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Tasman FM

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Submission 65

SUBMISSION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS

Scope and role:

Community broadcasting in the Tasman has two facets. One is that a reliable information source is available to residents in times of emergency. The lack of an information centre was very apparent on the 28th April 1996 and it was partly in response to this event that Tasman FM was setup. Secondly community radio on the Tasman has a community unifying effect. It provides a means for community groups and representatives to talk to the rest of the community about themselves and what they are there to achieve. This not only provides publicity but it encourages acceptance by the community of different views etc within the community. In this way community radio is a very positive force in a rural community. It can help a rural community retain its sense of identity. This is increasingly important in Australia today as the role of people in rural Australia changes.

Content and programming:

This is a facet of community broadcasting that our organisation does not find onerous because it is essentially what community broadcasting is about. Stepping out of the mainstream. Music plays a huge part in our lives yet we all have a great variation in taste. This is reflected in Tasman FM in that we have around 18 – 20 broadcasters that all play different types of music. With the Australian content rule this means great exposure for the listening public to new artists and different genres of music and in turn great exposure for the musicians and songwriters that they wouldn't get otherwise. It is a shame that radio and television in general isn't subject to the same conditions. Music is a huge part of cultural identity and unless you step out of mainstream pop music industry you won't hear or see that identity. The Tasman community is like many isolated rural communities in Australia, it has a huge cultural diversity and it is changing all the time. Community radio can reflect this.

Technological opportunities:

This is an area where our radio falls down because it relates directly to funding. Due to the geographical topography of the Tasman region our signal fails in places. This is detrimental to the radio and the community for the reasons previously outlined. There are many areas where technology would be a great assistance but the cost of the equipment is prohibitive. Grants can of course be applied for this but success is not always forthcoming and then there is the cost of installation and maintenance and grants are not available for labour. Some more assistance in this field through CBAA or ABA would be good. Its not just the equipment, there is a need for solid advice and hands on assistance in this field for small community radio stations.

Opportunities and threats to community broadcasters:

Technology can be an opportunity or threat to broadcasters. Some of our broadcasters don't handle new technology and we must respect this and find ways to work around this. Funds can be a key threat. To make things happen in any organisation takes money. If things don't happen fast enough people become discontented. The diversity of people involved in community broadcasting is an opportunity and a threat. Our people are all volunteers and so its not a case of do this do that. Some more assistance in people skills and training would be advantageous. Media of any sort and ego with a capital E seem to go together. The element of people skills is very important.

It must be said however to sum up that the nature of community broadcasting is in itself its biggest opportunity through positive diversity and exposure. I hope this submission goes some way to highlighting the support needed for a great Australian medium.

If you require further information please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Dobner
President