

PLENARY PAPER

NATIONAL BAND COUNCIL OF
AUSTRALIA

Conference 2 - Melbourne
28-29 November 2009

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Preamble

The National Band Council of Australia (NBCA) has been in existence, in various forms, since 1934. The Council has had more organisation and impact since a reorganisation and redirection was successfully adopted in 1970.

The Australian National Band Championships has been a consistent event since 1946, conducted each year in various locations throughout Australia. The National Championships represent a significant opportunity for an annual focus of those who enjoy the stimulation, artistry, and fraternity of banding. The National Championships have developed many positive aspects of banding culture including improved performance standards, opportunities for performers, conductors, and players to enjoy development and success, and the involvement of participants with a wide range of ages, background, and abilities. For many people involved in banding, the National Championships have provided many of the most significant and memorable moments, and developed its own unique traditions and culture.

The National Band Championships – both as a logistic event and in the wider context of philosophy and rationale – has also experienced challenges. Like many other areas of society at the beginning of the 21st century, banding struggles to position itself in a marketplace dominated by issues such as work-life imbalance, a crowded school curriculum, a technological revolution, a global financial crisis – to name only a few. Community music making, and banding in particular, has many strengths but the challenge relates to the delivery of those positive messages to target audiences. The Arts – and, interestingly grass-roots sports – face similar challenges of diminished government funding, commercial sponsorship, audience numbers, and participants. Ironically, these challenges loom large at a time when musical standards have arguably never been greater.

Some of the challenges the National Championships face relates to internal issues – regulations, programming, structure of the contest program, and

registration of players. These issues should, in theory, be settled through discussion, listening, and consideration of views in the context of what decisions are in the best interests of banding.

This paper has been developed to assist NBCA Councillors in addressing some of the many issues that continue to concern the wider banding community regarding the National Band Championships, and extending to state associations and the wider banding movement. The paper is the result of extensive consultation - through interview, discussion, and an invitation to provide written comment in the form of a submission – with 40 key identities in the banding movement. These identities include professional musicians, music educators, conductors, adjudicators, players, and those involved in various administrative and commercial interests related to banding. A wider commentary from individual players via the dissemination of discussion material via state associations has also been received. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the contributors to this document for expressing their views.

It is hoped that this document will assist to inform positive discussion concerning the issues listed here. It should be recognised that banding is a passionate and almost all-consuming interest for many. As a result, viewpoints are held – and defended – with substantial intensity. One of the great strengths of banding is its notion of being a broad church that welcomes many people and accepts a diverse array of personalities. However, the NBCA has a responsibility to ensure that the National Championships retain a position of goodwill and high regard amongst the whole banding community, and this requires Councillors to approach these issues with careful consideration and with a determination to find ways forward in the interests of the National Championships and Australian banding in a wider context.

History of the NBCA

The following article is drawn from the NBCA website:

Australia was proclaimed a British Colony in Sydney NSW in 1788. As a penal settlement, band music was limited to Naval and Military Bands or ceremonial and social occasions for the authorities during the establishment years of British culture in this part of the world.

Eventually civilian bands were established progressively in the various States in the mid 19th century, and expanded when Australia became a federation of all States and formed a National Government in the year 1901.

Brass band music has always been regarded as "Music of the People" and a brass band contest was held at the "Royal South Street Competitions" in Ballarat on 15th October 1900. There were 9 bands from Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania, competing in music and marching. This contest became an annual event, and continues today.

In 1910 the Barossa and Light Eisteddfod was founded in South Australia on similar lines to the South Street competition. After three years it became the Tanunda Band Competition, and is still in existence today.

The First World War and the Great Depression did not stop the march forward of the band movement, and in the early 1930's it was felt essential to form a National Council, with all States represented, to unify contest rules and regulations, and apply them throughout Australia. The States had previously formed their own Associations, and after several attempts had failed, the Australia Band Council (ABC) was formed in New South Wales on 13th April, 1934. The states of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, and South Australia were represented

The new organisation had a simple Constitution of a few rules and Drill and Marching Regulations. During the period from 1934 to 1970, the Council was

a committee which met tri-annually to review contest rules and regulations. Any changes decided at the meeting were subsequently circulated to all State Associations.

In 1965, the South Australian President, Mr Cliff Sorrell, who represented South Australia on the ABC, submitted a report to the Council and each of the State Associations on the subject "The Future of the Band Movement in Australia". In this paper he suggested that the ABC should take a leadership role.

The report was fully discussed at the next ABC meeting, and the State Associations agreed with it in principle. The President of the time, Mr C H Green continued to serve until 1970. When he retired Cliff Sorrell was elected, and under his guidance a five year plan was created and the ABC Constitution was updated. It became evident that the Council needed to meet more regularly, and annual meetings were instituted.

In order to avoid confusion with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the name of the organisation was changed to National Band Council of Australia (NBCA). The NBCA continues today in its role of coordinating the principles for the running of National Championships, although the detailed running of the Championships is carried out by the State Associations in rotation.

To date the NBCA has had 12 Presidents, the longest serving at 25 years being Mr C H Green from Queensland. There have been 11 Secretaries and 10 Life Members have been elected. All of these people have been most dedicated in serving the Australian band movement, and have held senior administrative positions in the various State Associations.

Structure of the NBCA

The NBCA is the peak representative body for brass and concert bands in Australia. The Council meets annually in the state where the subsequent year's National Championships will be conducted.

The NBCA Council consists of the following:

President

Vice President

Executive Officer

Councillors representing the state band associations of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania.

Functions of the NBCA

In a broader, practical sense the NBCA performs the following functions:

- Provides a platform for the state band associations to discuss matters relevant to the banding movement
- Determines the location of the annually Australian National Band Championships
- Approves organisational and logistic arrangements of hosting committees
- Determines regulations for the conduct of the Australian National Band Championships

REGISTRATION

The issues concerning player registration, for the National Championships and state-based events, are a prime concern for the majority of respondents. There is a very strong perception of unfairness regarding competition at the National Championships based on the perceived (and in some cases real) differences in the approach taken by state associations to this issue.

As a starting point it is worth summarising the NBCA's current position regarding registration:

- 4.1: Each playing member must be registered with his or her band for at least forty-two days immediately prior to the date of any contest
- 4.2: An unattached player may be registered with their state governing body on payment of an annual fee as prescribed by the state governing body provided that there is no registered band within a distance determined by a state governing body. An unattached player may compete in solo competitions only provided they are eligible under the several regulations governing such competition.
- 4.3: A band, when joining an affiliated state governing body or renewing its membership thereof, shall simultaneously forward a complete list of players, including conductor, or any other requirements called for by the state.
- 4.9: A state governing body shall not permit any player to be registered with any affiliated band unless that player has provided a clearance from the Band with which the player was last registered. Any dispute arising out of this regulation shall be resolved by the state governing body under their rules.
- Applications for Permit Players shall be made in writing to the affiliated state governing body with which the band is registered not later than fourteen days prior to the commencing date of any contest. The maximum number of permits for wind players to any brass band shall be two and to any concert band shall be four. Bands shall be granted permits for percussion players as required by the score.

Commentary

At the outset of this discussion it should be established that ‘registration’ and ‘membership’ are distinct and different terms. It is possible for an adult player to be a *member* of many bands, but it is only possible for the same player to be *registered* with no more than two bands under NBCA regulations – a brass band and a concert band. Registrations are generally related to the participation of players as members of bands for contesting purposes.

There are some clear assumptions made in the NBCA regulations relating to the relationship between the NBCA and state associations, and in turn between the state associations and affiliated bands. The NBCA supports the requirements of the state associations regarding the conduct and administration of registrations, but also assumes that a formal registration system is in place. Further, the NBCA regulations assume that the state associations have similar registration requirements in place – this is not the case.

Another important assumption relates to the notion that the NBCA and the state associations deal with bands, rather than individual players. It is clearly the responsibility of band secretaries to manage the player lists of their own bands and to notify any changes to the state association. In turn, it is the state association that advises the Secretary of the state association responsible for the conduct of the National Championships in a given year a certified list of players and conductors for each participating band.

The requirement for registrations to be completed not less than 42 days prior to a contest is a historic requirement, seemingly established to allow time for hard copy registrations to be processed. This is a disadvantage to bands where unforeseen circumstances may result in bands contesting with missing or substandard players, bearing in mind that a permit or emergency player must be a *registered* player in order to fill the gap. Some have suggested that consideration be given to relaxing this requirement as a means of assisting bands to submit new registrations to fill gaps while encouraging inclusive involvement of players new to the movement. It has also been suggested that

this requirement was set in place to limit movement of playing members between bands in the period before a contest, thereby minimising the possibilities for band 'stacking'.

The regulation concerning the transfer of player registrations exists to protect the integrity of band memberships. Accusations of 'poaching' have been levelled against bands and some individuals across the course of years and it is generally accepted that bands should have at least some recourse in addressing issues of unpaid fees, return of property, and other issues that may result in a transfer being delayed or declined. It is also generally accepted that players should be free to make choices concerning the bands in which they may wish to appear in contests. Note that there is an underlying assumption that the NBCA and state associations deal with bands, rather than individuals. This is an important point to make regarding recent rule changes in Victoria where a departure in the context of contest registration has occurred.

While there is provision for an unattached player to be affiliated with a state association, it is clear that this affiliation would be restricted to participation in the solo contest – not for an appearance with a contesting band.

Recent developments, including the FABB contest and recently passed rule changes in Victoria, have indicated a substantial departure from the notion that administrative bodies relate to bands rather than individuals. The examples given here require players to register directly with the contest organisers rather than an individual band. In Victoria, this means that Victorian bands are now able to field players with no regard to any transfer requirements. While there is nothing necessarily wrong with the VBL as an independent incorporated association making its own rules, the point should be made that bands in no other state can do this, and that there may be an unfair advantage given to Victorian bands in a national contest that assumes similar registration requirements within state associations. There have been substantial concerns raised in recent years about the registration of significant numbers of overseas players in Queensland, and the registration system has been largely abandoned at a state level in Western Australia owing to a

diminishing player involvement and interest that resulted in the WA State Band Championships being cancelled in 2006. Fortunately a more positive mood has prevailed in recent years in that state.

The issue of Permit Players has also been problematic, and it was interesting to hear and read the wide range of opinions regarding the use of permit players in principle, the number allowed under the rules, and the reasons given for their use. Some believe that permit players are essential for allowing a band to secure enough players to take the stage at a contest, or to fill some of the holes created by missing instrumentation. There are allegations that some bands with open chequebooks entice professionals or top-line UK players to play on permit (or register!) in order to gain a competitive advantage, and the widespread use and registration of overseas players is generally seen as against the spirit of a contest for community bands. Others state the view that the use of permit players is really band 'stacking' and that bands should be responsible for developing their own players and band culture rather than relying on outside help. Some people experienced in administration have a negative view of the use of large numbers of permit players owing to the unpredictable and often unknown impact this has on contest scheduling and the general operation of the contest.

All of the respondents regard the issue of player registration as a **key area of significant concern** for the future of banding. The following points require consideration:

- ONE registration system used by all state associations is essential for the promotion of fairness and transparency in competition. The system needs to recognise that players choose where they play, is inclusive and user-friendly, includes transfer requirements, and reinforces the key relationship between state associations and bands. Regulations regarding registration must be completely uniform across the NBCA and all six state associations so that there is no suggestion of unfairness or undue advantage to bands in any one state.

- Having individual states administer a national approach to registrations is the preferable option. Registrations provide a significant income stream for state associations, and bands affiliate with state associations primarily to enter competitions at a state and nationals level. However, in the case of the state associations being unable to agree on a common approach to registrations, the NBCA should establish a National Registry to administer all Australian player registrations. The point has been made that state associations spend much time on the management of registrations and that a streamlined national system would allow state associations to focus on other important areas of promoting the interest of affiliated bands within states. This option would have significant strengths and weaknesses to overcome or resolved in order to be implemented.
- A player can hold one registration in any of the following, applicable to age: Open Brass, Open Concert, Junior Brass, and Junior Concert. Any registration system must serve and protect the interests of individual bands having the right to field their own players, and this in itself avoids allegations of poaching, band stacking, and other accusations of unfairness. This is arguably as important as players having choice about where they play.
- All player registrations must be in the hand of a Contest Registrar no later than 7 days before the contest.
- Players eligible for registration should be Australian citizens or permanent residents, and reside in the state where their band is registered. Overseas players should not be able to register with Australian bands in any state.
- There is no requirement for permit percussion players to be registered.
- The permit player regulations for wind players be retained, but there are no restrictions on these players for residency, state registration, etc. The term 'Musical Associate' may be a good label for these 'free choice' players.
- Registration data must be managed by electronic means, preferably with the same software systems

- Registered players must display photographic identification (i.e. driver's license, student card, or similar) at contest registration. Identification must incorporate current residential address.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS – BANDS

The National Championships continues to provide a significant focus for brass and concert bands each year. It is worth pointing out that there are a number of 'purists' in both the brass and concert band camps that would not be upset by the disappearance of the other 'genre'. Leaving personal preference aside, the fostering of these rifts is entirely counterproductive, short-sighted, and undesirable. The general public, government agencies, sponsors, and audiences regard our ensembles as 'bands' regardless of the difference in the brass and concert band genres. The future challenges faced by the banding movement require us to develop more 'critical mass' – not less, and the ability to work together to produce mutually beneficial outcomes will be crucial to ongoing prosperity and success of the National Championships and each of the state associations.

The timing of the Championships – at Easter each year – presents problems for attracting audiences, securing travel and accommodation arrangements, and for bands people spending holiday time away from families. Some band people – and schools in particular - also have issues related to church involvement and Holy Week. The general costs associated with Easter in terms of costs are greater largely due to penalty rates across a range of industries. The Easter weekend provides four clear days for competition under the current schedule. However, it may be worth considering other long weekend possibilities that occur through the year – especially Australia Day and the October weekend.

In terms of the contesting program for bands, the following issues are clear:

- Should there be a hymn and on-stage march?

- Major works now being composed in some cases exceed the current time limits
- The use of test pieces presents significant problems in justifying venue expense – these sections occupy a significant part of the contest program and are not appealing to audiences.
- Why are adjudicators screened?
- Should brass bands appear on the platform once or twice during the contest (currently twice)?
- Should concert bands appear on the platform once or twice during the contest (currently once)?
- How much playing is regarded as too much or too little to determine a result versus the time and expense in attending the National Championships?

In discussing the above issues it is important to consider the aims and objectives of the National Championships as a whole.

Are the National Championships for:

The bands: Do the National Championships present an opportunity for bands to improve standard and capability, present the opportunity in playing in venues that would normally be beyond the means of any one band to secure, and present a rationale for travel?

The players: Is a social aspect important? Should there be opportunities to be musically inspired by others, to develop skills, to actually see and experience other performances?

The audience: Do the National Championships appeal to audience – are they *sellable*? Audience engagement and attendance is a key factor in the National Championships achieving a balanced budget. Can we afford to pay significant amounts for a large performance hall for the presentation of 15 bands playing the same piece to an empty house?

A reasonable answer to this question would conclude that the National Championships should serve all of these stakeholders. However, the pragmatic aspects of logistics, financial return, and sustainability must also be considered. The National Championships must not run at a financial loss on a continuing basis, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure sponsorship. The NBCA cannot preside over an event that will eventually result in the state associations becoming insolvent.

Commentary

The Hymn and On-Stage March trace their inclusions in the National Championships into history. Bands have always, in a historical sense, played these musical genres and they remain important to current practice in training and repertoire selection. These items provide excellent contrasts in musical interpretation and technique, while maintaining player interest. The On-Stage March is a more recent inclusion in the National Championships, introduced after the retirement of the marching trials, the quickstep competition, and display marching. There are many excellent examples of marches that have proved popular with players and audiences alike. There have been a diversity of views expressed regarding the inclusion of these two items in the contest program – some are very supportive of these items as they allow bands the practical advantage of settling into their performance and listening to an unfamiliar hall, as well as being very appealing to an audience. Others suggest that these items are out of place at a contest where the majority of preparation lies within major works that are often lengthy and unfamiliar to audiences.

The inclusion of a test piece at band contests stretches back to the very earliest days of contesting and has been in force for more than 150 years. It was introduced initially to ensure that bands competed on a level playing field and in the early days of the Belle Vue contest the arranger of the test piece was often acted as the adjudicator. The UK National Championships instigated the practice of commissioning a work written specifically for brass bands – the first piece in this regard was *Labour and Love* composed by Percy Fletcher in 1913. The test piece tradition has thus served two

purposes: to provide a level playing field for adjudication, and to create an established canon of works written specifically for the brass band genre that reflect the historic development of the movement. It is interesting to note that the concert band movement has also developed a large canon of works specifically written for the wind ensemble/band without so much emphasis and focus on contesting.

As mentioned above, the use of a test piece as part of the National Championships is problematic from the audience engagement point of view. Stories relating to the experience of the members of the Newcastle Steelworks Band at the 1924 Belle Vue contest - in the respect of the distraction to the players by the sound created by the thousands of pages being turned by audience members following the score of the test piece as the band played – have been published. It is perhaps fair to say that those days have well and truly passed in the Australian context – if that was in fact ever the case. The fact that some of the finest bands in Australia perform the National Championship test selection to large empty halls is a very significant problem for organisers hoping to work on a break even (or better) proposition. In financial terms this simply makes no sense.

In contrast, the Own Choice sections of the National Championships are much easier to promote – a large number of bands from across the country playing an exciting array of quality music. In addition, the most astute directors pick repertoire that emphasises the strengths of their playing team to maximum advantage, often producing very capable, if not brilliant and exciting, performances.

Ultimately, the ongoing success of the National Championships in a musical sense will be directly related to the following issues:

- Bands must enjoy the musical experience. They should feel that they have a reasonable chance of winning a section, if not the Championship, depending on their performance on the day
- Bands should be able to demonstrate their strengths
- There should be good variety in the program of works presented

- Bands should present their performance outcomes to a good audience
- Costs to participate in the contest should be minimised. One of the concert band tests in 2010 costs \$480.00 RRP. Even with a negotiated price reduction, this is a lot of money to be paid for a piece that is not likely to be played again in the near future.

There has been considerable feedback suggesting that brass bands should not appear once at the contest, based on the structure of the current program of Hymn, Test, Own Choice, March, due to the demands made in concentration and endurance. However, concert bands currently perform all these works in one setting and face similar problems, although the observation has been made that there is a greater range of instruments to share the workload. However, in the higher Open Concert Band grades, brass players work at the same intensity and difficulty in terms of physical endurance, technique, and solo/section demands as their brass band counterparts – the band genre being the only difference. It is certainly not easy for any band to play a complete contest program consisting of the current items in one stage appearance.

However, it has been suggested that it would be possible for all bands to appear once only on the platform at the contest if adjustments were made to the required programme. The one-appearance scenario for concert bands originally grew from requests for concert bands to streamline the stage and percussion setup for performance. A contest program that allows bands to demonstrate strengths and capabilities, while including suitable variety and appeal to an audience, should be constructed. This may have further benefits in program construction/scheduling and costs associated with staging the event.

The practice of screening adjudicators also has historical precedents stretching back to the beginnings of contesting. The 'screen' or 'box' was originally designed to shield bands from the adjudicator's view in order to preserve anonymity, but also to prevent the adjudicator from being distracted.

Adjudicators are very knowledgeable and professional people who very likely can identify a band by its sound in any case. Perhaps it is time to allow adjudicators to come forth from the box and be allowed to adjudicate the complete performance package rather than the aural stimulus alone.

It is also worth noting that a panel of adjudicators is generally preferable to the opinion of one person. Serious consideration should be given to the panel concept for adjudication for all band grades at the National Championships.

In examining the playing time allotted for the appearance of Bands at a National Championships the current timing arrangements for Open grades should be considered:

Hymn max 6 mins

Test usually a major work between 10 and 20 minutes, depending on grade.

Own Choice currently 18 minutes

O/S March max 6 minutes

A band should expect to prepare an own choice program of 30 minutes (max.), and add the Test - totalling a complete program time of 45 minutes plus.

It is suggested that the following program be considered:

- All bands come to the platform only once for the Grade Championship
- The program consist of Hymn (6 mins), Own Choice Major Work (no time limit, but notionally 21-22 mins), and On-Stage March (6 mins) – a total of about 34-35 mins, approx. This should be ample playing time and variety to establish a result for the Grade Championship.
- It is suggested that the inclusion of a Test Selection be discontinued at National Championships. If a Test is to be contemplated, this should

be conducted in a pre-set small hall with limited audience capacity at another time – a performance essentially for adjudication.

Other suggestions for consideration:

- A panel of adjudicators should be engaged for all band grades at the National Championships.
- The adjudicators should not be screened.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS – SOLO AND ENSEMBLE CHAMPIONSHIP

The Solo and Ensemble competitions are a separate part of the National Championships. These contests provide an opportunity for participants to prepare and perform a solo or ensemble work for adjudication. It is interesting to note that it is the leading bands that place emphasis on this area of player development as a means of improving technical and interpretative skills as well as confidence. Similar benefits are derived from participation in small ensembles – quartets and quintets – in developing confidence and technique.

The issues raised concerning the solo and ensemble championships are as follows:

- Should music be a test piece, or own choice?
- When should an event be cancelled? Should events run with a minimum number of competitors?
- Should there be a penalty for withdrawal?

Commentary

It should be mentioned here that solo and ensemble contests tend to be costly events to run, are difficult to schedule, the use of a small number of accompanists creates programming problems (often on the day with no forewarning), and requires at least six rooms with a similar number of pianos,

announcers, and adjudicators. Percussion solos also require additional sets of equipment.

Very often there are a significant number of withdrawals from solo events. There are a number of reasons for this, but the following are significant:

- A test piece that is too difficult – or too easy
- A test piece hard copy is not easily obtained, and arrives too late for preparation
- A test piece that does not suit the instrument e.g. an alto sax solo for baritone saxophone
- A test piece that is not engaging or enjoyable to play
- A test piece that tests technique, but provides little scope for musical interpretation
- A player – for a variety of reasons - is not ready
- The event is poorly scheduled e.g. in Sydney all solos were on Thursday, but Junior Concert Bands did not play until the following Monday.
- Band rehearsals take priority over solo appearances
- Participation in solo contests are not considered to be within the 'culture' of an individual band
- Circumstances beyond the control of a player may prevent participation

Solo test music should be set to encourage a wide variety of *amateur* players to enter. Ideally, test solos should be selected to appeal both technically and musically to adult players, set at approximately Grad 7-8 AMEB (or equivalent) standard. Setting of works that require Licentiate, Fellowship, or senior university level standard will not attract many entries.

It is not unusual for competitors in eisteddfodau around the country to withdraw without notice, and this is usually considered in the construction of the program. There should be no penalty for withdrawal as there are many valid reasons for a competitor not appearing, but early advice of intention to

withdraw should be encouraged. In no circumstances should entry fees be refunded.

In similar solo competitions and eisteddfodau the audiences are usually not very large for solo sections, even for events that are Own Choice. In South Australia, the SABA Solo and Ensemble Championship has been Own Choice for a number of years and entries have been stable but have not increased markedly as a result. Given the small audiences involved, it is suggested that the 'level playing field' facilitated by the use of a test piece may be beneficial in the solo context – it presents all competitors with the same challenges, facilitates a reasonable load for Official Accompanists, and provides an indication of the required standard.

However, some scope for flexibility may be appropriate for Junior solos. Students sitting performance examinations, for AMEB, school practical music assessment, audition, or university examinations may welcome the opportunity to present repertoire of their choice in the context of the Nationals solo competition. The setting of a prescribed work may be a significant disincentive if there is little time or reason to prepare the work given the restraints of competing musical assessment requirements.

In terms of minimum numbers for sections, it is suggested all sections should run with at least one competitor and the championship awarded on the basis of a set score being achieved. Sections should only be cancelled in the event of no players registering before the event. If even one competitor has prepared and presented for the section, there is a general opinion that the NBCA should allow the competitor the opportunity to perform.

There has been feedback provided concerning the EEb, BBb, and Concert Tuba sections. It is suggested that consideration be given to creating sections for EEb/F Tubas, and BBb/C Tubas. The String Bass section should be discontinued, but it is possible that there may be some interest in a solo bass guitar section.

The following suggestions are presented for consideration:

- Test pieces be affirmed for all instruments
- No sections be combined
- No sections be cancelled unless there are no competitors presenting to play
- There should be no minimum number of competitors
- There should be no penalty for withdrawal
- Early intention to withdraw from a section should be encouraged
- The NBCA Music Consultative Committee should prepare clear selection guidelines for solo test music
- Music for Junior events should be Own Choice within specified limits (e.g. one piece only with a maximum time limit)
- Tuba sections should be EEb/F Tubas, and BBb/C Tubas. The Concert Tuba sections should be discontinued
- The String Bass section should be discontinued.
- Consideration be given to the introduction of solo bass guitar sections

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS – PARADE OF BANDS

There has been much debate in the last few years concerning the position of marching at the National Championships. Historically, a range of marching events were conducted to large crowds, including compulsory marching drill, display marching, and a street parade. Currently, only the street parade – known as the Parade of Bands – remains included.

Commentary

Participation in the event is compulsory for all Open Grade Brass Bands and optional for Junior Brass and Concert Bands. A summary of opinions, with commentary, follows:

The Parade of Bands should not be 'compulsory'

NBCA Regulation 2.1.5 states in terms of the on-stage program: *All items shall be optional; however, a band cannot win the Championship in a grade if it does not perform all items.* Perhaps brass bands should be given this choice where marching in the Parade of Bands is concerned in order to eliminate the notion of 'forcing' bands to do something they do not wish to do.

This issue has the potential to divide the banding community. There is a surprising amount of support for the Parade of Bands, especially from bands that are more active as marching bands, and those players that enjoy a variety of experiences during their trip to the National Championships. Other bands see the marching event as a waste of time and a distraction from their preparation for the On-Stage program. Some have made the point that marching is indeed an important and highly visible role that bands play in the wider community and that the event should be approached with serious preparation and polish – having bands do a street parade poorly reflects badly on the contest and on the movement. It has been disappointing to hear about bands that have been highly placed in their grade within the Parade of Bands bragging that they would have achieved more if they had *actually had a rehearsal*. The conductors of A Grade Brass Bands in particular are generally very unenthusiastic about the Parade of Bands.

There is a strong view that, if the Parade of Bands is to be included as a compulsory event for brass bands in the National Championships, it is important for bands to put some time and effort into the presentation. Having the Parade of Bands as part of the aggregate score for the Grade Championship would ensure that all bands presented an adequate standard of music and drill, while bands that put in special effort to present well would be rewarded. The alternatives are to allow the present unsatisfactory state of affairs to continue, or to discontinue marching at the National Championships altogether.

Concert Bands do not march

This is untrue – *some* concert bands march, but many have received poor treatment at the National Championships. Either points have not been awarded, critiques not completed, or unfavourable scheduling has resulted in a poor representation from concert bands. It is interesting to note that all South Australian concert bands that regularly attend the National Championships are active marching bands.

It should also be noted that some concert bands never parade as marching bands. There are also some brass bands that only ever march when they attend the National Championships.

The Parade of Bands should be compulsory for Concert Bands

A regulation enforcing this suggestion would serve to significantly reduce the numbers of concert bands attending the National Championships. Bands such as the Elder Conservatorium Wind Ensemble, NSW Department of Education Wind Ensemble (formerly known as SSWE), and most composite and institutional bands would immediately withdraw. The aspect of marching is not as strong in a cultural sense as it has been in brass bands, especially in those concert bands that have been formed in the last 25 years.

The Parade of Bands promotes the National Championships

This statement is not in itself true – the Parade of Bands has the *potential* to promote *banding*. It is unreasonable to assume that any member of the public witnessing the Parade of Bands will be moved to buy a ticket to listen to a band contest. However, the Parade of Bands is an outdoor activity with the capacity to reach – quite literally – the people ‘in the street’. It is also the only event in the National Championships that has any reasonable chance of securing media coverage for banding. Naturally, nothing is achieved if the Parade of Band is conducted at a time and place where it will not be seen, and the media will not cover an event that is poorly promoted.

One colleague has made the point that a re-packaging of the Parade of Bands as a *Festival of Bands*, with a significant street theatre (i.e. 'entertainment') component rather than a strict marching contest, may be of significant benefit in engaging a wider public and media profile.

The Parade of Bands is too costly to include in the National Championships program.

This is not true. In fact, this is the only event at the National Championships that has the likely potential to attract support in-kind support from local government, and some other general interest cash sponsors. However, without this support road closures and associated support can be very costly for an event that has no prospect of achieving a box office return.

The Parade of Bands is an unacceptable insurance risk

The feedback from various respondents suggests that insurance companies regard walking around with an instrument backstage or on stage and walking around with an instrument on the street in a marching formation as an equal risk and the inclusion of the Parade of Bands should have no impact on the cost of insurance premiums or the extent of insurance cover required by organisers. As an added legal protection, there should be a declaration added to entry from that participating bands are appropriately insured, that their members participate in all events at the National Championships entirely at their own risk, and that bands and their members will not claim damages against the NBCA or state associations in the event of death, loss, or personal injury.

The following suggestions are presented for consideration:

- A decision be reached regarding the position of the Parade of Bands at the National Championships for brass bands:
 - compulsory (status quo)
 - optional but compulsory for championship
 - compulsory and included in aggregate for championship

- entirely separate and optional, or
- discontinued completely.
- A decision be reached regarding the position of the Parade of Bands at the National Championships for concert bands:
 - compulsory
 - optional, or
 - not required.
- If this part of the National Championships is retained, the NBCA needs to repackage this event so that it is a vibrant and valuable part of the National Band Championships that is positive and inclusive.
- Bands should sign a declaration on entry forms that they are appropriately insured in the case of accident or other misadventure experienced by their players, and that the NBCA, state associations, and organising committees are not liable for damages relating or resulting from any incidents.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS – OTHER SUGGESTIONS

Some other interesting suggestions have been received concerning the National Championships. As follows:

- On Saturday evening, at the conclusion of all competition, an invitational entertainment contest should be held. This would replace the Gala Concert, and provide an opportunity for the whole band movement to see and hear some of the best bands in action in a general public and audience friendly programme.
- The creation of a 'Nationals Fringe' - offer the opportunity for bands to undertake public engagements and other events around the city holding the National Championships. This has the benefit of providing a strong public focus and would likely attract good support from sponsors, local government, shopping centres, etc. It would serve to get bands out playing for the general public and add to the Nationals experience for visiting bands.

- The provision of a NBCA ‘conference’ – including workshops, master classes, and other forums to provide opportunities for networking, communication, and development. Activities should not be restricted to music alone, and matters concerning such things as management, recruiting, tour organisation, youth development, and adjudication, etc. should be considered.
- A high-profile opening event to launch the weekend is needed to promote the National Championships
- A major social event for participants and supporters is needed and should be incorporated into the official program. It may be possible to have two events running concurrently – an ‘A list’ black tie style event for invited officials, guests, sponsors, and selected participants (some conductors, solo champions, etc), and a more casual event for the majority of participants.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS – FUTURE PLANS

Nationals as a Joint Venture With the States

The NBCA has in the past been very happy to keep a distance from those committees responsible for organising the National Championships.

However, it should be remembered that state associations are offered the opportunity of hosting the nationals on average every six years. With this gap between events it is inevitable that organising committees will include people with no previous experience in organising the National Championships.

The itinerant nature of the contest allows participants to experience National Championships with a degree of variety in venue, location, and approach. However, participants expect this very significant event to be run with skill, precision, and attention to detail. Mistakes are not tolerated, attract adverse comment, and often create an adverse perception.

Perhaps the current arrangement should be reversed – that the NBCA be largely responsible for overseeing the planning, execution, and evaluation of the National Championships, assisted to a very significant degree by the state association hosting the event. The NBCA, as the ‘owner’ of the National Championships, should play a more substantive role in the running of its event, while working cooperatively with the state associations.

The NBCA should have more proactive, hands on role in the following areas:

- Creation and supply of a Nationals Business Plan template, with exemplars from previous years.
- Creation and supply of a Nationals Operations Plan
- Assistance with budget and marketing plan templates, standard forms, form letters, and other printed material that can be adjusted, edited, and re-used.
- Establishment of guidelines for venues, adjudicator selection, and test music selection
- An enhanced role for the NBCA Music Consultative Committee in providing advice and ultimate approval of test selections in collaboration with state Music Advisory Boards.
- An enhanced or expanded role for the NBCA Contest Liaison Officer in assisting state organising committees.
- Assisting the organising committee with obtaining sponsorship and other forms of support.

Financial Viability and Monetary Support

There is a view in banding circles that the NBCA could do more to create structures that would assist state associations in hosting the National Championships. These aspects include:

- A National Championships Business Plan: an annually updated Business Plan to assist organising committees with current information

and trends related to the staging of the National Championships, including the listing of objectives, audience targets, marketing, promotion, budgeting, and evaluation.

- A National Championships Operations Plan: a blueprint, or organisational plan would be immensely helpful to any members of state organising committees organising the event or the first time.
- Government funding: the notion of having a national event organised and operated by a state body is problematic for funding purposes. Most government funding bodies *will not fund contests or competitions*, and most of the funding for state arts is dedicated to supporting professional companies and other commercial activities. It is actually very difficult from community-based music activities to qualify for any of the hotly contested community funding available. It is much more likely that a Nationals 'Fringe Festival' of performances, developmental workshops, youth focused activities etc. would attract funding.
- This event should be attractive to sponsors because of the following strengths: participation from all states, involvement of all ages, hundreds of musicians in one place at one time, high quality musical performances, significant exposure and return on investment,
- A long-term major sponsor is needed for the National Championships. This arrangement should be negotiated by the NBCA.
- The current license arrangement of currently in place regarding the fee payable by state associations to the NBCA for the 'right' to host the Nationals Championships should be reviewed. A more appropriate business arrangement is needed to ensure that both the NBCA and the hosting state association has a proper financial return from a successful contest, and in view of the considerable support that the NBCA would provide to a hosting state association if the aspects outlined in the above points are instigated.
- Engaging an event management company to arrange all logistic and scheduling matters pertaining to the National Band Championships

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS – PROFILE

Many respondents identified broadcasting issues as significant in creating and enhancing profile for the National Band Championships and banding in general.

There has been an established relationship with the ABC in terms of the recording and broadcasting of some of the A Grade Brass performances. Independent commercial interests have also been granted permission to record performances, produce, and market CD recordings of National Band Championship events. There is no reason why the NBCA could not arrange the recording of Brass and Concert band events to create a composite CD recording of the best performances, or produce a CD or DVD of an entertainment event for public consumption.

The concept of live streaming has been far reaching and successful. The National Championships must develop a significant web broadcasting presence, and there are huge benefits for banding if this technology can be embraced. It has been suggested that the NBCA should focus on creating maximum exposure for the National Championships and negotiate terms with this objective in mind. It has also been suggested that the live streaming of concerts held in the weeks immediately before the National Championships – such as try out concerts and ‘Pre Nationals’ concerts would serve to stimulate interest and excitement in the contest among audience members and bands people.

Potential sponsors for the National Championships should be considered carefully. Traditionally, instrument manufacturers, such as Boosey and Hawkes and Yamaha have supported the National Championships. However, there are a number of other music-related potential sponsors, including music suppliers, music publishers, and the Music Education divisions of large corporations – such as those who support events such the Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic – that do business with Australian bands and may be worth approaching.

More detailed attention should be directed to attracting targeted groups to contest events. Package group deals for church groups, retirement villages, school groups, music clubs, art clubs, service clubs, etc. should form an important part of the marketing plan for the National Championships. Links with the tourism industry, via government offices and direct approaches to tourism bodies, associations, and businesses should also be included.

The following is a selection of other responses received:

How do we promote the Nationals as a flagship event?

- Quality venues, well located. The NBCA should impose guidelines to help ensure the selection of appropriate venues.
- Wide participation of bands from throughout Australia
- A level playing field for competition
- An enjoyable and valuable opportunity for networking and immersion in band music
- The thrill of performance, and the satisfaction of achievement

How can we expand our work into areas beyond contesting?

- Obtain development funding to commission new works
- Operate national events e.g. a national band, a national youth band
- Improve training/teaching opportunities, especially for brass band
- Programs developed through the NBCAS for regional centres to establish brass band teaching programs

THE NATIONAL BAND COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA – FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There are a number of future directions where the NBCA can play a leading role for the continued development of the National Championships and

banding in general. In addition, it is important for the NBCA to create new funding streams to support any initiatives.

The following projects are suggested:

- CD and DVD recording, production, and marketing – of selected sections at the National Championships
- The creation and publishing of an annual yearbook, including reports, photographs, and results of the National Championships, State, selected regional contests, personal profiles, awards, and other events of interest.
- A national approach to NBCA and state-based awards, similar to the Young Australian of the Year Awards for example, where individuals and bands are acknowledged at a state level and become eligible for a national award.
- The creation of a national banding 'Hall of Fame'
- The promotion and operation of an annual camp for brass and concert band players that may lead to the creation of 'national' ensembles
- A publication program, based on producing published works that trace the history of banding in Australia, and those that promote the skills and knowledge of those in the banding movement to a wider audience
- The creation and publication of an annual NBCA Directory – listing businesses, services, and skills of those bands people involved in small business. This would include trade services, retail outlets, restaurants, music services, professional services, etc. for the mutual benefit of bands people marketing goods and services to bands people.
- Commissioning of works for band by Australian composers
- Creation of national campaigns for community band involvement, education, and participation – and material to support these initiatives
- Links and dialogue with other community music associations, the Music Council of Australia, ASME, ABODA, and other associations supporting music

The following is a selection of responses received:

What are the aspects you value most about the National Championships?

- It is the NATIONAL Championships
- Participation
- Musical Excellence
- Use of quality venues
- Seeing different parts of Australia
- Playing for distinguished adjudicators
- Making music and memories with mates

What is missing from the National Championships?

- Bands – we need to encourage more bands to compete. Find out why the bands that don't come stay away.
- Development activities – masterclasses, workshops, opportunities to learn about administration, recruiting players, resources for teaching junior players, etc.
- Social interaction
- Concert band recording and broadcasting on a par with brass bands

What are the challenges facing the band movement at the beginning of the 21st century?

- Retaining players
- Public profile

What are the Strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats concerning banding?

Strengths

- High quality
- Community based
- Wholesome values
- Creative outlet for thousands in the community

Weaknesses

- Outdated image
- Often poorly administered
- Too much time spent on administration
- Heavy focus on contesting

Opportunities

- Education
- Development of a National strategy – the NBCA should do much more than simply ‘give out’ the Nationals each year. The NBCA should lead the national agenda
- Our people – why do we not utilize their skills and experience to assist the greater good of banding?

Threats

- 100s!!! Too many to mention!
- Increasingly crowded marketplace
- Time demands – work, family, leisure, etc
- Lack of profile and support
- Difficulty in achieving balanced bottom line – lack of funding and increasing expenses
- Band politics and the pushing of competing agendas

What role should the NBCA play in the future of banding?

- It **MUST** drive the future of banding
- Advocacy for banding
- Ensuring the National Championships remains a prestigious event
- Focusing the strategic direction of the banding movement

Conclusion

This paper has identified some of the key issues facing the National Championships, and the wider banding movement. Certainly, there are other issues that demand the attention of those who care about the future of banding and this paper does not pretend to be definitive in this sense. However, the issues and accompanying commentary presented has been assembled with due regard to the feedback interviews, discussions, and submissions received from banding colleagues across Australia. It is hoped that these issues will receive careful consideration at the NBCA Conference this month.

I hope that this paper serves to assist and inform the NBCA Council as it discusses these issues with a view to promoting a positive future for the National Championships, and in a wider sense the future of community banding throughout Australia.

Dr Kevin Cameron

President

National Band Council of Australia

November 2009

