

From Bushvision Inc - Rural Television Network based in Mt Gambier

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To The Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology & the Arts

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Dear Sir / Madam,

Bushvision would like to address this inquiry under the following headings

- * Reasons for Bushvision being established.
- * The sort of help that Bushvision was trying to find
- * The way that Bushvision has started.
- * The opportunities that Bushvision has
- * Addressing an injustice.
- * The threats that Bushvision has.
- * The difficulties Bushvision has getting content produced.

Reasons for Bushvision being established.

Bushvision began after several hundred landholders began an email network that wanted to change the way information was disseminated through the current media.

They believed the full story of what happens in the rural community was

- * Told from the outside,
- * Was more negative than the reality.
- * Was mostly sensationalised.
- * Was contributing to a lowering of morale in the rural community.
- * Was keeping the rural community disenfranchised.

The goals Bushvision established itself for were put together in the OBJECTS OF THE ASSOCIATION below

The objects of the association are

- 1 To enhance the quality, content and relevance of audiovisual communications to and between the non-metropolitan communities of Australia.
- 2 To establish and maintain a more accurate, comprehensive and representative historical record of events and issues that concern the non-metropolitan communities of Australia.
- 3 To protect, restore and enhance the values, perspective's and customs that contribute to healthy, prosperous and enduring non-metropolitan communities of Australia.
- 4 To protect, restore and enhance the unique social, economic and

environmental attributes that embody and distinguish our non-metropolitan communities from each other while maintaining and developing our common bonds.

5 To proclaim, promote and pursue the economic, social and environmental interests of Australian non-metropolitan communities to the national and international community and to enhance their knowledge and understanding of us..

6 To assist community groups (particularly disadvantaged groups) in disseminating helpful information to rural and remote Australia

7 To reduce the disadvantage of lack of performing opportunities and exposure for artists residing in non-metropolitan Australia

8 To develop partnerships (joint initiatives) with other groups who have similar aims and objectives.

9 To reduce the disadvantage of fewer educational opportunities due to distance for rural Australia.

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The sort of help that Bushvision was trying to find

Bushvision started just with a membership fee and nothing else. To get moving it wanted to be able to start a central office to create some sort of organisation / public involvement. As a nation wide non profit community group working to help the rural community, It looked for funding in ever place it could and the regulatory (govt funding) process was a huge disincentive as it tended to keep the staus quo with changes at the edges rather than help brand new ideas that make things happen much differently.

To explain here is a crude explanation of the difficulty

There was help offered for a great idea (if it was in existance), but not if it was "unproven".(This means great ideas cannot have much complexity because they have to either happen easily or be funded privately)

To prove (to a funding body) a new idea would work required a professional feasibilty study. To get funds for a feasibilty study (\$100,000) required a "Pre feasibility study".(which had to be funded privately)

In short there was no process to help get a new concept started.

A concept like Bushvision had to do other things (go sideways) to enable it to do the things it wanted to do.

The way that Bushvision has started.

To begin the organisation, Bushvision has taken on doing community work which is a secondary effect to what it wanted to do. In other words it took on teaching older people computer skills and teaching unemployed people television & computer skills to assist the organisation to pay its rent etc.

While Bushvision would have always done those things, the difficulty was that there was no other funding that helped a community TV channel to begin and that in the case of work for the dole participants, some participants took advantage of the efforts of Bushvision volunteers that were managing them and also DEWR put pressure on the CWC`s (who in turn) put pressure on BV volunteers to do things in such a way that the volunteers in Bushvision (who were excited about TV) became frustrated at the attitude of the system.For example Bushvision had to send a copy of it`s lease agreement to the EMPLOY SA office in Adelaide on the building BV was renting in Mt Gambier to prove it was actually renting the property.

Despite the fact that the local Mt Gambier EMPLOY SA rep was able to verify the situation, paperwork was sent to Adelaide.

The next thing was that because the lease had the land title descriptions and no street address on the lease, it was rejected and another lot of paperwork had to be done to verify the title description was the actual street address. Meanwhile BV was several months behind in paying it's bills because it was not being paid by Employ SA who was taking 6 weeks to think about each bit of paperwork it was sent to decide if Bushvision was actually in the building rent was being paid on.

In short the whole process wasted a lot of volunteer time to do all the running around plus funds from CWC`s were not coming in on time and this all put a lot of stress on a fledgling organisation. There was also a risk that complaining to the CWC would also put funds at risk of not being paid so Bushvision did not make any complaints.

All this just to do projects that were at a tangent to the type of project Bushvision wanted to have.

In summary it has been the amazing dedication of many many volunteer people to work for no remuneration for several years, and absorb a lot of beauracratc crap (that while there is accountability also has too much scope for unnecessary delays in funds being paid and good projects getting going.

In July 2005 Bushvision received a trial community TV license.

Now that Bushvision is broadcasting 24 / 7 another lot of hurdles have appeared, the major one at the moment is being getting sponsorship while still doing all of the following

- * Trying to get facilities built and better equipment purchased
- * Teaching mostly unemployed and unskilled people skills to be able to make programs
- * Teach people who have never run an organisation before how to run an organisation with lots of technical and legal hurdles to overcome. For Example almost every day we have to explain to someone the four different copyright issues that playing music on TV has to be thought through about.

BV also has to

- * Deal with the ABA / ACMA on issues that it seems reluctant to make decisions on. e.g. It took over a year to get the ABA to even consider making a decision on whether Bushvision could even apply for a trial community TV license.

While Bushvision does not complain about having to show it was capable, It was very annoyed that it had to continually put pressure on the ABA and be somewhat abusive to the ABA just to get a reply.

Being nice and waiting for replies by a certain date got us nowhere. The dates would go by and months later still no reply would come.

But in spite of all this BV received a trial license is now broadcasting.

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The opportunities that Bushvision has

Bushvision has many oppourtunities because it is an organisation that uses any & every communication tool it can to assist rural Australia to communicate.

Because of Bushvision`s use of the latest digital technology and the lowering cost of this technology, Bushvision is producing some programs for as little as \$500 per 30 minute episode.

The tools it is using (or plans to use very soon) are Satellite TV, Community TV, Web streaming, rebroadcasting under open narrowcasting legislation and digital broadcasting on spare multichannels.

All these options are merely ways for Bushvision to eventually be able to reach every person in both Rural Australia and in the Capital Cities with TV content produced by or for Rural Australia.

Another possibility that Bushvision might seriously consider in the future is to join with Lismore's LINC TV to improve its service in that rural area.

Addressing an injustice

Of the above opportunities, there is one situation that stands above all others that needs to be addressed and that is the fact that **Community TV broadcasters do not have access to digital spectrum.**

This is a grave injustice because all the national and commercial networks will have 4 digital channels each.

Bushvision believes that the best way to address this injustice would be to either give community broadcasters access to digital spectrum or **legislate for one of the other nationwide TV channels (e.g. SBS) to carry all the community broadcasters on one of their channels for free** and for SBS to be compensated by the other channels that have 4 digital channels to cover the broadcasting costs and any loss of revenue SBS could have from such an arrangement.

This sort of arrangement would then allow the community TV broadcasters to continue to develop their unique range of programs and content they are producing that reflect the culture and community they come from. In Bushvision's case it wants to be the catalyst to begin a large number of rural produced programs that will never be produced by other channels.

Bushvision believes that should a national channel such as SBS carry all the community TV channels Australia wide, then each capital city community TV channel would have the right to broadcast digitally in a similar footprint to their current analogue broadcast area and (because Bushvision has clearly demonstrated it is a nation wide rural community TV type of channel) **Bushvision should have the right to broadcast digitally in all the non metropolitan areas across Australia** via this arrangement.

The threats that Bushvision has.

Bushvision's threats are probably a little bit different to other Community TV channels. Some of those threats are

- * (Unforeseen) Financial challenge, - Currently Bushvision has no debts and a tightly knit management team, so we expect Bushvision will be able to grab opportunities many other community channels may struggle with, but something unforeseen could arise.
- * Not Understanding or dealing correctly with the legal & regulatory responsibilities that impinge on community broadcasters and non profit community groups.
- * Being unable to keep a good team (of mostly volunteers) together,
- * Having time to lobby govts (such as with this email) for changes that will improve things for Community broadcasters while dealing with everything else.
- * Dealing with layers of bureaucracy that often takes years to make a good and fair decision despite it staring them in the face.
- * Unwittingly getting involved in a legal action that causes Bushvision to go broke.
- * Being unable to source enough regular TV content.

The difficulties Bushvision has getting content produced.

Although Bushvision is very much in its early days, it does realise there is a huge challenge getting enough TV produced to sustain a rural TV channel with everything broadcast on it having a rural focus.

There are a few things the Federal Govt could do that would help though.

(1) **Unemployed people who train in video editing course being able to have their \$800 training credits each 6 months go towards paying for (IT) equipment that could get them some work. IT equipment like computers and video cameras.** Currently once WFD participants have been trained in IT skills they get annoyed that their training credits cannot

go towards getting equipment that can give them lots of practice and experience in things like keeping good computer records or videography etc
Instead they have to be resigned to brief learning courses and then they tend to forget what they have learned.

If unemployed people were allowed to have equipment purchased from training credits, (perhaps with a skill / motivation test associated with it) then we believe that would

* assist learning skills in the people that need it most

* assist employment opportunities,

* assist a range of IT skill development including more grass roots TV productions.

(2) Providing modest competitive grants (up to \$25,000) to individuals / groups who have produced a good pilot program and want to make a TV series for broadcast on Community TV.

This would be in contrast to the larger amounts of funds that go towards "Professional" videos to be broadcast on ABC & SBS that Community TV producers cannot get access to because of their self taught / home grown beginnings. Providing \$250,000 - \$1,000,000 per year in this category would be a marvellous idea especially if half had to go to people / groups outside metro areas.

(3) Providing a fuel rebate system where rural tv producers can claim a 200% rebate on their fuel used to go to places outside metro areas to produce good rural tv stories.

The reason for the 200% rebate is so the wear and tear on their vehicles would get some remuneration.

This is because there are a lot of rough tracks for rural videographers to cover to get their stories.

(4) Both State & Federal Govts agreeing to a formula that gave community TV channels a proportional share of Govt television advertising according to viewership.

Once an amount has been determined, then we believe the formula should be \$X,000 per TV channel for the effort to organise the (Sponsorship) advertising and then the remainder split according to numbers of viewers / total community tv viewers.

And finally to repeat a point we have already made

(5) Providing for free a digital multichannel to broadcast Community TV nation wide.