



Ipswich
City Council

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

House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Communications,
Transport and the Arts
Submission No: 239
Date Received: 8/11/00
Secretary: Janet Holmes

3 November 2000

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: **Adequacy of Radio Services in Regional and Rural Australia**

Thankyou for the opportunity to respond to the radio industry inquiry through the Local Government Association of Queensland.

For almost two years, Ipswich City Council has been working closely with our only local radio station Star 106.9 FM.

Ipswich City Council and Star FM have entered into a deed of agreement to ensure that the station continues to provide and focus on local issues as a primary source of localised radio services.

Unfortunately, the recent Australia Broadcasting Authority review has threatened the future financial viability of the station through various recommendations and the proposals to introduce additional radio licences in Brisbane.

The Brisbane stations have a strong penetration into the Ipswich area through a fortuitous signal.

These stations are very keen to collect advertising revenue but are not focused on the development of our communities.

Currently, both Ipswich City Council and Star FM are responding to the Australian Broadcasting Authority on their recent recommendations. A copy of a letter from Ipswich City Council is attached.

In summary, it is important for our communities to have a committed and viable local radio service to provide news, sport, emergency service messages, community service messages and localised advertising (at relative and affordable rates) for the ongoing development of our communities.

The Committee Secretary
House Communications Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

The recent Australian Broadcasting Authority review is threatening the vital radio service provided by Star FM to the Ipswich Community and Ipswich City Council is taking action to ensure that our communities are not unfairly compromised.

We look forward to the support of the LGAQ to support Ipswich and other affected communities in regard to the adequacy of radio services.

Yours faithfully



Paul Pisasale
DEPUTY MAYOR



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3 November 2000

The Committee Secretary
House Communications Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA QCT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: Ipswich 2000/5195

Ipswich City Council notes the advice from the ABA regarding further proposed changes to the 4QFM technical arrangements. Our interpretation of the document is as follows:

1. Our local station will have to change to a new channel
2. Slight signal improvements will occur in the Ipswich CBD
3. Improvement will occur in the Goodna, Springfield and Redbank areas
4. Major reception problems will result in Karalee, Chuwar, Karana Downs, Karana Gardens
5. No improvement will occur in Brassall, Tivoli Hill, Raymonds Hill, Denmark Hill, Emerald Hill, Limestone Hill and other areas that are obscured by natural terrain barriers
6. Esk and Boonah will be marginally better off if at all
7. The ABA intends to allow Ipswich people who drive into Brisbane the ability to listen to their station
8. Nothing is being done to ensue that local radio services can be maintained
9. The Brisbane stations still have an unfair advantage

These are our key findings from the ABA document.

It seems to the Ipswich City Council that little progress has been made and the ABA has not acted upon the representations we made to it.

The Ipswich City Council is concerned that the ABA is moving in an inappropriate direction by deciding to allow two new commercial stations to broadcast into the Ipswich region. Has the ABA fully considered the ramifications of the effect of local services? What arrangements will the ABA make for the provision of local services when the local station's revenue base is further eroded and local services are the casualty?

These are important issues that demand answers. Ipswich does not want to be like other centres in regional Australia whose radio stations have become local transmitters for networked programs. If these were not important issues for regional Australia surely the House Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts would not be conducting an enquiry. Ipswich City Council finds bullet point three in the terms of reference for the above enquiry particularly relevant to the current ABA review of the Ipswich area.

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

The action being considered by the ABA will have a dramatic and negative effect on all the above.

Ipswich City Council was also surprised to learn that a contingent from the ABA recently visited at least one other local authority to discuss the LAP, but has ignored invitations from Ipswich City Council to attend a meeting in our City to discuss these very important matters.

Ipswich is determined to build a strong local radio service. We fought hard to get it established and are prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure that poor planning choices by successive Federal Government bodies, charged with the responsibility to administer radio services, do not repeat the mistakes of 1974.

The Deed the Ipswich City Council has with 4QFM is a ground breaking document and enshrines local services. What the ABA is inadvertently doing by failing to amalgamate the service areas and allowing more commercial competition is striking fatal blows to our local station. We do not understand why the ABA does not move to rectify this error.

The latest document from the ABA ensures one thing and one thing only. **Loss of local services.** That is, there will be no guarantees of localism, smaller audience share and therefore a smaller revenue base from which 4QFM can draw to fund operating costs. This equals loss of local services - the very thing that regional Australia is demanding is reversed. Despite this trend it seems the ABA, in the case of Ipswich, is continuing to produce broadcasting policy that perpetuates the erosion of our local services. We respectfully ask that the ABA review its decision in the light of recent events.

In relation to the key points from your advice we offer the following comments.

Point 1. Ipswich City Council foresees no difficulties with a change of frequency to 94.9 providing the result is improved reception.

Point 2. Slight improvement in Ipswich CBD is not satisfactory. Real problems have always existed with the stations coverage and our understanding of the ABA proposal is that little benefit will be gained. Vast improvement is required.

Point 3. The Ipswich City Council is pleased that an improvement will result in the Goodna, Springfield and Redbank areas. The only cautionary note is that the ABA must be sure that it has planned for adequate signal strength to cater for the future growth in this important heavily populated area.

Point 4 . Council cannot accept the ABA proposal in the direction of Karalee, Chuwar, Karana Gardens and Karana Downs. 4QFM's signal in this area is less than satisfactory at the moment and we would expect a vast improvement rather than the degradation proposed by the ABA.

Point 5. It is not satisfactory to Council that large portions of the City that have problems now will see no or little improvement by the station adopting the ABA's proposal. These areas must be able to hear 4QFM if it is to be considered an Ipswich radio station. Areas of concern to us include: Brassall, Tivoli Hill, Raymonds Hill, Denmark Hill, Emerald Hill and Limestone Hill. Many other areas are affected that sit behind these suburbs.

Point 6. Esk and Boonah need to receive a better signal and additional translators would mean a different frequency so that people in these areas would constantly need to retune their radios as they conduct the business of their daily lives. We would support a solution that alleviates the need for these local transmitters.

Point 7. The Ipswich City Council applauds the ABA's attitude on the matter of allowing Ipswich people the ability to listen to the local station as they drive into Brisbane. This represents a major step forward on the proviso that technically this can be achieved.

Point 8 & 9. The Ipswich City Council is concerned that the ABA by approving this plan will place in jeopardy local radio services in the region. The impact of greater competition on a station that has been proven to struggle since its inception will produce a predictable result. The ABA needs to move to ensure that this does not happen.

Ipswich City Council sees some merit in the ABA proposal before us. However, without further amendments we remain sceptical that any meaningful signal improvements will occur in the areas specified. For Council to be satisfied, we must ensure that the local station can be as clearly heard and as widely received in Ipswich and suburbs as the Brisbane stations. This has never been the case. We see nothing wrong with this request and trust that the ABA's final position on this matter results in that, and the reception to and from Brisbane being clear as an absolute minimum.

Yours sincerely



Cr Paul Pisasale
Deputy Mayor