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SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS

Community Broadcasting Enquiry

1.
2SER'S Mission Statement

2SER has a community broadcasting licence with a special interest defined as educational broadcasting.

> *The mission of Sydney Educational Broadcasting Limited is to operate community radio station, 2SER, and related media services, providing a stimulating forum for learning and the expression of alternative ideas, informed by and promoting principles of social justice. In pursuit of its mission, the company anticipates, reflects and responds to the social, cultural and educational needs of the diverse Sydney community.*
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> *The company is committed to freedom of inquiry and the pursuit of excellence in educational broadcasting and the promotion of interaction between community groups.*

History

Community broadcasting, along with the revival of film and television, literature, music, theatre and the arts, was one of the social and cultural innovations that followed the burgeoning of an independent Australian identity, 35 years ago.

2SER (Sydney Educational Radio) has its origins in that movement. In the early 1970's it was proposed that an educational radio station be established based on a consortium of Sydney universities. 2SER made its broadcasting debut on October 1, 1979, with the support of many hundreds of groups and individuals.

2SER has made a significant contribution to the cultural, social and intellectual fabric of Greater Sydney for 27 years. It has identified, nurtured and fostered many social trends, ideas and attitudes at grass roots level and seen them flourish in the mainstream. It has provided exposure and a platform for local, emerging talent to develop and prosper.

The station has also contributed to the diversity of ownership and editorial control in Australian broadcasting and has offered an alternative forum for both its contributors and listeners.

Today, 2SER operates as a company limited by guarantee and is jointly owned by Macquarie University and the University of Technology, Sydney.

Operations
2SER operates a community radio broadcasting service for Greater Sydney with a focus on education. The station broadcasts a range of contemporary music and talks-based programs.

Staff
The station operates with a core full-time and part-time permanent staff of 10, 3 contracted positions and approximately 200 volunteer program-makers.

Budget
2SER has an operating budget of approximately $900,000 per annum funded via sponsorship, listener subscription, programming, events and contributions from The University of Technology, Sydney and Macquarie University.

2.
Programming
2SER's programs aim to stimulate learning, to inform, and provoke discussion and debate. The station is committed to social change, access and diversity. It is independent and provides alternative views to those of the mainstream.
Broad community participation enables the station to disseminate a range of opinions and information about matters in the public interest.

The station broadcasts 104 programs each week: 90 of these programs are realized by some 200 volunteer program-makers. Other programs are sourced via the Community Radio Network, the sector's nation-wide satellite program distribution service, and internationally, via the Internet.

Around 80 program-makers produce and present 48 hours of talks-based programs per week. Programs canvas a range of topics: education, currents affairs, science, health, the arts, environment, social justice issues, international affairs and cultural events.

Each week the station broadcasts 42 locally produced music programs covering a range of musical styles and genres: world, country, jazz, blues, rock, folk, reggae, electronic and experimental.

The station provides 15 hours per week for non-English language programs broadcast in 8 languages.

Audience
According to the most recent research figures available to 2SER via Roy Morgan Research, the station has a weekly cumulative audience of approximately 100,000. Listeners are defined as 'well educated, affluent, discerning, media-savvy and socially and culturally aware and active".

2SER's website averages 600,000 hits per month (2006 YTD = 1,785,375): 90% are direct hits and 34% emanate from abroad, primarily from the USA, the UK and Japan.

Community Participation
Providing access to community organizations is a key function of 2SER's role as a
broadcaster. Members of the station community interact on daily basis with a diverse
range of community-based organisations, non-government bodies, businesses,
government agencies and educational institutions. The station provides a cost effective
means for organizations and individuals to disseminate ideas and information.

Training & Development
2SER has a well-established reputation as an incubator for broadcasters. It has made an
outstanding contribution in this area, in particular to the ABC and SBS services.
Hundreds of program-makers have developed and honed their skills at 2SER and made
the transition from volunteer to positions in the media (please see the attachment
'Voluntary to Salary').

The station operates a radio school which offers nationally accredited, certificate level
training.

3 & 4.

Items 3 and 4 are interdependent. New technologies and the merging of technologies provide the community-broadcasting sector with extraordinary opportunities, however, they also pose the most significant threat to the sector.

The challenge to fund the development of websites, audio on demand and streaming services, podcasting and cross-platform content, whilst maintaining and developing traditional broadcasting infrastructure, and to provide for the migration to digital radio broadcasting, is colossal.

In order to maintain its relevance and to meet the growing expectations of media-savvy listeners, 2SER, and the sector, must be able to offer, and proffer from, these new services. 2SER's long-term survival is predicated upon its ability to do so.

The station community has a wealth of creative vitality, ideas, and expertise. It has the nous to explore, experiment with and develop new digital content and it is currently doing so (streaming, podcasting, audio on demand), if within financial constraints.

Although these services provide stations with the ability to increase interaction with listeners, to increase community participation and to increase the listener base and thus potentially increase subscription and sponsorship income streams, they also pose a threat. Their proliferation is leading to a fragmentation of both audience and sponsorship/advertising budgets, so the mainstays of income generation for the majority of stations, listener subscription and sponsorship, are also threatened.

The cost of developing and implementing web-based services is modest when compared to the anticipated costs associated with the migration to digital radio broadcasting.

Funding the migration to digital radio broadcasting poses the greatest threat to the future of community broadcasting.

Funding assistance from the federal government for the community radio sector's migration to digital radio broadcasting is crucial.

Given the value of the social capital which the community-broadcasting sector contributes to Australian life, such funding would be a worthy and wise investment.