



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

## Proof Committee Hansard

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS,  
TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

**Reference: Radio racing services**

SATURDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 1999

BARRABA

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND THE**  
**ARTS**

**Saturday, 18 September 1999**

**Members:** Mr Neville (*Chair*), Mr Gibbons, Mr Hardgrave, Mr Hollis, Mr Jull, Mr Lindsay, Mr McArthur, Mr Murphy, and Mr St Clair

**Members in attendance:** Mr Hollis, Mr Neville and Mr St Clair

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

- . The extent of, and the value placed on the coverage of the ABC's radio racing service.
- . The impact of the discontinuation of the service on the community and the industry.
- . The current extent of radio racing coverage and gaps in that coverage.
- . Future options for the provision of broadcasting services of racing in regional Australia.

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**Committee met at 10.33 a.m.**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

**BOWMER, Ms Jackie, Manager, Australian Broadcasting Corporation**

**BUCKNELL, Mr Bill, Committeeman, Life Member and Retired President, Barraba Jockey Club**

**BURKE, Mr Terence Patrick, President, Hunter and North West Racing Association**

**CLIFT, Mr John Arthur, Country Representative, Hunter and North West Racing Association; Member, New South Wales Country Racing Council; Member, New South Wales Blood Horse Breeders Association**

**MUNRO, Mr Hugh Mack, Committee Member, Hunter and North West Racing Association; President, Bingara District Jockey Club; Member, AJC**

**PERRY, Mr Trevor, Committeeman and Life Member, Barraba Jockey Club**

**RASMUSSEN, Mr Anthony, Program Director, New South Wales Regional Radio, ABC Radio**

**ROBERTSON-CUNINGHAME, Mr Robert Alexander, Committeeman, Glen Innes Jockey Club; Committeeman, Deepwater Jockey Club; Ex-chairman of the Hunter and North West Racing Association**

**St VINCENT, Mr Paul (Private capacity)**

**SINCLAIR, Mr Alan Menzies (Private capacity)**

**SPLETTER, Mr Robert Charles, Regional Manager, New South Wales Country Racing Council**

**THOMAS, Mr Bede Harold, President, Inverell Jockey Club; Delegate, Hunter and North West Racing Association**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public roundtable discussion of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts into its inquiry into the impact of the ABC radio network to discontinue its radio racing service. The inquiry has generated considerable interest across Australia, particularly in regional and rural areas of New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. Without prejudging the outcome of the inquiry, I can say that the submissions clearly suggest that the ABC racing service was highly valued by many racing enthusiasts in regional Australia. A number of submissions describe being no longer able to access radio broadcasts at all. Others refer to limitations of the alternative services. Others again describe efforts being made to fill the gaps in services and propose measures that might assist in this process.

In conducting this inquiry into radio racing services, the committee is interested in assessing, firstly, the extent of the gaps both in access to radio race broadcasts and in access to alternative sources of racing information; secondly, the effectiveness of alternative sources of racing information in allowing racing enthusiasts in regional and rural parts of Australia to follow their interest in the sport; and, thirdly, the extent of the impact that the discontinuation of the ABC racing broadcasts has had on the industry. The committee is looking at the future, focusing on finding ways of providing an appropriate form of race broadcasts to regional Australia. We are therefore particularly interested in teasing out some of the difficulties that those attempting to fill those gaps in coverage may be having, and in exploring ways of filling those gaps.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome all participants and any members of the public who are just sitting in on today's discussions. The members of the committee wish to express their appreciation to all those who have made submissions and to those who have given up their time today—particularly as this is a Saturday—to assist the committee in its inquiry. We are aware that a number of you have travelled long distances, from the north and north-west of New South Wales, to be with us. We would like to thank you for the effort you have made to be here.

Before proceeding, I wish to advise all witnesses and participants that the committee does not require evidence to be given on oath. However, the public roundtable discussion is part of the legal proceedings of the parliament and warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be taken as a contempt of the parliament.

Today's proceedings vary a little in style from normal public hearings. We are not asking people to appear as individual witnesses. For reasons of ensuring that all evidence today is protected by parliamentary privilege, I ask that all questions and answers be directed through the chair. If you do that and you have to say something a little on the margin, you will be protected by parliamentary privilege.

May I thank those who have assisted Jan from our secretariat in putting together this roundtable discussion. This is a very well balanced committee, although not all members are here today. We have four Liberals, four Labor and two Nationals. We have four from Queensland, four from New South Wales and two from Victoria.

Ladies and gentlemen, the background to this inquiry is that the minister for communications, Senator Alston, called on his parliamentary committee—this committee—to inquire into the impacts of the ABC discontinuing its radio racing service. The process is that, once the minister does that, the committee then either accepts or rejects the reference. If we accept the reference, a series of procedures then follows. The first is that we advertise throughout Australia for people who wish to make submissions to the inquiry. No doubt you would have seen those advertisements in a number of racing and sporting magazines and in the general media, inviting people to give us their submissions under the terms of reference that appeared in those advertisements.

The next step was that we looked through those submissions—we got over 200 of them, and some are still coming in—as well as a couple of hundred form letters and roneo type

endorsements of the inquiry. We have also, quite unusually, received petitions as well. It is not our role to receive petitions; nevertheless, it is an indication of the depth of feeling. The third step in the process is for us to go out and take evidence. We will be holding hearings in the capital cities, in regional areas and also in rural areas. The fourth step in the process is for us then to go back to Canberra, consider the submissions and the verbal evidence, and write a report which will be tabled in the parliament, probably early next year. Then the minister responds to that, generally within three months, and, hopefully, that becomes the basis for arresting or ameliorating the problem that people have been suffering.

The committee was particularly keen to come to an area that was representative of the people who had lost their service. The hearings were to be in two parts. We got half of yesterday's proceedings in. Yesterday morning we held hearings in the Commonwealth Centre in Brisbane, where we heard from 4TAB, which is the equivalent of your 2KY service; the Queensland TAB; and the National Party's racing committee in Queensland. We heard also from the state member for Gregory, Vaughan Johnson, who is based in Longreach, and Bob Katter, the federal member for Kennedy, both of whom put very much a country spin on their evidence. We had then intended to go to Longreach and speak to the Queensland Principal Club and witnesses from that area of Longreach and Winton, round to Bedourie, Blackall and Barcaldine. Unfortunately—we suspect, but we do not know, because of the strains put on the military and the fact that the Prime Minister and the defence minister, the foreign minister and the immigration minister have to be moving around very quickly at present—our jet was withdrawn from us yesterday. That forced the cancellation of the Longreach hearing. Nevertheless, we are here today.

This was to have been the third leg of the hearings: we would hear what the experts said in the capital city and what people said in western Queensland, and then we were looking for a race meeting that was indicative of the country race meetings that people go to, to help us understand the dynamics of that race meeting. We have been on a metropolitan course, we have been on a provincial course, but not a lot of the time do members of parliament get onto country courses. We wanted to get a feel for the dynamic of that and the way that radio affects your lives here, in particular how the ABC service might affect your lives.

In preliminary discussions for this inquiry we have been asked, 'What's all the fuss about? You can get it on the Internet or on the satellite.' Radio is a very user-friendly medium. That question does not look into the circumstances of someone who is on the tractor on a Saturday afternoon or on the header, or the cane harvester, or someone who is digging a cow out of a bog or a sheep out of a bore drain, or whatever it might be. You just do not have the luxury of being able to sit in front of your computer, or put your feet up and have a nice pina colada while you watch it on the satellite. That sort of difference is coming through very clearly.

We also received evidence in Brisbane that, when the Sky satellite link goes down, there being no radio racing service there is no way of finding the results of races or getting the fluctuations to the courses. That is just a very practical application of it.

Perhaps another point that colours the way we are thinking is that if, for example, you withdrew all television and radio broadcasting from Rugby League or Australian Rules, it

would not take long for that particular sport to wither, or at least to wither in public perception. So there are elements of that that we are looking at as well.

This is the first roundtable discussion that we have had, and we want to just get a little bit of an idea of how you feel. Perhaps the chairman of the race club might like to make an opening statement. You are the guy at the coalface, so to speak. Maybe you could tell us what your perception of this problem is, how it affects you personally, how it affects your race club and how it affects the social fabric of this community. If anyone else wants to make a short statement, they can and we will then go into questions, answers and interactivity. I now invite you to make an opening statement.

**Mr BURKE**—You have touched on some of our problems in saying that there are three things that give us great concern. Principally, that is the lack of information that we can get on race days because we live in country areas. Station 2KY does have a service but, unfortunately, that service for people in country areas is very limited. Even in an area like Tamworth, there are parts of Tamworth where you cannot get that service. It was great in the days when the ABC radio broadcast race meetings on Saturday afternoon.

At this stage, I would like to say one thing that has been said a lot about gambling and racing: there is more of an interest in racing than just gambling. Numerous people have said to me recently, and over time, that they missed being able to listen to racing on a Saturday afternoon. These were people who had never had a bet on a racehorse but they had a great interest in maybe breeding, the sport itself, following jockeys or trainers and a general interest in the sport itself. It is not just a gambling thing.

Many people in our area have really missed out by that lack of a radio service to them. I think you used the term ‘user friendly’ with regard to radio and that is the way we feel. You also mentioned that someone might be on a tractor, mowing the lawn, in the garden, or whatever, and they can have the radio on and listen to the races as they go. They might be mowing the lawn: they can get off the mower, put the mower aside, and go and listen to a race that they may have a particular interest in for various reasons. Maybe they do have a bet on it; maybe they are just following the sport itself.

We miss that and the sport itself suffers. This town of Barraba has its once a year race meeting. We have race meetings 130-odd times during the year in our association, but there are nine small towns that race once a year. The people who will be at the races today are mainly country people from around Barraba. They suffer greatly from a lack of knowing what is going on in the racing world. When you get away from understanding and following the sport, the sport can somewhat die. That would be a great pity because over the years racing has been a part of Australia. We would like to think that racing itself continues on and prospers in country New South Wales, particularly in these small areas, the country areas, which in themselves have been deprived so much from what is going on in sport and also other services.

**Mr SPLETTER**—I wrote the letter on behalf of the Country Racing Council in Sydney because they are keen to re-establish this service. We have noticed here in this association, and I think it follows through country New South Wales, that betting turnover has dropped since the cessation of the ABC racing radio service. The letter that I forwarded on behalf of



the committee and the Country Racing Council noted that the turnover dropped from \$11m to \$9m on the racecourse turnover itself—the bookmakers turnover. TAB turnover was not rising as was expected.

**CHAIR**—Is the TAB agent here today?

**Mr PERRY**—No. It is at the Victoria Hotel; it is a PubTAB.

**Mr SPLETTER**—I did give an invite to the TAB agent in Tamworth. Had this meeting been in Tamworth, he would most certainly have been there. The association has noticed how betting has declined. Racing is of great interest to most people, but it can only prosper on betting turnover. Barraba today, for example, gets a number of dollars from the Country Racing Council—a distribution of funds from the TAB turnover. Money is handed to the Country Racing Council from the TAB.

If the TAB turnover drops, then the funding drops, Barraba's receipts from the total pool drops. Eventually, if it continues to spiral downwards, there will not be a Barraba race meeting. Barraba is one of the most successful one-day country meetings that we have in this area. We have about eight or nine, and Barraba is one of the better ones.

If TAB turnover declines, Barraba race meeting is in jeopardy. You gentlemen and ladies today will notice when you get to the course that the atmosphere at Barraba is absolutely fabulous. I am not saying that it is the best one-day meeting. I think it is the best one-day club, but I do not think it is the best one-day meeting. The atmosphere is fabulous and all one-day clubs are similar. Clubs like Tamworth probably suffer more than Barraba. They have 22 race meetings, 12 TAB and 12 non-TAB, or that is the objective. If they are not going to get a reasonable amount of money from the TAB pool, a big club like Tamworth—which runs the Prime Stakes, which is a listed race and one of the best races in country New South Wales—may suffer and that race may suffer.

**CHAIR**—How many Saturdays are you at Tamworth races?

**Mr SPLETTER**—Tamworth would probably race 10 and the other two would be public holidays such as Easter Monday and Melbourne Cup Day. They have 12, maybe 13, non-TAB meetings out of their allocated dates. From my own personal point of view, a long while ago the ABC TV used to broadcast the trots. I am a bit of a punter; I am not a mad punter. Every Friday night I would go to the TAB agency on the way home to have a few bets on the trots because the ABC trots used to broadcast the last two or three races live. Following those races, they would give you the whole meeting as a re-run. Since the ABC TV ceased telecasting those Harold Park meetings on Friday night, I have never had another bet on the trots. It was only because I could see it live and I could see my money racing around. It was never a lot of money, but it was an interest. I think that is what we are suffering from at the moment: the interest is dying because we have not got the facility to hear the horses going around. That is my problem with the cessation of the service.

**CHAIR**—Does anyone have a comment on the effect on the social fabric on towns like Barraba? Someone made the comment that you do not always go out to gamble. Some people go for the sport and some go for the social recreation part of community life. I would

like to have a feel for what you think about the effect of racing on the social fabric of the district.

**Mr SINCLAIR**—This might be an appropriate time for me to comment, since I am not representing any racing club. I feel that I am representing country people. Firstly, I should tell you that I am 35 kilometres away from the urban area. I have been listening to the ABC radio for 45 years, so I am a conditioned listener. I was distraught when they cancelled the racing service because it was my only avenue to get the information that I required. I am an entertainment type of punter. I enjoy it; it is a relaxation for me. Hundreds of other people are in a similar situation. There will be a lot of people at this meeting today who would not be able to get information at home to use on the track. There would be no way of them getting that unless they had a very expensive pay TV available to them.

I also speak on behalf of a lot of older people. You mentioned the social fabric. I think it is very discriminating against older people. I know lots and lots of older people who get a lot of fun out of listening to it and having an occasional bet. I know there is a large number of people in the country who has supported racing over the years. Those people have now been dispossessed largely. They cannot keep up with the news. They cannot get track information and all sorts of other information.

Where I live I can receive only the ABC and 2TM Tamworth, which dropped the racing programs some years ago. I depended very heavily on the ABC. When it was stopped my only avenue was to drive about 3½ kilometres to the top of the hill on the back of my property. On a good day I could pick up 2VM Moree. That was a pathetic way to get information. If there was a bit of disturbance around I would not get anything. I was very upset about that.

Then, of course, this decision affects a whole host of other people who just cannot get the racing station. As far as country people are concerned, the racing station in Tamworth is hopeless. You cannot even get it five kilometres out. It is just a no-no as far as we are concerned.

**CHAIR**—In most instances, they are only what they call narrowcast licences.

**Mr SINCLAIR**—Whatever it is, it is of no value to the people who live in the country because they cannot receive it. Also, a friend of mine who lives in the city cannot receive information either. Basically, as far as I am concerned, this decision is discriminating against country people, especially older people. To get the information that I require it costs me in excess of \$500 a year because I have to contribute to pay TV. That is the only way that I can get the information, whereas if I was an urban dweller I would have it free. If that is not discrimination, I do not know what is. Country people are penalised by comparison with people in urban areas.

The other point that I would like to make is that the long-term effect of dropping this service is already causing a very serious decline in the number of people attending race meetings. I am a regular racegoer and so I have seen this. This is a very large industry supporting a whole lot of people and cutting off this service will have long-term serious effects. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

**Mr HOLLIS**—When you say long-term serious effects, what do you mean? Do you mean loss of jobs?

**Mr SINCLAIR**—I mean loss of interest in racing. If you cannot get the information, you very quickly lose interest because you do not know what is going on, and clearly that is the case. I raced horses early in the piece, and you need that information. How a trainer or another people in the country manages, I would not know.

**CHAIR**—Mr St Vincent, you are in the business of training, you are at the sharp end of the ship, so to speak. What do you think has been the downstream effect for trainers, jockeys, strappers, produce agents, veterinary suppliers and veterinarians? Can you give us a bit of a feel for that side of the business?

**Mr St VINCENT**—Yes, Mr Chairman, I can. Firstly, I think that it is basically as Mr Sinclair said, when you cannot hear what goes on or you are not in contact with what goes on, you generally lose interest. That is just human nature, that is just part of what life is all about. When something is taken away—and this was taken away—what happens is a loss of interest. That just spirals, snowballs, or whatever you would like to say, through all different channels. People who would have been able to listen to a race broadcast, people who were maybe interested in either following a jockey, trainer or certain horse, people who in some small way would have been generating a flow-on in the racing industry, just drop off. When you take more people out of the industry, the industry starts to decline.

Luckily, my stables are in Tamworth where I can get the 2KY radio station. If I was out where I live, a few kilometres out of town, I would have to have a portable TV set with me all the time for pay TV, because I cannot pick up the radio station there. Therefore, I have either got to drop what I am doing and be inside to gain what knowledge I need, or be in town working at the stables.

When you ask how it affects jockeys, trainers and strappers—people in the industry—basically the ABC radio station was a part of life. And now that racing has been taken away you will find that everybody's interest is declining in those fields.

**Mr St CLAIR**—Do you still listen to the ABC?

**Mr St VINCENT**—Yes, I do. I listened to it on the way up in the car this morning and I heard an interview with John Strachan, and I was very pleased to hear it. It was regarding the meeting here today, at Barraba, and that generated an interest in me instantly.

**CHAIR**—Was that interview out of Sydney or out of the local station?

**Mr St VINCENT**—It was out of the local ABC station.

**Mr St CLAIR**—The ABC has a big base in Tamworth. Can I just follow that up a bit. I drove over from Guyra to here today, a couple of hours drive, and I tried to pick up all the various AM and FM stations as I came through. The only one I heard talking about racing this morning was 1188 Inverell. It had a session on this morning. Does it vary from station to station?

**Mr St VINCENT**—Basically, in Tamworth all we have is the Saturday morning racing show which only runs for a short time. During the week there is nothing, apart from the 2KY hook-up which is linked in on a very short-term licence. If I drive to Brisbane—

**CHAIR**—They do have a few AM stations, be fair to them. There is 2KY, and 4IP in Brisbane, and they have fair coverage.

**Mr St VINCENT**—Yes, I was getting to that. If I drive to Sydney with a horse on, I can leave Tamworth and once I am out of the city area I get nothing. I can pick up a fleeting coverage through Murrurundi. Then I am gone again until about Muswellbrook when I can pick up Newcastle on the AM. And then, of course, as I get to Sydney I am right.

Heading to Brisbane, you can get the one in Tamworth. But there is nothing else again until Armidale, and then there is a new station at Glen Innes. They have an AM hook-up. Is that correct?

**Mr ROBERTSON-CUNINGHAME**—No, it is FM

**Mr St VINCENT**—I know I can nearly get to Tenterfield on that, but then I am out of play until I get into Queensland where they have a very good radio station, 4TAB. That is a tremendous radio station which covers racing absolutely to the fullest.

If I go west, once I leave Tamworth there is nothing until I get to Moree with its radio station, but that is about it. So, you just get little bits unless you are sitting up in front of the television set on pay TV.

**CHAIR**—Of course, the ABC's regional network, outside the capital cities, gave about a 95 per cent coverage to populated regional rural Australia. Those big AM transmitters gave a huge coverage, and that was the beauty of them.

**Mr St VINCENT**—Yes, undoubtedly, because sitting in the car in the bush you would just leave your radio on the ABC. There is no point in doing anything else because when you run out of one range you can change into the next range and you are still on the same program. That is how you survive.

**Mr St CLAIR**—Have you any idea why the ABC stopped broadcasting, just as a punter in Tamworth?

**CHAIR**—Did any of you query the ABC in this area?

**Mr CLIFT**- We queried the ABC but the answer was that the radio ratings for horse racing was very limited. That was the answer they gave. Whether that is a fact, I do not know, I have not seen the ratings. The answer we got was that the ratings were not high enough for them to worry about it.

**Mr SPLETTER**—And they said that you could also get that coverage on other forms of media. They said you could get pay TV, that was successful, and free-to-air TV at that time. One of the free-to-air Sydney stations was running two or three races on a regular basis.

**CHAIR**—We are talking here mainly about the capital cities and big provincial cities.

**Mr SPLETTER**—We were getting pay TV, but one of the capital city TV stations was broadcasting free-to-air three or four races of an afternoon, wherever the feature meeting was. Another reason they gave us was that there was plenty of coverage on normal free-to-air or commercial radio. That is an absolute nonsense because there is nothing. You cannot see your pay TV when you are washing your car or if you are sitting on the toilet or in your tractor. That is a nonsense.

Mr Chairman, you were mentioning the social fabric of race meetings to Barraba, for example. The biggest problem I have in my job is the allocation of race dates. Every year if Barraba does not get 18 September, Deepwater 15 January, Glen Innes 7 January and Bundarra somewhere in October, all hell breaks loose; I am fighting with all of them. The whole of the social structure of that town revolves around that race meeting. The Sydney hierarchy decided that in the year 2000 Deepwater or Glen Innes—I think it was Deepwater—would run in March. The whole of Deepwater was on the phone to us complaining about how could they do that. People in Sydney arrange their holidays so they can go to Deepwater on the second or third Saturday in January, every year, year after year. The whole town revolves around a number of social factors, probably the biggest of which is the race meeting. In any of these little one race meeting towns it is a huge influence.

**CHAIR**—You are saying that the certainty factor is important.

**Mr SPLETTER**—That is exactly the way they look at it. I do not see it that way. I think that they should be transportable. Our attitudes are different. I think that if it is better for Tamworth to run on 15 January then Deepwater has to go to the 22nd. But Deepwater does not say that; Deepwater wants 15 January because that is what it has been for the last 15 or 20 years. Deepwater nine times out of 10 gets their way because it really is an important issue for Deepwater.

**Mr St CLAIR**—I see. Mr Robertson-Cuninghame, it is the FM station at Deepwater that is starting to broadcast? Is that what you were referring to earlier?

**Mr ROBERTSON-CUNINGHAME**—There is an FM station at Deepwater but it is very limited. There is an FM station at Glen Innes and that is what I wanted to allude to, if I may do that now. I do not like looking back, but I was shocked at the regrettable and regressive decision of the ABC to discontinue this. We had a good program. We had scratchings at 10 o'clock in the morning from the ABC plus selections. We had Greg Miles in Melbourne, whom the ABC have lost now. David Morrow and Paul Dolan gave their selections and the scratchings. It was very good. I always listened in to that whenever I could.

You asked some time ago about the contact with the ABC. I was chairman at the time and with Mr Spletter we agitated both politicians and the hierarchy of the ABC. I was extremely disappointed in the reaction from both. Senator Alston was very hard to convince. I had a four-line reply from Mr Fischer which I was equally disappointed in. Mr Sinclair did give me quite a bit of information. When he gave me the information, which was already reprinted from the ABC, he said, 'When you read this, you will know that the ABC knows

nothing about the bush.' When I had read it I agreed with him. I thought it was the greatest lot of garbage I had ever read.

The situation in Glen Innes is indicative of what can be done. It did not even have a low power FM station. With agitation from somewhere we suddenly ended up with a high power FM station, which I can hear perfectly up to about 80 miles away. That is what we want.

**CHAIR**—Is that commercial or ABC?

**Mr ROBERTSON-CUNINGHAME**—That is commercial and that is the 2KY. I don't see why the ABC should be relying on commercial stations to provide this program. We, as taxpayers, pay for the ABC and the ABC has a duty to give us these programs that we have been used to and that we require. To pass the buck on to 2KY is just releasing their responsibilities. It is time the ABC faced up to the fact that we require this program. Seeing we are paying for it as taxpayers, we should get it.

**CHAIR**—Your recommendation is that the ABC should be required to reinstitute the program.

**Mr ROBERTSON-CUNINGHAME**—Absolutely.

**Mr HOLLIS**—You are all here because you are committed to the broadcast of races. What percentage of the people out there, however you define that, actually listen to that radio? One of the things the ABC is claiming is that there were not enough people listening to it—although depending on who you wrote to in the ABC you got a different reply. I wrote to the ABC and they sent me a long letter, which I also sent on. They argued that because of the privatisation of the TAB in New South Wales it was no longer appropriate that they compete with commercial operators in providing a service. That was the reason they gave me. I am not going to hold you to any exact figure, but do you think 12 per cent, 50 per cent or 80 per cent of people would be tuned in to the ABC on Saturday afternoon listening to the races? They may not be there sitting all afternoon with their ear glued to it but, by the very nature of radio, they may be driving along in their car and may have made a conscious decision to have that program on for that Saturday afternoon.

**Mr ROBERTSON-CUNINGHAME**—From my experience it would be very hard to tell. Without a proper survey it would be extremely hard to tell. In the situation where I am, where 2KY has come in, as far as I am concerned the ABC can go to hell. I am not interested because I am getting the program, but I think for the rest of New South Wales or the eastern part of Australia my remarks still hold good.

**Mr HOLLIS**—Someone put to us that, although it was important coming here, we should be going much further out where people are deprived of all the services. You come from a fairly wide ranging area. Would you agree that, despite the fact that people have travelled distances to be here, if we just based our whole deliberation on coming here we might get a slightly misleading view?

**Mr ROBERTSON-CUNINGHAME**—It is quite possible.

**CHAIR**—If you drew a line from, say, Narrandera through to Roma or somewhere along there, what would the situation be west of that line rather than east of that line?

**Mr CLIFT**—From general discussion from the country council—and that has delegates from out at Bourke and out in the west—they are very insistent that the country councils should be pushing government to release the licences to 2KY so that they can get these satellite stations out into the areas. At present, unless they go to a race meeting, they cannot hear any races at all. They are very worried that this is going to have a very big effect on New South Wales in the long run, especially on a labour market in the racing industry and the breeding industry which is considered the third biggest employer of wages in New South Wales next to BHP and those places.

The way racing is going in New South Wales with people not being able to hear it, you then lose interest and do something else. You play cricket or start to follow golf and when Paul wants to syndicate a horse he cannot get the shareholders to go into it because they have lost interest. When you look at the Stud Book figures, the number of mares that have been joined is dropping some 25 per cent because people are not interested. They leave their mares empty and this is affecting the whole racing structure in New South Wales. You have Victoria running over the top of us and Queensland ahead of New South Wales. We had 75 per cent of the mares in the breeding industry in Queensland.

**CHAIR**—Are you saying that because the Queensland TAB service is reasonably good, that is holding the racing industry together?

**Mr CLIFT**—I think it is holding the racing industry together. You have the ministers in both the Victorian and Queensland governments behind racing. They are subsidising breeding systems in conjunction with the breeders and this is helping. For instance, when you go to a tin-pot place and the first prize is worth \$5,000, there is a breeder bonus of \$5,000, so therefore you are really getting \$10,000. This is not happening in New South Wales. I know a stud that used to have 200 brood mares boarding on the place and they lost something 100 per cent of those mares to Victoria and they have not come back.

**CHAIR**—Bundaberg used to be a 52-week-a-year thing and now, I think, we race 17, one in three weeks, plus some public holidays. People associated with racing in Bundaberg tell me that even in the place the size of Bundaberg if you do not have a sufficient number of races, a core of interest, you cannot sustain keeping the strappers, jockeys and trainers in the town because they will move to the Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba or Rockhampton. They need to be in a base where there is a critical mass of racing activity going on. If you cannot do that you cannot justify full-time employees.

Of course, when they pull out, the vet loses business and the produce agents lose business, et cetera. What we have to find out in this inquiry is the extent to which radio information impacts on that. That is one of the terms of reference—the impact of that. We have to try to come to grips with that because, until we get that right, we cannot make any recommendations.

A couple have said about the 2KY 4TAB. 4TAB, in giving us evidence yesterday in Brisbane, said that they have 62 stations in Queensland now, which is a fair number. They

have done a handful with shire councils. Where the shire council will put up a small transmitter, they will provide the feed at no charge. They will provide the landline feed or the satellite feed at no charge provided the council will get the licence, transmit the signal and be responsible for the upkeep of the station. The actual service costs them nothing.

Even they said to us in evidence that they will not be going any further than that. They have to rebid for those licences every five years and they said that there was a good possibility that they will drop some as they come up for tender or bid in the future. I think the comment was: if you think the ABC has caused a stir, just wait until 4TAB starts to drop it because that will be virtually the end of racing. I do not believe we have to get to that end. We have to look at this problem now or perhaps what has happened over the last 18 months and see it in that context, rather than predict doom in the future.

**Mr SINCLAIR**—Just in answer to the question: I do not want to get away from that without providing some sort of information. I could not guess at the number of people it has impacted on but it is not an insignificant number, put it that way. If you look at the records, I think you will see that almost all councils in this region wrote to the ABC and then were horrified at the answer they were given. The answer indicated that, firstly, it was available on the Internet, and, secondly, it was available on pay TV. Then, thirdly, they were asked, ‘What are you worrying about? We have got a lot of other people to satisfy.’ That was most disturbing to me and to my council. We had a lot of people ring the council and say, ‘What are you doing about it? They have just taken this away.’ You are the member for the South Coast. I would ask you: how do you think the people of Wollongong would react if they had all of their racing stations removed overnight—no discussion, no consultation? How do you think they would react?

**Mr HOLLIS**—There are a couple of points we have got to bear in mind. First of all, one of the things that this committee will have to decide is whether we are trying to hold the tide back. Everything changes; life changes. Are we trying to hold the tide back? I do not know the answer to that. Where are the young people today? As we look around the room, none of us are that young—even though we are all young at heart. Is racing any different in this town or anywhere else in the country from, say, the football club? Bob Katter, at the meeting yesterday, was lamenting the fact that there would not be some football thing in town. People these days often are not participating. One thing I will be keen to find out is whether the young people are showing the same interest as we do who are a little bit older. Are they coming on?

The other point is that this committee is going to have to make a recommendation to the minister, and we are going to have to come up and discuss a couple of things. If we get all hairy chested and demand that the government recommends strongly to the board—the government cannot instruct it—that it restore this service, and the board says no, we have got to have a good look at alternative things. People are saying to us in the representations that we and local members have been receiving that this service has got to be restored. We may have to be able to come up with an alternative. We have got to look at that as well, and that is where we are very dependent on you people. You know this area; we do not. This is one of a number of centres we will be visiting. People are very angry about the situation, as you rightly say, and obviously the report will convey the anger of the country people. But



we have got to go further than that and come up with recommendations—which must, I believe, look at alternative provision.

**CHAIR**—Mr Hollis has made a very important point here. We can identify the problem, but we have got to offer the minister some options, some ideas and some recommendations. For example, there are three different types of narrowcast licence. The word ‘narrowcast’ means it is narrowed by its range, its content or a third item which I have forgotten. One of the things that have been said is that perhaps there should be a fourth type of narrowcast licence that is confined to regional recreation and sporting services, so that people bidding for that would have a reasonable degree of certainty of getting those licences and being able to maintain them, perhaps for a 10-year span rather than a five-year span. That may be a practical way of encouraging people like 2KY and 4TAB, or indeed shire councils, to put up transmitters in their own areas. They might broadcast just specialised sporting programs like racing, perhaps on Wednesdays, Saturdays and public holidays, and the local rugby league on Sunday, or Australian Rules or whatever it might be. That is one suggestion that has come up.

Another suggestion, which was put to me verbally rather than given in evidence, concerns another ABC service that we do not get in the country, called PNN. Are you aware of that? It broadcasts the parliamentary proceedings of the Senate and the House of Representatives when they are sitting, and at other times it has a continuous news program. It picks up overseas news programs, the equivalent of radio versions of things like CNN—there is a German one, for example—and they broadcast those. At present that goes only to the capital cities, Newcastle and Canberra, I think. The ABC people there might correct me if I am wrong.

Apparently, the BBC has something similar in the UK, and at the weekends that service is devoted as the BBC second sporting channel for the less popular sports and so on. I have asked the secretary to look into this so I am speaking very loosely, but that was a suggestion made, that perhaps this could be a twofold thing. Not only would it give country people access to parliamentary broadcasts and a continuous news service—

**Mr HOLLIS**—That is if you wanted them.

**CHAIR**—but also at weekends and on public holiday Mondays you would have available a network, as an alternative to the ABC, to do specialised broadcasting. That is another suggestion that has been put to me—not in evidence, I might add, but verbally.

We are going to have to say in our report to parliament—and in turn that goes on to Senator Alston—how we might address this problem. So could we take up Mr Hollis’s point now in regard to what you see as solutions. What would satisfy you? What would you find a satisfactory service? I do not want to stifle the debate. If you want to talk about the problems and the effect on country towns, and you want to flesh out some detail, please feel free to do so, but let us for the second hour try to come up with some ideas as well.

**Mr St VINCENT**—Mr Chairman, if I may interrupt: Mr Hollis has come up with looking at it as a solution into the future. Where I am, in the heart of the industry, I believe that you need contact all of the time. What I have found now is that the only way to have

contact is to be in Queensland on 4TAB. I do not think anyone would be worried whether the ABC existed any more as far as the sporting show on a Saturday is concerned, because the bottom line is that they race every day of the week and we have to have coverage every day of the week. 4TAB in Queensland does that, but somewhere in the future, you indicated, there is a problem that it may cut back because of having to reapply for licences. If this is the case, the government should make these licences available in some manner that a commercial station wants to take them to provide this service to the public, firstly because the racing industry needs a constant service, seven days a week, on what is happening in the racing game, such as 4TAB provides.

I do not know the opinion of 2KY in Sydney. Do they want more radio stations? Do they want a bigger coverage? If they do, why can they not get it? Are they at their limit, or which way do they want to go? With the racing industry and the government surely we have to be able to get a full coverage, and 4TAB is the best one around. If we had 4TAB in New South Wales, I do not think anyone would be concerned about the ABC.

**CHAIR**—The criticism of 4TAB that we got in evidence in Brisbane yesterday was that it served people within five kilometres of the town. It has got a few high-powered licences that go out about 25 kilometres, but unless people on properties are under one of those signals they tend to miss out. You are picking up the townies, so to speak, in the bush, but not—

**Mr St VINCENT**—I can relate to that. Let us forget about the name 4TAB. Let us think about a radio station that can then broadcast throughout the state and can broadcast racing. Therefore, it needs a better communications system. What we are saying is that this is out of the reach of anyone in the commercial side of things.

**CHAIR**—I made a suggestion to the TAB: what would their reaction be if the government was, say, to draw a line down from Charters Towers to Roma, to Narrandera, down into central western Victoria, and if to the west of that line you had a series of regional-type AM stations of a similar strength to the ABC, if the government was to make those available, what would 4TAB's reaction be. They said they would be too dear to run. An AM station is a lot more expensive to run than narrowcast FM. So they were not greatly enamoured of that idea.

The ABC regional network is probably unique in the world in the way that a whole continent is covered by relatively few transmitters. I know that there are pockets where they have to fill in with other FM stations and second transmitters and things. But, by and large, you have Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, right down the coast, right through coastal areas—Toowoomba, Armidale, Tamworth and so on—all the way down. The ABC has relatively few stations covering probably 95 per cent of populated inland Australia.

**Mr ST VINCENT**—It is a very good service, there is no risk about that. But it appears that all of a sudden the bottom line is that we do not have a good enough communication system that a commercial station can use successfully.

**Mr HOLLIS**—It is a difficult situation in this world to which we are moving of user pays. It is an expensive service. In the final analysis, who picks up the tab? Do the listeners,

the supporters of racing, have a greater claim than, say, the supporters of rugby league? I should imagine that many people in this area follow various codes of football in the capital cities. They might demand, 'If you people are providing a radio service for the followers of racing to listen to their sport, why can't we have rugby league, or why can't we have dahlia growers or rose growers or something like that?'

I throw that out because this is one of the things that the minister will be looking at in our recommendation: in the final analysis, who is picking up the tab? Is it the taxpayers of Australia or is it the individual listeners? Against that, there is also the argument of community obligation. You know what has happened with community obligation over the last few years, especially if you come from this area. I bet you have had your banks closed, I bet you are worried about Telstra, I bet you are worried about all these things. You have the airlines. How much of a community obligation has Qantas got? So over the years, with all political parties, even I have not enforced that community obligation enough, and I am not quite sure that any government would be prepared to force the ABC to pick up a community obligation for what in reality is one aspect of a sporting activity.

**CHAIR**—By and large, the government cannot direct the ABC—it is a separate corporation. You cannot have two bob each way. You cannot get very high powered people to go on the board of the ABC and to manage the ABC on behalf of the community and then be interfering with it every five minutes. So there is that aspect of it.

Another suggestion that has been put to me is that there is the ABC charter. Given the fact that so much in life now has been privatised—we are privatising power stations, transport systems, Telstra—there is a commercial aspect of life moving into just about everything. Whether the rules under which the ABC operated were realistic enough, because the TABs were being privatised and commercialised—and this was one of the ABC's genuine concerns—they were coming into conflict with their own charter that they never sponsor anything. SBS can have sponsorship but the ABC cannot even have a sponsorship. In fact, they are pretty iffy about even saying it is the BP night at the opera. That is how strict they are.

So you had this problem that all the radio announcers that they had to call on at various times were being employed by the TABs and people like that. Some of the metropolitan jockey clubs 'owned', so to speak, the race callers. Because that was also commercialised and all the states were going to privatise their TABs, the ABC said that they were coming more and more into conflict with their own charter. So is the answer to alter the charter of the ABC to reflect more the commercial realities of Australia today? Is that an option that we should be recommending to Senator Alston?

**Mr MUNRO**—It was just a comment, Mr Chairman. That has been replaced by the ABC on Saturday afternoons with Rugby League in the winter, and the commercial stations are running Rugby League as well. It just seems a bit silly for both the ABC and the commercial stations to be running football.

**CHAIR**—I have a bit of sympathy for the ABC on that because they were the ones who, in the early days, promoted Australian Rules football and got it to where it is, both on radio and television. They were the ones who got Rugby Union up to a certain level. When they

get it to a certain level, then the commercial people go and knock it off. So where they can hold onto something like Rugby League—I am not saying it should be exclusively Rugby League—I have a bit of sympathy that the ABC should be able to hold onto that. What happens then is that they have to go and try to promote soccer or netball or something else. All the time they are being used, if you like, to build a sport and build an audience. When they get it up to a certain level, some greedy commercial organisation comes in and whips it off them.

**Mr HOLLIS**—It is free enterprise, Mr Chairman.

**CHAIR**—I suppose it is one of the commercial realities, but I must admit that I have some sympathy for the ABC wanting to hold on to some popular things. The ABC has only the unpopular things of life or the less popular things. They do not want to end up in some quaint corner of sport. They do want to have some universality.

**Mr St CLAIR**—Can I add to Mr Munro's comment. I think it is a very valid point for this area, and I raised it in Brisbane yesterday. ABC-FM plays the Rugby League; analogue plays the Rugby League; the commercial stations play the Rugby League. If they broadcast the races during that time, at least you would get an interruption. In other words, at least you would get your races coming through the system.

It is the same with cricket in the summer. People will have the radio on all day—while they are in the garden or on the tractor or whatever—listening to the test or whatever it is on the ABC. You used to have, as you know, the races being broadcast in whatever the intervals were. It gave an interruption. Those who did not want to listen to the races could go and check a tyre or something, put more diesel in or whatever the go was. But at least it was an interruption and then people would listen to the ABC in this region. If they did not want the ABC cricket, then they could turn over to a commercial channel.

**CHAIR**—I think there was a period—and I cannot remember how far back it was; perhaps it was seven, eight or 10 years ago—where the ABC had a very high powered interactive service with three states, overlaying cricket, Rugby League, Australian Rules or whatever it was in each state. Of a seven-race program, they would broadcast about four or five races. If it was some minor race, you would just hear them say, 'Race in Brisbane,' and then they would give you the results at the end. If it was a reasonably important race, they would broadcast the four or five best races of the day. In the other ones, they gave you the results. I thought that was a very good service when they were running it that way.

**Mr SPLETTER**—Doesn't the ABC also broadcast Rugby League on the Sundays? That means that all Saturday afternoon and all Sunday afternoon are full of Rugby League.

**CHAIR**—It varies from state to state, of course. I think they broadcast Rugby Union too.

**Mr SPLETTER**—I think the one that we get is Rugby League both afternoons.

**CHAIR**—Ms Bowmer is here from the ABC. I do not know whether you want to participate. Please do not feel inhibited. It may be that you do not want to participate ahead of your executives in Sydney appearing before the committee. If you want to pull us up on

any inaccuracies of detail, we are quite happy for you to do so. We are all speaking broadly, and I suppose because you are at the coalface and know exactly what the ABC is doing, you might at times be a bit offended by the global approach we are taking. Feel free, if you want, to correct us at any time or to contribute. If you are compromised by the fact that your executives have not yet appeared before us, then we will understand if you want to hold back as well. The same applies to Mr Rasmussen. Ms Bowmer, do you wish to say anything?

**Ms BOWMER**—No, not right now.

**CHAIR**—Do you want to make a comment later on?

**Ms BOWMER**—So far there has not been anything I could comment on.

**CHAIR**—Okay.

**Mr SINCLAIR**—Could I make a comment about young people. It is very important, and it has not been mentioned yet, to say that young people are not getting along to racing these days. That is true, and the reason is fairly obvious. All our young people have to go to the cities to get jobs. However, if you take yourself to, say, Wallabadah race meeting on New Year's Day when all the young people are home with their families, that meeting packs in 8,000 or 10,000 people and the average age would be well below 30.

There is a change in the composition of country people. There are a lot of old people and not many young people left in the country. I think you have to keep that in mind. That has an affect on the TAB stations too. When young people are not here they will not spend money to win them over to punting.

**Mr MUNRO**—Already the ABC, 2NU, has cut back on sporting services. Some time ago Ken McKenzie, and Jack Tomlinson before him, used to give sporting results on Saturday evenings. That was a very good way to hear the results of the race meetings or the cricket and whatever was happening in the area. That results service has gone by the board. The service is probably costly to run and there is no Ken McKenzie around to give the results on a Saturday evening.

However, I think the whole problem could be fixed very easily. There is no hope of altering the ABC's decision, in my opinion. I think that the act governing the licences for FM stations should be altered to make available stations that are more powerful so that they can give us coverage via 2KY or 4TAB. We can get the Victorian version of 4TAB or 2KY on pay TV clearly as well as anything. Surely there are avenues whereby we can get that radio service.

**CHAIR**—Do you favour a new category of licence?

**Mr MUNRO**—Yes, a new category of licence and giving it to 2KY or 4TAB or the Victorian version. It was nice to have the ABC on a Saturday afternoon, as Paul said, but you did not get the racing coverage that we now can get on pay TV through the Victorian station, or through 2KY if we could get it, because it is a complete coverage.

**CHAIR**—We will be speaking to the Australian Broadcasting Authority and the new body that replaced the NTA about how much spectrum is available. Radio and television broadcasting at present is going through a huge upheaval. We will in the next year or so have digital television. That is going to mean that all the television stations have to broadcast in both analog and digital mediums for eight years. There are huge debates going on. Overlaying that will be new players bringing in what is called datacasting. There is a huge debate going on there.

Not far down the track from that we are going to have a third type of radio. You have now got AM or FM, but in most Australian towns we will have digital radio, and digital radio will bring with it its own dynamics and problems. In fact, your radios will have little screens on them where there will be a certain amount of limited information. You will have an LED screen on your radio. That technology is only two or three years away. That is going to up-end all this again, and we should be mindful of things like racing as we introduce these new technologies.

I cannot give you any idea of what the ABA or the new national transmission organisation will tell us, but there are difficulties with the spectrum at present. They will sort themselves out over the next eight years, but slotting everyone into these changeovers is causing some problem with the spectrum. We are not going to shut down the analog televisions one day and turn on the digitals the next day. There is going to be an eight-year overlap. If you buy an analog TV, you want to think you are going to get six, seven or eight years out of it before you have to ditch it. There are all those sorts of considerations overlaying. It is not just simply a matter of the government saying, 'You can have that block of spectrum for racing broadcasts.' It is not that simple, sadly. There is so much demand on the spectrum at present that there is a difficulty.

For example, probably 20,000 people live in the coastal area just east of Rockhampton—you probably know that area called the Capricorn Coast: Yeppoon, Emu Park and those places. They would have a 4TAB network, but in the bidding for the licence one of the commercial television stations knocked them off. So that area on the outskirts of Rockhampton will not have a racing service at all. There are difficulties, and I do not know whether or not the government will have enough spectrum left to allow that area to have yet another racing broadcasting station. I cannot comment on that, but your broad recommendation, Mr Munro, was that we should be looking at a new form of licence?

**Mr MUNRO**—I think so. The system seems to be very complicated as it is. I have heard of other cases where a commercial station, because of its locality, has beaten the racing stations.

**Mr HOLLIS**—I would be interested in what others think. Can you tell us your view? We may be facing difficulties, but you must have some idea of what you would like us to recommend in an ideal or realistic world.

**Mr MUNRO**—We have 10 people around the table. How many would like to see the ABC pick it up again?

**CHAIR**—Could you explain 'pick up'?

**Mr MUNRO**—Pick up racing again.

**Mr HOLLIS**—Just go back to where it was or have a 2KY type service?

**Mr MUNRO**—No, an ABC service.

**Mr HOLLIS**—It is not for us to tell you what you want. You tell us what you want—that is, whether you want it to go back. Tell us what you would like in an ideal world and then what you would like, given the realities of the situation. Do not listen to us. You tell us what you want.

**Mr St VINCENT**—Firstly, speaking on behalf of the racing industry—that is what I am all about; racing is my life—I have a question. Have you had discussions with 2KY regarding this?

**CHAIR**—No. They are appearing before us in a couple of weeks time.

**Mr St VINCENT**—The 2KY racing radio station is brilliant for the racing industry. I believe that is what we need. That sums it up for me. There is no point in waffling on for a week about it. I think it is the best: it covers it entirely; it covers it seven days a week. The only problem is that it is too limited because of areas. One has gone to Glen Innes, as Mr Robertson-Cuninghame has stated. I just wonder if 2KY is sitting back and saying, ‘We want to go further and further when we can get licences.’ If that is the case, an approach has to be made to the government to try to enable 2KY to gain more licences. Thank you very much.

**Mr CLIFT**—2KY are saying that they want to go out all over New South Wales but that they cannot get the licences. You would think the real solution from a government point of view, considering the amount of money the government takes out of the TAB and the turnover they get, would be for 2KY to get these stronger licences for a longer period.

You could ask us whether we want the ABC and we could all put up our hands, but they are an independent body. Unless you can produce the right kinds of figures, you cannot go to them and say, ‘You should be putting it in.’ I think the ideal way is to go through 2KY, because it is completely a racing station. If it can get the licences on a long term, it is going to run them out as quickly as it can because it is in its interest to do so.

**Mr BURKE**—Can I support Mr St Vincent and Mr Clift. It is the industry as a whole which these gentlemen mentioned. What has happened is that there are fewer Saturday meetings in most country areas, particularly in this area. Racing associations have fewer Saturday meetings and more midweek meetings. If the ABC were to change back to where it was, people would be still ignorant of what might be happening midweek. I believe we do need a racing service as it is, which is 2KY at present, and then everyone will be right up to date with what is happening every day of the week.

I would like to mention one other thing, if I could. Mr Hollis mentioned young people and Mr Sinclair mentioned them as well. I think you would be pleasantly surprised when you go to Barraba today to see the number of young people there. It would be a crying shame to see Barraba go without its race meeting because of a lack of support from various avenues

and for those young people not to have that outing. They like to have their flutter—and today is the sort of day that does help to keep them interested in racing—but it is also a social thing for them. I think that one goes with the other.

**CHAIR**—It is part of the social life of the town and the district?

**Mr BURKE**—Very much so, yes.

**CHAIR**—Mr Perry, you have not said anything. Would you like to say something?

**Mr PERRY**—Bill and I are about to go. We have duties to perform.

**CHAIR**—Would you like to make a few comments before you go?

**Mr PERRY**—Yes, I would, but I just want to inform you that we have a luncheon there today for guests and sponsors and everyone is welcome. It starts at 12 o'clock, and that is why we have to go. If you do not get there until 12.30 or one o'clock, it will still be going.

I was more involved in racing as a secretary, not in the industry, and I did it for the sake of the town. The town has been my life, and I am still interested because of that. I feel that we have to keep racing before the public. Whether it is through 2KY or the ABC, I do not care. I am an ABC listener, I have to admit. If I wanted to listen to the races, I would have to try to find the station. But people do listen to races when they are travelling in cars. I do a lot of miles, and I think it is very important to be able to travel and listen.

In other words, keep the thing alive. I know I am getting off the course a little, but I know of one thing that is very wrong in racing at the moment. Our local press—and I am not wanting to cause detriment—only talk about the trainer and the jockey. They do not talk about the owner in the press. You could have the best horse in Barraba or in Tamworth, and no-one would want to know. People are losing interest because people are not publicising these things. That is getting away from what we are talking about, but I think we have to keep personalities and people in racing. Whether it be the ABC or whatever, I do not care. I am doing it for the sake of our little town.

**CHAIR**—Even if the ABC did not re-introduce the full race calling service, do you think it is important that the ABC, in their Saturday morning programs—be they local, Sydney based or Brisbane based—talk about the local race meetings and perhaps give a service late in the afternoon with the results?

**Mr PERRY**—I think the service with regard to results is very good.

**Mr MUNRO**—We do get them in the morning. They have given them this morning already.

**Mr PERRY**—Yes, but we do not get the afternoon results.

**Mr MUNRO**—They have had good coverage this morning. Barraba got a very good coverage.



**Mr THOMAS**—From which station?

**Mr PERRY**—2NU. You get a morning summary.

**Mr MUNRO**—Is that taped?

**Ms BOWMER**—No, that is live.

**Mr MUNRO**—But could the committee get access to that tape?

**CHAIR**—What is the policy in this area?

**Ms BOWMER**—We have a sports reporter, Mark Lowe. He is a dedicated sports reporter in our program—he does results every Monday and a preview on Fridays of the coming events, including racing and other sports. He certainly covers all local racing events. We could in fact, thinking laterally, cover more racing, more events through the week as well, as long as they were local events. We always have that covered on a Saturday and there is no reason why we could not do information through the week. Our program director would probably agree that I, for one, have always wanted more sport through the week. I am sure we could be a bit more lateral in having it not just on Saturdays.

**CHAIR**—What would be the chances, say, before *PM* at night, when you have those drive-time programs coming out of Sydney, Brisbane and places like that, of the ABC taking the last 10 or even five minutes before the news at night to have a local sports wrap-up?

**Ms BOWMER**—Perhaps Tony Rasmussen might comment there, but we have Peter Longman, and Longy, as all our listeners know, gives a lot of results at various times during our drive-time program and that does go on the regionals—that is the regional drive-time program, as opposed to the metro.

**CHAIR**—But that still comes out of Sydney and Brisbane?

**Ms BOWMER**—That comes out of Sydney, but if it were a results thing—is that we are talking about, results at the end of the day?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Ms BOWMER**—I am not quite sure what time Longy does *Drive*. Tony Rasmussen?

**Mr RASMUSSEN**—Yes, that would be a possibility. We have made a conscious effort over the last 12 months to increase the amount of sport being given on those drive-time programs, in general programs, rather than just, say, splitting off for specific times, say, a 10-minute period. Sport is covered throughout the day and throughout those programs.

**CHAIR**—But do you do a New England and north-west mid-weeks?

**Mr RASMUSSEN**—It is state wide, from the drive-time program.

**CHAIR**—The question I was asking was: is it a possibility that, if not every night of the week, perhaps on Wednesday and Saturday nights, you could broadcast local results?

**Mr RASMUSSEN**—That would probably be something you would need to ask at the official hearings.

**CHAIR**—Okay. I do not want to compromise you in any way. We will put that question to them. I would like to get a feel for how many of you around this table would like to see the ABC return to roughly what it was before or something similar?

**Mr BURKE**—Can I ask if there is an alternative?

**CHAIR**—I will ask you some other questions too. Who would like to see that as their first option? Six. How many would like to see some mechanism whereby 4TAB and 2KY could be spread more evenly into the network? All of you. So that would be your first option, the ABC would be your second.

**Mr SPLETTER**—The ABC used to do a fabulous job on Saturday afternoons and public holidays. But the 4TAB equivalent, 2KY, does it every day of the week. As Mr Burke stated previously, we have got 140 meetings in this association this year, roughly 70 each way—TAB and non-TAB. About four or five years ago, there would have been 40-odd TAB and 140 non-TAB. We have lost a lot of meetings in this area and they have all been non-TAB meetings. We in the country now have a greater need, or at least as large a need, to hear mid-week racing. Tamworth race next Wednesday. It is a big meeting in the area and we feel we should be entitled to hear that meeting. Muswellbrook might race next Friday. Scone, Gunnedah, would race the Tuesday or the Thursday after that. We have got a lot of mid-week racing now and we need to hear those races.

**Mr HOLLIS**—I own a greyhound which I race at Dapto. Why should I not be able to listen to that? I like races, but why can't I listen to my greyhound racing?

**Mr SPLETTER**—That is another advantage of 2KY.

**CHAIR**—You can get the trots as well.

**Mr St VINCENT**—You get everything.

**CHAIR**—And the odd camel race too. What would you say to the proposition of the ABC charter being altered, not dramatically, but to take cognisance of the commercialisation of a lot of things that are happening and allow the ABC to do cooperative ventures with people like the TAB to provide a service?

**Mr MUNRO**—I would prefer the ABC to do that if they could. I just assumed that it would not be possible.

**CHAIR**—I am just asking the question: if the charter was to recognise special circumstances like this, what would your reaction to that be? A lot of people have a very strong view that the ABC should never let any form of commercialism into that charter. A

lot of ABC supporters, not just racing people, have a very strong view on that. I recognise and respect that. But there is also another school of thought that says they should be able to sponsor opera, ballet, things like that, on television and do cooperative ventures in sport and so on. Indeed, a bit of that goes on unofficially.

For example, over the weekends, if there is a news story out in the bush, you do not get Seven, Nine, Ten and the ABC sending a cameraman out. You might get one or two of the cameramen going out and they will share the film. That is why when you watch the news at night you might see exactly the same thing. It might not be the same story, and there will be a different voice-over, but it will be exactly the same shots. We recognise that as being sensible and practical, don't we? The question I am asking is: what would your reaction be if the ABC's charter accepted, in respect to something like this, that there was a commercial reality there and that the ABC should be allowed to do certain limited cooperative ventures? What is your view of that?

**Mr MUNRO**—That would be okay because then there would be no ads, would there?

**CHAIR**—The best of both worlds.

**Mr SINCLAIR**—I am opposed to commercialism creeping in on the ABC. I want it to be independent and I want it to service the communities. That is the view I have. If it starts to take on commercial things, then we will not be getting independent comment. Look what has happened to commercial radio?

**CHAIR**—Yes—talk-back radio.

**Mr SINCLAIR**—Clearly, people are paid to say certain things. I oppose that strongly. I think the ABC should remain independent. If they can borrow some of the programs, or in some way have some reciprocal rights, I do not have any objection to that. But, as far as I am concerned, we have got to preserve that independence with a lot of zeal.

**Mr St VINCENT**—My belief—and this is on the racing side of things again, being selfish as I am—is that it would not give us the service we require constantly, seven days a week. Therefore, I would not be for it.

**CHAIR**—Are there any other areas we have not explored? I do not want to keep going if we have talked ourselves out, but if you want to explore some other angles I would like to hear them.

**Mr CLIFT**—There is one thing that must be kept in view when you sit around in Sydney at some of these meetings and listen to the STC. I was down at the Newcastle Cup on Thursday and there just happened to be a couple of provincial executives at the same lunch I was at. I think we must be very mindful that we can give the best service we can to get the maximum revenue into the TAB, and the taxes go to the government out of that, because the general opinion of city and provincial racing is that they are subsidising the social aspect of Saturday racing in the country.

They are doing their best to eliminate the percentage that they are putting in to subsidise those race meetings. If anything happens so that the revenue drops down and they cannot get their present share out of it, they are going to hammer away and say, 'Listen here, we are not going to give any more so that the Country Racing Council can subsidise Saturday racing because they are bringing no money into the industry from a tax point of view. Therefore, we are not going to be in it. We just want to see TAB racing because that is where the money is coming from.' That will be the greatest disadvantage country New South Wales and country Queensland will ever see, because the social aspect will be completely gone out of racing in the country. The minute that happens, it will probably be the death knell.

You can see it is happening in the league. The big money is dragging the good league players away to the city. They are trying to do away with these Saturday meetings in places like Barraba and Bingara, and they are trying to get you to race on Sunday. Even in Tamworth, they say, 'You shouldn't be racing on Saturday. You should swap your Saturdays for Sundays so it becomes a TAB meeting.' A lot of people do not want to go to the races on Sunday. They want to go on Saturday and do the garden with their family. We are getting away from family life. I think this is one of the big points we have to look at. We have to keep that family life going. I know when my family was growing up—I have nine children—we dragged the whole damn lot of them to the races every Saturday.

**CHAIR**—I was just going to comment that it is great that we have got your views on the record.

**Mr MUNRO**—There is one point that worries me. When the ABC did their survey, the chairman of 2KY was quoted in the press as saying that New South Wales was adequately covered by 2KY. He seems to think that no-one lives outside a town boundary. Whether he was misquoted—

**Mr HOLLIS**—We have the map here of the covering area.

**Mr MUNRO**—But he was quoted as saying that New South Wales was adequately covered by 2KY.

**CHAIR**—The coverage maps I have seen are pretty basic. All they show are spots with circles around them. I will send this map around so that you can have a look at it.

**Mr St VINCENT**—Are you actually aware of the areas that are covered by 2KY?

**CHAIR**—No, I am not. We tried to get that, didn't we? That is it—the map. That is very inadequate. If you ask for a Telstra map of mobile coverage, they will give you dark and light shades from North Queensland right down to Victoria. You will be able to see exactly where you can get mobile coverage.

**Mr St VINCENT**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I think that 4TAB, 2KY and the Victorian people should be required to have a coverage map. The ABC has coverage maps, which are quite accurate ones.

**Mr St VINCENT**—The bottom line is that you would have to be with me for only a couple of days and you would work out where you could get the radio reception and not. As I stated earlier, from here to Queensland and from here to Sydney along the main highways and west it is pathetic. The bottom line is that it is pathetic. That is why I did ask you if you had spoken to 2KY.

**CHAIR**—No, but we are going to. I suppose I should not be anticipating them, but let me put it this way: if they follow what Queensland have said, they will go up to 50 or 60 stations and then they will stop.

**Mr St VINCENT**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—If that happens, a lot of the state will not be covered. The question I posed to them in Brisbane was: would it help if there was sufficient spectrum available to allow four or five regional stations in each state? As I said to you earlier, 4TAB is not real fussed on that because they said they are very expensive stations to run. But that certainly would cover all the western parts of those three states.

The other option would be, if the ABC's charter is altered, that there might be some way of broadcasting cooperatively. I do not know in what form. I suppose that is why one of my colleagues in Canberra asked, 'Why aren't we following the BBC system by giving country people the PNN broadcast and then using Saturdays, holiday Mondays and perhaps Wednesday afternoons, for sport?' That is an option, I suppose. That is something we will explore with the ABC in the course of the inquiry. That might be just pie in the sky stuff, but on the other hand it may be something that is worth looking at. Any other questions or comments?

**Mr ROBERTSON-CUNINGHAME**—This whole discussion depends on what we are after, whether we are after just broadcasting races on Saturdays and public holidays or seven day a week broadcasting. There is no doubt that the absolute would be the seven day a week broadcasting. If we cannot achieve that everywhere then we have got to take second best.

You spoke about a matter I was going to raise, cooperative broadcasting. I would not have used that word but often you see on television, even on the ABC, a notice saying, 'By courtesy of Channel 9', or, 'By courtesy of Channel 7.' I cannot see why the ABC, especially on the weekends, could not have race broadcasting from the jump out of the barrier to the winning post, and the results, by courtesy of 2KY. That is what I understood you were meaning by cooperative broadcasting. That is all I have to say, Mr Chairman.

**CHAIR**—Mr Hollis has said that he wonders whether we have, over the years, enforced the community service obligations sufficiently strongly. Is there a case for the ABC's budget to be segmented so that the regional network must have a certain amount spent on it, and in spending that amount certain services must be provided within it? Is that an option, the segmenting of the budget? They have RN, FM, ABC Regional Radio, Capital City Radio, JJJ and so on, and they all take a share of the ABC's budget. Would Mr Hollis' ambition be better achieved by the ABC being required to delineate, as part of its obligations, certain amounts to certain forms of activity?

We are calling for the current program details. About three per cent listen to FM, three per cent listen to RN? Mr Rasmussen, have you got those figures handy?

**Mr RASMUSSEN**—No, we have not got those figures with us.

**Mr SINCLAIR**—There is something about what you have just been saying that I get a little bit concerned about, and that is the loss of the regional influence in the ABC. Every afternoon now it is your local ABC, but it is coming from Sydney and it is the same local ABC in all the other regions. I would like to see a greater emphasis on regional broadcasting and more local information.

**CHAIR**—Be that sport or otherwise?

**Mr SINCLAIR**—That's right, and sport in particular. As far as racing is concerned, I think it would be sensible. The great draw back towards the capital cities is happening in radio. We should turn that around.

**CHAIR**—Are there any other comments? I think we have given it a pretty good shake. We have talked ourselves out. I suppose that is the best sign of a round table as we have canvassed all the issues. This has been very helpful to us and we will need more of these. We will try to get back to Longreach because we will get a similar reaction to what we have received from you. It will probably have the advantage of being a bit further west and a bit more remote.

I would like to thank the diversity of people here today, including your district racing associations as well as the various local ones. We are grappling with a very difficult topic. There are no easy answers to this. We will progress with this over the next few months and hopefully come up with some recommendations and options for the parliament, the government and minister that can be implemented to improve the quality of life for people in regional and rural areas.

Thank you for coming today. Thank you, Mr Spletter, for your personal organisation on behalf of the committee. We appreciate that immensely. Thank you to the Barraba Shire Council for the use of its premises. Thank you to the media for your cooperation and anticipated.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr St Clair**):

That this committee authorises the broadcasting of this public hearing and the publication of evidence given before it this day.

**Committee adjourned at 12.22 p.m.**

