



Community Radio Coraki Association Inc.

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Richmond Valley Radio

A submission to

*the House of Representatives Communications
Committee inquiry into the adequacy of radio services in
non-metropolitan Australia.*

With respect I offer the following from my perspective of five years' chairmanship of Community Radio Coraki Association Inc.

*We hold a 1Kw TCBL licence.

*We have broadcast programs into the Richmond Valley for five years.

*The station has been funded entirely by its listeners, members and sponsors. No government grants, no philanthropic donations, ever.

*We have been very poor for five years, but the show must go on.

*We are fiercely parochial and independent.

*We are an egalitarian association. We do not run an inner circle of power, except for our program committee of three of our ladies- aka Doctor Music. They are also our sensors. We play nothing that you couldn't let your kids or your maiden aunt hear.

*We have achieved a higher moral plane than that required by the Codes of Practice.

*We are not a religious organisation, but we like to think that we are fellow travellers with Christianity.

*We wrote a five year plan two and half years ago. We exceeded the revenue, costs, program and audience aspects of that plan in January this year. A new five year plan is currently under construction.

*In 2000, we worked just under 20,000 volunteer hours. This year we estimate 26,000 hours.

*Two of our members contribute 80 hard, volunteer hours per week at the station.

*Six contribute more than 50 of those sort of hours.

*We are only 35 people, all volunteers. No paid employees. Most of us are unemployed and living in poverty relative to the rest of Australians. But we are having fun and our community loves us - that is the pay-off.

*Some of us are approaching meltdown. We need to employ a paid CEO (not me) and a paid station manager. The Regional solutions Program may help there.

*The qualifications of some of our members include:

A BCOP engineer; Three electricians; A professor with two Phds - the Dean of Research at Southern Cross University; An accountant; A psychologist with a masters degree; A computer manager with an Honours degree in computer science and an Austel licence; a motor mechanic;

And lots of children, mothers, grandmothers, fathers, and grandfathers.

*There are five other community stations broadcasting in the Richmond Valley: COW FM (Casino); 2NCR (Lismore); BAY FM (Byron Bay); NIM FM (Nimbin) and Paradise FM (very new, not yet transmitting.)

*There are two commercial stations: 2LM(an AM station) and ZZZ FM, both owned by the Karalis network.

*There are Lord knows how many national stations.

*A recent survey conducted by the marketing division of NorthPower in Lismore, Ballina, Casino and Evans Head indicates (it was only 100 random phone calls in 100,000) that we have a 20% market share.

*Our own micro surveys indicate that we have defeated 2LM in these areas. The other community stations rate less than 1% of the market.

*Five minutes of advertising time limits revenue. We would like the option of six minutes. But then, six minutes may be irritating to our listening community. Six minutes would make life much less stressful for our traffic controller who is quite paranoid that the commercial stations will dob us in to the ABA for exceeding five minutes. (We have an unblemished record with the ABA, even though the two commercial stations complained, in writing, to the ABA that we were exceeding our

licence power. An ACA officer inspected our transmitter and gave us 10 out of 10.)

*If the BSA allowed six minutes, then we would run a one minute buffer zone and the pressure on our traffic controller and announcement copywriters and editors (to create ads of exact length) would be reduced. For them, our station would then become fun again.

*I believe the answer to our revenue problem is to increase advertising rates. Our basic rate for a 30 sec spot is \$3 per play. The local commercials charge \$10 to \$20.

However if we increase our rates, our micro-businesses could not afford us, and they are one of the reasons that we are here. The answer? National advertisers, which of course includes the Federal and State governments. But we need to convince the national advertisers that we have a decent audience share. To that effect we have applied to the Regional Solutions Program for funding for an AC Nielsen survey. They are the only ratings firm that the national agencies will listen deal with.

The national advertisers, whilst they would get value and good results for their advertising dollars, would then subsidise our micro-businesses.

*Currently we have five sponsors waiting in the wings because we don't have room for them on air, and we will not break the law.

*Our signal is well-received in Lismore, Casino, Ballina and Evans Head, because we broadcast in mono, vertically polarised only. In five years, only four listeners have raised the question "Why don't you broadcast in stereo?"

*We believe that the power of influence of radio broadcasters on society is mythical, undeserved and self-generated. Our aim is to continue to debunk that myth and return the power of influence to the community. And we are succeeding.

*I invite you to check out our website. It will reveal many of our philosophies.

*Even though we did not achieve a four-fold transmission power increase in the recently completed Lismore LAP as we had requested, it is my perception that the ABA has administered the BSA as it applies to our organisation accurately, courteously and efficiently when its limited human resources are considered. They are OK.

*The Community Broadcasting Association is dominated by the ageing university-funded stations. It is at odds with regional grass roots community stations. Don't listen to the CBAA when they quote the longevity of 2NCR at Southern Cross University. Nobody is listening to 2NCR except themselves.

*The CBAA has no idea what is going on at the grass roots level in the bush. Even its regional university station members don't because they are funded by their mother, the university.

*Neither does the Community Broadcasting Foundation have any idea what is going on in the poorer part of town. Both the CBF and the CBAA blatantly discriminate against TCBL stations, even though it is not a lack of expertise that prevents acquisition of a permanent licence.

*There is much waste with the CBF funding of ethnic-specific programs. There is another 88.9 FM in Sydney - Radio Skid Row. Some years ago I read their program guide. It boasted a weekly Swahili language program. The last census revealed that in all of greater Sydney, 17 people indicated that Swahili was their first language. Would anyone other than the presenter and his/her family listen to that program?

*We believe that we are the only radio station in Australia that is doing these things:

We play only requested music while we have live announcers on air, without the need to play unsolicited tracks. In 2000 we played 50,110 requests. All were logged.

Our Australian content average exceeds 40%, which fact validates the BSA requirement for Australian content.

At night our automatic pilot (very big computer, very smart program) plays only tracks that have made number one in Australia, time calls, ads, ids and community service announcements.

Our news, our *halfway nearly always seven thirty report*, two ocean and beach reports, and on *this day come* to us via telephone lines from community members in their homes.

Our request line has become additionally a counselling line for some of our listeners-the single mothers, Vietnam vets, lonely people, estranged wives, a victim of the suicide of her husband, traumatised people and the elderly. A Mothers' Day incident illustrates the point:

A lady listener in Ballina (Gail), aged about forty, rang the station early on Mothers' Day and asked for Robyne. I had answered the phone and said to Gail that Robyne wasn't in yet and perhaps I could help her. "No," she replied. "I just want to wish Robyne a happy Mother's Day. She's been a mother to me." She was crying.

*Even though we could source funds from the CBF for aboriginal programs, we would rather be without and remain poor. To run Koori programs would be to create division between black and white. We have many Koori listeners. Our Blackfellas request the same music as our Whitefellas.

This is our contribution to Reconciliation.

To our Kooris, the station is sacred in more ways than one. Musically and that the studio is adjacent to a Bora ring.

*We buy one program (How green is my Cactus) and contra three other programs (take 40 Australia, Planet Rock and My Generation) from mcm entertainment

(Austereo). The programs are delivered via CDs. Very soon we will take the programs via the Optus 2 satellite. mcm has permanently loaned us a download computer. They are very keen on community stations. These programs are exclusive to us in the Lismore district.

*Our station employs six networked computers. Their total hard disk capacity is almost 100 Gigabytes.

*Our only dislike for the BSA is that it forces us to tag our ads as "sponsorship announcements." It is counterproductive for us and the ABA and means nothing to our listeners. Sponsorship is advertising.

*Our operation costs about \$1500 per week.

*Digital radio is a long way off in the bush. Our listeners couldn't afford it. Neither could we.

*There's lots more to our station, but I've said enough. To summarise:

1. The ABA is good for community radio.
2. The BSA is good for community radio.
3. Syndication of commercial regional stations is good for the community if a fair dinkum community station is available to fill their shoes, for the syndicated station will lose their listeners in droves.
4. The CBAA and the CBF is out of touch with regional Australia.
5. Community radio as another type of electronic media will generally only succeed in the bush with capital and wages funding by government.
6. We provide many social benefits to our community.

FINALLY:

We believe in rock 'n' roll, and that music will save your mortal soul.

Yours faithfully,
Roger Wood
CHAIRMAN