

To: The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Communications Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

From: John MacInnes, President 3WAY-FM

Re: Submission to Radio Industry Inquiry

Date: Wednesday, 6 December 2000

3WAY-FM, Warrnambool's Community Radio Station, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Radio Industry Inquiry. Warrnambool is a city of approximately 30,000 people on Victoria's South West Coast, and 3WAY-FM has held a permanent community broadcasting licence for 10 years.

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

The social benefits and influence on the general public of radio broadcasting in non-metropolitan Australia in comparison to other media sectors.

- We strongly believe that the community radio sector of which we are part provides a major public benefit, particularly in regional areas. It is a genuine, popular and independent alternative to mainstream commercial and ABC services, and provides access to the airwaves for countless individuals, community groups and organisations that would otherwise have no voice.
- Warrnambool's locally based commercial AM station (3YB) recently became part of a wider network, (ACE Radio Broadcasters Pty Ltd) and is perceived to have less local flavour and access since that change occurred. Much of its programming emanates from major network sources.
- One recent example which illustrates the above point is the broadcasting of our local Hampden League football which up until 1998 was conducted by 3YB. Following a network decision to discontinue this practice in favour of taking AFL matches down the line, there was no coverage of local football in 1999. In 2000 3WAY-FM formed new partnerships and responded to widespread community demand by providing live-to-air football coverage throughout the season. This service was very well received.
- The football example illustrates a major point about community radio. It is responsive, and is inclusive of individuals, community groups and organisations which

otherwise would have no access to the medium of radio. It is also essentially local in flavour.

- 3WAY-FM commissioned a professionally designed and administered listener survey during this year and found, among other things, that in the Warrnambool listening area, approximately 72% of those who listen to radio listen to 3WAY-FM. Of those who do not listen to 3WAY-FM, almost all supported the existence of community radio, citing its local nature and accessibility to a huge range of local community groups and individuals as the major reasons. The high quality stereo signal was cited as another reason for supporting 3WAY-FM.
- We have had significant informal feedback from a diversity of listeners including residents of aged care facilities, disabled people, people at home or at work and young people about our programs.
- Our programs are made and presented by our members who themselves come from the local community and are representative of an enormous range of age and interest groups.
- The local regional ABC station (1602 on the AM band) provides Western Victorian and some local coverage, and also takes programs through the ABC's extensive network. We would not like to see any diminution of the ABC's funding, as we believe the ABC provides a valuable service, particularly in regional Australia. Any cut in ABC funding would probably be most keenly felt in regional and rural areas.

Future trends in radio broadcasting, including employment and career opportunities, in non-metropolitan Australia.

- In its 10-year life as a licensed community broadcaster, 3WAY-FM has provided the entry point for a number of people who have gone on to careers in radio and television as professionals. Community radio provides a readily available and accessible entry point for people in country areas to gain the necessary experience.
- Community Radio generally has exhibited strong growth in the recent past, with the number of stations in Australia having grown from about 120 just 8 years ago to around 200 now. Most of this growth has occurred in country areas.
- 3WAY-FM is operated entirely by volunteers. This in itself demonstrates a level of commitment to the local area and a willingness to be of service to the community. Our station is growing in popularity and its turnover is increasing. (Up 50% from 1999 to 2000)

- 3WAY-FM provides education for its members through formal training programs for new presenters, new skill acquisition for existing presenters in using emerging technologies and marketing/management skills for our committee members and other volunteers who assist in the running of the station. These factors are important, especially for young people in country areas, where unemployment is a major problem.

The effect on individuals, families and small businesses in non-metropolitan Australia of networking of radio programming, particularly in relation to local news services, sport, community service announcements and other forms of local content.

- As mentioned above regarding the first term of reference, we believe 3WAY-FM, as a community radio station, is highly responsive to the needs of community members in a variety of ways that cannot be matched by either networked commercial stations or the ABC, both of which include in their programming large amounts of material emanating from metropolitan sources. In addition to our recent entry into live coverage of local football, (as referred to already) we have, throughout the 10 years of our existence provided support to local groups through:
 - access to the medium for preparation and presentation of programs,
 - support for local musicians and artists,
 - free community service announcements for hundreds of community groups,
 - programs for and by schools, TAFE and local university students, churches, clubs, ethnic groups, disabled groups, Koories, arts organisations, sporting bodies, welfare agencies, employment services, health groups, conservation and environmental groups and more.
- We have experienced an upsurge in interest in our station in recent years, not only from the sorts of interests referred to above, but also from the business sector. This latter interest is reflected in a rising level of businesses and other agencies deciding to provide us with sponsorship support. We suspect this is a result of our being integrally part of the local community, while the commercial sector is increasingly non-local in its programming following networking.

The potential for new technologies such as digital radio to provide enhanced and more localised radio services in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

- We believe the potential for improvement is enormous, and in our case, is limited only by the level of resources available to us. Already in the last few years we have:
 - gained access to the Community Radio Satellite (from which we take programs from midnight to 7.00 am. Our volunteer live presenters cover all other times.) This development was possible through the Community Broadcasting Foundation.
 - Gained access to the Internet and improved computer capacity through the Community Broadcasting Foundation.
 - Developed the capacity to use sophisticated editing software to produce our own promotional, identification and sponsorship messages and write them onto compact discs.
 - Gained the equipment and know-how for the conducting of outside broadcasts, which will enhance our ability to provide service to our local community.

- We believe the community radio sector provides “enhanced and more localised services” already, and does so very effectively. Obviously we could do it better with improved technology. Because of this, we believe there is a compelling argument for increasing the resources available to the community broadcasting sector. It has demonstrated a high level of self-help, as well as responsiveness to and integration with the local communities of which it is part. It is therefore deserving of strong Government support to ensure its future development.