

Disk of letter enclosed.

The Committee Secretary
House Communications Committee
Parliament House
Canberra, 2600.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have only just heard of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the adequacy of regional radio services, so I hasten to put down some thoughts in the hope that they will reach you in time.

Regional radio is crucial to country and coastal areas. One-third of NSW's people live in these areas, but government services in most fields are less than those that capital cities enjoy and are diminishing. So a strong radio network is essential to inform people of all that is going on in their districts, economically, culturally, politically, in sport and, not least, with the weather. We rely on our ABC for such information. We also rely on it for the airing of issues of concern to regional Australia - issues which demand discussion and action. In the past regional ABC staff were able to do research on such issues and thus help to keep both rural and city people informed of country matters which may affect them directly and indirectly. (Good liaison with city media can allow for such useful sharing of material.)

Unfortunately, funding reductions to the ABC over the last fifteen years have meant that program producers and presenters are too limited in number and too stressed to enable this currently to be done, certainly for it to be done to their satisfaction or to that of country people. The presentation of country news in city and national media (print and electronic) is generally scanty, poorly researched and often trivial. This has increased the feeling of regional people that they are unvalued and marginalised. Equally, time and financial resources are not now available to allow for quality programming on regional radio. Stressed staff do the best that they can, and for this regional people are grateful. But we feel that our Federal Government should provide funding (that is, our tax money) so that regional radio can be of the quality which we need.

Commercialisation of the ABC is something that regional people fear. When ratings and money concerns predominate minority interests, including those of large minorities such as non-metropolitan people, tend to be neglected. We need a strong, well-funded, independent ABC.

For those of us who live in non-metropolitan areas the ABC is especially important. This is because we have much more limited access than city people to adult education, theatre, concerts, a variety of films, associations concerned with diverse leisure interests, government services and good telephone and information technology services. The various radio services in particular go some way in covering these deficiencies, that is, in areas where quality reception of them is available. These include the enriching and diverse Radio National, Classic FM and Triple J.

In reality many parts of regional Australia have poor or non-existent reception of these national networks. A priority should be that all areas gain quality transmissions. These services also help regional people to feel part of our nation.

I urge you to recommend increased funding to the ABC. Commercial networks simply do not supply what the ABC does now, nor what it might do much better if it were adequately funded.

Yours sincerely,

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24/10/2000

Secretary:.....

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15 JAN 2001

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND
THE ARTS

House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Communications,
Transport and the Arts

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