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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND  
THE ARTS

25 October 2000

Mrs Janet Holmes  
Inquiry Secretary  
Parliament of Australia  
House of Representatives, Standing Committee  
On Communications, Transport and the Arts  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

House of Representatives Standing  
Committee on Communications,  
Transport and the Arts

Submission No: 124

Date Received: 26/10/00

Secretary: Janet Holmes

Dear Janet

Please find enclosed a Submission to the House of Representatives Communications and The Arts Committee, Inquiry into the Adequacy of Radio Services in Non-metropolitan Australia.

Should you have any questions in relation to the Submission please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

  
Noel Crowe  
General Manager  
*Sport 927*

## Radio Sport 927 (3UZ Pty Ltd) Submission

Inquiry into the Adequacy of Radio Services in Non-metropolitan Australia

House of Representatives Communications and The Arts Committee

### **Introduction**

This submission to the House Committee On Communications, Transport and The Arts Inquiry into 'The Adequacy of Radio Services in Non-Metropolitan Australia' contains some comment on the policy set by the Government with the introduction of the Broadcasting Services Act (1992) and the contrast with the type of services that were dictated by the Broadcasting Act (1942).

We also describe what we believe is an appropriate example of a radio broadcasting service that can be networked from metropolitan markets into regional and rural Australia.

### **Radio Sport 927 (3UZ Pty Ltd)**

Radio Sport 927 is a Melbourne commercial radio station owned by the Victorian Racing Industry. The station's principal role is to broadcast all Australian racing events, thoroughbred, harness and greyhounds on which the Victorian wagering agency Tabcorp operate a betting service.

Over the course of the 2000/2001 racing season the station will broadcast some 50,000 individual races supplemented by the provision of information to enable listeners to make informed wagering decisions.

### **The Changed Structure of Radio Services in Regional Areas**

Under the previous Broadcasting Act (1942) radio stations were under an obligation to provide comprehensive programming ie to be "all things to all people".

In country areas this meant that stations broadcast a high level of local content and this was understandable given that most areas relied on a single, generally commercial, radio station.

For example in 1981 Mildura had a single commercial station. However, in the following 20 years there has been a rapid expansion in the number of radio services in regional areas. In Mildura 5 services became available by 1994 and by 1999 the number had expanded to more than 10.

The expansion in the number of radio services was facilitated by the introduction of the Broadcasting Services Act (1992) as well as the formation of the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

The Broadcasting Services Act (1992) introduced the concept of Narrowcasting to serve the needs of listeners with specific interests and it aimed to provide at least one Community station in each market. Additional ABC Services were also introduced.

The range of services that became available to non metropolitan listeners removed the need for each individual service to provide comprehensive programs with a high degree of localism. The aim was to ensure that the total mix of services available to a community was comprehensive.

In this period, the Government expanded the JJJ service, which emanates from Sydney, to 70 country areas. This network met a popular demand for the service in these areas and there has been no suggestion that they are deficient because they do not offer any local content.

A community radio station is, by its nature, a service designed to meet the needs of the local community and as such provides a considerable degree of local content. In this way a community station provides the localism that is not possible with the networked services that are also in demand by the public in regional and rural areas.

#### **Racing Radio Station Services Networked into Regional and Rural Australia**

Radio Sport 927, and all racing radio stations in every state and territory, operate a relay, or network service, into most regional and rural areas throughout Australia and do so due to the strong demand for racing radio services in regional and rural areas.

All racing radio stations re-transmit, or network, their programs from metropolitan based studios and serve regional areas through the narrowcast or commercial licences that they hold.

Although these racing radio programs are delivered from the metropolitan studios of the station, they are reliant on racecallers broadcasting "live" from regional and rural race tracks. Most race calls actually emanate from non metropolitan areas.

Racing in regional and rural Australia is not only an integral part of the very fabric of society but also a significant contributor to employment and the general economy of most regional and rural regions throughout Australia.

Whilst Sport 927 provides the infrastructure for Victorian race broadcasting it also, through network arrangements with racing stations in other states, provides a full coverage of interstate race meetings and is therefore able to provide a national racing service to regional and rural listeners.

It is widely acknowledged that without a racing radio service in regional and rural areas not only would very large numbers of listeners be totally denied a service that they demand but also racing's social and economic contribution to regional and rural Australia would be placed at significant risk.

### **Radio Sport 927 Broadcasts Networked into Regional and Rural Victoria**

In addition to the Melbourne service, frequency 927 AM, Radio Sport 927 operates a network service into eleven regional services that now enable approximately 90% of the entire Victorian population to listen to racing on radio, networked on relay from Sport 927. Originally this relay service was facilitated by a number of low powered 'Open Narrowcast' (LPON) class licences secured by Sport 927.

Whilst still reliant on low powered services to network its service into both the Gippsland region and Western District most other major regional areas now receive high powered relay services of Sport 927 race broadcasts and racing programs.

In response to demand we are anxious to extend the service to Gippsland and the Western District. These areas are partially covered by low powered Open Narrowcast (LPONC) transmitters using LPONC licences but the areas need high powered transmitters to adequately serve the public.

Until the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) undertake the completion of the Local Area Planning Process (LAP) in the Gippsland region and Western District no high powered services are able to be established, and only after the ABA have identified that spare frequencies are available in those regions

The Sport 927 regional service was established to accommodate the broadcast of races and racing programs that, in most regional areas, were previously broadcast by the local community station. Additionally ABC radio also provided race broadcasts into all Victorian regions up until June 1998. These broadcasts of races and racing programs into regional areas was generally restricted to Saturdays and major racing events such as the Melbourne Cup.

The need to establish a full coverage of race broadcasting services throughout the state has become particularly acute following the cessation of race broadcasts to these areas by the ABC in June 1998.

The cessation of the ABC racing service resulted in a groundswell of criticism from listeners from almost every part of Victoria as was the case in all states across Australia. So extensive and vocal was that criticism it was considered as important an issue that the Federal Government established a House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts inquiry, Regional Radio Racing Services.

The Committee's report, released in June 2000, acknowledges the strong demand for racing radio broadcasts that exists in regional and rural Australia and fully supports each racing stations racing radio services that are networked into most major regional and rural areas.

### **Submission**

Radio Sport 927 submits that:

- Most major regional areas are now served by multiple National, Commercial, Community and Narrowcasting radio services offering a mix of networked, special interest and local programs.
- The introduction of Community stations to these areas, with their focus on community or local issues, has largely transferred this type of programming to them, from other stations, that provided this type of program in the past. This has generally satisfied the need for localism in these areas.
- There is a demand by the public in regional areas for the range of radio services available in metropolitan areas. Examples are JJJ, ABC Classic FM and Race Broadcasting, all of which are networked.
- Networking of radio services into regional and rural areas is both legitimate and appropriate where the program format/material is unable to be generated locally, as is the case with racing radio services.
- The networking of racing radio services into regional and rural areas provides a significant social benefit. It also supports and stimulates employment opportunities and contributes to the general economy.