

Tamworth City Council

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1 June 2001

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

Dear Sir/Madam

RADIO INDUSTRY INQUIRY

Council has directed me to offer the following comments in respect of the Radio Industry Inquiry currently before the House of Representatives Communications Committee:

Country Music

The City of Tamworth is renown for Country Music and the staging of the Annual Tamworth Country Music Festival for 10 days in January of each year. Tamworth is known world wide as Australia's Country Music Capital and the City is extremely proud and protective of its country music heritage. Radio Station 2TM has its headquarters in the City and broadcast a very popular country music program known as **Country Music Radio** (formerly known as **Hoedown**) seven days a week between the hours of 6.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. for a period of 35 years, featuring all forms of country music.

In November 1999 the owner of Radio Station 2TM, the Broadcast Operations Group, purchased Sydney Radio Station 2SM and restructured this radio station to become the sole program source and headquarters for a 30 station network, one of which is local Radio Station 2TM. The Broadcast Operations Group decided to discontinue **Country Music Radio** and on 30 January 2000 the final program was broadcast on Radio Station 2TM.

The reasons given for dropping **Country Music Radio** by the management of the Broadcast Operations Group were "*.....the format was considered incompatible with Network plans to target listeners 18-45 years in Sydney, Newcastle and country areas of NSW and Southern Queensland. The programme has also been dropped because - over the last decade - it has become increasingly unviable. Staff and operational costs have increased substantially, while advertising revenue has diminished to the point where the programme generates insufficient revenue to cover even the smallest portion of its own costs.*"

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Given the importance of this program to the Country Music Industry, Council, country music listeners and the Industry strongly opposed the discontinuance of the *Country Music Radio* program to no avail. Council holds the view that the removal of *Country Music Radio* from Radio Station 2TM programming has impacted negatively on the annual Tamworth Country Music Festival, the City of Tamworth, the Country Music Industry and the State of New South Wales generally. Withdrawal of *Country Music Radio* has seen the demise of an extremely popular country music program and terms of a broad country New South Wales listening audience.

Networking of Radio Programming

The networking of radio programming from source Radio Station 2SM has a negative impact upon individuals, families and small business in the City of Tamworth and the surrounding region. Radio Station 2TM has suffered a considerable loss of local identity and community listening loyalty. Council contends the local community service value of Radio Station 2TM has also diminished directly due to the networking of radio programmes from the Sydney metropolitan area. Reduced broadcast time is allocated to local and regional sport and community service announcements and overall, the local content of radio programs has reduced noticeably.

Networked radio programs have minimal relevance to the local and regional community. The standard and type of music broadcasting has changed considerably and is sometimes inappropriate to the local and regional listening audience. Niche network programming designed for the metropolitan market is not relevant to the local and regional community.

Decisions regarding selection and planning of radio programming have been completely removed from the City of Tamworth and the region resulting in a significant loss of program appeal. The opportunity to switch to the nearby Radio Station 2MO based in Gunnedah, 80 kilometres west of Tamworth, as an alternative has been denied because this station is also part of the 2SM network. Council is strongly of the view that the changes to Radio Station 2TM programming have resulted in a considerable loss of the sense of community and local identity.

New Technologies and Digital Radio

Council is of the view that given the availability of new radio technology, local radio station licences be made available at low cost to provide radio programming suitable to the local and regional listening audience incorporating local news, sports reports and fulfilling a local community service obligation.

Yours faithfully

Philip L Lyon
GENERAL MANAGER

The Mayor - I might just make a comment there yesterday I went to a launch and I should have brought the brochure along with me - near initiative from - stop.