

Finding National consensus: how State band associations started working with each other

Jeremy de Korte, June 2019



Daily Mail, 05/02/1923, pg. 3

For nearly as long as we have had formal brass bands in Australia, we have had band associations. These early groupings were either large or small where affiliated bands worked with each other. Except for perhaps in Victoria where, as we found in a previous post, they experienced some major upheaval just thirty years after the first band association came into being. However, the collegial atmosphere brass bands led to associations that tried to foster common aims and ideals.

One core function of a band association was the formulation of rules of competition and association. It would be fair to say that some of these rules were contentious back then (even as they are sometimes now). This being said, the function of competition rules was to make sure that every competing ensemble was on a level playing field with other bands. There were the odd protests, of course, this goes without saying. Generally, the judgement of State associations held when

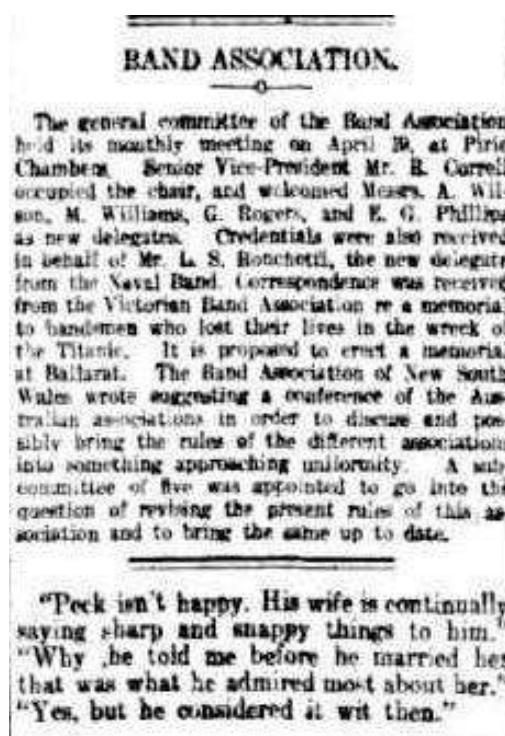
questioned. However, with all States creating rules of competition, when it came to bands wanting to compete in other States, this undoubtedly caused problems at times. The States then tried to start working with one another to bring some uniformity in rules for competitions that attracted interstate entrants.

Hence the subject of this post. This is an examination of how the State band associations tried to put aside their differences and work with each other. This post is not a synthesis of the different State competition rules. As will be seen, uniformity was not an easy process and some iterations of a National Council did not last long. Undoubtedly the War years intervened in the activities of bands, so a working National Council was further fragmented and delayed. When reading this post, people might get a sense of déjà vu, however, this will be open to individual interpretation. This is just another of those fascinating stories that add further history to the activities of Australian bands and bandsmen.

The early years, 1900 – 1930:

The current iteration of our 'National Band Council of Australia' (N.B.C.A.) dates back to around the early 1950s and their competition result archive reflects this (National Band Council of Australia, 2019). However, efforts to form a National Council through various conferences predate this by another 40 years.

The first State band association to form in Australia was the Band Association of New South Wales (B.A.N.S.W.) in 1895 and they staged their first interstate band competition in Sydney, 1896 (Greaves, 1996). This was followed by the Victorian Bands' Association (V.B.A.) in 1901 with other State association forming soon after (Greaves, 1996). With each State association now assuming responsibility for running competitions, there were a number of rule differences for bands to negotiate, especially if they competed in interstate events.



Register, 24/04/1913, pg. 4

The band associations affiliated with each other and recognized each other's rules and processes. It was not uncommon for letters and other correspondence from State associations to be presented at various meetings. With this in mind, through an article in Adelaide's *Register* newspaper in 1913, we see that the South Australian Band Association (S.A.B.A.) received a letter from B.A.N.S.W. "suggesting a conference of the Australian associations in order to discuss and possibly bring the rules of the different associations into something approaching uniformity." ("BAND ASSOCIATION.," 1913). This was probably one of the first approaches from one association to another with a proposal to at least discuss differences in rules. There is no indication at this stage as to whether this conference took place, or if it did, what the outcome was.

Notwithstanding the disruption of the First World War on Australian society in general, once this had finished the associations carried on with their activities. It is in the year of 1921 where we see the next mention of a National Council being formed through an article published in the *Argus* newspaper reporting on a conference held in Ballarat. A summary of the article tells us that:

- An Australian Band Council has been formed
- "Only one association from each state is to be recognized."
- An order of States has been decided as to who will host the next championships.

("INTERSTATE BAND CONFERENCE.," 1921)

Slightly more detail on this 1921 Ballarat conference was provided by the *Northern Star* newspaper brass band correspondent, 'Drummer Boy' where he has noted that, in addition to only one association being recognized in each State, "only players of bands affiliated with that association will be permitted to play in contests in other States." (Drummer Boy, 1921). There was also another discussion on how many professional musicians could play in each band, with the recognition that brass bands were essentially amateur groups. The next conference was to be held in Brisbane (Drummer Boy, 1921).

There may or may not be a connection, but a picture of an "Australian Band Committee" was published by the *Daily Mail* in 1923 (pictured at the head of this post) ("AUSTRALIAN BAND COMMITTEE.," 1923). Perhaps this is a result of the aforementioned Brisbane conference although, at this stage, the connection is unclear.

THE NEXT BAND CARNIVAL.
Mr. G. W. Allen, secretary of the Toowoomba Band Contest Committee, has been officially notified by the Australian Band Council that next year's Band competitions to be held in Toowoomba at Easter, will carry the 1926 Australian Championship title for the A, B, and C Grades. This should make the Carnival the most important yet held in Queensland.

While there had been championships held in various States billed as interstate band contests, they were essentially conducted by the respective State association under their own rules. However, the formation of an Australian Band Council meant that championships could now be held under National rules and patronage. In 1925 we see how this is affected through a tiny article published in the *Toowoomba Chronicle* where the 1926 Toowoomba competitions “at Easter will carry the 1926 Australian Championship title for the A, B, and C Grades” (“THE NEXT BAND CARNIVAL.,” 1925). This is an important step in banding competitions as it is now evident that the States had actually agreed on common rules and a national committee had given patronage to a competition. This recognition was not forgotten by local brass bands. In 1927, the Victorian Band Association (VBA) upheld a protest brought about by one band, which was written up in an article published by *The Age* newspaper:

Malvern Tramways Band complained that two other bands in Melbourne were claiming themselves to be Australian champions, and a ruling was sought. It was set out that the title of the Australian championship was legitimately held to belong to Malvern Tramways Band by reason of its success in winning the Australian championship contest at Toowoomba, Q. last Easter. The association secretary (Mr. W. Martin) stated that he had replied that the Queensland Band Association had the right to grant the championship in 1926, and by its success at the Toowoomba contest Malvern Tramways Band was thereby the possessor of the title. The matter was one in which the band itself could take what action it considered advisable.” (“Victorian Band Association.,” 1927)

On a side note and somewhat related, this was a perfect case of when a State association proved to be effective on one ruling but failed to uphold another ruling. The two other bands that Malvern Tramways was referring to in their protest were their two main crosstown rivals; Brunswick City Municipal Band and Collingwood Citizens’ Band. In the latter part of 1927, these two bands held a ‘challenge contest’ at the Exhibition Building with adjudicators “P. Jones, P. Code & R. McAnallay” presiding (“CHALLENGE BAND CONTEST.,” 1927). Interestingly, the presenters of this contest declared that “This contest...will decide which is the best brass band in Australia” (“CHALLENGE BAND CONTEST.,” 1927). Needless to say the Victorian Bands’ Association was not pleased about this contest and they tried to disqualify both Brunswick and Collingwood – which brought about a response from Brunswick accusing the VBA of over-stepping itself as the current VBA rules “do not provide for a challenge contest” (“BEST BAND DISCORD,” 1927). The challenge contest still went ahead with Collingwood winning by two points (Greaves, 1996).

The 1930’s:

If the preceding two decades could be regarded as tentative, the next two decades where the National Council was reformed could be regarded as consolidation. In 1931 a new Victorian Bands’ League was formed by a large group of Melbourne metropolitan bands and every other band in the State rapidly affiliated. This led to the demise of the VBA and we see in a *Herald* article from 1933, the other State associations recognized the VBL as the single association for bands in Victoria and they sent through their affiliations with the new league (“BAND UNITY MOVE,” 1933). In the same article, Mr H. G. Sullivan, Secretary of the VBL “said he wanted to

see the formation of an Australian Band Council to unify band contests throughout Australia” (“BAND UNITY MOVE,” 1933). This move was also welcomed in other States. The Secretary of the Queensland Band Association (Q.B.A.) Mr. J. R. Foster, “said they were hopeful that in the near future a Federal Council would be formed to control and lay down rules for brass band contests throughout Australia.” (“BRASS BAND CONTESTS.,” 1933).

1937. Lieut. K. G. Kennedy. *The well-known Drum-Major and Adjudicator, also President of the Australian Bands' Council.* (Source: Victorian Bands' League Archives)



BRASS BAND CONTESTS.
Federal Council of Control ?
CONFERENCE FOR BRISBANE.

BRISBANE, Monday.—Referring to the statement that a Federal body had been formed to control band contests, Mr. J. R. Foster (secretary of the Queensland Bands' Association) said they were hopeful that in the near future a Federal Council would be formed to control and lay down rules for brass band contests throughout Australia. The Victorian Bands' League and the New South Wales Bands' Association had affiliated with the Queensland Association.

It was hoped that the first conference for the formation of a Federal Council would be held in Brisbane. Mr. Foster added that the Queensland Association had decided to hold a conference of all Queensland Bands' Associations in Brisbane during Exhibition Week to revise the rule book.

Toowoomba Chronicle and Darling Downs Gazette, 27/06/1933, pg. 4

A clue as to why the National Council was resurrected at this time lies in a long newspaper article from 1934 published in the *Central Queensland Herald* in which Mr. Foster, was interviewed. He provided some enlightening history:

“Years ago the whole of the State Band Associations throughout Australia were controlled by a Central Australian Band Conference, but since 1918 this body has not functioned although several attempts were made to revive the Council” said Mr. Foster yesterday.

“Last year, through the efforts of the Q.B.A., negotiations were made between New South Wales and the Victorian Bands' League to hold a conference representing all States to endeavour to formulate a set of rules applicable to band contests throughout the Commonwealth.”

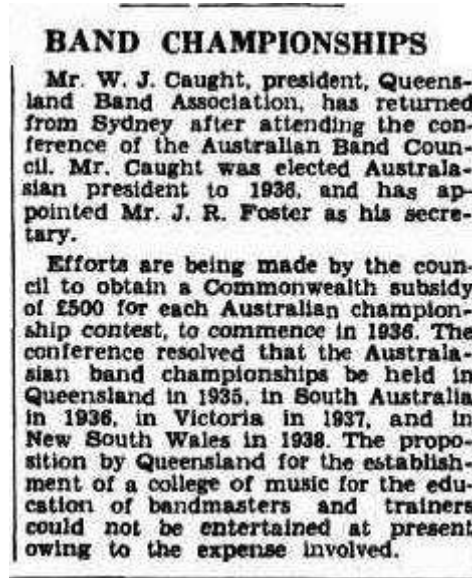
“The conference, which will be held in Sydney, will commence on April 9 and all States except Western Australia have expressed their intention of being represented.”

...
 “Included in the agenda will be a suggestion from Queensland that every effort will be made to establish an Australian school for band music on the same lines as Knellar Hall in England.”

“If this could be achieved it would be of inestimable help to building band-masters to study the theory of music and up to date band training methods”

...

“At present time all State Associations are affiliated, but it is felt that the establishment of a uniform set of contesting conditions will further cement the co-operation already existing amongst the State Associations.” (“HALL OF BAND MUSIC,” 1934)



Courier-Mail, 23/04/1934, pg. 16

No doubt this is an interesting set of developments and hopeful proposals. Evidently, the State associations were quite collegial in the way they were now operating. It seems, however, that “The proposition by Queensland for the establishment for a college of music for the education of bandmasters and trainers could not be entertained at present owing to the expense involved.” (“BAND CHAMPIONSHIPS,” 1934). This being said, an order of National championships was decided – “Queensland in 1935, in South Australia in 1936, in Victoria in 1937, and in New South Wales in 1938.” (“BAND CHAMPIONSHIPS,” 1934).

We also see evidence from this conference on just how difficult it was to achieve unity in rules. Mr. Dall, then Secretary of S.A.B.A. and the South Australian representative at the conference, was quoted in an article published in the *Advertiser* newspaper on the 30th of April:

“If such conferences are continued they will be of tremendous benefit to contesting bands in Australia. We found it difficult to frame rules owing to the different conditions operating in the various States. In framing a set of rules to apply to all States without seriously affecting any State’s present rules, we found it necessary to compromise on several items so that they would be applicable to all States.”

“If the conferences can be continued there is no doubt that in the near future a set of rules will be framed that will be entirely satisfactory to all bands throughout the Commonwealth. With this object in view we framed a set of rules for two years trial.” (“BAND CHAMPIONSHIPS HERE IN 1936,” 1934)

AUSTRALIAN BAND COUNCIL

Future Conferences In Melbourne

The biennial conference of the Australian Band Council, which is sitting in Brisbane, decided yesterday to make Melbourne its headquarters in future.

The first conference of the council was held in Sydney two years ago, but in future all conferences will be held in Melbourne. Mr. H. J. Sullivan, secretary of the Victorian Bands' League, who is the Victoria delegate to the council, was appointed permanent Federal secretary of the council.

The annual band championships will be held in the different States in rotation, as before.

Courier-Mail, 01/05/1936, pg. 18

The next biennial conference of the Australian Band Council was held in Brisbane during May, 1936. The *Courier-Mail* reported on some resolutions which included making Melbourne the national headquarters in future and that all future conferences would be held in Melbourne ("AUSTRALIAN BAND COUNCIL," 1936). "Mr. H. J. Sullivan, secretary of the Victorian Bands' League, who is the Victoria delegate to the council, was appointed permanent Federal secretary of the council." ("AUSTRALIAN BAND COUNCIL," 1936).

Evidently, a new President of the Australian Band Council was elected as seen by the picture which was published by the *Australasian Bandsman* newspaper in 1937 ("Lieut. K. G. Kennedy," 1937).

BANDS PRAISED

Hawthorn Conference

Band music was the music of the people, and its popularity with the public was indicated by the rapid growth of the band movement, said the Mayor of Hawthorn (Councillor J. A. Gray, M.L.A.), when he opened the third annual conference of the Australian Band Council in the Hawthorn Town Hall.

The president of the Municipal Association (Councillor E. C. Rigby) said he was agreeably surprised at the improved standard of brass bands and band music. Music was an essential part of the life of the community.

Other delegates to the conference were the president (Mr. K. G. Kennedy) and the secretary (Mr. H. J. Sullivan) of the Australian Band Council; Mr. R. Correll, of the Victorian Brass Band League; Mr. D. T. Beatson, of the Queensland Band Association; and Mr. H. G. Dall, of the South Australian Band Association.

Argus, 01/08/1938, pg. 2

Numerous rule changes were reported on before the commencement of the 1938 conference in Melbourne by the brass band correspondent to the *Advertiser* newspaper, colloquially known as 'Baton'. He wrote a very detailed overview of the rule proposals which, unfortunately, cannot be listed here due to

brevity. However, the rule proposals covered areas such as registration, marching and the quickstep competition (Baton, 1938). The conference, held at Hawthorn Town Hall in suburban Melbourne was a success and the Mayor of Hawthorn gave the conference, and brass bands full praise (“BANDS PRAISED,” 1938).

In 1939 the National Championships were held in Bundaberg, QLD over Easter and we see some reporting of new rules that were decided upon at the Melbourne conference. The *Cairns Post*, while highlighting the local brass band that was to take part, also reported that:

Rule nine of the Contest Rules governing all future championship contests now reads:- “(a) The Australian championship shall be competed for annually at a time and place to be decided by the Council, and shall be for “A” grade only”
“(b) State championships shall be held at such time and place as may be decided by the governing body.” (“BAND CHAMPIONSHIP.,” 1939)

Such are the vagaries of the rules. It was at this time however when the world was again plunged into War and there was a suspension of a majority of band contests. We next see articles relating to the National band council appear again in the middle to late 1940s.

The 1940s & 1950s:

It appears that the Australian Band Council was quiet during the Second World War years, which was understandable and certainly there is not much evidence to suggest that National competitions took place. This is not to say there were not local and State competitions during this time, at least in Victoria (Victorian Bands’ League, 1939). However, as shown by these same records, a competition was held in Frankston, Vic. in late 1945 and early 1946 which was called an “Australian Championship” (Victorian Bands’ League, 1939, p. 34). While it was called as such, the only bands that participated came from Victoria.

Coming into the 1950s we again see the ideals of the Australian Band Council being reiterated in local newspapers. Published in 1952, an article in the *Mudgee Guardian* tries to explain what the A.B.C. actually is and what it does:

“While the N.S.W. Band Association controls Band matters within that State, the Australian Band Council is the governing body for Band matters throughout the Commonwealth, and has jurisdiction within each State.

The objects of the A.B.C. are similar to the N.S.W.B.A. that is to say: To ensure that Band contests, solo and part competitions shall be conducted throughout Australia under a uniform set of rules: to deal with any appeals which may be made to the Council by any affiliated State governing body in respect of any action taken under any rule of the Council: to promote a general love and knowledge of Band music and good fellowship amongst Bandsmen: and to promote and assist in the promotion of, and to control Band contests.” (“BAND SERIES No. 6.,” 1952).

The article then proceeded to highlight other aims and ideals.

Unfortunately, the exact date of a name change to the National Band Council of Australia is unclear, however, as mentioned, their website publishes National results dating back only to 1950 (National Band Council of Australia, 2019).

Band President.
BRISBANE, January 11—
Mr C. H. Green (Brisbane)
has been re-elected president
of the Australian Band
Council. He is also presi-
dent of the Queensland Band
Association

Central Queensland Herald, 13/01/1955, pg. 17

Conclusion:

The history of the National Council is unique as there were a special set of circumstances needed to make sure it formed and succeeded. The various starts had similar aims and ideals with the uniformity of rules being first and foremost. Collegiality was emphasized despite the difficulty in creating a uniform set of rules and procedures. The interactions between different State associations are clearly highlighted in this regard. It seems that the State associations tried to make this work with the best of intentions and that is something to be admired. Certainly, the legacy is still seen today with the continued existence of a National Band Council of Australia and the National band championships which are held each year in a different State.

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