

AM:JF

12 December 1975

Mr. Antony Jeffrey,  
Director, Music Board,  
Australia Council,  
P.O. Box 302,  
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2060

Dear Mr. Jeffrey,

I am writing to you at the suggestion of the Chairman of your Board, Mr. Ken Tribe, whom I met 2 weeks ago at the lunch-hour meeting you kindly arranged. I have also discussed the substance of this letter with the Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Dr. Peter Ucko.

On Friday 28 November, I talked to Mr. Tribe about the need for communication between your Board and this Institute on the matter of funded fieldwork among Aborigines.

My reasons for raising this subject are as follows: once or twice recently visits have been made to north Australian localities by two fieldworkers, one funded through your Board, the other by this Institute. In at least one such instance the visits have coincided; on other occasions visits to the same settlement have been made first by one individual then by another, allowing little time for respite in between.

"Overlapping" of either kind is avoided, as a matter of principle, by this Institute. Many of our members know from experience that field work can disturb the daily routine of an Aboriginal settlement and that overlapping, or double-banking of fieldworkers' visits is rarely in the best interests of the Aboriginal people concerned. Moreover, the presence in the same locality of another field worker with a tape recorder may necessitate major adjustments to a funded field project, even a curtailment of some of it, a situation which would be viewed with concern and as a waste of funds by the Council of this Institute.

.../2



The staff position of 'Research Co-ordinator' has recently been established at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and expressly to avoid occurrences of this kind. As you will know, the Institute's areas of interest are wide: in addition to music and dance (including filming), field work is currently being carried out in anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, ecology, human biology, psychology and material culture.

As critical as its timing, is the nature of a fieldworker's visit. For instance this Institute does not encourage short 'touristic' visits to Aboriginal settlements by young music students with tape-recorders and cameras. Published articles based on excursions of this kind may reflect a collector's enthusiasm but rarely do they provide impetus to scholarly research.

Fieldworkers sponsored by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies must fulfil a number of conditions all of which are plainly stated in an application form. Each application for funded fieldwork is considered first by the relevant Advisory Committee - in the case of Aboriginal music and dance this is the Ethnomusicology Advisory Committee, - then by the Council of the Institute. At the conclusion of each term of fieldwork, a report from individual fieldworkers is required, a summary of it published in the Institute's Newsletter, and collected tape recordings of Aboriginal music deposited in the Institute's Sound Archive.

Information as to the nature and objectives of the fieldwork funded by this Institute are thus widely circulated; music recorded on tape is listed and catalogued; and tapes preserved under the best conditions possible.

Members of various Aboriginal communities now know of facilities available to them at this Institute. If they request it, tape copies of their own material are sent to them. Currently a number of Aboriginal men and women are recording their own songs, stories and language samples and depositing them in the Sound Archive for preservation and for the information of succeeding generations of Aborigines.

Copies of all incoming tapes are sent from here to the National Library thus doubly ensuring their safe-keeping. Tape copies are available for research and educational purposes but only from this Institute and according to the preferred 'options' of each individual collector.



We should be glad to have the views of members of your Board in regard to the prevention of overlapping of funded fieldwork. We should also like to invite field collectors who have made recordings of Australian Aboriginal music under your Board's sponsorship, to deposit their tapes for Archival preservation with this Institute. Subsequently, copies of the same material will be deposited with the National Library, a procedure which will take place from here and as a matter of course.

You and members of your Board will appreciate that Aboriginal music is a vital and sensitive area within the totality of Aboriginal culture in so far as we know it. We feel that your co-operation in regard to both matters raised above, to fieldwork 'overlap' and to depositing tapes for preservation, is necessary and urgent.

Yours sincerely,

Alice M. Moyle  
Research Officer, Ethnomusicology