**International ISRC Agency Bulletin 2013/03**

**Proposed Evolution of the ISRC Standard and System**

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The ISRC standard was last revised in 2001. Since that time it has served the music sector well but scheduled review by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) provides an opportunity to revise it. This document outlines

(i)       areas where the current standard does not take full advantage of technology that is now available,

(ii)      the process for revising the standard and

(iii)     the proposal of the International ISRC Agency for a revised standard.

**The Current ISRC Standard**

The current ISRC system was designed long before the Internet was available and therefore does not have a central database of assigned codes. This means that users assign their own codes using a prefix allocated to them – which does create a reasonable expectation of uniqueness.

However, other users are not able to find out the assigned codes if they want to use them and cannot find out what recording a code represents.

Also, there is no way to find out if a recording has previously had an ISRC assigned so multiple assignments are too common.

**ISRC Standard Revision at ISO**

The International ISRC Agency is recommending that ISO revise the ISRC standard. This will involve the creation of a working group of experts nominated by national standards bodies and interested organizations. These experts will start with a working draft provided by the International ISRC Agency and develop this into a draft that they all approve. This is then voted on by national standards bodies and, depending on the result of the vote, further revised until it is ready for publication.

**The International ISRC Agency's Proposal**

The proposal from the International ISRC Agency is the product of its experience running the ISRC system for many years. It also draws on detailed discussions with recording owners (both large and small), their representatives and service providers, ISRC users such as online services and the registration authorities of other standards. It further takes into consideration the identification recommendations of the Linked Content Coalition. These recommendations are widely respected.

The proposal is designed to deliver the benefit of the available technologies while causing as little disruption to users as possible. The code length and structure will not change – so little or no change to databases storing ISRC will be needed.

It is planned to introduce a registry that will store the ISRC together with just enough metadata to define the track – probably just the title, version title,

featured artist, duration and recording date. It will not store information about rights, ownership, genre or popularity for instance, but these important classes of data can be curated and made interoperable by others using the ISRC as a foundation. Only by being in the registry would an ISRC be valid under the new specification.

Existing ISRCs would not change and can be entered in to the registry. The registry would generate most new ISRCs – once the recording had been registered.

As an exception, some registrants with demonstrably effective policies to prevent duplication would be able to assign their own codes for a limited time even under the new system. Indeed, where countries already have systems in place that ensure that all recordings with ISRCs are registered, this would be allowed to run alongside the new system for a time provided the registry receives all assigned ISRCs and their reference metadata.

The existing network of national ISRC agencies would no longer allocate prefixes but there would be provision for local support and assistance in local languages. Existing ISRC Managers who assign ISRCs on behalf of their clients would be able to continue but would need to get their ISRCs from the central registry rather than assigning them in-house.

As well as allowing the registration of recordings, the registry would offer two further services: a resolution service would translate ISRCs into their metadata and a query service would return a list of ISRCs for tracks that match some search.

The current system is the least expensive media identifier system that has been standardized by ISO. A revised system with a registry will inevitably have higher operational costs reflecting the increased functionality. These will need to be recovered but the intention is to keep registration costs as low as possible so that getting an ISRC is not a significant part of the cost of creating music.

**Next Steps**

Comments on this proposal are welcome and should be sent to isrc@ifpi.org while anyone with the resources to participate in the formal working group should approach the relevant committee secretary of their national standards body to seek nomination.

Existing ISRC system users should continue to use the current system until a revision is complete and implemented. The codes that are assigned will be able to be registered later and should be used in the meantime.

Users should monitor the ISRC website at www.ifpi.org/isrc for updates and information.