

OPENING STATEMENT (JON BISSET, CBAA)

Thank you to the committee for having us join today.

I'm Jon Bisset, CEO of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (the CBAA). Joining me today is Gordon Waters, Braidwood FM's Station Manager, and Holly Friedlander Liddicoat who coordinates CBAA's Government Relations program.

I'd first like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, who's lands we are broadcasting from today, and their Elders past, present and emerging.

In opening, I'd like to give an overview of the CBAA and the community broadcasting sector and then turn to the issues raised in our submission. I'll then hand over to Gordon who can speak about his experience last November when his station played a critical role for the Braidwood community, while under threat from fires.

The CBAA is the national peak body for community broadcasters across Australia. Our members include 89% of permanently licensed community radio stations, based in all States and Territories, and representing First Nations Australians, multilingual communities, young people, seniors, the LGBTQI+ community and people with a disability.

Community radio is Australia's largest independent media sector, one of three pillars of broadcasting alongside commercial and public broadcasters. Almost six million people listen each week to 450+ community radio services across Australia, 76% of which are in regional or remote areas.

Of these listeners, 918,000 listen *exclusively* to community radio – that is, they listen to community radio but not commercial radio or ABC/SBS. This figure shows the importance of utilising the sector for government communications, whether in future bushfire emergencies or equally with the current COVID-19 health crisis.

During the devastating 2019-20 bushfire season, 80 community radio stations broadcast to fire affected communities. These stations are closely linked to their local communities, drawing their volunteers and staff directly from the towns they serve.

Their stories are wide ranging. Along with the heartbreaking stories, we've heard about the many ways stations served their communities during and in the aftermath – conducting formal emergency broadcasting, sharing emergency and community information on air and online, connecting people to vital evacuation and relief services and working with community groups to organise local fundraising events. These services were only made more critical when power, internet and mobile

reception went down and community radio remained one of the only sources of local information.

Our submission to the inquiry also focused on the challenges stations faced, the Victorian emergency broadcasting model and the need for the involvement and integration of our sector in the Government's emergency planning – how can the sector's strengths be best utilised when most needed?

We also emphasised the small budgets of community radio stations, and the difficulty of quickly mobilising 'community capital' to face funding shortfalls in the same way as financial capital. This makes stations vulnerable to unforeseeable shifts in their income sources.

In closing, the CBAA stands ready to work with federal, state and territory governments to ensure the sector is prepared to play its role in future events and that our critical services can remain on-air during emergencies and in recovery.

We're working with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications to optimise the sector's funding arrangements to ensure the sector is adequately funded past the 2020/21 Budget in October. We're also engaging with the Government and the Senate (through a separate inquiry) to ensure the sector is fully utilised in distributing COVID-19 public health messaging, particularly to multilingual and other underserved communities.

I'll now pass to Gordon to make a brief opening statement, after which we'd be delighted to answer your questions.

OPENING STATEMENT (GORDON WATERS, BRAIDWOOD FM)

Thank you to the committee for having me here today.

My name is Gordon Waters and I am the Station Manager of Braidwood FM in Braidwood, NSW and have been for the past six years. I have also provided IT Support to the station for the past nine years, and due to this commitment to Braidwood FM, was awarded Braidwood's 2020 Citizen of the Year. I am also an occasional presenter and have been in and around Braidwood most of my life.

During the bushfires at the end of 2019, I started and lead Braidwood FM's two month-long bushfire update program. Initially with my colleague Rod McClure who helped me with nearly 14 days of straight coverage, and then later bringing in other volunteers to assist in the broadcasting of what was becoming a crucial service to the local community.

Braidwood FM is now in its 18th year of broadcasting and is run by a small team of 15 volunteers and has become a vital part of the community by providing a wide selection of entertainment and local programs but more importantly a local voice of news and information. I look forward to answering your questions about our experience.