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Sent: Tuesday, 20 February 2001 10:29 AM

To: CTA.Reps@aph.gov.au

Subject: Supplementary Submission from Port Macquarie Country Labor

PORT MACQUARIE COUNTRY LABOR

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION

TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON

COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT, and the ARTS

INQUIRY INTO THE ADEQUACY OF RADIO SERVICES IN NON-METROPOLITAN AUSTRALIA

PREAMBLE:

The residents of the Kempsey Shire experienced a minor flooding of the Macleay River from Thursday 1 February through to Monday 5 February 2001.

Kempsey Shire State Emergency Services:

The S.E.S. became operational at 4:30PM on Thursday 1 February 2001. One of the first actions of the S.E.S. was to issue flood warning messages via fax to all local media. The media organisations contacted were:

Television:

Prime Television Port Macquarie (news)

NBN Television Port Macquarie (news)

Radio:

Regional ABC Kempsey

Radio 531 Port Macquarie

Tank Community Radio

Radio 2MC FM Port Macquarie

Star FM Port Macquarie

Telstra, NorthPower (electricity authority), Department of Main Roads, Kempsey Shire Council.

From 4:30PM on Thursday 1 February to and including Monday 5 February 72 faxes were sent to each of the organisations listed. The faxes were sent on the hour every hour. All sections of the media received the flood information by fax.

The Kempsey Shire S.E.S. Control Centre received 720 phone calls seeking information on the flood situation or complaining about the lack of information. The S.E.S. does not have a record of the number of flood warning messages that were broadcast by the electronic media, especially radio.

On Saturday morning 2 February 2001 the S.E.S. Control Centre received a phone call from Radio 2MC seeking a reason why the station was not receiving information on the flood situation on the Macleay. After some discussion and confusion it was discovered that the fax machine messages were being sent to was locked up in the station's newsroom. The matter was rectified with information faxed through to the radio station's general fax number.

On Saturday evening from 5:30PM repeated at 6:30PM, 7:30PM, and 8:30PM, a fax was sent to all media containing a special message for people residing on the Lower Macleay. The message was that the floodgates on the Lower Macleay would be opened at 9PM. The message was intended to alert residents to the opening of the floodgates in plenty of time to move from the river irrigation pumps; also stock to higher ground.

We understand this information was not broadcast by the commercial or ABC radio stations. The following morning after the flood gates were opened the S.E.S. Controller received many phone calls from people complaining re: lack of information.

The Controller of the Kempsey Shire S.E.S., May Gill advised Jeff Condron from the Country Labor Information Office that during the time Kempsey Shire S.E.S. Control Centre was in operation from 1 February to 5 February, the Control Centre received 720 phone calls seeking information on the flood situation and complaining about the lack of information available on radio, both on commercial and ABC.

The only comprehensive coverage of the flood situation on the Macleay was from community radio station Tank Radio. Mrs Gill informed Jeff Condron that 2MC had provided 'bad coverage'. The Kempsey Shire S.E.S. Controller was not given, nor could she obtain the fax number of the DMG Hub Station based at Albury to be included on the Control Centre's list of fax numbers to be contacted re: information on the flood situation.

From the time the Kempsey Shire S.E.S. Communications Centre was in operation, 55 hours:

Thursday 1 Feb 4:30PM to 11:30PM 7 hours

Friday 2 Feb 7:30AM to 11:30PM 16 hours

Saturday 3 Feb 7:30AM to 11:30PM 16 hours

Sunday 4 Feb 7:30AM to 11:30PM 16 hours

Radio 2MC was on relay from the Albury Hub for 45 hours.

The Port Macquarie branch of Country Labor request that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts call for a report from the management of Radio 2MC FM, Star FM, and Radio 531, advising the number of fax messages received from the Kempsey Shire S.E.S. that were broadcast in relation to the minor flooding on the Macleay 1 February through to 5 February 2001. It appears that the majority of the messages were received when the stations were on relay.

The Port Macquarie branch of Country Labor requests that when handing down its decision on the inquiry into the adequacy of radio services in non-metropolitan Australia, the Committee include the following:

- That in times of floods, the commercial stations covering the area effected remain on air with local broadcasting for the duration of the flood crisis.
- Each station be obliged to give regular reports at fifteen minute intervals. This recommendation also to include bushfires.

Provincial and regional radio stations have a duty of care to their communities and in times of natural disasters they go a full alert and remain on local programming for the same time as the State Emergency Services Control Centres do within the station's coverage area.