



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT
AND THE ARTS

Reference: Adequacy of radio services in non-metropolitan Australia

TUESDAY, 13 MARCH 2001

WALPOLE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

INTERNET

The Proof and Official Hansard transcripts of Senate committee hearings, some House of Representatives committee hearings and some joint committee hearings are available on the Internet. Some House of Representatives committees and some joint committees make available only Official Hansard transcripts.

The Internet address is: **<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>**

To search the parliamentary database, go to: **<http://search.aph.gov.au>**

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

Tuesday, 13 March 2001

Members: Mr Neville (*Chair*), Mr Gibbons, Mr Hardgrave, Mr Jull, Mr Lindsay, Ms Livermore, Mr Macarthur, Mr Mossfield, Mr Murphy and Mr St Clair

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

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on the adequacy of radio services in regional and rural Australia and the extent to which there is a need for the Government to take action in relation to the quantity and the quality of radio services in regional and rural Australia, having particular regard to the following:

- The social benefits and influence on the general public of radio broadcasting in non-metropolitan Australia in comparison to other media sectors;
- Future trends in radio broadcasting, including employment and career opportunities, in non-metropolitan Australia;
- The effect on individuals, families and small business in non-metropolitan Australia of networking of radio programming, particularly in relation to local news services, sport, community service announcements and other forms of local content, and;
- The potential for new technologies such as digital radio to provide enhanced and more localised radio services in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

Committee met at 4.39 p.m.

Participants

BURTON, Mr Rod, Treasurer/Secretary, Walpole Community Centre

CECIL, Mr John Davin, Regional Program Manager, ABC Radio

CLEMENTS, Mr Ashley, Project Officer, South West Development Commission

FRANKLIN, Mr Raymond, Manager, Coalmine Beach Caravan Park

GANNAWAY, Mr Ken, General Manager, Radio West/Hot FM

HUBBLE, Mr Jeremy Stuart, Director Corporate, Shire of Manjimup

JEWELL, Mrs Penny (Private capacity)

JOHNSON, Mrs Gloria May (Private capacity)

KENDRICK, Mrs Jennifer Anne (Private capacity)

MAIR, Mr Gregory Alan, District Manager, Department of Conservation and Land Management

MANNING, Mr Howard (Private capacity)

MANNING, Mrs Jacqueline Margaret, (Private capacity)

MEAD, Mr Alan Frederick, Network Chief Engineer, Radio West Broadcasters Pty Ltd

PEARCE, Mr Donald Neil (Private capacity)

REDMAN, Mr Don, Local Tourist Operator, Riverside Retreat Chalets

RODGERS, Ms Jennifer, Station Manager, Radio West/Hot FM

STOKES HUGHES, Mr Owen Edward (Private capacity)

TAPLEY, Mr David, Councillor, Shire of Manjimup

CHAIR—Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I declare open this public forum which forms part of taking generic evidence for our inquiry into regional radio. The inquiry arose out of a concern expressed by members of the three major parties in the parliament that the character of regional radio was being lost. Some terms of reference were suggested to the minister, but he came up with still others.

There are essentially four terms of reference. Firstly, the minister wanted to know what part regional radio played in the fabric of community life in country areas. Secondly, he wanted to

know the effect that it had on employment, presumably both in the community and within the industry itself. Thirdly, and probably the most important, was what were the impacts of modern trends in radio on localism—local news, local sport, community announcements, talkback and all those sorts of aspects of radio—but with particular reference to the effects that networking had had on the character of radio. There was a perception at the time when this inquiry was called that large chains were buying up country radio stations and networking them back to hubs or to capital cities. Fourthly, he asked us to look at what opportunities might arise in the new era of digital radio—a new medium again—which has some of the characteristics of digital television that we are about to receive over the next few years.

What followed from that was that the inquiry was advertised in newspapers around Australia in and submissions were called for. We actually received 270 submissions. We also wrote to all the local authorities in Australia, to all the peak bodies of the radio industry and to the radio magazines to tell them about this inquiry.

The third phase, the phase we are in now, is the consultative and testing phase. We have gone out into the country. We have called some of the people who have made written submissions to give evidence to test what they say, to investigate their views, to look at the perceptions as we move around to see which ones are real and which ones are just perceptions and nothing more. We have done that in a number of ways. We have done it by inviting witnesses to Parliament House where we consult with them. Every Wednesday morning when the parliament was sitting we have had a hearing of this committee from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Then we went into an outreach mode going to capital cities and to provincial cities. We have been to Melbourne. We have been to Logan City, which is the city sitting between Brisbane and the Gold Coast so you could say virtually to Brisbane. We have been to places such as Tamworth, Bathurst, Townsville, Longreach, Darwin, Geraldton, Perth—the third capital, I suppose you could say—and then here today.

At each hearing we try to get a cross section of communities that might be relevant to the particular inquiry. For example, in our inquiry into regional racing and the ABC racing service, we went to a little town in Mr St Clair's electorate called Barraba, which is west of Tamworth, where we saw a race meeting and found out what effects the ABC discontinuing that service had on a community of that size. I suppose you could say Walpole is the Barraba of this inquiry. This is the small town, small shire, and small community whose views are just as important as the views we have heard in the capital cities and in the major and medium sized provincial cities.

The next phase after this is that we will hear from some more witnesses in Canberra, especially calling back the ABA—the Australian Broadcasting Authority—and one or two commercial witnesses that we want to examine again. Then we will start writing a report. We will make recommendations to the minister and we hope to table those in the parliament by June. That is the process. What happens then is that the minister looks at those recommendations. Quite often, some are implemented immediately and then at a later date—it is supposedly three months but it never is—the minister responds in the parliament to the recommendations of the committee.

There are two opportunities to debate that. We debate it when we table this report and we can debate it again after the minister tables his response. For today, these gatherings are very important. You are asked to address your comments through the chair. That will give you parliamentary privilege, but if you have a dogfight across the hall and you do not speak through the chair then you do not have the protection of parliamentary privilege. As you get up, I would like you to identify yourself and the organisation you represent. Just say 'private citizen' if it is your own personal view. If you or your organisation has made a submission to the inquiry, you might mention that as well. Try to keep your views succinct. If you want to ask a question of the committee, fair enough, but we would like to hear your views, especially on those four terms of reference.

We have discovered a couple of dynamics as we have gone around that we did not expect. The first one was that on the east coast the liaison between commercial radio and the state emergency services and other emergency organisations has been very poor. Largely, in network station areas where there is a fire, flood or some accident there has not been the opportunity to get into the local radio station and broadcast a message to the community. That has been, surprisingly, across three states. When we came to the west, we found a different dynamic. We found that liaison with emergency organisations and radio stations is quite good, but the problem here seems to be that you do not have radio in all areas or have only very poor radio in some areas. That has been rammed home to us very succinctly at Geraldton and in Perth over the last two days.

We want to hear the people down this way at Albany, Walpole, Manjimup and other areas in this pocket of Western Australia. I would like to particularly thank Rod Burton, the secretary of this community organisation, for facilitating the meeting today and for being so helpful. Thank you very much for that. To get the proceedings under way, we have had two submissions but possibly there are others amongst you. The South-West Development Commission had a view on this and Don Punch, the chief executive, has lodged a submission.

Perhaps Mr Clements would like to give us a five- or six-minute overview and then Rod Burton could give us five or six minutes. Then I would like to break into questions and comments. As I said before, keep them short and we will try to respond to them. Bear in mind that we are not a lobbying organisation. We are not going back to demand money for a particular project. What we have to do is try to get a national flavour for what is wrong with regional radio and how it might be corrected. I remind you to address your comments through the chair.

Mr CLEMENTS—I have just a couple of issues from our submission that I would like to raise with the committee. One of them is the lack—or thereof—of Radio National services in the south-west region. This was promised to the region some number of years ago but with the sale of the transmission authority it did not come to pass. It is a service that has been identified by a number of reports in the region and it is felt by people in the region to be very much a gap in our regional radio service network.

CHAIR—Which ABC services do you receive?

Mr CLEMENTS—Obviously, the services are based from Bunbury which is basically the local ABC radio service.

CHAIR—Regional radio?

Mr CLEMENTS—Regional radio, and some areas receive Triple J as well. But that is fairly scattered across the region.

CHAIR—Do you receive the FM fine music program?

Mr CLEMENTS—In Bunbury I believe we do, yes.

CHAIR—And Triple J?

Mr CLEMENTS—Yes, in Bunbury.

CHAIR—And Radio National?

Mr CLEMENTS—Not in Bunbury, no. There are Radio National services in the south-west to my knowledge. Please forgive me, but if anyone wants to correct me, please do, I have only been with the commission a week. I have actually come down from the Mid West Development Commission where I did a submission to the inquiry for the mid-west region. It is a bit of a turnabout.

One of the things the commission would like to raise with the committee is that the federal government does have a black spot funding program for the television transmission services plus SBS. The commission feels strongly that that should be expanded to include radio services as well. We feel that that might address some of the black spot issues. For example, here in Walpole the actual standard of radio transmission is very poor. You can get it in some cars, I understand—correct me if I am wrong—but in houses in the township here the standard of radio is very poor, and we feel that that is a service to the community that is not being met. That concludes my viewpoint, Mr Chairman.

Mr BURTON—I am involved with a lot of community activities in Walpole. I represent the Walpole Hall Committee. I submitted a submission in October last year and basically I will read parts of it so other members of the committee are aware of what I was putting to paper.

Currently we receive ABC and GWN television and virtually no radio reception at all. Radio reception does improve at night-time but, again, with very modest results. The areas of isolation and the social impact of a lack of radio communication only tend to acerbate our identity as remote and sometimes forgotten. Local news items, sport, community service announcements and local advertisements serve little consequence when these can only be broadcast to within 40 kilometres of where the action is. So basically in Albany or Bunbury, any advertisements or advertising does not reach Walpole at all.

Walpole is fast becoming a major tourist attraction with the now famous treetop walk attracting over 200,000 visitors a year. This tourist icon is only 14 kilometres from Walpole. Road surveys in 1998 indicated approximately 560,000 people travelled through Walpole each year. Comments by our visitors to the area at service and industry points such as the tourist bureau, service stations and accommodation venues regularly express concern at the lack of radio. They really think there is a problem here.

As Walpole is the heart of the forest environment particular concern has been raised on many occasions with the risk of bushfires during the summer and the distinctive lack of radio communication to advise of any threat. I wrote this in October last year and last week we had a fire here which had the potential—and our district manager may be able to add to this—to create a lot of problems for the community and put people at risk. Greg was able to identify the problems on local radio, which is broadcast from Albany, but we were not able to hear it—and here is the fire only one or two kilometres away. In my situation I had my children ringing me up telling me how bad the fire was in our local environment because they lived in Albany, but we could not hear the comments here.

As Walpole is our closest major town, it would appear logical that this centre should be given access to extended service to the radio, both FM and AM. Albany provides most of Walpole's government services, shopping facilities and rural avenues. Recently, Walpole received funding from the regional telecommunications infrastructure fund to construct a communications mast and associated Telstra infrastructure.

CHAIR—What for?

Mr BURTON—For mobile phones. This tower was built to a specification such that it could accommodate a mobile phone network and the appropriate transmitting equipment for radio and television broadcasting. I understand Walpole's area of the state is identified as remote and therefore is covered by Karratha radio. This station is situated nearly 2,000 kilometres north of Walpole. From my observations of others in regional WA where radio reception is a way of life and taken for granted, I feel it is critical that all avenues be explored to extend the coverage to unite smaller rural towns like Walpole.

CHAIR—Very good, thank you.

Mr HARDGRAVE—This is a sort of multiway street so I might, if I may, ask a couple of questions in relation to those submissions and some of the comments. It is my understanding—and we talked to these people yesterday and today—that this town is in the remote area licence for something called WAFM and also North West Radio, coming out of Karratha. It is 2,000 kilometres away but you nevertheless are, according to the Australian Broadcasting Authority, in that area. If you receive GWN television, the WAFM people tell us that you are then able as a community to spend some money, if you wish, to purchase some re-transmission equipment and apply for a narrowcast transmission licence which would handle a radius of, say, five kilometres or something around this town. About \$3,500 to \$5,000 I think was the amount of money. Have you heard about that? Has anybody brought that to your attention before?

Mr BURTON—Last year when we did talk about it, various people raised the pros and cons of different avenues. Probably it was out of my field because of its technical nature. I just took those on board and obviously hoped things would arise out of this. We feel that with Albany being our regional centre, 120 kilometres away, it made logical sense that we perhaps direct ourselves in that area and obviously with Bunbury in the other direction.

Mr HARDGRAVE—I certainly can understand that. Because they said that you were part of that licence area, I wanted to find out if they had told you how you could actually hear them.

Mr BURTON—I contacted Karratha quite a few times but never received responses. I probably would have asked four or five times for people to give us an idea of how we could go down this path. I think it was perhaps put in the too hard basket in the sense that we were 2,000 kilometres south of Karratha, so nothing eventuated from there.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Really, perhaps to rebroadcast the Albany ABC station here would be your preference anyway?

Mr BURTON—We would like to put it back to the community and see just what avenues are available. A lot of people have different radio choices and probably a lot of us really do not realise what is available and what can be transmitted and retransmitted. We would just like to have radio here to give us the chance to take on the commercial or national or whatever.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Just on the question of people passing through, what was that figure again?

Mr BURTON—In 1998, Main Roads did a road survey count and found an average of 465 cars a day travelling through Walpole. They used an average of 3½ to four people per car, which equated to over 500,000 people a year. The Treetop Walk is probably the best parameter we can use now, because there is a physical count there, and an average of 200,000 people visit that site alone. So we are not plucking figures out of the air; we can substantiate that. A lot of these people are staying in the area for two or three days. Because radio is a way of life for a lot of people, they find it a little bit difficult to come to terms with it.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Have you explained to anyone, apart from us, the difficulty of the fire threat and lack of communication and, for that matter, the isolation that those 500,000 and 200,000 people have as they are passing through this area? I understand the ABC signal drops out about 10 clicks down the road. We could hear it outside, but it certainly sounds like it is coming from a long way away. It is not all that far away really, is it?

Mr BURTON—No.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Have you communicated that difficulty and those observations to others?

Mr BURTON—Yes.

Mr HARDGRAVE—The ABA, for instance?

Mr BURTON—Yes. I did have reasonably regular contact with a couple of members in Sydney. We have raised it with our local politicians, both federal and state, and I have raised it with Radio West.

Mr HARDGRAVE—What is Radio West?

Mr BURTON—Radio West is a local commercial radio station, both in Albany and in Bunbury. While they been sympathetic to the cause, they have identified that we do not fall into

their boundary. Therefore, it comes back to the Australian Broadcasting Authority licence rules and regulations, hence my contact with the guys in Karratha who, as I said, did not return any of my results.

Mr HARDGRAVE—So you would support promotion of black spot funding for television being extended to radio services?

Mr BURTON—In September or maybe October last year we submitted, on behalf of the local shire, a black spot funding application. I understand the results are coming out in February or thereabouts.

CHAIR—About four weeks away.

Mr BURTON—We are hoping we receive funding to assist us with that, because at this stage we receive one commercial TV station and one ABC and there are two others—SBS and WIN TV—we do not receive. We are hoping that that will address part of the problem. If black spot funding can be extended to the radio, we believe that this tower situated in a very strategic spot in town will help overcome a lot of the problems.

Mr HARDGRAVE—I want to ask one question of Mr Clements, from the South West Development Commission, who, by his own admission, is only new to the general area. The submission said the National Transmission Agency, which was purchased under privatisation, was used as some reason for not proceeding with the Radio National roll-out to the extent that is apparently wanted. Do you have any idea who told you this? It does not make sense to me as an excuse.

Mr CLEMENTS—I am afraid it was before my time so I cannot comment with any great detail on that, I am afraid.

CHAIR—Are you saying that the NTL are not as warmly disposed to small stations as the old NTA was?

Mr HARDGRAVE—That is what the submission says. The only reason I raise it is because the NTL, the National Transmission Ltd, are in fact looking for custom—in other words, they are looking for opportunities to broadcast things. So it would be quite unusual for them to say, ‘No, we are not going to broadcast that, it would be something within the ABC.’ It is worth noting that the ABC provided us with some information this morning, which I am happy for anybody else to have a look at, which says that Nannup, Augusta, Wagin and Mount Barker—and I know that is not really anywhere near Walpole—all have Radio National services. There is obviously a big gap between Albany and Augusta, and Manjimup and Bridgetown do not have Radio National. That might be updated information for you, that is all.

Mr CLEMENTS—I believe the ABC was originally intending to actually implement this service, but for one reason or another it did not happen. The ABC in Bunbury still has advertisements on their wall apparently saying that they provide the service when it is not the case.

Mr HARDGRAVE—It is not one of the stations.

CHAIR—Just what local authority are we in here?

Mr CLEMENTS—We are in the Shire of Manjimup.

Mr PEARCE—I am speaking as a private citizen but with previous board membership of 2UUU in New South Wales. As far as the NTA NTL saga goes, while I was resident near Leeman we approached the NTA with a view to setting up a community radio station. It worked out that with the fees they wanted to charge us to use the local transmitter sites it was cheaper for us to supply power and build our own tower. The break-even point was about 2½ years.

CHAIR—Could we have a note on that, please?

Mr HARDGRAVE—Was that the NTA or NTL?

Mr PEARCE—We are talking about 18 months ago, so it was the NTL. It was a long way from being commercially viable for us to use that service.

CHAIR—Could we have a note and a bit of detail on that? That would be very interesting. We find it quite offensive that gatekeepers can tell people that they cannot have things.

Mr CLEMENTS—Just to back-up that point: I have said that I have come down from the mid-west region where a lot of the shires up that way are very keen to implement community broadcasting. But the fees there are very prohibitive, as has been mentioned, and it is certainly something that is, I guess, prohibitive to increasing the amount of community broadcasting in regional Australia.

CHAIR—We have got some other people who registered. Don Redman, who is a local tourist operator, wanted to say a few words.

Mr REDMAN—I have travelled down from Perth today. I am not a technical person but I know that I drove all the way from Perth to Walpole and the radio reception I received all the way was excellent until I got within 10 kilometres of Walpole. I believe this is an issue that has to be addressed in an era when you can land people on the moon. I would like to see that happen. That is about all I want to say at this stage.

CHAIR—Have you ever thought of a community station in this area?

Mr REDMAN—I have only been a member of this community for a short time, but somebody else might like to answer that.

CHAIR—There has not been any movement here in Walpole or Manjimup or somewhere like that? Not specific, okay. Let us have a listen to the two radio station managers now. John Cecil, would you like to speak now?

Mr CECIL—I am the regional program manager for the ABC at Albany. The first point I would make is that I am aware that the management of the ABC have met with you earlier today and that I would seek not to contradict anything that they have passed on—for my own

health. The ABC at Albany, firstly, counts Walpole in its patch and it is as frustrating to us as it is to Walpole that we cannot get here. We have two transmitters linked to our studio. The first is the transmitter at Albany which is on 630—that is 6AL. The second was linked to us about 18 months ago and that is a very large transmitter at Wagin which is 6WA operating on about 50 kilowatts.

CHAIR—You also supervise Esperance, don't you?

Mr CECIL—No; Esperance is supervised by the ABC at Kalgoorlie. Esperance is an outpost of the Kalgoorlie station. It is as frustrating to us as it is to Walpole that we cannot be heard here. It had been our understanding that the transmitter at Wagin, which is extremely powerful, provided some relief. Certainly, driving in today, I was able to move to the Wagin frequency and improve the signal after ours died out, as Gary Hardgrave said, about 10 clicks that way.

I am very interested in the community view about whether that is the case or not. It is certainly our perceived wisdom. The officers of the ABC in Albany are very keen to be involved with Walpole and we have been involved, as best we can, over a number of years back to the old days when we ran correspondents. These days, we are identifying, as others here are, the need for an emergency involvement, a civil involvement above and beyond the news reporting and the news broadcasting. For instance, to the point where storms in Albany that caused damage and took the top off the town hall, and so on, we were able to report on that and break into the state based programs. We go local when we need to. We have the flexibility to be able to take control of our station and use it as we need to when we need to. As those events turn up—and they turn up without warning and very violently sometimes—we can move.

CHAIR—What is the protocol when you have one of these events? Is there a state emergency or an emergency response committee that has a protocol that sets a certain chain of action rolling with the commercial and ABC stations?

Mr CECIL—As far as we are concerned, the protocol is a two-way thing.

CHAIR—Do you sit down? Do you have a committee that says, 'This is our state emergency plan in the event of a fire, violent storm or a flood'?

Mr CECIL—There is actually a committee forming up, as we speak, to be able to deal with that issue because some holes have been identified. The way it works at the moment is that, if the police or the state emergency service need us, they call us out. If we think it is bad enough, from our side, we will go and offer. In the case of the storm, it was quite evident that it needed to be done and it was done as a community activity above and beyond. We turned out on the day.

CHAIR—With great respect, I am not being critical, but anywhere we have been where there is a good protocol in place, it is not who makes a decision on whether it is important or not; it just cuts in automatically.

Mr CECIL—Yes.

CHAIR—In fact, the emergency response committee generally contains the ABC and the local commercial radio station manager, or his or her nominee, on that committee. They actually are part of the emergency response plan.

Mr CECIL—We are sort of two days previous. They meet in Katanning on Thursday.

CHAIR—Okay.

Mr CECIL—The events of the last couple of months have highlighted this in great detail.

CHAIR—What about the wider thing and the fact that people in this area cannot get your signal properly? Has the ABC ever thought of doing another transmitter or translator in this area?

Mr CECIL—That is an issue that I should properly defer to those relationships between the NTL and the ABC as they discuss where transmitters go and which signals are given to which transmitters. It is beyond my brief.

Mr St CLAIR—John, is there a geographical problem here? Is that part of the thing or is it not?

Mr CECIL—My limited technical knowledge is that there are too many trees.

Mr St CLAIR—Do not say that; I do not want to hear that, not from the ABC.

Mr CECIL—I know it is a shocking statement. It is just a hard place to get to for a signal.

CHAIR—It soaks up the signal, is that the idea?

Mr CECIL—Whether it soaks it up or whether people cast their eye around and say, ‘Those trees are in the way’, I do not know. It has always been very hard for us to get here. We have tried, over the years, things like improving the signal. We put in a larger transmitter at Albany about five or six years ago to increase the power. We have put various signal processing activities on the transmitters, and all to no avail really.

Mr St CLAIR—The reason I asked that was because I come from a lot of high country. My ABC operates out of Tamworth down on the plain country, but I get good reception 150 kilometres away or further. I just wondered whether you had a geographical thing around here that was creating the problem.

Mr CECIL—Maybe somebody like Alan Mead, who is knowledgeable on the technical side, might be able to answer that in a general sense better than I could. He may have a better reason than trees. But I do know that we have made efforts, and we have boosted signals. It seems to get soaked up somewhere between there and here.

CHAIR—Does Albany have a regional radio transmitter? Where do the FM, the RN and Triple J come out of?

Mr CECIL—ABC, RN, Triple J and FM come from the Mount Barker tower.

CHAIR—Does that get into here? Can you pick up Triple J and Radio National?

Interjector—We can get Triple J, but who wants to listen to that. It is filthy.

CHAIR—Hear, hear!

Mr HARDGRAVE—If we can get that lady's name, she will be on Triple J tomorrow morning.

CHAIR—Mr Cecil, are there any other points you wanted to make?

Mr CECIL—One of the things we are proud of is the fact that we are involved with the multimedia world and bringing multimedia to regional areas. We have the coordinator for multimedia in Western Australia in Albany, on the south coast, which is a uniquely decentralised arrangement for the ABC. We also have a national program that comes out of the ABC on a Sunday night, which again is an extremely decentralised arrangement for the ABC. They are on the south coast, although you cannot hear them in Walpole. I suppose that is a real coup for us, and we are very proud of those two attributes.

CHAIR—We listen even in Queensland.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Mr Cecil, I want to ask a question, but I do not know whether you can answer it or not. In the submission from Mr Burton, reference is made to a communication mast, which is supposed to take the appropriate transmission equipment for radio and television. Has that actually got the equipment to take the ABC signals?

Mr CECIL—I am sorry. I do not know that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Can anyone answer that for me? Maybe Mr Burton could answer that.

Mr BURTON—The tower is 50 metres high. It is a triangular tower built with 600 millimetre triangulars. It was actually built to allow for repeating dishes and other various equipment to go on it. So it would allow for multifunctional from extra TV, extra radio and even private individuals.

Mr MOSSFIELD—But the equipment is not there at the moment, is it?

Mr BURTON—No, there is no equipment there at the moment.

CHAIR—Has it got mains power?

Mr BURTON—It has got mains power.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So what plans are there to put the appropriate equipment in so that you will be able to get the signal?

Mr BURTON—There are none immediately, other than seeing what actually comes out of this inquiry to allow us to go down a funding path. Obviously Walpole has a small population, and we cannot always keep on hitting the individual for funding for it. We are hoping that the appropriate funding will become available perhaps via the black spot program.

Mr MOSSFIELD—That is really one of the issues that you are putting to the committee?

Mr BURTON—That is right.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Obviously individual people have satellite transmissions at the local level. What part does that play?

Mr BURTON—At the moment, the dishes provide the extra SBS and WIN TV. In some cases it provides extended radio coverage, but the dishes vary between \$1,000 and \$2,500, depending on the quality and type.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So it is just individuals who might have that?

Mr BURTON—It becomes a situation where various individuals have different priorities. Obviously there is a considerable cost which cannot be passed across to everyone.

Mr St CLAIR—Mr Burton, what sort of a community is Walpole? Is it a farming community? Is it a fishing community? What sort of community is it, other than a very cohesive and a very vibrant one?

Mr BURTON—Walpole is basically a farming community. Originally we were a timber town. Following the downturn in the timber industry and the restructuring, that industry no longer exists in Walpole—we no longer have a sawmill. The majority of the farming is beef and dairy. We have various cottage industries, and tourism has activated some of those.

Mr St CLAIR—There is a huge potential there.

Mr BURTON—That potential is expanding all the time. We have growing accommodation. Also, Walpole is fast becoming a getaway place for people from Perth—it is five hours away, on the coast and surrounded by national parks and pristine forests, so it is very attractive. But, of course, as people come down here they do expect to some degree to have some of the comforts they are used to in the metropolitan area and other regional areas.

Mr St CLAIR—Some might like to turn the radio off and put the CD on.

Mr BURTON—There is no doubt about that. It is like the mobile phone: when we got the mobile phone a lot of the locals thought it was great, but a lot of people wanted to get away from it.

Mr GIBBONS—In 1994 the ABC discontinued a short-wave service which went out virtually all over Western Australia. Was that service available here and widely listened to?

Mr BURTON—My understanding of the ABC and the current radio reception is that nothing has changed in the last 20 years.

Mr GIBBONS—So that short-wave service was not available here either?

Mr BURTON—If I compare what radio was when I was younger to what it is now, I do not see that we have improved anything at all.

Mr HARDGRAVE—It is not a case of having lost something that you used to have—you have just never had it.

Mr BURTON—We never had it, and we have just put up with that. As Don said, if we can put men on the moon and have all this communication, surely, even with our trees being a potential problem for radio waves, there must be some way that we can do something to bring us up to speed with the rest of the world.

Mr HARDGRAVE—How big was Walpole 20 years ago?

Mr BURTON—Probably not much different to what it is now in terms of a stable population base, but a lot of people are now coming to visit the area for different reasons. We had a growing dairy industry, which is now on a downturn, and we had a growing timber industry. While we have lost that, we have picked up some from the tourist trade.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Maps are funny things. In the middle of my electorate in suburban Brisbane there is something called Toohey Forest. That may mean nothing to you, but in the middle of Toohey Forest is Griffith University campus. According to those planning mobile phone rollouts 10 years ago, there were no people in Toohey Forest, therefore there was no need to have mobile phones. There are hundreds and hundreds of people with mobile phones. I used to find if you stood near the big industrial waste bin near the bus stop and moved your right leg you could actually get some reception. Maybe Walpole is just forest on the maps.

Mr BURTON—There is no doubt about it. Sometimes our attraction is that we are a forest environment, that is why we have people coming down here. On the other hand, we have those people who do like to receive radio.

Mr HARDGRAVE—You must admit it is a great irony that, yes, we can put people on the moon, but Mr Cecil broadcasts a magnificent radio program on a Sunday night which I can hear comfortably driving around my electorate in Brisbane, X thousands of kilometres away, and your opportunity to hear it runs out 10 kilometres away.

Mr BURTON—I do hear him from time to time, but that is about it, because the reception fades in and out to the extent that I cannot leave the radio on.

CHAIR—Jeremy Hubble, from the council, can you give us the population of the shire and the official population of Walpole?

Mr HUBBLE—The population for the shire is about 10,500. I cannot give you the exact population for Walpole. The census in 1996 had the population somewhere in the order of 250. It might be a bit more. As part of a recent black spot application, we were able to confirm that there were approximately 140 permanent houses within Walpole, but the population is a bit hard to judge from that.

My comment is to clarify a question that Mr Mossfield raised about existing infrastructure to take radio. As part of the arrangement we had with the installation of the tower up on Allen Hill, we had some provision for future services which we had hoped would come to the region—and that is twofold. Firstly, we provided for access to go on to that tower at no cost for self-help radio, self-help services, sea rescue, bushfire board and the like. So we anticipated roughly about eight or nine services in the future that we might want, and part of the deal was that they could go on at no charge. Secondly, it is all very well having a position on the mast, but you need a facility at the bottom of the mast to house your transmission gear. We have a shed down the bottom that is for the exclusive use of the shire and those services for which we negotiated, and that is available and has power to it.

CHAIR—Does the rest of the shire get reasonable reception?

Mr HUBBLE—No.

CHAIR—And, if so, how many ABC services and how many commercial services?

Mr HUBBLE—I cannot give you those exact details. I can give you some general comments.

CHAIR—No, from your own experience.

Mr HUBBLE—From my own experience we constantly get asked for Radio National. That is not received anywhere within the shire. General radio within Manjimup itself seems to be adequate—I think there is three stations. That fades out within about 10 kilometres of Manjimup. Again, topography and trees make extended transmission difficult. I understand places such as Quinninup, Northcliffe and Windy Harbour have very poor or non-existent transmission.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Is there any ambition though from the shire to do something about that? We have taken evidence from shires in the mid west—I am just trying to find the brochure that they gave us—where seven of them ganged together and created this retransmission of the Geraldton station so that people within their shire could get it. This is extending local government services beyond the pale, I suspect, but it is not without precedent. Why wouldn't Manjimup shire look at returning some basic services, especially given there are hundreds of thousands of people coming through it each year creating wealth for the shire?

Mr HUBBLE—Those shires involved ought to be totally commended for their efforts. To date the shire has not been involved in the transmission of television, the provision of reticulated power or the transmission of radio. These are things that have been forced on the shire, which is funded by the ratepayer—the people you see in front of you.

CHAIR—There are grants available though—and generous grants.

Mr HUBBLE—I accept that, and I will finish what I am saying. The ratepayers are now asking for these services, which are readily delivered to people in metropolitan areas but are not readily delivered free of charge to people in the country areas. You then look around and say, ‘Who is going to do the work and who is going to put it in place? Who is going to set up the self-help radio station, man it and make sure the thing gets fixed up every time it falls down?’ Invariably, if there is no-one else, it will probably be the shire.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Or, alternatively, you simply take a feed from an established radio station which provides programming content, on the basis that they are in agreement, and you meet the cost of retransmission of that. I accept that it is not a traditional local government role. I am just astounded by the number of precedents I have found. As the chairman has said, there is funding now from the Commonwealth to help with black spot funding for television, and the submissions we are getting suggest that radio should also be included. Essentially, the current system—administered out of Sussex Street, Sydney, where the ABA is located—is not working. They think there is just a bunch of trees here and no people. So we need that local attention to detail and, if you draw attention to this problem, maybe something could be done about it.

Mr HUBBLE—To respond to your comments, Mr Hardgrave, we provided information to the South West Development Commission as part of this submission here. In terms of black spot funding, I personally completed two black spot applications, which consumed in total about a month of my time because it required copious amounts of information. I was then asked to go back and redo all the numbers on Walpole because they did not believe my figures. They did not believe there were more than 100 people living here. I had to go and prove that there were, which took more of my time—this is time not spent on doing the other duties I am normally paid to do. We have been advised today that one of those applications is successful, and the application for Walpole transmission of ABC, GWN, SBS and WIN is very likely to be successful. So we have not been sitting back. We certainly have been sitting back in relation to radio, but that is a matter of resource.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Don’t get me wrong. I appreciate the feedback on the paperwork involved and I am pleased that the local shire has been doing all that it can because there is a range of possibilities but this committee’s hearings have put Walpole well and truly on the map, I suspect. As *Hansard* is being read by the ABA they will be discovering Walpole, if they did not know it existed.

Mr HUBBLE—Obviously, the shire considers the interests of all our ratepayers and Walpole is one of them. The effort that has gone into Walpole now needs to be repeated for Northcliffe, Quinninup, Windy Harbour and Pemberton. That is all officer time that is pretty scarce.

CHAIR—Could I ask you two questions? The tower that has gone up here was funded under the RTIF—the Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund, was it?

Mr HUBBLE—That is correct. It was about \$180,000.

CHAIR—Yes. Did that cover the full cost of it?

Mr HUBBLE—Largely, yes.

CHAIR—You have applied for four channels for the black spots television program?

Mr HUBBLE—We have. There is a difficulty with the channels in that the ABA has issued four channels for Walpole to someone else who is transmitting in a very localised sense and thereby deprives the community.

CHAIR—You should be entitled to \$25,000 per channel plus \$25,000 for infrastructure or to boost the power up to the site, or whatever. You should be able to get up to \$125,000 to get that television on air. It should not be a great burden to the ratepayers.

Mr HUBBLE—That is correct. I am quite confident, given that the tower is already in place and given that we have anticipated putting these services on the tower, that the additional cost is not significant. The cost to put something in place is funded, but there is no funding for ongoing maintenance costs. There is a charge to use the land on which the building is placed and an ongoing maintenance equipment cost. There are costs that do ultimately pass on to the ratepayer.

CHAIR—I am not here to justify the government's policy, and I think this goes back through other governments as well, not just the current one. Where this program came from largely, as I understand it, was that some shires in outback Queensland and places like that said they recognised that they were not going to get the full suite of television out there unless it came down through the satellite. They said, 'Give us some subsidy and we will put a localised signal out in our own area and look after our own shire. We will look after the site and don't worry about having NTL having to come out to mow the site. When we are doing our road maintenance we will mow around the tower and make sure there is a fence around it so there is no danger of fire around the facilities.' That was the nature of the self-help thing.

I was intimately involved in this because I have an area in my electorate between Bundaberg and Gladstone, which are two quite big provincial cities, where there is no television, no mobile telephony and very little radio for, in fact, anywhere from 4,000 to 6,000 people. I know exactly your problem.

This program was designed to find a circumstance like this and to give you anything between \$100,000 and \$150,000 to put up a transmitter that might cover 10, 15 or 20 kilometres. If you combined it with an RTIF program for a mobile telephony tower you get the best of both worlds with very little imposition on the ratepayers, other than the council, when it is doing this maintenance round, making sure the fences are right and putting the mower around the base of it so we do not have to involve NTL in other costs in the future. That is the nature of the self-help and I thought it was a very good program. I am surprised to hear you criticise it.

Mr HUBBLE—If you think I am being critical of it, I am not. I will be the first to publicly be very happy if the funding is announced, as I expect it will be. I think it is great because it brings services to an area that probably would not get the service otherwise. The point I was making was that there are costs associated with that, which have transferred to a relatively small number of people who would not expect to pay those costs if they were in a metropolitan area. The maintenance costs, from speaking to people who have the service in place already, tends

not to be mowing around the edge; it tends to be when the service goes down, getting someone out to fault find and bring the service back up, because the shire gets inundated with phone calls as soon as something drops out. To do that you need to have a maintenance contract in place and you need someone locally who is capable of doing that work. If there is not anyone locally then in this case it might be someone from Denmark or from Manjimup, and that has a cost. We are very grateful and we have used the funding to the extent possible. If the funding could extend to radio, that would be beaut.

CHAIR—I take your point. I might like a tramline outside my house, which is halfway between Bundaberg and Bargara, as I would like to take the tram into Bundaberg. But the realities of life are that Bundaberg is not going to have a tram service while capital cities do have tram and suburban rail services. There are compensating features in every community that you live in Australia. I am not going to have a concrete nine bridge across the gully near my house because that is not required—a small culvert is required.

I think any government of any political colour has to try to deliver within the budgetary constraints and within reason to give every community in Australia the opportunity either directly or through a self-help program to do that. In a pure world where we had 100 million people in Australia, we would probably be able to provide a lot more of these services. The job of this committee is to try to pinpoint where we can finetune services to get a better coverage of radio to regional Australia in particular but, more than that, to get a suite of programs that suit your needs.

We have been talking about very basic things here today. In other parts of Australia that we have gone to they are furious that they have lost the local content, but they get some announcer from Townsville, the Gold Coast, Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne. In fact, one radio station in a town of 12,000 people, bigger than your whole shire, does not even have a local breakfast program. They take the whole thing 24 hours a day on relay from a provincial city. They have no localism whatsoever. Some people in that town say, 'What does local radio mean to us? It means absolutely nothing. We don't get anything out of it. We don't get any local announcements other than a few pseudo local announcements that are sent down the line from the provincial city.'

So there are other problems. Your problems in Western Australia are a bit different from the others. We would like you to give us a feed on how these things can be improved and we will certainly include them in our report. Please do not think we are picking on shires in Western Australia to do our work for us—we are not. We are asking how a self-help program can be made more effective.

Mr St CLAIR—What is your rate base expressed as a percentage of your budget; would it get to 30 per cent or 24 per cent?

Mr HUBBLE—In terms of revenue it is about 30 per cent. Rates raised about \$3 million out of a total revenue of about nine.

Mr St CLAIR—Right, thank you.

CHAIR—We will turn to the manager of the commercial station.

Ms RODGERS—I really do not have a lot to say; I have just come here as an observer. This is not our licence service area so we actually cannot do much.

CHAIR—Are you an independent or a network station?

Ms RODGERS—A network station.

CHAIR—From where?

Ms RODGERS—Our hub or our network office is in Bunbury.

CHAIR—And what group is that?

Ms RODGERS—That is DMG regional radio.

CHAIR—What is your localism? Are you live for breakfast or—

Ms RODGERS—Yes, we are live on the AM station.

CHAIR—Until when?

Ms RODGERS—From six until 10 every day.

CHAIR—And where do you take your feed from then?

Ms RODGERS—From Bunbury.

CHAIR—Is the Albany community happy enough with that?

Ms RODGERS—It is funny you should say that. I have only been on board for 12 months and maybe Ken or Alan would like to speak more on that. People get used to it and they really do not know at the end of the day, I believe, because we actually are very local in terms of our—

CHAIR—Do you slot in stuff from Bunbury?

Ms RODGERS—Yes, we do. We slot in our own commercials, our own lines, our own time checks, weather checks, community service announcements twice an hour 24 hours a day.

CHAIR—We have had some criticism of that. I think it was at Port Macquarie or Coffs Harbour where the local radio station was saying what a beautiful sparkling day it was and in downtown Port Macquarie—

Mr St CLAIR—It was in Wagga Wagga talking about the weather in Port Macquarie.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Port Macquarie had been blown out to sea.

CHAIR—It was 1,500 kilometres away while there was a raging storm on.

Mr HARDGRAVE—But it is an old trick in radio. You actually never really talk about the weather because it might look good over the east but over the west there is a big storm coming.

CHAIR—I do not think this committee concedes that pseudo-localism is a substitute for genuine localism.

Mr GIBBONS—How far is Bunbury from here in kilometres?

Ms RODGERS—It is about 250 kilometres, about a four-hour drive.

Mr HARDGRAVE—I will just put DMG completely on the spot here. If you were able to retransmit your AM and FM stations into this community, even though it is not in your market, you would be able to cope with that, wouldn't you, if Walpole became part of the Albany market?

Ms RODGERS—I do not see there is a disadvantage there, no, but it is not within our licensed service area.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Did you know there were 500,000 people going through on roads in this area and 200,000 people going to the local tourist attraction 14 kilometres away? If I were in DMG's shoes and I had a couple of stations licensed 120 kilometres to the east of here, or for that matter my hub 240 kilometres to the north-west of here, I would be a bit tempted to try and get something going in this area here—

Mr St CLAIR—Fortuitous.

Mr HARDGRAVE—because, fortuitous or otherwise, Mr St Clair, there would be to my mind a dollar to be made out of being able to sell to 500,000 extra listeners a year surely? Did you know all of that? I do not want to put you completely on the spot but it strikes me there is a business plan that you could take back to your management out of this afternoon's hearings, I would have thought.

Ms RODGERS—I can take it back.

Mr HARDGRAVE—There you go, Jenny. If you get a promotion you can write us a little note at some stage.

Ms RODGERS—Having said that, I know for a fact that Walpole use us extensively for their community service announcements, and when we gave the thunderstorm warning the other day we had a caller from Walpole who said, 'Is that true? Is there a storm coming?' I am going to finish on that note.

Mr HARDGRAVE—So you do get fortuitous coverage here?

Ms RODGERS—We obviously do.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Daytime as well as night-time?

Ms RODGERS—I am not sure. I know this is not our licensed service area but we do get feedback from Walpole and we do promote a lot of their community services and do what we can from where we are with what coverage we do have.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Don't be worried. If the ABA pick on you and tell you to retweak a transmitter because you should not be going to Walpole we will deal with them.

CHAIR—Can we speak with your general manager now, Ken Gannaway. By the way, could we just apologise, Ken? We did receive an invitation when we were in Townsville to come to Bunbury. We could not fit it in. We would have liked to have done that but we just did not have the time.

Mr GANNAWAY—Fair enough.

CHAIR—But we have seen your other hub and they did point out the two slightly different technologies that you use. This is an older technology but I did not want you to think that we were not grateful for the invitation.

Mr GANNAWAY—Thank you. Jenny was invited to speak and did, I think, adequately cover the fact that it is not our licence area.

CHAIR—Let me I put a question to you then. Were you aware that in the last few weeks, coming on air on the 29 March, that Geraldton has been given—and I do not know what the right terminology is—an outreach station or a relay station further inland to give it a better coverage area. It has been given it by the ABA.

Mr HARDGRAVE—It has been given an AM licence. It is almost like a section 39 licence but in reverse, because it has an AM retransmission licence.

Mr GANNAWAY—In reverse, no, I was not aware of that.

CHAIR—Have you ever applied for a relay facility in this Walpole-Manjimup area?

Mr GANNAWAY—No, not to my knowledge.

CHAIR—Have you ever investigated it?

Mr GANNAWAY—No. I will defer to our chief engineer, Alan Mead. We are not handballing him. We would just like to deal with the facts.

Mr HARDGRAVE—The next man I want is from the ABC.

Mr GANNAWAY—We are going to defer to John Cecil. No, Alan has been with the network for quite some time and may be able to answer that one.

Mr CECIL—Mention the trees.

Mr MEAD—Mention the trees, John says. Many years ago I was based in Albany, and we did actually try to get a licence for Walpole. That was rejected by the ABA.

CHAIR—Could we have that in writing?

Mr MEAD—I would not have the documentation any more, but I know that is the case. The other problem, as John said, for reception from anywhere is the terrain—the trees and the topography.

CHAIR—Were you aware of this RTIF tower?

Mr MEAD—Yes, I have spoken to him on a number of occasions and we did discuss the north-west radio situation and our situation for the licence area.

CHAIR—Would you reconsider it in the light of what we have heard today?

Mr MEAD—Of the number of people?

CHAIR—It is really a question to your general manager. Would you reconsider—

Mr MEAD—I would not be aware of the potential revenue figures at all with regard to that. But, yes, we have in the past applied for an AM licence here, but that was probably 10 or 12 years ago.

Mr CLEMENTS—I would like to make a quick comment, Mr Chairman, on the Geraldton situation that has been referred to. One of the things that should be noted in this is that it took at least two years to get those changes through. That is because the licence had been previously held by a Karratha based network. Because they held the licence, it took Batavia Coast FM quite a while of negotiation. It was quite a lengthy process for this to happen. If there is an area where there is a licence over the area and there is no service being offered, if someone else comes in that can promise to deliver the service across the area, the ABA should consider that a bit more thoroughly than maybe they have in the past.

CHAIR—We will be quite robust in our recommendations, I assure you.

Mr PEARCE—As we have somebody of a technical nature present, I would like to address a question to him, through the Chair, if I may.

CHAIR—Sure.

Mr PEARCE—Has there been any experimentation with antennae phasing angles, given the altitude of the Mount Barker transmitters and the dip they require to hit Albany effectively? Is that part of the reason why the signal is not reaching this distance?

Mr MEAD—No, I do not think that is part of the reason. In our case we are limited by the ABA to the power we can transmit and the direction that we can transmit it in. Our antennae from Mount Barker is not pointing down so much as pointing towards the South Pole. There are probably a lot of polar bears or penguins that can hear us but not a lot of people. We did try to get that changed to a more suitable pattern for our needs but, because there are other licence areas, even though they are owned by us currently, the thinking was that that would not necessarily always be the case and there would be a conflict within service areas.

CHAIR—Was your power boosted at Albany at the same time the ABC power was boosted?

Mr MEAD—No. We have 40 kilowatts radiated power on the FM pointing basically south. The load does cover Denmark but not very much further than that. The AM is just the standard two kilowatts AM service, which is really absorbed greatly by these trees and the terrain.

Mr St CLAIR—Wonderful trees.

Mr MEAD—Wonderful trees, yes.

Mr MAIR—I am the District Manager of the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Walpole Office, or CALM. CALM is a state government agency which has responsibility for managing national parks, state forests and reserves throughout Western Australia. In this particular district it involves about 400,000 hectares and I think, on a quick count, five local government authorities.

In emergencies, CALM regularly has a lead role in fire management and a supporting role—often a lead role—in the originating stages due to the fact that we also have no police station in Walpole, which is another story. We recently had a relatively long duration fire immediately adjoining, or very close to, Walpole and immediately to the south of us to which Mr Burton referred. During that period it was ironic that local people were getting information from friends and family in Albany. Other CALM staff and I probably did 14 to 16 radio interviews over the duration of that fire but very few of those, if any, were heard in Walpole.

We are also involved in other emergency incidents, such as whale strandings, oil spills, searches for lost people, et cetera. For us, an effective radio network—and the issue seems to be reception out here—is an important medium for conveying our messages; that is, the messages of the activities which our organisation is engaged in, including news and emergency advice. We value the radio network. We have had some good support recently from regional ABC but, as I mentioned earlier, unfortunately it did not reach the very community in which we live.

One other area in which we rely on the radio and we look again to ABC regional is that CALM has the responsibility for vast tracts of land in which it does carry out some prescribed burning. Part of our notification to the community of that intended burning is via the radio. Again, it is difficult to advise people in a rural community of prescribed burns if they do not get that radio reception.

Touching on the point of emergency management and its links to radio, two levels of LEMAC exist—a local area emergency management advisory committee and a state emergency

management advisory committee. I do know they have links to the radio mediums to broadcast emergencies, but I do not know the detail to which they—

CHAIR—Are radio managers or their nominees members of those committees?

Mr MAIR—I am not able to answer that question. I am involved on the periphery of the Local Emergency Management Advisory Committee. The police sergeant—

CHAIR—Have you ever had an incident when the station has been on network and you have not been able to get a message out to a community because it was on network?

Mr MAIR—I personally have not while I have been district manager in this district. That is all I have to say on that.

CHAIR—Would any private members of the community like to say anything? We would also like to hear what you think of localism. I know that this has been overshadowed to a large extent. When you do not have any radio, or not very good quality radio, the first thing is to get the basic service. I would also be interested to know from those of you who get reasonable reception your feelings on that third term of reference, on whether localism has suffered over the last five to 10 years or so—be it ABC, commercial or community, if you have a community station in your area. Does anyone have any comments?

Mr MANNING—I am a private citizen and I have just a couple of comments. Firstly, on what you were talking about then on local content, I think it would be nice to have, but obviously the reception is the priority. There is no point in having local content when the audience cannot hear it.

CHAIR—That is a good point.

Mr MANNING—On radio reception in general our situation is that, if I am outside the house in the backyard or front yard, I can listen to the radio by moving the vehicle from the front yard to the backyard or vice versa and turning the car radio on. If we move inside the house we have no radio reception at all except for some of the FM stations.

That is probably not as important for me. During the day my work has me at times in the vehicle where I can keep in touch with outside news. There is a world outside of Walpole; we are all aware of that. We are interested in what is happening in the rest of the country and the world. So I am kept up to date a little bit during my work by listening to the car radio. We have a young family—three young children—and my wife is in the house a fair bit of the time and she finds it very hard to keep in contact with the outside world. The evening TV news comes at a very busy time for anyone with young children so that is not really an option. You always feel like a mushroom: as far as you know there is Walpole but is there anyone else listening?

I would also like to make a comment on the self-help that has been talked about. This community has never been shy of self-help. The building we are in is a result of ten years hard work by this community.

CHAIR—A tribute to you.

Mr MANNING—We will do things we believe are necessary. What we need to know is where we draw the line: what is our community's responsibility and what is somebody else's responsibility? We can respond to that. Thinking of radio though, this area is less than 1000 people locally and, as you have heard, it has over 560,000 people passing through. Is it self-help for us to provide that service for all these other people as well? Self-help is something that we as a community have always done but we really need to know where we draw the line. Do we have to continue to provide facilities and when can we expect support coming from other areas? That is all I would like to say.

Mr FRANKLIN—I am the lessee of the Coalmine Beach Caravan Park which is about a kilometre across the water there. Last year we had about 34,000 people stay in the park over the 12 months—

CHAIR—Thirty-four thousand?

Mr FRANKLIN—Yes, and there were very few of those 34,000 who could receive radio. In all our chalets and in most caravans, if they had their radio outside, they might pick it up. Most people cannot receive any reception at all. Our figures are 20 per cent up on February last year and most of our monthly figures are growing as Rod Burton said. The amount of people who are travelling through the area is increasing and I think all operators would agree with that. We keep getting told that tourism is growing and, with all the baby boomers starting to hit the roads, it is only a matter of time before the numbers just go through the roof.

Ms KENDRICK—I am a local schoolteacher. From the educational aspect, we do not have access to with radio. We do get ABC TV via our dish but radio is not an option. Mr Cecil referred to their storm last year. We had a similar quite serious storm late last year and it was quite stressful knowing that we could not communicate with bus drivers at that time of the morning. It was 8.30 and we did not have two-way radio at that time. We now have that but it is just quite difficult that we do not have that access in a time of an emergency.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Would someone like to volunteer to answer this question? Do you actually feel like you live in a remote area? It strikes me 240 kilometres away from Bunbury is not all that remote. I see people shaking their head, no. This is obviously a regional centre but it is not remote in comparison to the Pilbara or something like that, is it?

Mr MAIR—We are 240 kilometres away from Bunbury which is a major regional centre. We are 120 kilometres away from Albany which is a major regional centre. At times we do feel like we are a bit removed from the rest of the world. We do not always wish to be like that and would like to be able to make a choice to tap into the rest of the world. At times we have all shared the sense that Walpole has been forgotten, but I think everyone wishes to choose.

Mr HARDGRAVE—It strikes me that, if you have Triple J, you have been sinned upon from a great depth. I have this really great map here which came from the ABC which talks about network coverage. You would be pleased to know that local radio covers 100 per cent of Western Australia, ABC Classic FM covers 86 per cent, Radio National covers 94 per cent, but Triple J covers 81 per cent—that is 81 per cent of the people. But you are one of the 81 per cent. News Radio covers 76 per cent, so that is Perth because it does not go anywhere else nor does it in virtually any other state—apart from New South Wales where it does a bit of Newcastle and

Wollongong and I think in South Australia it does Port Augusta. I guess my point is that you have this mixed bag circumstance. You are not being treated like a remote area. Mount Isa does not get—actually they do get Triple J, quick pick another example.

Mr St CLAIR—Longreach.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Longreach does not get Triple J, although there is a young lady trying to get it at the moment and the local community are trying to ostracise her and keeping her away from envelopes, pens and letters.

CHAIR—They are actually going to retransmit it at their own expense.

Mr HARDGRAVE—My point is this: the sense of doing it yourself is what a lot of these communities have done. I am from Brisbane, so I am on the other side of the Nullarbor for you guys, therefore I am probably nine-tenths behind everybody in the argument. But, frankly, the sense of getting it done seems to me to be the only immediate real answer you have. To be blunt, the authorities seem to have forgotten you. That is pretty pathetic given that, by all tests, five hours drive from your capital city does not make you isolated. I do not believe five hours west of Brisbane heading towards Roma makes people living there feel remote either. The five-hour test is what I am working on here. That is just—for what it is worth—some feedback from me. I do not know whether that helps you or frustrates you even more.

Mrs JOHNSON—You were saying about the community helping, et cetera. The commercial radio station in Albany said it was 10 years ago that they applied to be able to get out here. Maybe if they applied again, with the grants that you say are available, it would come into your station to be able to help us—

CHAIR—If you have mains power and you have a 50-metre antenna—

Mrs JOHNSON—That is right. With the new antenna available now, what is the expense that you would be looking at? What is the problem? Why could you not come out here to Walpole with your transmission?

Mr St CLAIR—It is the licence, I think, that is the problem.

Mrs JOHNSON—So maybe that is where you could come in to help them and working together we could do all this.

Mr HARDGRAVE—The great irony, Mrs Johnson, is that you have again a remote licence and for some strange reason it jumps over other licence areas— Albany being one of them. There is then this little pocket on the map of the licence that is given to North West Radio out of Karratha and it says that Karratha shall broadcast here as it shall to Karratha, Port Hedland, Broome, Kununurra and all these other places which are half a world away.

Mrs JOHNSON—Maybe you can help change that then.

Mr HARDGRAVE—I take your interjection that maybe we can help change that, and maybe we can. I think talking about it and highlighting it is the first real step. It continues to strike me that you are being overlooked very badly. What the ABA—my colleagues will be stunned; I rush to their defence—have done is that they have said, ‘There is this pocket down here that is not serviced by anyone else.’ So they have attached you to the Karratha licence. That is what they have done. It is in Western Australia so therefore it makes sense—I am being very ironic and cynical here.

One would suspect that if they have not contacted you and said, ‘Look you are able to receive us. Here is how to do it. Here is a transmitter for retransmission’—which they have done in about eight centres in Western Australia, and in other centres the communities have bought the \$3,500 or \$5,000 worth of gear and retransmitted it—I think you have a reasonable case to say, ‘Well, they really do not want us. What is the next best option?’ It strikes me that that would be the commercial stations in Albany and the ABC station in Albany.

Mrs JOHNSON—We can get FM. I have a little business here in Walpole. I turned the radio on to FM the other day, and I heard the most disgusting thing. The announcer actually said, ‘If there are any children in the room’—and this was at 10 o’clock in the morning—‘they should go out for the next five minutes.’ I do not know whether anyone happened to listen to that the other day, but it was revolting that they were talking about that at 10 o’clock in the morning.

CHAIR—What was it about?

Mrs JOHNSON—I would rather not say.

CHAIR—Okay.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Was it Triple J?

Mrs JOHNSON—It was Triple J.

Mr STOKES HUGHES—I am from Peaceful Bay which is, as the crow flies, about 20 kilometres from here back towards Albany.

CHAIR—What sort of reception do you get?

Mr STOKES HUGHES—Excellent. That is only 20 kilometres away. You are talking about self-help from here so that they can try to establish themselves. I feel as though surely—and I am not a technical man in any way—there could be a booster from that 20 kilometres to overcome the problem that Walpole is suffering.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Mr Chairman, could I just put it back to the ABC again, now that we have been discussing this for a while. I think you were a little bit hesitant initially to make any suggestions as to what the ABC could do to bring radio to Walpole. Did I get the right impression? You said that was the morale of other people.

Mr CECIL—Not hesitant, but not in the technical strand of the ABC. So the information I have is very much program based and is from a local resident's point of view rather than a fully informed engineering point of view. I guess I am not wanting to fire off any red herrings.

Mr MOSSFELD—You do not want to make a commitment if it is not technically impossible to do that. What would you be taking back to your superiors as a result of today's discussion?

Mr CECIL—My report will be based on the civil aspects, the emergency aspects, if you like, that we do not cover this area at all well. The story from Jennifer about the school buses and trying to round everybody up and tell them what is going on is very much in our province, because that is what we do. As I said in my very first remarks, the frustration of not being able to do that is immense. We cannot get here. Under the existing broadcasting circumstances, we have no way of getting here. I would further recommend that we talk about how we can do it. I know that debate is going to go into an area between the NTL and the ABC, which is a province I am very keen to leave to those who deal with that area.

I would perhaps add that I have been involved as a citizen in Albany with the provision of SBS to Albany. It is now a government service, but we got it running as a self-help service. I think there are some community resources around that can be brought together to provide at least some information and, if not solutions, some direction to people like Mr Hubble, whom we could assist as community people because we have done that sort of thing a little to the east.

Mr HARDGRAVE—If there were another one of these 8.30 a.m. storms there is actually no way that the people in Walpole could be fully aware of what is occurring unless they literally go around and ring a bell and crank up a megaphone or something—is that so?

Mr CECIL—There are two aspects to that answer. Firstly, that is the case. Secondly, because nobody here relies on the radio—because it is a hit and miss arrangement—they might not choose to tune to the 558 frequency, which is the more powerful of our frequencies, just to see if anything is there. Perhaps as a rider on that: when these things happen in communities that are remote from the transmitting station—wherever that transmitting station is—the tendency is to get on with trying to solve the problem. People do not tend to say, 'A violent storm! I must ring the ABC.' They are dealing with the crisis at hand and—with all our resources—by the time the media know about it it could be past the moment.

Mr HARDGRAVE—If you were sitting somewhere and there was a natural disaster heading Walpole's way, officially you would pick up the phone and call the station in Karratha and say, 'You must warn your listeners in Walpole.' Meanwhile in Walpole no-one down here has been told how to receive the Karratha station. Officially you do not broadcast here, neither does the commercial DMG stations, therefore you would ring Karratha. But no-one has been told how to receive it.

CHAIR—There is no retransmission.

Mr HARDGRAVE—There is no retransmission organised, authorised or even publicised. There has been no attempt, it seems, to pass the information on. It strikes me that the simplest answer is to simply expand the Albany market—the ABC and DMG—10 kilometres west,

literally. This would then fix all the problems, one would suspect. If you have to crank up your transmitter, you have to crank up your transmitter. You do not have to comment on that because you want to keep out of it.

Mr CECIL—If the issue is a bigger transmitter, if that would solve the problem, that would be a wonderful thing to have.

CHAIR—What about two small relays on your existing antenna?

Mr CECIL—We are on the AM band so it is a different type of arrangement.

Mr HARDGRAVE—What is the broadcast power of your 558?

Mr CECIL—The 558 is 50 kilowatts.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Which is pretty standard ABC size, isn't it?

Mr CECIL—That is about as big as they get. The Albany operation is five kilowatts. That, I suppose, could be termed—

CHAIR—You go up only on that frequency? You do not go on the FM frequency?

Mr CECIL—No, the local station, the Albany operation, operates on the AM band.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Is the same problem true to the east of Albany as it is to the west? Is there another Walpole sitting out there—between there and Esperance, for example?

Mr CECIL—Not that we have heard of. The Wagin transmitter covers that area extremely well. It is a drier and sandier area—

Mr HARDGRAVE—So it is really the trees?

Mr St CLAIR—Maybe it is time to put another sawmill back in town.

CHAIR—I might just mention that Mr St Clair is a former sawmiller. Ladies and gentlemen, we are happy to stay a bit longer if you are, but we have gone well over our time. I would like to set some sort of limit as we are now at 6.15 p.m. Could we wind it up about 6.25 p.m. or something like that? Does that sound fair enough to everyone?

Mrs JEWELL—If we are going to get into levity—for example, another sawmill in town—I think we should all get our 8 cents back, seeing that we do not get our ABC, and we could buy our own licence. Maybe that is the answer.

Mr St CLAIR—How many in the town?

Mrs JEWELL—Four hundred and twenty-three. It is not only a matter of communication during disasters. You cannot even get the cricket, and that is a civil disaster.

CHAIR—We did not come here today to try to justify the government's position, but equally I do not want to walk away from here giving you a false sense of expectation. We want to hear solutions. If you want to run a philosophical argument with the government on whether government should cover every square inch of Australia, mobile telephony covers 94 per cent of people in their homes but it covers only 13 per cent of the landmass. So, if you are in that other 87 per cent of the landmass, quite frankly you are not going to get mobile telephony. That is the reality of life for 18 million people on a continent the size of ours and it will always be so. We live on a vast continent with the people largely living around the east, west and southern coasts. We will never get to a situation where you are going to have a TV, radio and mobile telephone signal right over this country. That is never going to happen. In the same way, not every provincial city is going to have a suburban rail and tram service. There are going to be some realities that will relate to population. You try to do the best you can. It is like a family: you give your kids the best shoes, clothes and education that you can afford, but there is a limit for every family.

I am not here to justify the government, the previous government or any government. I just wish to say that we have come here today to look for solutions for people like you and also hopefully to get across Australia a better quality of commercial and ABC radio programming for people in country areas. That was our term of reference. We have picked up these other things such as your saying, 'Well what good is better quality radio when we cannot get the initial signal?' and we are taking that on board. It will play a very important part in our report; make no mistake about that.

But if you want to have a philosophical argument about whether the government is doing this, that or the other, then I suggest you will have to talk to your local member or to your local senators, because it is a philosophical argument that we as a committee do not have in our terms of reference so we are not going to be able to solve it for you. But if we can go back and rev up the NTL, the ABA, the DMG and the ABC by what we put in our report, it might well be that you do get a translator or a retransmission facility. Just understand this philosophical argument. While I understand you are hurt and are outraged, we have come here looking for solutions. Give us, over the next 10 minutes, what you think might solve your problems.

Mr TAPLEY—The solution is quite simple. We have a tower up on the hill now and we put a repeater station up there which gives us transmission to Walpole. The reason Peaceful Bay would get it so well is that it goes virtually across the sea to Albany. There is no interference with the timbers; there is very little forest between them. We have a lot of forest, a lot of hills. The tower here will pick up Mount Barker quite well—comparative levels—and that should be an easy solution. It is not too hard to find the answers; you only have to do it. I can remember that when I was a young kid—say 50 years ago—we put up a little aerial for the old radio with the old wet battery and I could listen to Jimmy Carruthers fighting, *Dad and Dave* and all those sorts of things. But now, if I put up an aerial, I cannot get reception in the house. I can get it in the car but not in the house. We have actually gone backwards in the last 50 years and that is not really good.

Mr GIBBONS—I noticed that the Walpole Fire Brigade has what looks like high frequency communication. Is anybody here from that organisation? I am wondering how that performs in this area, given the problem with the trees and terrain.

CHAIR—On that point about Barker, does Mount Barker broadcast the Albany signal?

Mr HARDGRAVE—That is what I would like to know. You mentioned the Wagin frequency 558 and the 50,000 watts, which covers everything from Merredin to the South Pole, except for Walpole. There is another frequency at 630, which is a very small community—

CHAIR—What signal does Mount Barker transmit? Is that your signal or Bunbury's or whose?

Mr CECIL—Mount Barker is an FM service. There are a number of services on that. There is TV for ABC, GWN and WIN, and I understand soon there will be SBS.

CHAIR—I am sorry, but you are missing my point. Which of your ABC regional radio services—the Bunbury, Perth or Albany signal—are sent out from there?

Mr CECIL—None.

CHAIR—What signal is it then?

Mr CECIL—The signals that come off there are the network signals of Triple J, Radio National and Classic FM.

Mr HARDGRAVE—I do not want to embarrass you but, according to the map the ABC gave us this morning, this could be yet another problem. There is 6AL at 630 AM, and regional radio has a coverage area which looks like it runs out about 10 kilometres east of here, but it seems to include Mount Barker and has Albany in the middle. So there are two places you can pick up Albany. I am really sorry to do this to you, but this is what it says on a map that was given to us by the ABC this morning. I would like to understand what 6AL at 630 AM is.

CHAIR—John, if you were to put another regional radio transmitter on Mount Barker, would that reach here?

Mr CECIL—Can I answer the first question first?

Mr HARDGRAVE—Sure.

Mr CECIL—The map, as drawn, shows the line for the coverage area of 6AL, which is at 630 kilohertz. Starting at the east of Albany, which is at about Bremer Bay, it then travels northward roughly in an arc to Mount Barker which is, on this map, said to be the northern extent of the 6AL service. It then has a lobe north and west of Mount Barker and travels then steeply south to an area—

Mr HARDGRAVE—Around Irwin Inlet or Peaceful Bay.

Mr CECIL—Your map is more accurate than mine is.

Mr HARDGRAVE—I am referring to two maps.

Mr CECIL—It is officially to the west of Denmark, but anecdotally we know it to be between 10 and 20 kilometres east of here.

CHAIR—Let me pull you up at that point. This lady over here heard Triple J. Which Triple J signal did you pick up, Mount Barker?

Mrs JOHNSON—I am sorry, but I do not have a clue.

CHAIR—Do you know what frequency it was on?

Mrs JOHNSON—I turn the radio on and that is it. I do not know the frequency.

Mr CECIL—To follow on from that, the other AM service that augments 6AL's on 630 is Wagin on 558, and with 50,000 watts that has a large coverage area. It goes to Merredin and well over to the west towards Augusta, but not Augusta, and over towards Ravensthorpe in the east. They are the AM services in this part of the world. The FM services emanate from Mount Barker, and they are Radio National, Triple J and FM.

CHAIR—Is that the Triple J this lady heard?

Mr CECIL—That would be the Triple J that the lady heard.

CHAIR—The question is: if an FM Triple J signal will travel from Mount Barker to here, if a Radio National signal from Mount Barker will travel to here, why wouldn't you put an FM regional radio signal off the same mast?

Mr CECIL—I think everybody at the ABC will be quite surprised to find that those services are reaching here.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Can I ask another question. You may care to review this when you see the *Hansard* and come back to us with some follow-up information. Given you are also the manager at Albany, you may like to qualify this for me because, according to this, there is your Wagin station which has 50,000 watts. What is the power of 6AL and where is it broadcast from? Is it broadcast from Wagin, because according to this map it is not?

Mr CECIL—No, it is broadcast from Albany.

Mr HARDGRAVE—From Albany itself?

Mr CECIL—At five kilowatts.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Herein lies the solution for Walpole, surely. If you were to create a 10-kilowatt 6AL, Walpole would get the signal, wouldn't it?

Mr MEAD—No.

Mr HARDGRAVE—The trees get in the way again? Does it have to be at Mount Barker? The ABC already has an infrastructure at Mount Barker. According to the ABC this morning, there are FM signals all over the place. If you could literally stick an FM signal into Walpole or relocate the Albany stick to Mount Barker, would that work? I am simply trying to get some ideas on the record, because we can then go back and look at this and ask the ABA for some advice. This is more a dictation that is going on here at the moment than anything else.

Mrs MANNING—We actually pick up Triple J a lot better than we do Radio National.

CHAIR—Yet they come in off the one mast. Is that right, John?

Mr CECIL—Yes.

Mr HARDGRAVE—But, according to Mr Cecil, theirs is not meant to be here anyway.

CHAIR—Is it fortuitous coverage?

Mr CECIL—I am suggesting that it is fortuitous. I do not have a map of the national services. The other point I would make is that 6VA in Albany is two kilowatts, we are five kilowatts and we both go the same distance towards Radio West. Anecdotal evidence is that the Triple J signal is more powerful than other signals on the Mount Barker mast.

Mr HARDGRAVE—That is because the devil is driving it.

CHAIR—Do DMG have any retransmission facilities of any sort between here and Bunbury?

Mr MEAD—We have services in Albany, Katanning, Narrogin, Bridgetown—or Yornup, which covers Bridgetown and Manjimup—as well as the Bunbury services. The FM service is from Mount Leonard, the same as the national services in Bunbury which cover the east, to a degree.

CHAIR—Of the people who live here who do pick up some sort of DMG signal, which one are they picking up—Albany or Manjimup?

Mr MEAD—They would pick up Albany—6VA.

CHAIR—So the problem seems to be the boosting of the ABC and the DMG signals into this area from Albany?

Mr MEAD—Yes, which is not as easy as it sounds.

CHAIR—I know that, but we have to have a starting point. We are going back to the ABA and to the government, and we have to have something on the record, we have to have a starting point.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Would relocating the Albany stick to Mount Barker provide a solution—or would Albany then have a problem?

Mr MEAD—No. The Albany service is an AM service, the Mount Barker is FM and they would not coexist.

Mr HARDGRAVE—But they do in other places, don't they? Don't they share masts all around the country?

Mr MEAD—Yes, in some areas, but usually the FM service shares the AM service mast, not the other way around.

Mr STOKES HUGHES—You did say that you were looking for solutions in order to save the trees. At Peaceful Bay there is a very high little mountain called Flag Lookout. That is roughly in that direction. Most of the trees are in that direction from here. You would get almost an unbroken direct line from that hill to here.

Mr CECIL—More as a resident of the community rather than an ABC representative—and from the words we have heard from the shire and from the councillor involved in this area about the tower that is here and from the Peaceful Bay residents' comments about the way things are lined up—it would seem to me that, as a community, we could approach a manufacturer, borrow transmit and receive equipment and spend a gainful week driving around the trees having a shot. To me, we could solve this problem in a community sense.

CHAIR—If it were television, you would get a \$2,000 grant to do that out of the black spots program, because you can use \$2,000 of that money to actually do field tests.

Mr CECIL—To pick up on Penny Jewell's 8c a day comment, I am personally willing to take time out of my day to drive around and try to find a solution. As a community resident, I am more interested in being able to reach this part of the world, and it bugs me that we cannot. It is not really the fault of the ABC office at Albany or the way we have run things that mean this is a problem—

CHAIR—We are not blaming anyone.

Mr CECIL—I understand that, but it is an anomaly that has gone on long enough. As a community, a bunch of folks, we should fix it and, as you say, there is money to do it.

CHAIR—Just one more question, you have an area consultative committee here; is that right?

Mr CECIL—Yes.

CHAIR—Where is it based?

Mr CECIL—It is in Albany.

CHAIR—Under their charter, they can get money for any demonstrable program that improves employment prospects. Have you ever applied for a grant for a study to improve radio in this area as part of your tourist profile?

Mr CECIL—I can answer that I have not—

CHAIR—I have two very active ACCs in my electorate, and they get grants for all conceivable sorts of things—even for a study to build a nursing home in a particular area to boost employment. It would seem to me that, if you have 200,000 people going around the timber tops up here and you have another 300,000 or 400,000 up to 500,000 tourists coming through this area and with the potential to boost motels, caravan parks, shops and things, why would you not go to your ACC for five or ten grand to do a study on the most acceptable way to get radio signals into the place? I bet that it would be approved.

Mr CECIL—I would put on the record that I would be keen to be on such a committee from the Albany end.

CHAIR—Yes. I am sure DMG would join you, wouldn't you?

Mr HARDGRAVE—I think if you were to talk to your local federal member, Geoff Prosser, and draw those sorts of comments to his attention. We will make sure that we draw what we have just said to his attention as well. I suppose if you taxed everybody who came through here a dollar a head, you could buy the Bunbury station and do whatever you like then, couldn't you?

Mr CLEMENTS—Summing up from what has happened today, there seems to be two things the committee can do to assist both Walpole and the south-west region: the first is to talk to the ABA and maybe sort out a better system of granting licences to help those areas that have ineffective or irrelevant licences. For example, the Albany station could then in some way take over. Maybe there is some sort of system that needs to be developed to allow that to happen. The second is to allow black spot funding to include radio, which will assist communities like this one to rebroadcast—whether it be commercial, the ABC or whatever. I think they are the two things that this committee can do that can really help us.

CHAIR—Any other comments?

Mr PEARCE—Just as a rough rule of thumb—I do not have accurate figures—I believe that the sensitivities of car radio receivers are about 16 microvolts per metre whereas domestic receivers are about 25 to 30 microvolts per metre, which accounts for the reason why people can receive in a car but not in the home. To double the signal strength—you are actually dealing with a logarithmic scale—to make it suitable to receive in domestic receivers here from transmission at Albany at 50 kilowatts, you would actually need to go to 500 kilowatts which is economically not a viable option.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Everyone would be glowing at that point.

CHAIR—On that note, I think you will appreciate we have gone well over our time and *Hansard* have been very patient with us. I would like to thank you all for coming today. You have added yet another dimension to a problem that we have seen in Western Australia, and a

very important dimension. There is not much point in improving the relevance and local content of radio if you cannot get the radio signal at all. I sense, too, that there is some fine tuning to be done in the emergency service area even in Western Australia, especially in those areas where you have not got the radio to deliver the message. We will certainly take on board—not only your particular problem—but your problem as indicative of lots of other small communities of perhaps under 500 people who need radio and cannot get it.

We are a very practical committee and our recommendations, when we do write our reports, are not those esoteric ones that go on for 40 or 50 recommendations, 25 of which ask for new studies. We try to have 10, 12 or 15 recommendations that are all hard-hitting and mean something so that when it is tabled in the parliament, and when the minister looks at it, hopefully, he goes out and does a few things straightaway and then responds to the rest in the parliament and later, hopefully, in later policy decisions.

This has been a very good community meeting. You are a very representative group of the radio industry of the shire, the conservation movement, emergency services and ordinary citizens of the community, and that gives us a lot of confidence that what we can say about you is indicative of other communities like yours around Australia. Once again, we thank Rod Burton for helping us put this together. Thank you for the use of this beautiful facility which is an absolute tribute to you. Thank you for your very gracious hospitality when we arrived. The two things you never go past in this game is a toilet or a cup of tea because you do not know when you are going to get to the next one.

Mr St CLAIR—Particularly when you are over 50.

CHAIR—Over the last four days we have been in Brisbane, Darwin, Geraldton, Perth and here, and tomorrow we fly back to the eastern states. Thank you for attending this afternoon.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Hardgrave**):

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

Committee adjourned at 6.38 p.m.