



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS,
TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

**Reference: Impact of the decision by ABC Radio to discontinue its
radio racing service**

FRIDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 1999

PARRAMATTA

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

Friday, 24 September 1999

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

Members in attendance: Mr Gibbons, Mr Hollis, Mr Mossfield and Mr Neville

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.

WITNESSES

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Committee met at 1.10 p.m.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts and its inquiry into the impact of the decision of the ABC Radio 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 Radio's racing service was highly valued by many racing enthusiasts in regional Australia. A number of submissions describe no longer being able to access radio broadcasts at all. Others refer to limitations of alternative services. Others describe efforts being made to fill gaps in services and proposed measures that may assist them in this process.

In conducting this inquiry into radio racing services, the committee is interested in assessing the extent of the gaps in access to both radio race broadcasts and alternative sources of racing information; the effectiveness of alternative sources of radio information in allowing radio enthusiasts in regional and rural parts of Australia to follow their interest in the sport; and, finally, the extent of the impact of the discontinuation that the ABC's race broadcasters had on the industry at large.

The committee is looking at the future and is focusing on finding ways of providing an appropriate form of race broadcasting to regional Australia. We are, therefore, particularly interested in teasing out some of the difficulties those attempting to fill the gaps in coverage may be having in exploring ways of filling those gaps.

[1.12 p.m.]

CARTER, Mr Maxwell Stephen, Chief Engineer, 2KY Broadcasters Pty Ltd, NSW Race Narrowcasts Pty Ltd

UNSWORTH, Mr Barrie John, General Manager, 2KY Broadcasters Pty Ltd, NSW Race Narrowcasts Pty Ltd

CHAIR—On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome the participants and the members of the public who are here today. 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 to assist us with our inquiry this day.

I welcome to the table the executives of 2KY, Mr Barry Unsworth and Mr Max Carter. I should introduce my colleagues: on my right, Mr Frank Mossfield, who is well known to you as a Sydney member of parliament; Mr Steve Gibbons, the deputy chairman of the committee, from Bendigo in Victoria; Ms Jan Connaughton, the committee secretary for this inquiry; and, on my left, Mr Colin Hollis, a south coast New South Wales member of parliament. The committee is a very well balanced one, with four Liberal, four Labor and two National members. It is also geographically well represented, with four members from Queensland, four members from New South Wales and two members from Victoria.

Before we start, I have to caution the witnesses. I have to advise you that the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath but that committee hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. Any false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. Mr Unsworth, would you like to make an opening statement, and then we will move to questions.

Mr Unsworth—Mr Chairman, could I provide you with a different version of the document that you would have before you. This was the original copy of our submission to the inquiry.

CHAIR—This is the original, is it?

Mr Unsworth—Well—

CHAIR—Has it been amended in any way?

Mr Unsworth—No. That is a reproduction of the original which you would have. But, for the purpose of my statement, I thought I would draw your attention to some aspects of it. It is easier if you can see my version than the one that you have reproduced.

What I have sought to do in the introduction is set out the history of 2KY Broadcasters Pty Ltd. We are a commercial broadcaster. We have been in operation in this city since 1925. We are the oldest broadcasting station with single ownership in Australia. We have developed in recent years an expertise in broadcasting the three codes of racing: thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing. We have been doing this since probably 1949 when we started to cover harness racing, and we have been covering provincial thoroughbred racing and greyhound racing.

As my colleague Ian Craig, the race broadcaster who was with us earlier today, pointed out, we have been broadcasting Saturday thoroughbred racing since 1974 and, as I said earlier, harness racing since 1949. So we have an extensive background in the provision of a service, and we have employed highly qualified employees to assist us in the provision of that service, whether they be race commentators at the course, coordinators here in the studios or people that we use to provide information for our audience who may be intending to invest in the TAB or through the TAB on the results of the races that we cover.

I pointed out that in 1983 we entered into a contract with what was then the New South Wales Totalisator Agency Board. That contract required us to provide a coverage of every race meeting for which they provided betting opportunities to the people of this state. When we commenced, we were covering something like 1,200 race meetings. I think I mentioned a figure of 3,500 in 1998. I have seen the TAB submission, and we are doing even more. I think there are well over 4,000 race events now. So there has been a growth in our coverage of racing, and that is commensurate with the growth in investment in the New South Wales TAB by the citizens of this state who are the clients of the TAB.

What we are seeking to do is to provide a service to racing enthusiasts in the state and, more particularly, a service to those who are prepared to invest in the result of racing in this

country but through the New South Wales TAB. I say 'in this country' because what we are providing is a comprehensive national racing service. If the New South Wales TAB, as it is doing today, provides an opportunity to bet on Esk, which I think is in Queensland, on Bairnsdale, in Victoria and here at the Hawkesbury race track in Sydney, we have to provide the coverage. My colleague Max Carter, the chief engineer, will explain to you the technical aspects of how we do that. But, for the purpose of our audience, if they listen to our broadcast, they will hear races that are taking place right around Australia in real-time. When the race is held, they are hearing the race.

Because we have this association with the Totalisator Agency Board, we are providing prior to races information relating to the likely investment result on the race. We call it the pre-race dividend. That fluctuates because we are dealing with a parimutuel pool arrangement. The pre-race investment dividend can fluctuate wildly, depending on the amount of money invested on a particular starter in a race. We are providing that update so that our audience can decide. If they choose to invest on a particular runner in a race, they will hear the result of the race. After the race is over, they will find out what the payout is on the winning entrants in that race.

In addition to providing that service, we also employ people who could be best described as 'turf consultants' or 'form analysts' who have analysed the likely result of any particular race. They might be euphemistically called 'tipsters', but we put them on a higher plane than that. 'Tipsters' and 'race course urgers' are in one category, but we actually pay these people to provide the best possible analysis of the likely result of the race. We broadcast that information in our programming, which can occur at any time. For example, on Saturdays our racing program starts at 7 a.m. running right up to the first race time. In the winter time that might be as early as 11.40. In the summer time, it could be as late as 1.20. So we are providing a lot of pre-race information. We have staff here who conduct interviews with people in the racing industry both within this state and interstate so that we can bring to our audience information that will enable them to make considered investments, whether the investment be on a New South Wales race, a Victorian race or a Western Australian race.

We devote a great deal of time to the preparation of those pre-race programs. When the racing commences, we have highly qualified race broadcasters, one of whom you have had the opportunity to meet today, Ian Craig. We believe he is currently Australia's premier thoroughbred race caller. He has been employed by 2KY for 31 years. Over that period, he has been calling initially harness racing and now thoroughbred racing for many years. His job is to go to the main metropolitan meetings and broadcast races. He is also involved in the programs prior to the races. But, once racing starts, he is at the track providing detailed commentary and assisting our race coordinators with information relating to what is likely to win the next race, what won the last race and how much you won if you had made an investment on one of those lucky winners. So that is his task.

We have people similarly employed with harness racing and greyhound racing. In addition to those people, we engage quite a large number of other race callers who work mainly in country districts. 2KY would employ on a full-time basis something like six people who would regularly call races. We have other people on staff who perform other functions who can call races as required, but it is a very skilled activity. Around country New South Wales, we have people who we pay on a casual basis to call races, whether they

be in Port Macquarie, Grafton or Orange. We have regular race callers, and whenever they call a race for us—in most cases, it will happen two or three times a month—they are paid by 2KY.

I make this point because the preparation of program and the presentation of program is a very costly exercise. It costs us a lot of money to produce and present the programs. Whilst we receive funding from the New South Wales TAB, which is now privatised and known as TAB Ltd, we do not receive sufficient funds from them to cover all our costs. Being a commercial broadcaster, the result is that we have to broadcast advertising relating to commercial clients' products, and that is interspersed through the program.

In terms of program delivery, we initially commenced as an AM licence broadcaster in the Sydney radio area. That area really covers the Sydney basin, although with what is termed 'fortuitous reception' it can be heard in the Central Coast of New South Wales, the southern highlands and in the Illawarra region. But we are licensed for the Sydney basin.

The Broadcasting Services Act 1992 presented an opportunity for us to extend the coverage of our race broadcasting. In the Broadcasting Services Act, there was a definition of broadcasting called 'narrowcast broadcasting'. I saw the opportunity in narrowcast broadcasting to seek an opinion from the Australian Broadcasting Authority to determine whether race broadcasting was narrowcast broadcasting. We obtained the first opinion to that effect, as there is a provision in the Broadcasting Services Act for people to apply to secure an opinion as to the program content of their intended program to determine whether it meets the criteria for narrowcasting.

This is very important because there have been a number of people who have sought to put a quasicommercial broadcast to air on a narrowcast licence. This is reacted against by existing commercial broadcasters who have paid a lot of money for their commercial licences. Apart from being a breach of the act, it derogates the principles under which narrowcast broadcasting was established.

The narrowcast concept in the Broadcasting Services Act was introduced to provide diversity of program. The thrust of the act was to try to provide the audience with a wide range of programming. Rather than everybody having to listen to pop music or talk radio, they wanted a whole range of program content. That was why narrowcasting was developed. If you look at the definition of 'narrowcasting' in the act, you will see that a narrowcast broadcast is designed to appeal to people in a small or a regional location. So it is 'narrow' by location or 'narrow' by interest. We felt that, because we did not generate a large audience response in Sydney for our broadcasts, we must qualify for narrowcast broadcasting. The Australian Broadcasting Authority agreed with us, and they issued us with the opinion.

This is an important question, because what I will be arguing before you subsequently is that there should be some special provisions made for race broadcasters within the framework of the definition of 'narrowcasting'. We have to make sure that those people who claim they are narrowcasters are genuine narrowcasters. Our program meets that criteria as determined by the Australian Broadcasting Authority in 1993. As a result, we were able to subsequently apply for narrowcast broadcast licences as and when they became available.

The first two licences that we were able to obtain, the licences in Newcastle and Wollongong, had become available as a result of the conversion of the previously existing commercial broadcasters on those frequencies. Mr Hollis would be familiar with the frequency 1314 in Wollongong, which was previously radio station 2WL. When 2WL secured a commercial FM licence, they had to surrender their AM licence. Nobody was broadcasting on that licence. The same thing happened in Newcastle. Commercial broadcaster 2NX had to vacate the AM frequency to secure an FM frequency.

I approached the Australian Broadcasting Authority to seek to have access to those frequencies. One of the first decisions that the new authority made in early 1993 was to give us access to those frequencies. We leased the existing AM broadcast sites, and we commenced our programming. Initially, we were sending program from Sydney to Newcastle over Telecom landlines, and we were rebroadcasting our program in those two cities. That was very well received by the racing enthusiasts in those cities, and we have continued since.

The problem we have is that up until now the Australian Broadcasting Authority has renewed our licence on an annual basis, but we do not have secure tenure to the licence. In the meantime, we have bought the sites off the previous owners, paying hundreds of thousands of dollars for both AM sites—the 2WL site at Windang and the Newcastle 2NX site at Sandgate. We purchased the AM sites, but we still do not have secure tenure or access to that licence.

The Broadcasting Authority in its most recent planning has determined that both of those previously commercial frequencies will now be narrowcast frequencies, but it has not yet put them up to the market for allocation under what it terms the ‘price based allocation system’. We will have to bid against everybody else who may register for this process to secure the licence that we have been broadcasting on for the last six years in respect of a broadcasting site that we currently own. When I say ‘we’ I mean TAB Ltd, whom we act for as an agent. That is the invidious position that we find ourselves in.

Beyond Newcastle and Wollongong, we have also taken the opportunity through the planning procedures of the Australian Broadcasting Authority to obtain other narrowcast licences. The first of those was in Broken Hill. It was one of the first narrowcast licences issued by the Australian Broadcasting Authority. It was done under its initial regime of holding public meetings to secure community opinion. The community opinion in Broken Hill was that there should be race broadcast coverage, and the ABA took note of that. It determined a narrowcast frequency. We registered and bid for it, and we were fortunate to receive that frequency at the price determined as the reserve price. We did not have to bid at an auction.

The next round of auctions or price based allocations that occurred involved a frequency at Bathurst. We were forced to bid to \$135,000 to obtain a frequency in Bathurst. Bathurst is not a large provincial centre, and we thought we had paid a very large sum to secure that licence. Seven other licences were allocated at that auction, and we paid amounts ranging from \$35,000 down to the reserve price of \$4,000 for licences in other centres, such as Orange, Lithgow, Mudgee, Dubbo, Cobar, Parkes and Condobolin. So we secured all those other licences for a lesser amount than we paid for the Bathurst licence.

The problem we confronted in Bathurst was that the local commercial broadcast operator bid against us. He was not satisfied with having the two commercial licences—the two low-power narrowcast licences—he wanted the high-power narrowcast licence as well. As a result, we were forced into a bidding duel. We were prepared to go to \$135,000, and we secured the licence. Having done that, we then had to site a transmitter to provide the service.

In the case of Bathurst, we had to go out and commence a greenfields site. It was a greenfields site because it was in the middle of a state forest. We had to lease space from the forestry commission and have an area of the forest cleared. We erected a mast. If you look at the last page in the document that I have given you—this is why I am concentrating on Bathurst—you will see that we installed a transmitting station. If you look at the equipment in the photograph, you will see that we have a very high transmitting mast with an antenna at the top of the mast. At the base of the mast we have a shed in which the transmitter is located and associated equipment. We have a satellite reception disk, and it looks unusual because in that particular area of New South Wales we experienced a lot of snow. So that is a satellite reception disk with a cover over it to enable the snow to be deflected when it falls. The chief engineer and I have been up there when there was a lot of snow present at the transmitter site. That transmitter site cost us about \$300,000 to install. It is not typical of all of the installations, but it gives you an indication of how much we have had to pay.

Another location that we secured a licence at was Orange. Fortunately, there we were able to site our transmitter in the television transmitter building, which also houses the commercial broadcasters. We were able to use the existing television tower, and we were able to even use the antenna that the other commercial radio broadcasters used. It cost us less money to install at Orange, because we were able to co-site, than it cost us to install at Bathurst, where we had to build from the ground up.

I make that point because it has cost 2KY, on behalf of New South Wales Tab Ltd, a lot of money to install equipment to broadcast the service on narrowcast licences that we have been granted for a period of five years. In my submission I make the point that we are concerned about the tenure of our licence. We are concerned that we have spent a lot of money to obtain the licences—in some cases as high as \$135,000 per licence. Having obtained the licence, we invest a lot of money in respect of the installation of the transmission equipment. Yet we have that licence for only five years. At the end of that period, we have to go through the whole process again and take our chances against anybody else who might like to bid against us for the licence that we hold. We know full well that we have made a major investment in that licence and, if they bid against us, they can hold us to ransom. If they beat us at auction, they can then either lease the licence back to us or force us to pay more than they paid at auction.

I make that point because I have seen this happen in respect of Queensland licences. I know the committee would be aware of the situation in Yeppoon. The Queensland TAB had an installation and a broadcast in place there, yet at the auction, because they were not prepared to pay more than \$20,000—their upper limit was \$20,000—another person came and paid I think \$30,000 and took the licence off them. That situation in Yeppoon happened recently, and it was an instance where Queensland TAB was broadcasting. But I was in

attendance at a recent auction where Queensland TAB sought to obtain a licence in Cairns. They were bidding against the Grundy organisation, which is not without considerable resources. They went to \$100,000 in the auction. At the auction, the Grundy organisation outbid them and went to \$110,000. Therefore, the Queensland TAB were denied the opportunity to commence broadcasts from that licence.

I understand since then that the Grundy organisation has agreed to lease back the frequency to the Queensland TAB to enable them to commence broadcasts in Cairns. But those examples I have given you indicate the tenuous nature of our licences. I think one of the most positive things that could come out of the committee's hearing would be to address the question of the allocation of race broadcast licences and the way in which they should be held.

My colleagues in Queensland tell me that they put similar advice before you, and have indicated that we are prepared to pay a reasonable annual licence fee to hold the licence. As a commercial broadcaster, we pay a licence fee based on our commercial revenues. That is not inconsiderable. In our case, we pay in excess of \$100,000 to the Australian Broadcasting Authority to hold our commercial licence. We would not want to pay anything like that to the Australian Broadcasting Authority to hold a narrowcast licence, but we would be prepared to do that if the licence could be issued on the same basis as a commercial licence.

Commercial licences are issued in perpetuity, in effect, provided that the licensee is of proper standing; that the licensee respects the basis of the licence; and that the licensee observes the program content nature of narrowcast broadcasting. That is the approach that my colleagues in Queensland have put forward. We believe the licence should only be used as a narrowcast licence, respecting the program requirements of narrowcasting or, in our case, race broadcasting or general sports programs. We do not see this as confined just to thoroughbred racing, harness racing or greyhound racing. The New South Wales TAB provides betting opportunities on 19 different sporting activities ranging from Australian rules, rugby union, golf, motor racing, English soccer and women's netball. There are a number of betting opportunities that are made available, and we would want to cover all of those sports for the purpose of providing information to potential investors on the New South Wales TAB for that purpose.

I would make the point—and I am delighted to see Mr Charley in attendance—that in the annual report of the Sydney Turf Club, a copy of which I have here and will provide you with, the chairman of that club, Mr Graeme Pash, made a very significant point. He said that TAB revenue accounts for over 60 per cent of that club's income.

The racing industry in this country cannot exist now unless it receives revenues from the various state totalisator agency organisations, whether they are still boards or have become private companies as is the case in Victoria and New South Wales and soon to be in Queensland. To generate revenue for the TABs which will then be passed on to the various codes of racing in the industry, it is important that everything be done to facilitate the provision of information, whether it be pre-race information, race descriptions or post-race information relating to investments. I think that point must be accepted.

Racing is Australia's fourth largest industry. In this state it employs 50,000 people. It has a great multiplier effect right throughout rural communities, whether they are involved in breeding, training, spelling, the provision of food, or whether racing activities are taking place in the district. Racing is a great employment generator right across the country. We should be doing everything we can to support the racing industry and to support those organisations, particularly broadcasting organisations, involved in the industry.

I will not go through the committee's terms of reference, but I would point out that, from pages 3 through to 5, I have set out our views in respect of them. The situation in New South Wales is simply this: we are in the process of rolling out a network of broadcast transmitters which will provide access to race broadcasting for all of the citizens of this state. The pace at which we are rolling out the transmission network is not determined by us; it is determined by the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

I have explained to you how, from very early beginnings in Newcastle and Wollongong, we then set up a network of low-power broadcasters across the state; we were transmitting from TAB agencies through low-power transmitters of only one watt to cover people in the towns. We are now going through the second stage. I have spent some time telling you about Bathurst, Orange and the central west. We have recently received 13 licences in the northern part of the state which will enable us to provide program to people in the New England region, in the north coast, the mid-north coast and the Hunter Valley; we are in the process of those installations. My colleague the chief engineer might be able to tell us that they will be on by the Melbourne Cup.

Mr Carter—Yes.

Mr Unsworth—That is our aim. We are trying to get this program out as quickly as we can. We have made the point in our submission that we believe we have moved beyond the provision of ABC broadcasts on a Saturday. We have a program in place which will provide race broadcasting seven days a week, not one day a week. It will provide pre-race information and post-race information. It will cover all codes, not just thoroughbred racing but harness racing and greyhound racing. Our colleagues in each of the states do the same thing, whether they are in Victoria, Queensland or any of the other states. We join together as an association of Australian race broadcasters, and we will be meeting next month in Perth. Our aim is to continue to improve the product that we deliver to the audience.

I would just make the point that we can only move at the pace determined by the Australian Broadcasting Authority. We are moving at that pace. We would like to see the job finished. With the way things are going, we think it will be finished by about 2001 in New South Wales. But that will be their decision, not ours. But a far more important aspect of this committee's inquiry from our perspective is the question of tenure of licences and the way in which those licences are reallocated to the people who currently hold them.

CHAIR—You will see from the terms of reference that we have been asked to advise the parliament and, in turn, the government and the minister on how we restore to regional and rural people a radio racing service. I think your point is well made; I did not know that racing was the fourth largest industry in the country. I can understand that its tentacles move

out into all sorts of fields—as you say, the bloodstock industry, happenings in the stockfeed industry, veterinary supplies, trainers, jockeys, strappers, country organisations and the like.

It is an important part of community life. We have had witnesses who have told us that, when the satellite link goes down for television, because there is no radio service in some areas, the whole local race meeting collapses; there is no way of getting the fluctuations or the results of other races, and so on, so the race meeting collapses. It may not be a big deal in capital cities if a race meeting goes down once in a while; but, if it is your one and only social event of that type for the year in your shire or town, it is a significant part of community life.

The point also has been made that people have been told that they can pick this information up on the Internet or satellite or pay television. Evidence has been given that a person cannot do that if they are in the four-wheel drive pulling a cow out of a bog or a sheep out of a bore drain; and that, if someone is on the tractor, the cane harvester or the header, a radio is a very user friendly item.

Today, coming to you as one of the key players, we need to know what options you can offer. You have given a very good outline of where you have come from and where you are going, and no doubt we will take on board in the inquiry your comments about the rollout of licences.

There is one area which we have not covered. We recognise what a narrowcast licence is—and you do not have this problem in Newcastle, the south coast or the Sydney basin because you have the three AM transmitters—but how could, let us say, your service be improved to cover more than just a five-kilometre radius of a town and get out into the properties?

I would just make one final point before you answer. One of the things the ABC service had going for it was that, once you got outside the capital cities, its regional service pretty well covered 95 per cent of populated regional Australia—these are the ABC regional stations. No-one would argue that the service that was being provided by the ABC was anything like the one you are providing. Nevertheless, it did get in everywhere; that was its one strong feature. So the question we need to ask you is: if you were providing the service, what options could you give us to get us into those areas, and not just within a five-kilometre radius of a town?

Mr Unsworth—I thought I had made it pretty clear that the five-kilometre radius was stage 1, the low-power open narrowcast licences using a one-watt transmitter. Depending on where we are, in some places it goes more than five kilometres. But in stage 2—and we currently have in excess of 20 licences—our service is as extensive as the ABC's. I do not know whether you have had any complaints from the central west, but I doubt very much whether you would have because we have a transmitter sitting on top of Mt Canobolas which will reach into every nook and cranny for a 120-kilometre radius around Mt Canobolas.

CHAIR—That is an FM licence?

Mr Unsworth—It is an FM licence. It is a high-power licence. It is 10 kilowatts—10,000 watts. We have another one at Bathurst of 10,000 watts. In fact, you can hear Bathurst in Orange, Orange in Bathurst and, if you are driving between Bathurst and Lithgow, you can hear Lithgow, Bathurst and Orange. So our service is better than the ABC's in the area where we have been given licences. So it is not true to say that we can only be heard within a five-kilometre radius of the town.

CHAIR—That is the sort of evidence we are getting.

Mr Unsworth—The evidence you have been getting is from people who live in areas where we have not yet been allocated a licence or, if we have been allocated a licence, we have not yet got it on. Mr Charley lives in Port Macquarie; I have been to his property in Port Macquarie. When we get our transmitter up and running, he will be getting a better service than most people.

The problem we have had is that Mt Cairncross, where we want to site the transmitter, is currently controlled by the New South Wales Department of Lands, and some public servants in the New South Wales Department of Lands did not think that we should be transmitting from up there. Fortunately, that decision has been overruled and we will be getting access to land up there. We will be joining together with the London *Daily Mail* group, which is Australia's largest holder of rural broadcast licences. That group, together with us, will co-site its new commercial licence for Port Macquarie and our narrowcast licence for Port Macquarie.

So it is not fair and it is a very short-sighted attitude to say, 'I can't hear the radio five kilometres out of the centre of Port Macquarie,' without being aware of the fact that we obtained a licence earlier this year and we are in the process of installing the transmission equipment. That is the case for all of northern and western New South Wales; we either have licences currently installed or we have licences that we are in the process of installing. What we have not got are licences in southern New South Wales. We know that the Australian Broadcasting Authority has recently issued reports suggesting that there will be narrowcast licences in Nowra, Bega, Eden, Cooma, Queanbeyan, Yass and Goulburn. I wish it would hurry up and have the auction so that I can go along and bid for the licences. I keep asking the ABA when the auction will be—but it will be in their time, not our time. So the process is rolling out.

I just want to deal with the point of the fellow riding around on a tractor who wants to listen to the races. I do not know whether he has a mobile phone and he is betting on the races on his telephone account. But I do not think that we are in business to be worrying about people who are riding around on tractors who might occasionally want to listen to the races. We are in business to generate revenue for the TAB to pass on to the racing industry. We will do that by providing a service to the overwhelming majority of people. We cannot provide a service at the lowest common denominator factor.

But I would say this: if someone is living in the most remote part of Australia, we can provide a service for him, provided that he is prepared to help himself. Mr Chairman, earlier today we showed you a satellite up-link on the roof of our building here in Parramatta. That up-link goes to the PAS2 PanAmSat satellite, and the footprint for that satellite covers all of

Australia and New Zealand. For a reasonable expenditure of, say, \$5,000, a person can install a satellite dish. We will make available a decoder as part of the package, and switch them on from our computer. They then will be able to listen to the program wherever they are.

CHAIR—Assuming that a shire council or a community organisation in a remote area were prepared to access the signal—

Mr Unsworth—We would make it available. Our chief engineer would have to provide a decoder and switch the decoder on so that it could get access to the program. But we would do that. The shire council's problem would be that it would have to have a licence to retransmit the program. That licence it would have to obtain from the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

CHAIR—If our recommendation to the parliament were that there should be a special category of licence either for race broadcasting or sports broadcasting in general, and that in remote areas there be some subsidiary licence that could be run by a council or a community organisation, would you be supportive of that?

Mr Unsworth—We would be supportive of that and we would be delighted to make available our program. Our program is a free-to-air program. If somebody wanted to access it in another state and rebroadcast it, the only problem we would have would be in terms of program content. But we accept responsibility for program content here, and I would not think there would be any difficulty at the other end.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Our first term of reference is the extent and value placed on the coverage of ABC Radio racing service. How would you compare 2KY's current racing service compared with the service that the ABC previously provided?

Mr Unsworth—I do not think the ABC ever tried to provide the same sort of service that we are providing. The Saturday service was incorporated in a general sporting program, and it endeavoured to cover three-state racing. Because it was coordinated in Queensland, it only had access to the Queensland TAB pool; therefore, the dividends that were broadcast, when they were broadcast, only related to Queensland dividends. Our program is dedicated to racing. It covers every event that occurs, seven days a week and, for the benefit of New South Wales listeners, the dividends broadcast are those that are available on the New South Wales TAB pool. So I think, in that sense, we have a more comprehensive program content.

The only aspect with ABC's broadcasting was that, because of its transmitter network, it was available more widely at the time it was discontinued than ours was which was still in the process of being rolled out. But I think you must bear this in mind: our research indicates that, on a Saturday, about 15 per cent of the population want to listen to our programs. That means that the other 85 per cent do not. Of the other 85 per cent in our market, the Sydney market, they have about 35 radio stations to listen to. If you are living in an area that is only served by the ABC and you have nothing else to listen to and you are one of the 85 per cent that does not want to listen to the races, you have a problem. In my discussions with the ABC administration and programmers, that was the problem they recognised: we were in the process of rolling out our program, and the ABC was in a

situation where the majority of its audience did not want to hear race broadcasting—and, particularly, did not even listen to it in areas where we were providing the service.

I suppose, if anything, you could argue, ‘Well, the ABC moved out too quickly.’ But it was inevitable that, in time, we would cover all the areas that the ABC was covering in New South Wales. My colleagues interstate were seeking to do the same thing in their respective states. So I think—and I put this in the submission—that is the situation ABC vis-a-vis us.

Mr MOSSFIELD—If the licences were granted, as you have said, in perpetuity, would there be any review of those licences over a period of time?

Mr Unsworth—The only review is that which the ABA is currently conducting into 2UE. If you breach the provisions of the act, if you breach the program standards, if you breach your licence, you will be reviewed by the ABA. The potential is that you will lose your licence. That is the review, and that is the same situation that applies to our current commercial licence. It has been issued in perpetuity and we pay an annual licence fee. But we are fully aware that, if we breach the program standards, we could place that licence in jeopardy.

Mr GIBBONS—You have mentioned that one of the problems is the slowness of the ABA organisation. To what do you attribute that problem; if it were sped up, if the pace were increased, would you be able to cope with it and roll on?

Mr Unsworth—There are two questions. Firstly, the problem the ABA has is that it has been given additional tasks. It was given the task of doing the analog planning for Australian broadcasting, and it commenced that program. Then subsequently it was allocated the responsibility of planning digital television. It is now even looking at digital radio. Its resources have not been amplified to any great extent. So the ABA’s problem is that it is trying to do a job now—including the one it originally embarked upon—which represents twice as much work with the same amount of resources.

The second question is: could we handle a faster rollout of licences? We use contractors; we are not doing the job ourselves. I think the answer is yes. We have just obtained 13 licences in auctions in May. Some of the work does not involve us; it involves us getting access to sites. Some of those are sites controlled by the NTL, which took over from the National Transmission Authority; some are Telecom sites; others are other broadcasters sites.

But we are well respected in the broadcasting industry. We are able to establish relationships with the controllers of those sites, and they give us access to the sites. It means that we have to get our transmitters in their huts; we have to get access to the antennas on the masts. The worst job we ever had to do was in Bathurst where we had an antagonistic commercial broadcaster and we had to build a site from the ground up. But, in many instances, we will be given cooperation by the local broadcasters. We will get on air as quickly as we can, and we will use contractors to do the job.

Mr HOLLIS—In a nutshell, if you were in our position and you had to make a recommendation—and, basically, what people are saying to us is that they want a service

provided; they are not greatly hooked into who is going to provide the service—what sort of recommendation would you be making?

Mr Unsworth—I think I would be saying that you have undertaken an intensive investigation; that you have examined all of the information that has been put before you; that, contrary to the belief that the ABC was the only provider of race broadcasting, there are other organisations in the field that are in the process of rolling out a more satisfactory race broadcast network than was available with the ABC, and people should be patient.

To some extent, it is a little like being a Christian: we are all waiting to go to heaven. I think what should be said to these people is: punters' heaven is on the way. They will be able to access the Racing Radio program given time, and they should be patient. I keep telling Mr Charley this, that he should be patient. But he is not as patient as I would like him to be. I am looking forward to the day we get the program in Port Macquarie. I will be inviting Mr Charley to have a drink with me down at the local pub, and we will listen to Racing Radio coming in loud and clear in Port Macquarie.

Mr Chairman, I also gave you the opportunity to look into the future with digital radio. I would like to give you some more copies of our brochure which talks about digital radio. You have had the opportunity of looking at our digital transmitter. The advantage of this for the racing enthusiast is that we will not only be able to provide program material with an audio broadcast but also transmit data. The data that we will transmit is the same sort of data that is currently available on our Internet web site, and which will be of great benefit to racing enthusiasts. We hope that will commence some time in the year 2001 and beyond. When that happens, I think we will have a lot of very happy listeners. Digital radio is something that is in the future, but we are right at the forefront of this development.

CHAIR—Mr Unsworth, I would thank you for your evidence; also you, Mr Carter, although you did not get much of a chance to speak. One thing I would like from you, Mr Carter, is for you to give us a bit of an idea over a comparable footprint what would be the comparative costs of an AM and a narrowcast FM licence? Could you give us a page of information on that?

Mr Unsworth—Yes, I can do that.

CHAIR—We may need to just show that comparison somewhere down the track. We have before us the brochure on digital radio and we also have a handbill on the first commercial digital broadcast in Australia. Would one of my colleagues move that the committee accept as evidence those two items, yet to be numbered, presented for inclusion in the committee's records of exhibits to this inquiry into radio racing?

Mr GIBBONS—I so move.

CHAIR—We will allocate those a number at our next meeting. Once again, I thank you. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your hospitality and for a very thorough inspection of your excellent facilities.

Mr Unsworth—Thank you, Mr Chairman.

[2.06 p.m.]

CHARLEY, Mr Robert Lindsay, Chairman, Australian Racing Board

HARDING, Mr Andrew Charles, Executive Officer, Australian Racing Board

CHAIR—I welcome Mr Charley, the Chairman of the Australian Racing Board, and Mr Harding, the Executive Officer of the Australian Racing Board. I advise you that, although the committee does not require evidence to be given on oath, committee hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. Any false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. Mr Charley, I think the best way to proceed would be for you to give us a five- or 10-minute overview of your evidence, and then we will proceed to questions.

Mr Charley—Thank you, Mr Chairman. Thank you sincerely for the opportunity to appear before your inquiry. I think it is fair to say that we feel gratified by the fact that our persistence has, to a certain extent, resulted in this inquiry. By ‘our persistence’ I do not mean Andrew’s and mine but the persistence of the racing industry as a whole. We were being constantly bombarded by people who were concerned that the cessation of the ABC service left them with no other service. My friend Barrie asked me to be patient. It is not my patience he should be concerned about; it is the patience of all those people who have no service at all and for whom the ABC was the only show in town.

At the outset I should say that I commend Racing Radio. I particularly commend 2KY and their colleagues in the other states for the great job they have done in rolling out a service which is far, far superior to the ABC. No-one would ever doubt that the service given by 2KY, Radio Sport 927, 4TAB and their colleagues in the other states leaves the ABC service in the shade. There is no question about that. It is seven days a week, and it gives all the information that the punter requires. However, there are people—and I happen to believe that we represent them—who can get no service at all. For them, Saturday was the day when they were hoping to hear the best horses in Australia race. Because, by and large, most of the major races in Australia are run on Saturdays. They no longer have any sort of service.

I believe the approach taken by 2KY is the correct approach. I have their submission in front of me, and I endorse 98 per cent of what they have said. I certainly support, and the racing industry supports, the problems they have with narrowcast licences and the fact that they have to rebid for them. When you look at the schedule in their submission which contains the licences that they have in New South Wales, it seems absurd to me that they have to go back and re-bid to be able to provide the citizens in those towns with any consistency of service.

In other words, the fact that they have no secure tenure on those licences places a very difficult burden on them from the point of view of investing in infrastructure to be able to improve the signal, carry it further by higher powered licences and do exactly what Barrie

talked about—in my area, for instance, be able to carry 120 kilometres, or whatever the case may be, as he is doing in the west. That is what should happen, and we would support the efforts of Racing Radio in any way to provide greater security of tenure of licence—for example, the extension of a particular type of licence throughout Australia which puts them in a separate category; something like 4JJJ. We would support that entirely.

However, the one or two things that I have to cavil with them in their submission relate to the very percentage of the population who have no service at all. In their conclusions they say, ‘It is a service which is superior to that previously provided by the ABC.’ I agree entirely. I do not, however, agree that it adequately satisfies the needs of racing enthusiasts of New South Wales. It will do, given time, given what 2KY want to do, but we should facilitate that process and make it much easier for them to be able to take the signal throughout New South Wales.

CHAIR—Can I just interrupt you. I do not like to interrupt introductory remarks, but it is pertinent to what you are saying. 4TAB said to us in Queensland that they were not prepared to go beyond the existing 62 licences. So the question I ask you is not just in the context of New South Wales but more broadly across Australia, because our inquiry is to cover Australia: what would you recommend to the committee should be done to get into the nooks and crannies between the narrowcast licences in small country towns?

Mr Charley—Mr Chairman, I will confess, and Andrew will back me up, I am sure, that we do not have enough technical knowledge about radio to be able to answer that. Our submission is based on, (a), making it easier in licensing terms for Racing Radio to expand its network and, (b), requiring the ABC to broadcast races on Saturdays—only on Saturdays. We are not giving up on (b). I do not want it misunderstood; we are not giving up on that idea. That would then take into account all those people who feel disadvantaged.

CHAIR—Can I ask you another question. Some have said that, because of the great interest in the various codes of football, it would almost be impractical for the ABC to go back into racing even if it wanted to and still fulfil its other obligations to sport. It has not been said in evidence, but it has been suggested to members of the committee informally that, if the ABC’s Parliamentary News Network service were expanded across Australia in much the same way as FM, RN and Triple J have been expanded, that might create another channel where the ABC could broadcast alternative sports services on the weekends on that program.

Mr Charley—That sounds like a great idea.

CHAIR—As I said, it has not been given to us in evidence, but I would be interested to hear your view on that.

Mr Charley—I completely accept what has been put; that there is a disproportionate percentage of people who do not have an interest in racing compared to the people who do. Nonetheless, the number of people in rural areas who have an interest in racing is still very significant. In fact, if you go back through the history of our sport or industry, there was a disproportionate interest certainly in earlier generations in the rural areas in horse racing, because most people owned horses and grew up with them and wanted to support them.

Even in remote country race meetings that you go to today, it is not at all uncommon for the young fellows off the stations to all want to race a horse at the meeting on Saturday. It is their love and their entertainment. If there were technically some way that a service—even a limited service—could be provided on Saturdays, it would at least fill the gap for those people who currently feel—

CHAIR—Your preferred option (b), the extension of the 2KY service and the various TAB broadcasters—

Mr Charley—Unquestionably, we would—

CHAIR—That would be your first preference?

Mr Charley—No question about that. We would love to see the best of both worlds. Racing Radio should be able to go to wherever—

CHAIR—I am not trying to lead you, but you would like to see some mechanism where their service could be enhanced to fill those gaps. That would be your preferred option.

Mr Charley—Definitely.

CHAIR—Your second option would be if, after they had rolled out as far as they could go, there were still a substantial number of people who could not receive a broadcast, you would favour some form of limited ABC broadcasting.

Mr Charley—Yes, that sums it up perfectly, Mr Chairman. **Mr Harding**—On that point, there is a matter that Mr Charley and I have discussed, and it goes back to a submission that was made to an inquiry conducted in Victoria. Certainly in Victoria—I do not know if it is the case across Australia technically—it is currently possible with the number of bands that the ABC broadcast on to, on one band, broadcast the *Grandstand* program uninterrupted by racing and, on another band, reproduce the program that was formerly in place. That is technically possible in Victoria now.

CHAIR—I understand that the ABC have been using the PNN channel in Victoria to broadcast Australian rules, if I am not mistaken.

Mr Harding—I am sorry, Mr Chairman. I cannot confirm that.

CHAIR—Mr Charley, you were going to say something earlier.

Mr Charley—I was going to say something very similar to what Andrew was saying. Where I live in the bush—not really in the bush; it is on the coast—I am just far enough out of town not to be able to get Racing Radio on my car radio. If I switch to the AM band, I could get the ABC program. On the two FM bands, I get the same program. So I am getting the same program on three ABC themes, but I cannot get Racing Radio.

CHAIR—To be fair to Mr Unsworth's evidence, are you talking about a one-watt transmitter?

Mr Charley—Yes, I am.

CHAIR—You have to see it in the context of his evidence. They are going to a higher powered transmitter.

Mr Charley—Absolutely. I see that entirely. On behalf of all racing constituents across Australia, I hope that process can be speeded up by this inquiry, making it easier for them.

Mr MOSSFIELD—This is a national inquiry, and I think we have reasonably established that 2KY provides a fairly comprehensive service in New South Wales. You support the extension of their service so that they will cover everyone. What are your recommendations relating to other states in Australia?

Mr Charley—I will speak briefly about one or two states. Andrew is more familiar with the others. The state that has concerned me most has been Western Australia. When I say ‘concerned me’, I mean the matters that have been brought to me from its state representatives. Victoria seems to be pretty well covered, apart from some areas. Andrew is more qualified to speak about Queensland because he comes from Queensland.

Mr Harding—As Mr Unsworth has said in evidence, 4TAB has been very pro-active in rolling out its service, but there are areas there that simply do not take it. One area is the Paroo Shire Council, Cunnamulla. It has taken up the option—and again this shows the extent of interest the community has in racing—of a licence and taking the feed from 4TAB. But it is only an LPON, and it only goes to Cunnamulla itself. For Eulo and the other towns that surround Cunnamulla, there is no service whatsoever.

CHAIR—For the more remote areas where the providers cannot reasonably be expected to go bidding for licences, you would favour some form of subsidiary licence that could be controlled by the community or the shire council.

Mr Harding—Any measure that seems to be—

CHAIR—They would either take the feed from the racing services—

Mr Harding—That is currently happening in Paroo, but it only goes so far. It does not include the full shire.

CHAIR—Whether these racing services are privately owned, like 2KY, or owned by the TAB itself, given the fact that the information coming to them is largely privileged and is not readily available to anyone else on a broad scale, do you think there should be a community obligation on them? Notwithstanding that Mr Unsworth said he would be prepared to make the feed available anyhow—I am talking more broadly now across Australia—if there were to be a special licence made to these services, do you think part of that licence should be a community service obligation to provide the feed for remote areas for councils and community broadcasters?

Mr Charley—I think that sounds like a great idea.

CHAIR—When I say ‘community service obligation’, that would mean they would have no choice in providing it; they would have to provide it. In return for the fact that they got a special licence for all the bigger communities, they would have to provide the feed, not the transmission, for the smaller ones. Do you understand what I am saying?

Mr Harding—I understand, Mr Chairman. So far as I am aware, from my discussion certainly with 4TAB, that is something they are currently willing to do.

CHAIR—Yes, they have expressed that to the committee.

Mr Harding—And they have done that in a number of cases already.

CHAIR—I am asking you these questions because your organisation is probably the principal one in Australia, so we would like to hear your views on it. But I will defer to my colleagues.

Mr MOSSFIELD—In view of your satisfaction with the service provided in most of the states, and your recognition that there will be a continuous expansion of radio racing, would this not offset the impact of the discontinuation of the ABC service? Would it not simply be duplication if the ABC came on line again and continued—

Mr Charley—Bear in mind that we are only talking about one day for the ABC—only Saturday. There has never been any suggestion that there would be any other day but Saturday. Yes, if the speeding up of the process that Barrie has talked about were able to be implemented, and if the Racing Radio stations had security of tenure, so they did not have to look over their shoulder all the time and they could invest in more infrastructure, we would support that entirely. I do not know the technicalities of radio. I would have to ask Mr Carter about your question concerning community service obligations, Mr Chairman. I am sure the feed could be provided, but I do not know what it would cost that community to have it transmitted. I would have to ask Mr Carter that. I just do not understand the costs involved.

CHAIR—Some communities are prepared to do it.

Mr Harding—Perhaps I could just add to that because this is in further answer to Mr Mossfield’s question, I do not think there is any question, certainly from Queensland’s point of view—and I just use that as an example—of there being any duplication. If the best case were achieved for Racing Radio in terms of the special class of licence, from my understanding there would not be any great change to the broadcast reach of 4TAB in Queensland.

If you look to the map that is appended to our submission, it shows that, whilst a great number of places have LPONs, that is all that will be the case, even if a special class of licence is struck. If you are in Tower Hill, you have to be in Tower Hill to hear anything at all. If you are in Charleville, you will not hear it if you drive to Quilpie, Morven, Wyandra or Augathella. Giving Racing Radio what it has requested and what the Australian Racing Board fully supports will never create a circumstance of, if at the same time, you reintroduce some form of ABC broadcast, duplication. There is no question of that, Mr Mossfield.

Mr HOLLIS—And if the ABC were really determined not to reintroduce it, I suppose the government cannot force it to. The government cannot give the board a direction to, because the board is supposed to be independent of the government. The ball is very much in the ABC's court.

Mr Charley—We understand that. We are also rather gratified by the fact that we know that many people have made submissions, we know that many people are keenly interested in this subject. Perhaps they might have some influence in changing the ABC's views, and this relates particularly to circumstances to which you referred earlier, Mr Chairman. If it were possible for technology to permit another way for a limited service to be provided on Saturdays, we would obviously be delighted with it.

Mr HOLLIS—We took evidence last weekend in Barraba. People there were saying that they did not particularly care whether a service was provided by the ABC or anyone else; all they wanted was a service.

Mr Charley—Absolutely.

Mr HOLLIS—The better the service, the happier they would be.

Mr Charley—Absolutely.

CHAIR—You have mentioned WA. Can you give us a bit more information about that? I would just make a comment, and it is not in criticism. It is a matter of surprise to me that we do not have, in each state, a defined footprint map. Mr Unsworth has shown us one here today that is fairly close to that. But it surprises me that all we can seem to get are little circles on maps from some states. If you ring up Telstra, Optus or Vodafone, they will give you a whole map of that state with dark red or dark blue and light blue colours showing your coverage and your fortuitous coverage for mobile telephony. That would have assisted the committee immeasurably, although I can see the Queensland—

Mr Charley—If you refer to 4TAB coverage in our document, we say that is the extent of the coverage, those circles.

CHAIR—No, it is more than that. Frankly, I do not think that is good enough for a public inquiry. I would like to have had a map similar to the mobile telephony maps on which we could see where the gaps are and are going to be and that are currently covered by ABC regional radio. At the end of the day, that is the thing we will have to talk to government about. If we give some superficial solution, then people will just come back to the government and say, 'Yes, but there's all this area of Queensland, all this area of Western Australia that you haven't made any provision for,' and the impact of this inquiry will be somewhat blunted.

Mr HOLLIS—Also, Mr Chairman, we must make sure that the solution we recommend to the government—and, again, it is up to the government to decide—is one that will exist into the future. We have been told in Queensland, in no uncertain terms and to put it crudely, that while there is a buck there, people will be in for it. Also, 4TAB have said that they felt they had reached the extent of their licence. It may be, because of this business to

do with negotiating the licences, they will be withdrawing instead of expanding. They just said to us, 'If you think you've had an outcry over the ABC withdrawing, wait until we start withdrawing.'

CHAIR—On the basis of what Mr Unsworth has said today, I would suspect that, were we to recommend to government greater certainty of licence and a reasonable system of licence fees, 4TAB might be inclined to be a little more aggressive in expanding their network than they have been. Well, it is not that they have not been aggressive thus far, but they have set a limit on about 60 licences and that is where they are going to stop. Perhaps they might be more inclined to expand if there were greater certainty in their licensing and costing.

We have to recognise too that 2KY has a very well developed satellite facility which the other states do not have. While recognising the importance of that service here, the committee will have to take into account what happens in each of the other states as well in getting into the nooks and crannies, so to speak. As members of parliament, we are going through the problem at present of how the government will allocate this \$120 million for the black spots. Some parts of Australia are still without television, communities of 3,000 and 5,000—even some in my own electorate. That is because, when inquiries like this were held, superficial results were had, but no-one has gone back over the last 30 years and filled the gaps. We would like to think that we are providing an answer to filling the gaps as we go.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do you anticipate an expansion in employment in the industry as a result of what will be a better coverage through Racing Radio, such as the 2KY expansion and in other states?

Mr Charley—I support what Barrie said earlier about being a big employer. The extension of the service will only have an effect at the margin; it would only be fairly minor. It is more a matter of servicing the community.

CHAIR—We did get advice that the fields were dropping off in some states because of those communities not being able to get the information. Do you think that is a significant issue?

Mr Charley—I do not think it is a significant issue. There is no question that the fields are dropping off in various places, but that has been more a sort of shifting effect from one part of the industry to another. Fields are better in one section than they are in others. This is a problem we have to address. But I could not put that down to the cessation.

There is one final thing I would say. I did particularly pick up on the point that you made a little earlier. In connection with that point, Andrew quoted the case of Charleville; he said, 'All right, Charleville is going to have the service.' If there were to be a new sort of licence, part of the CSO of that licence would be that Augathella and the other places in that region would have to be able to provide the service, assuming they were given a feed. I think that is a solution. That then can be sheeted home to those who really are the ones complaining. They are saying, 'Look, we can't get any service at all.' However, if they feel sufficiently strongly about it to go and perhaps take out a licence themselves, as they have done in a few places, that could well be a very good solution.

Mr Harding—In the submission that the board has made, we have pointed to the economic importance of the industry, its taxation revenue for government, its links with other sectors of industry—tourism, hospitality. As Mr Charley has made the point, it is not being suggested that, because the ABC has withdrawn its service, the industry will go into decline in any sort of significant measure. That is not the suggestion. Also, I know that the ABC, in its submission, is making the point that it is not its role to prop up the racing industry, and that is not what the board is concerned about. What the board is concerned about is the access of those regional rural communities that are a very important part of the industry to racing broadcasts.

The best source that we could go to was the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures. We have tried to go to some facts about the level of community interest in racing. It is apparent from the ABS March review of sports attendance that racing—and this is thoroughbred racing—has the second largest attendance rate of any sport in Australia. If you take attendances as being the best measure of people's interest in sport, I think that stands as fairly stark evidence that racing is something that is not marginal.

I go back to the ABC submission. The ABC's suggestion is that there is little interest in racing. But if you go to the statistics that they call on aid to make that proposition—

CHAIR—We would not have got 200 submissions from all over Australia if there were not an interest, I can assure you. We would not have got a submission from a small country town out in far western Queensland—a well structured submission, countersigned by 50 people—if there were not an interest.

Mr Harding—That was the point that I wished to make.

Mr Charley—We certainly would be prepared to take up what you have asked for, and that is to see whether we cannot provide you with a better footprint of each of the states. We will put our attention to that.

CHAIR—I would thank you for your evidence today. I trust that we can come back to you, if we need to, in writing for any additional information.

Would one of my colleagues please move that the committee authorises the broadcasting of this public hearing and the publication of evidence given before it this day.

Mr HOLLIS—I so move.

CHAIR—I would thank all of you today, the current witnesses, the witnesses from 2KY, others in the public gallery and the media of Sydney and of New South Wales generally who have been most supportive of this inquiry. In fact, I was told that last week I beat most of the cabinet ministers in news recognition largely because of this inquiry—and I thank those elements of the media that allowed us to do that.

Committee adjourned at 2.35 p.m.

