



9/133 Crialand Road  
Emmaville 2371

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The Secretary  
House Communications Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra 2600

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts	
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Secretary: .....	June Holmes

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you about the Country Radio Inquiry, which I read about in the paper. I hope this address is correct, because I am very upset about what is happening to our local radio.

I am 73 years old and was born a country girl here in the New England. Since I married I have lived in Sydney and Brisbane for fifty years, but now I have returned to my home town in retirement because I am a widow and my sisters still live here.. All my life I can remember having a radio in our house, because country people are used to having one. I am not in good health, so the company of the radio was important to me.

I always listened to Paul Tolley who was on 2NZ in the evenings for five nights in the week. He had a lovely speaking voice and he was easy to listen to. He always listened to what the people were talking about. He was so intelligent. I don't think he has always been on radio, because he talked about so many things. I think he was a film producer, and had travelled overseas, before he was on radio.

You could ask Paul anything and if he or the listeners didn't know the answers he always found out and came back and tell you, or got someone on to chat about it. He spoke to tax people, bank people, politicians, authors, councils, electricity, cooks. And I think he helped people when they had problems, by ringing up the right places and got their problems solved for them. We used to have a lot of laughs, and sometimes we cried because there were sad people who phoned, and Paul would talk to them. There were some people who wrote good poetry we loved to listen to - there was Alf, Barry, Joy, Magpie, Savva, Santa's Reindeer are some I remember. It was lovely to hear the music the callers played. One played the harmonica, and some played the organ and piano, and there were two regular ones who came on and played the accordian, called Uncle Dave and Marty. They played old dance music and Australian songs. And that was interesting, too, with a break in all the talk back, just for a change.

Just because I am an older lady does not mean that I am ignorant. I want to listen to intelligent talkback, and Paul was so good, and he had so many callers who would telephone and talk to him. He had proper talkback, like a two way conversation with friends and you would forget you were talking on radio. Sometimes he argued and sometimes he put another point of view, but he was so fair. If he didn't know something, he would say so, and if he said something wrong, he would come back and say so. I liked that.

What I liked out Paul's talkback was there were so many different ages who phoned him, not just old people. There were quite a lot of children who rang up and asked about homework. There was a young married blind lady, and she taught us a lot about how to laugh, and how she was enjoying being a mother of her new baby. There were teachers and people from the universities. There was a lady who had breast cancer and used to tell us how she was going. I do worry what happened to her. There were farmers who used to talk about what was happening, especially when they had stock stolen.

The radio was good for stolen things. People would phone in and because it covered most of New South Wales and south Queensland, the message got spread very quickly. I remember when a person had his bob cat and truck stolen. He had been injured in an accident, and had had it specially adapted so he could use it to work. When it was stolen he was devastated, because he had a family and it was how he earned money. But it was found very quickly because of the radio. So was a trailer off a semi which was stolen from a parking bay, which was worth a lot of money. They were both seen by listeners and reported to the police. When over two hundred goats were stolen from Inverell the trucks were seen and reported, too. They were not found for some time after the first reported clue, but the owner rang later and kept us informed of how the search was going. That was how valuable the country talkback was, and it was so interesting to listen to.

Then on a Monday at the end of January I turned the radio on, and Paul was not on any more. They didn't tell us anything. They just sacked him and a lot of people on the radio. It was so rude and insulting to the people. They had put on a man coming out of their radio in Sydney. I'll speak my mind. The people they have on now drive me mad. They don't know anything about the country, and they don't seem to let people talk about the country things which interest us. They even call our station with a Sydney name now, so we don't even have our station anymore. They even have Sydney weather reports and traffic reports, which is stupid and no use to people in the country. It has been 2NZ ever since I was a little girl.

I don't listen to that radio anymore. I think their language is smutty and offensive, especially in the evenings and over the weekend. The programme they have put on instead of Paul isn't as intelligent, and doesn't cover so many topics, either what is in the news or general topics. They only talk to the people for a few minutes and then they are off again, sometimes only for a minute or two if they don't agree with the caller, especially on politics. The presenters don't seem to have much general knowledge except football and sport. It was the evenings when I specially liked to listen to Paul because he read so much, and was an experienced business man and had travelled, and knew what he was talking about, and that used to get callers in. I heard him speaking Japanese to an exchange student one night, and on another night he spoke Maori to a caller. I had never heard that before. He was never rude to people, even when he didn't agree with their opinion. He certainly debated with them, but he was fair in letting them talk. If I have put on the radio again to see if Paul is back on, I don't hear very many of the voices I used to hear. I think they have given up on the city radio and I don't know what they are listening to, perhaps the ABC.

We used to talk about each other on Paul's programme, but because we were friends. I got to know all the voices, they were like my family because I live alone. I never met them, but you felt you knew the people. If they knew you were in hospital, or you did not come on the air, people would ask if you were alright. If they died, I would still think of them by their voices. But now we won't know what happened to all our friends. I really feel like I am mourning and it is very hard. It has taken a long time to feel better, but sometimes I just sit and wonder what happened to make them take Paul away from the country people, and why they did it because there were so many

people who listened to the programme. I know a lot of people in Emmaville did, because they used to talk about the night before when you met them in town.

I have tried to listen sometimes, because I miss the radio. One night I heard a couple of the elderly people who spoke to Paul regularly, especially one we knew was dying and had difficulty talking and Paul was so patient with them and always made them welcome. They must have been lonely, too, and they phoned this Sydney station, and the man was so curt with them. After they went off the air, he made some very rude remarks about elderly people, and kept it up. I thought it was awful, and turned off the wireless. We don't treat our friends like that in the country. I haven't listened anymore at night.

I used to like listening to John Laws. Some of the things he said I didn't agree with, but most of the time he was interesting. They took him off, too, without telling anyone. They have someone on called Howard Sattler who comes from Perth. He is awful and no way is he in the same class as John Laws programme. I don't listen to it, either, because it is not interesting and his voice is just the same tone all the time.

I do listen to 2NZ, and I will still call our station by that name, on Saturday mornings because they have country music on then. 2SM took off the country music overnight, which I liked. I have emphysema and don't sleep very much, and I liked listening to the music.

I don't watch television very much, except for the news, because the reception is not very good here. I cannot get NBN all the time, and sometimes we lose Prime too. The ABC is good. But it is too frustrating to bother twiddling for a good picture.

I still turn on the radio first thing when I wake up like I always have, and we always did in my family, like all country families, but now it is on the ABC. It has some local news, but no talkback, but I like the news. I just have it turned low and turn it up when something sounds interesting. Instead of listening to the radio like I always did religiously to Paul, and I used to time my dinner in time to turn his programme on, now I play my tapes or read. But it is still a very empty home when I don't have the friendly voices to listen to.

I don't know if you call this a Submission, but these are my thoughts about country radio. I hope you can stop the Sydney stations being on country radio, because they don't know anything about the country, and they don't understand country people or how we live. They seem to think if you don't live in a city you are a hick, but I think they are hicks because they are so ignorant about real people, and talk about us as if we are imbeciles. That is what it sounds like to me. But I lived and worked and raised my children in cities for fifty years and I know there are good and bad people there too. There are some nice people in Sydney and Brisbane, but they are not the ones who are on the radio. The ones they have put on the wireless are not a patch on Paul Tolley. He cared for his listeners and he was a genuine bloke, and so were most of his callers.

Yours sincerely,

*Thora Lightfoot*

Thora M. Lightfoot