

COMMUNITY BROADCASTING SUBMISSION

1. The Scope and Role of Australian Community Broadcasting across radio, television, the internet and other broadcasting technologies.

I would like to see Community Broadcasting be a more effective voice of the wider Australian Community than it currently is. Community Broadcasting should be a good forum for diverse opinions and healthy discussion. It is very important that it allows access to people and community groups which are not represented in other media. In Community Radio in particular, the tendency is to just play music and avoid sharing the opinions of people in the community for fear of offending someone or because the management of a community broadcaster is intolerant of the opinion of some community groups.

An example of this is the attitude of many community radio stations towards churches and christian groups. In Australia, more than twice as many people go to church every week as go to see live sport. Sport is well covered in Broadcasting but christian teaching, ideas and discussions are not well covered.

I believe there is good correlation between the number of volunteer presenters available to present particular types of programs and the level of interest in that type of programming in the community.

One community radio station has 4 hours of very restricted christian programs per week (out of 168 hours per week) which the Management sees as fulfilling its community access obligations. There are so many presenters from the community interested in being on these 4 hours per week that individual presenters get about 2 hours per month. This is while there is numerous hours designated for other types of programs which often no one is interested in presenting. The Management has the attitude that it is better to run "fill" programs of the CBAA satellite than to run another hour or two of a christian program. This management attitude extends to other types of program which are different to the station's Rock & Roll "corporate" style.

It would be good if Community Broadcasters could be legally protected (privilege) to allow free speech without fear of litigation provided they don't directly incite violence against any person or their property or broadcast material which is knowingly incorrect with the intention to deceive.

It would be good if Community Broadcasters were legally protected from adverse and unreasonable state legislation such as the Victorian anti-vilification legislation which only requires a person to feel offended for there to be an offence and truth is not a defence.

2. Content and Programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity

People of diverse opinions should be able to freely express their honest opinions provided they don't directly incite violence against any person or their property.

Vague and subjective statements such as "The purpose of this code is to encourage programming that reflects the principles of community broadcasting; to break down prejudice and discrimination; and to prevent the broadcast of material, which is contrary to community standards." should be deleted from the Community Broadcasting Codes.

Code 2 should read:-

Code No. 2: Guidelines for all programming

- 2.1 Community broadcasting licensees shall not broadcast material which may:
- (a) incite, encourage or present for their own sake violence or brutality
 - (b) simulate news or events in such a way as to mislead or alarm listeners or
 - (c) present as desirable the misuse of drugs including alcohol, narcotics and tobacco.
- 2.2 Community broadcasting licensees will avoid censorship wherever possible, however, consideration shall be given to the audience; the context; the degree of explicitness; the propensity to alarm, distress or shock; and the social importance of the event.
- 2.3 No part of this code is intended to prevent the broadcast of material which is factual, or the expression of genuinely held opinion in a news or current affairs program, or in the legitimate context of a humorous, satirical or dramatic work. However, community broadcasting licensees shall not broadcast material which will directly incite violence against people or property.

3. Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks

Multi channel digital broadcasting should be used to increase the number of opportunities for individuals and community groups to broadcast. It may be a good opportunity for Community Broadcasters to run a number of more specialist program channels.

In my experience, every community radio station and television station I have been involved with has a significant number of disenfranchised program providers. Holders of Community broadcasting licences should be compelled to provide alternate programs on the extra available channels if there are program providers who are interested in using them.

The practice I would like to see adopted regarding sponsorship announcements would be that they would run on all channels the community broadcaster was transmitting. This would make sponsorship of a community broadcaster more attractive.

4. Opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters.

While the Community Broadcasting Codes of Practice 2002 has very positive requirements such as

Code No.1: Responsibilities of broadcasting to the community: principles of democracy, diversity and independence

The purpose of this code is to ensure that the 'Guiding Principles' are reflected in the day to day operations and programming of community broadcasters.

Community broadcasting stations will:

- 1.1 Have policies and procedures in place, relating to the licensees community of interest, which ensure access and equity and encourage participation by those not adequately served by other media.
- 1.2 Be controlled and operated by an autonomous body which is representative of the licensee's community of interest.
- 1.3 Have organisational mechanisms to provide for active participation by the licensees

community in its management, development and operations.

However, I have been involved in three different Community Radio Stations and two different community television licensees and these ideals are sidestepped in every case.

It has been my experience that all the community radio stations I have been a member of have been controlled by a narrow interest group which has become entrenched. One Community Radio station is controlled by the smooth jazz group, another community radio station is controlled by a Hindi (Indian) group and the third radio station is controlled by the Rock and Roll interest group. They use similar tactics to prevent what they see as too much diversity of opinion in their board or management committee meetings.

They all adopt a “corporate style” of programming between 6am & 6pm Monday to Fridays and use excuses such as “we need to do this in order to get sponsorship.” If this was really true, this would represent a breach of-

Code No. 4: Sponsorship

Commensurate with the need to ensure active participation by the community in the station’s management, development and operations, community broadcasters will adopt and implement - in consultation with their communities - a sponsorship policy which:

- 4.1 ensures that sponsorship will not be a factor in determining access to broadcasting time
- 4.2 ensures that the content and style of individual programs is not influenced by the sponsors of programs
- 4.3 ensures that overall programming of community broadcasting stations is not influenced by sponsors

Two of the three community radio stations I have been a member of quite blatantly used the need for sponsorship as justification for requiring a “corporate” or “station music style” to be enforced from about 6am to 6pm on weekdays. Adequate enforcement of this regulation would greatly improve opportunities and reduce threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters.

There is also an idea which is quite prevalent that boards or management committees have to be able to move motions without dissent rather than the board members expressing individual ideas consistent with the parts of the community they represent. There is also a reluctance to provide details of the board’s deliberations to members and minutes of such meetings are usually recorded in a way which avoids revealing information.

Regulations requiring the Management Committee or Board of Community Broadcasters to be more accountable to the members would achieve a more diversity.

Sincerely,

Murray Peterson

PS. I have been a member of Community Television Sydney, SLICE TV (Sydney) and Bankstown Community Radio (BFM Bankstown, NSW). I am currently a member of Cumberland Community Radio (2CCR-FM at Baulkham Hills, NSW) and Community Radio Association Mackay (4CRM Mackay, Qld)

I had been a member of the Programming Committee of Community Television Sydney and I have been the Secretary of the Management Committee of Community Radio Association Mackay.