

House of Representatives Standing
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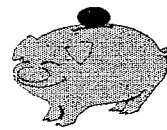
Supplementary
SUBMISSION

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
House Communications Committee

INQUIRY INTO THE
ADEQUACY OF RADIO
SERVICES

IN NON-METROPOLITAN AUSTRALIA



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IN THE COUNTRY, WITH THE COUNTRY, FOR THE COUNTRY

Sunday 19th November 2000

Dear Committee,

We are experiencing a heavy continuous rain pattern, with more than eight inches having fallen in the past few days.

I have moved right across my dial of local radio stations, and the critical flood reporting is not good. These are the responses I received when trying to find when radio coverage would be broadcast.

2TM Tamworth is unmanned, no reports. In addition to local conditions and flood situations, this is the main upstream catchment area for crossover 2MO listeners downstream.

2NZ Inverell was manned at 1320 hrs, but laughed and said 'there is a Radio Inquiry about that at the moment'. The 30 sec. insert local weather 'update' at 1500 hrs was: 'much the same to come, with isolated showers' followed by two local road closures. Obviously recorded, no detailed weather/flood reports. Two weather inserts after hourly news 7/8 pm. did have detailed road closures. Not repeated after later news. Why after dark? See 2VM.

2VM Moree was manned, and gave me the same response about the Inquiry. But at 1600 hrs did broadcast a 45 sec. update of SES reports. I had spoken to Moree SES 30 minutes before and they said they had just given a report to 2VM. This was also updated at 1700 hrs. Good if you are in the 2VM area and not in the bridging area of 2NZ which is the same storm catchment.

2MO Gunnedah was manned and said a volunteer presenter was going to the station and giving detailed SES weather reports, road closures and river heights every two hours, switching across the satellite programme being delivered from Sydney.

ABC 2NU is unmanned. Broadcasting cricket on satellite relay. Not even regular news breaks on the hour. Three hours have not revealed any. No local weather reports.

2SM Sydney. Phone answered by 'Rod'. When I asked him on what stations I could find local flood reports, was told 'Well, my dear, ring your local SES. That's what they are for'. When I mentioned that farmers relied on local updates as they were critical, he told me to ring 2SM on Monday and complain. Immediately after my call, at 1555 hrs a recorded message was broadcast on the satellite relay to stations that 'The SES has a central number at 123500'.

MAX FM Community radio at Narrabri is continuously broadcasting weather, flood and river height reports.

WARIALDA SES tells me they are broadcasting regular reports on the New England Radio Watch UHF band for trucks.

PRIME TV Tamworth broadcast two flood stories in the body of its local segment, with a standard weather report, no reported road closures or river heights in its local news at 6 pm. The weekend news is a compilation city/country broadcast and only broadcast at 6 pm. Saturday and Sunday.

Conclusion: Weather only happens during business hours during weekdays.

Comment: This is not good enough for local conditions. One, there is a supposition that electricity supply continues in flood time, which as often as not, goes off and reliance is then on battery radio for information updates. So do our telephones.

In flood, bushfire or thunder/hail storm weather situations, things can change rapidly, and unexpected local patterns can develop which impact on other local events, especially in floods where a heavy thunderstorm upstream can alter the whole picture in minutes. This is what happened in Nyngan in 1990. It certainly happens on the north west plains, where I was a farmer for nearly twenty years. A creek gusher can either rapidly raise a local level and send a wave down the river, or cause a back up from lower down the river and spill on your country where it may not have rained locally. And because it is sunny where you live does not mean a flood situation is finished, as water travelling down a river can take some hours or even days to reach your particular site.

If every farmer, truck driver and other affected persons rang the generic SES phone number for regular updates they would go frantic with blocked lines, especially when a weather emergency covers a wide geographic area. It would hamper their emergency efficiency and communication channels with their local SES units. A radio covers thousands, and even persons not normally radio listeners turn their radios on in these circumstances.

We had the ridiculous situation a couple of years ago when there was a major fire in the Pilliga State Forest and Sydney radio news were reporting that 'Narrabri Hospital was carrying out an emergency evacuation of patients, due to the threat of the approaching fire'....and it was no closer than 30 miles away. That was both misreporting and alarmist, leading to phone calls to town residents from all around the state to see if they were safe. This put added pressure on phone facilities to the area, and had the potential to cause problems to emergency services.

In the floods which badly affected Narrabri in 1971,74,76, 84 and 86 we had our radio on continuously, day and night, recognising the local river, creek and rainfall reports and analysing them as to our personal situation both for farm and stock precautions, and personal safety when or if the house was under threat of water entry. The radio was our security, our contact with the outside world, messages were received as to food and stock food drop via the radio when the phones went out, which they often did. Most of us had property names painted on our roofs for aeroplane patrol comments if needed. [My property was *Broadwater* which was too long, but the shortened version of *B-Water* was just as appropriate when needed in these circumstances].

Unless God can be organised to cause rain to fall during week days when actual local programming is scheduled, perhaps some **licence provisions should be incorporated in order that when safety and emergency services are activated, regular, and I mean regular, local reporting is mandatory and satellite relays from far distant centralised bases should be replaced by local broadcasting. And that this should continue while the whole licenced broadcasting area is affected.**

There has occurred in the past the situation that once a threat passes a town, downstream reporting is downgraded. As we were linked to 2MO in the floods aforementioned, this did frustratingly occur on a couple of occasions, except in the major major floods. As the 2VM reporting area covers a different river catchment and river system, there are blank spaces between radio stations for reporting.

I understand that at least SES Headquarters has put in a strong Submission regarding local reporting of crises and I trust that the Committee will pay particular attention to such Submission.

It is a pity that I should be driven to submit that mandatory provisions be incorporated in a local licence when I would have hoped that the tradition of local radio community reporting would have naturally broadcast such information. They say you cannot live in the past...well, the radio licencees don't even live in the area or have apparent knowledge of regional needs as was once the case, and is still so in the few independent stations who currently survive scattered around regional Australia.

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May I submit that the Committee read the internet site [www.amt.org.au] for actual industry input and reports.

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I wish to confirm that my name is on your list for a full set of Submission volumes with regard to the Radio Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



G. Penrose