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ISRC International Agency Bulletin 2006/03 Assigning Meaning to ISRC Elements

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The International ISRC Agency reminds users of the ISRC system that it is inappropriate and indeed unwise to attempt to infer anything from the individual elements of an ISRC.

ISRC is designed, constructed and operated as a “dumb number” – the individual elements that make up a full code are not intended to convey any meaning to a user of the code. Though it is tempting to make these inferences which will sometimes be valid, serious errors with business and financial consequences can result.

Where repertoire changes hands no new ISRC is assigned so assumptions can be very dangerous.

An ISRC is defined in the ISO document ISO 3901:2001 and is constructed of four elements:

Country code:	Country of registrant as two character ISO 3166 code	e.g. FR [i.e. France]
Registrant code:	Three character code assigned by national ISRC Agency	e.g. Z03
Year of reference:	Two digit year of allocation of ISRC	e.g. 97 [i.e. 1997]
Designation code:	Five digit serial number of recording	e.g. 00212

The Country Code indicates the country where the Registrant is based. This may be the country of the label allocating the ISRC but may be the country of an agent working on their behalf. It may be the location of the headquarters of a multinational company. It is not necessarily the country where the recording was made, where the artist is based or where royalties are collected. If repertoire has changed hands, it may bear no relation to any of the above.

The Registrant Code is the code of the original registrant. This may or may not be the current rights owner. If repertoire has changed hands it may very well not be.

The Year of Reference is the year in which the ISRC was assigned. It says nothing about the year of recording, first release in a particular territory or later re-release. It is most unwise to assume that it is the year of recording for the purpose of

IFPI Secretariat is the ISO appointed International Registration Authority
for the ISO International Standard ISO 3901: International Standard Recording Code

calculating copyright expiry as this will usually be inaccurate for historical recordings which have had an ISRC assigned quite recently. (Note: practice under an earlier version of the standard was to use the year of recording but this should no longer occur and in any case will be unreliable).

The elements of an ISRC are designed to ensure that no assigned ISRC is the same as any other assigned ISRC. That is all they do and to assume otherwise is hazardous.

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