

Tuning into Community Broadcasting: Submission by 2RRR

The following submission is made on behalf of community radio station 2RRR ('Ryde Regional Radio').

2RRR is one of Sydney's most diverse radio stations. It does not subscribe to a set format or theme but reflects the diverse array of community groups and listeners that are not adequately served by other media in the Sydney metropolitan area. In a crowded and highly competitive market, 2RRR does not seek to emulate the format or style of other radio stations. Rather, it trades on its strengths as a highly diverse station that provides listening pleasure to a wide and varied audience. This is particularly reflected in the many foreign language programs that 2RRR broadcasts, but also in its scope of specialist music programs and other programs targeted at particular interest groups. 2RRR has programs that address local health issues, the motorbike riding community and local football competitions, amongst others; and these are all examples of content that is not being covered to anywhere near the same extent, if at all, by other radio stations within the Sydney area.

Community broadcasting plays a valuable role in giving a voice and platform to sections of the Australian community that would otherwise not be heard. It offers a viable and worthwhile alternative to mainstream media and enables an emphasis to be placed on sectional interests that might otherwise fall 'below the radar'. Community radio encourages the diverse and heavily blended nature that is the modern Australian society. 2RRR involves itself in the local community in a number of ways, maintaining a relationship with both of the local councils in the area that it serves but also by developing relationships with local educational institutions through which mutually beneficial educational and training opportunities can be developed.

2RRR has over 100 volunteers producing 168 hours of radio each week. The station employs one part time station manager, as well as casually employing personnel for its own very successful in-house training program. Virtually all of 2RRR's programming is produced within the station. Over the years, a significant number of 2RRR volunteers have moved on to professional media careers, in some cases in high profile roles on commercial stations or with the ABC.

In the coming years, the major technological changes that are developing for the media will confront 2RRR. The station does not presently broadcast via the internet, but 2RRR believes that its highly diverse programming makes it an ideal candidate for a future expansion into 'podcasting'. The station management believes there may be significant opportunities for 2RRR to become as much a 'content provider' as broadcaster, particularly if the traditional means of radio broadcast become less relevant in the future. (In the UK, with its highly developed digital market, only 15% of radio listeners tune into programs via a 'conventional' radio receiver, with the remainder listening via other devices such as computers and mobile phones).

These future possibilities pose many challenges for the sector in general and for stations like 2RRR in particular. To be successful, stations will require resources and

entrepreneurial management who can identify and exploit opportunities as they arise, without placing stations in a position where their resources cannot sustain such expansion.

In the more immediate future, 2RRR believes that its ability to adequately service its audience is somewhat compromised by a lower than satisfactory signal strength and 'crowding' on the lower FM band. The geographically based licence areas that apply in metropolitan areas to 'sub-metro' stations may no longer be a viable vehicle for determining audience capture or station position. The current areas that exist under this regime are arguably too small and make it difficult for stations to be other than marginal propositions within their defined areas. A revamped licence regime that removed strict geographical limits in favour of a more general approach (eg dividing Sydney into possibly four zones and then allowing a number of stations that target different groups to exist within each zone) might produce a more viable sector than is currently the case.

Community radio derives its funding from a variety of sources, including a modest contribution in the form of government grants of various kinds. 2RRR believes that this support by the government is essential for the continued health of the genre and to allow a continuation of the service that is currently provided through this alternative medium.

2RRR's tagline for the last few years has been 'your alternative'. In seeking to be a true alternative, 2RRR is determined to offer something other than what other radio stations within the Sydney region provide and to give voice to as many community groups as possible under the single banner of our broadcast licence. 2RRR firmly believes that community broadcasting fulfils a significant and vital role in modern Australian society and it sees its own future as continuing to serve that ambition, while exploiting the new technological opportunities as they occur.