

EBAQ Ltd Submission - Community Broadcasting Inquiry

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

The Ethnic Broadcasting Association of Queensland Ltd trading as 4EB FM has been broadcasting in Brisbane since 1979. In that time the station has changed from AM to FM and now broadcasts in over 50 different languages. We have over 300 broadcasters, many more volunteers and thousands of listeners. Community support has increased to the point where we currently have over 4700 members, as well as over 200 community organisations and over 200 businesses supporting the station through sponsorship, donations and membership on a yearly basis.

Interaction is 4EB FM's primary focus - allowing people from the community to broadcast "live" on the phone everyday as well as conducting outside broadcasts and allowing many visitors to the studios and this makes the station a community hub. For many communities they do not have access to a public space to utilise and this reinforces the need to communities to not only broadcast on 4EB FM but also use the building as a base for organising community activities. From the radio broadcasts - information continues to flow through the community via the internet, magazines, television, community gatherings and word of mouth.

Use of the Internet to webstream will increase as demand increases. In particular, considering the geographic make up of Australia and the current number of licensed community radio stations, each full-time ethnic metropolitan community radio station has the best position of any organisation to provide a local language service across the whole of the state from which they broadcast. This could be a way of providing a language broadcast service to those communities that have no service within their state. The cost effective way of providing this local service would be to broadcast via the internet and to market this service as such for the benefit of all potential listeners in each state that have limited or no language services available to them. Eventually, this service could be provided by other means for those people that do not have access to the internet. This would assist significantly in maintaining language and culture.

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

Currently, 4EB FM broadcasts in 50 different languages on a weekly basis. Programmes consist of local and international news, community announcements, settlement information, presentation of government and aid organisation information, music and cultural information, and interviews with government employees, experts and community leaders.

All programmes are produced locally and provide a service that contains specific local information that is very different from SBS, other local ethnic commercial media services, satellite services or internet services in people's first language.

With services such as 4EB FM available, government advertising can more effectively be communicated to all residents (including those that have English as a second language). This can help to stop divisions occurring in the community due to lack of information. 4EB FM has helped to improve the harmony of our multicultural country and proudly promotes our diverse population.

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

4EB FM's primary focus is broadcasting on 98.1fm and we also provide limited internet services such as web-streaming and being able to download programme segments.

4EB FM would like to provide a repeater service to other regions in South East Queensland that currently have no locally produced programmes in languages other than English. The possible licensing of such a service for regions outside of Brisbane is of great interest not only to 4EB FM but to potential listeners in these regions.

We have had many requests from outside of the Brisbane region for a radio service to be provided to regions that currently have no service. In particular, areas surrounding Stanthorpe, Ipswich, Gold Coast hinterland, Sunshine Coast hinterland, and Toowoomba and other western regions have all requested for community radio to be broadcast in their region in their first language. Whilst it may not be financially viable to build a studio in those regions, providing a radio signal from Brisbane would be of huge benefit to those people that have migrated to those regions whether they be professionals, retirees, students or refugees.

Networking between regions is already a large part of 4EB FM with many programmes exchanging "live to air" reports with other language programmes intrastate, overseas and interstate on a weekly basis. These reports between community, commercial and government stations are provided on a voluntary basis by 4EB FM's broadcasters and provide a valuable service to communities not only in Brisbane but in many regions in Australia and abroad.

New services such as Podcasting and digital broadcasting will be sought after by the younger segment of 4EB's listenership and will be a large part of 4EB's future. However, there has been a very small financial return from the investment in new technologies with changes in radio listenership patterns being much slower than the changes in technology.

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

Opportunities are often created by resources such as income, volunteer labour, staff experience and through support provided by businesses, government and community organisations. 4EB FM has managed to increase its net income through increased productivity and this has allowed the staff to provide more technical and production support and the station has worked towards providing more training for broadcasters.

With a steady income base the station has been able to maintain the small staff that it has for the past four years and has lead to more support for volunteers who have also maintained their involvement.

All of the above opportunities are being pursued vigorously as well as seeking an increase and improvement in links with all tiers of government. The federal government provides a major source of funding to 4EB FM through ethnic program grants and if funding were to be reduced this would be a huge threat to 4EB FM and it's ability to provide adequate services to the greater Brisbane region and beyond.

There are opportunities to increase programming for new and emerging communities. More particularly there is the opportunity to increase youth programming to target second-generation migrants as well as target those young people who are growing up in Australia who have migrated from many regions of the world including Asia, Pacific, Middle East and Africa.

Unfortunately, we have a limited amount of airtime and there is a large amount of demand so it is difficult to cater for all communities but we strive to do so. As a result many programmes on 4EB FM are limited in length. Many programmes are only 45 minutes in length which indicates how difficult it is to gain a one hour programme or a programme of longer length.

One significant threat to 4EB FM is managing change and being prepared for the changing environment within the media industry.

I do not believe that government departments have used community radio to its potential to advertise and promote government information to the residents of Australia. I believe this is an opportunity for the Federal government to better promote its services in a more cost effective manner to a larger audience.

For further information please contact:

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