

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Please accept this submission on behalf of the Progressive Music Broadcasting Association Inc., licensee of Three D Radio in Adelaide.

The Progressive Music Broadcasting Association (PMBA) was formed in 1978 as a community response to the ABC removing the alternative music program "Rocturnal" from its national FM station (the ABC decided that it would follow a fine music format). The PMBA was established after a massive community meeting and applied for one of the two S-class licenses that became available in Adelaide at that time. The application was successful and Triple M went to air in 1979, becoming the second FM broadcaster in Adelaide. In the early nineties, the Triple M name and callsign (5MMM) were sold to the owners of the commercial Triple M network interstate and the name Three D Radio (5DDD) was adopted.

The primary purpose of the PMBA is to broadcast contemporary, alternative, progressive music and arts programs. Its community of interest is those who are involved with local music and arts, music collectors and those who are interested in music generally. It is also a progressive organisation which holds dear the ideals of democracy, equality and access. It is fiercely independent.

The PMBA operates a high power transmitter (6.5kW) sited at Mt Lofty and is a major metropolitan broadcaster with significant reach into country SA. We broadcast 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Various surveys put our audience share at between 1 and 3% of the total Adelaide radio audience. We have about 1,000 subscribers who pay \$45 (or \$30 concession) each year to support their station. About 80 of these subscribers are local bands who actively support the station.

We are the prime broadcaster and supporter of local music in Adelaide with about 30% of our broadcast being local music. We place a high value on encouraging announcers to play what they want to play. There are no music programmers or computer generated playlists. About 50% of our music broadcast is by Australian artists and 30% has a significant female content.

We operate a central library where all music that comes into the station is stored and is available 24 hours a day to all members of the PMBA. It is one of the largest libraries held by any radio station in Australia. The library currently holds about 75,000 items and consists of about 19,000 vinyl LPs, 11,000 vinyl singles, 1,500 tape reels, 2,000 cassettes, 1,500 cartridges and 40,000 CDs. We receive over 100 new items each week to add to the library. We hold the largest collection of local contemporary music in Adelaide including many rare early copies of significant Australian bands and artists.

The association is operated entirely by the volunteer members of the PMBA. There are no paid staff or agents on commission. Whilst this is not uncommon for small rural community broadcasters, it is unique for a major metropolitan broadcaster. Since 2001 we have chosen to operate this way to ensure we maintain our independence and remain true to the founding ideals of the PMBA.

We choose to operate on a very small budget of around \$80,000 per year. Our main expenses are electricity (18%), rent for office/studio/transmitter sites (33%), fees/licenses (11%), equipment (20%) and admin (18%). We pay commercial rates for all our rental properties, there are no peppercorn leases. We are highly innovative at extracting the maximum benefit from our equipment, constantly inventing new ways to do more with less.

Our main income is from our subscribers and members (43%) followed by sponsorship (28%), other fundraising (18%) and grants (11%). Our sponsorship policy ensures that we have minimal sponsorship messages (usually less than 1 minute per hour) and that they are almost exclusively music/arts related promotions. Our membership and our community of interest expect us to maintain our independence from commercial pressures.

We have 120 members with about 100 of these involved in on air programs. All of our programming is made in-house and there are no syndicated programs or network feeds. A core group of around 35 members manage the operation of the station via 5 committees. All members are strongly encouraged to stand for board positions or join any of the committees. We have members ranging in age from 15 to 84 and some of them have been broadcasting since 1979. We train about 40 new people each year in all aspects of broadcasting and running the radio station. There are currently over 60 people on the waiting list to be trained and demand remains strong.

We have specialist programs that focus on specific genres (hip hop, hardcore, reggae, folk, blues, jazz, metal, punk, rock & roll, hillbilly, yodel etc), often presented by musicians. We broadcast frequent gig guides to promote the live music scene in Adelaide. We have provided a place where local musicians can come to speak about and play their music. Many have been able to play live to air, providing the opportunity to have a recording in our library and to have a copy for themselves. Many bands do not have access to recording facilities and over the decades we have been able to assist them to do this at no cost to them. This has helped them showcase their music and often attract bookings for gigs etc.

We offer our listeners one of the few broadcasting experiences available that is free from advertising and brand marketing pressure. When you hear a song on Three D Radio, it's because the announcer wants to play it, not because they've been told to play it. The range of music heard on Three D is not available anywhere else on Adelaide radio.

The PMBA is a vibrant, successful association and a respected broadcaster that is pivotal to the diversity of the Adelaide music scene. It's 100% volunteer run model is a success story, not just from a financial point of view, but also for the independence it gives broadcasters. That is what the PMBA believes community radio should be about – **independence, access and localism**.

The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the internet and other broadcasting technologies

It is unlikely that most community broadcasters can consistently achieve the high level of in-depth investigative analysis that is accomplished by the ABC or SBS, nor can it provide the high level of mass appeal that is provided by big budget commercial broadcasters.

What community radio excels at is localism. Providing an outlet for local news, information and (especially in our case) music and arts. We believe that this should be the focus of community broadcasters.

Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity

This is critical to the success and relevance of community broadcasters, whether they be ethnic, music or radio for the print handicapped. There is little point in a community broadcaster mimicking the output of a commercial/national broadcaster.

We maintain a quota system that ensures that the music we broadcast is at least 40% Australian, 20% local, 10% demo/self made and 25% has significant female content. We strongly support Australian music quotas and would support its extension to include local content.

Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks

Technology has changed remarkably since 1979 and although we still use our original turntables that have played some 2,000,000 records between them, we have adapted with the times.

The fall in price of technology in general has meant that we can do more with less money. Combined with the massive growth in the number of community broadcasters, this has meant that as a sector we are now an attractive market to technology suppliers who actively compete for our business. This has drastically reduced the cost of setting up a VHF FM broadcasting station. This 88-108MHz spectrum space is crucial to ensure that independent community broadcasting can continue to start up in a relatively low cost manner and it will remain so until digital broadcasting has become a very mature technology.

For metropolitan community broadcasters, digital radio presents an opportunity that is almost equal to the original establishment of community radio. While the commercial media may not welcome the additional fragmentation of their audience, for us, fragmentation is embraced. As a progressive music broadcaster we actively encourage diversity above all else. More channels will equal more choice for listeners. We also see the addition of an extra one or perhaps two channels as providing us with the opportunity for another 100 to 200 people to broadcast more diverse content. This will lead to more subscribers, more income and greater independence.

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

Digital Radio

Digital radio is a seminal opportunity for community radio, but without a substantial injection of funds for equipment purchases, it will not be possible for the majority of community broadcasters to add the additional digital services.

In the late 70's and 80's community broadcasters pioneered the FM broadcast band in Australia. The commercial sector was disinterested in the FM band and believed it would never take off. It was community radio that showed them the way and developed the techniques to attract significant audiences. We were the ones that dared to play Australian artists that actually sang songs about Australia and not California. We were the ones that played 4 songs in a row – something unheard of on the AM band.

It would be an historic achievement if the community sectors' transition to digital could be assisted by the Australian Government so it could pioneer the digital spectrum in the late 2000's as it did the FM band in the late 70's.

Transmission Site Fees

The sale of the Government owned National Transmission sites has caused a rapid rise in costs to community broadcasters who have their transmitters located on these sites. Our own fees have nearly tripled since the sale. It has been good to see the recent increases in subsidies available to community broadcasters who must pay these increased fees and it is vital to our continued operation that these subsidies keep pace with expected future increases.

Sponsorship

One of the greatest threats to, and perhaps one of the greatest failures of, the community radio sector is that of widespread dependence on sponsorship. While our station stands out as being fiercely independent of the demands of sponsors, we believe there is a trend in community radio to pander to the desires of sponsors. It would greatly improve the independence of the community radio sector if stations could be encouraged to diversify their income sources away from a heavy reliance on sponsorship.

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