

Conclusion

- 6.1 The Committee recognises the immense value that the community broadcasting sector contributes to Australian society. The Committee is thoroughly impressed by the quality of programming produced by broadcasters and the dedication and commitment shown by the sector's volunteers.
- 6.2 Although the Australian Government's contribution to the sector has been significant, the Committee feels that a substantial boost in core funding, with annual indexed increases, will ease the financial pressures on community broadcasters, allowing them to continue to provide valuable services to their communities. In particular, the Committee sees great value in providing funding for paid station managers and is of the opinion that better management practices will lead to a more robust community broadcasting network.
- 6.3 The Committee recommends an increase in targeted funding over the next four years to address more urgent problems that the sector faces. In particular, the increase in funding should contribute significantly to the update or replacement of community broadcasting infrastructure. Indigenous broadcasters in particular should be assisted by this increase in targeted funding.
- 6.4 The Committee recognises the importance of regional and rural broadcasters, particularly as they are often the only source of local information and entertainment for many areas. The Committee trusts that the Australian Government will ensure that regional and rural broadcasters are not financially disadvantaged when compared to their metropolitan and suburban counterparts.
- 6.5 The Committee considers that the amounts of funding recommended in this report are not substantial. The Committee also understands that the

- Australian Government has a significant budget surplus in the next financial year.
- 6.6 Therefore, the Committee recommends that, despite the budget and funding levels having been announced, the Australian Government implement the funding recommendations presented throughout this report for the 2007-08 financial year.
- 6.7 An increase in targeted funding will be of enormous benefit to the sector in terms of upgrading infrastructure. However, the Committee believes that stations should not rely on funding in the long term for the replacement of equipment. The Committee's governance recommendations should see an increased level of effective station management, including better financial and forward planning. A significant boost in funding for business management training will also make a great contribution to effective governance in the sector.
- 6.8 The Committee recognises that the Australian Communications and Media Authority's regulation of the sector is a difficult task. The Committee anticipates that its recommendations for the regulator will clarify guidelines for stations and assist in reducing the number of breaches and complaints.
- 6.9 The Committee strongly urges the Australian Government to conduct an investigation into recent transmission fee increases for community broadcasters, and determine what are appropriate charges for not-for-profit community broadcasters.
- 6.10 The Committee has made some brief yet very important recommendations concerning the Copyright Act and Radio for the Print Handicapped services. The Committee urges the Australian Government to act quickly with regard to those recommendations so that providers may extend their services to those Australians in most need.
- 6.11 Community broadcasters now reach a significant audience. The Committee is puzzled by the Australian Government's reluctance to advertise on community broadcasting stations and urges it to take the opportunity to reach a greater number of Australians.
- 6.12 The Committee tabled its first report for this inquiry in February 2007. That report dealt with the important issue of access to digital spectrum for community television.
- 6.13 The Committee notes that there has not been an Australian Government response to that particular report, despite the urgency of the issue and the

- Committee's decision to table the report early in the year prior to Government budget decisions.
- 6.14 Additionally, the Committee was disappointed to note that there was no consideration given to community television in the 2007-08 Federal Budget.
- 6.15 The Committee considers it will be the death knell for community television if it does not gain access to digital spectrum before the end of 2007.
- 6.16 Some community television stations are already very close to ceasing their operations. In fact, it is understood that the closure of one particular broadcaster can be partially attributed to the uncertainty of access to digital spectrum.
- 6.17 The Committee understands that some community television stations are currently surviving only with the support of particular state governments. One particular station recently was informed that its state funding would be withdrawn if the station could not guarantee access to digital spectrum. Despite that particular situation being resolved the outlook is still bleak for community television stations.
- 6.18 Again, the Committee strongly urges the Australian Government to implement the recommendations of the first report for this inquiry.
- 6.19 The key findings from the first report recommended that the Australian Government:
- sell the unreserved channel known as Licence A, with an obligation to be placed on the new licensee to carry community television during the simulcast period
 - at analogue switch-off convert the spectrum band known as Channel 31 to digital and permanently allocate it to current and future community broadcasters
 - provide funding of \$6 million to the community television sector for the conversion of broadcast equipment to digital
 - provide funding of \$1.7 million per year to the community television sector for each year of simulcast.
- 6.20 The Committee also requests that the Australian Government respond promptly to this second report, given the value of the community broadcasting sector and the modest requests made for increased funding.

- 6.21 This second report concludes the Committee's inquiry into community broadcasting. The Committee thanks all those individuals, stations, peak bodies and other organisations that made important contributions to the inquiry in the way of submissions and at public hearings.

Hon Jackie Kelly

Committee Chair

20 June 2007