



**Musicological Society of Australia**

**The National Recording Project**

**for Indigenous Performance in Australia**

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## **Garma Statement on Indigenous Music and Performance, 2002**

*This statement was prepared and ratified by delegates during the Garma Symposium on Music and Dance convened by Mandawuy Yunupingu, Marcia Langton AM and Allan Marett at the Yirriya Music Development Centre at Gunyanyara from 10 to 12 August 2002 as part of the fourth Garma Festival of Traditional Culture in Arnhem Land.*

Songs, dances and ceremonial performances form the core of Yolŋu and other Indigenous cultures in Australia. It is through song, dance and associated ceremony that Indigenous people sustain their cultures and maintain the law and a sense of self within the world. Performance traditions are the foundation of social and personal wellbeing, and with the ever-increasing loss of these traditions, the toll grows every year. The preservation of performance traditions is therefore one of the highest priorities for Indigenous people.

Indigenous songs should also be a deeply valued part of the Australian cultural heritage. They represent the great classical music of this land. These ancient musical traditions were once everywhere in Australia, and now survive as living traditions only in several regions. Many of these are now in danger of being lost forever. Indigenous performances are one of our most rich and beautiful forms of artistic expression, and yet they remain unheard and invisible within the national cultural heritage.

Without immediate action, many Indigenous music and dance traditions are in danger of extinction with potentially destructive consequences for the fabric of Indigenous society and culture. The recording and documenting of the remaining traditions is a matter of the highest priority both for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Many of our foremost composers and singers have already passed away leaving little or no record.

At the Garma Symposium on Music and Dance held in association with the 2002 Garma Festival, the following proposals were put forward in order to address the current critical situation:

- that the establishment of local knowledge centres with digital storage and retrieval systems be supported as a basis for the repatriation of sound and visual records to communities. Such records play an important role in the maintenance and protection of tradition. Research should be conducted into the most culturally appropriate ways of storing and retrieving knowledge from computers. It is acknowledged that different communities may ultimately adopt

different storage and delivery systems, and that there should be regular meetings to explore the success or failure of different strategies.

- that a national recording project be established to ensure that the songs of as many singers as possible are held for future generations. This project will be conducted under Indigenous control with an advisory board of senior men and women from a broad range of communities guiding its priorities and strategies.
- that the recording and repatriation of songs to local knowledge centres be supported by universities and other institutions to assist Indigenous communities to integrate their cultural knowledge into a broad range of community activities such as education, bilingual, and health programs; and that the maintenance of performance and ceremony be encouraged by their incorporation into community governance.
- that well documented recordings of Indigenous song be published in order to educate the broader Australian public and international audiences about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance traditions. The production of both the recordings and documentation should be based on broad consultation with learned senior men and women who would control access to sacred knowledge in song texts. Other forms of production, including multimedia and web based forms should also be explored.

The Symposium calls on the federal government to support and sustain Indigenous song traditions through the establishment of knowledge centres, and a national recording project as a National Research Priority. The Symposium resolves to pursue funding through the Australian Research Council as well as through local, state and territory, and federal government, and industry. The participants resolved to request governments, universities, industry bodies and other institutions to acknowledge and respond to this urgent need.