

the Chair
House Communications
Committee
for Paul Neville MP

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Personal submission to the inquiry
into the adequacy, quantity and
quality of radio services
and rural Australia.

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The thoughts and experiences of a radio-listening member of the general public, who chooses not to have a television. (This, when discovered by others, is met with comments ranging from awe to disbelief!).

- Summary :
- radio services are adequate
 - quantity of local: networked programming to be continued at our current level
 - quality needs to be looked at.

Each point has been dealt with separately, and my conclusion summarises these main points. (However, don't let that deter you from wading through!)

- The social benefits and influence on the general public of radio broadcasting in non-metropolitan Australia in comparison to other media sectors.

The radio can be a lifeline out here in the country, as the radio is located in town (Armidale) ours servicing an area of almost 200kms, it is important in giving information on local conditions e.g: accident has closed the highway, gas leak in Blah Street, train derailed and will be late, severe storm over Invergowrie-heading east, road closures due to flood/snow/fire conditions. When electricity is out, most people have a means of listening to their local radio station, even if it is switching on the car radio, to find out what has happened, and when it may come back on. This is a far more reliable way to find out what's going on than ringing here, there & everywhere finding engaged signals and block/overloaded phone lines, especially in the case of an emergency, when these lines may be needed by combat services (police, fire, ses, etc)

If you have lost/found (almost anything!) the first place that people turn to in order to reunite owner with pet/article is the local radio. This immediacy is much appreciated by all who use it: can't find Fluffy or Pooches at breakfast - call local radio station - Fluffy or Pooches home by nighttime, much to everyone's delight. In some ways, this facet of radio intrinsically represents the 'community' reflected by radio, but sadly missing from many neighbourhoods.

The local radio also provides information on local meetings, sports, plays, exhibitions, public lectures, concerts etc. Data is provided: when, where, what price, plus interviews are held with participants/organisers promoting an insight, and an interest, in an event, which is invaluable as an indicator to me, as to whether I should attend. In fact, I heard of this inquiry through our local commercial radio station who have a weekly discussion with our federal member and indeed with our state member, our mayor, and slots discussing what's happening in all the towns in the listening area.

Of course, these things are also covered by the local papers, but I don't always get to town to buy these (the tyranny of distance - it's a half-hour drive), and it's pot-luck whether the info I want regarding these events is in the particular one that I buy.

As others tell me, television reception of local channels is scratchy at best, with satellite television not providing any local input.

Networked radio (which is mostly talkback) is always interesting to hear, you get the opinions of people in other places - good, bad or indifferent. This form of radio provides an insight into what people whose lives are very different from mine, and whose influences and motivations are vastly removed from here in both distance and daily experience, are thinking. Of course, the questions asked by different announcers are telling, just on their own, leave alone their opinions. Some questions appear to be completely inane, as if drawn from a hat, while others appear to be motivated by an agenda which

has not been openly discussed e.g. 'cash for comments'.

When listening to networked radio, it is usually with the "bullshit" meter idling, or to put it more politely, with a touch of skepticism. There is so much on talkback radio, and even on some 'news' programmes, which smacks of agenda's one way or the other, that a good personal filter is needed to figure out who is actually saying what what is actually happening, and what the end result may actually be. This is one reason why I listen to different stations - commercial (local & networked), ABC, & community, to get different angles in the information given, the questions asked, and the answers given.

As for current TV broadcasting: I don't indulge. I do, however, have strong opinions on television, most of which are negative. It's effect on our society is vastly underrated, as is it's ability to bring mind-numbing, vacuous nonsense into our living rooms. People who would never consider actually committing murder, acts of violence and abuse, adultery, robbery, fraud, and the act of looking through their neighbors' windows, actually view it on a daily basis. Is this pandering to a rank voyeurism, or just shaping a new social conscience? Why is it that we find it easier to question what we hear, rather than what we see? I suppose it can also be educational...

When I did have a television I enjoyed the local news - local input, local colour, local stories. But where TV can never replace the radio is in the freshness of the breaking news - you'll get it

straight away on radio, but have to wait for the pictures to be ready for television. While the pictures may be spectacular, one is always left wondering how much editing played a part in the final effect of the piece.

- Future trends in radio broadcasting, including employment and career opportunities, in non-metropolitan Australia.

Urban myths.....

- Think of the paper we'll save when we get a computer!
- The internet will mean the death of books.

- Who listens to the radio?

We all listen to the radio at sometime or other, for different reasons. Sometimes we need to hear of local issues from a local perspective, sometimes state and national issues from a local perspective, and sometimes (as exporters and members of the world community) international issues from a local perspective. Sometimes we need to hear the national and international perspectives on issues and situations - all of this can help to give us a balanced view. I would hope to retain the local radio services that we already have, and introduce more balance, and more international stories/flavour into networked broadcasts. Listening to networked broadcasts, I hear endless stories of 'us' & 'them' (fill in the gaps with 'protagonists of

the day'), underlying bigotry, parochialism, one-sided views of everything outside the Sydney metropolitan region, generalisations promoted as fact, and an attitude of provoking divisions in the community. Sure, these are extreme examples, but is it any wonder that I do not wish to have this foisted on me for more hours of the day than it already is?

The beauty of radio is its local content, and ability to relate to a local audience, while providing coverage of wider issues. Yet I can see a need for a radio station which is run along the lines of television's SBS - a national one producing news/stories from/to all cultures and areas of our society.

The future is bright for radio, as long as truly local radio stations remain, in conjunction with networked broadcasts. Listening to the radio can be done anytime, anywhere, and while doing anything else, but broadcasts must be kept relevant, unbiased, and providing quality information to keep us from just turning it off.

- The effect on individuals, families and small business in non-metropolitan Australia of networking of radio programming, particularly in relation to local news services, sport, community service announcements and other forms of local content.

I listen to various radio stations: 2AD - Armidale commercial, 2TM (I think?) Tamworth ABC, 92.1 FM Armidale community, 100.3 FM Armidale commercial (music), Radio National. 2AD is networked from 5am to 6am, 9am to 12 noon (then network and local news until 12:25 pm), and 6pm to midnight weekdays. Saturday it's networked 12 noon to 12 midnight. Sundays networked all day. No local news on weekends. It seems to be a good balance between local and network content, but there should be a mechanism in place for local input to cut in when needed. For example if fire/rain/snow is threatening closure of local roads, there should be a way to advertise this through ad or station identification breaks, to the local area from the local station.

I would not want any diminution of the current amount of local content. As explained in the first point (social benefits and influence... etc), local information is vital to any community, replacing other former community contact points in a way that television has not, and the internet will not. Local content should not be

~~shrivelled down 15 second slots in networked radio, or merely redefined to local advertising and weather slots, slipped in between network programming.~~ If in doubt as to the importance of local radio, please re-read my response to point one.

What does happen to small businesses who wish to advertise locally? Yes, these ads can be slipped into networked stuff at a local level, but local radio is so much more than an advertising medium, and so much more than a vehicle for profit.

Local content of all types is very important, let me give you an example - I avoid sport shows like the plague, except for the one produced by our local station, called 'SinBin'. It has a good mix of local, national and international sport with no grunts and groans, no hyperventilating, and no extending the English language beyond its limits. It has local presenters, local flavour, and a format which makes it pleasant to listen to.

- The potential for new technologies such as digital radio to provide enhanced and more localised radio services in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

"Localised radio services"... What does this mean I turn to my Concise Oxford Dictionary, which

tells me: lō'calize, -is/e

⁽¹⁾ "invest with characteristics of a particular place". If this means saying that digital radio will provide more local radio service, it's a waste of time and money, as we already have them. If this means digital radio will provide a simulacrum of local radio stations - no thanks, there's enough of them about already.

⁽²⁾ "restrict or assign to a particular place". What would the restrictions be? One particular country music show assigns itself to a particular place: a rusty tin shed, sitting on 44 gallon drums, broadcasting the show through a coathanger (on the roof, one presumes) with Barney (or is it Barry?) the bull in attendance!! Come on, enough is enough! I don't suppose we could restrict these unbelievable flights of fancy?

⁽³⁾ "attach to districts, decentralize" - sounds better, but local radio is (as it has been from its inception) thoroughly decentralized through the nature and operation of radio waves, even with part network programming. But if digital radio means squeezing out, either overtly or covertly, our local radio content, I'm not in favour.

How will digital radio work? Will I have to plug in to the electricity or phone socket to pick up the signal? What's that going to cost? Another new radio? Or another new gimmick? Or would digital connection be limited to the connection from major stations (networking) to my local radio station? Is it like packet-streaming, but using waves?

I'm afraid that this section brings me only questions - any answers would be appreciated!

o Conclusion

I am against any diminution of local radio stations with their own programming. As it is, we have lost a great deal of local air time - replaced with network programmes - over the last 1-2 years. While there currently is a nice balance between local and networked content, I am keen to keep our local air time as it is, and to see an improvement in the quality of networked programming.

In our society, where radio is ubiquitous, you can listen to it whatever else you are doing, at home, at work, or travelling. So we should apply the 'GIGO' principle, and ensure that quality radio remains available for all of us. Items of interest and relevance from local, state, national and international sources; listening to a mixture of views that adequately represent our community - local, state, national and international; unbiased not overly parochial comment; and above all, not using this medium to divide our community into ever smaller factions (supposedly at each other's throats). These things will keep us listening, regardless of whether it comes through new or old technologies.

Thank You for this opportunity to participate

atfield.