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House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Communications,
Transport and the Arts

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Secretary: Janet Holmes

Secretary:.....**INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSION BY ROBIN AND PHIL DALEY**

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HOUSE OF
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**ON THE
RADIO INDUSTRY INQUIRY**

**NB: This is an individual submission by Phil and Robin Daley
and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of
Monaro Community Radio's executive or members.**

Introduction:

Radio broadcasting in rural and regional Australia is broadly categorised into three groups; private broadcasters, government broadcasters and community broadcasters. Our submission will focus on the role of community radio within the spectrum, the role of the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA), the community expectations, the social benefits and in particular, the difficulty in gaining a permanent community broadcast licence.

About Us:

Our involvement is with Monaro Community Radio Inc. as presenters. Monaro Community Radio is, as its name implies, a community radio station, which serves the community of the Monaro and the Snowy Mountains in south-eastern New South Wales. The station has been operating for approximately four and one half years under various temporary broadcasting licences granted by the ABA. It broadcasts from the small town of Nimmitabel, which is in the centre of the station's broadcast area and is located on the Snowy Mountains Highway between Cooma and Bega. It is a true community radio station. All of its funding has been raised from within the community; it has not applied for or received any government grants towards its establishment or its ongoing running costs. All of its presenters and committee people are volunteers from within our broad community, it has no paid positions within the organization, decisions affecting the station are taken democratically and it broadcasts the type of programs our community wants to hear.

Monaro Community Radio (MCR) was formed through the perceived need by a group of residents, for a radio station, which presented alternative radio entertainment to the mainstream broadcasters operating within the region. The commercial station, 2XL played extreme rock music and the public broadcaster, the ABC did not offer the type of music the rural community desired. While that was initially country and easy-listening music, the influences of our presenters have widened the available choices

for listeners and our programming now covers a broad spectrum of tastes. We started broadcasting on only one day a week but presently we broadcast 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Thirty-two volunteers present their programs at various times throughout the week and we augment our broadcast by relaying satellite programs produced through the Community Radio Network.

MCR is currently broadcasting on a temporary licence, which it has been forced to share (month-on month-off) with another aspirant group through what we both personally see as total incompetence on the part of the ABA. We will expand on the reason for that statement in the section "The role of the Australian Broadcasting Authority".

The station's sphere of influence covers the area from Perisher Valley in the west, Kiandra in the northwest, Wolumla in the east and Michelago in the north. Towns within its broadcast area are Cooma, Berridale, Adaminaby, Dalgety, Jindabyne, Bemboka, Bredbo, Bombala and Delegate.

Social Benefits

Radio is probably relied upon more in rural and regional Australia than any other medium. It is transportable, instant, able to be listened to whilst working or playing at other activities and provides a choice of the type of entertainment the listeners require.

We believe the social benefits of community radio are grossly under-rated. On our station, apart from the listener often knowing the presenter personally, there is a great social interaction available to listeners of community radio. Listeners can phone in to request favourite songs or music, they can receive notification of coming local events, they can advertise community activities free of charge, they can receive national news broadcasts, they can receive radio for the print handicapped, book readings, religious broadcasts and can be entertained by many groups including schools within their community who want to share their experiences.

Many of our listeners are located in remote areas and can be only reached by the ABC or Monaro Community Radio and they greatly appreciate what our station is able to offer them. The rural community is experiencing an economic downturn and our station provides a focus for uniting that community through the types of programs it presents.

The community becomes deeply involved in community radio. They have a sense of ownership of both the radio station and the types of programs that are broadcast; many of them even become volunteer presenters.'

Community Expectations

The community expects to be able to hear the type of programs it wants to hear and to have the ability to choose between different broadcasters in order to meet their expectations. Community radio can and does offer a wide range of programs to satisfy those expectations.

The Role of the Australian Broadcasting Authority

It is our opinion through our experience with MCR that the ABA is out of touch with the aspirations of community broadcasting in the rural areas of Australia. Their high-handed, uncaring approach to our station's licence applications gives us the impression that MCR is a thorn in their side. It is our opinion the station is treated as if it has access to bucketfuls of money which can be readily expended to answer the ABA's every whim.

As an example of that approach, when MCR applied for its first permanent licence after being on a temporary licence for almost four years, it was placed in the same category as the other applicant which had no broadcast record at all and which was competing for the same permanent licence. Both applicants were expected to set up a full radio station to service the same licence area, which would realise the ABA's licence requirements.

We consider this requirement of the ABA to be most unrealistic, expecting the presence of two community radio stations in a relatively small community to compete for limited community funds on the expectation of being chosen as the successful applicant.

The truth of the matter is that the two groups have raised large amounts of community money only to find that they have equipment that will be never used if one or the other is not granted the permanent licence. If, as is the present situation, the ABA requires both groups to share the licence on a month-on-month-off basis on a permanent basis, the equipment will be used for only half of its potential time.

It is our opinion the ABA has no concept of the area MCR broadcasts over or the location of its transmitter and studio relative to that area. Despite the station having issued numerous invitations for the ABA officers to visit and observe our operation, they have shown no interest in making this very important fact-finding trip.

Funding of Community Radio

It is a well-documented fact that community radio is under-resourced in terms of material needs such as equipment and funding. There does not appear to be available the type of funding to enable community radio to start from scratch and build up equipment which is reliable and modern. More often than not, the equipment is adapted from other uses and is held together through nothing more than the hard work of the members. Perhaps this is part of what makes community radio so appealing to those who make it happen.

The groups of intending community broadcasters often raise funds through raffles, concerts, subscriptions and direct hounding of potential financial supporters. While this action gives the whole community a sense of ownership of the radio station, it often restricts its development through limiting the funding base. Governments must come to realise the very real value of community radio within the wider community and offer appropriate funding to ensure its survival and growth.

Future Trends

Among its 35 presenters, Monaro Community Radio has more than 10 junior presenters varying in age from 11 years old to 17 years old. From these 10 presenters we would expect that one or more will eventually pursue a career in radio as broadcasters, editors, technicians, journalists, etc. We feel that by providing these young people with the experience of working in a community radio the station is contributing to the future of all types of radio broadcasting in Australia.

By providing this kind of training we believe that community radio is the incubator of future radio personnel and perhaps has augmented the training role of the ABC and the commercial stations.

Conclusion

With the growth of community radio stations across Australia in recent years, the community-broadcasting sector is vying with both public and private broadcasters for a significant share of the listening public. We believe it is essential that the ABA realises the importance of community radio stations and provides them with the necessary support mechanisms to ensure the viability of this form of communication.

In closing, it our individual opinions that Monaro Community Radio has been poorly treated by the ABA and forced to jump through many unnecessary hoops. However, it is our opinion that while the Federal Government and the ABA are in favour of community radio broadcasters they seem to be unsure as to the most appropriate way to encourage and nurture this emerging broadcast medium.

Yours faithfully

Phil Daley Robin Daley
Monaro Community Radio presenters.