



Musicological Society of Australia

The National Recording Project

for Indigenous Performance in Australia

International Council for Traditional Music Statement on Indigenous Australian Music and Dance, 2011

This statement was prepared by the Australia and New Zealand Regional Committee of the International Council for Traditional Music and endorsed unanimously by the General Assembly during the 41st World Conference in St John's, Canada, from 13 to 19 July 2011.

The International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), a non-governmental organization in formal consultative relations with UNESCO, is a worldwide organization dedicated to the preservation of traditional music. Research conducted by members of the Australia and New Zealand branch of the ICTM reveals that Australia's traditions of Indigenous music and dance are in crisis. These traditions are among the oldest and most endangered in the world, and yet insufficient financial support is currently available to undertake the work that is required to protect and preserve them. The Australia and New Zealand Regional Committee of the ICTM, with support from the International Executive Board of the ICTM, has issued this statement to draw attention to this crisis and to call for greater support and action in this domain of endangered intangible cultural heritage.

Songs, dances and ceremonial performances lie at the centre of Indigenous Australian cultures, playing a vital role in religious beliefs and practices. They are important repositories of cultural knowledge. Through song and dance, Indigenous Australians maintain social and personal wellbeing, sustain their cultures, and maintain Law and their own identity. Performance traditions are also used to strengthen Indigenous languages and provide intergenerational links between families and communities. Indigenous songs and dances are therefore essential to Indigenous culture and society.

Once found all across Australia, these traditions now only survive in a few regions, and it is estimated that 98% of musical traditions have already been lost. Many senior composers and performers have passed away leaving limited or no record of their knowledge. Modern lifestyles and the ongoing devastating impact of colonization are affecting the dissemination of cultural knowledge between generations. The preservation of Indigenous Australian performance traditions through recording and documenting is therefore vital for their survival.

Members of the Australia and New Zealand Regional Committee of the ICTM collaborate in projects aimed at preserving Indigenous Australian music and dance, including the establishment of Indigenous knowledge centres and initiatives such as the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia. The Australia and New Zealand Regional Committee of the ICTM recognises the benefits

of these initiatives, and calls for them to be supported and expanded in any way possible. Urgent action is required to ensure the preservation of those living practices that remain, for the benefit of all Australians, and for cultural diversity worldwide.