

Assigning an ISRC Compliance Rules

1 Background

This document (“Assigning an ISRC – Compliance Rules – Version 1.0”) is published by the International ISRC Agency acting as the registration authority for the International Standard ISO 3901:2001 International Standard Recording Code (ISRC). It specifies the detailed implementation of the standard, as regards the assignment of ISRC to recordings.

This document updates and replaces some of the guidance given in the ISRC Handbook (3rd Edition) and various ISRC Bulletins. The withdrawn clauses and documents are listed in Annex A.

2 Compliance

Although the use of the ISRC system is itself voluntary, compliance with the standards and associated documents issued by the International ISRC Agency is required to enable effective implementation of the standard so that it can benefit all users.

This document sets out the rules under which ISRCs are to be assigned to recordings.

The terms “shall”, “should” and “may” are used here in the following sense:

“Shall” is used to indicate behaviour that is required for overall compliance with the standard.

“Should” is used to indicate behaviour that is strongly recommended (based on the experience of the International ISRC Agency) to ensure effective implementation of the standard.

“May” is used to indicate that compliance is optional and the user should consider carefully how to implement the standard.

The ISRC assignment rules set out within this document may be updated when necessary, for example to take into account developments in recording technology or practice. The latest version will be available for download from the International ISRC Agency website at <http://isrc.ifpi.org>.

3 The scope of ISRC

An ISRC shall be assigned to only audio recordings and music video recordings. These are here referred to together as “recordings”.

3.1 Audio Recordings

Audio recordings include audio-only music recordings, spoken word recordings and ambient recordings (including wildlife recordings). A more detailed explanation of audio recordings appears at Annex B.

3.2 Music Video Recordings

Music video recordings are defined as audiovisual recordings where the audio component is wholly or substantially a music recording. This includes short form music videos and concert recordings. A more detailed explanation of music video recordings appears at Annex C.

4 Principles of ISRC assignment

A recording to which an ISRC is to be assigned shall have exactly one ISRC.

A recording to which an ISRC has been assigned shall not have another ISRC assigned to it, even if ownership changes or it is licensed.

An ISRC that has been assigned to a recording shall never be re-assigned to another different recording.

The use of a 'Country Code' element, a 'Registrant Code' and a 'Year of Reference' within an ISRC are solely a means to uniquely construct the ISRC, and have no further significance¹.

5 Should an ISRC be assigned?

An ISRC shall be assigned to a recording if the owner intends to exploit it, or believes that it may be exploited in the future. Exploitation does not necessarily imply monetary value but may involve reputation, promotion or exposure.

If an ISRC is assigned, the assignment shall be in compliance with the provisions of the International Standard and the rules in this document, together with other rules that the International ISRC Agency publishes.

Where there is no expectation of future exploitation, an owner may elect not to assign an ISRC but should note that owners of other rights used in the recording may regard the uses to which it is put as "exploitation" and may accordingly need to track use.

¹ Details about how to construct ISRC appear at <http://isrc.ifpi.org/isrc-standard/structure>. Once an ISRC is constructed and assigned to a recording, the elements of the code shall not be understood other than as components of an assigned ISRC. In particular the code elements shall not be taken to have significance regarding a right holder or year of publication.

6 Who may assign an ISRC?

An ISRC shall be assigned only by the current owner of a recording. The “owner” shall be understood to be the owner of the rights in the recording or a long-term exclusive licensee of a recording. The party assigning an ISRC is known as the “registrant” and assigns ISRC using a “registrant code²”.

Except as noted in Annex D and Annex E, no other party shall assign an ISRC. In particular, a party receiving a recording for retailing, distribution, streaming, broadcast etc., shall not assign an ISRC but shall use the ISRC that was assigned by the owner. Further, a party acquiring the rights in a recording shall not assign an ISRC unless it is sure that the previous owner did not assign an ISRC.

7 When should a new ISRC be assigned?

The International Standard states that ISRC shall be assigned when the “full mastering process for the recording is finalised”. That practice originated when recordings were released only on vinyl, tape or CD, and remains acceptable.

An ISRC may now be provisionally assigned before mastering.

Practicalities of project management may require ISRC to be provisionally assigned in anticipation of a completed mix. Allowing an ISRC to be associated with a recording as it completes its substantive production stages is acceptable and can have benefits for the continuity of other information such as data about performer line-up and other contributors. Such assignment of ISRC becomes secure only upon completion of a final mix, since full details of title, contributors to that mix, duration etc., may not be fully known prior to this point.

It is recommended that registrants should not communicate an ISRC for an unfinished recording outside the production process, particularly if it is associated with metadata that may change before release or if several different mixes are subsequently produced. If different mixes are created, then distinct ISRCs should be assigned as described within this document.

A recording that is releasable (i.e. it is mixed and mastered) but is not in fact released may be assigned an ISRC. The ISRC shall be associated with the recording as it stored and, in order to avoid multiple ISRC assignment it shall be used in future exploitation of that recording, i.e. if that recording is later released.

8 When is a new ISRC required?

Recordings that are identical shall be identified by the same ISRC. Recordings that are completely different shall be identified by different ISRCs. Between

² Details about becoming an ISRC Registrant are available at <http://isrc.ifpi.org/get-isrc/apply-now>.

these two extremes are many subtle cases that require careful handling. Consistency between registrants in treatment of these cases contributes to the overall integrity of the ISRC system.

A key principle to be applied is to determine whether the new recording differs from the old because of different creative input. If creative input is responsible for the difference then a new ISRC is required. In some circumstances there can be fine degrees by which recordings differ: Subjectivity and judgement can come into play. The following sections consider by example cases when a new ISRC shall or shall not be assigned.

9 New ISRC never required

A new ISRC shall never be assigned in the following circumstances:

9.1 A recording is encoded using a different technology

ISRC identifies the recording not the encoding of the recording so the same recording encoded with (say) MP3 and AAC technologies shall carry the same ISRC. Similarly a music video recording encoded with (say) H.264 and VP8 technologies shall carry the same ISRC.

9.2 A high-resolution version of a recording is created

Subject to the rules below on re-mastering, a high-resolution (say 96kHz/24bit) version of a recording is the same recording as a standard resolution (say 44.1kHz/16bit) version. These versions shall carry the same ISRC.

9.3 A version for a different business model is created

The recording is the same whether it is sold, licensed, streamed or broadcast. All these versions shall carry the same ISRC.

9.4 A compilation is created

Where the recording is reused on a compilation without change, re-mixing or re-mastering, the same ISRC shall be used.

Where the recording is re-mastered for use on the compilation, normally no new ISRC is required but the rules in this document shall be used to determine whether creative input means a new ISRC is required.

Where the recording length is altered on the compilation, the procedure in this document shall be followed.

9.5 A recording is licensed from a third party with its ISRC

Where a recording is licensed from a third party and an ISRC is provided, that code shall continue to be used without alteration to refer to the recording.

10 New ISRC always required

A new ISRC shall always be assigned in the following circumstances:

10.1 A live version of a studio recording is released

The live recording is completely different from the studio version and a new ISRC is required.

10.2 A pre-release version is created for promotional purposes

If the pre-release version is different from the final release and it is to be used outside the registrant's control, a new ISRC shall be assigned. The rules in this document on re-mastering shall be used to determine whether the recording differs from the final release.

10.3 Different versions are created using different studio 'takes'

Different versions or recordings or mixes require different ISRCs. Different 'takes' are different recordings, even if all the personnel are the same. A new ISRC shall be assigned.

10.4 An edited version is created

A version that is edited, for example to mute or replace profanities, shall be assigned a new ISRC.

10.5 A 'cover version' is created

A 'cover' is a different recording of a musical work, by different artists. The cover version is completely different from the existing recording and a new ISRC is required.

10.6 A music video is created

A music video is always different from an audio recording and it shall not be identified by the ISRC of the audio recording on which it is based. Even if the soundtrack of a video has an ISRC assigned because it is to be exploited separately, a new ISRC shall be assigned to the video.

The metadata record for the video created by the registrant should note the ISRC of the audio recording on which the video is based.

10.7 Different music video versions are created

If different versions of a music video contain either different video content or different audio content (in accordance with the rules in this document), then different ISRCs shall be assigned to them.

10.8 A remixed version of a recording is created

A remixed version of a recording will differ from the original and hence it shall be assigned a new ISRC.

10.9 A different version is created by adding further tracks to a recording

When instruments or vocal performances are added to a recording, this will result in a different version, hence a new ISRC shall be assigned.

10.10 An extended (“12 inch”) version is created

The extended version is a different recording and a new ISRC shall be assigned.

10.11 A clip is taken from the recording for promotional use or as a ring-tone

The clip is a different recording and a new ISRC shall be assigned.

Registrant may elect not to assign separate ISRCs to each clip or ring tone generated only if the metadata they store and communicate to others is unambiguously clear that each clip is taken from a recording with a specified ISRC (rather than being the recording identified with that ISRC).

10.12 An interlude, skit or interview is created

These are all different recordings and each shall be assigned a new ISRC.

10.13 A callout is created

If the callout (a clip from a recording which includes the “hook”) may be exploited separately (rather than just being used within the recording), an ISRC shall be assigned.

10.14 Stems, soloed tracks or other components are created for release

A “stem” is created when one or more tracks from an original multi-track recording are used to create an intermediate recording that is intended for further combination into a finished mix. When such a stem is intended for release independent of the finished mix it shall be assigned an ISRC.

A version of a track where the vocal (or other element) has been suppressed shall also be assigned a new ISRC if it is intended for release.

Where a stem is created as a normal part of the production process without an intention to release it separately, no ISRC should be assigned.

Stems provided for the film sound process, may result in recordings that might themselves need to be identified using ISRC.

11 Circumstances determine whether a new ISRC is required

In the following circumstances, the registrant shall determine whether or not a new ISRC is required according to the rules presented.

11.1 A re-mastered version of a recording is created

Re-mastering is a broad term that covers many different processes. A new ISRC shall be assigned if (and only if) the processes applied to a recording during re-mastering involve the application of creative input to the recording itself. The following processes do not involve creative input for the purposes of ISRC assignment:

- simple level change
- equalisation applied to a whole recording without variation
- compression applied to a whole recording without variation
- digital signal processing including de-noising, de-clicking, speed or pitch correction, sample rate change, dithering etc., where the manually controlled parameters are invariant across the whole recording

A new ISRC shall not be assigned in the context of essentially invariant or technological adjustment processes.

11.2 The length of a recording is altered

The length of a recording is sometimes a useful tool to determine whether two recordings are the same or not. However, sometimes this can create misleading results. Additionally, calculation of the length of a recording can be uncertain. The playing time of an encoded digital file is clear but this can include arbitrary amounts of silence or ambient sound before and after the recording itself. The following rules shall apply:

- Where recording has been edited to remove or add sections such as verses or choruses, a new ISRC shall be assigned.
- Where the recording has been edited to change its length in a way that does not substantively affect the creative input (such as changes to the speed or changes to the fade-out) then a new ISRC shall not be assigned if the difference in recording length is less than 10 seconds; otherwise a new ISRC shall be assigned.
- Where a recording has been edited to remove or add only parts that do not involve creative input (such a silence, ambience or applause) with a resulting change in the recording length, a new ISRC shall not be assigned.

12 ISRC never appropriate

An ISRC shall never be assigned in the following circumstances:

12.1 Identified entity is not a recording

An ISRC shall never be assigned to anything other than an audio recording or a music video recording. For example, an ISRC shall not be assigned to a 'wallpaper image', or to an item of merchandise, or to a book.

12.2 Identified entity contains recordings

A CD or an MP3 file is not a recording, though it can contain recordings. A CD or MP3 file shall not have an ISRC assigned to it. A recording carried on a CD or in an MP3 file shall have an ISRC assigned, and the carrier shall (when technically feasible) include the ISRC of each recording that it contains.

12.3 Identified entity is a MIDI file or polyphonic ring tone

Because a MIDI file is not an audio recording or a music video recording, an ISRC shall not be assigned to such a file.

13 Recovering from errors

It is recognised that occasionally errors will occur and it is responsibility of all affected parties to work to correct or at least mitigate the error.

13.1 Minor procedural errors

If the ISRC assigned has minor procedural errors but no risk exists of impacting other repertoire or right holders, the parties should learn from the error but not seek to correct it. For example, if the wrong year of reference is used, but this does not impact any other validly assigned ISRC, the ISRC should be retained.

It shall be the responsibility of the registrant to check that no risk of impacting other repertoire or right holders has been created.

13.2 Single recording assigned more than one ISRC

Where more than one ISRC has been assigned to a recording, the registrant shall select one and use it as the preferred ISRC. The other ISRC(s) shall be noted in the registrant's internal records and not used for future releases. Business partners shall be informed of the error and steps taken to mitigate the potential for further error. It is noted that it is not realistic to withdraw physical or digital stock. Where repertoire databases exist and can accept registrations, such ISRCs shall be registered as such and linked to the preferred ISRC.

13.3 Single ISRC assigned to more than one recording

Where an error has led to the same ISRC being assigned to more than one recording, generally an attempt should be made, if possible, to resolve this in favour of correctly assigned ISRCs. It is noted that it is not realistic to withdraw physical or digital stock. A new ISRC shall be assigned to one or both recordings,

and used for future releases. Erroneous ISRCs shall be noted in the registrant's internal records. Business partners shall be informed of the error and the steps taken to mitigate the potential for further error. The National ISRC Agency or International ISRC Agency should be contacted for further advice.

13.4 Errors affecting other registrants

Errors can affect other registrants that have acted in accordance with the rules. Examples include the use of the wrong registrant code or the wrong country code. If this happens, the registrant shall contact their National ISRC Agency for advice. If the National ISRC Agency needs to coordinate with other National ISRC Agencies, it shall do this through the International ISRC Agency, which will coordinate efforts. Where possible, the approach taken by ISRC Agencies shall be to minimise the impact on correctly assigned ISRCs.

14 Particular situations

The following situations give rise to specific compliance rules.

14.1 Compound recordings

Some recordings are compounds in that parts of them may be exploited separately as well the whole. Examples are classical works and concert videos.

Where both the whole and the parts of a recording may be exploited separately, an ISRC shall be assigned to each part and another ISRC to the whole.

The metadata records created by the registrant for the separate parts should note the ISRC of the compound recording from which it was taken.

14.2 Spoken word recordings

Spoken word recordings such as lectures, language training materials and audiobooks are audio recordings and may have ISRCs assigned to them in exactly the same way as recordings of music.

Registrant should note that the ISRC for a spoken word recording is not intended to replace the assignment of an International Standard Book Number (ISBN). Whereas an ISBN identifies the product, the ISRC identifies the recording that is embodied in that product, regardless of the format on which it is used.

One ISRC shall be assigned to each of the smallest units of content into which a whole recording is divided. This will be a chapter or a CD track in most instances.

Registrants should store appropriate metadata for each assigned ISRC.

14.3 Ambient recordings

Recordings of sound effects, wildlife, streetscapes, steam trains etc., are audio recordings and may have ISRCs assigned to them in exactly the same way as recordings of music.

Registrants should store appropriate metadata for each assigned ISRC. Many existing standards such as DDEX have defined terms such as 'main artist' to mean a performing artist rather than a sound recordist, and so care may need to be taken with regard to the mapping of metadata associated with ambient recordings.

14.4 Music mixed by DJs

Some recordings involve a DJ remixing other recordings. Where a DJ mixes several original recordings to create a composite recording that is then issued, a new ISRC shall be assigned to the whole composite recording. The metadata records created by the registrant of the composite recording should itemise the ISRC of the original recordings from which it was created.

14.5 Surround sound recordings

A multi-channel recording shall have a different ISRC from a stereo recording produced from the same masters.

Some equipment allows automated mix-down (creation of stereo from surround) or mix-up (creation of surround effect from stereo). Neither process involves the creation of a new recording and no new ISRC shall be assigned, even if the instructions to mix up or down are associated with the recording (as is the case with DVD-Audio for instance).

14.6 Split ownership

Where ownership of a recording is divided in any way, the co-owners shall agree on which of them is to assign an ISRC to the recording and that party shall inform the others of the assigned code.

It should be noted that assignment of an ISRC does not affect ownership in any way and the use of a particular registrant code in an ISRC does not imply that the assigning party owns the recording, or that royalties are to be paid to them.

Annex A – Documents withdrawn by this publication

This document (Assigning an ISRC – Compliance Rules – Version 1.0) replaces the following clauses and documents, which are withdrawn:

- ISRC Handbook 3rd Edition, Clauses:
 - 3.2
 - 4.1.1
 - 4.1.2
 - 4.1.3
 - 4.1.4
 - 4.4
 - 4.5
 - 4.7
 - 4.9
- ISRC Bulletin 2008-02 ISRC Assignment to Spoken Word Recordings
- ISRC Bulletin 2010-03 Assigning ISRC To Music Mixed By DJs

For the avoidance of doubt, if there is any conflict between different sources of information about ISRC assignment, this document shall be considered as being authoritative.

Annex B - The definition of a recording

The entity to which an ISRC is assigned is a recording. A recording is considered by the International ISRC Agency to be an expression as defined by the <indecs>³ project.

A recording can be understood as the thing that the listener or viewer experiences. It is independent of the encoding of the recording (for instance as an analogue waveform or digital bit-stream) and independent of the product in which the recording is included.

14.7 The relationship between a musical work and a recording

Musical works (songs) and recordings are distinct categories of copyrightable entity, and they are identified by distinct identifiers. The relationship between these is illustrated in Figure 1.

³ The final report of the <indecs> project can be found at http://www.doi.org/topics/indecs/indecs_framework_2000.pdf. Although dating from 2000, the indecs project is the underpinning of ISRC and several other media metadata systems.

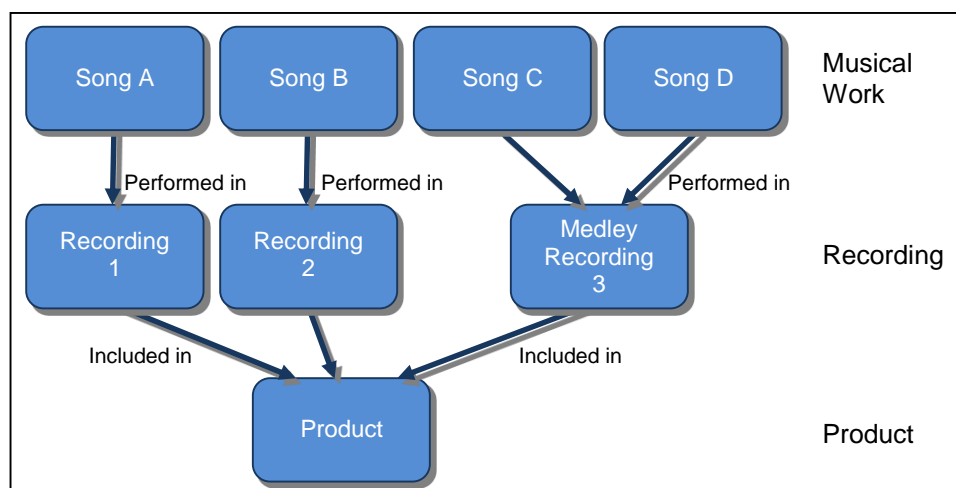


Figure 1 - Relationships

Musical works are identified with the International Standard Musical Work Code (ISWC). A recording is identified with ISRC. A musical work may be recorded once or many times as different recordings, and each distinct recording would have its distinct ISRC. A number of musical works can be combined in one recording, such as a medley.

Annex C - The definition of a music video recording

A music video recording is a sound recording that is wholly or substantially of a musical performance, that is synchronised with moving pictures.

For the purposes of ISRC assignment, it is not necessary that the visual component of a music video recording contain movement: only that the recording comprises a visual component. An audiovisual recording with a slide show or even an unchanging image shall be assigned ISRC in a manner consistent with music video recordings.

A file containing an audio recording and a picture (for example as a tag) shall not be considered as containing a music video recording, because the audio and picture is not synchronised.

Except as noted in the paragraph below, other audiovisual recordings are not music video recordings and shall not be identified with an ISRC. Identifiers as such the International Standard Audiovisual Number – ISAN – are available for these recordings.

Some products or formats such as long-form recordings of musical concerts and music documentaries may comprise mainly music video recordings, along with additional recorded elements such as spoken segments or interviews. In such circumstances, assignment of ISRC to the non-musical audiovisual elements is permitted and this approach may give greater consistency of identification across all elements of the recording.

Annex D – Third-Party Assignment of ISRC

Circumstances may occasionally occur in which a party obtains a recording under license, and whereby the licensing party is unable or unwilling to provide an ISRC. There has been a procedure for dealing with this situation, as set out in ISRC Bulletin 2007/02⁴, summarised below. However, it is strongly recommended that any party licensing recordings to others should consider the information provided at <http://isrc@ifpi.org> and should obtain a Registrant Code, and manage their own ISRC assignment process.

ISRC Bulletin 2007/02 describes a process to be followed when ISRC is not available for licensed recordings, as:

- This shall only be done using a secondary Registrant Code, allocated by a National ISRC Agency expressly for the purpose.
- The Registrant to make in good faith all reasonable efforts to secure an ISRC from the Licensor.
- The Registrant to make good faith efforts to report the assigned ISRC to the Licensor.
- The Registrant to register the track with its assigned ISRC in any appropriate industry database, showing the Licensor as owner.

Annex E –Assignment of ISRC by ISRC Managers

Circumstances may occur in which a party that owns recordings wishes to delegate the assignment of ISRC to a third party termed an 'ISRC Manager'. Often, ISRC Managers are digital aggregators or distributors.

ISRC Managers that have been appointed by National ISRC Agencies may assign ISRCs on behalf of the recording owner in accordance with the procedure in ISRC Bulletin 2009/03⁵ as summarised below.

- An ISRC Manager must have obtained a Registrant Code from a National ISRC Agency, allocated expressly for use in the role of ISRC Manager.
- In order to prevent improper, or multiple assignment, the ISRC Manager can only assign ISRC to client recordings under instruction from the client to do so and where the client is the owner of the recording(s). The client must also provide assurance that no ISRC has previously been issued to the affected recording(s).

⁴ ISRC Bulletin 2007/02 is available at http://www.ifpi.org/content/library/isrc_bulletin-2007-02.pdf

⁵ ISRC Bulletin 2009/03 is available at http://www.ifpi.org/content/library/isrc_bulletin-2009-03.pdf

- The ISRC Manager shall not assign ISRC to a recording that has already been assigned an ISRC.
- Once assigned, the details of the ISRC shall be provided by the ISRC Manager to the owner of the recording and the assigned ISRC shall be used to identify the recording in all circumstances thereafter.