

International ISRC Agency Report 2011

ISO 3901:2001 - International Standard Recording Code (ISRC)

Since the ISO TC 46 / SC 9 meeting in May 2010 in Korea, the International ISRC Agency has continued to meet its obligations under ISO 3901:2001.

Management of International ISRC Agency

The management of the International ISRC Agency remains with a contractor who is responsible to IFPI. These arrangements have worked well and the support from the staff of IFPI in London and the Recording Industry Association of America (which acts as the National ISRC Agency for the US) has been excellent.

Success and Implementation of ISRC

ISRC implementation continues to grow as online music retailers insist on the provision of an ISRC with music that they accept for sale.

This growth is reflected in the increased demand for Registrant Codes (see US situation below) and growing awareness of the ISRC system amongst potential users.

Liaison Activities

The International ISRC Agency is, formally or informally, often asked to participate in other development processes where these affect, or are affected by, identifiers for recorded music. In particular, there has been considerable contact with Digital Data Exchange (DDEX) which is a consortium standards setting organization and specifies messaging technologies for the music supply chain. ISRC plays an important role in these messages. Discussions have been held with the International DOI Foundation (the prospective Registration Authority for the ISO Digital Object Identifier specification about configuring a revised ISRC as a DOI. Finally, a major presentation about music identifiers was made at the South By South West (SXSW) festival in Austin, Texas, USA.

Registrant Code Exhaustion

The ISRC system is not very efficient in the way it allocates a Registrant Code of the same type to small and large users. Small users then use only a small fraction of the codes theoretically available to them. In the US this has resulted in the exhaustion of the available registrant codes associated with the “US” country code. This situation was resolved by the US National ISRC Agency in close consultation with the International ISRC Agency and stakeholders. The country code “QM” is designated a user assigned code element by the ISO 3166 maintenance agency and will never be assigned to a country. New ISRC Registrant Codes in the US are now allocated for use with the QM country code.

This move has been well understood by end users but it did uncover that at least one music aggregator was validating the ISRCs it received against a list of valid country codes. This process has long been recommended by the International ISRC Agency which was not aware that the recommendation had been implemented! A rapid software change by the aggregator in question has resolved the issue but indicated the need for better communication.

Revision of ISO3901

A great deal of effort has been contributed by stakeholders to an informal working group to recommend a way of revising ISO3901 to address the shortcomings that have been identified in the system.

The requirements for a new system are now well understood and a proposal for the structure of a change has been agreed. This proposal ensures that disruption to the business processes of users is minimized and the transition to a new system is smooth.

A New Work Item Proposal has now been submitted to SC9 for ballot and a candidate working draft for a new standard accompanies the proposal.

New RA Contract

A revised standard will document the appointment of a Registration Authority and it is being taken as a working assumption that IFPI will remain the RA for ISO 3901 as the obvious international non-profit representative of holders of rights in sound recordings. However there is great concern that the contractual terms being required by ISO for Registration Authorities are onerous and difficult or impossible for candidates to accept. Although no discussions have taken place with the ISO legal team, early indications from other recently appointed bodies are disturbing.

National ISRC Agencies

The network of National ISRC Agencies continues to deliver services to ISRC system users. Where these are delivered on a cost recovery basis, the costs are often noted as being the lowest in the media identification world, and many agencies fully absorb the costs of providing this service.

Appointment of new ISRC Agencies

In accordance with the policy established some years ago, no new agencies have been appointed, pending the expected revision of the standard.

Territories without an ISRC Agency are served direct from IFPI in London and this arrangement works well in the allocation of Registrant Codes and the occasional appointment of “ISRC Managers” who are authorized to assign ISRCs on behalf of their clients (this privilege normally being restricted to the rights owners themselves).

China

The International ISRC Agency has held extensive discussions with the relevant authorities in China to work towards the convergence of the national system for the identification of sound recordings in China and the international system based on ISRC. The International ISRC Agency expects to make an exception to the hiatus in the appointment of new national ISRC agencies to guide China’s implementation of ISRC and the transition to the envisaged revised system.

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2011-04-19