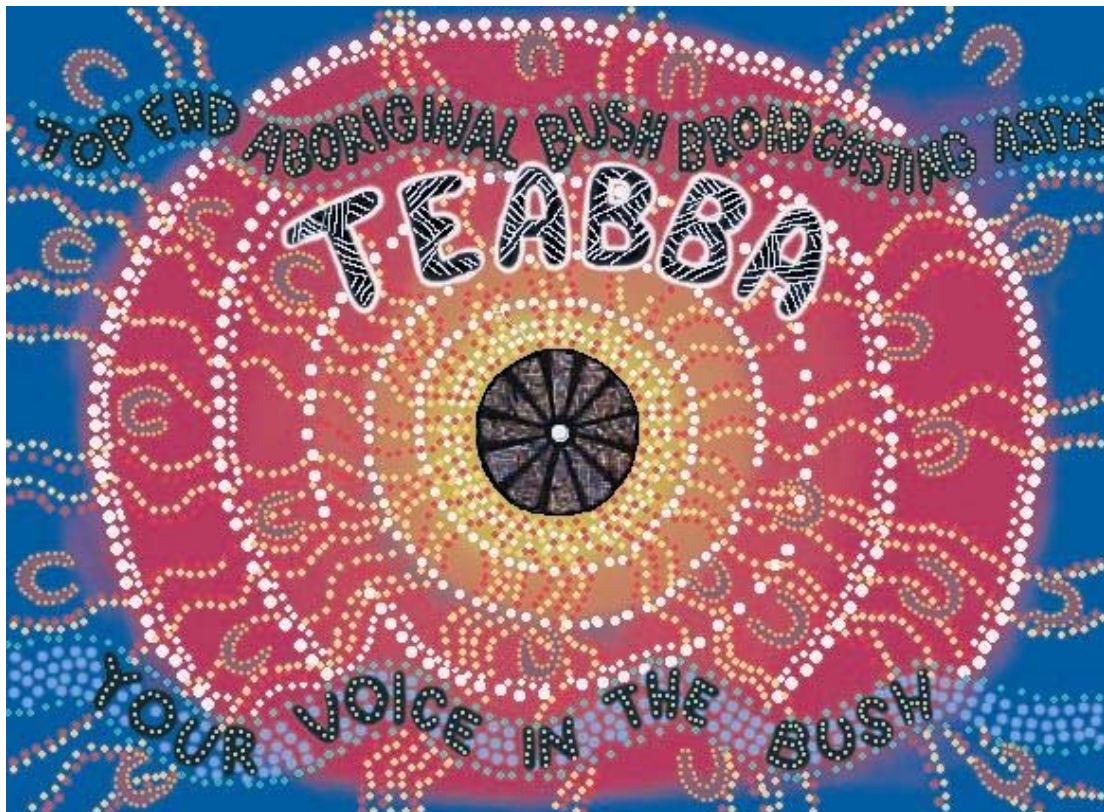


TOP END ABORIGINAL BUSH BROADCASTING ASSOCIATION

(TEABBA)



SUBMISSION TO

**HOUSE COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE INQUIRY
INTO THE ADEQUACY OF RADIO SERVICES IN NON- METROPOLITAN
AUSTRALIA**

17 MARCH 2006



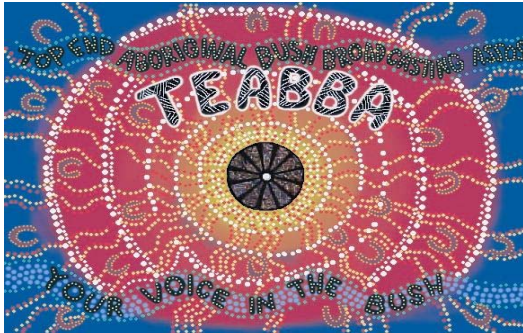
TEABBA

Community Broadcasting Inquiry

TEABBA would like to take this opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives, Communications Committee answers to the Terms of Reference, our views, concerns and risks regarding the Radio Industry Inquiry.

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Introduction

The Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association, now known as TEABBA Media Services was founded in 1989. TEABBA was conceived though the persistence of Traditional Elders across the Territory concerned with what commercial and mainstream media were broadcasting to their remote indigenous communities. These particular media groups (though no fault of theirs) broadcast in English and thus encouraged loss of traditional language and culture. It was via this concern of these traditional elders, that TEABBA was established and given the massive task of ensuring language and culture were maintained in its programs.

The biggest way that TEABBA achieved this was by providing these remote communities with the opportunity and facility to broadcast themselves in language to their immediate community or to the whole broadcast footprint via satellite across to 30 remote indigenous communities. This was done using the newly installed broadcasting equipment provided by the government under the BRACS project (Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme) and now known as R.I.B.S (Remote Indigenous Broadcasting).

Access to a satellite channel allowed TEABBA to pioneer the regional radio network model of linking BRACS stations to a central hub, (using dial up telephone lines). Programs are then relayed to Alice Springs for -linking up to the satellite. This program is received and rebroadcast on FM transmitters at each of the 30 BRACS communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory. This has empowered communities to broadcast their own stories and news in language, as well as providing entertaining and culturally appropriate programs.



- **The social benefits and influence on the general public of radio broadcasting in non-metropolitan Australia in comparison to other media sectors**

The benefits socially or individual empowerment through the use of radio is extreme, from relaxing whilst listening to a show playing a persons preferred music, to being informed of the latest News, locally, national and even international. Community Announcements of events, festivals, open days for the public or points of interest within a local area is also very important, to encourage people to support or participate in the events.

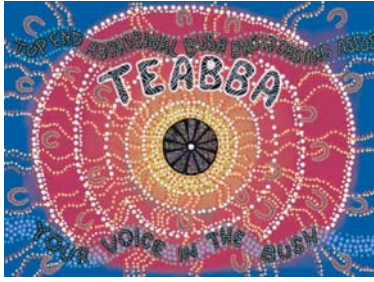
The weather has a high level of interest to a Community which is in a low lying area and one that is affected by rain or tidal influences. Cyclones are always a threat for at least five months a year across the Top End of Australia, so a constant reminder to prepare for the inedible is always going to air, doing this repetitively through television would cost a small fortune every year.

It is no secret that Aboriginal Communities, have issues regarding Health, Housing CDEP (work for the dole) to name a few. Radio can deliver messages from private enterprise and Government agencies to target these issues in English and in several different Aboriginal languages to all Communities to help traditional people, to understand things that have or may effect them or their families. Again cost, for these short, but extremely important messages would be too expensive to put across television.

Most good radio stations also offer a follow up segment, or forward on any feedback good or bad and other enquiry's regarding the messages going to air on their network.

Newspapers, telephone, personal computers with e-mails, and internet accessibility are daily luxuries to some, but to others (the disadvantage) can only wonder of the capabilities.

As most people in Aboriginal Communities don't have the income to purchase these items or the Community Council Office doesn't allow Community residents to use the limited equipment that is available. Simply, because the Community may only have a couple of Telstra phone lines.



- **Future trends in radio broadcasting, including employment and career opportunities, in non-metropolitan Australia.**

The Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Service (RIBS) was established as a result of the findings of a task force led by Eric Wilmott, 'Out of the Silent Land' (1984) that identified that the remote communities in the northern half were without radio and television services.

Since 1988 these communities have been receiving the same services as the rest of Australian, given choice of turning off stations locally when needed and the ability produce and rebroadcast their own radio and television programs.

History shows that a whole new Indigenous broadcast sector sprung up out of this remote local broadcast capability over the past 18 years but no regional, intrastate, interstate or national level coordinated effort has ever been made to address, fund and resource appropriate training programs at the recipient station.

As a result many of these communities have not been able to achieve the following:

- Realise the full potential of the station as an educational and community development tool.
- Assume the responsibilities of owners and licensees of a community broadcast service.
- Know and manage the service in accordance with the codes of ethics of community broadcasters.
- Set up management guidelines and systems including cultural protocols in recording, production and broadcast.
- Training in radio and television program making.

History also shows that this community broadcast outlet was placed under the Community Development & Economic Program as another CDEP project and was activated or ignored at the whim of the local community management staff and council members of the day.

A typical community member entering this workplace is endowed with traditional knowledge, with little or no formal education, multilingual with some spoken simple English or Creole language skills but now English reading and writing skills. In the days of pre-national competency standards in education and training and monologue equipment has worker in training at certificate level II had some success rate at work and was able to provide a service and going to air the languages he/she chose other than English.

Since Batchelor Institute, as the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and provider of VET courses in broadcasting converted to the national training industry package for Film, Television, Radio & Multimedia; as well as raising the level of the only available course to these people to certificate III and many have been taking two to three years to successfully complete that level of training.

The main difficulties placed against these learners are:

- Lack of English literacy skills (no learning support is provided before or during the above study)
- Illiteracy hinders learning based on the use of informational technology and broadcast digital equipment.
- Lack of course content and learning activity based at or on the learner's workplace and environment.
- No work supervisor or established workplace procedure or environment.
- The learner/trainee is burdened with the multiple disciplines of technical operations, radio and television program making and management of all these.

Considering that broadcasting is in the heart of publishing, that recipient members are traditionally oriented adults based in remote locations and coming in a minimum entry level to dealing with complex broadcast policy and structures and technical equipment - it is paramount that this department assists in facilitating appropriate education and training.

Without this there will be no positive future at all in radio (and television) broadcasting at the remote indigenous community stations.

The most likely solutions to this area lies in the seven critical success factors for Indigenous training listed below and as identified by the National Center for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

- The involvement of and ownership of training by local communities
- The incorporation of indigenous identities, cultures, knowledge and values into training programs.
- The establishment of partnerships between Indigenous communities, training providers, industry and government organizations.
- The inclusion of flexibility in course design, content and delivery
- The commitment, expertise and understanding of all staff
- The provision of appropriate and adequate student support services
- The provision of funding that is ongoing and responsive to the realities of location.



- **The effect on individuals, and families and small business in non- metropolitan Australia of networking of radio programming, particularly in relation to local news services, sport, community services announcements and other forms of local content , and ;**

The content and the delivery of any Radio station regardless of the stations location or that of its listening audience. Is most important, by boosting local moral and creating Community interest by using and referring to local names, businesses and favoured geographical spots, to support the feeling of comradeship.

Correct pronunciation of Family and Community names is a sure way of knowing just how local the presenter really is. Or, just someone trying to say and identify places with no passion what so ever, or mentioning some Aboriginal Community on their network cause their frequency can be picked up in that Community just so they can apply for Aboriginal Government Funding. Stations doing this are easily identified, as they hold no competitions, encourage request, do give away's, or training support for these Community people.

Youth input and content, is lacking on most commercial radio. Why, well there's not enough money to be made from kids talking about their school projects or excursions, interests and the new music that they like to listen to. Let alone a group of Community youths that most urban or metropolitan people have difficulty in understanding, as English is only their second or third language and normally don't have the same Interests as urban youths. Remembering, that in commercial radio air time is big money.

So, with the youth from an Aboriginal Community having access to have input into the content of the radio service, effects them and their families greatly. As they can speak in English or in Language for those who can't speak English or to cater for the community members that cannot understand English on a Network that other Communities have access to and which the programming has been tailored made and monitored by Community people. Young people need to be encouraged, to improve their confidence, and if they have limited entertainment outlets then radio and re-broadcasting is a great tool.



- **The potential for new technologies such as digital radio to provide enhanced and more localised radio services in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.**

Radio services in and around Darwin are already running and utilizing digital technology. TEABBA's membership consists of 30 remote Aboriginal Communities in the Territory. Approximately 7 of those member communities currently have access to digital technology (being Tie Lines located in the RIBS units) to assist the improvement of broadcast quality. However, finding funding is always an issue.

One of TEABBA's current objectives is to renovate each member communities RIBS Unit. The current state of an average RIBS unit today would consist of 1 x CD player, 1 x Cassette Player, 1 x Small TV Monitor, 1 x VHS, 1 x Telephone Interface and that's on a good day! Renovating the RIBS Units would entail the installation of all new equipment, including a computer. Introducing this digital technology for communities would result in an excellent and varied library of music and other program materials. Currently a meager library of CDs and cassettes are the only available materials and contending with theft, poor maintenance and difficulty in accessing materials and lack of funds to purchase them is overwhelming and can cause lack of morale and low self esteem for RIBS Broadcasters. Another part to this objective of TEABBA is to uniform all RIBS Units so technical maintenance and training is realistically achievable.



TEABBA'S Overview

If ever there was a basis for the **Whole-of-Government** approach to be urgently implemented, it is the area of Remote Broadcasting that is an essential priority. Basically all but a few of the 30 year old RIBS units within the Top End are well beyond their use by date, in fact some of these units are a health and occupational hazard, in relation to their work area, the status of air conditioning, the condition of the buildings that they are expected to operate in are beyond a joke.

Budgets

Many RIBS broadcasters contact TEABBA frustrated in not being able to do a daily show due to a lack of a set of headphones, or that one of their decoders is not working, microphone or such, even small things such as a pen and paper to do their daily log. This comes by not all, but some councils who receive funding for their RIBS unit, but have used the funding for something else, not even related to the RIBS unit or, the Council staff are so busy that they just don't have the time to attend to these urgent issues for our RIBS operators. This leads to the RIBS operator losing their enthusiasm to produce good work, or be even interested enough trying to continue with their set tasks. What needs to be asked of Government is why this is not being policed, in remote areas. There are strict guide lines that are implemented in urban and easy accessible organisations, but again falls short when it comes time to helping our remote communities.

CDEP

Knowing that the CDEP (work for the dole) programs are the only employment opportunities in remote communities, can cause great distress for the CDEP participant/RIBS broadcasters in that they are expected to do their daily programs on air in return for their CDEP wages, which in relation to the rate of pay they do get is way below what the normal person would expect, and we also note, people on CDEP do not get super annuation. This also is something that needs to be addressed, when super annuation was made compulsory, was is not made for all workers, be it work for dole or whatever. If they do not have equipment that works, and they cannot do their programs, they can be penalised by having their CDEP wages stopped. We then have the situation of no income. Who is responsible for this, and when are the Government going to take the responsibility in making the urgent changes. Until the matters are addressed, CDEP is failing our members in remote communities. Another issue is the role of the CDEP co-ordinators, it is a case in some of the communities that the CDEP co-ordinators, offer no support in acquiring new equipment or negotiating with council in relation to obtaining further

funding. A good example is contacting a remote community council to offer assistance in their application for funding is met with a “yes were doing that” to find out later, that no funding for the ribs unit was even asked for. How does a remote community function?. If the government looked at it from this example.

“ the CDEP worker who looks after the local rubbish collection, the bins are overflowing, I am sure that someone from the council would be onto that CDEP worker immediately, but if the radio is not working, it is a “don’t worry, we’ve got ABC, this is not what the community want to listen to, the community needs their language content, they need there community announcements. Who is policing this?”

Technical Issues

This is one of the most frustrating aspects of RIBS in remote communities. Being a specialised field, in the NT we would only have 5 technicians that are experienced in dealing with RIBS and re broadcasting. Our area covers 30 communities, we not only have to deal with the remoteness, but issued in relation to the cost and quality of particular technicians.

Another issue that causes concern is, the technicians, feel they have no obligation to the RIMO office to provide written reports as to what work has been carried out by them so that that report can be provided to the next technician that may have to go to that community to do the next lot of work. There have been instances where technicians have gone to a community which is operating on a specific licensed frequency to find that when they have left, the frequency has been changed to one that the community does not even have a licence for, who is policing this. There have also be instances of technicians visiting communities and installing equipment again which is not in the confines of the licence and removing other expensive equipment that has been installed by the overseeing RIMO office

Responsibility of Funding Organisations

It is a frustrating part of being a RIMO (Remote Indigenous Media Organisation) office, when you have continuous changes to staff, departments, and governing bodies. etc. There are organisations that have had as many as three different staff changes in as many months, and you then have staff who look after the financial aspects of reporting, that themselves are not experienced in the complex matters of finance.