Submission to Inquiry into Community Broadcasting

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

Closing Date:
17 March 2006

From:
The Octapod Organisation
2/231 King St
Newcastle, 2300, NSW

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.

1.   Executive summary

1.1   Newcastle is Australia's sixth largest city, and its largest provincial (non-capital) city.

1.2   Newcastle is emerging as a regional cultural capital, and cultural activity in the local area generally creates opportunities for young people – including the unemployed and the underemployed -- to constructively engage with the community. The Octapod's 10-year history of successful cultural development activity and leadership has significantly contributed to the profile of Newcastle as a cultural centre, and has led to **an aspirant community radio group** forming around an online radio station staffed by local young people working as volunteers.

1.3   There is currently no youth-focused community radio station in Newcastle, Hunter, or Central Coast areas. There is no regional youth-focused community station outside the state capitals with the exception of the Gold Coast. The Octapod believes **that there is in fact a greater need for such services outside metropolitan centres,** as there is a smaller range of youth activities and employment opportunities in regional areas.

1.4   Existing community broadcasters are retreating from wider community involvement in programming and governance due to financial and other pressures, thereby **decreasing the involvement of local communities and young people in particular**.

1.5   There are no plans for a third community license in Newcastle due to perceived lack of spectrum from ACMA, despite Newcastle having a smaller number of community stations when compared with other population centers of a similar size. The reason given for this is that Newcastle is considered to be part of the Sydney and Central Coast region for the purposes of allocation of radio spectrum. The Octapod believes, however, **that there is both a community need and the technical capability for a third community license**.

1.6   Digital and internet broadcasting technologies, and in particular wireless broadband, **offer immense opportunities for experimentation and an entry-level platform for youth and community media** that complements the available community radio licenses.

1.7   These new technologies **need to be integrated into regulatory frameworks and recognized as valuable community assets** by existing management structures and authorities such as ACMA so that they can be adequately supported by existing granting bodies such as the Community Broadcasting Foundation.

1.8   Without such support for cutting-edge and youth-oriented projects, **we suggest that a significant opportunity is therefore lost for young people in regional areas** to participate in community media. Such media enable local young people to become actors in local and national community networks, and ultimately in civil society.

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2   Background to the Octapod

2.1   The Octapod organisation is Newcastle's non-profit community arts and new media organisation. The Octapod has existed as incorporated association since 1996.

2.2   The Octapod hosts the This is Not Art (TINA) festival every year on the October long weekend with funding from the NSW Ministry of Arts, and a variety of local sponsors and supporters (see http://www.thisisnotart.org/Sponsors/tabid/114/Default.aspx).

2.3   Projects initiated by local young and unemployed people (including on-line, print, visual arts and new media) have been successfully hosted by the Octapod Association over the last ten years.

2.4   The Octapod is an affiliate member of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia.

2.5   The Newcastle City Council's Youth Venue through its Ninja Radio project has identified the need for a youth-focused radio station within the Newcastle CBD as a key priority for enhancing social inclusion and supporting and promoting youth music and arts projects.

2.6   During 2005 the Octapod Association and Newcastle City Council's Youth Venue, The Loft collaborated to develop an on-line radio station, TiN (This is Not Radio) also which has also broadcast on special events FM licenses for the TINA festivals. Over one hundred volunteers have been involved in this project in its first six months. Monthly project meetings are open to all members of the Newcastle community and allow for discussion and airing of views by presenters, music programmers, technical staff, trainers and producers.

2.7   Project funding for online and special events radio broadcasting has come from the NSW Ministry of Arts, The Foundation for Young Australians, and The Aids Council of NSW. A grant to enable purchase of a 100-watt transmitter has been made available through the Australian Youth Foundation.

2.8   Transmitter installation and maintenance is supported by in-kind by a local two-way communications company, and low-cost access to a transmitter site is being negotiated with a local tertiary institution.

2.9   In April 2006, TiN will broadcast Youth Week on a low-powered FM special events license within the Newcastle CBD.

2.10   Since mid-2005, the Octapod has been developing a project proposal for a broadband wireless community, NewMesh, in partnership with other local non-profit media & community groups. The project aims to provide access to free on-line services for diverse community groups and addresses identified economic and technical barriers to technology. In developing this project the Octapod has drawn on its expertise in engaging a broad cross-section of the community including disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

2.11   The convergence between traditional broadcast and new forms of media delivery is clearly a new area for creative solutions to be applied, and this submission highlights the opportunities for community media in general, and the position of Octapod in particular, to take advantage of both older analog one-to-many models (FM, television) and new digital 'long-tail' many-to-many models (file sharing, interactive community media archives, wireless broadband networks).

3. Terms of reference – Octapod's Response

3.1 Scope and role of Community Broadcasting

3.1.1 Octapod is of the view that in general terms the scope and role of Community broadcasting is undergoing a generational shift in all areas of broadcasting – audio, visual and internet. The shift is largely demand-driven but positively enabled by the increasing availability and capability of an expanding range of convergent technologies.

3.1.2 There is, to younger generations at least, no significant distinction or benefits to be gained by the treatment of older technologies in their traditional analog categorization – radio, television, video, film, telephone and computer. The current generation who are computer literate is geared up to utilize as both producers and consumers in an integrating and convergent way all broadcasting technologies in digital form.

3.1.3 There is a clear need to reinvigorate community broadcasting in this new age and for new audiences – not by merely replicating services available in traditional media (simply streaming an FM signal for instance), but in providing a means by which communities can share in the new potential for access and diverse means of participation.

3.2 *Content and programming*

3.2.1 Australian society is multidimensional in character. Not only is it multicultural and a federation of states (plus territories and off-shore) but it is a diversity of socio-geographical communities (local and regional). It is an aggregate of generations, and a milieu of constantly forming, storming, norming and reforming opinions, expectations and achievements – a dynamic society.

3.2.2 Community media should encourage questioning of assumptions that underpin the notion of communities and provide a platform for the sharing of ideas between as well as within communities.

3.2.3 Community broadcast licence holders should be required to more stringently conform to the their licence requirements to do so, and ACMA should take a more active role in this monitoring function.

3.3 *Technological opportunities*

3.3.1 Octapod is concerned to ensure that there remains capacity and capability for community influence, involvement and interest in a move away from traditional analog media models*.*

3.3.2 Octapod's NewMesh proposal described in 2.10 and 2.11 above provides a model for the future creation and distribution of community media content.

3.3.1   Wi-Fi (and the next generation of WiMax services), for audio content delivery represents way forward without the cost barrier of community broadcasters migrating to digital radio delivery.

3.4   *Opportunities & Threats*

3.4.1   Potential **opportunities** for community broadcasters include new technologies and new generations unfettered by past paradigms, and the creative solutions devised by grassroot, non-profit associations, who tend to operate from a business model and ethics of collaboration rather than competition.

3.4.2   **Threats** include increasing lack of community access to spectrum resources by governments regarding public spectrum as private property, and the commercial imperative that many community media outlets feel forced to adopt because of the expense of maintaining analog broadcasting infrastructure, as well as staffing and production costs.

3.4.3   The ease of access for the audience of FM radio, however, should not be ignored nor forgotten in the move to digital services, and the network of traditional broadcasters should be maintained and enhanced in any future developments.

4. Newcastle -- Demographic profile

4.1   Proportion of residents under 25

4.1.1   The outer areas of capital cities and coastal Australia experienced the highest population growth in 2002-03, according to ABS regional population figures released in 2004.[1]

4.1.2   Newcastle has a higher proportion of young people in the 20-24 age group than the State average.

4.1.3   In 2001 in the Lower Hunter the youth population (15-24 year olds) is relatively evenly spread over the five LGAs. Proportionally, the highest concentration of this group was in Newcastle (15 per cent of the population) and the lowest in Port Stephens (11 per cent).[2]

4.2   Unemployment

4.2.1   While Newcastle's overall unemployment rate has improved since the 1980s, when it was several points higher than the national average, young people in particular suffer from limited work opportunities on leaving secondary and tertiary education in the Hunter, and often have to leave the area to find full-time work in their chosen fields.

4.2.2   During 2004, youth unemployment in Newcastle was measured as the highest in New South Wales, with nearly one in three teenagers looking for full-time work.[3] ABS data for the 12 months ending November 2004 showed that youth unemployment in Newcastle increased from 27.9 per cent in November 2003, reaching 30.6 per cent in November 2004 – 9 points above the NSW average.

4.2.3   Further, in August 2004, the ABS estimated that 9% of unemployed teenagers were long-term unemployed, that is, they had been unemployed for more than a year. The proportion of unemployed teenagers who were not in full-time study, and who were long-term unemployed was 13%. This was considerably higher than the proportion of unemployed teenagers who were in full-time study, and were long-term unemployed (7%).

4.3.   Underemployment

4.3.1   Data compiled by the Centre for Full-Employment and Equity (CoFEE) at the University of Newcastle has estimated that official unemployment statistics under-represent the number of persons who are able to work more hours per week by an average of fifty percent.[4] This is borne out by other sources which indicate that the unemployment rate reflects a deeper problem of

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[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *3218.0 - Regional Population Growth, Australia and New Zealand*, 2002-03, , Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 12/03/2004 .

[2] Hunter Valley Research Foundation, Chapter 2, 'Population and demography', *Hunter Valley Yearbook, Newcastle and the Hunter Region 2005-2006*, released October 2005.

[3] Grierson, Sharon, *Media Release*, 17 December 2004.

[4] William Mitchell and Victor Quirk, *Working Paper No. 05-16: Skills shortages in Australia: concepts and reality*, Centre for Full Employment and Equity, University of Newcastle, 1 November 2005

underemployment for young Australians. For example in August 2004, the ABS estimated that of all Australians aged between 15-24 working part-time and not in full-time study, nearly two in three people (58%) wanted more hours of work and were available to work more hours. The ABS suggests that there is considerable underemployment among young part-time workers who are not studying full-time.[5]

4.3.2   Clearly, there is a need for services in the non-government sector to provide opportunities and skill-development for under-employed local people to increase their chances of finding full employment, and to complement existing training and skill development programs in the tertiary sector. Media and cultural projects such as facilitated by Octapod give highly-needed skills and experience to local young people, and anecdotal evidence suggests that this creates pathways to full-employment.

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[5] 'Young People At Risk In The Transition From Education To Work' in *4102.0 - Australian Social Trends*, 2005 Latest ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 12/07/2005.

5.   The Local Community Radio Environment

5.1   *Recent developments*

5.1.1   Due to an ageing volunteer population and financial pressures, community stations in the Hunter region have aimed towards an older (50+) demographic.

5.1.2   Newcastle's 2NUR, while remaining a General Community station, for example, has playlisted programming between 6am and 8pm weekdays in an 'Easy Listening' format. 2NUR currently has no youth-focused daytime programming, with university students from Newcastle University (the license holder) programming music from 8-11pm. From 11-1am long-standing specialist music programs operate, with BBC world service after 1am. Weekends are also oriented towards older listeners, with established programming operating during the day, and ethnic broadcasting in the evenings.

5.1.3   The other community broadcast licence holder in Newcastle is Rhema FM, which was successful at the last amendment to the LAP in 1998. Rhema is a Christian station and part of an extended network which also operates in Gosford and many other regional centres. They rebroadcast much of their programming from their headquarters in the USA. This excludes participation by the many local people who hold differing religious views or indeed support a secular society.

5.2   *Opportunities for community radio involvement by young people in Newcastle*

5.2.1   Initial enquiries to ACMA about the process of application for a community broadcast license have met the response that
> "Unfortunately ACMA is not aware of any available frequencies in Newcastle that could be used for the provision of an additional community radio service."[6]

5.2.2   This was explained in telephone conversations with the Licensing Area of the (then) ABA during June 2005 as relating to the fact that Newcastle's LAP is considered to be part of the Sydney & Central Coast section and spectrum availability in these areas is already limited.

5.2.3.   ACMA's representative therefore recommended
> "… that you contact one of the existing community stations in Newcastle, in particular the general service 2NUR (02 4921 5555), to ask about becoming a station volunteer or program provider. It is a condition of a community broadcasting licence that stations must encourage community participation in the operations of the service and in the selection and provision of programming."

5.2.4   To date, our program proposal submitted to 2NUR in September 2005 has not been responded to. Discussions and meetings with the Station Manager

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[6] Email from Catherine Prior, ACMA, Subject: TCBL enquiry, Date: 6 October 2005, 2:50:15 PM.

have indicated that there is a long waiting list for programs, and little turn-over of existing presenters.

5.3   Issues Arising

5.3.1   Discussions with the CBAA and Mike Clark, Managing Director of RadSpec have confirmed that there is the possibility of independent investigation into the availability of radio spectrum.

5.3.2   It is also considered that the continued broadcasting of commercial NBN television on the VHF band is a major barrier to the allocation of a third community licence in Newcastle. NBN was understood to be moving from this band during the 1990s, but this has not happened.

5.3.3   Octapod proposes that there is a clear need for a third community license, and that Newcastle's young people are excluded from media participation in the current environment.

6. Newcastle in the context of existing Community Radio Broadcasters Australia-wide (see tables attached)

6.1   Appendix A, "Newcastle & comparison with similar population areas".

6.1.1   This table demonstrates that as a regional centre, Newcastle is significantly disadvantaged when compared with regional centres of a similar population size in NSW.

6.1.2   For example, Wollongong, with about half of the Newcastle population base according to ACMA's LAP, has two community stations, and Gosford has four.

6.2   Appendix B, "Comparison of Community License Holders in State Capitals of a similar size (Canberra & Hobart)"

6.2.1   This data demonstrates that Newcastle is also disadvantaged when compared with other state capitals of a comparable population size. For example, Newcastle has only two community stations in comparison to Hobart, which has four.

6.3   Appendix C, "Current Community Licenses (Youth) National"

6.3.1   This table demonstrates that there is already considered to be a need for Youth stations in the Gold Coast and Hobart, population centres of a similar size to Newcastle.

Explanation of terms

ACMA
The Australian Communications and Media Authority

LAP
A Radio Licence Area Plan, managed by ACMA

Long-tail
The phrase *The Long Tail* as a proper noun was first coined by Chris Anderson. Anderson argued that products that are in low demand or have low sales volume can collectively make up a market share that rivals or exceeds the relatively few current bestsellers and blockbusters, if the store or distribution channel is large enough. Examples of such mega-stores include Amazon.com and Netflix. The Long Tail is a potential market and, as the examples illustrate, successfully tapping in to that long tail market is often enabled by the distribution and sales channel opportunities the Internet creates.

Wi-Fi
Wi-Fi is a set of product compatibility standards for wireless local area networks (WLAN) based on the IEEE 802.11 specifications used for internet access.

Wi-Max
A new set of standards beyond the 802.11 specifications (802.16) which offers many enhancements, anywhere from longer range to greater transfer speeds.

APPENDIX A: Comparison of Community Radio Licences awarded in Newcastle with regional centres of a similar size

Community Radio Profile — Comparisons with Newcastle — Octapod Submission

Comparison of Community Radio Licences awarded in Newcastle with similar regional centres in NSW

NEWCASTLE

STATE/TERRITORY	Licence Area	Call Sign	Frequency	Current Licensee	Service commenced	Licence Number	Community of Interest	Population served LGA (2004)	Population served LAP
NSW	NEWCASTLE RA2	Rhema FM	99.7 Mhz	Newcastle Christian Broadcasters	1-Dec-99	1150030	Religious -- Christian	City of Newcastle: 145,633	497,553
NSW	NEWCASTLE RA2	2NUR	103.7 Mhz	University of Newcastle	13-Mar-78	3053	General Geographic Area	" "	" "

SURROUNDING AREAS

NSW	CESSNOCK/MAITLAND RA1	2CHR	96.5 Mhz	Central Hunter Community Broadcasters Inc	28-Mar-00	1150040	General Geographic Area	Cessnock: 45,204; Maitland: 59,949	" "
NSW	MUSWELLBROOK RA1	2GGZ	101.7 Mhz	Mt Helen FM & TV Upper Hunter	1-Sep-99	1150038	General Geographic Area	Muswellbrook: 15,195	" "
NSW	PORT STEPHENS RA1	Port Stephens FM	100.9 Mhz	Port Stephens FM Radio Inc.	1-Feb-00	115004	General Geographic Area	Port Stephens: 62,448	" "
NSW	LAKE MACQUARIE RA1	2MAQ	97.3 Mhz	Lake Waves FM Community Radio Inc	1-May-00	1150043	General Geographic Area	Lake Macquarie: 189,196	" "

GOSFORD/CENTRAL COAST

STATE/TERRITORY	Licence Area	Call Sign	Frequency	Current Licensee	Service commenced	Licence Number	Community of Interest	Population served LGA (2004)	Population served LAP
NSW	GOSFORD RA1	RHEMA FM Gosford	94.9 Mhz	Gosford Christian Broadcasters Limited	23-Oct-04	1150186	Religious - Christian	Gosford LGA: 154,654;Central Coast (Combined Gosford & Wyong): 285,508	285,509
NSW	GOSFORD RA1	Radio Five-O-Plus	93.3 Mhz	Five-O-Plus Public Radio Association Inc.	22-Nov-02	1150187	Organisations serving 50+ years	" "	" "
NSW	GOSFORD RA1	Hits N Country 94.1	94.1 MHz	Central Coast Broadcasters Ltd	22-Nov-02	1150739	Country and Sport	" "	" "
NSW	GOSFORD RA1	2CCC	96.3 MHz	Central Coast Community FM Radio Association	10-Aug-92	6527	General Geographic Area	" "	" "

WOLLONGONG

STATE/TERRITORY	Licence Area	Call Sign	Frequency	Current Licensee	Service commenced	Licence Number	Community of Interest	Population served LGA (2004)	Population served LAP
NSW	WOLLONGONG RA1	2VOX	106.9 MHz	Illawarra Community FM Broadcasters Ltd	19-Oct-90	2006	General Geographic Area	Wollongong: 191,558	257,510
NSW	WOLLONGONG RA2	2LIV	94.1 MHz	Living Sound Broadcasters Ltd	30-Jul-00	1150163	Religious - Christian	" "	" "

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Comparison of Community Radio Licences awarded in Newcastle with state capitals of similar population size

CANBERRA

STATE/TERRIT	Licence Area	Call Sign	Frequency	Current Licensee	Service commenced	Licence Number	Community of Interest	Population served LGA (2004)	Population served LAP
ACT	CANBERRA RA1	1ART	92.7 Mhz	Artsound FM Inc.	15-Jul-00	1150190	Arts	ACT: 322,900.	356,384
ACT	CANBERRA RA1	1WAY FM	91.9 Mhz	Canberra Christian Radio Ltd	15-Jul-00	1150191	Religious – Christian	" "	
ACT	CANBERRA RA1	1CMS	91.1 Mhz	Ethnic Broadcasting Council of the ACT	15-Jul-00	1150192	Ethnic – General	" "	"
ACT	CANBERRA RA1	1XXR	98.3 Mhz	Community Radio 2XX Inc.	2-Jul-76	4226	General Geographic Area	" "	"
ACT	CANBERRA RA1	1RPH	1125 kHz	Print Handicapped Radio of ACT Inc.	5-Oct	5292	Print Handicapped	" "	"

HOBART

STATE/TERRIT	Licence Area	Call Sign	Frequency	Current Licensee	Service commenced	Licence Number	Community of Interest	Population served LGA (2004)	Population served LAP
TAS	HOBART RA1	7HFC	103.3 Mhz	Hope Foundation Communicators Inc.	30-Mar-80	3080	Religious – Christian		
TAS	HOBART RA2	7THE	92.1 Mhz	Hobart FM Inc.	13-Apr-77	3082	Educational / Specialised Music	Hobart: 48,533	218,079
TAS	HOBART RA3	7THE Edge Radio 99.3	99.3 Mhz	Tasmanian Youth Broadcasters	24-Feb-03	1150787	Youth	" "	"
TAS	HOBART RA4	7RPH	864 kHz	RPH Print Radio Tasmania Inc.	5-Oct-92	5508	Print Handicapped	" "	"

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Community Licences awarded to Youth stations -- Nationally

State	Licence Area	Call Sign	Frequency	Current Licensee	Service commenced	Licence Number	Community of Interest	Population served LAP
QLD	GOLD COAST RA1	Radio Metro	105.7 MHz	Radio Metro Ltd	8-Nov-01	1150709	Youth	441,386
QLD	BRISBANE RA1	1197	1197 kHz	Brisbane Interactive Radio Group Inc.	Dec-01	1150706	Youth	1,636,520
SA	ADELAIDE RA1	Fresh FM		Fresh Broadcasters Inc.	22-Aug-01	1150740	Youth	1,119,913
TAS	HOBART RA3	7THE Edge Radio 99.3	99.3 Mhz	Tasmanian Youth Broadcasters	24-Feb-03	1150787	Youth	218,079
VIC	MELBOURNE RA1	Student Youth Network Inc.	90.7 Mhz	Student Youth Network Inc.	6-Dec-01	1150694	Youth and Students	3,395,253
WA	PERTH RA1	Groove 101.7FM	101.7FM	Youth Media Society of Western Australia Free Broadcast Inc	24-Oct-02	1150795	Youth	1,339,994
NSW	SYDNEY RA1 94.5 MHz Free Broadcast Inc. 28 Jun 20031150109 FBi	FbI	94.5Mhz		28-Jun-03	1150109	Youth	3,597,031