

COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF N.S.W.

RADIO INDUSTRY INQUIRY

SUBMISSION

Submission to:

Ms Janet Holmes,
Inquiry Secretary,
House Committee on Communications,
Transport and the Arts,
Parliament House,
Canberra

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The following is a concensus of opinions canvassed from our members around the State:

There was universal concern amongst members at the current move towards syndication and aggregation with many local stations being downgraded.

It was felt that Radio is extremely important to non-urban dwellers and any reduction in services would be devastating. One member commented "of the available media only radio can conquer the distances, hills, floods, fires - no lines".

Included amongst such 'media' would be telephone - as evidenced by a comment from another member that "there is a misguided perception that a telephone service can supply most communication needs. There are many areas without a mobile service and yet more where the landline service is inadequate. These services tend to go out of commission in an emergency. Local radio provides a vital lifeline in such times".

In both times of emergency and otherwise, local radio provides an important link within communities for disseminating local information.

Radio has an immediacy which television does not - radio has the ability to realise what is happening. Newspapers (local or daily) are not available on a daily basis for many properties.

A local radio station run/controlled by local people is very much part of the community as a whole. Local stations can offer 'free' time to bring local people details of community events and fundraising activities.

It is vital that local content be maintained in radio programming. Local news, weather reports, news of sports events - cancellations or results, and community service announcements (e.g. roads blocked, etc.) are of far more immediate importance than national or international events at times. Without being disinterested in world events, news of a hailstorm coming across the mountains on freshly shorn sheep has a greater local urgency.

The point was made that local announcers have a status within the community and are able to influence young people in a positive manner. With many local stations being downgraded local announcers and broadcasters are losing their employment and career opportunities. Both ABC and commercial stations are suffering the same fate. Work experience opportunities and therefore aspiration to work in radio broadcasting are lost to local young people. Many of our well known and respected broadcasters and radio journalists started their careers in small country radio stations.

A thread through the comments received at C.W.A. Head Office was the importance of the ABC as well as the local commercial stations. The ABC have been particularly good over the years at providing weather, market information and general agricultural programs. This is particularly important now with commercial stations becoming more centralised and providing less district coverage.

The ABC's wider role of providing serious drama, music and current affairs and also of promoting Australian talent in those fields was commented upon.

Members felt every effort must be made to maintain government funding and ensure that we have an independent service free from commercial influence.

One Group sent a list of what they regarded as essential programs on regional radio:

- Distance education
- Agricultural education
- Weather Reports
- Emergency reports
- Current affairs
- Parliamentary broadcasts.

This Group also mentioned the importance of the entertainment value of radio and also the company it provides for isolated people. They hope that standards will be maintained (no swearing, etc.). They appreciated all night talk sessions and hoped there would be no 'dumbing down' of content.

Another important role of radio in rural areas is to allow isolated workers to have contact with the outside world. While driving tractors, harvesters, grain trucks, drenching stock or fencing, workers are able to participate.

SUMMARY

Of all the forms of information technology available today, local radio is still one of the most important for communities in non-metropolitan Australia. Both commercial and ABC stations are invaluable to the residents of rural areas. The ABC provide an excellent mix of general information of a regional or national content and commercial stations provide localised news and information. Local radio, whether commercial or ABC must not in any way be downgraded.

Whilst we realise it is not the role of Government to assist non-viable commercial enterprises, we do believe that a close watch needs to be kept on syndication and aggregation through the ACCC. We would not want to see local content phased out in the name of profit. There must be a balance.

Summary (Cont'd)

Local radio continues to be the community's lifeline. It also provides information for visitors to areas and locals where radio is invaluable in announcing attractions, entertainment or disruptions due to weather and unforeseen events. We believe that community radio licences should be restricted to 'community' rather than small minority single interest groups. While having no argument with the right of such groups to broadcast, any government granted community licence should take into account the needs of the whole community.

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