

Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts  
Inquiry into Community Broadcasting  
March 2006

Submission by ArtSound FM 92.7, Canberra ACT

This submission by the Board of Management of ArtSound FM 92.7 in Canberra addresses the four terms of reference of the Inquiry.

Terms of Reference

**1. The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the internet and other broadcasting technologies**

*Community Radio*

Community radio provides the opportunity for communities of common interest to be represented and to participate in public life and discourse, and so to help develop and maintain a robust, healthy and interesting community, both locally and, by cumulative effect, nationally.

As well as fulfilling that primary role, community radio serves as a focus for developing a sense of local community through shared goals, activities and achievements.

Community radio is a unique medium. Apart from its obvious role as broadcaster of entertainment, it acts as an extensive personal and portable information system. It can respond quickly and well to local needs and events. It can talk about its own community, reflecting the personalities and interests of its people. It can program for specific audiences, rather than aim to be all things to all people, or to serve only the lowest common denominator.

Community radio allows for the more personal, humanised expression that is often lost in commercial media. One person, or a small team, can conceive, write, produce, engineer, perform and deliver a product exactly as they envisioned, and receive direct and often immediate feedback from their audience. Few opportunities exist for that kind of expression anywhere else in the media.

Community radio is a powerful means by which people can communicate both common and diverse values and experiences, and so learn about their culture and about themselves. There is a symbiotic relationship between broadcasting and culture. ArtSound FM succeeds because it has created a continuing, creative partnership with writers, performers, musicians and producers across Canberra and the surrounding region, and because it is a shared enterprise with its audience.

### *ArtSound FM to the present*

ArtSound FM is a twenty three year old cultural resource which exists to enlighten and enrich the quality of life for the people within its listening area. It strives to serve the section of the listening public with interests in classical, jazz, folk and world music, and in cultural affairs programming. It seeks to encourage an interest in and appreciation of local arts and issue-oriented news and information.

In the early 1980s a small but passionate group of musicians and artists identified these programming areas as being substantially unserved in Canberra by other media outlets. Today they would still remain poorly served, despite a large increase in the number of radio stations, were it not for ArtSound FM's efforts.

The station's membership remains firmly of the view that a high quality FM outlet, dedicated principally to the music and arts of the Canberra region, was a good idea in 1983 and still is. There are writers, actors and musicians of national calibre in Canberra, yet before ArtSound FM commenced its service, there were only token opportunities for the development of this talent through commercial media. There was no guarantee that the various visual and performing artists in the local area would be given support and encouragement through a reasonable and substantial proportion of local programming time. The Australian Broadcasting Authority agreed with those views when it awarded ArtSound FM a high-power, full time broadcasting licence in 2000.

### *Artsound FM and the future*

At ArtSound FM, we aim to fulfil and expand community radio's role by:

- complementing and supplementing other radio stations by broadcasting music in the genres of jazz, folk, world, and classical;
- broadcasting spoken word programs (news, reviews, interviews and creative works) relating to music, theatre, film, dance, literature, and the visual arts, and primarily relating to the local arts community;
- producing programs for national and international distribution, to expose and promote local creative talent while showcasing our production facilities and expertise;
- helping to develop, expose and distribute to larger audiences high quality, original Canberra productions;
- seeking to challenge and disprove negative stereotypes about local arts endeavours, and about Canberra itself, by showcasing local talent and expertise, and drawing attention to the quality, quantity and variety of local artistic achievement;
- providing training and experience in recording and broadcast technology, and in radio programming and administration;
- providing individuals with opportunities for community service and personal development by acting as a sponsor, donor, board member, presenter, administrator or other volunteer;
- serving as a focal point for cultural activity and artistic expression in the region; and
- producing private and public audio and/or visual recordings to preserve personal and public histories for future generations.

## **2. Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics consistently reports that the Canberra populace spends significantly more on arts activities and products than do people elsewhere in Australia. Given the role of all the arts in Canberra's economy, social life and identity, they should be properly and fairly reflected in the media. Community radio is an ideal method for doing so.

Canberra and its surrounding region, like Australia as a whole, have a culturally diverse population. While SBS, CMS and 2XX provide for foreign-language broadcasting, there remains scope for specialised programming that reflects the cultural diversity of our communities and that celebrates our numerous artistic traditions and continuing innovations.

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

The rapid growth of new communications technologies, in conjunction with the emergence of more efficient digital distribution media, has laid the basis for a whole new range of services which will change the face, not just of broadcasting, but of our entire communications system. Simultaneously, the internet and podcasting techniques are transforming the conventional ways in which consumers receive their programming. Distant radio stations, and other program sources, whether domestic or international, private or public, are now available to Australians in ever growing numbers. But community radio will always hold up a mirror to the local community and provide recognizable voices and artists. Australians are entitled to as much choice in programming as changing technologies and technical distribution arrangements enable them to receive. However, "choice" for Australians would be meaningless unless it also continues to include programming which reflects local community cultural heritage, and community radio has largely taken on this role. In its relatively short lifetime, community radio has become a most cost effective vehicle of social and cultural expression for many Australians.

The advancement of digital technology means that community radio now has access to high quality production tools. This contrasts with community radio in the early 1970s which survived on electro-mechanical devices handed down from commercial radio stations. This means there no longer needs to be a technical quality distinction between community radio and its national commercial peers. When digital radio arrives, a further distinction of coverage will disappear overnight – what were small sub-metropolitan community stations will theoretically have the same quality of service and coverage as traditional large, high powered metropolitan stations.

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

ArtSound FM continues to explore the artistic possibilities of the radio medium. We seek to support individual artists and to increase the audience base for all the arts. Programming to achieve this aim varies according to the field of artistic endeavour. Examples are commissioning

and broadcasting original works; technical and production assistance; programs about and reviews of artists and their works; and educational programs about techniques, trends and so on.

We intend to develop programs for and by children which help foster creativity, social and artistic skills and cultural interests, as well as an appreciation of local identity and diversity.

We also plan to increase communications with and between the regions immediately adjacent to Canberra. In this regard, we will develop a network of community arts correspondents, provide them with access to suitable equipment, and encourage them to contribute "program modules" that reflect what's going on in the daily life of the arts community. ArtSound FM can facilitate productions and co-productions that might otherwise not be undertaken, by finding grants to commission local works and by offering production facilities. These original productions will be distributed via community radio presentation in Canberra and elsewhere.

### *Threats*

a) Commercial broadcasters have consistently opposed any expansion of the community broadcasting sector. It is important that community broadcasters have access, on reasonable terms, to sufficient digital broadcasting frequencies, enabling them to meet their community objectives using the most modern technologies.

b) Care must be taken to ensure that community radio stations have access to broadcasting sites at reasonable rates which reflect their not-for-profit status. **We recommend that action be taken to ensure that commercial operators of national broadcasting sites do not discriminate against or exclude any licensed community broadcaster wishing to gain access to prime transmission sites now effectively monopolized by commercial operators.**

c) Community broadcasters, by the very nature of their operations, face a challenge in achieving financial self-sufficiency. The sector is generally mindful of its licence obligations but must continue to have access to a reasonable level of sponsorship income. **We recommend increasing the current limit of 5 minutes of sponsorship messages in any hour to 6, thereby providing a modest but vital increase to community radio's revenue generating capabilities.**

### *Conclusion*

ArtSound FM is succeeding in its aim to cater to listeners with a particular interest in all the arts, and in selected music genres, whose preferences were not well served by other radio stations because of restrictive commercial formats. Established as a non-profit entity by and for the local arts constituency, ArtSound FM continues to serve its diverse membership drawn from throughout the ACT region, and is proof of the power of community radio in action.

### Contact Details

Mr Evan Shipe  
President, Board of Management  
ArtSound FM 92.7

PO Box 87  
CURTIN ACT 2605

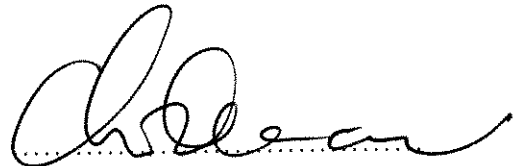
T: 02 6281 6286  
F: 02 6281 0020  
E: [shipe@shipemason.com](mailto:shipe@shipemason.com)  
W: [www.artsoundfm.asn.au](http://www.artsoundfm.asn.au)

### Statement

This submission was prepared by select members of the Board of Management, and was considered and agreed by the Board of Management at its meeting of 14 March 2006, and is submitted to the Committee by the Board of Management on behalf of ArtSound FM 92.7.



Evan Shipe  
President, Board of Management  
15 March 2006



Chris Deacon  
Vice-President, Board of Management  
15 March 2006