



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS,  
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS

**Reference: Community broadcasting**

THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2006

MELBOURNE

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE  
ARTS**

**Thursday, 20 July 2006**

**Members:** Miss Jackie Kelly (*Chair*), Ms Owens (*Deputy Chair*), Mrs Bronwyn Bishop, Mr Garrett, Mr Griffin, Mr Hayes, Mr Johnson, Mr Keenan, Mr Laming and Mr Ticehurst

**Members in attendance:** Mrs Bronwyn Bishop and Mrs Owens

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

- The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the internet and other broadcasting technologies;
- Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity;
- Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks; and
- Opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters.

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**Committee met at 11.06 am**

**DEE, Mr Gregory William, Station Manager, Channel 31, Melbourne Community Television Consortium Ltd**

**LANE, Mr Peter James, Board Chairperson, Channel 31, Melbourne Community Television Consortium Ltd**

**McARTHUR, Mr Peter Stewart, Assembly President, Channel 31, Melbourne Community Television Consortium Ltd**

**O'DONOVAN, Ms Carly, Programming Manager, Channel 31, Melbourne Community Television Consortium Ltd**

**ACTING CHAIR (Ms Owens)**—Welcome. I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts inquiry into community broadcasting. The inquiry arises from a request to this committee by Senator the Hon. Helen Coonan, the federal Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. Written submissions were called for and 126 have been received to date. The committee is now conducting a program of public hearings and inspections. This hearing is the fifth for the inquiry.

Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr McArthur**—I am also a member of ERA television.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission or would you care to make some introductory remarks?

**Ms O'Donovan**—Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about C31 Melbourne. I am a programming team member, so I look after new producers and programming issues for the station. I also assist Greg, the station manager. I will give you a brief overview. C31 Melbourne has been broadcasting to the diverse communities of Melbourne and Geelong and the surrounding areas for the past 11 years. As a community television station, C31 operates on the principles of access, diversity, localism and community harmony. Some of the communities represented on C31 include CALD communities—culturally and linguistically diverse—the disabled and deaf communities, gay and lesbian communities, faith based communities, sporting communities and so on.

C31 Melbourne is watched by over 1.3 million Victorians per month, reaching a larger audience in Melbourne than Foxtel, according to the OzTAM figures for June 2006. There are currently 130 producers either in the preproduction stage or currently producing content for C31 and there are an estimated 1,000 volunteers who are also engaged in community television

production for 31 in various capacities. We estimate that approximately 100 people per year are trained who will go on to paid work in the film and television industry and related media fields.

I will tell you a bit about how we are funded. C31 Melbourne has an annual budget of close to \$2 million. We are currently operating with a small surplus of around \$25,000 per month. C31 relies on the sale of sponsorship announcements for funding. As a community station, C31 can broadcast up to seven minutes per hour of sponsorship announcements. Rather than targeting big businesses, franchises and corporates, C31 has targeted Victoria's small business sector for sponsorship, and this has been very successful.

Our recent figures show that almost 70 per cent of sponsorship bookings in C31's prime time, from 6 pm to midnight, were from small businesses, with 82 small businesses running spots on the station during June 2006. This arrangement helps to ensure the independence of the station while allowing small business access to television advertising, which ordinarily would be cost prohibitive. C31 also receives substantial support from the Victorian state government to purchase sponsorship time from the station. Another source of income for the station is program air-time sales, which contribute an average of \$30,000 per month in funding.

I will turn now to our broadcast system. C31 broadcasts via the playbox system, which is an automated digital presentation system. This has enabled us to broadcast 24 hours per day. When we were broadcasting via tape and manually, we generally had to close presentation at 11 pm and send staff and volunteers home. Now we can broadcast over 24 hours and are running first-run programs up until midnight, and sometimes past midnight.

C31 Melbourne was the first CTV licensee to adopt the playbox system, and it was an important step towards full digital transmission. Playbox produces a digital signal, which we have to convert to analog to broadcast. Playbox is also important in ensuring that the community has continued access to new technology. C31 volunteers who are trained in our presentation system receive skills which are directly transferable to the broadcast systems of the commercial networks.

We are also looking into other ways of using new technology to reach audiences via internet streaming, which will probably commence towards the end of this year. We have also been approached by mobile phone carriers for our content, and by various others. We definitely want to ensure that the community can access new technologies and that C31 is available via traditional broadcasts and other, new ways of reaching audiences.

There are some white folders over there, which are our information packs. Among other things, they contain the season grid for our last three-month block, which we completed at the end of June. Reading from this grid, there were 90 shows per week that were first-run, locally made programs and which accounted for 55 hours per week of first-run, locally made programs. C31's programs come from a variety of sources. The majority are supplied by community producers who are auspiced under C31's member groups and access affiliates.

There are currently 27 member groups and 11 access affiliates, each of which is a not-for-profit organisation providing channels of access to the station. The groups represent diverse cultural and geographical communities. For example, we have the Asian Television Association of Australia on Saturday afternoons and Sunday evenings. There is Bent TV, which represents



the gay and lesbian communities, and Eastern Regional Access Television, which is a television group representing the outer suburbs of Melbourne's east. These groups vary in both the size and the amount of television they produce for the station. SINFM, which produces *1700* on Monday to Friday, has about a thousand members and produces five hours of live television a week, and Somali TV has about four or five members and produces one half-hour a week. So those are the two extremes. There are also independent producers who purchase airtime from the station. There are currently 30 independent producers, and their programs are generally in magazine style and represent a particular hobby or interest, such as hotrods, fishing, pets and cooking.

Our programming objectives encourage diversity, local programming and innovation. On this grid you can see that there are 31 culturally diverse programs, two Indigenous programs and seven grassroots sports programs, including football, soccer and hockey. We receive new ideas for programs via email, phone, students who have heard about us at school and through word of mouth. In the information pack you will also find a copy of our program proposal kit, which all new producers receive. It provides instructions on how to approach a station, how to write a program submission and the things you have to think about. That is there for further reading.

We also actively encourage greater diversity in programs. For example, Salam Cafe turned up at the station with a six-part series called *Ramadan TV*, which was produced on very low-end equipment. We saw the potential there, and wanted to encourage them to make a regular program. We put them together with better studio facilities and general volunteers from within the organisation. Salam Cafe are a Muslim based panel program, and they ended up producing two 13-part series for the station. They have won two Antenna awards and CBAA awards; they have been very successful and will be returning this year. *No Limits* is a disability advocacy show. Before *No Limits*, there was no disability programming on the station—there was *Deaf TV*. Greg Dee was very active in assisting the group with writing grant proposals, getting studio facilities and that sort of thing, so we are actively encouraging new programs on to the station if we see a need for them.

We encourage new producers with no television experience on to the station. *1700* is a program that is produced from Monday to Friday live to air. All of the cast and crew are under 25. A lot of them are under 18. They have never held a camera or done any directing or anything like that, and we have given them studio access, free airtime, a tech to help them with directing and those sorts of things, and they produce five hours of live television a week, which is a pretty amazing feat. I have more to say, but thank you anyway.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—The statement that you read from, is that a supplementary submission?

**Mr Dee**—Yes, we could submit that to you.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Is there any objection to our accepting it as a supplementary submission and also receiving the documents in the white folder as an exhibit? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

**Mr Lane**—I am essentially going to address the media policy issues. Australian governments have been world leaders in supporting a strong and growing community broadcasting sector. We have a unique situation with high-powered broadcast community television that is the envy of

many other countries in the world, and we should be proud of it. Australia is an ongoing success story in balancing the needs of government, commerce and the public in the broadcasting environment. It does it better than almost anywhere else. The present and preceding governments have supported community broadcasting in giving community programmers access to community audiences, and communities access to relevant local diverse programming.

Community broadcasting has significantly delivered on the objects of the broadcasting act. It has done its job, and we have seen that with the growth and the strength of radio. Community television, I would argue, provides value for its allocated spectrum. The training value provided for the broadcasting industry alone could be costed at millions of dollars per year. If you had to build schools to train those people, what would it cost the government? The local content production is unparalleled. In fact, we produce more local content in a week than all the other stations combined.

In the case of community television now, we have the first major development in television broadcasting in decades with a substantial improvement in technical quality, but at the same time that we have a fragmenting audience and, therefore, income base for broadcast television. This presents challenges and opportunities to stakeholders and broadcasters in all three of the television sectors. Public and commercial sectors are provided with a full seven megahertz of digital spectrum and financial support to the tune of \$75 million.

We have had a longstanding commitment from this government, since 1998, that CTV gets free access to digital spectrum, and we have had reassurances from the minister and the Prime Minister that we are provided for in the forthcoming digital action plan. Yet so far the community broadcasting sector has been denied parity with the commercial and public industry sectors, has no allocation or reservation of any digital spectrum, has the lack of a clear decision on the method for community access to digital broadcast spectrum, and has no financial support for community television, including no financial support for digital transmission. It seems rather inequitable.

While we wait, we are losing our audience. The business model enshrined in the Broadcasting Services Act allows for revenue through sponsorship and sale of airtime, both of which are based on audience—they are audience related income. We have to be available to the entire viewing audience, to have that entire potential viewing audience, in order to maintain our legislative revenue base.

The lack of clarity on policy makes it almost impossible to business plan. Stations, their members, audiences and community producers need to know for forward planning—particularly financial planning—what the situation with digital is going to be. The stations have to plan to buy transmitters. Do we buy analog or digital? We have to plan for multiplex costs. Do we try to go alone? Are we going to be a must-carry? How do we possibly plan without that knowledge? We have to plan for site costs. Again, we cannot know until we know the model. Producers have to buy cameras. Do they buy a high-definition camera next time they replace their camera? They do not know. They cannot make those choices. What about the audience? Do they buy digital TV? Do they buy a tuner inbuilt? Do they buy a separate set top box? They do not know. Do they buy an MPEG-4?

As a volunteer of the chair of the board of Channel 31 Melbourne in Geelong, I am personally concerned that I and others cannot properly carry out our forward responsibilities, our legal responsibilities as directors, due to uncertainty in government policy in this area. We cannot do the planning that we are legally responsible for. Financially, due to our nature as a community enterprise, there is a necessary tension between providing access and sustainability. In one sense, our job is to make access to quality production and broadcast as cheap as possible, to give away as much as we can and to be able to pay for it and keep doing it, rather than to make as much money as we can by selling something. We have almost an opposite objective to a commercial company, and that should be recognised in the support for community broadcasting. Also, the existing CTV stations are still young. In some cases they are infants. That needs to be recognised. It took radio a very long time to become stable, but look at it now. This makes us more vulnerable financially than the other sectors. We need more certainty to plan our future and more time to fund developments than other sectors, not less.

I will now move to the audience. We have a continuing audience loss due to digital and cable take-up. If this continues at a similar rate, all CTV stations will be exposed to financial vulnerability due to their lack of ability to broadcast and be received digitally. I believe this problem will be serious for all CTV stations within 18 months. CTV stations cannot afford to run both digital and analog at once. Hence, we are going to ask—and have asked in our submissions to date—for funding from the federal government. In order to meaningfully continue the laudable support shown for Australian community broadcasting in legislation, regulation and policy by this government and in keeping with financial support for other sectors for digital simulcast, we recommend that before the analog switch-off date the government gives permanent or temporary allocation of digital spectrum for community television simulcast as soon as possible. I believe that may be possible within a time frame of something like 12 to 18 months. I know there are a number of things to be organised before we can broadcast, but 12 to 18 months would be probably in time to not terminally affect us financially.

Our second recommendation is that the government allocate spectrum to allow for standard—not substandard—television delivery for community use, as that standard changes over time. There are other wordings of that in the CBAA submission. Essentially, we do not want inferior TV. We want what is seen to be the norm for television. Our third recommendation is that the government provide funding for digital broadcast during the simulcast period. You could refer to the CBAA submission to this inquiry for the figures. Another recommendation is that, at analog switch-off, there is no direct switch—that is, it is not a case of analog off and digital on at the same time. We must be able to simulcast. If there is a direct switch, we will lose our audience and we will not gain a new one. It took 12 years to get where we are now in Melbourne. We do not want to have to sit there for another 12 years to get an audience back. You cannot say that, because they can receive digital, they will turn on Channel 31. Look at how long it took SBS to get an audience.

Our next recommendation is that, prior to or at the time of switch-off, there is a reservation of digital spectrum to allow time to explore the possibility of community use of seven megahertz of spectrum. We can put aside that spectrum so that we have time to find out if the community can usefully use that spectrum. Also, the government should support research into community and civil use of seven megahertz of digital broadcast spectrum, including and additional to current CTV stations. For example, we could have CTV local access stations; an ethnic channel, national

or local; a national Indigenous channel; a national children's channel; and state government, local and educational use. There are plenty of potential users for seven megahertz.

Finally, we would recommend that the government review their policy to determine the basis for not providing funds for community television as are provided for community radio through the department of communications and the Community Broadcasting Foundation. I can see no policy basis for that distinction and we believe that the CTV sector should be funded in a similar way to the radio sector. We believe these are reasonable recommendations given the demonstrated value of community broadcasting in Australia. Having made long-term commitments to community broadcasting, it now rests with the government to allow community broadcasting to achieve its ends.

There are two possibilities for the future for community broadcasting. The first is that we are a substandard dinosaur that slowly dies on the vine through lack of watering and lack of ability to produce a decent wine, if you like. The other possibility is that we continue to be creative, productive and in fact the leaders in new uses of the technology, new creative ways of using the technology and demonstrating to both the commercial and the public sectors the changes they can make to escape the safe formulas that are relied on in commercial broadcasting. Please give us a chance. Let us be the stepping ground for the other sectors, as we are now, and let us be the form of broadcasting that allows for people's hearts, for what is close to them both emotionally and physically, to be in their media, not just what is distant from them.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thank you. We had some discussion yesterday in the visit which, as you know, is not on the record until it is actually said here. So I am going to ask a few questions that I already know the answers to—you told me yesterday—just because I would like to get them on the record. There has been an assumption, and I have heard it said, that when a person goes and gets a set top box and converts to digital they can still get community television. Is that true?

**Mr Lane**—Yes, it is true in many cases. But the person has to (a) know how to do it and (b) be prepared to do it. The anecdotal evidence, which is significant—in fact, I would say that of the probably 100 people that I have personally spoken to about this issue, because, of course, we continually ask people about Channel 31 out in the community—is that probably a maximum of 1 in 20 actually takes the trouble to have a splitter on their signal and possibly put it through their VHS so they can still get the VHS, and to use two remote controls. The standard answers people give are: 'I've lost Channel 31 because I have a set top box and I didn't know you could do that,' or 'It was too much trouble,' or 'We've done that, but it's on my daughter's television in her bedroom.' Those are the standard answers that you get. They are those types of answers. It is possible for those who have the knowledge to do it, but most people do not. What is television? It is a passive medium.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So if you read the instructions you would end up losing Channel 31 pretty much?

**Mr Lane**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—When you talk about the audience loss as people convert to digital, is that the main factor or are there other factors as well?

**Mr Lane**—It is conversion to digital and take-up of Foxtel. Community television is not carried by cable in any form and the cable stations have asked for something equivalent to our annual turnover to carry our signal on Foxtel.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So, when people convert to Foxtel, they get their free-to-air via Foxtel?

**Mr Lane**—That is right, except for Channel 31.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do you have any sense of what kind of audience loss there has already been?

**Mr Dee**—Yes. We have tracked it pretty closely over the last three years now. We did a data survey via OzTAM. We were reaching 1.7 about three years ago. We think we have lost about 400,000 people to digital and Foxtel. So it is a significant audience drop, which affects our revenue and our viewers, who are very discontented now that they cannot see the station they loved so much.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Absolutely. Would you like to talk a little more about the approach to Foxtel and the attempts to get community broadcast?

**Mr Dee**—We did approach them formally through the CBAA. We spoke to them on many occasions. They proffered some interest at certain times and they also promised us—in meetings, not on paper—that once they went digital there would be lots of channels and said, ‘Greg, don’t worry. We’ll give you space.’ Come digital, they said, ‘No, it’s all too hard and, by the way, we’ve started up our own community TV channel,’ which was to our dismay because there was no consultation. There was no communication with us, the CBAA or our stations. That is their current position: they have a community station. We have said to them, ‘Where is the content coming from for your community station?’ The CEO at the time said, ‘From you, Greg. You’ll be supplying the content.’ I said, ‘Hang on. How’s this going to work?’ So it has not gone swimmingly with Foxtel, to be completely honest.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Can you see any solution to that?

**Mr Lane**—It is difficult. If Foxtel insists on a very high commercial price for access for a community broadcaster that is the only free-to-air broadcaster not included, then it is difficult to see a resolution. However, we believe that Foxtel may in fact be interested in the programming, so a solution may be possible. It may be that a little leverage from the government would assist.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Basically, Foxtel is carrying the other free to airs, presumably at a fee, but Channel 7 and Channel 9 already have an interest in it—is that right?

**Mr Lane**—Indeed.

**Mr Dee**—Channel 9 has an interest in Foxtel. With PBL they have 25 per cent ownership.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Yes, but with Fox News too. Both Seven and Nine are involved in that.

**Mr Dee**—Yes.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—As well, PBL has a share.

**Mr Dee**—When they started, they carried the other free to airs. They wanted them to attract audiences to Foxtel, so they were carried for free on their analog service. Now they have gone to digital—and there is digital on the satellite and digital over the cable. I think there is about a 50 per cent break-up between satellite and cable. They are now charging the free to airs to use their satellite space. My understanding is that Seven and Ten are refusing to pay at the moment. If you go to Foxtel on satellite, you cannot see Seven and Ten; you can see Nine, ABC and SBS. The satellite is owned by Optus or SingTel, so Foxtel have to pay for that satellite space. Our original ask was, ‘Please let us be retransmitted like the other free to airs.’ That was our first ask three years back.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You do not have any satellite customers, do you?

**Mr Dee**—No, we are just free-to-air terrestrial.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You would not mind about that if they would take you on.

**Mr Lane**—That would be wonderful.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Where there is a cable, Seven and Ten are still being transmitted free.

**Mr Dee**—That is right. That is my understanding.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Obviously Nine gets it free because it is part of the business.

**Mr Dee**—Yes, it is part of the business.

**ACTING CHAIR**—As I understand it, the current government proposal is to provide one standard definition channel at some point. How do you respond to that?

**Mr Lane**—We have seen in the minister’s press release on the digital action plan that high-definition television is going to be allowed for the commercials as part of their multichanneling. If we are not given the ability to provide high-definition television, then we will have a substandard model that is not the normally accepted definition of television at this time. A standard definition channel, as I understand it, would not allow us to do high-definition television. We would be being given the dinosaur, if you like, or the substandard service.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Can we talk about the training role that you seem to have fallen into or grown into. It is an informal relationship with the commercial sector at the moment—is it not? Would you like to talk about that role and how you see that developing through the change in form.

**Mr Dee**—I will talk about that and then Carly can. Yes, Seven did approach us and we had a luncheon with the boys and girls and they were very keen to look towards us as a training

opportunity. So we have been talking with Channel 7. SBS know us as well as being very much a possibility.

I was saying yesterday that three of our C News journalists who have been with us for the last year have gone to the *Today* show: Matthew Mitchell, Gorgi Quill and, just last week, Chris Bendall—who has been writing our news for at least a year and a half as a volunteer. So there are distinct relationships. Because the other broadcasters have no formal training processes, they look to us as a training ground and we are happy to take up that ground. On a more practical level, we do it on a day-to-day basis, as you mentioned in your report, Carly.

**Ms O'Donovan**—Yes, absolutely. I was an arts graduate who was volunteering for Channel 31. I received all my television training with the station and am now an employee. There are four other full-time or casual employees with the station who are in the same boat. On a day-to-day basis, I provide advice and training to people who have no experience whatsoever. It is informal. They do not end up with a certificate but they do have skills that they can take with them.

**Mr Dee**—That is just the station. Peter McArthur might talk a bit about all the member groups who are filming every day, day and night. They are doing on-the-job training with all their volunteers—aren't they, Peter?

**Mr McArthur**—Yes, indeed they are. It provides a huge avenue for volunteer groups in the community to attempt things themselves. Normally they would sit back and expect the television station to do everything. We are finding that a lot of the groups are getting really adventurous and doing things themselves—admittedly sometimes on the smell of an oily rag. Advice can be given by the paid staff at headquarters, but certainly in the other eastern area where I operate from, there is almost an expectation by local groups who have got some good message they want to deliver that they will come to us.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You also have a strong role in technical training, obviously, through the sector. There is a lot of talk in the community radio sector about the need for funding for training. Are you able to meet your training requirements at this point?

**Mr Lane**—No. The main problem with delivery of training is delivery of course ware. The learning materials and the courses—the actual materials that are taught—need to be adapted from the standards for the certificates for normal broadcast television. There are different standards of equipment, for instance. And they are different from the non-broadcast media certificates. So there is a great need to develop the course ware and training plans and also to deliver accredited training and some support.

We are not asking for more than what radio gets already. There is a radio training program that is called 'community broadcasting training' but it is only for community radio, and television is not allowed to receive any of the money—or very little of the money. So the development of course materials and delivery mechanisms definitely require funding, and a bit of support of a similar level to community radio in the ongoing case is also needed.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Are there types of programs that are not being made at the moment because of a lack of resources? I know that, in radio, high-level current affairs, for example, is very difficult without additional funding. Are there areas in your field?

**Ms O'Donovan**—With a lot of the culturally diverse program producers, it takes them a lot longer to get on air. There is an Afghani group that have been in the pipeline for about 18 months that have approached the station, and we have given them as much help as we can, but for obvious reasons it is taking them longer to get it together. There are English problems and that sort of thing. I think groups like that have problems in getting their programs on air quickly.

**Mr Dee**—And, as Peter said, they are made on—I would not say the ‘smell’—the distant fragrance of an oily rag.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Isn't that what community television is about: people who are amateur, who have got an idea and want to have the ability to put that to air so that people can make a judgment about it. How do you set a standard? Do you have a standard that says, ‘We are not going to put the rank amateur to air. It has got to reach a certain standard before we will let it go to air’?

**Mr Dee**—Absolutely. We have absolute technical standards, because we respect our viewers and we want them to enjoy the experience.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Every bit of the community is not entitled to have a go. They have got to reach a standard first.

**Mr Dee**—Yes, that is true—just so it can be broadcast. If there is no sound and people cannot hear it—well!

**Mr Lane**—Every member of the community is entitled to have a go, but in order to have a go in television you have to have some training and development. However, many people can come in and be performers et cetera with very little introduction, as long as the technical standards are met. We concentrate on technical and legal standards and completeness and then we encourage quality of content.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But what if something totally amateur came in, in the sense that nobody is going to watch it according to a standard you have set? You have actually set a standard that people must meet.

**Ms O'Donovan**—If something came in that was technically very bad and content-wise I could not see any great importance in it, I would be less likely to hook them up with people within the community who can offer training. With *Salam Cafe*, that program came in originally very grainy. They had shot it on four cameras. They had recorded each camera and then gone back and edited, rather doing a switch, but we could see the value in it as a program and we worked to find other volunteers within Channel 31 to connect people.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—What you can say you represent, perhaps, is an entry point, the experimental stuff. It is a bit like someone who makes their own CD at home singing their latest song, which sounds dreadful and you would never put it to air, but somebody might hear it and say, ‘With work and production it could be turned into something.’



**Mr Lane**—That is right. The screen development association is like Open Channel and Metro. They are there to support creative, emerging film makers but we are here to support creative, emerging television talent.

**Mr Dee**—The standards we have achieved are very high because of the digital opportunities. The cameras are now worth \$2,000 or \$3,000 each. You can buy a Macintosh computer or a PC and you have a full-blown editing suite, which is as good as the stations are using. Some of the standards are amazingly high for 31; people cannot believe it. Some producers are happy to stay here; they do not want to go. Vasili has been approached for a couple of years now by SBS and is still resisting them because he is enjoying the freedom, the opportunity and the fact that there is less pressure. Some people are willing to stay because they are happy; they are content with our audiences and the lack of pressure. As an example, about a year and a half ago Carly showed me a clip of kids who were making a hockey show. When they came in showing wild, swinging shots of a hockey field, I said, ‘That’s a show?’

**Ms O’Donovan**—You did not see the first one, which was a computer printout of them sitting on a couch with no hockey footage. They were just talking to a camera. They had to get up, press ‘stop’, record and then sit back down in front of it. I said: ‘There’s no way. You need to have hockey flesh in there and some greenery.’ They were very passionate. About four or five pilots later they were eventually accepted to go on air. They have won Producer of the Year award at the Antennas.

**Mr Dee**—There has been magnificent support from the whole of the hockey community. All the kids’ games are covered—senior games and international games. They have become a real icon at the station. They are humorous as well. Other sports producers are looking to them as an innovative sports show, so we are leading the way with innovation in sport. It is a local sport. It is a second-tier sport which we are very happy to support.

**ACTING CHAIR**—We are almost running out of time. Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Mr Lane**—I have a couple of things to follow up some of your questions. Firstly, in relation to training, I spoke to the arts coordinator at the ABC about another matter and asked, ‘Do you see significant training in broadcasting coming from the sector?’ She said, ‘Everybody I know in television has worked in community television.’ I said, ‘Everybody?’ She said, ‘Everybody in the ABC.’ That is a significant statement. These are all anecdotal, however. We cannot afford to survey the entire industry and show our value in the training sector. We would appreciate some partnership or support in order to be able to do that. I think we would find it would be a very significant presence in terms of people’s experience in community broadcasting in the commercial and public sectors.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I presume what you are saying is that people in Melbourne ABC have had that experience.

**Mr Lane**—Yes.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Because you really do not have equivalents in other parts of Australia, do you?

**Mr Dee**—There are five others now: Perth—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I said ‘equivalents’.

**Mr Lane**—Community stations are local, so they meet local community needs and therefore are diverse. However, in terms of their impact on training, I think you would find that there is a very mobile population amongst cities in the broadcasting area. Just because you have people working in, say, the ABC or Channel Seven in Brisbane, it does not mean they did not come from Melbourne initially. So, wherever they got their experience, the majority of young people now moving into broadcasting do have experience in community broadcasting.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I almost feel that the term ‘access television’ is better than ‘community television’ because it is about access, isn’t it. As to reach, if we are talking about rural areas—and I cannot really describe Geelong as rural or regional—how big is the reach? All of the C31s are not yet in a loose-knit network, but that possibility must exist.

**Mr Dee**—The figures are that we can reach four million in Melbourne with our signal but there are five million Victorians. So we are losing one million regional Victorians—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That you cannot reach?

**Mr Dee**—that we would love to touch base with in the regions. We believe there are diverse communities in those regions, not just in the cities. There are Muslims in Shepparton who would love to see our stories. We would love to get there. But there are issues with spectrum. That is another conversation altogether—a long conversation.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So if you go digital with your new equipment, you reckon that digital would give you that reach?

**Mr Dee**—If our buddies from the ABC and SBS would look at giving us one of their channels for a little while, we could reach those regional communities.

**ACTING CHAIR**—For how long is one channel going to be enough given—

**Mr Dee**—In Melbourne?

**Mr Lane**—Is it 21 hours a day at the moment?

**Mr Dee**—You are asking how much regarding one standard def channel at the moment—is that what you are asking?

**ACTING CHAIR**—One channel, whether it is high definition or standard. How much more content is there and how many more communities out there still do not have access? What would it look like if you were really serving their needs?

**Mr Dee**—I think it is like Peter’s picture before: one Indigenous station, one children’s channel, one ethnic channel, a diverse channel and our normal mainstream community channel we could pretty much fill up tomorrow.

**ACTING CHAIR**—And is that doable on the seven megahertz?

**Mr Dee**—On the seven megahertz, yes, with standard def.

**Mr Lane**—Especially if it is MPEG-4 you could have six different standard definition channels.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Would those decisions on how those channels were used come from the centre?

**Mr Dee**—We would imagine working as a team with the children's foundation and indigenous and other ethnic—

**Mr Lane**—We have met with the National Indigenous Television Service committee representatives and with the Australian Children's Television Foundation representatives. We have had discussions with state government and there is state government interest in New South Wales. You may have seen the recent paper from the New South Wales government. All of these parties are real potential players—they are not just pies in the sky. What we want is a bit of possibility to be stated by the government on spectrum access so that we can meaningfully have discussions, develop partnerships and develop these users. They are not going to waste their time unless they are going to get some possibility of digital access.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You did say that you wanted permanent or temporary digital spectrum now, guaranteed to you.

**Mr Lane**—That is right.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—When you say 'temporary', how long would that be?

**Mr Lane**—In order to get simulcast it may be that the way we are provided with spectrum now is not the same way that we would be provided with permanent digital telecast. That is what I meant by that. As to how long 'temporary' is: when is the switch-off date?

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So you mean until switch-off?

**Mr Lane**—Yes. I have one last brief point. There is a real problem here with branding. You have Rupert Murdoch coming out and saying that community television is the way of the future. He actually means citizen reporting, not community television. When you have Foxtel coming out and calling their station a community television station, we have a problem. We are likely to get lost in a branding war unless something is done about that. There is an act that describes what community television is. I think it is just important that government recognises that community television is not just about making the claim that you are community television. It should be seen to be that which is legislated as community television.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Maybe you should take up my point and call it 'access'.

**Mr Lane**—Perhaps so.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Or even ‘community access’. It seems to me that it better describes what you are about.

**Mr Lane**—I think you are right.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thank you very much for the great visit yesterday. It was very special. It was good to see.

**Mr Lane**—That is terrific. I was glad you could come.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It was a pleasure. Thank you very much.

**Mr Lane**—Thank you for letting us talk today. It was great and we appreciate it. We have a voice in the media to be heard.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thank you.

[11.55 am]

**EVANS, Mr Tim, General Manager Business Development, Vision Australia**

**JOLLEY, Mr Stephen, Manager, Vision Australia Radio, Vision Australia**

**SIMPSON, Mr Michael, General Manager Policy and Advocacy, Vision Australia**

**ACTING CHAIR**—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission or would you care to make some introductory remarks?

**Mr Simpson**—We would like to make some introductory remarks. I will start and then hand over to Stephen Jolley before the three of us answer any questions the committee might have. You have received our formal submission, which outlines three key recommendations that our service, the 3RPH service, would like to have the committee consider and recommend to government to enhance community radio broadcasting, particularly for people in our sector—people who are blind or vision impaired or have other print disabilities. Vision Australia is a very young organisation. Vision Australia came about as a merger in 2004 between four organisations—the Royal Blind Society, which was primarily in New South Wales, the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, the Vision Australia Foundation, and the National Information and Library Service. In July just two years ago, those organisations, which between them have a history of over 400 years of service to people who are blind and vision impaired, came together to create Australia's largest blindness and low-vision organisation.

Our services are primarily targeted at people who are blind and vision impaired—people who either are totally blind or have low vision. Our organisation is a partnership between people who are blind, people who have low vision and people who are sighted. We work very much with organisations in the community, including businesses and government at all levels. Whilst our services are primarily targeted at people who are blind and vision impaired, through the provision of counselling, rehabilitation, training, skill development and equipment, one of our very important services is information access. Information access for people who are blind or have low vision and, particularly, for people with other print disabilities is most important because it is estimated that only three to five per cent of the printed information which is available to people generally in the community is available to clients of our organisation. It is estimated that 17 per cent of the Australian population have a print disability, and it is primarily that group that our information services are targeted at. The information services are about providing people with large print material, audio material, Braille material and, very importantly, the information provided through our radio for the print handicapped network—the RPH network. Primarily in our case, this is done through Victoria, but through radio for the print handicapped Australia—RPH Australia—it is done through a network of stations right throughout Australia. Stephen will talk about the particular recommendations in our submission.

**Mr Jolley**—I thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to be with you today. I would like to say a few words about our submission and draw your attention to some aspects of the submission—particularly the recommendations. Vision Australia RPH is a network of eight licensed community radio stations addressing the information needs of people with a print disability. We participate actively as a member of RPH Australia, which brings together the country's 15 RPH stations. We support RPH Australia in its endeavours to further develop RPH. In particular, we endorse its efforts to extend services to more Australian regional centres; find new platforms for delivery, such as the internet and digital television; reform copyright law to facilitate more flexible delivery methods for RPH content; and increase funding opportunities for RPH providers.

Noting the intention of the inquiry to find ways to support a vibrant and diverse network of community broadcasters, we have in our submission addressed each of the terms of reference. It is our intention to present information about the current state of Vision Australia RPH and to identify needs, particularly those which can be alleviated through the intervention and assistance of the Commonwealth government. Our submission looks at each of the terms of reference, the first being:

- The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the internet and other broadcasting technologies ...

We then talk about the part played by the Vision Australia network. Of the 15 licensed RPH stations across Australia, eight comprise the network operated by Vision Australia. Our stations operate throughout Victoria and into southern New South Wales in the following locations: Melbourne, Mildura, Albury, Shepparton, Bendigo, Geelong, Warrigal and Warrnambool. The community of interest to our radio service are people with a print disability. My colleague Michael has already talked about those people who experience print disability, and they do so for any of a range of reasons, including vision loss, a physical disability where they cannot handle the printed word and learning or comprehension difficulties. Many others tune to RPH because it is convenient and its readings and other specialised information content are of interest. McNair Ingenuity Research in 2005 concluded that 135,000 people each week tune to the RPH Melbourne service. Of those, a fifth reported that they themselves had difficulty accessing print.

The annual operating cost of Vision Australia RPH is around half a million dollars. We receive revenue from the government, from program providers, from sponsors and from individual donors. That is the challenge that community broadcasting has: to find the revenue to operate. Our operation is strengthened by the involvement of many volunteers. There are over 800 volunteers involved in the delivery of the service. There are around 450 in Melbourne and around 50 in each of the regional stations.

Looking now at the area of programming requirements, our programming comprises readings from newspapers and other printed publications and information from government, disability and other community organisations that is of special interest to various listener groups—that is, content not available through other electronic outlets. Our submission talks more about the programming that we deliver through the RPH service. Most of the programs in our network emanate from our Melbourne studios, but for up to three hours a day each of the regional stations breaks away for its own content. For example, in Mildura, they will be able to hear the *Sunraysia Daily*, and in Albury, they will hear the *Border Mail* as well as other local community information.

In our submission, we also talk about the technological opportunities that the new environment offers. Though RPH is delivered by analog radio, we are mindful that the needs of our community of interest will be better served through the delivery of their content through alternative pathways such as the internet and digital radio broadcasting. We look to the Commonwealth government to help us overcome barriers that exist at the moment to full utilisation of the digital technologies. These barriers include current copyright provisions and uncertainty about spectrum availability as well as the need to find the funding for the transition to the digital environment.

I would now briefly like to talk about the opportunities that exist, although there are threats to these opportunities as well. Utilisation of the internet for RPH delivery will enable listeners to access live content where radio is not accessible. It will also enable listeners to access content as audio on demand, providing more timely and convenient access to increasing the opportunity to make maximum use of the content. That is where audio on demand is very good. It will enable us to showcase this specialised broadcasting format to the world. That is another opportunity that the internet does provide.

Amongst the barriers are the current copyright regulations, whereby RPH broadcasters have, under section 47A of the Copyright Act, the opportunity to broadcast any printed content over the radio. We need this provision to be extended to enable such content to be delivered over the internet and also to be available for accredited RPH broadcasters on other community broadcast services. At the moment that is not the case, so specific permission needs to be sought, and that can be time consuming and can mean unacceptable delays in getting the content to air. This is just touching on some of the items raised in our submission.

I would now like to cover the recommendations contained in our submission. The first recommendation is that the Commonwealth government amend the Copyright Act provision in section 47A so that statutory licences for RPH licensees are extended, as I just mentioned, to encompass delivery over the internet and on general community licensed stations by accredited RPH program makers. We would also like to see the Commonwealth government assure RPH licensees that they will not be financially disadvantaged as a result of migration to digital broadcasting, and that it will facilitate introduction of digital broadcasting of RPH to the maximum advantage of listeners. There will be terrific opportunities with increased quality of audio and a lot of other advantages that go along with digital transmission that we are all very mindful will make a difference.

Another area of concern to us is the accessibility of the digital receivers. We need the Commonwealth government to use its influence to ensure that people unable to adequately see the content displayed on a digital receiver screen are provided with alternative ways of accessing this information. We see in the digital environment already, with digital television and with digital radio, that content providers can put a lot of information on the display screen. We need technology to make alternative ways of looking at the screen available so that people can access this. Those are the remarks I wish to make at this stage.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thank you very much. In the conversion to digital, which is occupying every community radio station's time at the moment, what are the financial barriers? How much will it cost you to convert and how will you be able to handle the transition arrangements while you are, probably, broadcasting twice?

**Mr Jolley**—It is difficult at the moment to quantify exactly what the costs will be for transmission in the digital environment. But they will be significant for each broadcaster—certainly, for our organisation, in the area of hundreds of thousands of dollars for our metropolitan service and then eventually into the regional services. What are unknown of course are the transmission site costs, the fees for access to the site and the costs of the ongoing maintenance of the transmitters.

The parallel running issue is an interesting one. It is clear that analog broadcasting will be available in Australia for a long time and that digital radio will exist parallel with analog transmission, so we would not envisage turning off analog broadcasting until there is that momentum shift from the audience that has moved from analog to digital. It is difficult to know at this stage how long that is going to take.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Who owns your current transmitter?

**Mr Jolley**—Our current transmitter is owned by Broadcast Australia—the organisation that provides the support for national broadcasters; they also have funding through the Commonwealth government to provide the support for RPH services in five metropolitan centres.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So you have a special deal; you are not in the same boat as most of the community stations that are negotiating at the moment?

**Mr Jolley**—We will be in that situation for our regional services. In the metropolitan services it was part of the arrangement when metropolitan RPH providers migrated to the mainstream AM band in the late 1980s and early 1990s as part of the government's metropolitan radio plan. The frequencies which were then vacated by commercial radio going FM were taken up. There were two frequencies in each of the cities and the government made one available for what is now the parliamentary broadcast service and the other for the RPH service.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So those eight stations, I think it is, that come under your banner will be negotiating their own?

**Mr Jolley**—Yes. There are seven of them. Melbourne is under the Broadcast Australia arrangement and the other seven we will have to make separate arrangements for.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is there much central programming, or do those seven stations tend to do their own thing?

**Mr Jolley**—There is a lot of central programming. We judge that we can most effectively meet the print access information needs of people with a program coming out of Melbourne—which delivers content of common relevance, like the metropolitan newspapers et cetera—but then the regional stations break away for their own content for two to three hours a day.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I just want to get you to expand a little on the barriers to moving down the paths that you might like to take in terms of the new technology. 3RPH is a community broadcaster which, of course, is more these days than just radio. In your perfect world, what kind of options would there be for the expansion of that service?



**Mr Jolley**—3RPH is the call sign of the Melbourne service, which is one of eight services which we operate. We are very mindful that in today's environment there are opportunities for providing content to people in alternative ways to radio. We are also very mindful that radio is—and it will be for a long time—the preferred way for many people in many or most situations. So we have an interest in making the maximum use of radio but also taking up the opportunities of other media pathways, such as the internet for live programming and for making audio available for on-demand access.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I think you talked this morning, too, about a mobile phone company that had approached you?

**Mr Simpson**—No. We talked about the fact that mobile phones up until recently were inaccessible because they are menu-driven, and menus which appear on screens are inaccessible for people who are blind or who have low vision. New technologies are now available to make those menus accessible. This is the point with digital radio receivers: transmission of digital radio can transmit information as well as the audio. A radio station, for example, could transmit today's weather in Sydney—that it is going to be wet and rainy—but on the screen it could have lots of other information like what the temperature is going to be and what the highs and lows are. It is that information that, if we do not ensure that the new technologies are fully accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired, they will miss out on.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So, as those new technologies start to be used more by the broader community, the role for Vision Australia and 3RPH will grow quite a bit, won't it, because you will need to fill in those gaps, or someone will need to fill in those gaps?

**Mr Jolley**—We need to work as hard as possible to ensure that people who cannot see or who cannot read are not excluded from access to all those wonderful opportunities that are out there with the new technologies. There are issues around the design of that technology so that it becomes accessible. There are also concerns around the regulatory environment so that we are not inhibited by the regulatory environment from retransmitting or reproducing that information in an accessible format, such as making it available as audio on the internet.

**ACTING CHAIR**—In your discussions about the changes to section 47A, have there been any particular reasons given by the commercial sector as to why they should not happen? Has there been any opposition?

**Mr Jolley**—I am not aware of any formal opposition to that. There are obviously concerns that people can have about freeing up the environment and what it might mean for them in the marketplace. It is important, though, to recognise that the most preferred way to access material that is produced in print or on a screen is to look at it. We are talking about a best alternative. We believe what we are seeking is not going to have a negative impact in the market because we are seeking a solution for people who are not going to be getting it the normal way.

**Mr Evans**—I think it is fair to say that there is concern by the commercial sector of loss of revenue through the transition to the digital world in respect of the ease and the ability with which their intellectual property can be copied and redistributed. We know that that is a concern of theirs. They have expressed it in a recent copyright review which has been conducted by the Attorney-General. We understand and have a great deal of sympathy for that position. But our

position is that publishers do not publish information in accessible formats, so therefore to get it into accessible formats there is one of two choices: they do it at the time of publishing in print or we have to do it. What we are saying is that they are not doing it so we have to do it, so therefore make it easy for us to do that. Do not put legislative barriers in the way to prevent us from easily getting permission and access to the information and distributing it through the channels that we are choosing to get information to our clients.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—This morning we watched Stephen demonstrate how he gets access to newspapers, which can be transferred to his own iPod device—as I will call it for want of a better description—so that he can then listen to them. He had to have an entry number, which would normally be the way a subscriber reads newspapers on the internet. That would seem to me to place people who are vision impaired and people who are not on the same platform. You could utilise the internet as a means of conveying information but there could be a subscriber type arrangement. That would presumably overcome their objection to the copyright question.

**Mr Simpson**—There could be things like that, and that could be considered as a technological protection measure if you wanted to put it into that context in copyright law. Vision Australia can build those sorts of things in. But there is another barrier, and that is that the technology you saw—the ability for Stephen and I to use a laptop or a desktop computer and to get it to actually talk—costs around \$2,000 more than a standard computer does. And the book port device—your iPod device—costs around \$600. One of the real barriers that we have is the cost of this technology either to organisations like ours, Vision Australia, or to clients of the organisation.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That seems to me a different point.

**Mr Evans**—The issue that you are talking about is what we call digital rights management protection. It is possible for us to implement technological digital rights protection, but it is extremely expensive for us to do that and quite problematic in respect of locking others out—it has to be specific to an individual, where we want to address a community. You have to realise that we have been providing library services to clients for over 100 years, and we have never once had a breach of copyright incident because our community understands that this is a special privilege. When they join the library they sign an agreement that says, ‘We will not breach copyright.’ We say, ‘If you breach copyright your membership will be cancelled and we will report you to the police.’ That is a huge consequence for someone who is blind and vision impaired.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—How can you do a similar thing to that with the internet?

**Mr Evans**—Just as you said, by having a pin number—a restricted entry pin number system. It does not matter what level of protection we bring in because someone who is very smart with technology will find a way around it.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—They can do that already.

**Mr Evans**—That is the point that we would make to the publishing community—exactly that point.

**Mr Jolley**—One of the benefits of the radio service is that a listener can discretely tune in and have the newspapers read to them and access all sorts of other information as they choose. Nobody else might know that they have difficulty reading the newspaper, and they can do it discretely in this way. We would be reluctant to put in place a system whereby people had to signal unnecessarily that they had this need, because some people may not want to do that. In regard to the process of registering to access a particular stream of material off the internet—which is usually open access media from broadcast stations; for other reasons it may be subscription—we would be reluctant initially to put in place an arrangement where people had to forgo that sort of privacy of discretely accessing what was available.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I think that is drawing a long bow. I do not think that is a reasonable objection. I think the point is that we have an obligation. From my philosophical point of view, every individual should have the opportunity to access and to reach their maximum potential. If the rest of the community has to provide, by way of subsidy or anything else, a technology which enables an individual to do that, then that is our obligation. I do not think it is unreasonable to actually register to get something.

**Mr Evans**—I think copyright law is about getting the balance between the rights of people who access information—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—And the right to get a reward for their effort.

**Mr Evans**—and the rights for the creators of the intellectual property to get a reward for their effort. That is recognised by us and we would take the necessary steps to ensure that that was protected. There are those extreme measures that would start to impose significant costs and restrictions on us and then there are those which are a half-way house. That is what we are proposing, basically.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Perhaps it would be a good idea if you, as Vision Australia, did some more work on precisely what you thought would be a solution, instead of just saying, ‘Amend the act,’ because that is too broad. There are many aspects we have to consider.

**Mr Evans**—Yes, we have done that.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—And I think it is important to let this committee have that further work as to precisely what was proposed, what the costs involved are and what the options are to enable new technology to be accessed by people who otherwise would be denied access to it. That is the point.

**Mr Simpson**—Is this around the specific question of radio over the internet?

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Yes.

**Mr Simpson**—Okay.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It is the same issue that the other community radio stations are having with music: that their cheaper copyrights for broadcast on radio disappear the minute they go on the net because it is a new thing and old relationships do not carry over.

**Mr Evans**—I can understand that. But I would say we are slightly different.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You have a special point.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I know it is slightly different.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I think it is largely different.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It is still an old relationship.

**Mr Evans**—Yes, it is largely different in that the information is not produced in an accessible format. Where music is available through many other channels, an accessible piece of information is not.

**Mr Jolley**—We just want to get that into the hands of people as reasonably conveniently as possible and make it as reasonably accessible as possible. I understand your point.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I think it is very important because what is happening is that technology is opening up a whole new horizon. It is offering the ability to reach your goal of giving 100 per cent access in a way that you could not have countenanced before.

**Mr Evans**—The technology is there to allow a goal like 100 per cent access to happen.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—The technology is there and it is a matter of working with it.

**Mr Evans**—The legislative framework is a barrier to that.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—It is lacking because at the time of enacting the legislation this was not contemplated.

**Mr Evans**—Yes, the world has moved on.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is why we need your extra work.

**Mr Evans**—Yes.

**Mr Simpson**—It is not only the fact that the technology is there; in Vision Australia we have an organisation that has both the commitment and the energy to make it work. As Tim and Stephen were saying, this information is not being delivered by the normal publishing process in an accessible way. Vision Australia is prepared to do that work, but we want to make it as easy as possible in terms of the current barriers that are there.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—As I said, under my philosophy of individualism, everybody has the right under our system to have the opportunity to maximise their own potential. It is our obligation as a community, as a society, to ensure that whatever means are available to allow that outcome to occur, it is our responsibility to do it. To deny you access to the internet, which opens

up new horizons, to me is just not acceptable. So we have to find a way around that, which is why, as I said, we need your extra work.

**ACTING CHAIR**—In terms of other areas where content is tightly controlled, like sporting events, the World Cup, Wimbledon, et cetera, you said this morning that SBS was quite cooperative about allowing you to broadcast the BBC. Are the commercial channels cooperative as well? Are there other areas where that tight control of content by the commercial sector is reducing access?

**Mr Jolley**—Where we have stepped up and said, ‘This event is not being adequately covered on the radio; we would like to step in and ensure that people who cannot see a TV screen can have radio access to it,’ it has been a history of very good support from providers like the Nine network and TWI for access to Wimbledon and similarly, the arrangement with SBS radio, which you might want to elaborate on, Tim.

**Mr Evans**—SBS, as you are probably aware, have a brief that extends into a broader cultural multilingual multicultural market. In the context of their broadcasting, for example, of the World Cup, they were covering the World Cup in many different languages but not English. I think the general assumption in the community was that the TV service would be adequate. I think the community realised that it was not going to be. We approached SBS and they were very forthcoming in terms of working with FIFA and the BBC to enable us to take the feed, and we fed that English broadcast version of the World Cup right throughout Australia through the RPH network. That was a really beneficial win-win partnership between SBS and us because we had a broader coverage than they could possibly get to. They were very concerned that they had not considered this issue and responded very quickly.

Subsequent discussions with SBS have concluded that the two organisations should get together at our senior levels and talk about how we can work more cooperatively to bring more of that sort of service through the RPH network, and we are planning to do that. We are also a BBC broadcast partner, and the BBC have been very very helpful in terms of allowing us to take feeds of their very high quality services. The ABC have been very helpful in trying to work with us as well.

I am not sure we have probed the commercials as deeply and as well as we probably could have. It is certainly on our agenda to do that and see how we can open up accessing more of their content, but where we have had those small opportunities, they have been forthcoming.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You might have a slight problem with regard to the commercials because, whereas ABC and SBS have a broad public sector brief to provide information to people who would otherwise miss out—that is part of their brief—to commercials you would be competition.

**Mr Evans**—It almost has to be a special circumstance where there is a niche that is not being addressed, and they will say, from a public spirited point of view, ‘We will address that issue with you in partnership, if it cannot be addressed through another commercial channel.’

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—We made the point this morning that there are many people who watch the television, turn off the sound and listen to the commentary on radio because it is more descriptive.

**Mr Evans**—For example, the World Cup feed that we got through SBS did not cost us a cent.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is wonderful. Well done there.

**Mr Evans**—It was a very generous donation to the blind community.

**Mr Simpson**—But the important point about radio—and we made it this morning and Stephen has reinforced it—is that it is designed for people to listen to.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is right.

**Mr Simpson**—Television is designed for people to watch and the commentary is only ancillary to the picture, whereas some radio paints the picture itself. That is why radio is so important to people who are blind, vision impaired or have other disabilities such as a print disability.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Can I ask you some demographic questions. We were having a discussion this morning and I was most interested in the fact that you said 50 per cent of your clients live in regional Australia and 50 per cent obviously in metropolitan areas. I was interested in the ages of the people you serve. I think you said the median age is 83 and the average age is 77.

**Mr Evans**—Seventy-three.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That would tend to suggest that many people who become vision impaired do so as a result of something that happens in the ageing process—something like diabetes, macular degeneration.

**Mr Evans**—Macular degeneration.

**Mr Simpson**—Cataracts, macular degeneration and glaucoma are the three key conditions that lead to sight loss later in life.

**Mr Evans**—From a demographic point of view, I think the average entry age of many of our clients is around 60. So what you are seeing is a significant number of clients joining our services around the age of 60 and, as I said, the average and our median age groups are quite elderly. But if you look at the demographic spread of our clients you will see that there is a big peak at that age group. There is a long tail, a long lead-in to that from very early childhood development ages through to working age and then into retirement. That is a long lead-in of people who, for example, are in the workforce or in primary, secondary or tertiary education.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—There are certain factors in early childhood. For instance, a lot of premature births were resulting in blindness and deafness as well, but a lot of that was to do

with the oxygen flow, I think, in many of those early years. Has that now lessened or is that still a major—

**Mr Simpson**—A lot of those sorts of things change along the way. There is a condition called retrolental fibroplasia, which is oxygen related blindness, but with the improvements in technology, particularly humidicrib technology, many of those conditions have now diminished. Except in some other developing countries, it has pretty much disappeared in Australia. But we know that the earlier onset of diabetes and the greater proportion of people with diabetes in the community will lead to a real lift in that area.

**Mr Jolley**—Also, with life expectancy challenges, people are living longer and they have more time to have these other conditions—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Develop, whereas they might have died before they manifested.

**Mr Jolley**—It is a really significant matter.

**Mr Evans**—The significant trend for us now is the ageing population. The things that Michael and Stephen have just been describing tend to have a correlation to age. So what we are expecting to see is growth in the demand for our service overall because of the ageing of the population and those late onset effects causing blindness, low vision and vision loss.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—The other point is that you have consciously made a statement which, it seems, is very much part of your mission that you will serve any person who cannot read for whatever reason.

**Mr Evans**—Any person who has a print disability.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—A print disability or a picture disability, for that matter. There are people within our community who indeed are still unable to read and write and there are kids who have various disabilities, such as ADHD, who find reading and writing very difficult to come to terms with. Do you develop special programs for people who fall into that category? What percentage of people whom you serve do they represent?

**Mr Evans**—Do we develop specific programs for people—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Who are illiterate for one reason or another?

**Mr Evans**—We do have some literacy services that we provide through our training and education systems. For example, in school, we also have a series of special teachers who work, in Victoria at least, with the Victorian education system and in other states with the relevant state systems. We also work very closely with disability liaison officers in the tertiary sector to develop specific programs around particular students' needs. So, if a student cannot access print, a disability liaison officer can come to us and say, 'This student requires the information in this format,' and then we will work with them to develop that program.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Do you extend that to dyslexic people?

**Mr Evans**—Yes, people with dyslexia, physical disabilities, perceptual disabilities—what we would class as people with a print disability—as well as people who are blind or have low vision. Our primary client base has been people who are blind or have low vision. It is a historical thing—it has come from our history—but more and more we are getting into providing services that extend into the print disabled community as well.

**Mr Jolley**—Yes, because we are doing things, through our services to blind and vision impaired people, which can make a difference for other people—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Absolutely.

**Mr Jolley**—it makes sense to extend those services, if possible, to them too.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Yes, that is terrific.

**Mr Evans**—Those solutions can be made available to the broader community.

**Mr Simpson**—But I think it is also important to add that there is a need to design specialist services, depending on the combination of disability that a person might have. Primarily we have been talking here about services that are targeted to people who are blind or vision impaired and who may have other print disability because of dyslexia or cognitive disability, perceptual disability and so forth. But there are others, for example, who are deaf and blind. Some of the generalist services that we have been talking about might not be able to reach that segment, so we have had to design services to meet the needs of people who are deaf-blind as well. So it is quite a broad and very targeted service.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is true, because I am very familiar with the work of the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children. But, of course, the big problem that flows from there is: what happens when they cease to be children?

**Mr Simpson**—Yes, and it is also very concerning with late-onset deaf-blindness. With Stephen and myself both having lost sight earlier in life, we have been able to develop the skills that we need, but people who lose sight or who lose sight and hearing later in life need particular attention and care, and there are some conditions that lead to both deafness and blindness later in life.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—What about the real extremes of disability where you have people who have multiple disabilities and very dramatic ones, with which I really am very familiar?

**Mr Simpson**—This is where Vision Australia's services have to be very flexible. That is why we talk about a living partnership between people who are blind, have low vision or are sighted and about working with all segments of the community including business and government at all levels, because, whilst there might be a broad group of our clients who fall into the category of people who are blind or have low vision, and they are spread right across the whole age range, there are people who have cerebral palsy who are also blind, and there are people who have multiple sclerosis who might have hearing loss and sight loss, so our services have to be flexible to meet the needs of all of those people.



**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—And that includes people who have mental impairment?

**Mr Simpson**—Yes.

**Mr Evans**—A good example of it is in employment, where we provide a service which is a pathway for people into open employment. We also provide a supported employment service. Many of the people in that service are high-needs people who have multiple disabilities. Our model for client service is to look at a particular individual and build a solution for that client around their particular needs. The employment service is one really good example of how we do that.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is very good. Thank you.

**ACTING CHAIR**—We will have to call it to an end. Is there anything else you would like to say? Do you have any final remarks?

**Mr Simpson**—Stephen, do you want to jump in?

**Mr Jolley**—I think we have covered adequately the points we made. They are about really taking advantage of the new opportunities to make sure that people who are blind and vision impaired, and other people we serve, are able to access those new opportunities.

**Mr Evans**—I would add to that that what we are really talking about is modernising, from our perspective, the ways that people access information and providing both the legislative and technical frameworks in which we can really try to make a difference in delivering information through channels that are emerging in the new digital world we live in. This is about saying to you, ‘This is a fabulous opportunity for our particular clients in order to really make a difference to them.’ We really want to make sure there are no limitations to our maximising the benefits that we can take out of this to our clients.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thank you all very much. I also formally say thank you very much for the visit this morning showing us through Vision Australia and 3RPH. It was incredibly enjoyable and we learned a great deal. It was wonderful. Thank you very much for today.

**Mr Simpson**—Thank you very much. We were happy to host you. We were just disappointed that the other members of the committee could not join you.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I was sorry Jackie could not be with us but she was in great pain.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.47 pm to 1.37 pm**

**TOLHURST, Mr Timothy, Executive Officer, National Ethnic Multicultural Broadcasters Council**

**ZANGALIS, Mr George, President, National Ethnic Multicultural Broadcasters Council**

**ACTING CHAIR**—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission, or would you care to make some introductory remarks?

**Mr Zangalis**—Thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you the role and the concerns of the sector we represent. We have been around since community broadcasting started back in the early 1970s. We now represent ethnic community broadcasters throughout Australia who put to air more than 2,000 hours of programming every week. There are around 100,000 languages spoken and of value to Australia. The programs go to air in over 100 radio stations throughout metropolitan, regional and remote Australia and they are produced by 2,500 volunteer broadcasters. It has built a strong network of association in the service of ethnic communities. It has established what we believe is a very viable, strong and relatively successful institution that performs a task of national importance.

It is a grassroots democratic situation. Communities select or elect their representatives to produce and present the programs. They are accountable to them. They are not just specialists who like to speak on a particular topic and do it as a means of assisting personal development or contributing to the station's overall appeal; they are doing it on behalf of the community. Thirty-five years ago, for the first time they managed to get access to the Australian air waves in languages other than English. They are Australian citizens of different ethnic backgrounds where communication in their first language is extremely important. Indeed, it does not disappear with a passing of time and given new waves of immigrants arriving on our shores almost yearly the question of service in the first and strongest language is not an ephemeral but an ongoing one.

With the passing of time we have accommodated what is another development in the integration of people into Australia, and that is bilingualism. The second and third generation of people can express their views more confidently in both languages. By virtue of what we perform and the specialty of it, ethnic community broadcasting is Australia's largest multicultural and multilingual institution. Apart from people learning skills and being of service, by the use of community languages we are a university in that respect—a workshop maintaining support for the language and culture of people who have a diverse cultural, ethnic and linguistic background.

We are doing this in the context of working towards a cohesive and diverse Australia where social cohesion is achieved. In other words, we are trying to practise what others have said in the past—unity through diversity. If we look back, Australia has reaped tremendous benefits by having a positive attitude. It was not easily obtained because we have been through a lot of difficulties to get to the position where multiculturalism is seen by many people not only as an inevitable process but also as a very welcome one for Australia. It is within that context that ethnic community broadcasting finds its place in Australia.

What do we do with the airtime that we have at our disposal? In the first place, we provide information to people on how to settle in a new country. This information is ongoing. Apart from information, people want to be informed about what happens in their locality, the nation and in the world. We want them to be informed participants in the total affairs of the nation; not only of

their own community. The programs vary from direct information on services to information about events and community activities et cetera. All that is done within the very restricted time that people are allocated to go to air. Unfortunately, because of the tremendous variety of ethnic background citizens we have in Australia, the time available in community stations, even those that are full-time ethnic community stations, is very limited. Therefore people are forced to share the station and divide their time between 60, 70 and 80 different ethnic community groups. Many of them may have three or four hours per week, others may have one hour per fortnight. These are limitations brought about by virtue of the limits we have on-air time and something that we need to address.

One may believe that digital broadcasting is going to solve the problem of additional time. It has promise but it also has tremendous difficulties. Migrating to digital broadcasting would require considerable capital investment in transmission, let alone reception, and most community radio stations in which most ethnic community broadcasting is housed, if you like, can hardly afford to buy themselves a cappuccino in between breaks, let alone invest big money. Community broadcasters have knocked at the door of the government and we do expect to see some financial assistance in undertaking that new step. The sector depends entirely on volunteers—not volunteers coming together once a month but volunteers who are there almost every day making those programs.

The volunteers are normally people who are either retired or young. That is a general characterisation, but it is only natural. Community broadcasting has responded more and more to the needs of that section of our community that you might call middle- and low-income earners. On retirement they are not swimming in money. No-one gets paid for putting programs to air. They pay their own way to and from the station, and they continue to support it both financially and with their time according to what is needed. The volunteers are the bread and butter of any community organisation. We believe there is a limit as to how far volunteers can be driven to sustain this service, which is of community value.

I will touch upon the question of localism and how important it is for Australia to have a very strong community broadcasting sector and, may I say, even more so a strong ethnic community broadcasting sector. Technology now allows input from all over the world through a number of means, of which you are perhaps much more technically aware than I am. This has a lot of pluses, but there are also minuses. In Australia we have built a concept of multiculturalism that is unique in the world and that has delivered to Australia, by and large. Such a concept is not shared in many of the countries that immigrants come from.

Through new technology people can have access 24 hours a day to their countries of origin. For instance, the attitude of Greece towards Turkey may not be a very amicable one, yet in Australia the Turkish are my neighbours and my daughter has probably fallen in love with a person from a Turkish background. So this idea of mixing and accepting diversity and thriving upon it is an Australian contribution. We believe that it is extremely important for Australia to have an Indigenous ethnic community broadcasting sector for national cohesion and from the national interest point of view. It is not in Australia's best interests to see ethnic community broadcasting pushed to the periphery and taken over by commercial ethnic broadcasting facilities who depend on 80 per cent or 90 per cent of their input coming from another country, even though that other country may have been my place of birth.

I want to re-emphasise the diverse nature of our society. Some people have the view that, when it comes to the first generation of people of non-English background, what follows will be fully and automatically integrated into what people often refer to as the mainstream. I do not want to go into great detail about this but it is important strategically for Australia to see the countries of immigrants, and that we do not put a stop to it and nobody comes into the country. Immigration and diversity and services for people of different ethnic backgrounds settling in Australia is a long-term strategy for us.

In the last 15 years Australia has received more immigrants than perhaps during the previous 15 years. With migrants now coming in on temporary visas, and many of them expecting to stay here, fulfilling work requirements, I would like to comment on how important and how long term this ought to be. If we expect Australia to be a country that will continue to receive immigrants for quite some time, multiculturalism and diversity are ongoing companions.

May I also suggest that it is a reversible process. Sometimes we get angry, and we might be too critical about the process of integration or the process of this, that or the other, but the fact remains that in most capitals and in most large states almost 40 per cent residents hail from countries other than England or the English isles. If the present trend of immigration continues, in about 30 years the majority of people in Australia will not hail from that background. That is not a threat. That is telling us, and we have lived through this over the last 30 or 40 years, how we have evolved and how we have created an Australian society in which every citizen feels that he or she owns part of the country. That is when you defend it in terms of values and principles, and through community broadcasting, because we come into contact with each other every day, we are assisting this.

There are a couple of other matters to quickly address. It is quite a specialised service, providing valued programs. Although we say that the myth that only professionals can do it died a long time ago, because ordinary people have proved that they can do it and they can do it pretty well, nevertheless training is required. Training is particularly required for people who have no experience at all or whose first experience of broadcasting was in another country. They need to learn about defamation laws, matters of freedom of expression, concern about how far you can go, sharing experiences and allowing people to express their point of view. It is specialised training. We very much regret that in the last two years the funding that was dedicated for the training of ethnic community broadcasters has not been renewed. What has happened is that more training money has gone to the sector as a whole but, as a result of that, the sector that had the greatest need is finishing up now with hardly any money. There is so little money that the stations are now required to do two things: either provide second service training or impose a fee on people who already provide community service to pay for becoming better performers.

Lastly, I will talk about the funding situation. Whatever service we provide, we cannot get away from money. We appreciate the fact that for the last 25 to 35 years there has been bipartisan support for contributing something towards the cost of putting on programs in ethnic community languages. People may ask from time to time: 'What is the rationale for that?' It is because the services we provide are basically in another language. They provide information. They try to help citizens to become aware of their rights and responsibilities in the language with which they are familiar. They also provide those skills that go with broadcasting. Funding has remained static for quite a while, for the last 10 years, apart from an adjustment of the CPI. Yet

the sector is expanding. We have reached the situation where, if more people want to come on board, because we have a commitment to assist the people we get on air, if the funding continues to be subdivided they will finish up at such a low level that the station will disappear.

Let me also tell you that funding in the ethnic community broadcasting area is attached to certain criteria. It goes to those broadcasters who are meeting the community criteria—that is, they come from and are accountable to a community. So in the true sense of the word, in the ethnic community broadcasting area it is the community that owns the time. It is the community that nominates the broadcaster. It is the community which the broadcaster is accountable to and elected from. So it is a thoroughly democratic sort of process, because the communities value the little time that is available.

Hopefully, as a result of this inquiry, we will see two things emerging: reinforcing the significance of the community sector as a whole and, for the large and thriving ethnic component of the community sector, it is important to have a clear statement of continued support. It is in Australia's best interests. With the concentration of media we will see more and more of our programming not being Australian made and Australians responding to that. It is important to have that third factor in community broadcasting. That support is indicated through some funding that at least keeps pace with the growth and development of that sector.

**Mr Tolhurst**—I do not have a lot to add to that. Firstly, I raise a little bit of housekeeping. Do you have the errata sheet that I provided? It is not specifically germane to this. I want to endorse everything that George has said. For me as an executive officer and a policy officer there are a few things that stand out, and one is the need for training and funding for training. As new and emerging communities come on, language is an issue for them. I think one of the great successes, apart from multiculturalism and the social resilience and community building success of community ethnic radio, is the literally thousands of people that they have trained over the years. For people who are perhaps only partly employed, unemployed or coming out of school, often with indifferent results from school, it gives another focus in life and it gives them a chance to succeed at something and complete something not only for themselves but for their community. In endorsing George's remarks I would just like to say that training and money for training should be regarded as a very high priority. The sector is not going to go away, it is not getting smaller, and it is something that is critical.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Can I stay on that topic for a minute. You said in your submission that you have special training issues because of the nature of your sector. Is that to do with the fact that you have 125 stations, each trying to train in 95 languages? What are the additional difficulties?

**Mr Zangalis**—In a particular city, broadcasters are trained—not necessarily in each individual station, but a station agreed by others becomes the training centre and other broadcasters can come around. Of course, some stations are very large and, in their own right, justify a training force. For instance, 3ZZZ is a full-time ethnic radio station. 3CR, which used to be there, got 30 or 40 hours a week in ethnic programming. So there are a lot of ethnic broadcasters. If you have a quota of anything between 10 and 15 people, it justifies the facility. I repeat: training can occur centrally with a station or two or three being the hubs of the training.

**ACTING CHAIR**—But, particularly with new communities, it would have to happen in different languages?

**Mr Zangalis**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So you could not bring everyone in for one training session; you would have to repeat it in a variety of languages?

**Mr Zangalis**—We have acquired particular skills over the years. We had this problem with the RTP for 10 years. The trainers of different ethnic backgrounds acquired the skill of being able to communicate, even in the English language, with people whose first language was not English. However, the trainers were bilingual and had the capacity to communicate certain things in another language. That skill is not available now, unfortunately. You are right: these days communities are able to get access to media and don't have to wait 25 years, like some of us did. That is a requirement. It is not offered.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What was the background of the withdrawal of that funding?

**Mr Zangalis**—The funding was given not by the department of communications but through an election commitment that I think the Hawke government made in 1987 to assist the training of ethnic broadcasters. It invited the ABC, SBS and others to form a consortium, and they all felt that the ABC has its own programming. SBS stated that the NEMBC should be responsible for managing that program, which had an endowment of \$1½ million, with interest. It kept us going for 13 years, and we have trained more than 2½ thousand people. The average, of course, has been below \$15 per person. Out in the market you know what it is worth. But apparently the department felt that as this ran out it was not their responsibility, and they dropped it.

A year or two ago the government decided to allocate quite a bit of money for training community broadcasting, but it was spread too widely. For instance, 3ZZZ usually gets \$15,000 or \$16,000 a year to train several hundred broadcasters. Now it will get no more than \$1,500. Those who had nothing will receive something, but those with a greater need will receive less now than previously. I keep coming back to how important it is for people to be trained in a multicultural atmosphere of tolerance, of accepting diversity, and of not saying, 'My faith is greater than yours,' or 'My political view is better than yours.' That is what we are dealing with in community broadcasting. It is a continuous exercise in accepting diversity and providing services.

**Mr Tolhurst**—I think part of the training thing develops notions of community work and volunteerism. Even in the old AERTP days there was some money for trainers but it did not really reflect the commercial rates or outside rates. But it allowed people, if there were language difficulties, to have someone who had been trained or someone from another station come in and be not a trainer but a mentor or facilitator or something like that. But, because new recruits to the station see people operating largely as volunteers, it is an ethic and a code that they pick up. The sector has given thought from time to time to providing fee-for-service training to outside organisations where people come in, are trained and just leave, but it was felt that that was not always highly desirable because it did not keep people in there or encourage notions of volunteerism.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You talked in your submission about the possibility of or the desire for shared multiplex arrangements with SBS. Has that gone anywhere? Have there been talks, or is it a wish list?

**Mr Zangalis**—We are still discussing in the general community sector how we will tackle the promise and the problems of digital. The department keep talking about the ABC being on, SBS being on and the rest in the commercial pool. There is limited access to it, of course. In the best of circumstances for listeners in Melbourne, only a couple of community stations will be able to get on board early or have the capacity to do so. We felt we have much more in common, as community broadcasters, with SBS than with channel whatever or the ABC, but the ABC has by choice decided not to carry out its own mandate, and I was at some stage part of policy making in the ABC. They shoved the multicultural, diverse component off to the SBS, and now SBS says: ‘Look, I want to be more like you. That’s where the money is.’ We in the ethnic communities find ourselves, both in radio and in television, back in the doldrums. But again, as a matter of strategy, we would like to have access to the SBS multiplex. We have much more in common. We are not commercial. They are fully funded by government; we are partly funded by government.

I want to make the point that funding by government in ethnic community broadcasting in the best of circumstances normally covers only 15 to 20 per cent of what it takes to run a radio station. The rest is raised, as I presume you are aware, from membership fees, radiothons, appeals and a bit of advertising. But we are concerned about advertising—and I am sorry I did not make this point earlier in my submission. Community broadcasting is about access and people being able to use the maximum time to do what other people do not do or do not do as well or as localised. The moment you start forcing stations to sell their time in order to make ends meet, that works at the expense of community input. We have agreed as a sector that four or five minutes per hour ought to be the very maximum. We have noticed that people under pressure are forced to sell time and, by doing so, deny the community greater access.

The promise that there is a lot of money out there for community broadcasters to make is an unreal one. In the world of what goes on, the money will not be spread between the weak and poor, if you like, community broadcasting sectors whilst out there there are sharks going for the lot, whether it is metropolitan or country Australia. That completes a point that I did not complete earlier about trying to resist pressures on community broadcasters to go out into the market and sink or swim.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You make a few quite serious points in here that I would like to explore with you. First of all, you say that you take eight per cent of the total amount allocated for ethnic broadcasting to run your organisation. That is \$265,000, so you presumably have quite a decent number of staff for that. I wonder if you would mind telling me what they do.

**Mr Zangalis**—I can tell you how many staff we have: right now we have two.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—They are being paid a lot.

**Mr Zangalis**—There is more to running a secretariat than paying wages, as you very well know. However, very soon we will have a youth coordinator and also what we call an emerging communities-cum-membership coordinator. If you want to know how much our executive

officer is paid, I will tell you: \$55,000 a year. He gets a fortnight's extra leave for the time he puts in on weekends et cetera.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I can see he earns his money.

**Mr Zangalis**—An administrative officer gets \$34,000 a year. People coming on board now as coordinators start at anything between \$30,000 and \$35,000. You run an office, you need to put out a publication, you have expenses and running the secretariat means that we have a national executive from all over Australia and I presume when people travel—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I understand. So you have to pay rent too?

**Mr Zangalis**—Rent, gas and electricity.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You say that currently people are paid \$35 an hour from the Community Broadcasting Foundation—

**Mr Zangalis**—Yes.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—and the stations are entitled to keep a maximum of 75 per cent. So where does the other 25 per cent go?

**Mr Zangalis**—The other 25 per cent goes to the broadcaster who needs to perhaps acquire a CD. Mostly it goes to CDs.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So it works this way: when somebody—

**Mr Zangalis**—The station does not provide CDs. There are 60 different languages; just imagine what the accounting situation would be with volunteers.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So the way it works is that a particular language group gets a spot. You say that you were originally producing and writing 4,000 hours a week but now it is 2,000 a week.

**Mr Zangalis**—It is 2,000.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So presumably that means that SBS produces another 1,000.

**Mr Zangalis**—SBS produces less than us because—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You say you produce double what SBS produces.

**Mr Zangalis**—Yes.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is 3,000 hours a week going out in different languages, but let's stick to the 2,000. You say you have 95 language groups?



**Mr Zangalis**—Yes.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Am I right then in calculating that they would then get four hours a day each?

**Mr Zangalis**—No. Communities are large and small and when it comes to dividing the airtime they develop their own rules whereby people reasonably feel that they have their share.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So you give somebody an hour and somebody else six hours a week?

**Mr Zangalis**—Yes, it is possible. A large community has not only the need but also the capacity through volunteers to do that. Yes, some get six.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So if a new group came in, you could say to the other group, ‘You’ve had six hours, you’ve had a pretty good run, we’re only going to give you five hours so we can give this bunch a go.’

**Mr Zangalis**—I am sorry; can you repeat that.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Because you are broadcasting you have to keep your airways full all the time. You cannot say, ‘I think it is reasonable that you only have four hours a week because that is what would service your community.’ That would then leave you with blank airtime. You cannot do that, so you fill it up with whatever you have. So if somebody new comes along, you have to curtail somebody else and say, ‘You can have that slot.’ That is perfectly reasonable, it seems to me.

**Mr Zangalis**—It does happen, but community broadcasters are pretty sympathetic people. If somebody knocks on the door and says, ‘I’m starving,’ they will not say, ‘How much money have you got in your pocket?’ They will say, ‘Come in.’

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But that is your job.

**Mr Zangalis**—That is our job, yes. I am not saying that it is not our job; however, it costs money to run a station.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But that is not what I am saying. I am saying—

**Mr Zangalis**—How do we divide the time? Yes, there is consideration—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You were talking about not having enough time. It seems to me that you have got quite a lot of time. When you add SBS to that, there is a lot of time.

**Mr Zangalis**—No, I do not think you are right. Ethnic community broadcasting is delivered in segments of one hour per program at eight o’clock in the morning or nine o’clock in the evening; some communities can have four or five segments a week. In that segment they have to put together everything from fine music to current affairs. Everybody screams, ‘I want more.’

They say, for instance, that in Australia there are hundreds of radio stations broadcasting in the English language—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is because that is the national language.

**Mr Zangalis**—Yes, exactly. And, if anything, we very much encourage the use of the common language. But, in terms of communication, it is important that people are informed so they can participate.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I am not disagreeing with any of that; all I am saying is that it seems there is a reasonable amount of time out there to be had. You also say that the \$35 an hour which is paid has been reduced by 30 per cent. So it used to be \$24?

**Mr Zangalis**—No.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—What did it used to be?

**Mr Zangalis**—No. In 1996 the hourly subsidised programming rate was pretty close to \$50 per hour. Since 1996 we have not had an increase commensurate with the growth of the sector. The share has dropped from \$48 to \$35 per hour.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is because the policy was that you should raise more of your money. Is that right?

**Mr Zangalis**—We are raising more money—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Was that the policy? Was that the reason that happened?

**Mr Tolhurst**—It is based on money that is available with each funding round. The money is apportioned according to what we get, basically. I will take a step back, which might clear some of this up. You talked about a figure of 95. That is actually the number of different languages, but on the ground there are probably over 900 different broadcast groups throughout Australia. So, if that is averaged out, you are really talking about no more than a couple of hours per language across Australia. So it is not that some have six and some have one; the number 95 is the number of different languages—but obviously that is repeated in different places. There is not a lot of time available. Yes, some stations have a lot of time for older groups, but a lot of stations are also struggling to get new groups in. The other thing is that older groups still have needs.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But it is very hard sometimes for a manager to make a decision, that this group has not got the same reach and efficacy that it did when it began and that perhaps it has to make way for somebody else. You make the point in your own submission that you have a problem with older people who have got the gig and who are very reluctant to give anybody else a go.

**Mr Tolhurst**—That is right.

**Mr Zangalis**—It is not the manager who makes the decision.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—It is your member.

**Mr Zangalis**—It is the membership. Each group has a chairperson and a coordinator and the cake is divided. They are all on the table. There are all sorts of compromises. There are also programming committees which advise the management.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I can imagine the fights. I can just see it.

**Mr Zangalis**—It is not a pleasant thing when you are subdividing one-tenth of a second.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—And then you have subgroups. For instance, the Italian community in Sydney has an AM station of its own—

**Mr Tolhurst**—Yes, they do.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—which they run themselves. Would you say that is the result of a mature migrant population which has decided it does not need to be part of your umbrella, that it wants to do things itself?

**Mr Tolhurst**—You are right. Most of those are long-term community groups which have the infrastructure—newspapers and all that sort of stuff—so they are cashed up enough to do it. They are largely commercial propositions so they see a commercial opportunity which they exploit. But there is still a lot of Italian programming on SBS, for example. I think they still have an hour or two every day in Melbourne. There is an Italian commercial program here. People listen to them for different reasons.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But they are not part of your umbrella.

**Mr Tolhurst**—No.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So we have three lots, if you like. We have SBS, your umbrella group and then we have people who want to do their own thing.

**Mr Tolhurst**—Yes.

**Mr Zangalis**—I think you have put it correctly. Historically, in the ethnic broadcasting area, there was the government sector, SBS and the ABC, and community broadcasting. Communities are diverse. You have Indigenous people—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Does community radio get the same \$35 an hour?

**Mr Tolhurst**—No. They get a big lump sum. But they do a lot more things—TV and music orchestras and all of those sorts of things. They are funded in the same way the ABC is. I think \$20 million was their last—

**Mr Zangalis**—For the radio alone.

**Mr Tolhurst**—Yes.

**Mr Zangalis**—And we broadcast from many more stations and for many more hours. What the government allocates for ethnic community broadcasting—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—It is about three-point-something million.

**Mr Zangalis**—It is under that.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—About \$3 million?

**Mr Tolhurst**—It varies, but it is around that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I would like to talk about digital, which is a big issue for everyone. You have said a couple of things. You have said that, even if the spectrum was available, a lot of stations would not have the resources to take it up properly. With respect to the 512 kilobits, am I reading correctly that you say that is not enough?

**Mr Tolhurst**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What will stop ethnic radio taking on the full potential of digital?

**Mr Tolhurst**—All the sectors can take it on, but it will be in a limited way. One of the claims that ethnic community radio has is its diversity and localism. So it is not a one-size-fits-all sort of radio. Yes, big stations like 3ZZZ here and Radio 2000 in Sydney probably have the funds or are able to get the funds to get in and do digital. But all the access stations who broadcast in English and in ethnic languages, the regional stations, will not have access to that money so they won't be able to get there. So there are going to be a lot of people excluded. As a sector body, we are concerned about not only the big stations but the smaller ones as well. As George was saying before about being part of SBS, that takes the load off the community allocation at present. If SBS were to provide space for even just the big stations—there is one in every capital city—that would take a considerable load off the current allotment for community stations in general.

Having said that, that is under the current digital arrangements. My understanding, without having facts and figures and a huge technical knowledge, is that there is new technology on the way which may provide opportunities for cheaper and more accessible bandwidth for smaller stations. But there is no certainty about that. Even if that were so, the smaller stations would still need some kind of infrastructure support to pay rent and to get onto transmitters and things like that. So it is a very costly exercise.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Most of your stations go through the commercial transmitter structure?

**Mr Tolhurst**—Yes. The other thing about the kilobit rate is that that 512 can only be divided so many ways, so there is competition about how much you get. Stations that play fine music want about half that. So MBS and those sorts of things—

**Mr Zangalis**—The department did tell us, when eventually we get there, that even if you have the money, there is a limit to how many people can go into separate multiplexes. Therefore,

while the promise of having much more time to accommodate all sorts of needs sounds terrific, in practice, most community radio stations, ethnic or non-ethnic, will not be able to get into the new technology, and they will have to survive for quite a while. The government could come along in 2010 and say, 'You're off to digital; out you go with analog.'

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—When they say to switch off in 2010-12—it is a bit flexible—does that include radio or is that only television?

**Mr Tolhurst**—I think it is only television.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I think it is only television.

**Mr Tolhurst**—I think the radio switch-off is in about 2015.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I don't think there has been any decision—

**Mr Zangalis**—I hope you're right.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I think for radio it is still in the never-never. I don't think there is any—

**Mr Tolhurst**—What George is thinking about is that there was a time when we thought it would be closer; that it would be in about 2010 or 2012. But Senator Coonan has since said that that will blow out to about 2015 or 2018.

**Mr Zangalis**—It would be interesting to clarify that. We are participants, and we get the impression, with the new technology being so integrated, that it is a matter of asking: where does radio end and television begin?

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I think there is a pressing need for digital television, simply because of the world-wide move to high definition, the fact that many things are now being shot in high definition, and our ability to remain at that level of technology which is compatible with the rest of the world. That is not the case in radio. Radio is very much more localised and does not depend on international content.

**Mr Tolhurst**—That is true, yes. We probably have some nervousness about that because there is commercial pressure on Senator Coonan's department to release more spectrum, and the way they can do that is to close down community radio bandwidth and issue that. That has not actually been said or threatened, but if more spectrum to do stuff like HDTV, where it is spectrum greedy—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—It is only greedy if it is going to multichannel; otherwise it actually takes less.

**Mr Tolhurst**—High definition is greedy too, but normal digital is not. There has been some pressure and some talk about 'Where do we find the extra spectrum on the old band' and those sorts of things. One of the things that has been raised is that if radio—not only community radio

but other analog radio—is removed then that is a space for digital to be used as well. I agree with you that it is not a pressing threat, but it is somewhere in the background.

**Mr Zangalis**—But the government has committed itself in the year 2007 to providing some answers to the community broadcasting sector as to what assistance, if any, it is going to give to community broadcasting to take advantage of the new technology. We are eagerly waiting. They have been saying to us, ‘You have knocked at our door; we know what you are talking about.’ A couple of years ago they told us, ‘It is not on yet,’ but now they are saying that next year they are going to give us an answer.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I think you will find that that promise relates to television.

**ACTING CHAIR**—We are going to have to wind up. Do you have any last comments you would like to make?

**Mr Tolhurst**—No. Thank you for allowing us this time to speak to you. We are always open to follow up, if you need it.

**ACTING CHAIR**—That would be great. I would at some point like more information on the commercially funded ethnic broadcasters. Perhaps we could talk briefly about that. They are coming into the market now, are they?

**Mr Tolhurst**—They rely on licences being available, and commercial licences are around \$180 million in Sydney and Melbourne. So not many more are going to come on stream. I think that in Melbourne now there is a Greek station and an Italian station. There used to be a narrowcast or low-power Spanish station. I am not sure that that is still there. Of course, it varies from state to state.

**Mr Zangalis**—By the way, the narrowcasting stations were given temporary licences very cheaply. But with the passing of time the capital value has increased. We know that the commercial factor is also a reality in the ethnic communities. We have to accept that. Some people say, ‘There is a commercial radio station, so why do you need community radio stations in ethnic languages?’ We answer in the same way. Commercial radio has been in Australia for a long time, but community radio has a place in the ethnic communities. So we have got three sectors: government, community and commercial. I might conclude by saying that commercial radio in ethnic communities, because of the volume, relies 90 per cent directly on imports from overseas. Make a choice: where will you put your money—to lock up production—

**ACTING CHAIR**—That was actually the point of my question, to get you to talk about that. That is exactly what I wanted to hear. Thank you very much for coming. It was a pleasure.

[2.27 pm]

**CURTIN, Ms Joanna, Assistant Station Manager, Ethnic Public Broadcasting Association of Victoria Ltd**

**WRIGHT, Mr Martin, Station Manager, Ethnic Public Broadcasting Association of Victoria Ltd**

**ACTING CHAIR**—I call the representatives from 3ZZZ. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission, or would you care to make some introductory remarks?

**Mr Wright**—One or the other, thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to appear in front of the committee. As you introduced us, we represent Melbourne's permanent ethnic community radio station, radio 3ZZZ. We are very proud of the fact that we exist because we deliver what the community needs. Without our doing this, community radio—particularly ethnic community radio such as us—would not be able to attract volunteers, listeners and support. In fact, it would cease to exist. Community radio assists in retention of culture and identity while assisting migrants settling to become part of the Australian community. This settlement and community aspect is important in making a cohesive and multicultural Australia which is the envy of the rest of the world. Ethnic radio's ability to connect people is important, because by connecting communities across geographic boundaries, where settlement has been fragmented across suburbs, radio allows people to know what is happening in their communities, reducing the feeling of isolation and increasing understanding of available services and programs and of the wider Australian community. It also increases knowledge of community activities within and without their communities.

There is even the basic stuff of life, such as I grew up with with country radio, where you have got births, deaths and marriages. The only way that that can be done across a whole community, which is very important to these new communities, is through radio stations like 3ZZZ. Otherwise, it means that these people have got to make multiple phone calls, because that essentially is the only other way that that information can be spread. 3ZZZ is particularly strongly placed to utilise our existing networks, and we do so through projects designed to reduce intolerance and promote understanding and acceptance of other races, religions and cultures. This is done externally through festivals, outside broadcasts and meetings, and internally through interprogram activities and projects that attract people from new and emerging communities to put together their own radio shows. We put a number of those communities together so that they not only work together to serve their own communities but also get to know each other better and have their listeners get to know each other better.

Some of the key aspects and strengths of 3ZZZ are localism and grassroots access. These are things that cannot be provided by other means such as SBS or commercial language services. They are more networked or more commercially oriented, depending on which one you look at.

In our case, 3ZZZ is a democratic organisation. All of our 68 language groups have a coordinating body which is elected biennially by the members of their community. Anybody in that community can join 3ZZZ, be part of it and elect our program groups. Currently we have a membership of just over 5,000 people.

The group committee has the responsibility for managing their allocated program time, keeping it relevant to changing community needs, reflecting those needs in material that is broadcast and reflecting the needs in the community access. As communities change, as they develop or as they move, they are kept in touch with and the way the group broadcasts alters with those changes. So they are there not only to serve the communities but also to react to the communities' needs at all times.

I heard you talking before about airtime. The lack of available airtime leads to problems in adding new programs and properly serving those on air. It is an extremely difficult balancing act to expand services under the current frequency range. This has the opportunity to change with the introduction of digital radio, which in itself poses some threats for the sector which is continually under financial pressure. It will cost money. It also faces some threats in being able to expand fast enough to fill that new medium. Going from 24 hours, seven days a week, and expanding into two or three bands, or whatever, is going to be a major problem, and there is going to be pressure on the volunteers, which I will talk more about in a minute.

Many programs serve their community with only one hour of broadcast time, leading to restrictions on access, information flow and community bonding which could be alleviated with additional time. There will be pressure on advertising space, which is a very important part of our revenue. Although advertising is limited to five minutes, for some groups even that five minutes out of the 60 can cause major problems. So the more that funding relies on sponsorship or advertising, the more pressure there will be on time.

The government training support through the AERTP used to provide quality training to ethnic broadcasters without requiring a formal certificate. They could train to the level that was set by the AERTP and get a certificate for it, but it was not a formal certificate like a certificate II, III or IV in radio. That has now ceased and that has now cost 3ZZZ around \$16,000, which was what we got to train broadcasters. We were training 100 to 120-plus broadcasters a year in that way. The replacement program now requires all training to be formal if it is to receive funding support. The training of new arrivals, refugees, people with limited English and even older people—and the majority of our volunteers come from those categories—now has an almost impossible barrier, the result of which will be an almost unacceptable pressure on some stations to be able to put properly trained broadcasters to air. To have them properly understand broadcast law, the risk of libel and the way that you properly bring in all of your communities or parts of your communities and share the time all requires training. Of course, using the panel and being able to interview also requires training. It now has to be done by volunteers. Not using properly trained broadcasters can lead to some problems, particularly in the maintenance of standards.

Apart from the five full-time staff we have at 3ZZZ, we have 400-plus volunteers who regularly put our programs to air. These volunteers in community radio work with a passion to serve their communities. There are no billboards out in Flinders Street showing your face saying that you are producing an hour on 3ZZZ like there are for those on commercial radio. All there is



is the fact that you know that the people in the community accept that you are there to serve them and to act as a conduit for information into their community. They understand and are committed to making their programs stay on air and to serve their community needs. This leads to a commitment to make quality programs to go to air—three to four hours of preparation are required, quite often, for a one-hour program. The preparation time is around three to four times that of the on-airtime.

Personal commitments are one thing but the increased costs in juggling time with the cost of petrol and other out-of-pocket costs make it more and more difficult for volunteers to be able to give their time. In our case, many of our broadcasters are new arrivals or refugees with limited income who have all the pressures of settling themselves into their new country; or they are older people who have time available and the commitment to give time but who are on a limited income through a pension and are not particularly rich, and in a lot of cases they come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. If they have been here for 40 or 50 years, they are starting to get older as well, which health-wise does cause some problems. The volunteer commitment is absolutely huge. If you think of 168 broadcasting hours a week, multiply that by four and multiply that by a factor of maybe three or four broadcasters, in some cases—always two—the volunteer hours that go into running a station like 3ZZZ are absolutely huge.

I will talk briefly about funding. It is a larger issue. I know the NEMBC have spoken about it. Whilst it is only about 25 per cent of our budget, it is of concern that in real figures the amount has dropped considerably due to the increased number of stations realising the importance of ethnic broadcasting. That pie is being accessed by more and more people. There are more pieces being taken out of it, and the pieces are becoming smaller and smaller each year. That increase in stations has not been reflected in government funding, which has been increased by CPI only and not the demand. With increasing transmission costs expected, the renewal of our contracts and other contracts for Broadcast Australia is also an issue.

The initial contracts run out in 2008. They were taken over from Radio Australia by Broadcast Australia. To our mind they were quite realistic financial contracts. In another two years they will change. It is a possibility for us and for other stations that the cost will increase from about \$15,000 per year to possibly well over \$80,000 per year. We are in negotiations on that at the moment. In fact, I spent this morning at a meeting with them. The one thing they said at the end of every line was, 'You can expect an increase.' They were not talking about CPI increases. That is going to be a major problem.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Did they give you a reason for that?

**Mr Wright**—The reason is that the market influences will be reflected to us. Commercial rates out there are around about \$100,000.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Yes, but they are a monopoly. They can say they will charge you \$5 million if they want to.

**Mr Wright**—I did not suggest that! But you are right.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But they can, so they are not responding to the market at all. Where are their increases incurred?

**ACTING CHAIR**—They are charging what the market will pay.

**Mr Wright**—They are charging what the market will pay.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—It is different. You can do that when you are a—

**ACTING CHAIR**—That is what they are doing. If the commercial radio stations are prepared to pay \$100,000, that is what the market will pay.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I repeat what I said to you in our meeting yesterday: I think you should look at whether or not the ACCC has a say on the way in which those rates are set. They are a monopoly, and monopolies have to be curbed.

**Mr Wright**—I wrote that note then and I will write it again, so I will have it on two bits of paper. It is not just us that will be affected by that. Digital radio, whilst welcome in many ways, could also mean we will incur set-up costs of up to or in excess of \$250,000. We are not really sure at the moment what those costs will be, but they will not be low. As Tim from the NEMBC mentioned to you, some of the bigger stations will be able to find that. We probably will, but it will certainly make life difficult for us. For other community radio stations that probably equally deserve that access, it is going to be absolutely impossible without some very strong government support.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—What about if there were a decision of government that said that, as far as radio goes, they would keep the simulcast going and you could elect whether you remain an analog station or become a digital station? The rule could say, for instance, that existing holders of analog spectrum could convert to digital—and they could put conditions on that if they wished—but that they would not switch off analog and you could simply remain on it. Indeed, maybe you would not be offered digital. Maybe you would remain an analog station.

**Mr Wright**—For the sector, I think that is vital. For us, we could then make the decision on whether we moved.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—If you, as a large station, decided to make that decision.

**Mr Wright**—As I said before, whilst the benefits of digital radio to us are quite large, we have also got the problem of being able to fill that time, so we would need time to move into it. We have also got the problem that many of our listeners are the same as our volunteers in that they have not got a lot of money and I do not know whether or not digital radios will be affordable to them. I have seen that the prices in England are still around £100—and \$250, for a lot of our listeners, would be impossible. That price could come down considerably in future but—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—The point is that people have umpteen radios, don't they?

**Mr Wright**—They do.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—They have them in the car and all round the house and so on. It is a bigger problem than digital television. It may be, if a decision were made that way, that

analog for radio would not be switched off, and then the digital problem would not be one for most of the community radio stations.

**Mr Wright**—Most of the community stations, I think, would stay—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Would stay with what they have got.

**Mr Wright**—I came from a smaller station to 3ZZZ, and the whole idea of digital to them is just a threat; there is no—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—No upside.

**Mr Wright**—There is no upside. They cannot afford to even look at it for upsides.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—And they would not even see a particular benefit for them.

**Mr Wright**—No. To complete this part: we urge the standing committee to recommend to the federal government a firming of their commitment to community broadcasting, particularly in the ethnic field. They could show this through an increase in funding commitments to reflect particularly the increase in ethnic broadcasting and multicultural Australia and the servicing of that, through a relaxation and increase in availability of funded training so that again becomes available to our volunteers, and, depending on where that goes and where the discussion we just had goes, a commitment to translate to digital transmission with supporting funding. Radio as a medium is simple and immediate. It allows people to deliver information to communities of limited English, new arrivals and the aged. This, with the community-strengthening aspects, should be acknowledged and supported by the federal government.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You refer in your submission a couple of times to the bringing of young people and women into the station. What strategies do you have to do that and how effective are they?

**Ms Curtin**—Maybe I can talk a bit about that. I will tackle young people first. It is very difficult, I think, for young people involved in ethnic broadcasting, for a number of different reasons. Young people are interested in volunteering and they are interested in radio and technology and the media, but for young people involved in ethnic broadcasting it is challenging because of timeslots, for example. Even with me at 3ZZZ, working towards getting more timeslots for young people is still a real challenge. Some of the timeslots are very late at night, and young people sometimes get the raw end of the deal. We are trying to work towards bettering that situation for these young people, but the way 3ZZZ is structured is that it is a democratic process and young people do not really have power in that process.

There are also a lot of challenges in terms of the language. To give you an example: one of the young people who broadcasts in our Punjabi program tells me that it is really challenging for him because the language that they use when they are broadcasting is a very formal language and it is not the same really as what they talk when they are at home with their parents and grandparents. So for him to broadcast properly and to be respected within his community—because if he talks the casual talk it is not looked upon well by his community—it takes a lot of work to prepare a program with the correct language, even though he is fluent in the language, if

that makes sense. That is just an example of the kind of challenge, and I think that happens across a number of different languages.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But that means that what is happening in that particular broadcast is that he is not representing the contemporary language use of his generation; he is servicing only one sector of that community—that is, the older community who expect that of him—at the expense of the younger ones who may listen or who may not listen because they do not want to hear that.

**Ms Curtin**—Sure, but I think it is really—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Is it that way? Is it really an older audience?

**Ms Curtin**—It is complicated because of the expectations placed on young ethnic people. You cannot unravel it from expectations of parents and grandparents. That is what their lives are about. It is not just what the radio show is about.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But that is not the point I am making. If he is going to speak in that formal language, he is talking to the older audience. The younger people are not going to listen, because he is not talking to them.

**Ms Curtin**—That may be so, but within his community he might not have a choice about the restrictions that are placed on him about the style of language that he is broadcasting in.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—No, but that is what I am saying—

**Ms Curtin**—I understand, but the young people listening might—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—He could, if he chose to speak the other way, develop a whole new audience. But that is a choice he is making.

**Ms Curtin**—True, but the airtime is determined by the group.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Okay. So, if they do not like what he is doing, they chuck him off and put somebody on whom they do like, because they have determined who the audience is.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I think Joanna is saying that that is one of the complexities that causes difficulties for young people getting in.

**Ms Curtin**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So it is an added choice that they have to make, or an added barrier, which makes it difficult.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But that is true about mainstream radio too. There are radio stations to which people will not listen who like language used or presentations done in a particular way.

**ACTING CHAIR**—There are youth English stations, but there is not a youth Punjabi station, so there is—

**Mr Wright**—In this case, the youth do listen to it because the material provided is directed at them, but they do not get the full benefit.

**Ms Curtin**—And the music provided is enjoyed by them as well—

**Mr Wright**—And not by their parents.

**Ms Curtin**—and that is a part of it too.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So the music is for the young ones?

**Ms Curtin**—See, it is the same.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So it is a very complex family and community relationship as well as—

**Ms Curtin**—Absolutely.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Life is complex.

**Ms Curtin**—Absolutely!

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—None of it is simple.

**ACTING CHAIR**—And more for some than for others.

**Ms Curtin**—Back to your original question about the strategies we are using to try and make this sort of thing easier: we have a youth committee at 3ZZZ which is made up of basically any young person involved at the station—and we classify a ‘young person’ as being under 30—who wants to contribute to making it better for young people at the station. So, for example, in the last six months we have written a youth policy which aims to support youth programming at the station, and that has been passed by our council, our board. That has been put together by these people. They have also been working on different projects—for example, they hosted an event.

So encouraging a broad range of ways for young people to be involved, not just being the voice on air but also contributing to other aspects of the station, has been a way of strengthening youth involvement, I think. Also, in those kinds of projects we can work in skill building and stuff like that, such as using sound-editing software. We did a youth leadership workshop as part of one project, which helped give them facilitation skills to strengthen that group, that youth committee, in the future.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—In the way you have structured it at the moment you just have certain hours for certain language groups. Mr Zangalis in his submission earlier today made an excellent point about this problem of the older people who like it this way squeezing out the younger people because the older people are going to keep it. In your management, with your larger structure, presumably it could be a management decision with the agreement of all of your

stakeholders to say, 'We'll dedicate so many hours a week to a younger persons' listening time,' and let them cede some of their time to give them a go. Would that be possible?

**Ms Curtin**—Anything is possible. There are challenges there. One of the challenges is that what many young people would want to do if they had no limitation would be to broadcast in a big mix of English and their mother tongue.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That could be quite exciting.

**Ms Curtin**—It is exciting. At the moment, 3ZZZ is restricted by the guidelines for funding through the Community Broadcasting Foundation as to what level of English is allowed within a program. That is something which is challenging for young people. Having said that, young people appreciate the opportunity that broadcasting in languages other than English gives them to keep up their other language and to develop those skills. They are the sorts of comments that we hear from young people: they really appreciate and enjoy that opportunity.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is there enough space on the airwaves for the sorts of issues confronting the next generation? I am moving on from what you have just said. There are in some communities very real problems with young people trying to find a balance between their old community and their new one. Is there enough space for that? Do you have any spare capacity at all?

**Mr Wright**—Probably not, but that will not stop us moving towards it. As Bronwyn mentioned before, it is not a management decision. We are democratic. While that does not mean that we will not slowly change it, it will take a little while to change. We have now a policy where the programs with more hours have to dedicate an hour to youth. We are moving towards that very quickly. That policy will continue working towards getting programs to at least include youth, if not have dedicated youth segments. They will have a portion or a full share of the broadcasting, so some of it will be youth oriented. It will take a little while to introduce that. In the last 12 months, we have strengthened our youth committee to the stage where now it is a vibrant and exciting multicultural group that sees that they have a future in the station. Now it is up to us to prove that they are right, but it will take a little while.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Back to that question of women: what percentage of your presenters are female?

**Mr Wright**—Of the active ones, it is about 27 per cent at the moment. There are more on the books. There are more coming in all the time.

**Ms Curtin**—Talking about women for a second, to give you a practical example of something that we do at the station, one of the things that we have just started is a cross-cultural women's project, which will be an hour-long program. Women from different cultures can come together and broadcast issues that are relevant to them. That is a project which is being supported by a VicHealth Bridging Gaps grant. 3ZZZ is always keeping an eye out for these kinds of opportunities because we have a women's committee which loves getting together because communicating with people from other cultures is so interesting. The general structure at 3ZZZ with program time allotted to different language groups—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You are in silos.

**Ms Curtin**—Yes—even when you are switching from one studio to the other. There is interaction within the station and within committee structures and all the rest of it, but women wanted the opportunity to get together and have a yak, basically. They wanted to talk and find out about each other and make more friendships—that kind of thing. They saw that as a need within their audiences, too. We are really excited about starting to do that. We are hoping that it will continue forever.

**Mr Wright**—Another thing that we are doing is running a forum this weekend for ethnic broadcasters from all over the shop in Victoria. About 25 per cent of the people are coming from other stations. We have two specific workshops, one about youth and one about women. We want to come back with ideas from the participants about the way that all community radio stations can include youth and women in their ethnic broadcasting. To us, they are extremely relevant workshops. They will be run by women for women and by youth for youth.

**ACTING CHAIR**—We are going to have to wind up very soon, but I would like to get the size of the transmitter and digital transition problem on the record. You obviously have a problem with your current transmitter. The licence agreement you are currently under dates back before the sale, I guess.

**Mr Wright**—It is before the sale. I think it finishes in February 2008. We are starting negotiations on that now. Our current figure is just under \$15,000. It has been increased by CPI, of course. There is a strong possibility it will come in over \$80,000.

**ACTING CHAIR**—And that is your analog?

**Mr Wright**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I assume that you do have to go digital as well.

**Mr Wright**—At this stage, we are certainly looking very seriously at digital. Whilst we have not done any real figures on the costing—as it all firms up, we will look at that closely—but the estimates from the technicians in the industry are that it could cost up to \$250,000 to do that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—That is not counting the transmitter. That is just internal?

**Mr Wright**—That would include a transmitter. And we do not believe the transmitter rental and the costs would vary; they would stay at about \$80,000. There may be a very slight decrease, depending on how many people go on the particular—

**ACTING CHAIR**—If you go analog, switch off digital, but if you run parallel then you have got—

**Mr Wright**—If we run them together, I would say we could be looking at double the prices, yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So that is—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But there is no real reason why you would do that, is there, except to save face with your existing audience?

**Ms Curtin**—What do you mean?

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—If you went to digital, the only reason you would simulcast is to keep faith with people who have got analog receivers.

**Mr Wright**—To serve our existing audiences, yes.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But, going back to your statement before, there is no real pressing reason for community radio to go digital.

**Mr Wright**—Only for the extra band time.

**Ms Curtin**—I think it depends on the take-up in the Australian community. For example, if suddenly cars are being manufactured with digital radios only then that is bad news for any community station left in the ghetto of analog broadcasting. It is important that community broadcasters are not seen as the poor cousins of the radio sector, but rather that we are seen as equally important as the other two.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Are there any final statements?

**Mr Wright**—No, we just want to thank you for the opportunity to meet and answer questions.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Thank you, we have enjoyed our visit.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I want to put on the record our thanks to you for hosting us yesterday.

**Ms Curtin**—It was a pleasure.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It was a pleasure for us too.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—We enjoyed it very much.



[3.06 pm]

**BOYD, Mr Rodney Thomas, General Manager, Western Radio Broadcasters Inc.**

**ACTING CHAIR**—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission or would you care to make some introductory remarks?

**Mr Boyd**—Thank you for the invitation to appear before this committee today. I am sure that you have had the opportunity to read our original submission, which was more background information in relation to Stereo 974's activities both on and off air. Before I go any further I need to point out that Stereo 974 is the on-air call sign that we have utilised for the last 10 years. You will note that our registered call sign with ACMA is 3WRB.

Western Radio Broadcasters Inc. are a not-for-profit volunteer incorporated association. We rely heavily on the hundreds of hours that our volunteers put into their programs each and every week. If we had to effectively pay for these services, we would not be able to fund the operations of our radio station. We train all of our volunteers in house and believe we have established a cohesive and team environment. Quite a few of our volunteers who originally started in the media with us have since moved on to full-time commercial media careers. Stereo 974 are grateful for the financial support that we receive from the Community Broadcasting Foundation Ltd. Recently, this has enabled us to carry out major upgrades to equipment, as well as funding set-up costs and training for language programs that we have introduced for new emerging communities.

I have spent approximately the last 20 years involved in radio. Prior to that, I successfully ran my own businesses. I joined another community radio station back in the mid-eighties—3RIM at Melton, where I not only conducted on air programs but also was elected to the committee of management and for a period of time served as president. From there, in 1990 I was employed by commercial radio station 3UZ Melbourne in an on-air role as a talkback and specialty program announcer. I became involved with Western Radio Broadcasters in 1996 and took on the role of general manager—a role that I fulfil to this day. So you could say I have come full circle. I started in community radio and have returned to it.

I am quite open to any questions or matters that you would like to direct to me, but I must preface this by saying that I cannot speak on behalf of the community broadcasting sector at large. I feel that this has previously been done not only by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia but also by other representative bodies.

Some of the issues I believe are facing community broadcasting are, firstly, management at station level—although committees of management do a great job, they only have limited time to give to the station. Unless there is someone controlling the day-to-day activities and steering the ship, the original direction can be lost. It is essential that all community broadcasters conduct

themselves in a businesslike manner—for example, business plans, budgets and the like should be in place. We can no longer support effectively a radio station on lamington drives and chook raffles. The cost of keeping up with technology so that we can provide a reliable service is horrendous. So, again, budgets have to be in place to fund these purchases.

Another issue that I would like to raise, having just gone through a situation where our radio station was flooded by six inches of water, is that I believe all committees of management need to act responsibly to make sure that the members' assets are adequately insured. This also extends to defamation insurance. We do not have the legal resources or the experience at announcer level and, again, it is extremely difficult to monitor and control 24 hours a day, seven days a week what is being said, especially at a station such as ours where we undertake approximately 56 hours of ethnic language programs per week. I believe that all community broadcasters should be required to carry current defamation insurance as a licence condition. Without this insurance they are leaving themselves wide open and, as far as I am concerned, if we never had defamation insurance I would make a recommendation to our committee of management to switch the transmitter off.

Another difficulty that we face is the definition of sponsorship announcement. I believe the sector, on the whole, and ACMA need to work vigorously on this. Although I have no problems with the cap of five minutes sponsorship per hour, we do at times have difficulties defining what a sponsorship announcement is. For example, if we interview an up-and-coming Australian artist and then mention where they are appearing or if they have a CD available for sale, under the current guidelines I believe that this is a sponsorship announcement. Until such time as we can receive further clarification surrounding this issue, we have put a halt to all such interviews to protect the licence of Western Radio Broadcasters Inc. Likewise, if we are conducting an outside broadcast from, say, a shopping centre or other commercial business, how do we mention where we are broadcasting from without breaching the sponsorship guidelines?

I believe Stereo 974 have been at the forefront of emergency response broadcasting. This originally stemmed from the Coode Island fire, where feedback information revealed a lack of information covering the direction in which the toxic plume was travelling. I need to mention here that we broadcast to an area where recent Victorian university surveys have revealed that 46 per cent of households speak a language other than English at home. We effectively have set up a blueprint whereby we can broadcast emergency messages in different languages and, in fact, we have liaised extensively with local government and emergency services. The City of Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay have produced fridge magnets advising that, should an incident or emergency happen, people tune to our station for up-to-date information. In fact, last year we were called upon on three separate occasions to put this plan into effect and received a commendation from the Emergency Services Commissioner of Victoria, Mr Bruce Esplin, for our efforts in this regard.

Another issue that I believe needs to be addressed is the placement of government advertising. Considering that there are in the vicinity of four million people listening to community radio, why isn't community radio receiving more government advertising revenue—not only placement into the niche broadcasting area such as ethnic but also English language? CBF funding is currently running at around \$35 per hour for ethnic language programs. I believe that SBS radio per program hour is costed at \$2,000, and with some 360 community broadcasters throughout Australia driven by volunteers it certainly is an extremely cost effective media outlet

that should receive greater government assistance, especially from not only government grants but also government advertising.

Most of these points I have previously covered in the Stereo 974 background information which formed part of our original submission. I now welcome any questions or discussion on any matters that you would like further information on. Over to you.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I have never listened to 974FM, obviously, because I have never been out that way. Can you tell me a bit about what it would sound like if I listened?

**Mr Boyd**—We are doing about 56 hours of ethnic broadcasting per week, predominantly between the hours of 8.30 in the morning through until six at night. It would be your eighties, nineties and today type music. There is a high concentration of Australian content in there as well. We cross to police media at 10.30 every morning. That gives us an update on what has been happening in Melbourne and any assistance that the police are requiring. We also cross once weekly to the Crime Stoppers update, which is really very much a follow-up to what appears in our *Herald Sun* newspaper here in Melbourne. So it recaps that for the audience. You will hear plenty of community service announcements, relevant messages for our community and some great listening.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Music is a major part of it?

**Mr Boyd**—Predominantly through the daytime, yes. We have tried to brand ourselves as the at-home, on-the-road and at-work station. We are piped through many business houses. We are even piped through the women's prison out the back of Deer Park. A lot of people rely on us for that information right throughout the day.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You have a general licence?

**Mr Boyd**—Yes, we have. We are a generalist station, submetro.

**ACTING CHAIR**—And you cover a part of the Melbourne metropolitan area?

**Mr Boyd**—It is predominantly the western and northern suburbs area. Our licence area plan, I think, takes us up to about Tullamarine airport. It cuts off around the Laverton area and then we head back into Melbourne. But, of course, we cannot put a lead curtain there to stop our radio waves from going any further. Effectively, you would listen to us anywhere in Melbourne and beyond.

**ACTING CHAIR**—In your opening statement you talked about community radio management needing to have plans and budgets. I am reading between the lines that you do not think a lot of them do. What can community radio or community broadcasting do about that and what can government do about that?

**Mr Boyd**—In our case our local member, then Mr Barry Jones, was very instrumental in getting Western Radio Broadcasters formed. We have moved along from those days. Back in the early stages of community broadcasting, the donations and pledges came in and that was the way that the station grew as it went along.

We are now in a broadcast area that is very expensive. We never seem to buy a piece of equipment that has a price tag on it under \$10,000. So stations need to know where they are headed. They need to have reserves of money. When a piece of equipment falls over, it has to be replaced. I think the terminology I used was that we can no longer survive on lamington drives and chook raffles. We have gone past that. We need effective management at that level within the station. We need the budget set. We need to monitor it very closely, just as any small business does.

We are a not-for-profit, volunteer-driven organisation, but we are a business after all. If we do not know where we are heading or we move into an area where possibly we do not have the funds and cannot pay the rent or something else, I believe that we are trading whilst insolvent. On any given day we should be able to close our books and know that we can pay what we owe in the marketplace and that we are well and truly swimming and not sinking. I think this is something that will only come about with management within stations.

I believe that a successful station manager or general manager, or whatever terminology you want to give him, has to be effective in creating that atmosphere and going out and talking to business and service clubs. I do a lot of guest speaking roles. It is about spreading that message so that we can get support from the various sectors and make sure that we are going to be there and leave the youth of the day, those who will pick up the reins and run with it when I am well and truly gone, with something to run with.

It is hard at small stations. We are a submetro station. We are not a Melbourne metropolitan station. We do not have all of the power in the world to generate from our transmitter site. We have the access to the airwaves and we have to do something with it, and we have to run a business at the end of the day. There needs to be somebody there answering that phone, taking those calls from prospective sponsors who want to get involved with the station or whatever and then onselling that. That is the way it has to be. It is about effective control and it is about nurturing the volunteers who are moving in and out of the studios so that there is someone there and they are not just coming in, unlocking the building, broadcasting, walking out and not seeing anyone.

**ACTING CHAIR**—The stations that are struggling with their management I am sure are not doing that on purpose. How would you suggest they move themselves from where they are to where they should be?

**Mr Boyd**—Speaking from a personal perspective—I do a lot of guest speaking at various community broadcasting get-togethers—I think we have to drop the attitude that it is our station and that somebody might plagiarise one of our ideas if we talk about it. We need a system of mentoring within the group, where we have people who have had experience and have been able to take a radio station from one with a \$200 SEC bill that they cannot pay, and so they would have been off air in a week, to the sort of station it has become today. If some of that experience—or being streetwise or whatever—can be interpreted and passed on to those who are now picking up the baton in the relay race and moving forward then that is a great idea.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—All businesses need good management, and running a business includes the ability to fail—being allowed to fail. Do you happen to know how many community radio stations have failed, have gone out of business?

**Mr Boyd**—I know recently that one station up on the border handed their licence back—I think I am right in saying it was 2State Radio FM. There have been a couple of others. I think Pulse down at Geelong had a problem and another group is currently broadcasting on a temporary community broadcast licence.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Is there power for the licence to be handed on to another group or is it back to start?

**ACTING CHAIR**—It is back to start.

**Mr Boyd**—Yes, it goes back.

**ACTING CHAIR**—The new legislation allows it to be handed on when a company changes its structure from an incorporated association to a company limited where it is effectively the same group of people but a different legal entity. It does not allow a handover from one philosophical entity to another.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So if somebody fails, the licence has to be handed back and it goes out to tender.

**Mr Boyd**—The process starts again: expressions of interest, people apply and then broadcast under a temporary community-broadcasting licence.

**ACTING CHAIR**—And so it starts again.

**Mr Boyd**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—The failure rate of small business is that 80 per cent go out in the first year and 80 per cent of what is left go out in the second year. The failure rate among community radio stations is not anywhere near that, is it?

**Mr Boyd**—Nowhere near it.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I think you are being a bit harsh on small business. It is not quite that bad.

**ACTING CHAIR**—No, that is the number.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Five years is the magical time.

**Mr Boyd**—I have heard that before. If you can survive in small business for five years, you should be heading in the right direction.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is right.

**ACTING CHAIR**—But it is something like 80 per cent in the first year. It is incredibly high. I know of three that have gone, but you are suggesting that there are a few that are tottering along and probably legally are gone.

**Mr Boyd**—A lot of smaller stations are doing it very tough at the moment. They might be a little bit in arrears in paying rent and would like to replace a couple of monitors in studios, or whatever. They have a wish list which they should be looking at but they really cannot do it at the moment.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I liked your opening remarks when you said that you began in community radio, you went to commercial radio 3UZ—about which we had a discussion yesterday—and you have come back to community radio, bringing your experience from that other area, and you are committed to this business model. I could not agree with you more about the defamation legislation. If you cannot afford to insure it you cannot have it. That is terribly important, particularly as you cannot take responsibility for monitoring languages which management obviously cannot speak. You have an enormous problem. When you are looking for sponsorship, for instance, it seems to me you are measuring your penetration.

**Mr Boyd**—Yes, we are.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—If somebody were prepared to pay money to go onto your station, they are giving you a vote of confidence. They have decided that you have a reach which has value. I have heard some people complain about sponsorships but I think it is part of a measure of how successful you are with the support that is being given. In the case of your station, you get a share of funding through the fund that has been sent up.

**Mr Boyd**—Through the Community Broadcasting Foundation, we do for ethnic language programs, yes. There is a general grant as well for equipment upgrades.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So what would be the size of that grant?

**Mr Boyd**—I can give you the figures for, not this closing financial year now, but the one before. We received \$46,433 in government grants for the year ending 30 June 2005. Some of that will be made up of not all coming from the Community Broadcasting Foundation. There could be about \$10,000 there. I think there were some volunteer grants that were available.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But all up there is government money, which could underpin that low rate of failure of community broadcasters. In other words, if they did not have any government money coming in, many more would probably fall over.

**Mr Boyd**—Yes, I think you are very right in what you say. We adopt a slightly different attitude than some of my colleagues might adopt. But I believe, with government grants, they are the icing on the cake because the government could decide tomorrow there are no more grants. So what we do within our business plan is look at them as the icing on top of the cake. We have to generate the funds to run our radio station. We are eternally grateful for those grants because they do ease the pressure and they do allow us to put back into our community, but by the same token they are not locked away in that they are going to be there till the year dot, either. To rely on them, I think, would be a little silly.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Whatever happens in the future, at the moment it does seem to be a cushion that enables people to stay in business when they otherwise would go out of business.

**Mr Boyd**—That is great. We love that cushion.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do you or the local commercial sector have any issues with your station? Is your relationship good?

**Mr Boyd**—No—or not that I am aware of.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You would be aware of it if they did.

**Mr Boyd**—I certainly would be aware of it. Actually, we have pretty good working relationships with most of the media. One of the best newsreaders in this town, Tony Tardio at 3AW, puts back in and does a morning program with us between nine and 12 each and every Friday morning. A lot of the others come in. When I ask these people why they get involved, they say that it is because their involvement in the industry has been pretty good for them and they want, in turn, to put back in and nurture people along. Our key trainer is a gentleman by the name of Bob Taylor. Bob runs the Announcers Academy in Melbourne. He was voice coach for Seven, Nine and Ten newsreaders and the youngest brekkie jock in this town on 3KZ, top rating. Anyone in the media who has ever made it has been to Bob. Bob is permanently at our station, not only training but also looking after some production, and we are just so grateful for that. Here is a man who has a wealth of experience—he has just celebrated 50 years of being involved in the media—and he is there on a daily basis. We get such a buzz at Stereo 974 because a lot of our people have moved off into commercial radio now.

Country radio was traditionally the training ground—you went way out bush somewhere and started doing demo tapes and then tried to get back to a major capital city. That has gone now, with the advent of satellite networking and the like. Community radio is the ideal way—it was the way I entered commercial radio—where you can get those ground skills; you can pick up the ball and run with it. Some of our people have moved off and done exceptionally well. Eddie McGuire called his first game of football on our radio station, and to this day whenever I bump into him he reminds me of the fact, and quite proudly, of his first game of football. He came over when he was a cadet journalist at the then ATVO in the sports department. He certainly moved on to bigger and better things.

Ashley Chua, who is now with 3MMM football commentary, started with us, was nurtured by us and has moved on. The list goes on—Michael Sinclair, Seven Sport, started with us calling some local football and has moved on. The list just keeps on going. That gives me a buzz. We have even had commercial radio knock off some of our programs. When our announcers come in and say, ‘Look, we are awfully sorry, but—’ and they are all guilty about the fact that they have been picked up by commercial radio, that is a joy to me. It is our loss, but it is somebody who is taking that next step and doing something with their talents. Community radio—great place to start, great training ground.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You are doing the role that suburban newspapers do.

**Mr Boyd**—Yes, very much so.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—There was a very distinguished radio man who put to me a proposition some years ago that he would love to put together a string of local radio stations that played a similar sort of role to a range of suburban newspapers—professionally run, he meant.

**Mr Boyd**—Yes.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But there was no place for it in the spectrum. You either had to be a community station or you had to go for the full, gold-plated licence. There was nowhere in there that he could create such a being. It seems to me there is a place for it.

**Mr Boyd**—There is a place for it. I think the greatest problem is the lack of spectrum. I have had numerous meetings with a lot of the emergency services people and there are various things that we would love to be able to do, targeted straight at youth, 24-hours a day, to get the right messages across—especially when we are broadcasting to an area with very high unemployment, drug problems and the like. I would love to be able to put together a dedicated youth station catering for the west and north of Melbourne to get the right messages across—by the youth. Not ramming it down their throat and saying that drugs are bad, but being able to get the message across in their language. I would love some spectrum to be able to do it, but that is nonexistent. That is sad, because it is something I believe that could really make a difference. Radio is immediate; radio travels with you. You cannot take your colour TV with you and sit it on the dashboard of your car and drive down the road watching it.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You can these days, believe me.

**Mr Boyd**—Well, you are not allowed to do it—that is the problem. But radio is there, it is with you every step of the way. Most people go to sleep of a night listening to the radio, even if they put it on snooze. When they wake up of a morning, what is it on? The radio. If you are out in the backyard gardening, the radio travels out there with you. It is a great companion. That is what we have found with the pick-up factor with the emergency response broadcasting. It is fine to have automatic telephone alerting systems, but most of the time it goes to message banks.

Radio is something that just moves with you. You do not have to be glued to a television. Whereas we can hand over the airwaves—and we have successfully done this—to get the right message across. Not a news flash—it is not about toxic plumes or some other disaster happening; it is about the right information coming from the right source so that the right message is there. In the case of a fire, where there is a toxic plume or whatever, it is the steps of: close the front door, close the windows, turn off the airconditioner and stay inside.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Do you do that as a generic broadcast?

**Mr Boyd**—No, we do it live for each and every incident.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Yes, for specific incidents. You do not do it as a public service announcement from time to time—you do it in response to an occasion?



**Mr Boyd**—We do it as a response, yes. But we also run community service announcements, advising people on the air. That is a role we cover.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—How would you have dealt, if you were the broadcaster having such a radio station in Canberra when those fires came, with all that conflicting advice that came from different areas?

**Mr Boyd**—Exactly right.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That was terrible.

**Mr Boyd**—It is. What we have been able to do is liaise with our Victoria Police, the various inspectors in the area and local government to make sure that we are getting the right information, and it is coming right from the centre.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Are your transmitter arrangements old ones or new ones?

**Mr Boyd**—The arrangements have been in place for many, many years and we are eternally grateful to—I will give them a free plug here—Olex, the cable manufacturers. Our transmitter is sited up on top of their very high drawing tower, where they draw all the big coaxial undersea cables, and there is no charge factor.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So you have not got the Broadcast Australia problem?

**Mr Boyd**—No, we have not.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—You are lucky, aren't you?

**Mr Boyd**—And I do not want it.

**ACTING CHAIR**—No, and that is why I am asking, because I know that so many have. In Sydney they are adding a couple of zeros when the licence comes up.

**Mr Boyd**—It is frightening, isn't it?

**ACTING CHAIR**—Yes, it is actually. It is very frightening.

**Mr Boyd**—But this is, again, about companies, about corporate Australia putting back into the community. That is important too, and companies can see the benefit of putting back into the community. It is pretty tough when you are going to rip off a not-for-profit, volunteer-driven organisation.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I could not agree with you more.

**ACTING CHAIR**—They are actually thinking about a business; they are not thinking about ripping off—

**Mr Boyd**—It is fine to rape and pillage and take all the profits and to have this inflated bottom line, but at some stage we have to put back into the community.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—It is called rent gouging.

**Mr Boyd**—I think you might be right. We are under the privilege of parliament here, we can say what we like, can't we?

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Yes, we are covered by privilege.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You obviously have a very good board.

**Mr Boyd**—Excellent.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Did you inherit that?

**Mr Boyd**—I did. Our board does not change along the way. They are a group of people who are very focused. It is about being a team at Stereo 974, it is about nurturing people, it is about being cohesive. We have an excellent make-up on our board of very successful businessmen, right down to people who work on a factory floor, so there is a good cross-section there. We have a Vietnamese gentleman who is a very successful businessman himself. We have a financial planner, insurance broker et cetera. We have another gentleman who is manager of warehousing and stores. We have someone else who is in—what's that fuzzy word they use nowadays for people on the end of the phone talking to people all day and making things go right?—customer service. We have a PA to a very successful businessman in this town, so it is a good cross-section of people.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Conversion to digital is another big issue.

**Mr Boyd**—Frightening.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Frightening for you as well?

**Mr Boyd**—Frightening.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Because of the cost?

**Mr Boyd**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What do you reckon it will cost you?

**Mr Boyd**—We are getting our head around it. I do not think there has been a lot of provision made for submetro licences at this stage. It just seems that the high-powered boys are going to go there and, from what I can understand, 'We'll worry about the submetros later.' I think it will be a very long, drawn out process. I sometimes wonder whether I will see it and, at 56 years of age, that is a little bit frightening in itself. Is everyone going to madly rush out and buy all these radios that are digital? I do not know. There will have to be a transitional period. I would like to think that maybe we can cross this bridge as we come to it a little further down the road.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I am just trying to remember what we did when we introduced FM broadcasting.

**Mr Boyd**—Shock, horror, gasp —FM? That medium—‘What’s all this about?’

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—People had to go and get new radios—

**Mr Boyd**—They did.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—to pick up FM, but it came in gradually.

**Mr Boyd**—We have the top-rating commercial radio station in Victoria still on the AM band.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—And in Sydney?

**Mr Boyd**—That is right.

**ACTING CHAIR**—In terms of the management of this station, what do you need for the possible or imminent, whichever way you look at it, conversion to digital?

**Mr Boyd**—That is a tough question because I do not even know where we are going. What band are we going on, what is happening and what will the delivery be? Are we going to be worse off? Under digital, will we be footprinted only to our licence area? At the moment, the way things are, we cannot stop our radio waves right on the boundary. I honestly do not know. I suppose I am like everyone else, because I keep hearing figures of about \$200,000 being brandished about.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—When you hear something might happen in 2015—

**Mr Boyd**—It is too far off.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—It is just pie in the sky.

**Mr Boyd**—We have a lot of time to plan for it between now and then and we will have to plan for it. We will have to do something with it. It is not fair for me to bury my head in the sand for one moment and I would be shirking my responsibility if I were to do that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—The year 2015 is seven years off. If you really did have to raise \$200,000, I would think you would want to know fairly soon that you had to do that.

**Mr Boyd**—Normally, we move mountains, we rattle cages and we beg, borrow and steal along the way. We will do it somehow.

**ACTING CHAIR**—There will be one station still alive, that is for sure.

**Mr Boyd**—We will still be there broadcasting; we will be peddling. The bells will be warm.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I think so. Do you have any further statements?

**Mr Boyd**—I have a couple of things. Community broadcasting is about volunteerism. We all know, and it is a cliché that is brandished about everywhere, that if all the volunteers withdrew their services in Australia—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—It would collapse.

**Mr Boyd**—the place would grind to a halt. That is very true. I found in my role as general manager that once upon a time I could get a little bit more hands on. I am spending about 95 per cent of my time now wading through paperwork and all those other requirements. Recently, we went through a licence renewal. We may as well have gone for a licence application. I can remember that previously it was a two-page form and you ticked the box next to ‘Do you want your licence renewed?’ Now all of a sudden we have this pretty long drawn-out system where 13 months prior to the expiry date we get 28 days in which to fill out all this paperwork, break down all our hours of broadcast and what we are doing on it—and I think I ended up sending off something in the vicinity of 267 pages. I did warn ACMA first to get the forklift out because I did not want anyone getting a back injury when they took it off the truck. There were a lot of certificates in there and letters thanking us for what we had done. That is fine, I suppose, because I just close the office door, put the lights on and work till midnight and do it, but there are a lot of stations where everyone is a volunteer. By the time they can go and clear the post office box, have a committee meeting, form a subcommittee to work on it and get it all together, they have already blown the 28 days. It is tough. Why does it have to be so tough? Let us get real. We are not commercial operators; we do not have PAs and everybody has a job in the place to fulfil. It is about volunteerism. Let us get real and get back to what this is about—volunteerism.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Basically, you are saying that renewal ought to be precisely that—

**Mr Boyd**—Thank you.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—unless you have done something for which you should not be granted the licence back.

**Mr Boyd**—I could not agree more. And if you have done something whereby you should not be granted the licence back, you would have already been hauled over the coals and would not have the licence or you would have to show cause or something similar.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Do many change hands? When they put in their renewals, are any knocked back?

**Mr Boyd**—No. I think there was a case recently where someone had some added conditions put on their licence renewal. That was only in the last week or so. No. You might get a couple of questions but—

**ACTING CHAIR**—They are very good at monitoring between those periods and sorting out—

**Mr Boyd**—I think so.

**ACTING CHAIR**—They are very direct if there is an issue and very fast.

**Mr Boyd**—ACMA are very fair to deal with, I must say. I have never had a problem in dealing with them. I will admit that we have had a couple of complaints along the way quite some years ago and I always found they were no Big Brother waving a big stick at me by any means. We worked through it together and achieved a very successful outcome. Again, when you are broadcasting in foreign languages, it is very difficult. If we had to have translations done of all of our ethnic broadcasting—some 56 hours a week—we would be broke. We just cannot do it, so there is a little bit of wing and a prayer, but we have to safeguard the licence as well. That is just so critical. I will go back to the fact that community broadcasting is about volunteerism and I believe that government and government departments need to keep that very much in mind. If I were to go to ACMA now and ask, ‘What are the sponsorship guidelines?’ I think I might get told in reply, ‘The act is there; I think you should read it.’ That is fine. We can read the act and I suppose we could get 50 different QCs to give us an opinion on it and they would all be different. We are treading through a mine field.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Maybe you should be like the Taxation Office and the tax commissioner could give you a ruling.

**Mr Boyd**—Thank you. That would be wonderful. That would be easy. But it would be too simple, wouldn’t it? We need to try to work through this area because it is tough and it is a restriction that is being placed on us. It is not about blatant advertising.

**ACTING CHAIR**—No, I know.

**Mr Boyd**—I do not have a problem with five minutes an hour. It is a little bit of Noddy Land stuff though.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—We used to have that, didn’t we? We used to have that concept of incidental advertising. It used to apply in the tobacco advertising code, so it is not a new concept. But what if advertising was incidental and it does not breach your sponsorship rules?

**Mr Boyd**—Yes. I suppose we could get 50 different opinions on that one too, couldn’t we?

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But you always will. Until it is tested and there is a court decision, there are always interpretations.

**Mr Boyd**—But as community broadcasters we cannot test it.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Someone could take it to court.

**Mr Boyd**—We do not have the funding to take it to court—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I am not saying you.

**Mr Boyd**—or go up to the High Court and create some case law.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Nobody would want that.

**Mr Boyd**—We do not want that. We really want consultation on this one and to try to work through it.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But SBS are doing something new. They are now putting advertisements in the middle of their programs.

**Mr Boyd**—That is right.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Nobody has pulled them up yet.

**Mr Boyd**—And every time you watch Foxtel, which we pay all this money for, there are just more ads getting loaded up in there too. But, again, government advertising is something that we do not see a lot of. I see placement coming through from a federal aspect, mainly in our Vietnamese program, and we are not receiving a lot of support. Considering the number of people who are listening to community radio, especially in niche market ethnic broadcasting, we are not seeing a lot of support coming through.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That complaint is not new. It has been raised by ethnic newspapers for decades, but government always has to look at cost-effectiveness and having value for money. So it is not a question of saying, 'We'll give you a bit because you're nice,' or whatever; it has to be a proper test of value for money in reaching the population you intend to reach. It is not a backhanded method of subsidisation; it has to be properly done.

**Mr Boyd**—It is a business relationship. It is bang for bucks. If you are going to spend the money, you need that impact and that audience reach, and you need to make sure that the message is getting across—again, especially with niche markets. We are in the western suburbs area of Melbourne, where, highly predominantly, people are working in factories and the like. I know this is a state based issue, but we do not even run one WorkCover or TAC announcement, and we should be. There should be some placement there. I know you cannot comment on that because it is a state based issue.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But those placements are handled by people whose skill and knowledge is where you are getting reach for the advertisement you are putting, so they are the people you have to convince.

**Mr Boyd**—I realise that.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—The government is the client.

**Mr Boyd**—The jewel in the crown is community broadcasting, and I think one day they will wake up to it. The previous CBAA survey might have upset a few people along the way last time with some of the figures that were produced, but I think you are going to see that those figures will be even better in the new survey. Our station is even piped through the three major hospitals in our area on the patient television sets. There are all those types of things.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—We heard from Channel 31 and they made a very good point which I think applies to you as well: they are getting most of their advertising from small business people. They sell 15-second spots very cheaply, which means it is a new voice in the market, because mainstream television, of course, is just not affordable for ordinary folk. But for a 15-second spot you can put something together reasonably cheaply—I think they said they are getting \$7.50 for a 15-second spot.

**ACTING CHAIR**—They sell them in \$2,000 packages, and that is the clearing price—the price that actually clears their full year. It will change.

**Mr Boyd**—That is excellent. But, again, where once upon a time small businesses would have given you a donation of \$50 and gotten a couple of spots, those days have changed. Everyone wants response.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thank you for your evidence.

**Mr Boyd**—Thank you.

[3.53 pm]

**JOHNSON, Mr Peter, Station Manager and Chief Executive Officer, 3KND and SEIMA**

**ACTING CHAIR**—Please state the capacity in which you appear.

**Mr Johnson**—I am the station manager of radio 3KND, Indigenous radio in Melbourne.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Would you care to make some introductory remarks?

**Mr Johnson**—I have a statement prepared. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your committee today. The written submission presented to this committee details the successful operation of the South East Indigenous Media Association, SEIMA, and their broadcast service, 3KND, which have now well and truly been established in the first three years of our media and broadcast operations. In summary, we have been on air for 24 hours a day, seven days a week for just over three years. We have trained over 80 Indigenous broadcasters and won awards for our training. In particular, we won the Victorian Indigenous Wurreker award for excellence in training. Thousands of hours of culturally relevant and community based programs have been produced and broadcast.

This is set against our station's policy of 70 per cent Indigenous music programming. This music policy is one of the points of difference we have from the other Indigenous radio stations located interstate. The SEIMA board's point in setting this particular policy is that, if we do not play Indigenous music, a powerful communication from our Indigenous artists, then this will betray our reason for being on air. We also have a 100 per cent Indigenous broadcaster policy.

Whilst our local community focus is considered core business, the National Indigenous Radio Service broadcasts a selection of our programs across Australia. These national broadcasts from our Melbourne studios provide a linkage to communities from across the country. Up in the far north-east of our vast continent, people can tune in to the south-east. Of course, we listen to them too. For example, every morning, following our successful breakfast show, we broadcast the *Talk Black* show from Bumma Bippera Media in Cairns. Our listeners are regular participants in this national talkback hour. Where would they hear this program and how would they participate in the national media forum without the broadcast services made possible by 3KND?

We have also produced and broadcast our own national talkback show, *Talkabout*, and music show *Songlines National*. We join the broadcast stations of 4K1G in Townsville, Radio Larrakia in Darwin, PK Media in Halls Creek, Koori Radio in Sydney, Radio Goolari in Western Australia and PY Media in South Australia, when they broadcast in their own language. While servicing our Melbourne based community is our priority, these 3KND initiated linkages forge communication and contact previously unavailable to the Melbourne Indigenous community.

Unlike most Australian organisations, however, we started from a position of ingrained disadvantage. The history of Indigenous people in Australia is well known. Incontestably, these people went through—and many are still going through—dispossession and hardship as result of colonisation by a European power that was not especially interested in the prospects and welfare



of the original people of this land. Of course, that is the past. It was bad, and a lot of bad things happened. It is the future that we are interested in, and various governments have shown that they are interested in redressing these problems and injustices that are still dogging us from the past.

SEIMA and 3KND came into being as a consequence of government policy, and your ongoing support is welcome and essential. In the words of the old song, we prefer to 'accentuate the positive; eliminate the negative'. Continued funding and support will facilitate this desire and will benefit all Indigenous groups in Melbourne and Victoria in a variety of ways, from sheer entertainment to current affairs to career opportunities undreamed of in past years.

In three short years of our operation, we have seen and reported remarkable results. However, for us to sustain our efforts and continue the work being done by and on behalf of the Indigenous people, we certainly want and need your continued involvement. We ask that you look at our proposals in a friendly way, not just as a piece of business that must be done. This might seem an odd request, but friendship, mentoring and community spirit are all extremely important in the Indigenous community, as well as in the wider community.

Something good—even great—has been started at SEIMA 3KND. We feel that it is absolutely imperative that the ball is not dropped at any time by anyone. To give you an idea of what I mean, think of what it was like on the day we first opened our doors at 3KND. We opened them with ambition in our minds and hope in our hearts, tempered with a little fear of the unknown, and we also had a really big 'Welcome' mat. All we had was a small building in Preston, in the northern corridors of Melbourne, where a high proportion of the Indigenous community lives. We had an array of equipment, some new and some old, a broadcast licence and a well-formed, ambitious plan, but we knew that we were stepping into the unknown.

Fortunately, our experiences have been positive—more than positive. Our results have been remarkable and gratifying. We have seen shy young kids and inexperienced people walk in through our doors, not quite knowing what they were doing. Weeks or months later, we have seen them transformed into assured, proficient people, confident in what they are doing, whether it be as contributing broadcasters, producers or technical support people. You cannot overestimate the value of self-esteem, the absolute necessity of self-confidence, in the development of high morale in young and old alike.

The merit of SEIMA is not measured just by the actual work we do, valuable as that may be. What we see is the whole ethos surrounding 3KND sending positive ripples out through the Indigenous groups and the wider community and all the interests and activities undertaken by those groups. While the founders of SEIMA understood there would be benefits, even they have been astounded by the far-reaching results of this rather small media organisation. Far more than in the general community, Indigenous media gives a voice to these groups and interests, a voice that spreads across Australia and brings in reciprocal programming from other states and territories. But it is not just that it is a voice; it is a voice that is spreading the word, and the word is 'achievement'. It is 'success'. It is 'you can do it'.

For the first time, Indigenous people are getting a concentration of good news about the achievements of their fellows in a wide range of fields. Whether it is sport, medicine, law, music, dance or other forms of entertainment, Indigenous people are hearing about Indigenous

achievements in Melbourne, Victoria and all over Australia. This builds the confidence of people, and it builds self-expectation too. If Cathy can do it, so can I. If Christine Anu and Ernie Dingo can do it, so can I. If Michael Long can do it, so can I. And if Lois O'Donoghue can do it, so can I. While Indigenous success and achievement has been on an upward gradient for many years, it used to happen quietly and in isolation. While this media organisation is spreading the word, SEIMA has become an actional example, projecting role models. Listeners better understand that all things are possible if you have the desire and put in the time and effort.

You can see, then, the vital necessity for SEIMA to continue its work. It would be a disaster for the Indigenous community if it all fell in a heap through a lack of funding and other support, and it would not help the rest of Australia either. There is a wealth of information in the material with which you have already been provided, but there are a couple of things I would like to highlight right now. Firstly, with the help of the Victorian government, SEIMA will be moving into new premises. This will enable us to upgrade our programming and our services to all audiences. We currently have an application in process with the broadcasting authorities to expand our broadcast signal to rural and regional Victoria.

As well as the radio station, we are establishing a recording studio, in association with our sister organisation, Songlines, an Aboriginal corporation dedicated to the mentoring and showcasing of young people in all areas of music performance. Performers and technicians from all areas of the music business come to Songlines and 3KND to advise and assist young Indigenous performers, helping to put them on the right track. Then, when they have reached a high enough level, these youngsters are able to record at the SEIMA studio and 3KND includes their music in its programming. This is music recording and broadcasting under the one roof. It is easy to understand how valuable this process is in building the confidence and expectations of young kids who, in the past, have all too often drifted into unhelpful pursuits and sometimes hopelessness.

Clearly, this whole thing is about funding. Everything needs to be paid for and there are many competing interests. What I must emphasise now is that our success does not necessarily reward us in material ways. Broadcast services, albeit supported by a high proportion of volunteer members, are still expensive to run. While we are always under financial pressure, the pressure is worsening because in real terms our funding is decreasing. This simply and sadly means that it is ever more difficult to maintain our programs, let alone plan for expanded services.

Good and positive things are happening, but without appropriate funding these things could start to unravel badly. Given the high degree of our success and our optimistic forecasts for what we want to do, this would be a tragedy. From a standing start around three years ago, we are now proudly established as a thriving resource in a hungry community. We regard problems as opportunities in waiting, but to remain a thriving and positive force we need your continued support, your understanding and the funding that only you can deliver. The silent voice of the Victorian Indigenous community used to be heard only through its art. Now that it has a voice it is also heard through its own community radio service, 3KND. We are travelling well but we still have a long way to go. We would like you to join us on the journey.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thank you very much. Only three years old?

**Mr Johnson**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—That is quite a rapid establishment.

**Mr Johnson**—It did have a temporary licence for some six years, when a lot of test broadcasts occurred, but officially our licence began three years ago.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Did a lot of people come across from the temporary set-up?

**Mr Johnson**—Indeed. They were foundation members.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Where were they broadcasting from before?

**Mr Johnson**—We had a temporary facility in Port Melbourne, I believe. That was before my time. A lot of the broadcasters were broadcasting Indigenous programs out of 3CR.

**ACTING CHAIR**—When do you move into the new building?

**Mr Johnson**—October is the government's projection. I suggest it is more likely to be Christmas.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Did I hear yesterday that you do not have the moving costs yet?

**Mr Johnson**—That is right. We have a building to move to and they have given us a sort of lock-up arrangement, but we do not have the funding to be able to move or indeed wire the whole place up.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So it is not finished; it is to lock-up stage.

**Mr Johnson**—That is right.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is the soundproofing and all that stuff in?

**Mr Johnson**—Yes. All the baffling is there.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So it is just your hardware that has to go in.

**Mr Johnson**—That is right: all the wiring and connectivity. We are basically breaking down a radio station and rebuilding one.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Will your new premises have the same equipment that you have now?

**Mr Johnson**—We hope to upgrade it, because a lot of our equipment was second hand when we got it three years ago. We got a whole lot of SBS gear.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Everyone does that.

**Mr Johnson**—I know! They are a wonderful change house.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So it does actually work when SBS has a better budget because you get its cast-offs.

**Mr Johnson**—Yes. When they get a big budget they open their back door. We are certainly hoping to be able to fit the place out with modern gear that reflects what happens in the rest of the communications industry.

**ACTING CHAIR**—The recording studio that you are talking about will exist in the new building; it does not exist now.

**Mr Johnson**—That is correct.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So that has to be fitted out as well.

**Mr Johnson**—In fact we already have a lot of that equipment. Through the CBF we have been able to establish certain music grants or production and equipment grants, so we have a lot of that equipment already. We could move in with existing gear. The problem is going to be connecting it all up and making a facility out of it. So the bare bones of running a radio station and a recording studio we already have; it is the fit-out and the getting technicians to work for three months to be able to make it all work and the reconnecting to the transmitter et cetera.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Will you have to go dark in the move, or will you be able to—

**Mr Johnson**—No. We will manage an overlap. That is not too hard, actually.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You will just move one over.

**Mr Johnson**—We will keep on air until we can throw the switch on the other one.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Terrific. Seventy per cent Indigenous music—that would be hard without a studio.

**Mr Johnson**—It is. There is a reasonable catalogue of Indigenous music and we certainly wear through our CDs. But we feel that it is important, as I said, that Indigenous music is a constant on the radio. You should be able to turn on an Indigenous radio station and hear Indigenous music; filling it up with other music is not really ideal or what we are there for. So we do have a fairly high turnover and there is a repeat nature to all the music; there is only so much music. CAAMA Radio provides us with a fair catalogue and we will certainly be making our own.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What is the other 30 per cent at the moment? Is it just general?

**Mr Johnson**—Yes, general music; a lot of country music—that is a very popular genre in the line-up. So it is mainly country and then all forms of music. We have hip-hop; we have all sorts of shows from different broadcasters, and they like to present hip-hop shows and all forms of music, really. We do not have classical music at the moment, but I am working on it.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Yes, that would be a hard one.

**Mr Johnson**—Yes, it is. I dream of that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What is your total turnover?

**Mr Johnson**—About \$400,000 a year, including GST.

**ACTING CHAIR**—And how much of that is grants?

**Mr Johnson**—All of it, except \$31,000 which is what they describe as ‘activity generated income’.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So it is mainly grants?

**Mr Johnson**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do you have subscribers?

**Mr Johnson**—No.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Have you given any thought to the move to digital?

**Mr Johnson**—I certainly have, and I have attended lots of forums and I have my head across it. But at the moment my philosophy is: do not fix what is not broken, and we are just going to forge on until the rest of the world, with all their expert advice, come up with the answer.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Good attitude!

**Mr Johnson**—When they can show us which line to plug it into to make it digital, we will plug it in!

**ACTING CHAIR**—A lot of community stations are having trouble with the location of their transmitters at the moment, but you guys are okay, aren't you?

**Mr Johnson**—We are. We share transmitters with 3AW and in fact our call sign of 1503, our frequency, is in fact an old 3AW frequency, just as a matter of interest. We have had that frequency since the beginning. We share with two other stations—3AW and SEN—and we pay an enormous amount of money to have our transmission towers. Being AM we need two towers. The site is an expensive site in the middle of Lower Plenty. The landlords and owners of that place certainly know how to charge, and they do.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So the cost is quite high now?

**Mr Johnson**—Absolutely. It costs us \$60,000 a year.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is that a fairly new agreement?

**Mr Johnson**—No. That was an agreement I inherited when I started the station.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So is it due for renewal at any time soon?

**Mr Johnson**—No, it is not. There is no extended contract. It is just: ‘You want this service; that’s what it is.’ We are up for a third of all maintenance costs; we share them with the other commercial entities. I quite often find myself writing to them and saying, ‘I know the toilet might have blown up, but couldn’t you pay for it rather than us?’ because they have a commercial income and structure; we do not. And they quite often come to the party. Broadcast Australia is a different story. They see us as just another station.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So are you partly through Broadcast Australia?

**Mr Johnson**—Yes. They have the overall management of the site. It comes within their make-up.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You are slightly ahead of the others, I think. Some of them are still sitting on \$8,000 to \$10,000, but they are looking at that kind of increase. You are already wearing it.

**Mr Johnson**—We are already wearing it, and there are other community stations that are afforded their own transmission card, like 3CR does, and that is an enormous saving, because we get the bill on the dot every month. We will get a phone call if it is a day late. It is quite extraordinary.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You talked in your opening statement and your submission about the mix of content that you have of local content, some national content and some local specific content from elsewhere. Do you want to talk about the philosophy of the station? A lot of community stations are purely local, some of them are communities of interest that cross a range of geographic communities and yours is a bit of a mix, really, I think.

**Mr Johnson**—I think one of the overriding policies of the board is to make sure that we are linked with other communities. The Indigenous communities are a disparate lot. They are all different across Australia, and I think one of the incentives is to get as much communication as possible between the disparate mobs so that there can be a greater unity. We enjoy sharing our services and other people’s ideas from across the country. It is very empowering.

The *Songlines National* music program, which is on a Sunday, is a five-hour program that goes right around the country and links all the stations I mentioned before hour by hour. So Melbourne crosses to Sydney, then Sydney crosses to Townsville et cetera right around the country. In each of those hours the broadcasters present their own local Indigenous music and the whole nation listens to that via the National Indigenous Radio Service. There is a real tune-in: ‘You fellas are using good didge up there,’ or ‘You’re not,’ or whatever, and that provides for a unity and a communication that previously was not there, apart from a few thousand years ago. It is an all-encompassing thing that allows people to communicate where normally there would be nothing. So that is an imperative, that we do link with other communities.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Tell me: do the people of Northern Australia who, if you like, invented the didgeridoo ever get a little bit cross that everybody else has taken it up and claimed it as their own?

**Mr Johnson**—I think they do.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Do they have proprietary rights?

**Mr Johnson**—No, they do not. Of course, it is called yirdaki—that is the instrument's name from the Northern Territory—and it has become a symbolic instrument of all Indigenous culture, really. But they do get cross, and the workshops that are done in places like the Garma Festival are very much parochial. If you really want to learn, that is where you go. You need to go to Arnhem Land or the north-west. They are a little bit cynical about southerners doing it, but some of the best I have heard have been out of Victoria. But they are very different. It is a very different sound. I heard a sound a couple of weeks ago in Lake Mungo which was extraordinary. I could not believe that the sound was coming out of one instrument. It sounded like four instruments out of one.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Yes. They can do that splitting.

**Mr Johnson**—Yes, and that twilling thing. It was quite extraordinary. But that is very different.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—The other instrument you can do that on is the trumpet. You can get two notes at the same time.

**Mr Johnson**—Yes.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—It is very hard.

**Mr Johnson**—Satchmo used to pull that off.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I had a friend who came from the north, actually, and he had a 100-year-old bloodwood. It was just the most phenomenal instrument. It was glorious—the biggest sound you can imagine. You could drown in it—just astonishing. He toured the world with it and when he was in Paris he was arrested for carrying a dangerous weapon! That was not funny at the time, but we do tend to laugh about it now. What was he going to do—blow through it?

**Mr Johnson**—An enormous dart gun, yes!

**ACTING CHAIR**—That's right. I do not think the gendarmes quite knew what to do with him. At the moment, how far does your reach go?

**Mr Johnson**—We go up to near Bendigo and down to the Mornington Peninsula and out past St Andrews. So it is a fairly reasonable footprint but would still be described as metropolitan.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Are there other Indigenous stations in regional Victoria?

**Mr Johnson**—No.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So would your preference be to be able to expand that footprint?

**Mr Johnson**—Yes. In fact, we are in process with the broadcasting authorities to expand that service so that we can have a service that goes through to Shepparton, Echuca, down to Morwell and Portland. We have had many approaches from the community to say, ‘Why can’t we have the service here?’ And that is what we are indeed progressing on.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So the negotiation has to take place?

**Mr Johnson**—ACMA has been encouraging. We have done the technical part. We have found what frequencies will fit into all those regional areas. We are at the stage now where we need to undertake a community consultation process, which would result in a united plea to allow the service to be spread to those areas and for our signal strength to be increased so that it can. We would obviously bounce that signal to the different local transmitters—and doing that by land line is the more obvious way to go—and retransmit from those sites. But we would do that live; it would not be a delayed service.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is there room in your schedule to allow the odd program to come from those regions?

**Mr Johnson**—That is imperative. We would not wish to just be broadcasting to them if they wish to have a part of the broadcast. Indeed, we would certainly make way for at least a couple of hours per week for each of those districts to be part of it. That is very important. That is what inclusion is all about. It is not about us being able to talk to them; it is not about one-way traffic; it is about inclusion and joining.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Would that happen through other community stations?

**Mr Johnson**—No. We would run our own broadcast but they would be able to send in their own programs via CD or internet, and we would put them up.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Terrific.

**Mr Johnson**—It is really exciting. It is a great thing to be looking to expand. If we can do it, it will be a remarkable service for Victoria.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Wonderful. In setting up over the last three years has there been a lot of support from the rest of the sector?

**Mr Johnson**—Indeed. I was quite surprised when I went to my first social meeting with the other station managers. I was new to radio. They were hospitable and encouraging and willing to share information and technicians, who are very light on the ground in radio. Yes, there is a lot of support. We certainly do not compete; we stand together. That was really refreshing, given that my background was commercial television, where you would shoot somebody from another station if you saw them walking across the street! It is somehow simpatico.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What about the training side of things?

**Mr Johnson**—Training is very important. That is where we get our broadcasters from. We have trained over 70 broadcasters—50 last year. They make up the stock of our broadcasters. We



run training programs continuously. We have full-time staff: a producer, Peter Grace, who was one of the original broadcasters on EONFM, one of the first FM broadcasters. He is a very Koori-friendly fellow who loves his training, and they really enjoy his version of training. That gets them up and running. We also run very strict media law courses. Although we run a certificate III in broadcasting that people can attain to, before they can go on air they must have done the media law component. Apart from being Indigenous, that is the other main requirement. Before you can get in front of a microphone, you need to understand how not to involve the law.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do you tend to keep your trainees for a while or are they starting to run off to other stations?

**Mr Johnson**—We tend to keep our broadcasters. A loyalty is built. They enjoy being part of 3KD. If they run off anywhere, it is interstate. They certainly do not run off to other radio stations locally—at least, we have not had that experience. We have a good and open working relationship with 3CR. A lot of Indigenous programs still come out of there. One of the reasons for that is that the individual broadcasters are able to achieve their own funding. They are therefore paid to present on 3CR. We are under a different arrangement and are not able to pay our broadcasters that way, because we are a funded radio station. Those broadcasters can achieve their individual funding at our station. Hence, we still have Indigenous broadcasters operating out of 3CR.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Terrific. How many listeners would you say you have?

**Mr Johnson**—That is a difficult question. We have only been on air for three years. We know how our switchboard lights up in various programs. We know, if there are changes made, how many people will ring up or write to us saying, ‘Why isn’t Fred there any more?’ When we have 3KND functions or events, we will get a couple of thousand people there. For example, we have the Share the Spirit day across the road in the park every year. We have had up to 5,000 people there, and the only way they hear about it is through 3KND. We are very comfortable that the whole of the Melbourne Indigenous population does tune in, and all organisations are represented by our organisation in terms of a media link. So we provide a service that we know a lot of the key organisations are using and that everybody listens to. Actual numbers are very difficult to state.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Are you included in the new survey that is going around?

**Mr Johnson**—McNair Anderson?

**ACTING CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr Johnson**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So you should get some idea.

**Mr Johnson**—Yes, we should get some idea, but that tends to be, from my understanding, a more generalist view.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It probably is. It probably is not specific.

**Mr Johnson**—Yes. The statement at a CBAA conference a few years ago was that upwards of three million people were tuning into community radio every week, but they cannot really—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—They cannot tell you who they are and which bits of it—

**Mr Johnson**—That is right—which part of the pie they listen to.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Not unless you spend a hell of a lot more on the survey.

**Mr Johnson**—Yes.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Regarding your submission, I am particularly interested when you say:

... Indigenous community broadcasting facilities in remote communities also be enhanced into *communication* centres that would provide telephone and internet services.

Then you say that Indigenous people could be trained in broadcasting or employed by those services, and those give development opportunities and solve for the government, in your words, ‘one of its apparently intractable problems’. That is quite an innovative idea. I notice you then go on to say that you want to differentiate the Aboriginal broadcasting service from normal community radio, in that it is not a volunteer service; it is a service where you have paid Aboriginal broadcasters and workers in it, so it is a different concept in reality.

**Mr Johnson**—It is. I will deal with the latter first. There are a number of spots within our service where we can afford to pay and have regular broadcasters. What we like to do is have a regular broadcast—for example, a breakfast program, an evening program or a drive program—where people get to know the broadcasters and then tune in. To have that regularity from anybody really requires income. The other broadcasters, who are just as valuable to us, are volunteers. They may do one hour or two hours a week. But the regular broadcasters, who provide for a regular service, need to be paid. They are paid quite humbly, but that is the way we maintain a constant source of broadcasters on air who are consistent.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But in a way this does not quite fit in with that. The submission says:

AICA is concerned that funding agencies will take an economic rationalist viewpoint of Indigenous broadcasting and attempt to change Indigenous broadcasting to a volunteer based system, without due consideration of the adverse economic, social and cultural impacts it will have.

But in reality you have a large volunteer component.

**Mr Johnson**—We do. Our volunteers in the main are not the CDEP supported broadcasters. They are normally either working or receiving their own income from other sources. We do not have a CDEP program. I think that is what that is getting to.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So they are meeting their CDEP requirement by being volunteer broadcasters?

**Mr Johnson**—No. They are not linked at all. I am yet to see a CDEP form come across my desk.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—So they are doing their CDEP qualification elsewhere, and then they come to you as volunteers?

**Mr Johnson**—That is right.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—And that is their income source.

**Mr Johnson**—Yes—well, I do not know all of their income sources. They have a variety of incomes. Some of them work part time and some of them are doing Work for the Dole, but it is not connected to our station.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Apart from successfully moving, upgrading your equipment and expanding your reach into regional Victoria, are there are other things, to do with programming and the way the station works, that you would really like to see grown or developed?

**Mr Johnson**—I think those three key things are the priority at the moment. We are a new station, and bedding in a whole team of broadcasters and seeing them grow is really the priority—building a service that people want to listen to, not just Indigenous people but the non-Indigenous community. We do certainly have a lot of feedback that that is what is happening. Just building that service and getting it right is the priority. To expand the licence, to move into these new premises, is the cream on the cake or the next big step. That is sufficient at the moment.

**ACTING CHAIR**—And they are one-offs, aren't they? They are one-off costs, almost capital costs.

**Mr Johnson**—That is right, once we are in. Of course, one of the beauties of moving to this new building is that one of the things we will lose in our overheads is rent, so that may help us make up for some of the loss that we do suffer. There has not been any expansion of funding over the last three years.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What is your current rent?

**Mr Johnson**—About \$20,000 a year.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But you are getting \$400,000 in grants.

**Mr Johnson**—We are getting \$400,000 in grants, yes, but—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is pretty good.

**Mr Johnson**—If we were not able to generate that \$31,000 which we gain from activity generated income, and further to that the CBF grant that helps pay for half our transmission, we would not be on air. It would just be too difficult.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—The size of your grant obviously recognises that. We took evidence earlier today from Vision Australia, who service eight radio stations under their umbrella in Victoria from a budget of \$500,000. If you are comparing available funds on expenditure, you are only one radio station, with \$400,000.

**Mr Johnson**—We are, but we are also undertaking great training and are a new mechanism for Indigenous people in Victoria.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—The latter part, I think, is important. It is new and it is something that is new for servicing that community.

**Mr Johnson**—That is right. There is not a wealth of—

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But I think \$400,000 is pretty good. That is all I am saying.

**Mr Johnson**—I put in our budget every year, and the line items that we are requested to put in will come back as, ‘You need to take \$60,000 or \$80,000 out of this budget and here is the amount of money the government is going to give you.’ So what I have done in the last three years is take out all the transmission costs. To my astonishment, no-one has ever picked up that we are a radio station that is not funded to transmit. Our costs are real and it becomes increasingly difficult when those costs are not related to the growing costs of producing a radio service.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It is not unlike the operating costs of other radio stations. What is different about it is the percentage of the turnover which is covered by grants. That is the difference.

**Mr Johnson**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—But that can be explained by the lack of a wealthy subscriber base.

**Mr Johnson**—That is right.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Or the fact that you are training and the fact that there is—

**Mr Johnson**—That is right. There are no big resources to call on, in human terms or subscriptions or anything like that. That is not the service we operate.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I think the other point that you are making is that you are doing something that is different from what other community radio stations are doing, in that you are reaching people perhaps who have never been reached before.

**Mr Johnson**—That is right, and giving a voice to people who have never had a voice before.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—In a way, I can see it as becoming quite an important tool for all sorts of messages.

**Mr Johnson**—Indeed.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—That is why I was quite interested in that concept of more remote areas, with health issues and a whole range of things. It could be an effective way, particularly if they actually got involved in it.

**Mr Johnson**—That is right. The promotion of health messages and the whole education process that we are doing are so important. It is a key issue within our station.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—If you look back at our history, it was something that Australia did incredibly well when we developed the pedal radio. We knew the importance of getting a message out to those people who otherwise would not be connected. In a way, this is the 21st century version.

**Mr Johnson**—It is. It gives disparate groups a chance to connect with each other and to hear different opinions from within the mob that would not normally be heard. You would not have people from Morwell listening to people from Portland. It just would not happen. But, with the connection right across the community, it does happen and they have to speak up as to what their issues are and how they are going about sharing that information and sharing how they progress or otherwise.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Does your licence allow for the five minutes of sponsorship per hour?

**Mr Johnson**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do you actually use that?

**Mr Johnson**—I do not think we have ever achieved five minutes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—But you do aim to do so?

**Mr Johnson**—We understand that is the ceiling. We get our sponsorship income mainly through government sources—that is, health messages, TAC, antismoking campaigns and all the rest. That comes through an agency called Ing Media in Sydney. That is our main source of activity generated income.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I guess, because the community that you broadcast to is geographically quite dispersed, there would not be the same local business opportunities?

**Mr Johnson**—No.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—But it is the reverse of what was being talked about by one of our other witnesses, who complained that they were not getting any government placement. I talked about getting value for money. Clearly, the placing of advertisements to reach that targeted community works in terms of value for money—

**Mr Johnson**—Absolutely.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—which is why you are getting it. That is why the placement agency is putting it there.

**Mr Johnson**—That is right. There is no mystery there, is there? It does work. If you want to talk to Indigenous people in Melbourne, come to 3KND and we will get your message out.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—There is only one voice—

**Mr Johnson**—That is correct.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—whereas there are other voices.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What about the impact of a community actually being able to see itself in this way? The community really could not see itself before, could it? It could not find itself or see itself.

**Mr Johnson**—No. That is right. It provides for a maturity of the community. Those thoughts, and everything that is said, need to be thought about and matured. It provides for a honing of direction as well. It is empowering, where previously they had no way of communicating or broadcasting. I think the empowerment side of it is one of the most beautiful benefits of what they now have.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Will we see a broadening of the range of spokespeople as well?

**Mr Johnson**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is that happening already?

**Mr Johnson**—Yes, that is already happening. I will give you one example. I am looking to produce a more intellectual current affairs program. I am looking to have Indigenous people who are already working at universities come in and formulate a program. They are very busy people—everyone is busy—but I am really banging the drum and I am starting to get places. I say: ‘We have a great following. Your community needs this top-end—’

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Leadership.

**Mr Johnson**—‘leadership to be talking to everybody. You’re fully employed and you’re a professional. How did you do it? How did you come to be that way? Would you like to talk about your experience and what you believe the community’s direction should be and put it in a current affairs context on a weekly basis?’

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—I think that is terrific.

**Mr Johnson**—I think that is really important, because it spreads the intellect.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It is great.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—The important thing about it is that this is a 21st century entry point and you are being given equal footing to get in.

**Mr Johnson**—Wasn't it a wonderful thing when the decision was made? Exactly. It is equal. You have as much bandwidth as anyone else, if you want to put it in those terms. You can turn on the radio and hear an Indigenous point of view. We run an Indigenous AFL sporting program called *Marngrook Footy Show*.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Fancy it being AFL!

**Mr Johnson**—Well, the rugby is not mentioned often! That is so well received, and it is so important. I dare say a lot of people are actually tuning into that program to do their tips, because the commentators' insights are marvellous. They really know what is going on—as opposed to a lot of commercial commentators. Eddie would argue, but anyway.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Thank you very much.

**ACTING CHAIR**—We will have to wind up. Do you have any—

**Mr Johnson**—Is that it?

**ACTING CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—We enjoyed our visit with you yesterday enormously.

**Mr Johnson**—Terrific. Thank you, and thank you very much for coming and seeing what the place feels like.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Let me formally put on the record our thanks for that. It was great. Do you have any last statements, anything to add, before we close?

**Mr Johnson**—No, I am very happy to have talked the way we have.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It has been great. Thank you.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs Bronwyn Bishop**):

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

**Committee adjourned at 4.35 pm**