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



MIDWEST
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION

Ms Janet Holes
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Communications Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts	
Submission No:	141
Date Received:	27/10/00
Secretary:	Janet Holmes

Dear Janet

RADIO INDUSTRY INQUIRY

Please accept this submission on behalf of the Mid West region to the House of Representatives Radio Industry Inquiry.

The Mid West Region of Western Australia extends along the west coast from Green Head to Kalbarri and inland more than 800 kilometres into the Gibson Desert. Its area of 472, 336 km² covers nearly a fifth of WA, and comprises nineteen local government authorities. The region has a population of over 50,000, 30,000 of which live in the City of Geraldton, the region's commercial, administrative and service centre. The region's economy is based on mining, services, agriculture, pastoralism and fishing.

Given the Mid West's size, thinly spread population and diversity, reliable communications are a necessity. In many cases effective communications infrastructure saves lives.

The Commission through its Mid West Communications Working Group has developed a Communications Strategy for the Mid West. This strategy identifies radio services as an issue for the region.

One major issue identified was been the withdrawal of Short Wave radio transmission services. Local communities were informed in 1994 that the service was being temporally withdrawn on a trial basis, however no replacement has since been offered. Short wave ABC transmissions were a valuable service that could be received in remote communities. Importantly, these services were relied upon when regular ABC services were disrupted during cyclones. This lack of service replacement raises duty of care implications.

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In order to address this issue, the Commission has attempted to lobby the ABC to consider the location of a high powered AM transmitter(10kw) in the town of Meekatharra. This transmitter would fill a hole in the network and provide vital cyclone warning information when transmitters in the Pilbara are disabled, as frequently occurs during the cyclone season. Despite lobbying, the ABC's unacceptably low transmission budget prevents capital spending on new transmission sites. This is a situation that requires addressing. The Commission is of the view that an AM transmitter in Meekatharra is essential for the well being of people living in the Mid West region.

Community radio is another area where community expectations are not being met. It is currently difficult for small communities to access Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) frequencies. In addition licence fees are often too expensive for small rural/remote communities groups, given their often small memberships.

The Commission is pleased with the recent announcement that Batavia Coast FM has been awarded a provisional transmission licence for the North Midlands region, which includes the shires of Mullewa, Morawa, Perenjori, Coorow, Three Springs Mingenev and Carnamah. Batavia Coast will broadcast a service from Geraldton which will be more relevant to the area and contain significantly more local content than the previous Karratha based service

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. If further information is required, please contact Mr Ashley Clements at the Commission on (08) 99210 785.

Yours faithfully



GRAEME BAESJOU
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

20 October 2000