

# Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan

Towards a stronger Indigenous contemporary music sector  
2008



**Cultural  
Ministers  
Council**

Produced by the Contemporary Music Development Working Group  
of the Cultural Ministers Council.

The Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan has been produced by the Contemporary Music Development Working Group of Australia's Cultural Ministers Council.

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# Executive summary

Indigenous culture is a strength to be celebrated and a major force in shaping our national culture and identity. Across Australia, from the large cities to the most remote communities, Indigenous people are making music. It's an art form that has the power to draw young Indigenous Australians into education and training programs. Making music is strengthening pride in culture, language and history and Indigenous Australians' contribution to Australia's mainstream culture.

Music is essentially about teamwork, mutual respect and discipline and these qualities have a broader relevance. Making music can grow the confidence and skills of young people and can potentially be an important source of income.

The Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan is based on principles of flexibility, sustainability and diversity and aims to focus support for Indigenous music so that the sector grows stronger. The plan draws on a wide range of reports and extensive consultation by Australian, state and territory governments over many years. It acknowledges the quality of existing plans and activities and intends to build on them.

The national action plan is a framework which Australian, state and territory governments can use to assess their existing programs, consider new directions and identify new partners to support Indigenous contemporary music, at a pace and level which suits the budgets, situation and timelines of each jurisdiction.

Through the Cultural Ministers Council all jurisdictions have agreed to consider a range of pilot initiatives to support Indigenous contemporary music. These initiatives are based on areas of activity which have had proven outcomes. They provide ideas and projects for jurisdictions to consider in their planning for support for this sector. The action plan encourages jurisdictions to identify and trial selected pilot initiatives where appropriate over a three-year time frame to test their effectiveness. Successful initiatives could then be developed as potential models for wider application.

Jurisdictions are responsible for funding initiatives in their own state or territory, and are encouraged to contribute to joint initiatives with other Australian, state and territory governments.

# Underlying principles

In adopting this action plan, the Cultural Ministers Council acknowledges the following key issues as being the foundation for effective support for Indigenous contemporary music:

1. Communities and individuals with a strong culture can be comparatively more resilient, able to address problems and build sustainable futures, particularly for their young people.
2. A plan of action for Indigenous contemporary music needs to be flexible and able to meet the different needs of northern and southern Australia and of urban, regional and remote areas.
3. Indigenous contemporary music comprises two important, complementary components. One is the social and cultural link between tradition and music. The other is the link between community-based music activity and participation in the commercial music industry.
4. Success in the Indigenous contemporary music sector may result in important cultural and social improvements in Indigenous communities, as well as increased economic benefits flowing to individuals or groups.
5. To be effective, support to the sector should build on the existing strengths of Indigenous artists and organisations so that new initiatives complement activities which are already working successfully or are showing real promise. By focusing on success, the action plan can create a development environment which favours creativity and innovation.
6. Arts and cultural programs need to be incorporated into education, employment, health and housing programs and activities. For example, an interest and involvement in music can attract Indigenous youth into vocational education and training, which can lead to skills development, qualifications and increased job readiness and employability.
7. It is important to be on the lookout for key transition points where music practice either takes a significant step forward or begins to stall. Programs need to be tailored with these transitions and stages in mind.
8. Support to the sector needs to be based on long term strategies and commitment which allow time for initiatives to develop and consolidate and which recognise the need for consistency and respect for community protocols.
9. A wide range of partners need to be enlisted to support Indigenous contemporary music, including the philanthropic sector and those dealing with training, infrastructure development and employment, such as state and territory education, economic development or employment agencies and Indigenous Business Australia.
10. To be effective the action plan will need to ensure that there is a clear return on investment and that outcomes of initiatives are clearly identified at the outset, tracked and evaluated in a comprehensive way.

# The plan: issues, goals and action

Indigenous contemporary music is diverse and complex. Played in the inner suburbs of major urban centres and in the most remote communities of regional Australia, it involves every genre of music from hip hop and rap to local community bands and country, rock and choral performances.

Indigenous music includes high profile performers, such as Yothu Yindi and Archie Roach, and bands that are well-loved in their own community or the community next door. It also includes successful performers such as Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, described by one reviewer as the greatest voice Australia has ever produced.

Participation and audience levels are high across all age groups, but particularly amongst the young, and music is communicating important messages in Indigenous communities on issues as wide ranging as health and road safety.

A significant level of support for Indigenous contemporary music exists across jurisdictions but it needs to be better coordinated. Greater strategic cooperation is needed between the Australian, state and territory governments and their agencies to ensure that initiatives complement and reinforce each other and that available resources are used in a targeted and focused manner.

The following components make up the core of the national action plan.

## 1. Improving the exposure of Indigenous contemporary music

### Issue

Indigenous contemporary music attracts large Indigenous audiences and a keen following amongst non-Indigenous domestic and international audiences, but systematic distribution mechanisms are not in place to build on this audience interest and demand.

### Goal

Focus efforts on improving touring circuits for Indigenous musicians across states and territories and between local communities, and on improving export opportunities. A more coordinated approach to both live performance and export development needs to be developed and aligned with the proposed Strategic Contemporary Music Industry Plan that is being developed by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA), working with the music industry.

### Action

- Develop a range of overlapping national touring circuits that link general performance and music venues, state and territory touring circuits and touring and music exchanges in local communities. This could include:
  - building on the work of existing performing arts touring coordinators in different states;
  - developing specific cross border circuits, such as an east coast circuit, encompassing Victoria, NSW and southern Queensland, and circuits across northern Australia from the Kimberley, northern NT and Cape York; and

- looking at innovative venues that might support Indigenous musicians more than mainstream venues, including micro-touring circuits between local communities, including remote ones.
- Coordinate initiatives to develop Indigenous music exports aligned with export market development under the proposed Strategic Contemporary Music Industry Plan. This would include developing international marketing strategies in conjunction with Austrade.
- Develop mechanisms to boost the broadcasting of Indigenous contemporary music content on Indigenous and community radio in Australia and overseas and review existing programs such as the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP) to ensure these programs are effectively showcasing Indigenous contemporary music. For example a program series, made available digitally, could be developed. Note: AMRAP is a community radio initiative that works with musicians and community broadcasters to increase radio airplay opportunities for contemporary Australian music.
- Promote greater use of Indigenous contemporary music content on the ABC, SBS and National Indigenous Television, particularly by encouraging the production of broadcast-quality material by organisations that are being funded by various governments to produce music.
- Establish a trial of small-scale quick response programs to support opportunities for exchanges, placements and travel and to provide seed funding for recording.
- Review existing programs supporting contemporary music touring to include specific support for Indigenous contemporary music touring, including at community level in remote areas.
- Consider the development of a “remoteness fund” which could support the costs of bringing musicians from remote locations for live performances.

## 2. Improving business skills in the Indigenous music sector

### Issue

In the Indigenous music sector, as with the broader music industry, there is a shortage of highly experienced producers, agents and managers. Expert business skills are required to help artists to survive and grow in the music industry. These skills are also highly transferable.

### Goal

Arts agencies should aim to work with the vocational education and training sector to enhance opportunities for structured training and certification for those involved in the Indigenous music industry. A particular focus could be training and mentoring for Indigenous people through industry partnerships in areas where real opportunities exist, such as logistical, production, recording and touring support roles in the mainstream music industry. Support in this area should be coordinated with the proposed Strategic Contemporary Music Industry Plan.

## Action

- Increase the availability of mentorships, exchanges and placements. This could be facilitated by developing workshops to link emerging practitioners in the sector with a mix of established Indigenous and non-Indigenous business and music managers and through formal mentoring programs.
- Create more business and management training opportunities in, for example, use of online and digital environments. This should involve enhanced collaboration with small business development and support agencies in each jurisdiction to develop packages specific to the Indigenous contemporary music sector.
- Work to ensure existing programs incorporate mentoring, training and succession planning to encourage local sustainability and continuity and a higher level of Indigenous employment.

## 3. Strengthening existing networks and organisations

### Issue

Networks amongst Indigenous contemporary music organisations and practitioners need to be strengthened and developed to promote better collection, storage and dissemination of corporate memory, experience and expertise. While some peak bodies have been set up to support the sector in various jurisdictions, the networks between organisations are not as developed as they are in the Indigenous visual arts sector.

### Goal

Enhance networks and coordination amongst Indigenous contemporary music organisations and practitioners. This could include identifying appropriate organisations which have the capacity to help build networks and collaborate across communities. Some community and independent music sector organisations are already playing an effective community development or coordination role around Indigenous music and they could be supported to enhance their roles. In addition, there may be opportunities to build music networks in other contexts by creating community development officer or coordinator positions.

### Action

- Strengthen existing networks and organisations in the Indigenous contemporary music sector by identifying and supporting positions within organisations which have the capacity to build networks and collaboration, including those that already play an Indigenous community development or coordination role based on music.
- Support projects which encourage the collecting, compiling and sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise on core activities. This would provide greater continuity and streamline tasks such as organising festivals, producing recordings for the internet and negotiating broadcast rights for events.
- Increase opportunities for industry networking by supporting the establishment or development of organisations, both at regional and intra-state level, which build links between those working in the Indigenous contemporary music sector.
- Encourage and support a greater level of collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous musicians through festivals, performances and recording projects to help share expertise and access to networks.

- Work closely with organisations, such as Regional Arts Australia, which focus on activities across state and territory boundaries and which have an interest in developing regional touring circuits and music workshops with Indigenous youth. This could involve developing awareness amongst regional organisations of the opportunities to apply for Regional Arts Fund strategic funds to support such activities.

## 4. Addressing shortages of facilities and equipment

### Issue

A shortage of infrastructure, such as venues, performing and recording facilities, equipment and touring circuits, is a major issue for the Indigenous contemporary music sector. In more remote parts of Australia, where Indigenous participation rates in music are higher, this shortfall is having a bigger impact and many opportunities are being lost as a result.

### Goal

Focus support around areas of existing achievement, where music or multimedia centres or festivals have developed due to specific local conditions.

### Action

Focus on well-established Indigenous cultural festivals in order to provide sound equipment, production facilities and related infrastructure needs with the aim of increasing the performance quality and quantity of live Indigenous contemporary music. This is likely to require liaison with government agencies responsible for industry development and infrastructure in each jurisdiction. It would also be valuable to encourage greater involvement by potential commercial partners.

## 5. Maximising opportunities for young and emerging Indigenous musicians

### Issue

Music education in schools can be a good way to engage Indigenous children and to help them build pathways and skills to get involved in making music. This will also result in wider social benefits, including:

- enhanced literacy and numeracy;
- improved school attendance and retention rates;
- gaining skills which can improve employability; and
- increasing the likelihood of continuing with further training.

Initiatives related to schools and education have generally only succeeded where there has been broad community support and motivated key people.

## Goal

Seek to increase the provision of music in schools and to strengthen the involvement of Indigenous students in music programs and classes. Enhance the interaction between communities and schools, making use of school resources and drawing on the resources of Indigenous communities. Encourage school-based workshops and live performances by established musicians as part of the development of touring circuits.

## Action

- Investigate ways that existing programs can encourage interaction between communities and schools around Indigenous contemporary music. This could involve encouraging and promoting emerging talent and live performances in schools and communities, song-writing competitions, concerts, workshops, recording sessions and online ventures. These activities could utilise Indigenous radio stations and possibly SBS or the ABC for online and on-air promotions and broadcasts. The ABC's *Triple J Unearthed* initiative is a good model of what can be achieved.
- Coordinate this activity closely with the proposed Strategic Contemporary Music Industry Plan.

## 6. Strengthening links between culture, language and Indigenous contemporary music

### Issue

In northern and central Australia in particular, music is preserving and transmitting Indigenous languages across generations. The fact that music attracts and engages so many young Indigenous people means it is an important force assisting the long-term survival of Indigenous languages.

Coupled with this, Indigenous music sung in language is raising awareness and appreciation of Indigenous languages in wider Australia. A successful musician such as Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, for example, has been able to make a significant impact on the contemporary music market, rating highly on the ARIA mainstream charts while singing almost exclusively in his first language, Yolgnu Matha.

### Goal

Support music activities which incorporate Indigenous languages and identify ways that arts agencies can include support for Indigenous languages in their arts and cultural activities. This would include the involvement of state and territory agencies which support Indigenous languages.

### Action

A first step could involve trialling changes to the Australian Government's Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records program to identify strategic projects which encompass both Indigenous contemporary music and Indigenous languages.

## 7. Targeting support to improve sustainability

### Issue

In many cases, existing support programs could be reaching a wider range of organisations and individuals involved in Indigenous contemporary music.

### Goal

Further develop clear application and reporting processes to better target government support to achieve a higher level of sustainability in the Indigenous contemporary music sector.

### Action

- Review current and future programs to streamline and develop information, administrative and application processes to better suit applicants from disadvantaged or remote communities.
- Introduce sessions linked to music industry expos, festivals and conferences to provide information about the support available to the Indigenous contemporary music sector. These sessions could also be used to get feedback from the sector to help refine and target existing support programs.
- Develop more systematic and coordinated resources to assist and inform the sector, including clear and straightforward standard legal documents such as contracts and 'how to' website kits.
- Produce a communications strategy at both Australian, state and territory government levels to effectively inform Indigenous contemporary music practitioners of available support.
- Coordinate an approach across jurisdictions to assist Indigenous contemporary music organisations and practitioners to understand and manage intellectual property issues better.

## 8. Enhancing income generation

### Issue

Indigenous contemporary music has the potential to generate significant income streams at all levels, even in remote communities, but currently this potential is often only being realised in an ad hoc and fragmented way.

New technologies for production, recording and distribution have improved opportunities to both produce and market music. Indigenous musicians increasingly use web-based and digital platforms such as MySpace and podcasts to create, promote and sell music. Skills developed in digital production, recording and distribution have a broad applicability and can be transferred to other online and digital technologies.

### Goal

Encourage strong and diverse cash flow streams. This should involve targeted support in those localities where Indigenous music offers job opportunities, particularly in support occupations, such as sound recording, logistics and touring.

## Action

- Provide support for quality production and recording of music events at top-tier, well-established Indigenous cultural festivals to enhance the potential for income generation, particularly through retail outlets such as ABC shops.
- Enhance links between Indigenous musicians and digital content producers, such as film makers, web designers and games producers, to raise awareness of the importance of so-called 360 degree commissioning opportunities, which involves content being more broadly repurposed to support a much wider range of formats. This should see Indigenous contemporary music being used more widely across mainstream films, games, websites and other forms of content, thereby broadening income streams to Indigenous composers, songwriters and musicians through royalties.
- Strengthen the provision of support and information about digital and online platforms to Indigenous contemporary music organisations and practitioners.
- Enhance technical support and assistance to enable Indigenous contemporary music organisations and practitioners to make effective use of new platforms for distribution and promotion, to increase their impact nationally and internationally and to improve income streams.
- Encourage links between the Indigenous contemporary music business sector and the Innovation Centres being developed as part of Australian Government election commitments, such as the Creative Industries Innovation Centre and the Centre for Regional Innovation and Competitiveness.
- Actively encourage registration of Indigenous musicians with the Australasian Performing Right Association.
- Increase prospects for artists' income by enhancing support for organisations or events that provide opportunities for performances of Indigenous contemporary music, such as regional and national festivals.
- Promote more broadcasting of Indigenous contemporary music on broadcasters such as the ABC and SBS to help broaden income streams from royalties.

## 9. Broadening philanthropic support

### Issue

To develop the Indigenous contemporary music sector, a range of partners need to be engaged: the music industry, government and communities. Broader industry groups, such as the mining and philanthropic sectors, also have a role to play in helping to broaden support for Indigenous contemporary music organisations, thereby contributing to greater sustainability.

### Goal

Develop a strategic approach to encourage and coordinate diverse partnerships, including the private and philanthropic sectors, governments (Australian, state, territory and local) and local communities.

### Action

Work more closely with ArtSupport Australia and the Australia Business Arts Foundation to ensure that support from government and the private sector is complementary.

## 10. Improving conservation and access

### Issue

Indigenous contemporary music needs to be collected in a more systematic way that identifies, records, stores and preserves culturally significant recordings.

### Goal

Make the experience and expertise of national, state and territory cultural and collecting institutions more available to the Indigenous contemporary music sector to ensure Indigenous contemporary music is collected and easily accessed by the public where appropriate.

### Action

In line with cultural protocols and copyright requirements, systematically conserve recordings and publications of Indigenous contemporary music and improve public access to these recordings, by developing joint projects between cultural institutions and music organisations in urban, regional and remote areas.

## 11. Improving data collection

### Issue

In common with the contemporary music industry generally, there is a lack of systematic data about the Indigenous contemporary music sector.

### Goal

Develop a more systematic body of data about the Indigenous contemporary music sector.

### Action

Building on the preliminary work undertaken by the Cultural Ministers Council Statistics Working Group and in line with the proposed Strategic Contemporary Music Industry Plan, establish as a priority analysis focused on the Indigenous contemporary music sector.

## 12. Building the policy profile of Indigenous contemporary music

### Issue

The development of the Indigenous contemporary music sector is to an extent dependent on broader social and economic progress taking place in Indigenous communities. The sector is also a powerful force for social and economic progress, as it encourages active engagement by so many people, particularly young people.

Involvement in music can foster:

- reduction in substance abuse;
- improved community health and cohesion;
- enhanced community pride in culture and young people;
- improved income streams from a range of related sources, such as royalties and cultural tourism.

## Goal

Seek to build the profile of music as a positive factor in helping to address social and economic disadvantage. An enhanced focus on the role of music in contributing to these broader strategies and outcomes could create greater opportunities for employment and income generation in the Indigenous contemporary music sector.

## Action

Coordinate initiatives under the national Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan with other initiatives being undertaken to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. The Cultural Ministers Council will seek engagement at Ministerial Council level on these broader matters and will report on progress.

# 13. Managing and reviewing the action plan

## Issue

To be effective the national Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan needs to have a long term commitment while maintaining the ability to be flexible and adaptive.

## Goal

Draw on existing findings about the issues facing the Indigenous contemporary music sector from various studies and consultations over the last 15 years. As the action plan develops and pilot components are implemented, ensure they are reviewed and the Indigenous contemporary music sector is consulted about progress in a coordinated manner.

## Action

Officials will develop an implementation plan, prioritise and monitor progress on pilot initiatives and report on the effectiveness of activities generally under the Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan over a three-year period to the Cultural Ministers Council.

# Possible pilot initiatives

The broad framework of the Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan should assist each jurisdiction to identify and develop pilot initiatives suitable for its own needs and situation. These can be progressed by that jurisdiction, either on its own or jointly with other jurisdictions as appropriate. Different jurisdictions may undertake more or fewer pilot initiatives, depending on their circumstances.

Pilot initiatives could include:

- 1. Increase Australian and international exposure to Indigenous music** by identifying and supporting the development of strategic international and domestic touring circuits, including urban venues and smaller scale circuits at community level in remote areas.
- 2. Improve business skills in the Indigenous music sector** by developing workshops to link emerging practitioners in the sector with established Indigenous and non-Indigenous business and music managers and follow up with mentoring.
- 3. Strengthen existing Indigenous contemporary music networks and organisations** by identifying organisations that play, or have strong potential to play, a community development or coordinating role in the music sector. Support the creation of community development or coordination positions within them.
- 4. Improve facilities and equipment infrastructure** by supporting well-established Indigenous cultural festivals to provide sound equipment, production facilities and related infrastructure, with the aim of increasing the quality and quantity of Indigenous contemporary music presented at festivals.
- 5. Enhance opportunities for Indigenous musicians in schools** through activities along the lines of the ABC's *Triple J Unearthed initiative*, focused on school bands and community-based bands, combined with school and community-based performance and song-writing competitions, concerts, workshops, recording sessions and online ventures. These activities could utilise Indigenous radio stations and possibly SBS or the ABC for online and on-air promotions and broadcasts.
- 6. Strengthen links between culture, language and Indigenous contemporary music** by trialling changes to the Australian Government's Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records program to identify strategic projects which encompass both Indigenous contemporary music and Indigenous languages and by involving state and territory agencies which support Indigenous languages.
- 7. Better target government programs to achieve a more sustainable sector** through streamlining and developing application processes to take into account the information needs of applicants from disadvantaged or remote communities and to encourage applications from new areas.
- 8. Enhance the potential for income generation** by providing support for quality production and recording of music events at top-tier, well-established Indigenous cultural festivals for retail distribution.

9. **Broaden philanthropic support of the Indigenous contemporary music sector** by working closely with ArtSupport Australia and with the Australia Business Arts Foundation.
10. **Improve the conservation of Indigenous contemporary music recordings and publications and improve public access to these** by developing joint projects between cultural institutions and strategic music organisations working in urban, regional and remote areas. This will increase the collection and accessibility of Indigenous contemporary music recordings and publications.
11. **Increase data collection on the sector** by establishing, as a priority of the Cultural Ministers Council Statistics Working Group, music industry analysis focused on Indigenous contemporary music.
12. **Build the profile of Indigenous contemporary music as a key part of broader Indigenous social and economic policy** through progress reporting on ministerial council agendas.
13. **Manage and review the action plan** by evaluating program outcomes and the progress of the pilot initiatives, and reporting to the Cultural Ministers Council annually.