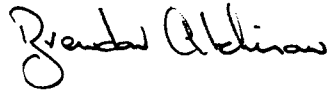


13 Smith St,
Brunswick 3056
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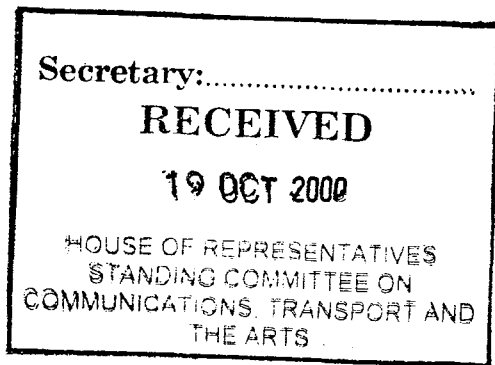
Dear sir,

I enclose with this letter my comments re various aspects on Regional Commercial Radio which I hope may be of some assistance to your inquiry. My career background in commercial Radio includes several years working in various capacities at stations 3 MA, 5 RM, 5 AU, 2DU, 2PK and 3UL

Yours faithfully,



Brendan Atchison



Brendan Hitchison,
13 Smith St,
Brunswick 3056
VICT.

Inquiry into the adequacy of radio services in non metropolitan Australia.

The secretary

House Communications Committee

Parliament House

Canberra A.C.T. 2600.

Commercial radio services in non metropolitan Australia have for decades provided an important life line and entertainment service.

Unlike metropolitan audiences, country listeners share a special affinity with 'their' station. They know the staff, there's a reassurance the station will broadcast their local news, community events, sports events etc with little hassle.

Until recent years the local radio in many areas of Australia was the listeners main source of news and entertainment. Television aggregation and the addition of new F.M services have expanded this choice.

During my years as Program Director of various Regional radio stations I saw many occasions when the local station galvanised the local community over many varied and sensitive issues. In one instance the downgrading of services at a local hospital saw the station instigate petitions, conduct outside broadcasts, interviewed local personal, staff and generally maintained local support for the retention of services. This campaign was an enormous success.

Local community organisations, police, councils, and general public alike all at some time use their local station. Stations are called upon to broadcast details of accidents, missing people, road closures, cancellations of events as well as other important information. The influence and benefits of local radio are enormous and continue to provide at little or no cost an essential service to rural Australia.

Rural Radio in Australia has traditionally carried a certain amount of networked programming. The main areas of networking were National news, Sports shows and a small amount of music based programs. These programs were traditionally relayed via terrestrial landline. During the Eighties enormous changes occurred for the distribution of programming with the advent of satellite technology. With the onset of recession, the downturn in many rural economies and the large turnover of stations, many stations started to lose their identity. New owner operators keen to recoupe enormous outlays for their investments saw Networking as the way to survive. The economies of scale were such that satellite networking was seen as an effective way to program groups of stations from a single feed. From my experience as Program Director, satellite programming when instigated in 1988 saw a staff reduction of two announcing staff, when this effect is multiplied by stations around the country the effect in employment terms is large. Generally Networked programming starts at six p.m. and continues through until 6 a.m. when local programming resumes. On weekends networking in many cases runs for most of the weekend with the exception of the breakfast shift. During these hours and Public holidays networking does away with penalty pay rates etc. Local stations for the most part are not manned during the hours of networked programming taking away from the community an important link.

As well as the reduction in announcer staff, other employment areas suffered. Technical staff were reduced as one technician would service as many as four and five stations, traffic and accounts staff were centralised doing away with these positions in many

stations. Its my opinion that networking has done away with jobs in rural radio and local communities are well aware that what they are listening to is coming from "somewhere else" and not their local station. Its fair to say many owners of stations bought and sold in the Eighties had little or know experience of the industry and certainly no experience as to the peculiarities and needs of country radio.

Radio to many new operators was seen as a money making exercise even after the hugely inflated prices they'd paid for these stations. Career opportunities in Rural radio have been in steady decline for some years. Reasons for this include Networking of outside programs as well as the fluctuating economies of many regional areas. Whilst new FM services have seen new opportunities arise generally they are at the expense of jobs on the AM band. Supplementary AM/FM license holders utilise staff for both services. It's important to note country radio has always been considered an excellent training ground for announcing staff and even with diminished opportunities it fulfills an important role in this area. Due mainly to financial constraints local news services on rural radio are very limited or have declined. Whilst some larger stations employ one full time journalist most make do with a "rip and read service in conjunction with a local newspaper. Networking in my opinion hasn't enhanced local news services Whilst stations are obliged under the broadcasting act to give a certain amount of free air time for Community service announcements from my experience they continue to make time available for this important role.

With the addition of supplementary FM licences, new independent FM operators and television aggregation Country radio has in the last ten years faced enormous challenges. The advertising dollar now has to be shared amongst the new competition. Breaking it down this means little room for risk taking and getting by with the absolute minimum outlay.

Much of Regional Radio's success is dictated by the fortunes of the local economies they serve i.e. recession, droughts, poor crops etc all have flow on effects which can severely effect a stations viability. Hence networking is seen in many cases as a more cost effective way of delivering programming to stations that otherwise don't have the resources of larger market stations.