

21 October 1977

Mr Patrick Saul, Director
British Institute of Recorded
Sound
29 Exhibition Road
LONDON SW7
U.K.

Dear Mr Saul

Several reports have reached us recently regarding the cylinder recordings made during the Cambridge Expedition to Torres Strait at the end of the last century. Inevitably there will have been some deterioration of these recordings in the 80 odd years of their existence and we are anxious to know whether any plans for their transfer to tape have yet been made. I am sure you will agree that it is time steps were taken to preserve their recorded contents.

I had hoped to discuss this matter with you in Mainz last month and was disappointed to find that you were unable to attend the IASA meeting.

By now you will have heard of the Edison centenary sessions at Mainz and especially of the impressive contributions made by Wilfried Zahn of the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Frankfurt/M. I was able to talk to Zahn about the possibility of having some of our Australian cylinders transferred to tape and he seemed very interested and keen to do this for us.

Depending on your own views on the subject, and on the accessibility of the Torres Strait cylinders, I am wondering whether it would be possible to have this valuable material transferred to tape by Zahn at Frankfurt. I have already mentioned this as a possibility to Dr Peter Ucko, Principal of this Institute, and there seems to be little doubt that the IAS would be able to contribute to the cost of this project if you were able to supervise it for us from London.

As I understand it the costs would include packing, transit to and from Frankfurt by air, and tape for the transfer. I believe Zahn would do the job as part of his normal research routine, but the approval of his superior, Dr Harald Heckmann of the Rundfunkarchiv, would of course first have to be sought.

Page 2
21 October 1977
Mr Patrick Saul

Should you wish to enquire further into the techniques of transfer developed by Zahn, I am sure Lloyd Stickells of the Imperial War Museum will be able to inform you in detail. He, as you will know, attended the IASA meetings, too. In so far as my own understanding of the process goes Zahn used light-weight modern cartridges and - to use his own words - "a lot of electronics". If he made any transfers for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies he would, he assured me, send us the tapes. I do not think there would be any difficulty after that in our supplying copies of the tapes for research and archival purposes to interested persons and other institutions. The cylinders would of course, be returned to whoever is in charge of them at the present time.

I would be very interested to hear from you whether you regard these suggestions as feasible, and if so, whether you would be prepared to help us in their implementation.

Yours sincerely

Alice M. Moyle
Research Officer, Ethnomusicology

jgt