

WORLD MUSIC

RADIO Inc.



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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

16 March 2006

The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio in particular.

Community radio is an invaluable tool for creating a homogenous and informed community; however radio does not play a sufficiently serious role in this regard. For example, although ethnic programs are much appreciated by the individual communities concerned, they are not able, by their very nature, to include the mainstream community.

Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity

What are urgently needed are community stations that will present popular music, folk music, as well as information from all cultures, but in the **English language**, much like SBS TV is doing. This would not only serve the people of the particular language/ethnic group from which the news/music comes, but would also cater to the English speaking population, as well allowing all the other listeners from various cultural backgrounds to become familiar with each others music.

Although Australia has drawn a population from many cultures, only one culture is dominant on air, in the popular music field.

If Australia is to seriously develop its own popular or folk genre, the music from all these cultures needs to be part of what is frequently heard on air; to be assimilated, and inwardly digested, in order that a new, typically Australian sound could emerge.

As it is, we have mostly popular music from the US, or pseudo-US, as in much of country music.

We need community stations dedicated to presenting popular and folk music from around the world, particularly from the areas from which our population springs.

This would draw many young listeners.

We at World Music Radio have been trying to establish such a radio station with so far little success with the ABA and opposition from the established stations. The musical content of the Christian stations' programs is very similar to the non-Christian ones; almost totally dominated by one culture, not Australian.

Community stations need to broadcast more news of future local events. This is done to a certain extent, but mostly the stations expect that the event organisers will send the material to the stations.

Perhaps funding community announcements would encourage stations to be more proactive in gathering information regarding community events, such as children's activities, elderly outings, news, and/or health updates.

Opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters.

The opportunities within community stations are tremendous. Not only for voices to be heard, but in education, in acquiring new skills and in personal development. The threats to achieving this are mainly situations brought on by ignorance, intolerance and a lack of people skills. Unfortunately this media often attracts individuals of questionable character and ability.

The multicultural component is often resented and it would seem that in some cases this would not exist at all if it were not generously funded by the CBF.

(For an example, I am enclosing a letter from a multicultural broadcaster- Ann Mihkelson PhD - written to the ABA. The writer has given permission for her letter to be submitted to this enquiry.)

This letter is perhaps too detailed for this enquiry, it is merely a sample of what happens in these situations, often not recorded or protested by people with basic English skills.

Irena Grant

Chair/President

World Music Radio Inc.

NEMBC Tasmanian Representative on the Women's Committee

(National Ethnic & Multicultural Broadcasters Council)

Co-ordinator of the Lithuanian Community- Northern Tasmania

THE LETTER

Australian Broadcasting Authority,
PO Box 34 Belconnen ACT 2616 *(end of 2004)*

Reference: 2004/0733

Re: Draft LAP Variation - Launceston

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee,

Many Launcestonians have been anxiously awaiting news of a world music radio station so that we could contribute to the pleasure and culture of our community. It is concerning that there is one group and their sympathisers who are passionately dedicated to see that this doesn't happen.

It has been suggested that WMRadio find a haven with 7LTN, a community station. It is with reluctance that I will attempt to explain why this is not possible.

I was a member/presenter of that station, and finally Secretary of the Management Committee.

I am not the only one who has been traumatised by the events that were constantly taking place there, and until now was reluctant to bring all the unpleasantness to the surface again.

I personally suffered vilification and humiliation when I first started, and only remained out of loyalty to the then Multicultural Co-Ordinator, who urged me to stay and "make a difference" by helping to make it a more congenial place in which to work.

I was not the only person subjected to abuse, but because I did not leave, various ploys were found to humiliate me.

For example, during a visit by the NEMBC, while I was preparing to become a presenter, I asked a question about training. This was considered by 7LTN to be out of order to such a degree that I was threatened with suspension! I still have the correspondence relating to this event where the Multicultural Co-ordinator protested on my behalf. She was in the habit of writing "welcome back" notes for people who had been away, and did so for me, but "Fuck Off Ann" was scrawled boldly over the welcome note.

Before that, after I had signed the Code of Conduct form, I was told I should consider volunteering somewhere else as signing the form so hurriedly showed that I was not taking it seriously enough. I have correspondence relating to that incident.

When our Co-ordinator enthused that we were lucky to recruit someone capable who had some time free from tutoring, she was told that I was not suitable as I was "too clever" for a community station.

The Multicultural Co-ordinator was calling regular meetings which were minuted. Until then there was no record of any multicultural meetings, or indeed a list of the presenters. Some people at the station knew the names of some of them, the others were pieced together slowly.

The funding arrangements were such that the CBF funds all foreign language programs at a community station, with the understanding that 25% of those funds go to the purchase of materials for the multicultural programs.

When the multicultural group asked for certain equipment, first it was locked in a room to which none of the multicultural group had a key, then, when this was repeatedly brought to the attention of the then President, the group was given a key, only to find that it had a password unknown to any in the group.

This was again repeatedly brought to the attention of the President, who managed to get the password, but then the group was told that none could operate the computer as none of us was capable enough. This was a group consisting of two scientists, in charge of teaching and running Science labs at the University, as well as other intelligent "ethnics".

The Co-ordinator then made a list of people who were conversant with computers so that at least the ones on the list would be allowed to use the equipment. This was only agreed if we agreed to be shown how it all works.

The "tutor" spent approximately three hours in which he was not able to show us how to convert an LP to a CD. When I said that it had all been a waste of time, I was called a "bloody bitch" to which I replied "In my experience you should have prepared yourself better if you were going to teach us; we all have other things to do with our busy time as well."

I did not file a complaint as our co-ordinator thought it best to let it blow over, but to my surprise I found that a complaint had been made against me by the "tutor" and I was suspended for 3 months! (I have the correspondence dealing with this).

The then President became aware that there was a sub-group in charge of everything, and resigned, citing "bigotry" and "prejudice" among this group over which he was no longer willing to preside. As far as I am aware many members of this group are still operating at 7LTN.

However, there were many quiet, decent presenters and other station members who subsequently elected a new Committee consisting of some multicultural presenters. I was Secretary, another was Treasurer and our co-ordinator had an elected place on the committee.

Until then no multicultural presenter's name had appeared on any program. Not just the name, but even the language of that program, although every other presenter was named, as well as the program he/she was presenting.

Our co-ordinator made a template of all programs –as part of the newsletter- where everyone's name, including those of "the ethnics" found a place. She did this because when it was first suggested that their names should also appear on programs, she was told that there was no room

on the page to include everyone. 7LTN is now using this same template which is still part of the newsletter.

The new Committee attempted to make the business of the station more transparent but was unable to control the sub group which began a campaign of vilification and mis-information about some members of the management committee.

The Committee found certain acts were criminal and informed the police who attempted an investigation. For example, the computer was showing that we had been on line since 6am, when we only opened the office at 9am. Apparently the modem had been taken and was being used at a private address.

We found who was responsible, but the person who told us was fearful of repercussions if he gave the name away.

We put out a special edition of the newsletter to tell the members what had been going on, but even then, this sub-group managed to convince some new members that it was this committee that was being accused.

Here are some excerpts of the events at the time. (newsletter – March 2002).

Item 1 The President reported the following:

The internal and external operations of the Station an unacceptable number of normal procedures were being by-passed.

Information and documents crucial to the Stations image and operation were being withheld from the Management Committee and responsible office bearers.

Internal and external Station business was being carried out by unauthorised, unelected members and non-members.

Unauthorised representation and not informing the Management Committee of issues and events that are lawfully the affairs for the Committee to manage and are in direct contravention of our Constitution and all guidelines that entitle us to retain our broadcast licence.

The Executive met on 31 Jan and 15 Feb 2002 to deal with administration, including:

Overdue Aurora bill for station power supply, which was to be disconnected the next day

The unavailability of passwords

Dealing with missing property, such as digital camera missing memory –card, value \$150

Missing Computer discs, LP's, 45's and CD's from the record library.

Membership monies have not been correctly receipted

Appropriate apologies and explanations sent to bodies and organisations awaiting responses as far back as May 2001.

Telstra confirmed unlawful use of our account off our premises to access the internet.

A hard drive (approx \$200) is missing from the computer in the meeting room.

Specific tools have been invoiced, paid for, but are not to be found on the premises.

Missing property has been reported to the police.

Computer discs were not filed; therefore program discs cannot be rebooted.

The library computer discs were found wiped of records

No authority was given for station and or private equipment, files and recordings to be dumped at the tip.

No authority was given for station archives, files or heavy audio equipment to be stored in the roof space of the cottage

The damage to the building and satellite dish has been discussed with the Launceston City Council who owns the premises.

It is apparent from the hole in the wall and a protruding microphone cable that a hidden microphone had been installed between Studio A and the control room, with the possibility of a hidden camera as well.

The Committee appealed to the Patron of 7LTN for help and advice, but it was refused.

The sub-group gathered a host of new members, called for a Special General Meeting a few months before the election in order to unseat this Committee.

We were told at the time, by a legal person present, that the proceedings were unconstitutional, but with much shouting the mob took over after the invited chair no longer agreed to preside over such unruly behaviour and vacated the chair.

The majority (12) of multicultural presenters, who were aware that for the first time Management had facilitated their progress and treated them with respect, then resigned.

It had been my intention never to think about the dreadful time experienced at 7LTN, but it is with horror that I found that it is now instrumental in preventing another station from starting a completely new concept in radio -a station which many of us were hoping would create a different atmosphere to the one which I experienced.

I read with disbelief that 7LTN now has 35 hours of free air time. Is this a misprint? If not, there must have been massive resignations since my time there because to even get one extra hour for a program – even if it was paid for- was a very difficult affair.

If we return to the original concept and application of WMRadio -what is the problem of having 2 stations? No audience can listen to them both at once. WMR has a wide cross-section of support and its objectives are directed to a different community of listeners to City Park Radio.

Yours sincerely

Ann Mihkelson PhD