



**Northern
Territory
Government**

Department of Corporate
and Information Services

**Department of Corporate and Information
Services**

Submission to

The House of Representatives

**Standing Committee on Communications
Information Technology and the Arts**

Community Broadcasting Inquiry

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES:

Community broadcasting plays a vital role in the cultural diversity of Australia through culturally appropriate content in target group language.

Community broadcasters are an integral part of the Northern Territory Emergency Services Media Network that broadcasts emergency messages such as cyclone, flood and health warnings to the Territory residents in all key language groups.

Community broadcasting provides opportunities for training. The Northern Territory Government has provided over \$100 000 annually in operational funding to community radio stations to facilitate training.

Most community broadcasters experience great difficulty in adequately resourcing the operational expenditure incurred in providing their services.

Funding for new technologies such as digital transmission must also be targeted at the end user group for remote clients. The Rural Equalisation Scheme successfully targets broadcasters, however, residents in these remote localities are the least able to afford the additional costs of purchase of the required reception equipment.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for this enquiry are as follows:-

- the scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the Internet and other broadcasting technologies;
- content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity;
- technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks; and
- opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters.

The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the Internet and other broadcasting technologies.

Community broadcasting provides a viable alternative to the commercial and national radio and television media. According to the National McNair Ingenuity Survey (September 2004) 45% of radio listeners in Darwin tuned in to the local community radio station. This is the highest percentage of listeners for a community radio service in Australia. This vital broadcasting service preserves the cultural diversity of the community by providing a local voice for all cultural groups that would not be available through either national or commercial broadcasters.

Given recent events on the eastern seaboard, apparently to culturally based, community broadcasting should continue to play a vital role in developing and informing the Australian culture.

The absence of community television broadcasting in all major NT centres means that community oriented content is restricted to the locally produced content such as news on the Nine Network in Darwin and other local content developed by Imparja in the Alice Springs region.

The need for community based local content on TV has been identified by the commercial TV broadcasters and is evidenced by the inclusion of "Community Billboard" type segments within normally broadcast network content.

The availability of local content, wider choice and job creation are key elements in the Northern Territory Government (NTG) strategic position in relation to broadcasting. Community broadcasting helps fulfil this need by providing essential training and alternate choices in programming tailored to various community needs. The NTG has provided over \$100 000 annually to facilitate training provided by community radio stations in Alice Springs.

Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity;

Community radio offers a mechanism whereby the cultural diversity of the Australian population is maintained and enhanced. The provision of culturally appropriate material through the variety of mechanisms inherent in community

broadcasting fulfils a niche that is not serviced in either the commercial or national arenas.

Local content targeted at the various ethnic and social groups is best delivered by community broadcasting. Multilingual broadcasting and the provision of content appropriate to target audiences is an effective communications medium. The recent introduction of a Yolŋu clan language radio network in eastern Arnhemland is evidence of this.

The Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Service (RIBS) provides an extensive network of community radio and TV sites throughout remote aboriginal communities in Australia with 48 sites within the NT. The scheme offers the opportunity for the inclusion of local content in the broadcast stream, however the limited funding available for this purpose somewhat restricts the amount of local content produced. This however, may be addressed in the review of Indigenous broadcasting being conducted by the Federal Government. Similar levels of funding are not, however, readily available for regional centres to produce local content.

Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks

Technologies are now converging with the Internet and pod casting offering a valuable resource to all broadcasters.

With the wider introduction of Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) technologies it is now possible for reliable cost efficient community broadcast networks to be established. This will be extremely useful to broadcasters in remote and regional centres where resources do not permit the development and maintenance of a full program suite.

Some concern, however, exists over ACMA's strategy of changing licence classes for all RIBS sites from rebroadcast licences to community broadcast licences. This change means that sites that were formerly not obliged to change from analogue transmission to digital will now be obliged to do so.

The impact will be most felt by residents of 48 communities in the NT serviced by the RIBS sites. These are all remote Aboriginal communities in the NT. The transition to full digital transmission which was not obligatory for the holders of rebroadcast licences will now become a requirement. These residents are the least able to afford to make the change and will be unable to do so without Federal Government intervention and support at a household level.

The introduction of digital broadcasting technology will not in itself act as a driver for the expansion of community broadcast networks. Other factors will have a far greater impact including the need for a far better value proposition for the consumer. The lessons learned from the less than successful introduction of national and commercial digital television should be well heeded if this were to be a success in the radio and community broadcast arena.

Opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters

The introduction of digital technology in particular, will afford community broadcasters the opportunity to deliver greater program content through multichanneling capacity and the ability to transmit data along with the audio signal. This opportunity may however be squandered if legislative change is not implemented.

The current legislation is complex for broadcasters to interpret. It is also open to subjective opinion and decision making. The current regime of parallel licences for open narrowcast broadcasting licences and community broadcast licences does not create a stable environment for either party.

Interpretation of licence conditions and seeking opinions from the ACMA attracts a fee from those least likely to be able to afford it. Examples exist where full and unedited broadcasts from commercial licence holders are retransmitted at mining sites under community and narrowcast licences. This does not appear to be within the spirit of the legislation. Its application lacks consistency and is open to widely differing interpretations and applications.

The introduction of digital broadcasting affords both industry and Government the opportunity to amend the legislation to remove these grey areas and make it more relevant to the community.

NTG SUPPORT OF COMMUNITY RADIO

BROADCASTER	LOCATION	DIRECT GRANT FUNDING	IN – KIND FUNDING
Territory FM (8TOP FM)	Charles Darwin University Darwin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$164 450 pa (incl. GST) 	
Gove FM (8EAR)	Endeavour Square Nhulunbuy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$31 042 pa for landlines for Territory Network which provides 7 hours programming per day
Katherine FM (8KTR)	Territory Training Centre First Street Katherine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$22 580 pa for landlines for Territory Network which provides 7 hours programming per day Value of reduced rent from DEET owned premises is \$20 000 to \$27 000 pa plus electricity
Radio Larrakia	Darwin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rent free accommodation from DCIS - value approx \$15,000 pa; A vehicle and office furniture were gifted in 2004.
Radio 8CCC	Alice Springs and Tennant Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was \$104 500 pa up to 31/12/2005 from DEET. Have reapplied for similar funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$33 154 pa for landlines for Territory Network which provides 7 hours programming per day ceased 20/12/2005
Radio 8KIN	Alice Springs and Tennant Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant for transmitter replacement applied for \$8742 yet to be determined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nil
Radio 8GGG	Darwin Christian Radio Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nil