

1 December 2000

The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport
Communications and the Arts
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

**INQUIRY INTO THE ADEQUACY OF RADIO SERVICES IN
NON-METROPOLITAN AUSTRALIA**

The ABC National Advisory Council considered the terms of reference for the Radio Industry Inquiry at its meeting last week.

The Council has asked that the attached responses to the Terms of Reference be forwarded to you as an indication of the ABC National Advisory Council's views on these matters.

Yours sincerely



DEBORAH KLIKA

Convenor
ABC National Advisory Council

AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

The ABC National Advisory Council (NAC) is a statutory body formed under the provisions of the ABC Act. The Council obtains community views and advises the ABC Board on ABC programming matters. The NAC consists of twelve members selected from across Australia. Council members are selected for their ability to provide broad representation of the community. Members are drawn from diverse age groups, backgrounds and locations. The NAC's recommendations are published each year in the ABC's Annual Report

The role of the Council under Section 11 of the ABC Act is to “either on its own initiative or at the request of the Board, to furnish advice to the Board on matters relating to broadcasting programs and television programs of the Corporation”.

The NAC as part of consultation with communities consistently receives advice that ABC Radio is essential to regional and rural Australia. Council considers that the ABC provides a valuable link between rural, regional and urban Australia and provides a forum for communities to engage and put their view.

The NAC's response to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry follows.

The social benefits and influence on the general public of radio broadcasting in non-metropolitan Australia in comparison to other media sectors.

The NAC sees the ABC's role as being to provide innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services for all Australians. All Australians should have the opportunity to receive the same choice and quality of ABC programming across all networks as delivered to metropolitan Australia.

The NAC notes that the Charter of the ABC is to broadcast services which contribute a sense of national identity, inform and entertain Australians and reflect the regional cultural diversity of Australia.

Council views the loss of services such as banks, health and local industry to regional and rural Australia as further indication of the inequality of services available in these areas.

ABC regional radio plays a vital role in ensuring that regional communities have a positive sense of empowerment by providing local information and perspectives. The NAC sees the ABC as vital in bridging the growing sense of divide between regional and urban communities. ABC regional radio stations are unique in their ability to provide services in regional Australia. The NAC is constantly advised of the importance of regional radio to regional and rural communities in providing information essential to those communities and enhancing the sense of community in these areas.

Coverage of rural issues and the ability to feed local material into the national network is an integral part of ABC Radio, providing a service not available from any other broadcaster. ABC regional and rural journalists and ABC regional radio stations provide a strong community link.

The ABC's election coverage allows regional Australia to have its point of view heard in the national landscape. ABC regional journalists provide current debate and policies from a regional perspective and allow coverage of issues of local relevance during election campaigns which might otherwise go unreported.

ABC rural broadcasting is highly valued by regional and rural communities and well as in metropolitan areas. The ABC's expertise and contribution in this area is an essential part of daily life for the majority of people in regional and rural areas of Australia.

The National Advisory Council is currently examining ABC Sports broadcasts and has become aware of the benefit, which could be provided by local sports coverage if the ABC had the funding, facilities and staff to provide this service.

The role of ABC Radio in times of emergency such as floods, bushfire, cyclone as well as the ability of local reporters to bring information to the Australian community as a whole in times of need such as the recent floods, or the Childers hostel fire is vital.

ABC Online content is also providing valuable and relevant information to regional and rural areas.

The NAC as one of its areas of review has recently examined the ABC local online gateway, *The Backyard* and commends this type of initiative as a way of allowing local communities to link into the wider community.

The NAC also supported the widening of the television *Radio Pictures* initiative and sees the ability of the ABC to develop stories by regional communities about those communities which are accessible to all Australians as a very important development. The NAC strongly supports the expansion of production resources for both radio and television to regional Australia and would encourage the development of a prime time television program reflecting regional Australia to a metropolitan audience.

Future trends in radio broadcasting, including employment and career opportunities, in non-metropolitan Australia.

The NAC encourages the employment of broadcasters in regional and rural Australia. Engagement of people at a local level is important not only as they have local knowledge and contacts but also because of their ability to feed into the national network to provide a balanced view of Australian life is essential.

The effect on individuals, families and small business in non-metropolitan Australia of networking of radio programming, particularly in relation to local news services.

The NAC has received negative feedback about the networking of news programs. Regional and rural viewers see ABC Radio news and current affairs as a vital source of information on international, national and local levels. The recognition that there are many parts of regional Australia without access to newspapers is another reason why consideration in ensuring that regional communities must have equality of information.

While not an issue for the ABC, the NAC has also received feedback to the effect that the networking of radio is preventing local businesses from advertising on commercial radio, as local advertisements cannot be readily scheduled.

The potential for new technologies such as digital radio to provide enhanced and more localised radio services in metropolitan, regional and radio areas.

The NAC sees it as a right for all Australians to receive the diversity of services and programming from the ABC. This includes local radio, Radio National, Classic FM, Triple J and NewsRadio on the Parliamentary and News Network.

Recent community consultation has again highlighted the need for Triple J to provide a greater amount of local content.

Transmission to remote areas is a constant issue raised with NAC members
The NAC sees the allocation of spectrum to the ABC and sufficient
transmission facilities as vital.

While no doubt the introduction of digital radio broadcasting could provide a
means of serving local audiences, the NAC is yet to be able to judge the
benefit of this to regional and rural communities. The NAC is of the view
however, that provision of digital spectrum to the national broadcaster will
prove essential to the ABC being able to enhance its services.



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