



October 26th, 2000

The Committee Secretary
House of Communications Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To whom it may concern,

The East Arnhem Community Radio Association Inc. (8EAR) would like to submit the attached as our response to the 'Inquiry into the adequacy of radio services in non-metropolitan Australia'.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Your sincerely,

Cheryl McKewen
Operations Manager – 8EAR

East Arnhem Community Radio Ass Inc.
8EAR ~ Gove FM

Submission to the House of Representatives
Communications, Transport and the Arts
Committee

**Inquiry into the Adequacy
of Radio Services in
Non-metropolitan Australia**

Introduction

8EAR is based in the remote mining town of Nhulunbuy, East Arnhemland, Northern Territory. We service a town of 4,000 as well as surrounding Aboriginal communities and homelands.

As a community radio station we operate under section 15 of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (BSA) and the Community Broadcasting Code of Practice. 8EAR operates on a not-for-profit basis and is managed and operated by volunteers who own and control the association.

a) The social benefits and influence on the general public of radio broadcasting in non-metropolitan Australia in comparison to other media sectors

8EAR assumes a significant role in the social and cultural life of Nhulunbuy. Local radio is the only timely and responsive media outlet that services the community and surrounding areas. Other media services include a weekly local paper, a late-arriving NT paper and a day-after delivery for national papers.

Access to an immediate communication tool like radio is essential for a community that receives power and water services from an operating refinery and one that is not accessible by road for more than half the year. 8EAR is the communication hub of the community.

In a small town bereft of a variety of social opportunities, local radio broadcasts provide entertainment and information that is readily-available in metropolitan centres. In addition, a large percentage of Nhulunbuy's working community undertake shift work during which time they rely on local radio services for entertainment.

Local radio is a vital component in the well being of isolated and remote communities. The advantage of being a community radio station means that we can provide a diverse range of programs that are not dictated by commercial trends and influences.

b) Future trends in radio broadcasting, including employment and career opportunities, in non-metropolitan Australia

There are limited career development opportunities in small remote centres – particularly for young people and those returning to the workforce. Community radio provides an opportunity for valuable training and development that can be easily translated into work opportunities in larger centres. Volunteers at 8EAR undergo rigorous training, become program makers, announcers and managers. We provide training opportunities in an industry that would not be otherwise available in Nhulunbuy.

Gove FM currently employs two part-time staff and utilises the services of approximately 20 volunteers. As demand increases for more localised programming so will the opportunities for employment.

The development of radio broadcasting in indigenous communities will also be invaluable in providing employment and career opportunities – particularly if Aboriginal people can work using their own language.

c) 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

In remote towns, individuals and families are extraordinary in their efforts to provide a social and sporting environment for the community in general. Community broadcasting in Nhulunbuy provides a cost-effective and timely communication opportunity for local community groups. Most local groups operate on a restricted budget and Community Service Announcements, interview opportunities and live broadcasts allow them to raise their profile. Specific local content relating to the provision of local services is vital.

8EAR actively participate in the community with live broadcasts of community events including Australia Day, Territory Day, industry expos and open days, the Gove Peninsula Festival, community group fundraisers etc.

Many small businesses operating in Nhulunbuy choose to undertake sponsorship with the community radio station as there are very limited opportunities to advertise their business and, in particular, visiting services and current specials.

The commitment received from local businesses demonstrates the value of local and timely content.

d) The potential for new technologies such as digital radio to provide enhanced and more localised radio services in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

New technology, including the implementation of digital, would provide many opportunities to enhance and localise radio services in Nhulunbuy. Linking the Community radio station with the BRACS station at Yirrkala community is just one example. This would enable the community station to broadcast more relevant Aboriginal programming to the broader community and at the same time provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to produce programs in a non-threatening environment at their local BRACS station.

New technology also provides more flexible and reliable services in remote communities. The local broadcaster may be the community's only source for disseminating relevant and timely information in times of emergency including cyclones, floods and fires.

New technology also enables local broadcasters to provide a reliable service to the community in areas where conditions can be unreliable and, in addition, a more mobile service which can expand the range of local programming opportunities.

The implementation of new technology can be difficult due to our remote location and lack of support services, continually providing challenges that larger centres do not contend with. Our service to the community would improve with technical and financial support.