

Secretary:.....

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

12 Adrian Court,
Heathmont
Vic 3135

Submission No: 277

Date Received:

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3rd March 2001

To the House of Representatives Committee members inquiring into the Radio Industry

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I am prepared to come to Canberra to appear before the Committee.

The stimulus for wanting to make my views known to the Government arise from events in Tamworth, immediately after the 2000 Country Music Festival.

As you know, many Radio Station 2TM staff were sacked, and most of its operations absorbed by a network operating out of Sydney.

You have already received submissions on this matter, and I have not added to the comments you have already heard from people based in Tamworth, other than sharing with my own observations.

I have attached my CV which allows you work out where I am coming from.

I have been in the media for 25 years, mostly in television, and the 2TM experience repeats the havoc wrought in rural television under the aggregation policies introduced by the Hawke Government, and maintained by successive administrations.

Until then, each major country community throughout Australia had its own television station, news service, and often other local programs. An example was Ballarat, where a talent quest winner named Darryl Summers starred in a childrens' show called "Hey Hey, it's Saturday morning." Created in a rural city, the show trialled on the Nine Network on Saturday Mornings and shortly after moved to national Saturday night prime time slot, renamed "Hey Hey, It's Saturday." It was a family favourite for nearly 20 years.

Under aggregation, each rural television station was required to attach itself to one of the three national networks, often against its will. The result was hundreds of TV jobs lost in the country, and the widespread destruction of local television production. Local news and children's programs have all but disappeared in rural Australia.

The damage is worse than that. For example, in Bendigo, one of the TV stations regularly allocated \$100,000 for community projects it either funded or sponsored. Aggregated to Channel Ten, most of the staff were laid off, and all community sponsorships and local production ceased. This is a common story all over Australia.

One of the perceived benefits of TV aggregation was to make the commercial programming of metropolitan commercial TV stations, and SBS, available in the bush. This has been achieved but I feel sure most country viewers lament the loss of local TV programming which reflected the issues to relevant their own societies. Pre-aggregation, local stations were free to deal with all metropolitan stations, chose network programs to suit their communities, and filter out low quality or inappropriate programs not welcomed by country viewers. Many rural communities enjoyed the best of what was on offer. The loss is not only to country communities, adding to the cultural disenfranchisement, but also to the TV industry itself.

Pre aggregation, rural TV was the seed bed of the industry where young people could start building a career, and possibly move on to greater things in the city. This loss of young, talented, multi skilled and resourceful people with "hands on" and "can do" attitudes is now sorely felt in the television industry, accompanied by a corresponding drop in standards.

Australian TV production has enough problems surviving , and I believe it has been weakened by a lack of diversity by becoming "Sydney-centric," and by a reduction in career opportunities.

The 2TM radio changes follow the same path. Having been involved in country music and its history for some years now, there is no doubt the Tamworth Country Music Festival was born on the airwaves of radio 2TM.

One of country music legends, John Minson hosted a popular night time show on 2TM called "Ho-down," which was broadcast nightly out of Tamworth. The promotion of Australian country music on his program eventually lifted the profile of the genre to a point where a festival to bring together the fans and performers became a natural consequence.

The Tamworth festival is now a well recognised cultural event in Australia, giving enjoyment to country music fans and professional opportunities to Australian performers. It also has proven to be the largest single boost to Tamworth's's economy.

It is a tangible and classic example of how a radio station close to its community can bring about change for the better.

Environmentalists talk about the importance of biodiversity in the natural world, and I suggest cultural diversity is essential to maintain a healthy human society - not just multi culturalism through immigration, but also naturally emerging groups in our own society which are worthy of recognition. Country Music is a valid expression of Australian culture, like bush poets, and other Australian authors and composers.

Access to radio airwaves is becoming essential to the survival of any form of Australian music. In 1987, I was fortunate enough to travel on a scholarship to study American media, and saw how Nashville developed its own country music culture. Nashville Radio keeps that culture alive and thriving throughout America. The thought that Nashville would surrender its radio station to a network broadcasting out of, say, New York is unthinkable.

Outside the music issue, there is the question of the media's role in reinforcing local community's identity - in Tamworth's case, weather and agricultural events like rodeos are relevant and interest the station's listeners. Sydney traffic reports are of no interest to New England listeners, yet that is what the local communities are burdened with.

Sadly, the system which allowed this to happen, also stops the solution, which is the creation of another local commercial station on the New England airwaves. There are only two commercial licences available to Tamworth- one AM and one FM. Both are in the hands of Mr Karalis' company, the current owner of 2TM.

I have been informed by the Australian Broadcasting Authority it is therefore impossible for any individual or consortium to set up a Tamworth based commercial radio station to give the community back what it has lost.

So on one hand the ABA has a policy not to interfere with program decisions by commercial operators, but on the other, has a policy which guarantees protection of those decisions, even if they are against the community's wishes. The owners of 2TM made a decision to network programs out of Sydney for commercial reasons, and are entitled to do so. But they have done that knowing a competitor cant test the popularity of that decision in the market place, which is a form of institutionalised protectionism.

In fairness, the ABA may not have foreseen the uncompetitive result and negative community reaction from the actions of 2TM's owners when it issued its last Licence Area Plan for this area.

The solution, in my opinion is for the ABA to promptly revisit this area, listen to the community, and consider implementing a new LAP as soon as possible.

Finally, I would like to comment on ABA responses which put forward the proposition that community stations and the ABC can fill the void created by 2TM's program changes. I submit this is a simplistic assessment by far removed beurocrats who demonstrate they have no understanding of radio reality, and this is disturbing in itself.

The ABC provides excellent programming in this area, and I make no criticism of its service. All over Australia the ABC coexists with commercial radio, and even though it operations are sometimes regarded as competing with them, it is generally agreed the ABC has a different agenda, and a different radio audience.

Community Stations, no matter how well intentioned, are from my observation, usually grossly under funded, restricted by regulation in their ability to generate income, lack business skills, achieve lower program standards, and have weaker transmission. Their influence on the communities in which they broadcast is with few exceptions, minimal.

Almost everywhere around Australia commercial radio stations are more dynamic, and the most listened to. In return, they invest more in community projects and events. 2TM was such a station- close to its community, and once the driving force to create and reinforce a unique identity for Tamworth.

I congratulate this inquiry for its very existence. It shows our elected representatives are prepared to listen to community concerns about the proper use of what are really first and foremost, **our** airwaves. I hope the Committee will agree with me the Government and the Australian Broadcasting Authority needs to urgently re-think its policies, and take steps to reverse the damage it has already allowed to happen in the radio industry.



Jim Brown's and Stanza TV- CV:-

Married with 2 teenage children 12 Adrian Court Heathmont
Vic 3135.

Education: NZ School Certificate and N.Z University Entrance, and part
time study at University- see below.

Former careers: Primary School Teacher NZ 1959 to 1964

NZ Police 1964 to 1975- Qualified to rank of Detective Inspector- most of Police
Service in CIB. Studied Criminal Law and Criminology at Auckland and
Wellington Universities.

Joined TV2, Wellington NZ in 1975 as News reporter.

1977 Transferred to Hamilton NZ as journalist in charge of staff of five

Moved to Melbourne late 1979 to work for Channel 9 News Melbourne.

1982 began working for Channel Ten Melbourne as news and current affairs
reporter. Won Thorn and Penguin awards for Ash Wednesday Bushfires, Lindy
Chamberlain Trial, Fall of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines Worked on
assignment in Yugoslavia (visions of Medjugorje) and Thailand- Yellow Rain
attacks on refugees.

During this time formed Stanza Productions Pty Ltd to make documentaries
and corporate videos etc.

Two major film documentaries were "Banjo's Australia" and Henry
Lawson's "Australia" in 1986 and 87. Both won awards for best documentary
and camerawork in Australia. "Banjo's Australia" was shown in prime time in
Britain on the BBC and on PBS in the USA where it was the first documentary
to be nominated for an Emmy Award. Both videos continue to sell well in VHS
form to the public.

1987 Travelled throughout USA to study TV industry on USIS fellowship.

In 1992 was contracted to "Healthy Wealthy and Wise" as a travel presenter and interviewer of Australian characters. By the end of 1998 had covered more than 200 Australian stories and worked on special programmes covering overseas travel destinations in New Zealand, Thailand, Louisiana, Northern Ireland and South Africa.

These programs have been sold to several countries.

While a partner in Stanza Television hosted and produced with Stanza's production facilities 20 one hour programmes for the Prime Network called "OUR COUNTRY" during 1997 and in 1998 hosted and produced "The Farming Show" for the rural stations affiliated to the Ten Network.

Has acted as a TV consultant, and been involved in management training for several major companies and specialises in teaching creative writing skills for in house publications and memo writing.

In 1996 collaborated with singer Noel Watson to release a CD titled "Banjo Jim and Me"- by performing readings of Banjo Paterson's poetry. Has performed publicly with Watson at the Tamworth Country Music Festival and Ballarat Wool Shed. Was a judge for 1999 Golden Guitar Awards, Tamworth Country Music festival, and is an experienced public speaker.

Also hosted a country music show on radio-"Around Australia."

Stanza has completed 3 documentaries on Australia shown overseas during the Olympic Games in 2000.

Currently presenting travel segments on "Good Morning Australia" with Bert Newton

Latest large corporate assignment is producing a video and interactive CD ROM for the Australian Greenhouse Office for showing at the Hague in November 2000. Stanza TV uses its own Media 100 non linear system


(JIM BROWN)

Holmes, Janet (REPS)

From: Morris, Robert (REPS) on behalf of Committee, Treaties (REPS)
Sent: Wednesday, 16 May 2001 8:54 AM
To: Holmes, Janet (REPS)
Subject: FW: regional radio inquiry



j holmes 15 may
01.doc

Jan

This was in the treaties box

Bob

-----Original Message-----

From: Roger Wood [mailto:roger@radio889.org.au]
Sent: Wednesday, 16 May 2001 11:48 AM
To: jsct@aph.gov.au
Subject: regional radio inquiry

dear janet

please find attached our submission to the regional radio inquiry

thankyou for accepting this very late submission

it's fairly lengthy, but it's an easy read (because it was a hard write), and i am sure will enjoy reading it

you may even get a few laughs out of it

i am of course always available for discussion

please ring 02 6683 2778 after 10am

regards roger wood