

SUBMISSION TO HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT & THE ARTS.

Inquiry on the adequacy of radio services in non-metropolitan Australia.

Location:

Tumut Shire Council is a multipurpose Council in rural New South Wales comprising an area of 379,500 hectares of highlands at Valley Flats at the northern end of the Snowy Mountains on the South Eastern edge of the Riverina.

The principal town is Tumut (pop. 6054) and other towns in the Shire are Adelong (pop. 810), Batlow (pop. 1172) Talbingo (pop. 393) and Cabramurra (pop. 235). The rural population is 2654 and the total shire population is 11,318.

The Tumut Shire is a fertile area, with an annual rainfall of 819mm in Tumut and Adelong and 1375mm in Batlow. It also has a thriving mixed economy. Tumut hosts three large timber mills as well as smaller timber processing operations dependent in local plantation forests. At this time Visy Industries are establishing a \$400 million unbleached pulp and paper mill near Tumut. It is expected that this development, when it proceeds, will generate some 600 jobs in the area. In addition, Tumut Shire has well-established dairying, beef cattle, horticultural and grazing industries. Batlow is renowned for the quality of its high altitude stone fruits and apples and Talbingo and Cabramurra service another of the Shire's main attractions, the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Scheme. The area is also home to the northern half of the Kosciuszko National Park and that, combined with its other natural features, especially the Mt. Selwyn snowfields and the Hume and Hovell Walking Track, have contributed enormously to the area's growing prominence as a recreational tourism region.

The Issues:

The Council area being so diverse in its different towns has a problem in obtaining adequate and reliable radio services into each town and its rural area.

As a result of these problems Council has formed a Shire Communications Committee comprising of representatives from each of the towns to find a solution to either poor quality or of no signal for radio services, television or mobile phone coverage.

Essentially, the hilly or mountainous terrain is an impediment to good quality services being conveyed from other locations into the smaller towns of Tumut Shire.

The specific problems with radio reception are as follows:-

- Adelong - Poor reception for ABC and commercial stations during the day.
- Batlow - No reception of AM Radio. FM is variable Riverina ABC and 2WG from Wagga not received. Can get pop music Station Star FM.
- Talbingo - Radio on the AM and FM Band are not good.
- Tumut - Receives Riverina stations ABC and 2WG Star FM and these are also conveyed by FM Translater in Tumut. Other stations are poor quality. However there is a Marked improvement for nighttime reception.

Of course most communities use radio during the day and television services in the evening.

The Submission:

Council and the Communications Committee have considered the terms of reference and would make the following submission to the Radio Industry Inquiry.

1. That a programme be implemented similar to the 'Black Spot Television Fund' Programme to overcome poor levels of radio communication in small towns particularly those located in the foothills of mountainous areas as experienced within Tumut Shire.
2. It is objectionable that radio programmes are being pre-recorded from Sydney and other larger centres for distribution in rural areas of New South Wales which has the effect of removing local content for local communities.
3. That community radio be provided by subsidy to enable local content to be broadcast for emergency purposes such as fire, flood, rescue and road conditions and for social, cultural and sporting information.

Council would be pleased if our submission is considered for its general input and that the inquiry also consider it for specific problems that relate to small communities, that are isolated due to terrain even though they are only two hours distant from the nations capital.