

**SUBMISSION TO
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and
The Arts**

“Tuning in to community broadcasting”

draft

From: HUNTER COMMUNITY TELEVISION (NOVACAST) (HCTV)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the Internet and other broadcasting technologies;
- Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity;
- Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks; and
- Opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters.

SUMMARY

- Newcastle and the Hunter Region has a predicted population of 612,000 in 2006 and is the sixth biggest population base in Australia and its largest provincial (non-capital) city.
- There is currently no terrestrial free to air community TV service in Newcastle or the Hunter or the Central Coast. This lack of community services is also true for the rest of regional NSW with the exception of LINC TV in Lismore. This situation denies participation in recording, developing and reflecting the diversity of our local cultures
- Novacast applied for a Channel 31 Community TV licence in early 2005 but was informed that there was a lack of available frequency in the area.. There are licences being operated in regions of a lesser population size, especially in Queensland and the NT.
- We have been operating under a narrowcast licence on Satellite Community TV (SCTV), a free to air service, in order to overcome the lack of frequency. We have no idea of the number of local reception dishes which could receive our local programs. Due to this lack of demographic information we cannot raise any sponsorship revenue.
- We are the only local broadcaster whose sole focus is on programs covering the diversity of cultural events in the Hunter.
- Novacast is establishing a broadband presence for it's programs at PlanetTV.org.
- This internet activity and our presence on SCTV on the Optus B3 satellite limits the accessibility of our local programs to the local population and this makes us victims of the digital divide. The only way to guarantee full accessibility is via a free to air terrestrial service that a Channel 31 licence would provide. This would also give access to CBAA and Community Broadcasting Foundation support.

- We have been broadcasting on Satellite Community TV for 10 months now.
- Due to increased competition for funding and heavier workloads on administrators to keep arts organizations viable, our programming has shrunk from two hours per week to half an hour per week. All of this with volunteer labour and no income. It is only just sustainable.
- One regional broadcaster, like Novacast, will take a long time to reach efficiency. We feel that if we combine the abilities of several regions in order to produce enough programming for a 24/7 service, this would be a better way to go. We would like to propose the concept of a regional CTV network sharing programs under several separate CTV licenses.
- In Community Media there has traditionally been an emphasis on delivering technology rather than on supporting community processes that give rise to media production. Initial capitalization costs have dropped but they are still a barrier. Having enough funds to operate till income arrives is important. We don't get any funding.

HUNTER COMMUNITY TV Inc. (NOVACASTTV) (HCTV)

Our HISTORY

Hunter Community Television Inc. (NovacastTV) was initiated from a set of meetings by key industry people late in **2001**.

A notice of intention to apply for a licence was sent to the ABA at that time.

Submissions to the Development Consent inquiry at Newcastle City Council for Saskatchewan Telecommunication's proposal for the roll out of broadband in Newcastle were made by HCTV in Sept/Oct **2002**. We hoped that this would provide a second alternative for local people to have a local TV service. That is if we were refused access to terrestrial broadcast (Ch31) frequency. They withdrew their application so that "opportunity" disappeared.

The LICENCE- Feb 2005.

We formally applied for a Community TV license in **Feb 2005**.

When asked for reasons why this was refused and we were told there was no frequency available. Local TV amateurs disputed this "opinion".

The licensing authority in Canberra was phoned and we were told that frequency "might" be available but we would have to demonstrate the ability to raise the money, acquire the facilities and operate the service before a decision could be made and even then success was not probable.

The Financial Review March 15th stated that the Minister for Broadcasting will takeover the power to issue licenses from ACMA. We are asking her for a CTV license for the Hunter.

BROADCAST UNDER ANOTHER LICENCE – May 2005

With the withdrawal and reissue of the Channel 31 licence in Sydney, and the threat of loss of advertisers and sponsors to existing community broadcasters of ten years standing, Satellite Community Television was launched to enable continuity of service.

HCTV joined as it was our first and only opportunity to broadcast. We now broadcast nationally.

We estimate we have a potential audience of 600,000 Australia wide. These are viewers pointed at Optus B3. They are mainly viewers of foreign language broadcasts made by Sydney producers. Our audience should be local to our region.

REGIONS DISADVANTAGED

Ex Channel 31 broadcasters in Sydney had an existing base of sponsorship which they have reactivated. The new regional participants (Canberra/Queenbeyan, Bathurst/Orange, Wollongong and Newcastle) have had mostly to build this support from scratch.

DISINCENTIVES TO VIEWERS

Viewers don't know the service exists. With no financial resources hence no publicity budget promotion has been difficult. There has been some press coverage in the Newcastle Herald.

The cost of installation of a satellite dish and receiver at about \$600 is a major disincentive.

MEMBER INPUT

We have 37 interested parties on our mailing list.

Many of them have stated that they won't produce material unless there is a guaranteed free to air (Ch31) service available.

Technical help in building a fitting broadcast equipment should also be available when a license is granted. Certainty and a guarantee of some continuity (even for short term trials) is essential for volunteers to commit time and energy.

We have about a dozen program-provider members, 5 of whom produce program material.

PROGRAM OUTPUT

We started broadcasting ten hours of programs a month. We produce an average of four hours programming a month.

ADDRESSING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.A. THE SCOPE of CTV in the Hunter – TV- Regional

There is no analogue terrestrial community tv service in the Hunter. Newcastle and the Hunter Region at predicted population (2006) of 612,000, is the sixth biggest population base in Australia and largest provincial (non-capital) city.

This lack of service would also be true for all regional areas of NSW (except Lismore).

This situation denies participation in recording, developing and reflecting the diversity of our local culture.

Anyone subscribed to UBI can receive us. We don't have any local audience demographics on this.

We have a 24/7 display of Satellite Community TV in a shop front of the Royal Exchange Theater in Central Newcastle.

1.B. THE ROLE of CTV in the Hunter – TV- Regional

Community TV broadcasting and services in the major capital cities grew out of the foundations of the community video resource centers established in the early 1970's by the Federal Dept of Urban & Regional Development. This provided the training ground for video makers and the facilities for them to use. Newcastle and the Hunter were not a part of this. There are no major subsidized facilities available here like Metro TV or Open Channel. Live studio production is the most efficient and economical way to make TV programs. Novacast program production is by individual members using their own desktop computer editing systems. Novacast has been broadcasting for ten months. We sell time to program makers on a cost plus a little (\$55 per half hour) on a not for profit basis.

Organization involved with NovacastTV are TAFE Hunter (Screen and Music Industry Courses)

The Hunter Writer Centre, The Royal Exchange Theatre and Softscan Digital Cinema..

A list of some programs made is appended.

1. C. BROADCASTING TECHNOLOGIES USED FOR COMMUNITY TV – Hunter

Due to the unwillingness or inability to grant spectrum in the Channel 31 band by the ACMA Novacast has been putting programs to air via UBI and Satellite Community TV using a narrowcast Licence. We don't know who receives our signal so we can't sell sponsorship to support it. We will get promotional benefits from video on demand and streaming our program content by broadband at a cost of about \$7 per week. It would help promote the satellite service.. We hope to get some synergy by an alliance with wireless broadband community radio narrow-casters sharing material ("TV without Pictures" "Radio with Pictures") facilities and bandwidth. Satellite and broadband options are not universally available options for all our potential local viewers as there are financial disjunctives. The poor can't afford it. This is the digital divide.

2. CONTENT REFLECTING AUSTRALIAN CHARACTER AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Novacast content is content that is made by and about the "cultures" of the Hunter Region.

We gather it but cant reflect it usefully because we don't broadcast.

We understand that it was a condition of government support of the transition of existing commercial networks to digital that they maintain a level local programming. Prime's response to this was to withdraw facilities and jobs from Newcastle and centralize their operation in Canberra. This resulted in a drastic drop in our local content on Prime.

NBN do a small amount of local news and events coverage.

All of Novacast content is local.

The vast majority of program content on free to air TV is foreign. This is culturally diverse but is

not OUR diverse culture.

The solution is to mandate more local content and to subsidize local content production

Program scheduling policy for Novacast has been to try and group our weekly programs in a block so that viewers know what time Hunter programs are on air.

Our policy is that community programming is not static product but is part of the process of debate and performance that happens in the community and giving voice to these resolves conflict and allows voices to be heard. All this is part of developing communities which are suffering from fragmentation.

Like most social capital based organization we suffer from a lack of real capital which stops us from being proactive and limits our outreach to potential program making groups and promotion to potential viewers..

3. TECHNOLOGICAL OPPORTUNITIES.

In 1970 video was hailed as a democratizing tool with accessibility to media imminent.

This happened at the level of access to tools. Distribution was the problem.

In the USA access to production tools and cable distribution was mandated by the FCC. Similar rights and regulation were in place in Canada..

The Channel 31 Community TV spectrum is the only means of “no cost” ubiquitous access by all viewers to community TV content in Australia. Other means of delivery only supplement this to particular audience segments. It is important that the existing network of Ch31 broadcasters be extended to include more licenses in the switch to Digital.

The so called “convergence” of technologies hasn't happened yet.

Computer Internet TV exists but quality is poor. The networked TV is close but not here.

What could be a massive boost to audience participation in our “TV Culture” is interactive TV with its back channel audience link

4.A..THREATS TO ACHIEVING A ROBUST NETWORK – TV- Regional

1. Robustness is underpinned by several factors
 - a) Quality of product meaning programming. This is primarily NOT technical quality but producing well written stories. Technical quality is next
 - b) technically skilled operators
 - c) Relevance of product to local cultures
 - d) Cash flow to support running and production costs.
2. Threats to this are.
 - a) Program quality depends primarily on the time spent by skilled videographers. Lack of training or the inability to attract skilled staff are threats. Our original business plan assumed that paid staff would be necessary to support volunteer workers.
 - b) This demands a certain scale of operation.
 - c) Lack of seed monies to build an organization till revenues build to a self supporting level
3. Because there are a variety of business models running across a number of CTV Broadcasting organizations then each must be seeded and supported till operating successfully. Their should be some synergy in learning from each others mistakes and successes..

4.B. THREATS TO ACHIEVING A DIVERSE NETWORK – TV- Regional

- a) Diversity is cultural diversity not a business model.
- b) Lack of money and viewers. If you can't afford it you can't get it. The digital divide
- c) This is a not for profit operation. If you don't fund and support needs and initiatives they wont proliferate.
- d) Diversity is what exists. Lack of diversity is where only the voice of the few is heard.
The expansion of community broadcast outlets builds more connected communities.

What we spend on diversity we save in other social costs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACHIEVING A ROBUST NETWORK – TV- Regional

In 2001 a fully costed and researched business plan was submitted as part of our intention to apply and with our application. It included a comprehensive spreadsheet. This is available digitally.

It was developed from research done for Manukau City Council's feasibility study for Auckland Community TV and on existing operating models like Triangle TV in Auckland.

Basic funding came from a combination of user subscriptions, broad station sponsorship and sales of airtime and rental of facilities at a cost plus basis to users. It assumed the necessity of a professional, at least part time staff to support volunteer program makers and for managing and promoting the service. This all depended on the granting of frequency and licence which did not eventuate. Progress to date has involved many hundred hours of skilled voluntary work.

We have perused most other options available. We have survived by using cheaper emerging technologies such as DVD and satellite broadcasting..

A robust network depends on all member organizations being sustainable. The biggest asset is skilled and experienced people. The biggest danger is losing people from burnout. There is a need to pay them. This depends on cash flow and managing growth of organization till they reach critical mass.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACHIEVING A DIVERSE NETWORK – TV- Regional

- a) Diversity is enabled by supporting, encouraging and giving an outlet to those viewers who want to get involved in the process of writing content
- b) Diversity is what exists. We don't need to increase diversity but to give voice to other regions through having more licensed broadcasters so more of this diversity is seen and heard by more viewers.. This seems to be the model in the NT.
- c) One regional broadcaster, like Novacast, will take a long time to reach efficiency. The combined ability of regions to produce enough programming for a 24/7 service is much better. We raise this as a possibility of a regional CTV network sharing programs under several separate CTV licenses. We have discussed the possibility of this internally with our membership and with regional program providers to SCTV namely WARP TV in Bathurst and ICTV in Wollongong and are talking with QCTV in Queanbeyan/Canberra about their involvement..

HCTV has agreed to pursue a regional license CTV application together with these parties..

The Author

Has produced broadcast programming for TVNZ, was technical advisor to the establishment of Tautoko FM, trained TV and radio journalists and worked for Film Australia, AFTRS, Open Channel and TAFE. He was part of the group that set up Australia's first cable TV system, advised the Post Office Special Research group and was a member of Standards Australia Wg29 Sc11 on MPEG4./ Multimedia As Softscan Digital Cinema he has produced video programs for corporate, government and NGO clients....

APPENDIX 1

NOVACAST LOCAL PROGRAMMING CONTENT- SOME EXAMPLES

CARRINGTON VS GRAINCORP Carrington residents oppose proposed grain conveyor development with associated noise and dust risks to health.

HOBBY TIME - is both informative and instructional in it's coverage of people's hobbies. The hobbies that people pursue are diverse, interesting and generally fascinating and 'Hobby Time' will provide an opportunity for viewers to gain an insight into a vast number of these pursuits.

LOU'S WORLD – Has covered many community events such as

- 1. The ShootOut- Captures the pulse of The ShootOut-Newcastle's 24 Hour filmmaking competition- The international film-making competition originated in Newcastle*
- 1. Mattara Hill Climb- A day of production cars compete for the fastest time*
- 2. Dragon Boat Festival – Corporate sponsored teams compete for the padling prize.*
- 3. Tin Radio – youth make programs and broadcast on internet radio.*

A TIGHES HILL STORY- Vera Deacon tells the story of how during the Great Depression, unemployed workers were evicted from their houses. She was a young girl at the time. The events are reenacted in a stirring drama with audience participation.

AT THE FOOT OF THE STORYTELLER'S CHAIR Stories for Kids by Bronwyn including Mitzi's tale, The Mulla and Marni's story.

TIDDALICK'S TOOTHY TALE - Kids keep their teeth clean and eat good food like Tiddalick the Frog. Sponsored by Hunter Health and Awabakle Corp.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS Hunter high school drama group HYDRA examine gender stereotyping and domestic violence.