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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE
COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Communications,
Transport and the Arts

Submission No: 236

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Secretary: Janet Holmes

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Secretary
House Communications Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT.

Reference: ADEQUACY OF OF REGIONAL RADIO

SUBMISSION

Dear Chairman & Members:

This is a personal submission with reference to two of the Inquiry's terms of reference, as published in the Sydney press: Social Benefits and Effects of Networking. My submission is relevant to my special interest, ie Music broadcasting.

1. SOCIAL BENEFITS: At present, rural Australian lovers of classical 'serious', jazz and folk music have available only one radio service (if they are lucky): ABC-FM. They enjoy no opportunity for choice, unlike residents of most major Australian cities (ie, Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne, etc). For rural resident musiclovers this often is a significant cultural deprivation and one for which no relief is offered by current Government policy.
2. EFFECTS OF NETWORKING: There is an easily recognized reduction in community involvement in information and discussion of local issues where local radio services are not provided. However, music is not greatly 'localized': a metropolitan choral society concert, say, may produce little special interest in a major city; in a country town, by comparison, such a concert might be an unprecedented event commanding headlines in the local regional newspaper.

In the main, there are few resources for generation within many non-metropolitan communities of topnotch performances of 'classical', jazz or folk music. In relation to jazz, Tamworth is the exception and Townsville for classical chamber music.

In the granting of licences to broadcast music outlets, the ABA maintains a policy of favouring local applicants. Of course, that policy is commendable, but not to the exclusion of programmes available and offered through networking from city-based stations (in the manner of ABC-FM) where local music groups' contributions are not feasible.

Members of the fine music network of non-government, non-commercial metropolitan stations have advised the ABA of their willingness to network such programmes to non-served regional areas and have applied to do so without success. The ABA justifies rejection of such offers on the ground of wishing to give preference to local broadcasters - even in locations where no such potential broadcasters have applied or possibly exist. The principle of preference for local provision of a broadcast service should not be imposed at the cost of depriving a rural community of specific programmes it would welcome but is unable to provide for itself.

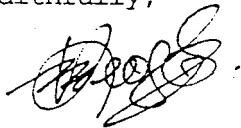
The non-government, non-commercial sector's association, the CBAA, always has encouraged spread of metropolitan programme diversity to non-urban communities and maintains a satellite (COMRADSAT) for this purpose. Despite this, the fact remains that non-urban Australians seldom enjoy more choice of music programmes than those offered by ABC-FM. Specialized resources are prerequisite for music broadcasting but many rural communities lack the specialized resources - not the desire - needed for services comparable with existing city stations.

IN SUMMARY: Locally-generated services rightly should be preferred over others, even where such local service necessarily would be less developed or comprehensive than existing metropolitan services. However, where no local applicants for a suitable licence emerge, metropolitan stations ready, willing and able to extend their service to a given non-metropolitan area should not be denied for the basic reason that those stations are not 'local'.

Looking at the present non-metropolitan radio scene, particularly in respect of broadcasts of quality music (classical, jazz, folk), it is evident that twenty-five years after FM stereo broadcasting was permitted, the glacial slowness of successive Federal government communication departments and regulators continues to hamper licensing policies adequate to enable rural communities the radic. advantages enjoyed for so long by city-dwellers.

RECOMMENDATION: I urge the Committee to recommend to the government urgent and immedaite steps to revise non-urban licensing policies by amending application of the existing necessary pre-requisite for localism - whilst retaining the principle of local control as highly preferable - in regions where local facilities and resources are unavailable. As it stands, the existing policy appears to say to unserved rural (ie, non-metropolitan) communities "If you cannot do it for yourselves, we'll not permit any out-of-towners to do it for you." This only punishes a disadvantaged community for being disadvantaged.

Yours faithfully,



Max Keogh