labels and retail, aggregating catalogue from multiple sources for efficient store ordering. Major label vinyl is distributed by **Universal Music Australia, Sony Music**

¹⁰ Streaming payout rates vary by platform and licensing agreements. Per-stream rates for mid-sized independent labels range from US\$0.00028 to US\$0.011. Australian Independent Record Labels Association (AIR), *Independent Music Report 2019*, AIR, Sydney, 2019, p. 19.

¹¹ Tim Ingham, 'Only 19% of artists on Spotify had over 1,000 monthly listeners in 2023', *Music Business Worldwide*, 4 January 2024.

Entertainment Australia, and **Warner Music Australia**, all based in New South Wales. Independent distribution is led by **MGM/Planet Distribution** (the world's largest independent distributor of Australian music, New South Wales), **Inertia Music** (New South Wales; acquired by PIAS in 2017, which Universal acquired in 2024), and **Rocket Distribution** (Victoria). Newer Victorian distributors like **Tweak**, **Magnetic South**, **Poison City**, and **Efficient Space** serve small-run artists that established operations cannot economically accommodate.

Traditional distribution margins capture approximately 30% of the price they pay to labels. However, post-COVID distribution fee structures have complicated this equation substantially. Some major distributors now impose per-unit fees ranging from \$2.50 to \$6.50 per record, ostensibly covering freight costs. Whilst international freight genuinely remains 50-100% more expensive than pre-COVID levels, the opacity can be problematic: artists set PPD without visibility into subsequent fees, discovering only after commitment that distribution charges will inflate pricing beyond intentions. This effectively doubles distributor take on some releases—30% margin plus \$6 fee on a \$20 distribution cost means distributors capture \$12 rather than \$6 per unit, inflating pricing beyond artist intentions.

Alternative distribution models exist specifically to counter this dynamic. Tweak Distribution, operated by Soundmerch, charges only PPD plus GST and actual local freight costs—typically adding \$2-\$3 rather than \$6-\$8 per unit. This transparent pricing serves predominantly Australian artists manufacturing locally, avoiding inflated fees whilst enabling retail access at prices customers can afford.

Micro-distributor emergence specifically addresses small-run artists that established operations cannot economically accommodate. Artists pressing 100-300 units face systematic exclusion from traditional distributors whose operational economics require larger minimum orders. Tweak, Magnetic South, and Efficient Space's distribution arm serve this underserved segment through reduced-margin models and artist-favourable terms. Yet distribution gaps persist: small-run and large-scale operations are served, but mid-tier artists pressing 500-2,000 units remain inadequately supported—barriers emerge at crucial career development stages.

The Cost Structure For Retail

Stores operate at the final margin layer. Records flowing through major distributors reach stores at distribution cost plus 30% plus distribution fees—a \$20 distribution cost becomes \$32-33 PPD for stores. Retail margins traditionally run around 50% markup on wholesale price, varying by format, market positioning, and competitive context. A record reaching stores at \$26 wholesale might retail for \$50-55.

A \$50 retail record generating 50% margin yields \$25 gross profit. After rent (typically \$2,000-\$5,000 monthly for small retail spaces), wages, utilities, insurance, and marketing, moving 200-300 records monthly generates \$5,000-\$7,500 gross profit—viable for solo operators at modest income levels, but too little to employ multi-person teams.

Used vinyl economics operate fundamentally differently, explaining the format's appeal despite acquisition uncertainty. Stores acquiring collections at \$5-\$10 per record can retail desirable titles at \$30-\$50, capturing 300-500% markup whilst still undercutting new release prices. This transforms

capital requirements: \$1,000 spent acquiring 100–200 used records (versus \$2,000–\$3,000 for 100 new records wholesale) whilst potential margins double or triple.

E-Commerce and Event Programming

E-commerce adoption shows widespread but limited penetration. Twenty-seven of 39 surveyed stores operate websites, yet online sales contribute under 50% of revenue for 22 of these—typically much less. The limited online impact reflects practical barriers: eight of 12 stores without websites cite insufficient time to manage online customers and shipping logistics, whilst five cannot afford website development or maintenance costs.

Event programming serves cultural and commercial purposes simultaneously, with 17 of 39 stores hosting events at least monthly. Among 33 stores hosting events, 28 cite building community and fostering customer relationships, 28 mention supporting local artists and the music scene, and 28 point to personal passion for music and culture—consistent responses suggesting programming functions as community infrastructure rather than primarily profit-seeking activity.

The Supply Network

Victorian record stores depend on complex distribution networks connecting international manufacturers, domestic pressing plants, labels, and artists to retail shelves. Major players include MGM and Rocket offering breadth—thousands of titles across genres that let stores to consolidate orders and spread freight costs. Smaller distributors like Tweak, Magnetic South, and Efficient Space focus on specialist releases and direct artist relationships, often handling runs too small (100–300 units) for major distributors to service economically.

Direct-from-label and artist relationships provide alternative pathways, particularly for small-run releases. Eight of 35 stores selling new vinyl source most or all stock directly rather than through distributors, whilst 24 source less than half directly.

International supplier dependencies shape inventory access and pricing substantially. Sixteen of 35 stores selling new vinyl source most or all from international distributors, whilst seven split equally between Australian and international sources. Only 12 source predominantly from Australian distributors. Optimal freight economics require order volumes often exceeding the \$1,000 customs threshold, forcing stores to balance shipping efficiency against import costs—a constraint particularly affecting specialist retailers importing catalogue unavailable domestically. This international skew reflects catalogue realities: much desired inventory originates overseas, requiring import relationships to obtain titles domestic distributors cannot efficiently obtain

Victorian label and distribution landscape comprises dense interconnected infrastructure supporting physical music retail. At least 93 record labels operate in Victoria according to 2023 research,¹² though this likely undercounts reality substantially. ARIA membership includes 17 Victorian labels, whilst AIR (Australian Independent Record Labels Association) counts 34 Victorian independents. PPCA

¹² Benjamin Wiesner, *Investigation into the Victorian Music Industry*, Victorian Music Development Office, Melbourne, 2023.

(Phonographic Performance Company of Australia) lists 1,186 Victorian-based licensors—a combination of labels, artists, and distributors suggesting actual label count exceeds 93 significantly. Bandcamp surface search across just two genres uncovered 54 Victorian labels.

This label concentration reinforces ecosystem advantages. Labels cluster near pressing plants (Zenith Records, Program Records), distributors (Tweak, Rocket, Poison City), and the nation's densest retail network (119 independent stores), building rapid feedback loops and personal relationships that geographic distance prevents. Melbourne's infrastructure density creates pathways where modest sales—moving 100-150 units through local stores and at local shows from a 300-unit pressing—sustain artistic practice through accessible manufacturing, personal delivery to dozens of retailers in a single afternoon, and immediate community response informing subsequent releases.

Existing data collection obscures independent retail's actual economic contribution. ARIA receives chart data from only 12 Victorian music retailers—predominantly chains like JB Hi-Fi—leaving 107 independent stores unreported and representing 90% of Victorian retail infrastructure invisible to official industry statistics.¹³ Combined with unreported direct-to-consumer sales through Discogs and Bandcamp (estimated \$11-17 million annually),¹⁴ official figures likely miss 25-30% of actual consumption—limiting evidence-based policy development.

Australian Content in the Supply Chain

Australian music comprises a minority share of vinyl stock across Victorian stores. Twenty-eight of 39 surveyed stores report **Australian content** representing up to one-quarter of inventory, nine estimate 26-50%, and just two exceed 50%.

For new vinyl sourcing, 24 of 35 stores obtain less than half directly from labels or artists—the majority flowing through distributors. When accessing distributor catalogues, sourcing skews international: 16 of 35 stores source most or all new vinyl from international distributors, seven split equally, and 12 source predominantly from Australian distributors.

¹³ Benjamin Wiesner, *Investigation into the Victorian Music Industry*, Victorian Music Development Office, Melbourne, 2023, p. 22.

¹⁴ National estimate; platforms did not provide data. Higher uncertainty than other figures. See Appendix A.

Part Three: Cultural Infrastructure

Beyond Transactions: The Cultural Role

Victoria's vinyl ecosystem functions as **interconnected cultural infrastructure** where pressing plants, artists, labels, distributors, stores, community radio, and venues reinforce each other's capacity to foster artistic communities. Understanding vinyl's infrastructure role requires examining not just retail transactions but the entire web of relationships, spaces, and practices sustaining musical communities.

The ecosystem prioritizes active scene-building whilst simultaneously maintaining musical heritage. Data shows catalogue music dominates streaming consumption, accounting for over 70% of total listening.¹⁵ **Victorian record stores complement this by actively championing new and local releases through human curation.** Feminista Vinyl championing gender-diverse artists, Blacksound Records curating underground extreme music, Spoilspout Records and Blossom Rot pressing local post-punk and indie, Program Records and Zenith Records offering community-embedded manufacturing, Roolette Records fostering inclusive artist communities—these operations build scenes whilst heritage functions (maintaining classic catalogue, reissuing out-of-print records, archiving historical recordings) occur alongside rather than instead of new artist development.

Many Victorian record stores balance commercial realities of proven catalogue with intentional community-building efforts. Survey data suggests this distribution skews toward active engagement: 28 of 33 stores hosting events cite building community, supporting local artists, and personal passion as motivations. Pressing plants describe prioritising "interesting" local projects alongside commercial work. Labels frame operations as cultural missions rather than purely profit-seeking. This widespread commitment to cultural infrastructure roles—despite economic precarity across sectors—reveals shared values transcending individual business models.

Community Hubs and Third Places

Record stores operate as contemporary **third places**—sociologist Ray Oldenburg's term for spaces beyond home and work where community forms through voluntary gathering.¹⁶ Shared musical passion fosters cross-demographic connection that algorithmically filtered digital platforms struggle to replicate.

The physical, tactile nature of vinyl browsing extends dwell time, transforming quick transactions into social experiences. Conversations emerge organically—customers seeking recommendations,

¹⁵ Luminate, 'A look at trends in Catalog Streaming', *Luminate Data Blog*, August 2023.

¹⁶ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*, Marlowe & Company, New York, 1989.

debating artists, sharing discovery excitement. These casual interactions build social capital and community cohesion that isolated digital consumption rarely creates.

Intergenerational connection points emerge through stores enabling knowledge transfer across age cohorts. BnD Music Factory celebrates this renewal: "Seeing young people come into store—buying vinyl, like I did when I was their age."¹⁷ The Push's 2025 survey data shows 29% of music-engaged young Australians aged 16–25 purchased vinyl in the past 12 months.¹⁸ Older customers share format expertise, historical context, and collecting wisdom; younger customers introduce contemporary releases and digital-native perspectives.

Regional operations particularly fulfil third-place functions where alternatives prove scarce. When licensing complications threatened Trash Cult's closure in Bendigo (2024), local mobilisation and council intervention preserved the venue-retail hybrid¹⁹, revealing how spaces become cultural anchors worth protecting—their third-place function creating value residents recognise despite difficulty quantifying economically.

Scene-Building and Artist Development

Vinyl infrastructure provides developmental support across artist career stages. Local pressing plants lower barriers to physical release whilst requiring artists to reach developmental thresholds before vinyl becomes viable. Program's Steve Lynch frames accessibility gains: artists previously faced "difficulty getting albums pressed in time for release dates" with "considerable wait times at international plants," plus customs duties, international shipping costs, and currency exchange fluctuations adding financial unpredictability to already substantial investment.

However, vinyl still represents significant commitment. Pressing 300 units costs \$5,000–\$10,000, at current rates, requiring either capital reserves or confidence in selling sufficient copies to recoup investment. This threshold means artists typically release digitally, building audiences proving vinyl's viability before committing to format's expense. Sam Lyons from Spoilsport notes format selection depends on 'sales confidence and artist preference'—pragmatic assessment of whether audiences can sustain vinyl economics. Format viability varies by genre and artist audience: electronic music, indie rock, jazz, and punk sustain dedicated vinyl collecting cultures, whilst other genres may find greater commercial viability through digital or alternative physical formats. Vinyl functions as complement to streaming rather than replacement, serving artists whose audiences value tangible formats.

Vinyl's significance extends beyond economics. For artists, pressing vinyl represents touchstone moments—tangible achievement validating creative work in ways that streaming metrics and digital releases do not provide for most artists. Nathalie Pavlovic from Blossom Rot, a label dedicated exclusively to female and non-binary artists, describes artists' consistent prioritisation of vinyl when discussing release goals, with the moment of handing finished records producing visible joy. For

¹⁷ Staff Writer, 'Record Store Profile: BnD Music Factory VIC', *The Music*, 23 June 2025.

¹⁸ The Push, *Young Australian Music Audiences*, 2025.

¹⁹ ABC News, 'Bendigo's Trash Cult saved after licence backflip from city council', *ABC*, 8 February 2025.

many experiencing their first vinyl release, the physical record represents "dream achievement" and "culmination of all their hard work."

Beyond personal validation, physical releases function as industry credibility signals. Whilst festival bookers, media, touring infrastructure increasingly rely on streaming metrics and social media engagement for decision-making, vinyl specifically signals commitment and investment. The \$5,000–\$10,000 manufacturing cost distinguishes serious artists from casual digital uploads, positioning physical releases as legitimacy markers that complement digital metrics rather than replacing them. This dual signalling of algorithmic visibility plus tangible investment strengthens artist appeal for media coverage, festival bookings, and touring opportunities that digital presence alone may not secure.

Label operations integrate throughout the ecosystem rather than existing separately. Blossom Rot, Efficient Space, Northside, and Poison City combine label functions with various retail, distribution, or event activities—positioning labels as community participants rather than distant gatekeepers. Carsten Bruhn from Roolette emphasises Melbourne's non-competitive label culture despite numerical abundance. The city's endless artist supply offers opportunities for all labels without zero-sum dynamics, with operators maintaining distinct taste profiles that foster complementary rather than competitive curation.

In-store performances function as career launchpads providing low-barrier opportunities, retail visibility, and direct sales simultaneously. Artists gain audiences beyond friends and family, test material in supportive environments without venue hiring complexity, and generate immediate revenue through direct sales to attendees.

Knowledge Transfer and Music Education

The vinyl ecosystem educates through embedded learning rather than formal instruction—knowledge circulating through conversations, demonstrations, and ambient exposure as participants navigate manufacturing, retail, and collecting.

Pressing plants demystify production through accessible communication. Program's founders credit VinylTech CEO Chad with transforming their perception: "There's no black magic here, it's just science." This openness contrasts historical knowledge hoarding where pressing plants guarded expertise. Contemporary plants instead invite artists to visit, witness production, ask questions—building format knowledge whilst strengthening artist-manufacturer relationships.

Retail staff share collecting knowledge and genre expertise through customer service interactions. Customers learning to inspect secondhand vinyl for condition issues, identify pressing variations, navigating genre terminology—all occur through conversations with knowledgeable staff willing to educate rather than gatekeep.

Informal knowledge networks through the vinyl ecosystem become increasingly crucial as traditional industry entry-level positions contract. However, operational expertise—pressing specifications, wholesale relationships, distribution pathways—has always circulated primarily through personal networks, excluding newcomers lacking geographic proximity or industry connections.

Human Curation and Discovery

Victorian record stores employ knowledgeable staff who share collecting knowledge, genre expertise, and personal recommendations through direct customer interactions. This human curation creates pathways for music discovery that operate through different principles than algorithm-based systems.

Victorian stores demonstrate strong commitment to Australian music. Twenty-eight of 39 surveyed stores stock Australian music at 25–50% of inventory. This exceeds Australian artists' representation in streaming consumption patterns, Australian acts account for only 8.4% of the top 10,000 artists streamed domestically, despite 98% of music-engaged Australians listening to local music, 71% feeling pride in Australian music, and 66% wanting to hear more.²⁰ Record stores address this gap between audience interest and consumption patterns through active curation and prominent placement.

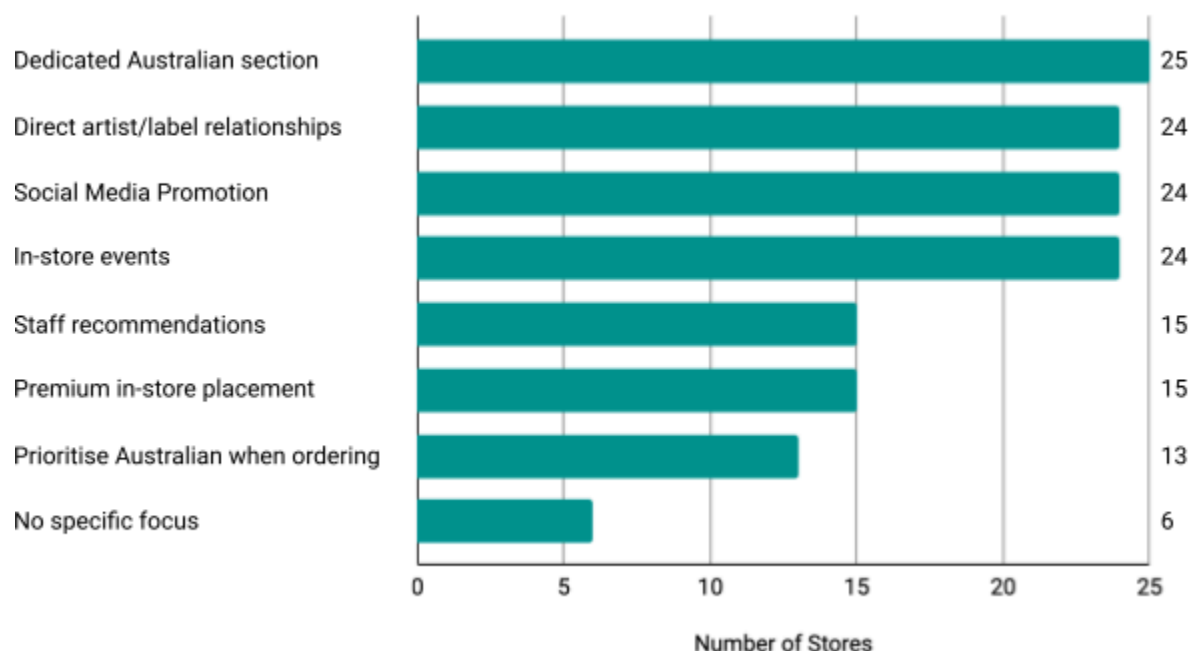
Discovery mechanisms centre on physical browsing's serendipity—customers encountering unfamiliar records through visual attraction, handwritten staff recommendations, overheard conversations, or hearing records played in-store. This creates economic spillover beyond physical sales: in-store encounters often convert to streaming listeners, concert attendees, and merchandise buyers, positioning stores as discovery engines generating value throughout the music economy whilst capturing only the initial transaction. For emerging artists lacking existing audiences, retail placement provides human curated) discovery pathways that are not currently offered digitally.

²⁰ Creative Australia, *Listening In: A summary and synthesis of insights on music consumption*, Creative Australia, Melbourne, 2025.

Figure 3: How Victorian Stores Champion Australian Music

Most common techniques for stocking, promoting, and selling local content

What techniques do you use to stock, promote, and sell Australian music?



Source: Survey of 39 Victorian record stores (2025); multiple responses permitted. Most stores use 3-4 techniques simultaneously, demonstrating active curation beyond passive stocking. Audience Strategies (2025).

Active engagement distinguishes vinyl's role in music consumption. Vinyl invites intentionality: selecting records, engaging with artwork, participating in in-store events, flipping sides. This ritual creates conscious listening experiences that complement streaming's convenience and ubiquity, serving audiences who value both formats for different purposes.

Event Programming and Community Building

Event programming transforms stores and venues into cultural activation points. Seventeen of 39 surveyed stores host events at least monthly—indicating substantial ecosystem-wide programming creating hundreds of annual artist showcase opportunities.

Youth access programming addresses structural barriers preventing next-generation participation. The Push's 2025 survey shows 36% of 16-17 year-olds cite licensing restrictions preventing licensed venue access, whilst 59% identify cost as prohibitive.²¹ Desert Highways in Reservoir directly addresses these barriers through in-store gigs every one to two weeks on Saturday afternoons—free and all-ages—so that "teenagers come in and see live music they usually wouldn't be able to" attend.²²

²¹ The Push, *Young Australian Music Audiences*, 2025.

²² Staff Writer, 'What is the best thing about running a record store in 2025?', *The Music*, 17 July 2025.

The programming question isn't whether events matter—evidence overwhelmingly confirms cultural significance—but rather how to resource them sustainably. The current model typically depends on owner passion and volunteer labour, creating capacity constraints and burnout risks that merit strategic attention.

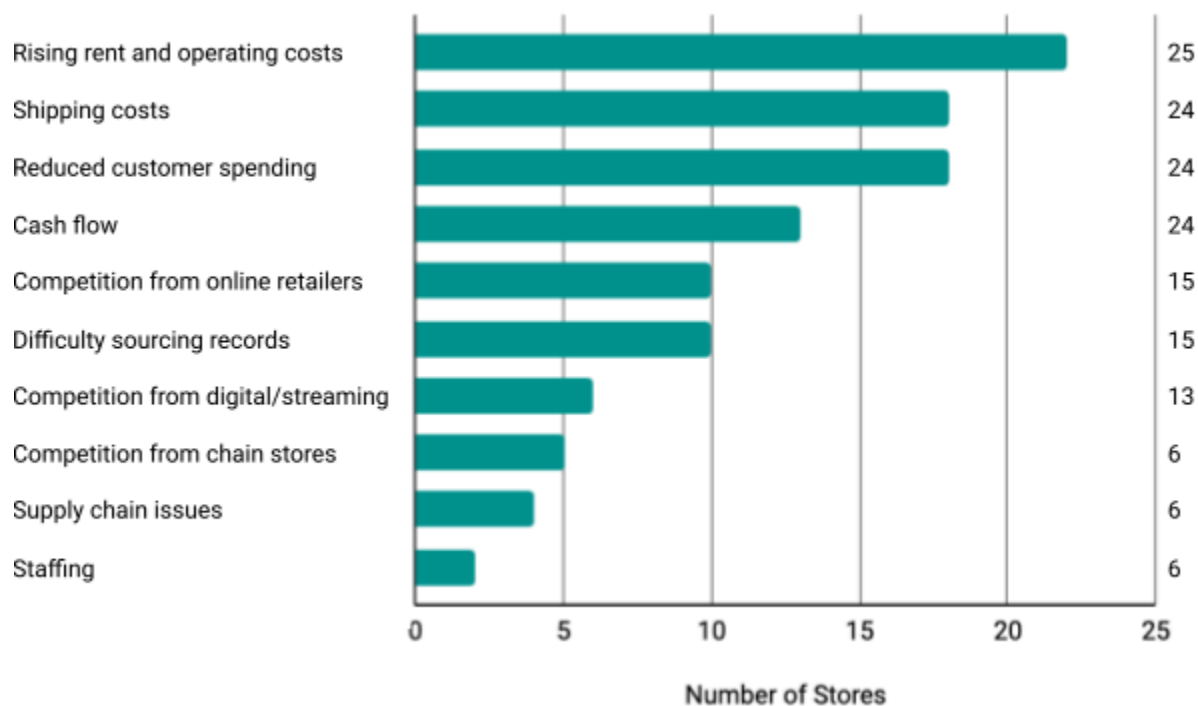
Part Four: Challenges and Barriers

Beyond the economic pressures detailed in Part Two—rising costs, shipping inflation, reduced customer spending, and margin compression—the ecosystem faces structural barriers affecting who participates, who's served, and whether growth can occur equitably.

Figure 4: Primary Challenges Facing Victorian Record Stores

Most common challenges in operating music retail stores stocking vinyl

What are the biggest challenges music stores face currently?



Source: Survey of 39 Victorian record stores (2025); multiple responses permitted. Audience Strategies (2025).

Note: Survey of 39 Victorian record stores (2025); multiple responses permitted.

Equity and Access Gaps

Regional Victoria remains underserved relative to metropolitan Melbourne's density (see Part 1). Beyond geographic access disadvantage, regional communities often face limited genre diversity, reduced inventory depth, and dependence on hybrid retailers where vinyl comprises secondary business.

Benny Badge articulates regional isolation: Shepparton completely lacks physical music retail infrastructure—"no record stores, band rooms, music courses, or venues supporting live music unless you're Jimmy Barnes cover band." Record Per Tutti operates online-only with occasional pop-ups precisely because insufficient density supports dedicated retail space. For many regional Victorians, JB Hi-Fi provides sole physical music retail access, creating dependency on chain retail where independent alternatives cannot achieve viability.

Ownership demographics reveal significant representation gaps. Whilst 32 of 39 surveyed stores have male owners, eight have female owners and one has a non-binary owner—approximately 20% female representation. Cultural and linguistic diversity proves minimal: 33 owners identify as neither culturally/linguistically diverse nor Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Capital requirements prove the primary obstacle. Starting record stores requires inventory investment (\$50,000–\$75,000 for modest stock), premises costs (bonds, fit-out, initial rent), and working capital sustaining operations before profitability. Trish from Feminista Vinyl articulates this barrier: "The thing is, you need a lot of capital to buy in bulk and import goods. That classic capitalism thing—the more capital you have to invest, the bigger you can go, and it snowballs."

Customer inclusion varies by store philosophy. Teresa De Miguel experiences social anxiety in record stores, feeling "a bit awkward" due to perceived "too cool for school" attitudes. James from There And Back Again has fostered a retail environment that explicitly rejects this legacy: "In my day, record store owners were dicks. Exclusivity and a holier-than-thou attitude is the enemy of record stores."

Rising vinyl prices threaten generational renewal. Vinyl's \$40–60 standard pricing positions format beyond many households' budgets. The Push's 2025 survey shows one-third of young Australians have \$0–50 weekly for all entertainment—making a single vinyl purchase consumes the entire weekly discretionary budget. This disproportionately affects young females (38% versus 28% of males in the lowest spending bracket).²³

Sustainability Concerns

Environmental impact awareness varies substantially. Two-thirds of surveyed stores recognise environmentally sustainable vinyl manufacturing exists, yet one-third remain unaware. Among those unfamiliar, six of seven express interest if offered—suggesting awareness barriers rather than philosophical opposition.

Local pressing offers substantial environmental benefits. Industry research found air freight accounts for approximately 72% of lifecycle emissions when records are imported to Australia,²⁴ making local manufacturing the highest-impact intervention. However, industry sustainability conversations often focus on 'bio-vinyl' compound composition rather than manufacturing location. Products marketed as sustainable use mass-balanced bio-attributed PVC that has "almost exactly the same carbon

²³ The Push, *Young Australian Music Audiences*, 2025, pp. 7–8.

²⁴ VRMA Working Group on Carbon Footprinting the Vinyl Record Supply Chain, *Vinyl Record Industry: Second Carbon Footprinting Report*, Vinyl Record Manufacturers Association, June 2025, p. 4.

footprint as conventional PVC,²⁵ yet manufacturers air-freight this bio-compound from overseas, source stampers internationally, and print in distant cities—negating claimed environmental benefits through supply chain emissions.

Local pressing reduces emissions substantially but costs more, potentially pricing releases beyond customer reach or reducing artist returns. Split pressing—manufacturing in multiple regions matching local demand—could address the cost-emissions trade-off but requires coordination and volume most independents cannot achieve. Even major labels prove reluctant to attempt it. This positions sustainability as luxury requiring either ideological commitment accepting economic cost, or sufficient scale enabling regional manufacturing without prohibitive per-unit premiums.

Systemic Barriers

Operational knowledge circulates through personal networks rather than accessible documentation. Carsten Bruhn from Roolette identifies this: "Bands have a lack of knowledge about how to get vinyl pressed, how to get it into a record store. How does wholesale work? How do I do vinyl? There's all this cloudy information."

Operational knowledge circulates primarily through personal networks rather than accessible documentation—pressing specifications, wholesale relationships, distribution pathways exist as insider knowledge rather than public resources. This disadvantages newcomers lacking geographic proximity or industry connections whilst creating inefficiencies where willing participants cannot find each other. The absence of centralised knowledge resources means participants learn through expensive mistakes or generous mentorship.

Volunteer labour models affect mission-driven operations. Feminista's six founders operate entirely through volunteer commitment whilst maintaining demanding day jobs. Trish Hayes articulates burnout reality: "You do get a bit of burnout because you're already doing your day job... After five years it's still fun and we really love it, but the challenges are real." Volunteer commitment allows Feminista to serve gender-diverse communities that commercial viability wouldn't support—yet raises sustainability questions. Can this commitment sustain indefinitely? The precarity affects not just Feminista but the broader ecosystem where owner-operators accepting subsistence returns cannot build capital reserves needed for succession planning, staff development, or crisis resilience. When the current generation retires or burns out, what happens to accumulated knowledge, customer relationships, and cultural infrastructure they've built?

Part Five: Strategic Insights

Victoria's Structural Advantages

Three conditions documented in Parts One through Four distinguish Victoria from comparable markets and amplify intervention impact.

²⁵ VRMA Working Group on Carbon Footprinting, *Second Carbon Footprinting Report*, 2025, p. 21.

Geographic concentration generates multiplier effects

Pressing plants, distributors, and retail concentration creates opportunities for integrated policy intervention. Artist and label investment can activate multiple value chain participants—triggering manufacturing, distribution, retail inventory, and launch events whilst keeping revenue circulating within the local music economy.

This infrastructure density enables artists to manage small-run distribution directly. Selling 100-150 units from a 300-unit pressing through local stores and shows can sustain artistic practice—what Allysha Joy earlier described as 'actually enough' without requiring national breakthrough. This model faces greater challenges in markets with more dispersed infrastructure.

Complete value chain infrastructure

Victoria maintains full production-to-consumer infrastructure rare in cities Melbourne's size. Two pressing plants eliminate international shipping costs and environmental impact whilst enabling face-to-face artist relationships—Program Records' staff "regularly attend shows by bands whose records they've pressed." Micro-distributors like Tweak and Magnetic South serve small-run artists that major operations cannot economically accommodate. This complete chain—pressing, distribution, retail—combined with venue and radio infrastructure, positions Melbourne as a genuine music ecosystem rather than merely a retail cluster.

Part Two's value chain analysis showed how artists simultaneously move inventory across multiple channels: gigs (immediate cash), Bandcamp (fan-direct), direct-to-stores (relationships), and distributors (reach). Melbourne's infrastructure density makes this multi-channel strategy manageable where dispersed markets cannot.

Cultural acceptance of alternative success metrics

Twenty-five of 39 stores express optimism about the next two to three years despite zero reporting strong financial positions. Operators maintain multiple roles simultaneously—running stores whilst playing in bands, operating labels whilst working distribution jobs. This pattern appears nearly universal.

Sam Lyons articulates the prevailing definition: success means "making something really good and having your peers and audience here love it" rather than requiring national validation. This cultural norm—prioritizing community contribution over profit maximization—builds ecosystem durability. Participants won't easily close because they don't evaluate success purely through financial metrics.

However, this same dynamic prevents capital accumulation needed for succession planning or crisis resilience. Rathdowne Records frames the trade-off: "As society becomes increasingly disconnected, a record shop is still a community gathering point... I get to witness this joy daily. In what other job can

you get up every day and select whatever music you want and listen to it all day long?"²⁶ The cultural acceptance of subsistence returns sustains the ecosystem's richness but limits growth potential.

How Advantages Translate to Operational Viability

Successful stores share three complementary patterns that leverage Victoria's structural conditions.

Community integration builds broad customer bases

Stores cultivating welcoming environments attract diverse demographics rather than narrow collector segments. James from There And Back Again explicitly rejects historical exclusivity: "In my day, record store owners were dicks. Exclusivity and a holier-than-thou attitude is the enemy of record stores." At Feminista's mission-driven safe space, fathers bring daughters "specifically at Feminista rather than conventional stores." This deliberate accessibility—rejecting knowledge gatekeeping and intimidation—builds customer loyalty across age groups and backgrounds.

Diversified revenue proves essential where pure vinyl margins fall short

Only 19 of 39 surveyed stores operate solely as music retailers; 20 maintain additional revenue streams through cafés, bars, venues, or labels. Among hybrid operators, roughly half derive majority revenue from music—indicating complementary businesses often remain economically necessary rather than optional enhancement. Hybrid models monetize physical space throughout trading hours whilst building cross-customer bases.

Staff expertise and distinctive curation differentiate from chains and algorithms

Nathan Pilch from Rocket Distribution identifies the Melbourne template: successful stores combine commercial staples with owner-curated selections—"each store has their own quirk they do well." Genre specialists like Wax Museum (hip-hop) and Northside (funk/soul) become authorities within domains, whilst stores collectively stock Australian music at substantially higher rates than streaming platforms.

Barriers Preventing Broader Success

Despite structural advantages, four systemic barriers documented in Part Four constrain who participates, who's served, and whether growth occurs equitably.

Access inequity

Regional Victoria faces threefold disadvantage: approximately one store serves every 150,000–200,000 non-Melbourne Victorians versus one per 62,000 in metropolitan Melbourne.²⁷

²⁶ Staff Writer, 'Record Store Profile: Rathdowne Records VIC', *The Music*, 23 June 2025.

²⁷ Calculation based on Victorian store census (31 regional, 88 metropolitan) and population data. ABS, *Regional Population, 2023–24, 2024*.

Regional communities face limited genre diversity, reduced inventory depth, and longer travel distances. Ownership homogeneity—32 of 39 surveyed stores have male owners; 33 identify as neither culturally/linguistically diverse nor Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander—reflects capital requirements (\$50,000–\$75,000 inventory investment) favoring economically advantaged demographics. Trish from Feminista Vinyl articulates this barrier: "The thing is, you need a lot of capital to buy in bulk and import goods. That classic capitalism thing—the more capital you have to invest, the bigger you can go, and it snowballs."

Price premiumization threatens generational renewal

Vinyl's \$40–60 standard pricing positions format beyond many households' budgets. The Push's 2025 survey shows one-third of young Australians have \$0–50 weekly for all entertainment—making a single vinyl purchase consumes the entire weekly discretionary budget. This disproportionately affects young females (38% versus 28% of males in the lowest spending bracket)²⁸. Combined with licensing restrictions preventing 36% of 16–17 year-olds from venue access,²⁹ youth face dual barriers that could trigger a delayed sustainability crisis as replacement cohorts age out. Neil Robertson from VMDO articulates the concern: "I do hear from some operators they're not seeing the next generation of 17–19 year-olds coming through like they used to, and that worries them."

Information opacity prevents efficient ecosystem connections

Carsten Bruhn from Roolette identifies the knowledge gap: "Bands have a lack of knowledge about how to get vinyl pressed, how to get it into a record store. How does wholesale work? How do I do vinyl? There's all this cloudy information." Operational knowledge—pressing specifications, wholesale relationships, distribution pathways—circulates through personal networks rather than accessible documentation, disadvantaging newcomers lacking geographic proximity or industry connections. Twenty-seven of 39 stores express interest in Melbourne-based events bringing independent labels and retailers together, indicating substantial latent demand for connection infrastructure.

The Data Black Hole

ARIA currently receives chart data from 12 Victorian music retailers, leaving 107 stores unreported—90% of Victorian retail infrastructure invisible to official industry statistics.³⁰ This, combined with unreported direct-to-consumer sales through Discogs and Bandcamp (estimated at \$11–17 million annually), means that official statistics potentially miss 25–30% of actual consumption.³¹ This "black hole" means industry planning and policy recommendations need to incorporate the ecosystem dynamics documented above to ensure a complete picture of market reality.

²⁸ The Push, *Young Australian Music Audiences*, 2025, pp. 7–8.

²⁹ The Push, *Young Australian Music Audiences*, 2025.

³⁰ Benjamin Wiesner, *Investigation into the Victorian Music Industry*, 2023, p. 22.

³¹ National estimate; platforms did not provide data. See Appendix A for methodology.

Strategic Implications

The ecosystem mapping in Parts One through Four, combined with structural advantages and barriers identified above, suggests four strategic principles for intervention.

Leverage geographic concentration for cascading impact

Infrastructure concentration enables policy interventions that support multiple ecosystem participants. The Heavy Machinery project exemplifies this: City of Melbourne funding enabled Miles Brown to curate 40 experimental releases that employed pressing plant staff, engaged distributors, stocked retail shelves, and financed venue launches. This integrated approach maximizes the impact of public investment.

Address access barriers preventing equitable participation

The threefold regional access disadvantage and ownership homogeneity reflect structural rather than individual barriers. Capital requirements systematically exclude economically disadvantaged demographics; price premiumization threatens youth participation crucial for generational renewal. Strategic intervention addressing these barriers expands who benefits from ecosystem strength rather than concentrating advantages among already-privileged participants.

Build information infrastructure democratizing operational knowledge

Knowledge gaps—pressing processes, distribution relationships, retail pathways—create barriers easily addressed through accessible documentation. Operational expertise exists but lacks distribution. The Independent Music Exchange at the Eighty-Six Festival in 2023 demonstrated viability: Program Records' discounted pressing for participants generated commercial transactions whilst allowing labels to "feel seen and talk to their peers," building knowledge-sharing infrastructure that strengthened the ecosystem beyond individual business deals.

Improve data visibility for evidence-based policy

The data gap prevents accurate ecosystem assessment. VMDO facilitating data-sharing partnerships with ARIA, Bandcamp, and Discogs would expose actual economic scale, inform future policy development, and strengthen Victoria's position in national music industry discussions.

Part Five: Recommendations

The following recommendations emerge from analysis of Victoria's vinyl ecosystem strengths, challenges, and untapped opportunities. It is recommended that interventions are prioritised by feasibility, cost, and organisational mandate. Immediate low-cost actions such as convening stakeholders and developing knowledge resources can demonstrate impact whilst building relationships for larger programmatic interventions.

1. Grants and Direct Support Programmes

1a. Increase Investment for Manufacturing

Victorian artists face \$5,000–\$10,000 barriers to vinyl release (Part 2), with pressing plants depending on artist volume for operational stability. Creative Australia's existing manufacturing grants³² address this barrier and should be maintained and expanded. These grants activate the value chain, supporting pressing plants, generating distributor activity, building retail inventory, and funding launch events. expanded funding with Victorian pressing requirements, ensuring federal investment strengthens local infrastructure and reduces emissions from imports.

1b. Support All Ages Events in Stores

Twenty-nine percent of young people aged 16–25 purchase vinyl despite budget constraints (Part 4), with 36% of 16–17 year-olds citing licensing restrictions preventing venue access.³³ It is recommended to establish event programming grants that support stores in hosting all-ages events, providing youth engagement opportunities that introduce young people to live music in non-traditional environments. This addresses both economic and access barriers threatening generational renewal, building pathways toward future venue attendance and ecosystem participation as the next cohort of collectors, concert-goers, and industry participants.

1c. Incentivise Diversity Initiatives

Thirty-two of 39 surveyed stores have male owners; 33 identify as neither culturally/linguistically diverse nor Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Part 4). Capital requirements create barriers favouring economically advantaged demographics. It is recommended to develop a diversity initiative utilising start-up grants, mentorship programmes, and capital access schemes targeting underrepresented communities. This intervention addresses systematic exclusion whilst expanding which communities feel served by music retail infrastructure.

³² Creative Australia, Record Label Development Scheme, announced September 2024. Grants of \$10,000–\$150,000 support recording, manufacturing, and artist development.

³³ The Push, *Young Australian Music Audiences*, 2025.

1d. Develop Regional Cultural Infrastructure

Regional Victoria's 31 stores serve one per 150,000–200,000 residents versus one per 62,000 in metropolitan Melbourne (Part 1). It is recommended to establish a regional hybrid business support programme providing start-up grants and business planning assistance for new music retail operations or help existing operators strengthen their businesses. This programme supports expansion where standalone vinyl retail remains unviable, reducing the threefold access disadvantage regional Victorians currently face.

1e. Australian Music Promotion Tools

Victorian stores stock Australian music at 25–50% of inventory (Part 3), yet lack coordinated visibility infrastructure celebrating this championing. It is recommended to develop a program to champion local music and distribute promotional tools such as "Buy Local" shelf signage, window decals, vinyl sleeve stickers identifying Victorian or Australian artists, and campaign materials for "Australian Music" sections—at no cost to participating retailers. These materials position stores as Australian artist development infrastructure whilst creating visible distinction between human curation and algorithmic distribution.

2. Information Infrastructure and Capability Building

2a. Industry Data Visibility

Current industry data captures only partial vinyl market activity. Facilitate data-sharing arrangements with ARIA whilst encouraging independent retailer participation. Additionally, engage platforms like Bandcamp and Discogs to quantify direct-to-consumer sales. More complete data would expose the ecosystem's actual economic scale, inform evidence-based policy, and strengthen Victoria's position in national music industry discussions.

2b. Operational Knowledge Resources

Artists, labels, and stores identify information gaps around pressing, wholesale pricing, and distribution as barriers (Part 4). It is recommended to commission practical guides covering pressing plant processes, distributor selection, wholesale pricing structures, and retail relationship building, written by experienced practitioners. These guides should be distributed free through record stores, music instrument retailers, and venues, democratising knowledge currently circulating only through personal networks.

2c. Business Capability and Training Partnerships

Stores identify capability gaps around website development and e-commerce (Part 2). There is opportunity to facilitate partnerships between vinyl businesses and educational institutions, where students contribute to website development, bookkeeping, and operational support whilst gaining

industry experience. This addresses capability gaps whilst building educational pathways into music careers.

3. Research and Innovation

3a. Expand Ecosystem Mapping

The current study establishes baseline intelligence; ecosystem health requires ongoing monitoring. An annual census could be considered, tracking store openings, closures, and operational changes. Brief annual surveys measuring financial health and emerging challenges would provide early warning of ecosystem stress, allowing responsive policy adjustment. Critically, mapping direct-to-consumer sales through platforms, fulfilment services, and elsewhere would address a significant information gap—these channels remain invisible in official statistics. Expanding this methodology across other Australian states would fill knowledge gaps in Australian music industry data, building a comprehensive national picture of vinyl infrastructure that informs evidence-based policy development and strengthens coordination between state music agencies.

3b. Victorian Artist Vinyl Adoption and Career Pathway Investigation

This report documents vinyl's role in artist economics through stakeholder interviews and modeling, revealing that 300-unit pressings can sustain artistic practice for emerging artists. However, systematic data on Victorian artist vinyl adoption rates, decision factors, and career outcomes would strengthen understanding of how vinyl infrastructure supports artist development and inform targeted grant design. Commission research examining which Victorian artists press vinyl, what factors influence format decisions, how vinyl fits into career progression, and what barriers prevent broader adoption.

3c. Investigate a Vinyl Resale Royalty Scheme

The visual arts sector operates a resale royalty scheme ensuring artists receive a percentage when artwork resells.³⁴ Given vinyl's robust secondhand market—26 of 39 stores emphasise used stock (Part 1)—commission a preliminary feasibility study investigating whether similar schemes could apply to music. The study should examine visual arts implementation, model potential revenue flows, and assess impacts on store economics.

³⁴ Australian resale royalty scheme administered under the *Resale Royalty Right for Visual Artists Act 2009*. Artists receive 5% of resale price for eligible artworks.

Conclusion: The Value of Vinyl Culture

Victoria's vinyl ecosystem exists through deliberate choice—not market inevitability or nostalgic accident, but daily decisions (often economically puzzling) to invest time, capital, and passion into physical music infrastructure during streaming's dominance. This intentionality reveals themes throughout participant responses: emphasis on community alongside commerce, relationships alongside revenue, and cultural contribution alongside financial sustainability.

Physical music retail's value extends beyond commercial transactions. Record stores function as third places where shared musical passion fosters cross-demographic connection, as youth music infrastructure providing all-ages access to live music, and as discovery pathways championing Australian artists through human curation. The format's intentionality—selecting records, engaging with artwork, participating in in-store events—builds active cultural participation and conscious engagement with music.

The opportunity lies in recognizing this infrastructure's dual character: economically fragile yet culturally vital. Victoria's concentration serves Australian music nationally through manufacturing access, distribution networks, and retail championing local artists. Strategic support could strengthen what passion currently sustains, building resilience that benefits the broader Australian music ecosystem.

What's at stake is cultural infrastructure offering what algorithmic systems do not currently provide effectively: community spaces, human-curated discovery, and artist pathways governed by relationships rather than platform metrics. Victoria's vinyl ecosystem matters for what it uniquely provides: intentional music experiences, community gathering spaces, and discovery pathways built through human relationships rather than algorithmic recommendation.

Appendix A: Research Methodology

Detail

This research employed four complementary methods: store census, quantitative survey, qualitative interviews, and desk research. The multi-method approach enabled triangulation across data sources, validating findings whilst capturing both breadth (ecosystem scale) and depth (operational realities).

Store Census

The census identified 119 active independent record stores across Victoria through systematic research conducted July–October 2025. Methods included online database searches (Google Maps, business directories, Bandcamp label pages), media coverage analysis, industry recommendations, and physical verification during metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria visits.

Stores qualified if they maintained regular trading hours, stocked vinyl as primary or secondary product, and operated independently. The census captured pure record stores, hybrid operations (café-retail, venue-retail), online-only operations with Victorian bases, and thrift stores with significant vinyl presence.

Chain retailers catalogued separately: 43 JB Hi-Fi stores (of 51 Victorian locations), three Readings locations (of nine Victorian stores), and 14 QBD Books stores (of 19 Victorian locations). Figures derive from company consultation and physical verification.

Quantitative Survey

An online survey distributed to all 119 identified Victorian independent record stores fielded 28 August through 3 October 2025, receiving 39 complete responses (32.8% response rate). The survey comprised 30 questions across six thematic areas: business operations and economics, Australian music and supply chains, cultural engagement and community building, industry challenges and future outlook, sustainability and innovation, and diversity and representation.

Survey design prioritised accessibility through an approximately five-minute completion time, plain language questions, and optional revenue disclosure recognising commercial sensitivity. The response sample represents diverse operations in scale (solo operations to stores exceeding 10 employees), business model (vinyl-only to hybrid operations), operational approach (new versus used focus, e-commerce adoption), and geography (metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria).

Demographic considerations: Survey responses reflected actual store ownership demographics—predominantly male owners (32 of 39), minimal cultural and linguistic diversity (33 of 39 identifying as neither CALD nor Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander). This outcome, whilst not meeting

initial diversity targets, accurately represents Victorian vinyl retail's ownership composition—a finding itself significant for equity assessment in Part Four.

Data handling: Twenty-nine of 39 respondents disclosed annual revenue figures, with remaining 10 declining or unable to share. All quantitative data reported represents actual response counts rather than weighted projections, with percentages calculated from relevant subsets (e.g., "8 of 35 stores selling new vinyl" excludes four stores selling exclusively used inventory). Where stores selected multiple options, totals may exceed response count.

Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with 29 ecosystem participants explored business dynamics, supply chains, cultural roles, and support needs beyond survey's quantitative constraints. Interview selection employed purposive sampling targeting diverse participant types:

- Retailers (9): Independent specialists, hybrid operations, chain representatives, regional and metropolitan operators
- Labels (8): Micro-labels, established independents, genre specialists, mission-driven operations
- Distributors (4): Major independents, micro-distributors, alternatives
- Manufacturers (2): Both Victorian pressing plants (Program Records, Zenith Records)
- Customers (4): DJs, collectors with retail purchasing insights
- Self-identified Multi-role participants (11): Individuals operating across categories (e.g., artists, who operate labels, venue adding retail, label operating distribution)

Selection drew from industry network recommendations, survey respondents volunteering for follow-up, and researcher identification of participants with particular expertise enriching ecosystem understanding. Interviews averaged 45 minutes, conducted via Zoom or in-person, recorded with permission, and transcribed for analysis.

Desk Research

Extensive secondary research contextualised primary findings within national and international trends, validated claims through published sources, and identified comparative frameworks. Sources included:

- **Industry reports:** ARIA 2024 Wholesale Music Report, Music Australia (2025), Victorian Music Industry Report (Wiesner, 2023), Creative Australia "Listening In" (2025), The Push "Young Australian Music Audiences" (2025), AIR Independent Music Report (2019), GYROstream SoundCheck Report (2024), VRMA Second Carbon Footprinting Report (2025), Vinyl Alliance/VRMA Greenwashing Guidance (2024), Luminate "Trends in Catalog Streaming" (2023), IFPI Global Music Report (2023)

- **Media coverage:** Music industry trade publications (*The Music*, *Music Network*), general media (ABC News, *The Guardian*, *The Age*), community radio (3RRR), artist/industry profiles (*Shoutout LA*), international music press providing comparative context
- **Academic and policy sources:** Australia Council research, government reports, international music economy studies, Ray Oldenburg's *The Great Good Place* (third places theory)
- **Statistical and demographic data:** Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population estimates (national, state, regional), Office for National Statistics (ONS) UK data, Statistics Bureau of Japan, respective city statistical offices for international comparisons
- **Company sources:** Chain retailer data requests (JB Hi-Fi and Readings provided operational data; all declined sharing revenue figures), pressing plant and distributor information, label catalogues and release data

Market Sizing Estimation

We estimate Victoria's new-vinyl retail market using a transparent, state-level allocation built from public data and documented assumptions. First, we anchor ARIA's 2024 wholesale total for vinyl albums (national). We convert this to an indicative retail value by applying a conservative uplift to reflect typical store-level margins. Our base case uses a +40%-100% retail uplift, with sensitivity tests acknowledging higher industry mark-ups for new vinyl. This establishes a national retail envelope for tracked Australian wholesale/retail channels; parallel imports, artist-direct sales, and the second-hand market are out of scope for this estimate.

We then apportion the national retail total to states using a composite allocation factor combining (i) each state's share of Australia's population (ABS Estimated Resident Population, latest release) and (ii) each state's share of brick-and-mortar record stores, enumerated from reputable directories and de-duplicated to exclude online-only or pop-ups. This blended approach recognises that demand follows both population scale and retail infrastructure density. Chain outlets and independent stores are counted as physical doors; branches are treated as distinct retail locations.

Where available, we cross-check the top-down allocation against a bottom-up survey of Victorian retailers (turnover bands, channel split), using it to validate order-of-magnitude rather than to replace the national anchor. We report an estimated range, reflecting uncertainty in retail margins, store census completeness, and any metro-regional mix effects.

Finally, we assign confidence levels to each component (high for ARIA/ABS inputs; medium for store-share allocation; lower where proxies are used) and document assumptions so results are auditable and repeatable. The guiding principle is methodological transparency over false precision.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Survey data received descriptive statistical analysis identifying patterns, frequencies, and distributions across operational, economic, and cultural dimensions. Qualitative interview data underwent thematic analysis identifying recurring patterns, contradictions, and insights across

participant experiences. Desk research provided contextualisation, validation, and comparative framework development.

The multi-method approach facilitated triangulation where findings from different sources reinforced or complicated each other. Survey data showing hybrid operations (20 of 39 stores) gained depth through interviews explaining why diversification becomes necessary (insufficient vinyl margins), validated through desk research documenting 30–40% cost increases across music infrastructure, and contextualised through international comparisons showing similar patterns.

Where sources contradicted, we noted tensions rather than forcing resolution—for instance, format growth statistics versus individual participant precarity, or optimism about the future despite present struggles. These paradoxes themselves offered analytical value, exposing ecosystem complexity that resists simplistic characterisation.

Ethical considerations: All interview participants received transcripts for review and approval prior to inclusion, with opportunity to redact commercially sensitive information or clarify statements. Survey responses remained confidential, with aggregate data only reported to prevent individual store identification. The research received informed consent from all participants regarding data usage in VMDO reporting.

Study Limitations and Caveats

This research provides comprehensive ecosystem intelligence whilst acknowledging data constraints and methodological boundaries. Understanding these limitations ensures appropriate interpretation and informs future research priorities.

Data Availability Constraints

Chain retailer revenue data proved unavailable through direct requests. JB Hi-Fi and Readings declined sharing vinyl-specific sales figures. Revenue approximations for the chain segment derive from survey data triangulation, distributor insights, and industry proxies rather than direct disclosure. This limitation affects precision of market share calculations but does not undermine ecosystem structure findings.

Direct-to-consumer marketplace sales through Discogs and Bandcamp remain unquantified. Neither platform responded to data requests despite multiple outreach attempts. Survey evidence and industry estimates suggest these channels represent 15–20% of consumption—a substantial “black hole” in official statistics. Victorian market sizing accounts for this gap through estimation ranges rather than precise figures.

ARIA reporting coverage captures 12 of 119 Victorian retailers, leaving 90% of independent retail infrastructure invisible to official industry statistics. This data gap limits longitudinal trend analysis and prevents accurate chart representation of independent retail contribution. The research addresses this through comprehensive census and survey methodology, though ongoing monitoring would benefit from expanded ARIA participation.

Market Sizing and Estimation

National independent store count (239 stores) represents an estimate derived from previous research, industry directories, and stakeholder consultation rather than a comprehensive Australia-wide census. Victoria's 119 stores therefore represent approximately 50% of this national figure, with acknowledged uncertainty in the denominator.

Revenue estimates rely on survey responses (29 of 39 stores disclosed figures), distributor insights, chain retailer consultations, and industry reports rather than audited financial statements. The research reports ranges (e.g., \$25–32 million Victorian retail vinyl sales) reflecting this uncertainty. Survey respondents may overestimate or underestimate revenue; non-respondents may differ systematically from respondents. Market sizing methodology prioritises transparency about estimation approaches over false precision.

Retail margin assumptions use industry-standard 50% markups and documented wholesale pricing, validated through multiple stakeholder consultations. However, actual margins vary by store positioning, format mix (new versus used), and negotiated terms with distributors.

Census Completeness

Temporal scope covers July–October 2025. Store openings, closures, or operational changes after October 2025 are not captured. Given Victoria's dynamic ecosystem (30 stores opened since 2020), the 119 store count represents a point-in-time snapshot requiring periodic updates.

Online-only operations may be undercounted if they lack discoverable Victorian presence through typical business directories, social media, or industry networks. The census methodology prioritised verification through multiple sources, yet stores operating exclusively online with minimal public profile may remain unidentified.

Thrift stores and hybrid operations inclusion relied on case-by-case assessment of vinyl significance to business operations and culture. Stores where vinyl represents incidental or minimal inventory were excluded, yet defining this threshold involved judgement calls that other researchers might apply differently.

Implications for Interpretation

These limitations inform confidence levels around specific findings:

- **High confidence:** Ecosystem structure, store typology, geographic distribution, cultural functions, economic challenges, equity gaps
- **Medium confidence:** Market sizing ranges, revenue distributions, channel splits
- **Lower confidence:** Precise market share figures, year-on-year growth rates for independents, exact online versus in-store ratios

The research prioritises accurate characterisation of ecosystem dynamics over precise market quantification. Strategic implications and policy recommendations derive from high-confidence structural findings rather than market sizing estimates. Data gaps identified here inform recommendations for improved industry data infrastructure (see Part Six: Recommendations, Section 2a).

Appendix B: Scope and Definitions

Scope

Purpose. Provide VMDO with comprehensive intelligence on Victoria's vinyl and record-store ecosystem to inform policy and strategic support.

Geographic scope. Victoria-wide, with detailed focus on metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Timeframe of primary research. Store census and verification conducted July–October 2025; survey fielded 28 Aug – 3 Oct 2025.

Units & currency. Sales and economic figures are in Australian dollars (AUD) unless noted. (Implied across sales/market figures.)

Inclusion criteria (independent stores). Regular trading hours (not occasional pop-ups); vinyl is a primary or secondary category; independently operated (chains catalogued separately). Includes pure record stores, hybrid operations, online-only Victorian bases, and notable thrift stores.

Chain retailers (catalogued separately). 43 JB Hi-Fi stores (all stock vinyl), three Readings locations, and 14 QBD Books stores stocking vinyl.

Methods. Store census and market sizing; quantitative survey (39 responses); qualitative interviews; desk research; triangulated analysis.

Definitions

Australian content (in-store share). Proportion of inventory or stock sourced from Australian artists/labels; typically a minority share across stores.

Chain retailer. Multi-location corporate retailers catalogued separately (e.g., JB Hi-Fi, Readings, QBD Books).

Consignment (sale-or-return). Store takes stock with the right to return unopened units and pay after sale; reduces retailer risk on unproven titles but adds admin burden; many stores prefer outright purchase for cleaner artist payments.

Distributor (traditional). Intermediary between labels/artists and retailers, typically taking ~30% margin; recent per-unit freight fees can materially lift store wholesale prices.

Hybrid operation / hybrid store. Retailers combining vinyl with complementary businesses (e.g., café, bar, venue, label).

Independent store. Non-chain retailers meeting inclusion criteria above.

Micro-distributor / alternative distribution. Smaller, artist-friendly models (e.g., Tweak, Magnetic South, Efficient Space) typically serving 100–300 unit runs with reduced margins and transparent freight.

Online-only operation. No permanent storefront; operates online and may use pop-ups/fairs.

PPD (Published Price to Dealer). The undiscounted wholesale price that physical distributors charge retailers. Post-COVID, some distributors add per-unit fees (\$2.50–\$6.50) on top of traditional ~30% margins, inflating the PPD beyond historical norms.

Pressing plant. Manufacturing facility producing vinyl records; Victoria has two (Program Records, Zenith Records) supporting local production and face-to-face artist relationships.

Pressing run. Quantity of records manufactured in a single production batch; typical Victorian independent runs are 100–500 units, with 300 units representing common scale that supports modest artist viability.

Record Store Day (RSD). Annual retail event that can drive concentrated sales spikes contributing to ARIA/AIR chart outcomes.

Retail margin (typical). Approx. 50% markup on wholesale; e.g., ~\$26 wholesale can retail at ~\$50–55, subject to positioning.

Third place. Record stores functioning as community hubs beyond transactions (knowledge transfer, discovery, all-ages access).

Value chain/multiplier example. Illustrative \$45 retail sale distribution: ~\$15 retail, ~\$6 distributor, ~\$7.50 label/artist, ~\$15 manufacturing (single LP, 300-unit example).

Appendix C: Expanded Ecosystem Data

Expanded ecosystem data presented derives from multiple sources: industry reports, published media, and original research conducted for this study. Where exact figures are unavailable, conservative estimates informed by survey data and stakeholder interviews are provided. See footnotes for specific sources and Appendix A for complete methodology.

Store Infrastructure

- **119 independent stores** across Victoria (2025) – representing ~50% of Australia's estimated 239 independent stores³⁵
- **500–600** people employed by Victoria's independent stores
- **88 stores** in metropolitan Melbourne, **31** in regional Victoria
- **43 JB Hi-Fi** stores, **3 Readings** locations, **19 QBD Books** stores stocking vinyl³⁶
- **Two vinyl pressing plants** (Zenith Records, Program Records) serving the ecosystem
- **5.9 stores per 100,000 residents** in Melbourne – more than double Tokyo (2.3) and exceeding London (4.9), Berlin (2.9), and Paris (4.7)³⁷

Market Scale

National Context:

- **\$44.5 million** Australian wholesale vinyl sales (2024, +5.6% growth)³⁸
- **\$75–90 million** estimated national retail value – accounting for retail margins and untracked purchasing channels³⁹
- **72.8%** of physical music revenue is vinyl (2024)⁴⁰
- **10th** largest music market globally (Australia, 2023)⁴¹

³⁵ Victorian store count from Audience Strategies census (2025). National independent store estimate (239) from industry consultation and previous research. See Appendix A for methodology.

³⁶ Chain store counts from company consultation and physical verification, October 2025.

³⁷ Store density calculations based on Audience Strategies store census (2025) and international comparisons. Population figures from ABS (Melbourne), ONS (London), Statistics Bureau of Japan (Tokyo), and respective city statistical offices.

³⁸ Creative Australia, *Listening In: A summary and synthesis of insights on music consumption*, Creative Australia, Melbourne, 2025, p. 16, citing ARIA data.

³⁹ Estimate based on ARIA wholesale data with retail margin uplift and adjustment for untracked channels (Discogs, Bandcamp, direct artist sales). See Appendix A for detailed methodology.

⁴⁰ Creative Australia, *Listening In*, 2025.

⁴¹ Creative Australia, *Listening In*, 2025, p. 6, citing IFPI data.

Victorian Market:

- **\$25–32 million** annual retail vinyl sales (estimated) – representing 33–36% of Australia's \$75–90 million market despite Victoria being 26% of national population⁴²
- **\$22–28 million** metro Melbourne, \$3–4 million regional Victoria retail vinyl sales (estimated) – reflecting 85–90% urban concentration⁴³

Sales Channels

Purchase Location:

- **\$17.5–24 million** through in-store visits – 70–75% of Victorian purchases occur in-store⁴⁴
- **\$6–10 million** through store e-commerce sites – 25–30% of sales (27 of 39 surveyed stores operate websites)⁴⁵

Retail Sales:

- **\$14–20 million** through chain retailers – JB Hi-Fi's 43 Victorian stores capture 55–65% of market despite⁴⁶
- **\$10–15 million** through 119 independent stores – averaging \$84,000–126,000 per store annually, representing 35–45% of market value⁴⁷
- **\$11–17 million** through Discogs and Bandcamp combined (estimated nationally) – representing 15–20% of market through platforms bypassing traditional retail entirely⁴⁸

Store Characteristics

Revenue Distribution (Independent Stores):

- One-third generate **under \$75,000** annually
- One-third generate **\$75,000–\$300,000** annually
- One-third generate **\$300,000–\$500,000** annually
- Two stores reported revenue **above \$500,000**⁴⁹

⁴² Victorian market sizing based on ARIA wholesale data, ABS population share (26%), and store census (119 stores = 50% national infrastructure). See Appendix A, "Market Sizing Estimation" section, for complete methodology.

⁴³ * Metro/regional split based on 88 metropolitan and 31 regional store distribution from census, 2025.

⁴⁴ Channel split estimate based on survey data showing 27 of 39 stores operate e-commerce sites, with 22 reporting online sales under 50% of revenue. Applied to Victorian market sizing.

⁴⁵ Survey data, 2025. Complement to in-store estimate above.

⁴⁶ Chain market share estimate based on Victorian market sizing and company consultation. Store count from JB Hi-Fi consultation, October 2025.

⁴⁷ Independent retail estimate based on Victorian market sizing and survey revenue data, 2025.

⁴⁸ National estimate; platforms did not provide data. See Appendix A for methodology.

⁴⁹ Survey of 39 Victorian record stores, 2025. 29 of 39 disclosed revenue figures.

Operational Scale:

- **Eight of 39** stores surveyed operate with single employee
- **27 of 39** stores surveyed employ 2-5 people
- **Four of 39** stores surveyed employ more than five people⁵⁰

Business Models:

- **19 of 39** stores surveyed operate exclusively as music retailers
- **20 of 39** stores surveyed combine music with cafés, bars, record labels, or other revenue streams
- **Nine hybrid operations** identified in the survey derive majority revenue from music; **eight** derive majority from complementary businesses⁵¹

Longevity & Growth:

- **15 of 39** stores surveyed stores trading 10+ years – foundation retailers who weathered CD collapse
- **15 of 39** stores surveyed stores opened in past five years (2020-2025)
- **Eight** new stores opened 2022-2024 alone⁵²

Digital Presence:

- **27 of 39** stores surveyed operate e-commerce websites
- **22 of these 27** report online sales represent **less than 50% of revenue**
- **12 stores of 39** stores surveyed without websites cite **time constraints (67%)** and **costs (42%)** as primary barriers⁵³

Artists & Labels

- **14,000 Victorian artists** actively releasing, selling, or receiving airplay⁵⁴
- **93+ record labels** in Victoria (likely significantly more)⁵⁵
- **69 community radio stations** providing airplay and discovery infrastructure⁵⁶
- **88%** of Victorian artists' Spotify listeners are outside Australia⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Survey of 39 Victorian record stores, 2025.

⁵¹ Survey of 39 Victorian record stores, 20

⁵² Survey of 39 Victorian record stores, 20

⁵³ Survey of 39 Victorian record stores, 20

⁵⁴ Benjamin Wiesner, *Investigation into the Victorian Music Industry*, 2023, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Wiesner, *Investigation into the Victorian Music Industry*, 2023, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA), *List of Community Radio & TV Stations in Australia for 2025*, CBAA, Alexandria, 2025.

⁵⁷ Benjamin Wiesner, *Investigation into the Victorian Music Industry*, 2023, p. 12.

Cultural Infrastructure

- **17 of 39** stores host events at least monthly
- **28 of 39** stores cite community building, artist support, and personal passion as programming motivations
- **Stores stock 25–50% Australian content** (substantially higher than streaming's representation)⁵⁸

Economic Realities

- **Zero stores** report strong financial position; **two-thirds** "doing OK"
- **25 of 39** stores optimistic about next 2–3 years despite challenges
- **20 of 39** stores operate hybrid revenue models (cafés, bars, labels)⁵⁹

Data Visibility Gap

- **12 Victorian retailers** report sales to ARIA
- **107 independent stores** remain invisible in official industry statistics⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Survey of 39 Victorian record stores, 2025.

⁵⁹ Survey of 39 Victorian record stores, 2025.

⁶⁰ Benjamin Wiesner, *Investigation into the Victorian Music Industry*, 2023, p. 22.

Appendix D: Case Studies

The following case studies illustrate aspects of Victoria's vinyl ecosystem through detailed profiles. Whilst not essential to the report's findings, they provide additional context and human stories behind the data.

Case Study: Northside Records—Building Culture Through Specialisation

Gertrude Street, Fitzroy | Est. 2002 | Funk, Soul, Jazz

Northside Records exemplifies how specialist curation and intentional community-building transform retail into cultural infrastructure. Over 23 years, owner Chris Gill has built a store that champions Australian artists, hosts live performances, operates a record label, and shapes Melbourne's music ecosystem through leadership extending beyond his Fitzroy shopfront.

Filling the Funk Gap

Chris opened Northside in 2002 to address a cultural deficit: "We needed something different in the town. We needed more representation for the FUNK! A space to act as a revered spot for the goodness!" Melbourne's live music scene "was quite bad" for soul, with limited specialist retail and sparse DJ nights. The city maintained "such a heavy rock vibe in the 2000s. Now rock is a cute sub-genre of this super-funky city."

After DJing since 1991, Chris was "perfectly qualified"⁶¹—yet had never worked in record retail: "I think to come at something with accidental fresh eyes is a great thing. Sure I got lots of things wrong, but I also got lots of things super funky!"

Physical Space, Cultural Intent

Designer Andy Wong created an interior that won the Dulux Paint Award in 2002, beating the Sydney Olympics, Fed Square, and "a host of disappointed corporate others." The design "still pops today. Not to mention my disco ball football!"

The space proved "intentionally malleable" to accommodate in-store performances: "We can get a full live band playing with nearly 100 people in the store! Squishy funk!" Chris frames success culturally: "It's important that people feel welcomed and into the music that you present. Traditionally there is a focus on maleness in record stores... opening up a store you want EVERYONE to come in and enjoy it."

⁶¹ 'An In-Depth Tour of Melbourne Independent Record Stores', *3RRR*, 27 August 2019.

Championing Local Artists

Northside operates as artist development infrastructure through three channels: Northside Records (35 releases of Melbourne soul and funk), in-store performances (full bands for audiences approaching 100), and direct artist relationships enabling flexible terms and prominent placement.

Artist Allysha Joy from the 30/70 Collective describes the mentorship culture Chris has fostered: "It just feels like support—having these elders in our community that have been guiding us and allowing us space to figure this stuff out and not just do it, but build a foundation beneath us.

Beyond the Shopfront

Chris's influence extends through ecosystem engagement:

Record Store Day Australia: Chris contributes to organizing the annual celebration driving sales whilst building public awareness of independent retail's cultural value.

Diggin' Melbourne Map: Chris co-created the collaborative map guiding customers across 50+ independent stores—positioning retailers as complementary rather than competitive.

Community Radio: "I have been involved in community radio in this town for over 20 years." Chris's work on 3RRR extends Northside's curatorial voice whilst championing local releases.

Community Over Commerce

When asked about proudest moments, Chris emphasises human connection: "Some of the proudest moments are small ones, particularly after or during in-stores, to see the faces of happiness. When a small girl was sitting a foot and a half from Paul Kelly—she was obviously a big fan."

The store operates as a community gathering point. "One of the best bits of running a store is all of the unpaid work we do with tourists. So many come through asking for tips for live music, food, fun and freakiness!"

Chris's reflection captures both commitment and precarity: "The shoutout is to THE PEOPLE! The amazing response from our beautiful community who continue to share in the funk, the whole funk and nothing but the funk!... It powers me on to know that young ones are also coming up and bringing us a brighter future too."⁶²

Northside's 23-year persistence—through format shifts, streaming's rise, and economic pressure—demonstrates cultural resilience built through specialist expertise, intentional inclusivity, and ecosystem leadership strengthening infrastructure for all participants.

⁶² 'Meet Chris Gill | Record store owner, radio host, professional dancer', *Shoutout LA*, 2025.

Case Study: There And Back Again Records—Regional Viability Through Welcoming Culture

Rippleside, Geelong | Est. 2024 | Secondhand Specialist

There And Back Again Records demonstrates how regional stores achieve viability through deliberate inclusivity and strategic positioning. Opened by local musicians James Harrison and Jack Robbins in late 2024, the store serves as Geelong's only standalone secondhand record retailer, building community through accessibility whilst filling market gaps metropolitan operations cannot address.

From Passive to Active

James and Jack operated for several years at Mill Markets, a shared bazaar where 150 stallholders trade collectively. The model proved "very passive"—stock remained available seven days weekly whilst owners visited once per week to restock. This low-overhead foundation allowed the pair to build inventory and test market demand before committing to permanent premises.

The transition to bricks-and-mortar proved "very intense in a great way"—moving to "hands on seven days a week." James describes "almost trying to keep up" with unexpected community response: "We weren't expecting it to be as positive and constant as it has been."

Rejecting Exclusivity

James explicitly rejects record retail's exclusionary legacy: "Exclusivity and the holier-than-thou attitude is the enemy of record stores." This philosophy shapes every operational decision, positioning accessibility as competitive advantage.

The approach works. Customers range from "15-year-olds fossicking through the CDs" to "85-year-olds in their walkers fossicking through the records." Lucas Harwood from Melbourne band Heavy Moss describes the store as "the perfect size—massive record stores intimidate me... Jack and James are incredibly passionate and friendly."⁶³

James frames this deliberately: "Vibe is almost everything. Obviously stock is important, but vibe is everything—having a welcoming environment."

Regional Positioning

As Geelong's sole secondhand specialist, There And Back Again fills infrastructure gaps chain retailers cannot address. The store stocks over 10,000 titles across all formats, with secondhand economics enabling affordability: "You can buy 10 CDs for the same price as one new vinyl record."

⁶³ Mary Varvaris, 'Pond, Ninajirachi & More Detail Their Favourite Music Shops To Celebrate Record Store Day', *The Music*, 11 April 2025.

This positions the store as an accessible entry point for economically constrained demographics, particularly youth. James notes physical media functions as "cure-all for our social media society"—tangible ownership countering streaming's ephemeral consumption—whilst pricing allows participation where \$50–60 new vinyl proves prohibitive.

Located one minute from North Geelong Station, the store serves regional customers lacking metropolitan Melbourne's retail density—addressing the threefold access disadvantage documented in Part Four through deliberate regional presence.

Building Local Music Infrastructure

Both owners are embedded within Geelong's music community—Jack leads the band Forever Son, which James also plays in. The store stocks local releases exclusively for new vinyl, pays artists directly rather than using consignment, and plans in-store performances as capacity allows.

James articulates the economic logic: "Physical merchandise is the fastest way to make money as an artist... there's no money in streaming." Direct payment avoids "weird, busy work" of consignment, getting "money to the artist as quickly as possible."

Viability Through Values

James's observation captures the store's foundation: "You really get the full spectrum of the human experience and connection just from that one little retail outlet. You just get so many different characters. And there's connection everywhere. It's beautiful."

This values-first approach—community contribution over profit maximisation, accessibility over exclusivity—demonstrates regional viability through differentiation. Where metropolitan Melbourne's density supports specialist niches, regional operations succeed by welcoming everyone whilst maintaining curatorial integrity that chain retailers cannot replicate.

Case Study: Lathe Cutting—Old Technology, New Possibilities

Why Affordable New Equipment Has Potential to Transform Small-Run Vinyl Manufacturing

Lathe cutting is experiencing unexpected democratisation through affordable equipment and online knowledge-sharing. What once required significant capital is now accessible through Swedish-made lathes priced around \$5,000 AUD, enabling labels to cut every release themselves and artists to create bespoke editions impossible through conventional pressing.

Historical Barriers

Lathe cutting served multiple functions—professional mastering engineers preparing lacquers for pressing plants, DJs cutting exclusive versions, studios making reference discs, and hobbyists creating private press records. All required significant capital. Entry-level lathes cost tens of thousands of dollars, used quality equipment around \$50,000, whilst a professional modern system from VMS approaches \$200,000.

Spider, who operates Winter Garden Records, describes the learning environment nine years ago: "There was this forum called The Secret Society of Lathe Trolls. It was a very gatekeeping sort of style, kind of like tattooing was when I got into that a long time ago." Access required capital plus entry into closed communities guarding operational expertise.

The Democratisation

Din Sync, a Swedish company known for reverse-engineering vintage synthesisers, transformed accessibility. Dr Mike Callender, who lectures in Music Industry at RMIT whilst pursuing practice-led research in DJ culture, purchased one of 22 units from their first manufacturing run: "I achieved successful cuts within 24 hours of setup."

Portability proves revelatory—Mike shipped his lathe to Newcastle in a Pelican case for automation upgrades. Approximately 100 people await the next 30-unit batch through a private Facebook community. Mike frames the shift: "We are on the edge of a completely new era of DIY record-making. What they achieved making this product so not only cheap but immediate is revolutionary."

The technology isn't flawless. Mike acknowledges: "There are other lathes that might do better cuts, but they're not accessible. No one can afford them."

Novel Business Models

Winter Garden Records exemplifies possibilities this enables. The label operates on a globally unique model: cutting every release themselves, one at a time, exclusively for their own catalogue. "I never

wanted to do commissions because then I have the freedom—I can do whatever I want. If they sound terrible, the band will be stoked either way."

Spider wakes at 5am to cut records before working as a tattoo artist, producing eight to 12 cuts per session: "I've realised it doesn't matter because there's going to be more after this. It's never going to stop."

Runs of 100 sell out "in about an hour," with records immediately appearing on Discogs for multiples of the \$40 retail price. Collectors value the intimacy—every record hand-cut rather than factory-pressed.

Spider's operation required nine years modifying a 1970s Japanese Hara lathe, adding stereo feedback capability, vacuum suction, and stylus heating. The cutting head—sourced from Perth's James Sillitoe—represents serious investment. Yet the model works through consistent practice sustaining both artistic output and collector demand.

Broader Potential

Mike positions Din Sync's emergence within historical precedent: "Chicago house started with Jesse Saunders making a record that sounded terrible. It didn't matter because people tapped into the fact that this guy without actual experience was able to realise a product and a pursuit."

Artists pressing 100–300 units face systematic exclusion from conventional pressing plants and distributors requiring larger minimums. Lathe cutting addresses this gap, enabling bespoke editions, art installations requiring custom formats, and experimental releases that commercial viability wouldn't support.

Old Technology, Contemporary Purposes

Mike's assessment captures both potential and realism: "Enormous potential, enormous." Success depends on Din Sync's manufacturing capacity to scale, whether quality improvements can occur without sacrificing affordability, and whether sufficient artists find small-run economics viable.

Lathe cutting won't replace conventional pressing—Program Records and Zenith Records serve different functions at different scales. But its re-emergence creates pathways for releases that minimum-run economics would prevent, sustaining artistic practices that modest sales support without requiring commercial breakthrough.

Case Study: Sustainable Vinyl Manufacturing—The Case for Buying Local

Why Local Production Matters More Than Compound Composition

Victoria's vinyl resurgence coincides with heightened environmental scrutiny. New pressing compounds marketed as "bio-vinyl" or "green vinyl" promise reduced impact, yet industry guidance reveals a more complex reality: where a record is manufactured matters far more than what it's made from—a principle supported by organizations like Green Music Australia, which publishes resources on responsible physical manufacturing prioritizing local production..

What the Data Actually Shows

Lifecycle assessments reveal distribution dominates emissions. Air freight to Australia (4.88kg CO₂e) represents 72% of total lifecycle emissions (6.74kg CO₂e)⁶⁴—making manufacturing location the highest-impact factor.⁶⁴

The VRMA's carbon footprinting demonstrates this starkly. A record pressed in Europe and air-freighted to Australia generates 6.74kg CO₂e lifecycle emissions—air freight alone adds 4.88kg CO₂e, more than tripling emissions compared to local pressing at 2.13kg CO₂e. Sea transport reduces emissions to 1.79kg CO₂e, whilst local pressing achieves 1.70kg CO₂e.⁶⁵

By comparison, compound choice—the focus of most "green vinyl" marketing—creates modest differences. Variance between lowest and highest compound footprints approximates 100g CO₂e per record.⁶⁶ For two million records annually, this yields 200 tonnes CO₂e savings—meaningful but dwarfed by distribution impacts.

Moreover, bio-attributed PVC—where biogenic feedstocks blend with traditional hydrocarbons—produces almost identical footprints to fossil-fuel PVC from the same supplier.⁶⁷

The Recyclability Problem

PVC remains one of the least recyclable plastics once reaching consumers due to various additives, whilst many bio-polymers lack established recycling options—meaning downstream impacts may exceed upstream benefits from transitioning away from fossil fuels.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Vinyl Record Manufacturers' Association (VRMA) Working Group on Carbon Footprinting the Vinyl Record Supply Chain. (2025). *Vinyl Record Industry: Second carbon footprinting report*, p. 3–4.

⁶⁵ VRMA, *Second Carbon Footprinting Report*, 2025, p. 3–4.

⁶⁶ VRMA, *Second Carbon Footprinting Report*, 2025, p. 26.

⁶⁷ VRMA (2025). *Second carbon footprinting report*, p. 4; Vinyl Record Manufacturers' Association & Vinyl Alliance. (2024). *Making Environmental and Sustainability Claims: Best practice guidance on avoiding 'greenwashing' in the record industry*, p. 6.

⁶⁸ VRMA & Vinyl Alliance (2024). *Greenwashing guidance*, p. 7.

Crucially, regrind material routinely returning to manufacturing cannot be counted as "recycled content." Recycling overstock creates problematic accounting: emissions from manufacturing recycled records add to emissions from producing original overstock. One VRMA member received over 250,000 unsold records for recycling—15% of annual pressing. The industry should focus on eliminating overordering rather than celebrating recycling its consequences.⁶⁹

What Actually Works

Evidence-based sustainable practice centres on two interventions:

Local pressing infrastructure eliminates 72% of vinyl-related emissions by removing imports. Victorian artists pressing at Program Records or Zenith Records avoid international shipping whilst enabling face-to-face relationships.

Eliminating air freight proves equally critical. The VRMA concludes: "there are no circumstances in which air freight can be justified." Switching to sea freight reduces emissions by approximately 90%.

Beyond these core interventions, reducing over-ordering prevents waste requiring recycling, whilst choosing single sleeves over gatefolds saves approximately 180g CO₂e per record—comparable to specifying 140g rather than 180g vinyl.

The Victorian Advantage

Victoria's infrastructure concentration uniquely enables sustainable practices whilst supporting artist viability. Melbourne's two pressing plants, dense distributor network, and 119 independent stores allow artists to press locally, personally deliver inventory, and coordinate launches.

Allysha Joy from the 30/70 Collective describes the localized cycle: "You can make a record, press it here, and sell most of it here." Manufacturing, distribution, retail, and performance occur within kilometres rather than across continents, keeping money circulating locally whilst substantially reducing environmental impact.

⁶⁹ VRMA, *Second Carbon Footprinting Report*, 2025, pp. 5, 24.

Appendix E: Acknowledgements

This report was written by Ethan Holben with support from David Boyle, Rufy Ghazi, Eva Szokol-Humay, and Simon Jacobs of Audience Strategies. The research draws on perspectives from across Victoria's vinyl ecosystem: store operators, artists, labels, distributors, manufacturers, and customers. We are grateful for their time, insights, and commitment to Victoria's music community.

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Appendix F: About Audience Strategies

We help brands grow their audiences by developing strategies and capabilities to better understand and engage with their target audiences. We use data, insights, research, analytics, and data science to inform our approach, and have a wide range of experience working with different types of organisations, from large global brands to small startups.

We specialise in five types of work: data strategy, audience segmentation and strategy, brand positioning, partner selection, and data-driven storytelling. We believe that the use of data to understand audiences is still in its early stages and evolving rapidly. We enjoy helping organisations figure out how to integrate data into their strategic decisions. Our core value is truth, in our work and as it relates to being honest with clients about whether we can have a big impact for them.

We also provide inspiration and training through conferences and workshops, and are committed to using a combination of data-driven strategic thinking and creativity to achieve success. More on [our website](#) and in this [presentation](#).

A small but perfectly formed team

							
David Boyle	Louisa Livingston	Richard Bowman	Rufy Anam Ghazi	Simon Jacobs	Eva Szokol-Humay	Ethan Holben	Charlie Palmer
Brand and Corporate Strategy	Segmentation	Music Research	Analytics	Survey Research	Music Research	Creative Strategy	
David has 25+ years of experience developing audience intelligence, data, AI and strategy capabilities that have changed the culture and economics of the world's most prestigious luxury brands and some of the biggest entertainment brands in the world.	Louisa helps companies and brands grow and has worked across Consumer Insight, Innovation and CRM. She has built insights capabilities that help brands make better decisions. From EMI Music to Hachette and Harrods, she has built transformative teams.	Richard has 20+ years of experience covering FMCG, media and entertainment industries. He has designed and delivered consumer segmentation for some of the world's biggest entertainment brands. Richard works closely with us alongside leading This Is Insight.	Rufy is a Music Tech and Research Executive with extensive experience in product strategy and music market research. Her background includes roles at TikTok (ByteDance) and Amra (Kobalt Music Group), where she excelled in product development and strategic partnerships. Presently she is leading the music work at Audience Strategies.	Simon has over 15 years of experience delivering insight and analytics solutions to some of the biggest entertainment, technology and luxury goods brands. His expertise is delivering solutions that make insightful findings accessible.	Eva is highly skilled at setting up, project managing and building analysis processes for complex, multi-country and multi-wave consumer insight initiatives across different industries ranging from the public sector, to international media companies, publishing, technology, education and retail.	Ethan has 20+ years of experience in marketing and content strategies across music and media. His expertise is developing audience-focused initiatives across digital channels. His background includes roles at Red Bull Music Academy, BBC and Aslice, specialising in data-driven growth.	Charlie Palmer brings 20 years of broadcast media expertise, having shaped pioneering campaigns and editorial for both BBC and Channel 4. He now channels his brand-building experience into Haus of Nige, a social enterprise supporting underground music and culture.