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**SUBMISSION INTO COMMUNITY BROADCASTING MADE BY SUNRAYSIA
COMMUNITY RADIO ASSOCIATION INC.(OPERATOR OF 3HOT FM
MILDURA VICTORIA:**

Prepared by Max Thorburn, Voluntary Station Manager and Music Director:

**HISTORY OF THE SUNRAYSIA COMMUNITY BROADCASTING
ASSOCIATION INC.**

The group was formed in 1983 and took eight years to secure a license. It was an objecting participant to the Mildura Supplementary License Inquiry conducted by the former Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. The Mildura inquiry was the longest in the history of the TRIBUNAL, lasting four years and resulted in its decision being overturned in the Supreme Court.

Subsequently, the Association applied for a Community License, which was one of the few opposed by the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters. However it was granted by the Tribunal and the station began full time operation from April 28 under the rules of the time which allowed stations to begin broadcasting on “offer of a license”. The license was duly authorized on July 9 that year.

The original license was issued for a main station at Byrne Court, Mildura, where HOT FM has its studio complex and with a translator station at Wentworth on a frequency of 90.7 FM.

The Wentworth translator is 36 kilometers to the west of Mildura. Sunraysia Community Radio Association secured a license for a translator station at Robinvale in 1995 and requested (and was granted) the same frequency of 90.7 FM.

Robinvale is south east of Mildura and by using the same translator frequency, HOT FM was mindful of spectrum space.

Further the Association preferred the use of low power translators because the broadcast area of Mildura is surrounded by National Parks and the use of a high powered

base transmitter would be a waste of energy (power). It would also create a heavy on going financial power bill.

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PROGRAMS:

Sunraysia Community Radio Association established a unique broadcasting concept in 1991 by allocating program time to various parts of the community.

The basic format has stood the test of time, although there have been some minor alterations in reaction to community needs.

One of the main instigators of the Association was the Sunraysia Country Music Club and accordingly, it has also provided a core program content. It also has been the backbone of the Mildura Country Music festival which promotes Independent artists and is now recognized as:

- (i) The largest independent country music artist in the world (larger than the festival in Germany)
- (ii) The third largest country music festival in Australia behind Tamworth and Gympie.
- (iii) The festival which conducts the Australian Independent Country Music Awards.

The festival co-coordinator is John Arnold, who is now Deputy Mayor of the Mildura Rural City Council. He is a former country music presenter on 3HOT FM.

Two other sitting Councilors Mark Eckel and Glenn Milne are former presenters and have held positions on the Committee of 3HOT FM.

Cr Eckel is the current Vice President of Sunraysia Community Radio and Cr Milne is a former Secretary of Sunraysia Community Radio.

The current President of Sunraysia Community Radio Association is Ian Horbury, who is also the President of the River City Jazz Club.

The River City Jazz Club also conducts the Mildura Jazz, Wine and Food Festival, an annual event of some magnitude, and one of the districts major festivals (along with the Country Music Festivals.

3HOT also operates for local organizations three special event broadcasts annually – for the Mildura Country Music Festival Committee Inc; Earthbeat Sunraysia Inc and the Mildura and District Returned Soldiers Agricultural and Horticultural Show Inc (Mildura Show Society)

PROGRAM CONCEPT:

Weekdays:

Midnight to 5am: General overnight programs – either computerized or from the CBAA satellite service.

5am to 9am : Country Breakfast

9am to 10.30am: Nostalgia and interview programs
10.30am to 5pm Country format with guest interviews
5pm to 7pm Teenage pop, including school age presenters

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7pm to 10.30pm Multicultural programs include Greek, Italian, Turkish, Samoan, Tongan, Vietnamese, Slovenian, Croation, Filipino, World Music (Monday to Thursday, Friday teenage disco)
10pm to midnight: Specialist programs: Live acts & breaking acts (Monday); blues (Tuesday) Folk (Wednesday) Soul (Thursday) Heavy techno/dance (Friday)

Saturday:

Midnight to 9am: Overnight service
9.-9.30 Folk
9.30 to 2pm Country
2pm to 5pm Sport/ Football Broadcast.
5pm to 7pm Gospel
7pm to 9pm Australian Independent
9pm to midnight: Teenage Pop

Sunday:

12 midnight to 6am: Rock & Blues
6am -9am Irish
9-12: Fifties and Sixties nostalgia
12 midday; Jazz
3pm: Church devotion
3.15pm Seventies nostalgia
5pm: Vision Impaired general program
6.30pm Meditation program
7pm: Contemporary Christian music
9pm Church interview and devotion
10pm Show Music
10.45 Greek Show

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCALISM:

The Sunraysia Community Radio Association made a submission to the Parliamentary study into regional radio "Local Voices Inquiry into Regional Radio". 2001.

The Association was deeply concerned at a number of findings and still disagrees with a number of views expressed at the time by commercial groups such as DMG, who argued that local programs could be presented from a hub.

It should be noted that during the Christmas/New Year Break 2005/2006; all commercial radio stations did not have any local programs broadcast from Mildura for a period of 14 days. All programs came from the hub. While on-air announcers were

given holidays, the sales staff worked one week of the 14 days to give the station a “local presence” of selling advertising.

No local ABC programs were broadcast during a 10 day break over the Christmas New Year period.

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Only COMMUNITY RADIO provided a service. In fact on Christmas Day 3 HOT FM presented a total of 12 hours of program LIVE from the studio from volunteers.

COMMUNITY RADIO in Mildura is the only electronic service (and there are now three commercial radio stations, three commercial TV stations and four ABC stations) that provides local programs on public holidays and largely Sundays.

- (i) One Commercial station STAR FM provides only four hours of local program weekdays with the balance of programs from the HUB in Albury, including all weekends.
- (ii) Radio 3MA FM presents six hours a day of local programs Monday to Saturday with all other programs from the Albury hub.
- (iii) Commercial Radio 1467AM provides a three hours breakfast show and a two hour Sunday morning sports show. All the rest of the programs come from Queensland.
- (iv) The ABC local service is limited to 6am to midday five days a week with no weekend broadcasting.

TAKING UP OF LOCAL PROGRAMS BY COMMUNITY RADIO IN MILDURA PREVIOUSLY ON COMMERCIAL RADIO:

Since 1991 Sunraysia Community Radio has taken up programs which previously were heard on Commercial radio:

They are – SPORTING:

- (1) Live broadcasts of the Sunraysia Football League matches on Saturdays. In fact Community Radio went a step better and began broadcasting for the first time Sunday games and Saturday night games from Red Cliffs. Community Radio also re-instated the broadcast of inter-league matches which had been scrapped in 1990. Interestingly, in March 2006 the AFL held a NAB challenge game between Richmond and Essendon in Mildura, a tribute game for the families of six teenagers killed in a horrific night time road accident in nearby Cardross. Mainstream (Commercial radio) put extreme pressure on the Council and Sunraysia Football League to gain broadcasting rights, but the sporting community held a view that Community radio – which supports local football with weekly broadcasts – should be awarded the rights.
- (2) Introduced a broadcast of the Millewa League Grand Final from Lake Cullulleraine and other Millewa games
- (3) Took over the football medal counts for the Sunraysia Football League and Sunraysia Junior Football League.

- (4) Pioneered a radio coverage of the counting of votes for the women's Saturday netball competition.
- (5) Broadcast of live hourly cricket reports of the Sunraysia Cricket Association Grand Finals.

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Other programs which were transferred from Commercial Radio to Community Radio:

- (1) Morning Word (a locally produced devotion spot) and Sunday at Three, a 15 minute program prepared by the Sunraysia Ministerial Churches.
- (2) The World of Jazz (axed by local commercial radio in 1985)
- (3) Greek and Italian radio programs. These were incorporated into a range of other multicultural programs through the Sunraysia Ethnic Communities Council, of which a Board member of Sunraysia Community Radio Association has an advisory role.
- (4) A weekly segment on hair care.
- (5) Daily job spot

LOCAL NEWS COVERAGE ON COMMUNITY RADIO:

As submitted to the 2001 Standing Committee report "Local Voices: Inquiry into Regional Radio):

3HOT FM increased the length of its local news bulletins from five minutes to seven minutes. In 2006 Community Radio local news has increased to 10 minute bulletins which are heard at 7am, 8am and 9am Monday to Friday, along with 9am on a Saturday and Sunday. The local news is sourced from the Mildura Independent Sunday Star News team and community volunteers and is provided seven days a week.

The news is monitored through the Media Monitors system, along with the mainstream news on Commercial radio, which in 2005 in Mildura was reduced through the apparent removal of two afternoon bulletins and shortening of bulletin lengths in the morning.

EMERGENCY SERVICES:

Police and emergency services are aware of Sunraysia Community Radio's localism. Recently there was a need for emergency announcements to be provided but it was after 5pm and while the ABC is the State of Victoria approved regional provider of information, the service is only available Monday to Friday between the hours of 6am and 5pm. After that, the only provider of local information is of course, COMMUNITY RADIO.

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CHALLENGES FACING COMMUNITY RADIO:

(1) *Australia wide*, Community Radio has the potential to be a larger network of stations and immediate live program source than even the ABC.

But the sector lacks a network of technical links to get program information to the central studio system in Sydney.

There is a system of programs which are beamed out of Sydney and then to individual stations, but no system that allows individual stations to provide good quality linkage to Sydney.

The CODEC system is out dated to a degree and the machines in service in Sydney are no longer manufactured.

During the Mildura Country Music Festival , 3HOT FM provided up to 30 hours of live programs from Mildura for the National Community Radio Network.

But the station does not have a CODEC machine and can't get one because of not just funds, but because the system is antiquated and the newer Tie-line system has yet to be introduced to the sector overall.

(2) *DIGITAL RADIO:*

This is a major concern to regional Community broadcasters, especially Mildura where there are no hills.

The difference in topography within a 50 kilometer radius of Mildura is a mere 35 metres. It is also a reason for the YATPOOL TV Tower being one of the tallest mast structures in Australia. (it's 660 feet high).

Digital TV has been introduced at Yatpool, but there are a number of black spots and we may present some supplementary information on reception defects if it becomes available soon. There is some work being done in the area at present.

There are four major Broadcast recognized sites in Sunraysia:

- (1) Yatpool (TV and all existing ABC radio services)
- (2) Trentham Cliffs (Two commercial FM radio stations)
- (3) Ranfurley (one AM service)
- (4) Byrne Court (two AM radio Narrowcast stations, five FM services (two Community Stations and three Narrowcasters)

Yatpool is 30 kilometres out of the main Mildura City area; Trentham Cliffs is 20 kilometres out of the City and Ranfurley is six kilometers. Ranfurley now has significant housing within 800 metres of its mast, restricting further high power services.

Byrne Court is in an industrial area but in recent years Council has permitted significant additional housing estates within 800 metres . The site is restricted to a total output of 2000 watts for all stations.

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At the 2004 Community Broadcasters of Australia annual conference in Queensland I queried Giles Tanner, who was then the General Manager of what was the ABA (Australian Broadcasting Authority) and he recognized the problems facing Digital radio at Mildura.

A new site for digital radio will have to be established and if it is a new tower in the vicinity of the TV tower at YATPOOL, the distance from Mildura is so great that the costs for Community Radio will make it prohibitive.

In current terms, Yatpool tower rental is in the vicinity of \$30,000 per annum; The cost of a powerful digital transmitter is around \$175,000 and then the cost of getting a microwave signal from Byrne Court to Yatpool is around \$10,000.

At present both Mildura COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS 3HOT FM and 3RPH (Vision Australia) pay an antenna rental of \$200 per year and the power costs for their transmitter operation is around \$1500 each per annum.

The House Standing Committee should be aware of :

- (1) A previous decision by the Government not to roll out extensively in regional areas Fibre Optic cabling, restricting internet and broadcast line access.
- (2) The decision to implement the European digital system ahead of a system being trialed by the USA. The European system was largely designed so that radio and TV stations could hold their signal to specified areas within their borders, rather than occupy spectrum space in neighbouring countries. Digital signals can be also held within the country of origin and limit overlapping into adjoining countries. Being of similar land mass to Australia, the USA wants to develop a digital system which covers an area equal to existing FM transmitters, rather than have the expense of needing several transmitters to provide coverage to the same area.
- (3) The original concept of Digital Radio and TV services was a cost saving because basically the one transmitter could provide five different services and theoretically five stations could combine resources and share the one transmitter. This is not happening because what broadcasters are saying is that if they get their own transmitter then they can provide four new services on the other channels. This creates additional consumption of energy (power) as instead of five services using the one transmitter to reduce energy consumption, greedy operators want to have four new services to compliment their original one.
- (4) The hard time given to Community Radio operators by the Australian Communications and Media Authority in regard to license renewals. 3HOT FM has secured renewal of its license (from July 2006) but it took more than 70 man-hours

of time to complete the required paperwork to get the license successfully renewed. The Authority requires volunteers to do the same amount of work to have the license renewed as would a commercial operator, who has the resources and ability to have paid consultant staff do the work for them.

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SUMMARY;

Regardless of what Commercial Radio says and what the ABC say they do, the only broadcasting sector which provides LIVE, LOCAL programs seven days a week in most regional centres is the COMMUNITY BROADCASTING SECTOR.

Commercial Radio and the ABC can use all the fancy language it can think of and twist words to suit, but when it comes to live presenters at ground level – where the storms are, where the action is outside 9 to 5 and at weekends, COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS are there.

They might be staffed by volunteers, but they are on the job (unpaid) seven days a week and able to respond immediately to a call for localism, whether it is a lost dog or cat, or a cancellation of a sporting event because of rain.

The House Standing Committee should be reminded that it cost the State of Victoria nearly \$1.5 billion to stage the 10 days of the Commonwealth Games in a professional manner but without the 15,000 volunteers that assisted, the event would have fallen over.

In Mildura, all commercial television and radio services are owned outside of area being served.

Apart from the ABC and the ownership of two Narrowcast licenses by a Mildura person, local ownership of the broadcasting spectrum in Mildura is with COMMUNITY RADIO.

+Submission: Prepared by Max Thorburn
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I am prepared to present further information and appear if necessary before the Committee. I have previously appeared before a House Committee in regard to Parliamentary Broadcasts on Radio; and the Local Voices: Inquiry into Regional Radio.