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Submission 71

**This submission is made by the Music Broadcasting Society of Victoria -
3MBS.**

Executive Summary

3MBS supports Australian classical music and people interested in classical music. Volunteers at 3MBS record and broadcast local, young and visiting musicians.

Independent support for local music and culture through participation by local community members is the cornerstone of community broadcasting. Community broadcasting stations like 3MBS undertake a range of activities to enrich local culture.

The government can build on the work carried out by community broadcasting stations through meaningful and strategic support for community broadcasting's place within digital broadcasting platforms. It can also provide more meaningful support for community broadcasting's training role and programming initiatives.

Australia has the most developed community broadcasting sector in the world. To build on this achievement, the government can provide a framework for further development. There are five times more community stations than ABC stations across Australia. Ten percent of the budget allocated to the ABC would be a baseline amount for ensuring the sound development of community broadcasting in this country.

Preamble

The MBS stations in Melbourne and Sydney were the first licensed FM stations in Australia. They successfully pioneered the licensed broadcast use of the FM band before other sectors had focussed on the medium. They were the first stations licensed to address a niche audience's listening needs. They were also the first to encourage listeners to participate in their operations.

3MBS is operated by enthusiastic volunteers absolutely committed to the recording and broadcasting of a wide range of quality music forms, including classical, jazz and related genres. 3MBS is absolutely committed to supporting the musicians in their local communities. The station is constitutionally committed to involving local people in their operations and choice of programs.

There are specific characteristics of digital broadcasting that meet the objectives of classical music community broadcasters better than analogue transmission. These include higher quality audio transmission and reception and the potential for the transmission of data relating to music composers and performers. This is central to the classical music listening experience and has been successfully trialled by 3MBS at the digital radio trials in Melbourne.

Introduction

3MBS is a community radio station that broadcasts classical music across Melbourne and beyond and has done so since 1975. It has 100,000 listeners each week. Its main source of revenue is listener subscriptions. More than 4,000 people pay annual subscriptions to keep the station strong. 3MBS is operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by more than 200 volunteers.

There is a degree of irony in the Music Broadcasting Society of Victoria making this submission to the House of Representatives about “ways to support a vibrant and diverse network of community broadcasters”. It was the persistent lobbying of Federal Parliament through submission and delegation by the people who started 3MBS in the 1960s and 70s that eventually led to the development of community broadcasting as it exists today.

The pioneers of community broadcasting talked to Federal politicians in the 1960s about diversity and independence in broadcasting. They highlighted the need for access and participation by those not catered for by government and commercial media. They described ‘listeners’ being able to control what they listen to by producing it themselves – the ultimate in interactivity.

Back then, not many Federal politicians were listening. It took more than ten years to convince those in power that Australia would be enriched by a third broadcasting sector. Community broadcasting enriches this country. It enriches our culture and it enriches the people who participate in it.

3MBS has been broadcasting since 1975. Community broadcasting has spread across the country since then. Now there are more than 300 radio and six television stations, representing Indigenous, ethnic, youth, religious, specialist music and print handicapped interests. Community broadcasting in Australia is more robust than anywhere else in the world.

Despite the government funding the ABC to establish a national classical music network that mimicked the service that MBS stations initiated, the MBS stations have survived and developed. They take their place alongside the hundreds of other community stations around the country servicing distinct community needs.

Volunteers at 3MBS take their place proudly alongside the 20,000 other active volunteers around the country working at those 300+ community stations to broadcast for Indigenous, ethnic, youth, religious, specialist music and print handicapped interests.

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

Scope: 3MBS presents opportunities for people from the community of interest of classical music to volunteer to produce a range of quality music programs and related activities. The station broadcasts across the Melbourne metropolitan area.

The station is sustained by listeners who pay annual subscriptions to the station despite being able to listen to it at no cost other than the cost of a tranny. The involvement and support from volunteers, subscribers and listeners is testimony to the inability of other media to adequately serve their interests.

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Classical music traditionally includes music from different periods including early music, baroque, the classical period, romantic and contemporary classical. The term also includes opera and operetta. Most MBS stations also broadcast jazz, folk, world music and musicals.

The station publishes and distributes to subscribers a 64-page colour magazine 6 times a year. The magazine contains details of music broadcast, articles, CD reviews, a crossword and other items of interest to classical music lovers. 25,000 magazines are distributed each year.

The station operates a vibrant website containing complementary information and a streaming service at www.3mbs.org.au. This allows people around the world to listen to the Australian musicians broadcast by the station. Listeners to the streaming service have registered from Europe, North America and Asia. The station also publishes an e-newsletter.

Role: 3MBS aims to be “the premier broadcaster and supporter of classical music experiences in Victoria.” To do this the station involves its listeners in its operation by inviting them to volunteer at the station. Anyone who shares an interest in classical music can volunteer to be trained in the wide range of skills required to operate a 24 hour a day metropolitan-wide radio station. Volunteers are trained to do the broadcasting. They decide policy and direction for the station. Volunteers do production work. They work in reception. They maintain and develop the CD library. Volunteers are involved in administration. They do repair work and buy the biscuits and do fundraising and a lot more.

Like other community stations, training of volunteers in a range of skills is important for station development. Broadcast training for volunteers is crucial. Each year, hundreds of volunteers receive broadcast training in community stations across the country.

Relatively little training is done within stations outside community broadcasting. For more than three decades, community broadcasting has provided entry level training for the whole industry. Recent funding for training from the federal government is the beginning of recognition and support for this role by community broadcasting within the industry.

One of 3MBS' crucial objectives is to support local classical music and local classical musicians. 3MBS is the only radio station in Melbourne to do this. This function is beyond the ABC's capacity because of its obligation to a national audience.

Skilled 3MBS volunteers regularly record local musical performances for broadcast. The performances that are recorded include those of young musicians, suburban musicians, major music groups and the best of visiting international classical musicians.

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

Volunteers record on average 100 local classical music performances every year. These are the only recordings made of these performances. Archives of recordings of local performers stretch back for decades. 3MBS further supports local musicians through

- The annual 3MBS Young Performer of the Year Award (This has led to a national award)
- The annual 3MBS National Composer Award (The winning composition is performed by a full orchestra – Orchestra Victoria - in front of a 3,000 strong audience)
- The annual 3MBS Classically Melbourne Free Family Concert
- The Musicians-in-Residence program (currently the Flinders Quartet)
- An annual showcase live broadcast of Melbourne's best musicians from Federation Square
- Radio programs sponsored by local organisations such as the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and Orchestra Victoria

3MBS also promotes local music and arts organisations through a daily on-air 'gig guide.'

3MBS exceeds its self-imposed objective of broadcasting music that consists of 25% Australian performance content. It also exceeds the target of 5% Australian composition content. To encourage local talent, 3MBS is establishing high quality music recording studios

3. Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks.

Technological opportunities: 3MBS has welcomed the development by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) of the Digital Delivery Network (DDN). The DDN is

cutting edge technological innovation using satellite and internet systems that enable stations to share, swap and distribute program material around the country. The beauty of the system is its ease of use. For stations with no paid staff, it is a boon to be able to 'set and forget' and have content delivered to their stations ready to be broadcast. 3MBS uses the service regularly. Development of the DDN to further distribute programming content, such as the Amrap content, will help 3MBS and hundreds of stations around the country.

3MBS has been operating a website and audio streaming service for almost ten years. These technological opportunities complement the station's broadcasting activities. However, the core business is to involve the classical music community in Melbourne – in broadcasting to the local area. Involving people in broadcasting requires training. With every technological opportunity comes a training requirement for volunteers. The station is gearing up for podcasting. With increasing availability of complementary technology, training requirements increase.

Digital transmission: Digital radio has the potential to transform the radio experience for listeners and broadcasters with better sound, more services and new features. It provides community radio with an important opportunity to better serve its diverse audiences and further enhance the participatory and community strengthening role it plays in contemporary Australia.

3MBS is keen to move to digital radio if it can deliver superior audio quality and ancillary services. The importance of audio quality for classical music broadcasting cannot be overemphasised. No-one interested in classical music will purchase digital receivers if the audio quality is not markedly better than on analogue. The audio quality is the Thing.

3MBS' participation in the Melbourne digital radio trials over the past 2 years have demonstrated that, within that framework, anything less than 192 kbits is not worth the effort.

3MBS successfully demonstrated the transmission of text associated with the audio service so that digital receivers displayed in real time details about the music being played. Volunteers developed this software and no other broadcasters involved with the trials – commercial or government radio – were able to demonstrate anything like this service.

3MBS' experience of analogue transmission facilities has also underlined the need to have control over transmitters. We would argue that the government enable community broadcasters to operate digital transmission facilities collectively, rather than exposing community stations to third party or commercial arrangements.

Listeners to 3MBS have contributed funds to a digital transmission appeal. They are keen to experience the superior audio quality offered by the new technology. Bring it on.

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

Opportunities: 3MBS will continue to involve the local classical music community in its operation. It will train broadcasters. It will record and broadcast local performers. It will investigate the applicability in new technologies.

Strategic national support for community broadcasting in the areas of training, programming and digital transmission will enhance 3MBS' ability to achieve its objectives. The opportunity to showcase Australian musicians to their local community as well as to overseas markets is something that community broadcasting is placed to take up more than any other media sector.

3MBS forms a strong network with the MBS stations in Brisbane, Sydney and Adelaide and Artsound in Canberra. Programs, resources and ideas are shared. 3MBS is also part of the CBAA.

Threats: The costs and framework of digital radio is certainly a threat if affordable access cannot be provided to community broadcasters.

It would be a further irony if the main threat to a robust network of community broadcasting was the lack of recognition and support of the sector by the federal government. It is still not evident, in terms of financial and strategic support, that the government is fully aware of the size, nature, diversity, the role played and the value provided by community broadcasting in Australia.

Thank you.

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