

**Cunningham, Adam (REPS)**

**From:** Walter H Mott [whmott@ihug.com.au]

**Sent:** Friday, 27 October 2000 5:06 PM

**To:** cta.reps@aph.gov.au

**Subject:** Attn The committee Secretary - Radio Industry Inquiry

This submission is made on behalf of North East Broadcasters Ltd (N.E.B.) Wangaratta Victoria. N.E.B. operates two stations in the licence area of Wangaratta. Radio stations 3NE and 3NN (Edge FM)

N.E.B. is also affiliated with F.A.R.B. and with the Independent Regional Radio Broadcasters (I.R.B.) Both of these organizations have or will provide submissions to the Inquiry.

We don't propose to dispute the submission made by I.R.B., but we haven't had the pleasure of seeing the F.A.R.B submission and therefore cannot support or comment on it's contents.

The social benefits and influence that our company exerts in our licence area is extensive, which is supported by our Listener surveys conducted by AC Neilson: The Wangaratta licence area is also serviced by several independently owned Newspapers, The Wangaratta Chronicle, Benalla Ensign, The Alpine Times and Yarrowonga Chronicle and the Border Mail. All of these publications serve their tight knight communities.

N.E.B. serves a role in bringing news, entertainment and advertising and community service announcements to these local communities quickly and cost effectively. N.E.B. does compete with other Radio services. 3 ABC services, 3 Community services and fortuitous signals from Albury and Shepparton Commercial Radio Stations of which there are 4. N.E.B. contends that the Regional ABC Radio station have had an unfair advantage in the planning process by having easy access to spectrum and more powerful transmitters. It must be remembered that the ABC does compete with Commerical Radio for Listeners.

Metropolitan Newspapers have a low penetration; The area is well covered by ABC, SBS and Commercial T.V. stations.

N.E.B. Stations can respond within minutes to local emergencies or disasters. The area suffers from regular flooding and fire which can cause serious loss of property and livestock and some occasional human casualties. Snow alerts, wind awareness, Grazier alerts, Crop Alerts (Frost), Road closures during snow season are just a few of the important items that N.E.B Broadcasts when there is a need.

N.E.B. also provides free access to Club, Charities and Community groups to promote their services or fund raising activities. N.E.B. would broadcast about 200 Community service announcements each week between the two stations

The future trends in Australian Radio Broadcasting do concern our company. These trends include the proliferation of groups that are controlling more and more licences. Of the 230 odd licences in Australia there are only 29 owners. The introduction of unlimited foreign ownership in Radio has certainly assisted the creation of large groups - this will continue.

Employment at N.E.B. Wangaratta involves about 18 full time personnel and several part time. All aspects of the company is operated in Wangaratta - sales, news, production, program reception, accounts etc. The major Radio chains are looking at Hub (networking) their stations around a central site where a hub will produce a product that will then be transmitted to other areas with only sales and reception occurring in the licence area.

The question is will this effect localism in these licence areas and the ability of these stations to respond to local issues or will they achieve uniformity across Australia and lose their local identity.

N.E.B. supports the view that the financial viability will strengthen the stations ability to provide

localism in our market. If we are weakened by more competition Regional Radio in Australia will end up with 3 or 4 networks generating signal from Capital Cities and this will be a major loss to Regional Australia.

Regional Radio along with Country Newspapers have been a great training ground for our respective Industries. All major capital city stations employ people whom have commenced training in the Country.

Networking does have a place in Regional Radio, N.E.B. runs the John Laws Program. N.E.B. contends that this is a local program for the whole of Australia providing a national news talkback which is available to all our listeners. N.E.B. can override this program in case of emergency or disaster.

Digital Technologies are being hurried into the Radio Industry and we don't believe that Regional Australia is ready. The technology hasn't been proved or chosen, spectrum seems to be unresolved and the radio receivers are expensive and need refinement. N.E.B. contends that Digital does have some advantages in being able to provide more enhanced services. Metropolitan areas should prove the technology and Regional Radio should follow.

In conclusion the Radio Industry and Government have an obligation to Regional Australia to provide Radio services that will provide communities with a focal point. It is up to us to keep our radio station relevant in our Local Communities.

Walter H. Mott  
Chairman  
North East Broadcasters Ltd.