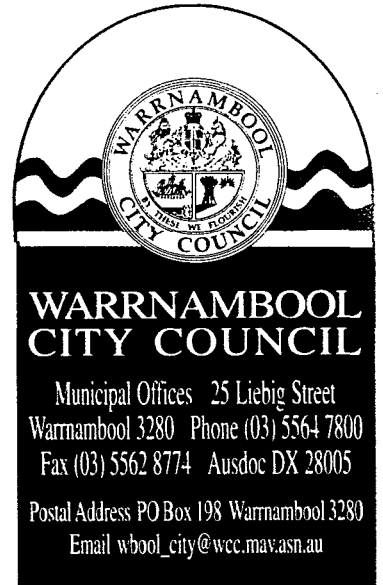
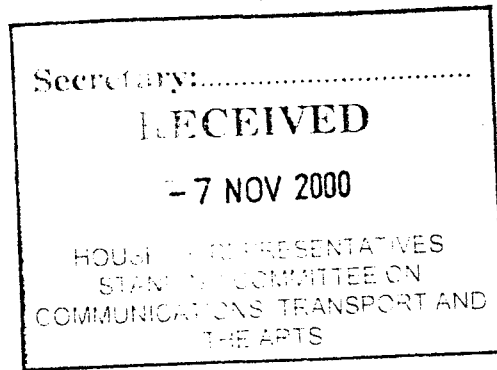


In reply please quote



November 2, 2000

The Committee Secretary
Radio Industry Inquiry
House of Representatives Communications Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: RADIO INDUSTRY INQUIRY

With this letter please find attached Warrnambool City Council's submission to Radio Industry Inquiry called by the Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts.

The submission has been prepared after consultation with local radio industry and incorporates their comments and views.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on 03 5564 7902 should you wish to discuss our submission further.

Yours sincerely

David Keenan
DIRECTOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts	
Submission No:	214
Date Received:	7/11/00
Secretary:	Janet Holmes

**WARRNAMBOOL CITY COUNCIL
SUBMISSION TO RADIO INDUSTRY INQUIRY
PARLIAMENT HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS**

Introduction

Warrnambool is a major coastal city in South West Victoria. It has a population of 28,000 which is growing by 1.81% per annum (Victorian Population Bulletin, 5th issue, May 2000, Department of Infrastructure). The main industry sectors comprise food processing, tourism and hospitality, building and construction, education, health, financial and professional services.

Radio services in Warrnambool are delivered by 3 broadcasters. They are:

- ◆ ABC Radio;
- ◆ 'Ace Radio' 3YB; and
- ◆ 3WAY-FM Community Radio.

In preparation of this submission Warrnambool City Council have sought comments from the above radio stations. The comments received are detailed below.

ABC Radio

ABC operates in Western Victoria with offices located in Warrnambool and Horsham. The provision of service is efficient with only two staff based at Warrnambool and Horsham offices respectively.

ABC believes that their service provision is adequate to the needs of public. Recent structural re-development of the Corporation involved some cost cutting measures. The station currently operates effectively and efficiently but any cost-cutting to regional radio will directly impact on the quality and quantity of service. Public response towards the service is positive and indicates that the service is well appreciated.

An increase in staff will allow to strengthen the network's presence in Western Victoria and to enhance quality and quantity of service. An increase in staffing levels is perceived as highly desirable. An expansion of network's services in Western Victoria will benefit the whole region, and, for example, will allow to establish a correspondent in Portland to provide on the spot coverage of local issues in the area.

ABC programs in the region cover such areas as:

- ◆ Current affairs;
- ◆ National current affairs;
- ◆ Local sport;
- ◆ Cultural and community events;
- ◆ Rural affairs and markets.

ABC is the only national network that covers current affairs and news in sport in the region.

Social benefits of the ABC radio broadcasting in the region are great and include:

- ◆ Public presence of the network in the rural and regional areas of Western Victoria;
- ◆ Coverage of local issues;
- ◆ Community ownership and identification with local issues of importance to community;
- ◆ Broadcasting of community functions, events and sport;
- ◆ Coverage of rural affairs and markets relevant to the region;
- ◆ Timely on the sport coverage of local information, news and events;
- ◆ Ability to reach a listener where other mediums fail through inadequacy of coverage or constraints of the medium's nature.

In relation to up-take of new technologies, ABC Western Victoria is guided by the strategies adopted by the ABC network as a whole. It is, also, worthy to note that extra government funding for the introduction of new technologies is highly requested. If sufficient funding is not provided, then the network have to introduce new services at a cost to existing services which will directly impact on quality and quantity of service provision. Radio presence in the future needs to be interactive with a strengthened role of a radio listener. The network's presence in the region, joint with technological advancement, has a potential to significantly enhance service delivery and quality of radio programs in Western Victoria.

ABC broadcasting in Western Victoria allows the network to be a part of the community and interact with the community on a whole range of local and national issues. All future cost-cutting to the service will lessen ABC's impact on and involvement in the life of local community, and is perceived as unacceptable.

'Ace Radio' 3YB

3YB is a commercial radio broadcaster which operate as a part of 'Ace Radio' network. 3YB coverage extends throughout South Western region of Victoria.

3YB's involvement with the community is extensive. The station supports local events and provides local community with information on local events, festivals and general local issues. The community has direct access to radio services through 3YB.

The station has a local news journalist who provides coverage of local information on a daily basis. All local sport issues are aired through a daily 'sports today' show. 3YB actively participates in the life of local community through broadcasting at hourly intervals community services announcements promoting local events.

Digital and FM radio will offer a wider range of programming to local community in general and in South West region of Victoria in particular through provision of more access to the radio in all parts of the region.

3WAY-FM Community Radio

In relation to Terms of Reference of the Radio Inquiry 3WAY-FM comments were as follows:

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

- 3WAY-FM strongly believe that the community radio sector of which the station is a part provides a major public benefit, particularly in regional areas. It is a genuine, popular and independent alternative to mainstream commercial and ABC services, and provides access to the airwaves for countless individuals, community groups and organisations that would otherwise have no voice.
- Warrnambool's locally based commercial AM station (3YB) recently became part of a wider network, (ACE Radio Broadcasters Pty Ltd) and is perceived to have less local flavour and access since that change occurred. Much of its programming emanates from major network sources.
- One recent example which illustrates the above point is the broadcasting of our local Hampden League football which up until 1998 was conducted by 3YB. Following a network decision to discontinue this practice in favour of taking AFL matches down the line, there was no coverage of local football in 1999. In 2000 3WAY-FM formed new partnerships and responded to widespread community demand by providing live-to-air football coverage throughout the season. This service was very well received.
- The football example illustrates a major point about community radio. It is responsive, and is inclusive of individuals, community groups and organisations which otherwise would have no access to the medium of radio. It is also essentially local in flavour.
- 3WAY-FM commissioned a professionally designed and administered listener survey during this year and found, among other things, that in the Warrnambool listening area, approximately 72% of those who listen to radio listen to 3WAY-FM. Of those who do not listen to 3WAY-FM, almost all supported the existence of community radio, citing its local nature and

accessibility to a huge range of local community groups and individuals as the major reasons. The high quality stereo signal was cited as another reason for supporting 3WAY-FM.

- We have had significant informal feedback from a diversity of listeners including residents of aged care facilities, disabled people, people at home or at work and young people about our programs.
- Our programs are made and presented by our members who themselves come from the local community and are representative of an enormous range of age and interest groups.
- The local regional ABC station (1602 on the AM band) provides Western Victorian and some local coverage, and also takes programs through the ABC's extensive network. We would not like to see any diminution of the ABC's funding, as we believe the ABC provides a valuable service, particularly in regional Australia. Any cut in ABC funding would probably be most keenly felt in regional and rural areas.

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

- In its 10-year life as a licensed community broadcaster, 3WAY-FM has provided the entry point for a number of people who have gone on to careers in radio and television as professionals. Community radio provides a readily available and accessible entry point for people in country areas to gain the necessary experience.
- Community Radio generally has exhibited strong growth in the recent past, with the number of stations in Australia having grown from about 120 just 8 years ago to around 200 now. Most of this growth has occurred in country areas.
- 3WAY-FM is operated entirely by volunteers. This in itself demonstrates a level of commitment to the local area and a willingness to be of service to the community. Our station is growing in popularity and its turnover is increasing. (Up 50% from 1999 to 2000)
- 3WAY-FM provides education for its members through formal training programs for new presenters, new skill acquisition for existing presenters in using emerging technologies and marketing/management skills for our committee members and other volunteers who assist in the running of the station. These factors are important, especially for young people in country areas, where unemployment is a major problem.

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

- As mentioned above regarding the first term of reference, we believe 3WAY-FM, as a community radio station, is highly responsive to the needs

of community members in a variety of ways that cannot be matched by either networked commercial stations or the ABC, both of which include in their programming large amounts of material emanating from metropolitan sources. In addition to our recent entry into live coverage of local football, (as referred to already) we have, throughout the 10 years of our existence provided support to local groups through:

- access to the medium for preparation and presentation of programs,
 - support for local musicians and artists,
 - free community service announcements for hundreds of community groups,
 - programs for and by schools, TAFE and local university students, churches, clubs, ethnic groups, disabled groups, Koories, arts organisations, sporting bodies, welfare agencies, employment services, health groups, conservation and environmental groups and more.
- We have experienced an upsurge in interest in our station in recent years, not only from the sorts of interests referred to above, but also from the business sector. This latter interest is reflected in a rising level of businesses and other agencies deciding to provide us with sponsorship support. We suspect this is a result of us being integrally part of the local community, while the commercial sector is increasingly non-local in its programming following networking.

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

- We believe the potential for improvement is enormous, and in our case, is limited only by the level of resources available to us. Already in the last few years we have:
 - gained access to the Community Radio Satellite (from which we take programs from midnight to 7.00 am. Our volunteer live presenters cover all other times.) This development was possible through the Community Broadcasting Foundation.
 - Gained access to the Internet and improved computer capacity through the Community Broadcasting Foundation.
 - Developed the capacity to use sophisticated editing software to produce our own promotional, identification and sponsorship messages and write them onto compact discs.
 - Gained the equipment and know-how for the conducting of outside broadcasts, which will enhance our ability to provide service to our local community.
- We believe the community radio sector provides “enhanced and more localised services” already, and does so very effectively. Obviously we

could do it better with improved technology. Because of this, we believe there is a compelling argument for increasing the resources available to the community broadcasting sector. It has demonstrated a high level of self-help, as well as responsiveness to and integration with the local communities of which it is part. It is therefore deserving of strong Government support to ensure its future development.

Conclusion

Warrnambool City Council recognises the importance of radio broadcasting in the South West Victoria and its positive contribution to the well-being of the local community. The Council strongly supports the development of radio services in Warrnambool and surrounding region. The Council believes that through the up-take of new technologies and provision of additional employment opportunities in the radio industry, Government is able to positively contribute to the development of regional and rural areas. The Council also believes that any further lessening of service delivery by ABC in South West Victoria will negatively impact on the region as a whole, and will lead to gaps in the information provision for local community.