

Music Council of Australia Annual Assembly 2011 Briefing Paper

DEVELOPING THE MCA'S STRATEGY FOR SUPPORT TO THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC INDUSTRY

Please refer also to the relevant section of the Annual Report

What contemporary music interests are represented among MCA Councillors?

What actions are needed in support of the industry?

What types of action are suitable for MCA?

Are there limitations on its actions?

What actions could we take?

What contemporary music interests are represented among MCA Councillors?

These interests are represented by virtue of continuing positions in the formal structure of the MCA.

- Artist management
- Broadcasting (community)
- Broadcasting (public)
- Contemporary music as a genre
- Country Music
- Creative industries
- Film and television
- Folk music
- Indigenous Music
- International promotion
- Jazz
- Legal and copyright
- Musicians' Union
- Publishing
- Record industry (independents)
- Record industry (prospectively ARIA via MIPI)
- Retailing
- Royalty collection (APRA)
- State music industry associations (AMIN)
- Venues or festivals
- World Music

In other words, the industry is very well represented among MCA Councillors. All are leaders in their particular spheres and many head industry associations.

What actions are needed?

We need to agree on the specifics and that can be a later discussion. But I just make some general points. Here is a pair:

- Responsive. Actions are needed where problems need solution. Obvious problem is monetising the internet, and there are associated sub-problems like, perhaps, updating copyright legislation, bringing the ISPs into a role that is positive for copyright owners, encouraging innovation by artists and managers etc.
- Pro-active. Actions are possible not to solve problems but to expand activities, possibilities.

Here is another pair:

- Persuasion. We can try to persuade others to act in our interests – usually, governments. Advantage: they use their resources and influence, which may be much larger than ours. Disadvantages: they will only do what they want to do; to the extent that we are dependent upon them, we can end up with a handful

of dust. Example: Contemporary Music Working Group worked for years but its activity was totally dependent on the Commonwealth, which never acted.

- Self-reliance. We can act in our own interests. Then we are in charge, we are not confined by the interests of governments, nor the decisions of others. Issues: Do we have the will? Can we actually cooperate in actions as well as talk? Can we find necessary resources? – can we contribute them?

What types of action are suitable for MCA?

Some general observations.

MCA is national. By and large it does not operate at state level. It respects the activities of state bodies like the state music councils.

MCA is across the whole music sector. It can play a much more holistic, coordinated role than any other music organisation. It can, for instance, play a more sophisticated and effective role in education than is likely to emerge just from the contemporary music sector. The sector can utilise that.

MCA has a track record in certain types of activity, as can be seen in part from the list of activities above, and even more so in other more mature areas such as education:

- Providing information which empowers others
- Doing research that strengthens advocacy
- Doing advocacy. It is pretty good at formulating advocacy and variable in the strength of delivery.
- Mounting projects. Success is to an extent dependent upon scale of resources.
- Partnering with other organisations to get better outcomes
- The MCA can bring a depth of analysis and invention to the sector.

Inappropriate. I have learned never to say never, but it seems to me extremely unlikely that MCA would take on activities such as large scale entrepreneurial activity like retailing, online sales or promotion, record production, festival production or generally any profit-making activity that is already well provided for.

Are there limitations on its actions?

Its own nature. Let us be clear about this. If the question had been asked ten years ago, great limitations would have been named that have since been overcome and forgotten. We can make of the organisation what we wish to, within reason.

In summary, I would say that its limitations are that there are types of action, as in the previous para, that seem inappropriate; that it has important resource limitations; that its management (e.g. me) has limitations of skill and understanding of the sector; that the effectiveness of the relevant Councillors (you) is untested in this context if active collaboration.

It lacks some credibility and status in the contemporary music sector. It began as an organisation largely concerned with the non-profit sector. Now it covers both, but it is still building effectiveness and reputation in the for-profit sector. My sense is that this problem would be quickly dispelled by effective action that is known to and felt by the sector.

The nature of the contemporary music sector:

- Various players have a poor history of cooperation, although this seems to have changed for the better in very recent years
- The interests of various subsectors are at odds
- Some subsectors are unwilling to share information that could be strategic – e.g. important publishers will not reveal basic financial information
- Some large organisations do their own advocacy, fight court battles etc. They cannot always be relied on to participate in sector-wide action. Their interests are not always consistent with the broad sectoral interest. They have resources but are often reluctant to share them.

- But on occasion, it suits the large organisations to work with a concerted approach organised by such as the MCA.

What actions could we take?

Depends on capabilities

It is important to note that if we take the view that the Councillors decide on the actions and then retire to let the management execute them, with present resourcing our actions will be limited. To be effective:

- a) Councillors will need to contribute energy or resources and/or
- b) Financial resources have to be found, perhaps including by Councillors, to pay for increased management capacity.
- c) By invitation, we can always increase the number of people working on our projects.

This Councillor group should decide on how MCA work in the contemporary industry area is to be organised.

Overseas exemplars

UK Music demonstrates a capability for advocacy beyond ours. This appears to depend to a great extent on the high level energy, commitment and confidence of Feargal Sharkey. We appear not to have a Feargal Sharkey. How could we organise to achieve similar outcomes by different means? (Impressive though it is, UK Music does not excel MCA in all spheres.)

The UK's Music Tank. It is university-based and offers workshops that explore the front edge of problem areas. A very interesting program. We have the opportunity to work with the QUT CRC to increase our research, but need to be able to a) devise a research program and b) contribute more funds than MCA is currently committed to.

Musical Futures Coalition, USA (Washington DC).

Possible specific actions:

- ***Continue the present successful practices in information, research, advocacy and projects.*** See above.
- ***Monetising the internet*** (forever and ever...). MCA has a consultant to put together a collection of reports of best practice. This lets us know what is happening now as a basis for speculating about possible strategies for the future.
Since the Attorney General has called a meeting between the copyright industry (ACIG) and the ISPs for September 23, there could be a new basis for forward movement.
The current report from the NBN inquiry also shows interest in that matter. MCA lacks a strategy that goes beyond the provision of information. It would be highly desirable that this group develops a strategy. It has a basis in the 2009 think tanks but the follow-through from them was inadequate and the situation needs to be updated. We could possibly begin by organising another set of think tanks.
- ***Local content on radio.*** This is an area that MCA has been involved in for many years. There is big unfinished business. Please see APPENDIX 1 for a summary of the situation.
- ***National Cultural Policy.*** Ensure appropriate attention is paid to the music industry, including as an important element of the creative industries. Develop a policy position by the time of the deadline in October. I will call for your ideas

either as a group or individually. The MCA has a good presence and reputation in Crean's office.

Include in the proposals a new attempt to get government support for the Investing in Emerging Musicians project.

- **Generation of music sector statistics.** This has long been a high priority for the industry and a low priority for the government. It is possibly an activity of the QUT CRC but that will give us only a one-off outcome. What is important is a routine of updating and only the government has the resources for that, and the status to oblige responses. An advocacy task.
- **Music exports.** This is a winning topic with government. From my understanding, there is scope for
 - A comprehensive export strategy
 - Upskilling Australian managements
 - Using export successes as bases for lifting standards and innovation in Australia
 - Involving governments in active support. This would include increased support to activities that have already proved their effectiveness such as Sounds Australia.
 - The Commonwealth could 'join the dots', as Crean likes to say: for instance, so that if it is supporting overseas presentation of music for trade or diplomatic reasons, it is tied in with the general career building and marketing objectives of those artists and the industry.
- **Music tourism.** In our phone conference, you noted that UK Music has caused a statistical survey of music tourism in the UK.

It occurs to me that such a survey in Australia could kick off an immensely constructive exercise. Some reasons and possibilities:

- A survey would quantify important activity for the first time. Even though we would not be drawing international music tourists in the numbers seen in the UK, there would be a lot of domestic travel to festivals so from the outset there would be a demonstration of the potential.
- The survey could lay the basis for building music tourism.
- Because of the economic actuals and potentials, a successful music tourism activity would elevate the importance of music, especially if we can build international tourism (exports).
- It would draw attention to quality music and quality presentations and could give support for cultural considerations; it ups the ante.
- It might make it possible to argue more effectively for support for infrastructure, education and so on.
- It could support exports of recordings and performances.
- There would be a new type of opportunity for tour organisers, with, possibly, specialists in music touring.
- Such organisers could over time build an international clientele. Or perhaps they would work best internationally.
- We could involve national and state tourist authorities to assist in the promotions.
- We could envisage venues and managements giving support.
- We should include all genres.

We would need to develop a strategy and figure out an appropriate role for us collectively through MCA and perhaps for some of your individual organisations.

- **Other ideas.** Please throw in your own ideas for discussion.

- *Richard Letts*