

The Secretary  
Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: [cita.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:cita.reps@aph.gov.au)

Dear Sir / Madam,

COMMUNITY BROADCASTING INQUIRY

We, Bundy FM Community Radio Association trading as Coral Coast Community Radio 94.7FM, would like to make the following submission to the above inquiry.

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

We are a permanently licensed, general interest community radio station situated in Bundaberg, Queensland. We were selected for the first community radio licence issued in our region in 1999 and the licence was issued on 6 October of that year. Our licence was renewed for a further five (5) years on the 6 October, 2004.

The initial problems of a new station are earning a support base from the community, in all areas, including members, presenters, listeners and businesses.

Dedicated volunteers are needed to form the applicant organization, make an initial application, raise necessary finances, buy equipment, recruit and train on-air presenters, administrators, technicians, salesmen etc. In effect we have to organize a small business from “scratch”.

Once an organisation starts broadcasting, it is necessary to increase the involvement of volunteers, and the community, to maintain an effective organization and product.

Technical skills are required of all members involved in producing our on-air sound, which is our public face to the community, and producing a professionalism that will appeal to the business community, without whose support a general-interest community radio station would have difficulty being viable.

Our organization has averaged a membership of approximately 110 members over the last few years (including up to 12 community organizations) and all are volunteers. We employ no staff. Of our membership we involve more than sixty (60) presenters in an on-air programming role per week. Other members are mainly listeners, supporters and community organizations.

We broadcast live from 6 a.m. to midnight, every day of the week, and we take the satellite programs from midnight to 6 a.m. (except Saturday morning when we have a presenter from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m.).

Our membership is drawn from all sectors in our community; our presenters range in age from 14 to mid 70s, including 22 female presenters, 5 teenage youth presenters, 19 presenters over the age of sixty, and 8 ethnic presenters. We have had indigenous presenters in the past.

The dedication, determination and skills of members has enabled the organization to overcome major early difficulties and show significant growth and stability to date. We have been fortunate to have in our membership, members whose expertise and experience has contributed enormously to the technical matters, financial administration, fund- raising, selling and people management that are essential to success and growth.

Over the periods of our licenses we have been fortunate to have the technical support of our local commercial broadcaster, Bundaberg Broadcasters Pty Ltd, from whose tower our transmitter broadcasts and who charges a nominal rental fee of \$2000.00 per year (this has not increased since our formation in 1999 or with the installation of a larger transmitter in 2005).

The financial support of the station by the government funded Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) has been instrumental in our acquiring capital equipment upgrades, including satellite reception and digital delivery (DDN), as well as studio and support equipment. We have also used the financial grant support of other government agencies and non-government entities where possible.

Our daily operating expenses are met by sponsorship (also known as advertising in the non-community broadcasting field) (2005 – 63%), members` fees and contributions (2005 – 22%) and donations and fund-raising activities (2005 – 14%). Last financial year, to 30 June, 2005, was the first year in which we had a small financial surplus.

Attaining increasing levels of income to cover increasing costs is an ongoing challenge.

Other roles that we undertake within the community include the provision of a free service for other non-profit organisations to communicate their messages to the community. These organizations are encouraged to provide us with information about their meetings, services, fund-raising etc. to enable broadcasting of these details. These organizations are also encouraged to arrange an interview to help spread their public message. We are also prepared to provide MCs, callers, guest speakers etc to other community organizations for their meetings and events.

We provide an outdoor broadcast service (not live-to-air, yet!) free-of-charge to attend community events to provide sound equipment, music, comperes etc.

We have recently completed the fitting out of a back-up studio / training studio and will avail ourselves of the training assistance to be provided by the CBF and the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia to become part of a national accreditation training scheme. Our existing members will be encouraged to seek accreditation.

We also expect to be able implement other training programs in speech, reading, and production techniques.

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

The selection of programming is dependent on members` interests and fitting them into our programming philosophy, which is governed by our licence obligations and the requirements of the Broadcasting Services Act 1991.

Our initial licence application set out our desire to serve the general community in meeting programming needs that were not available in the mainstream media.

Our programming principles have therefore been to provide alternative listening opportunities for the community. We are not aiming to compete with the commercial broadcasters, who mainly aim for single niche markets, but we try to provide a variety of programming to cater for other interests. To this end, we provide nine and a half hours of ethnic language programs each week, one hour of indigenous programming each week, nine hours of youth oriented (and presented) programs, and music programs of popular, country, easy, memories, jazz, blues, Christian, world, rock classics and alternate.

With a growing mature age community, we appear to have developed a rapport with a large segment of this sector.

In our programming to date, we have concentrated on presenting music programs.

We have been unable to attract members interested in presenting local news, current affairs etc (although there are segments of these in our ethnic programs). We have tried to liase with the local university but with no success. However we can provide an hourly national news service through the Community Radio Satellite (CRS) and its National Radio News.

Access to programming via the CRS provides us with a reliable back up programming option to fill any sudden vacancies that may occur. The CRS also provides us with our midnight to 6 a.m. programming.

The Digital Delivery Network (DDN) supplements the CRS service by providing us with an ability download program aids to assist our presenters with program materials to enhance their presentations.

Australian content has a heavy emphasis at our station with some programs featuring 100%. The Broadcasting Code of Practice stipulates a minimum Australian content of 25%. Our presenters know this is a station requirement as well.

The Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP) is a government funded scheme to distribute recordings by Australian artists to community radio stations. This project has been extremely beneficial to our presenters in bringing variety and currency to their programs.

Along with AMRAP releases, we frequently feature recordings and interviews with local and visiting artists in our region.

As mentioned before, we provide nine hours of ethnic language programming and are always encouraging multicultural groups to become associated with our station. We currently broadcast programmes in the Tagalog, Italian, German and Hungarian languages. We also broadcast for Irish and Scottish audiences. Discussions in the last six months have been held with persons from Spanish, French and Indian residents.

Feedback from the community has reflected favourably on our station's programming variety.

Also a favourable comment has been that, whilst we don't provide a local news service, our local voices, local community notices and local knowledge do strike a resonance with our local listeners. With networking so prevalent in the mainstream media the concept of community has been lost, but community radio provides the missing niche. This is an area that we certainly like to promote.

***Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks.***

The technical component of community radio is, perhaps, the most difficult of all the areas for us to comprehend.

To date, we have been fortunate to have had a volunteer who worked in the telecommunications industry and was on call to us in any emergency, for any explanations and for advice. Unfortunately, health problems now preclude his involvement.

As the technological field is so specialized, and being based in a rural area, a volunteer prepared to commit to our needs is hard to find. We are now reliant on the services and the goodwill of a local telecommunications business for our support in this area. This service, of course comes at a cost (it was mainly free of cost previously).

(As I write this, today Sunday 26 March we have a technical problem and have been off air since 6 am. The business is currently uncontactable!!)

With the whole field of telecommunications progressing at a rapid rate, it will be even harder for us to come to grips with the technological advances.

As the technology affects all media, community radio must be able to provide the same quality as the other broadcast media to remain a viable choice. The cost of upgrades will be a prohibitive hurdle for many stations.

The community radio sector is fortunate to have had the financial support of the Government, through the CBF. All change is, however, going to incur high costs and without the continued support from the CBF the digital upgrades and associated costs will be intimidating.

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

The opportunities for community radio to contribute constructive community benefits are many.

- Community radio provides many people with experience in a field often assumed to be one of celebrity. An alternative to their life choices which with its communication requirements can be used to promote self-esteem.
- Community radio provides people from the many diverse sectors of the community to come together, not only for a common activity, but the opportunity to work together to achieve their aims. People from ethnic backgrounds, indigenous, special needs, mature age, youth, unemployed all working together in a common goal.
- The opportunity exists for these people to be provided with accredited training to provide additional skills and experience to their lists of accomplishments and to provide the community with a quality service. The CBF has called for grant applications for training opportunities and we hope to become part of a national program of training.
- As there is more to community broadcasting than the broadcast itself, the many activities required to achieve the ends means that opportunities exist for acquiring knowledge in many areas behind the scenes as well.
- The reliance on volunteers to manage and administer the organization encourages these people to contribute in and understand areas that their life to date has not asked them to. Volunteers should be encouraged to co-operate and communicate with their peers in the organization to ensure continuity, cohesion and efficiency.
- Technological upgrades will benefit the station by continuing to provide the community with quality transmission.
- Opportunities should arise from the national surveys being carried out to assist promotion and sponsorship sales.

Threats to the future of our station (and community broadcasting) can arise from –

- Not maintaining the principles of serving the diverse needs of our community as required by our licence conditions i.e. falling under the control of special interests.
- A reliance on too few of the membership to contribute to the management, administration, fund-raising, promotion of the station. Attracting volunteers with ability and experience in the support areas our activities is an ever-present need.
- Technological advances costing more than the station is able to responsibly finance.
- The fear of transmission costs (rent for our tower space) being increased to market rates. This would impose severe financial pressure on our organization. Although the CBF does offer some grant relief in this area.
- The fear that sponsorship income will decrease. The competition for a share of the area's advertising budgets is intense, with four commercial radio stations, three television stations, two commercial narrowcast broadcasters, one other community radio station, one daily newspaper, four regular free newspapers and a new regional magazine all vying in this market. Some businesses have stated they only advertise on E-Bay.

If you require further information please contact me.

Yours faithfully

Diana Day  
President