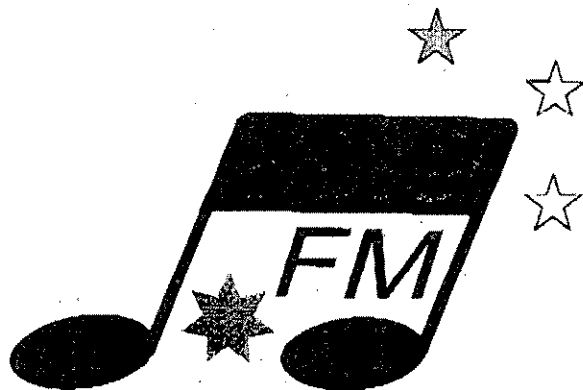


Submission No. 22



*Community Radio Coraki Association Inc.*

PO Box 90 CORAKI 2471

Phone: (02) 6683 2778

Request Line: (02) 6683 2889

Facsimile: (02) 6683 2799

Email: docmusic@radio889.org.au

Website: www.radio889.org.au

ABN: 23 407 529 272

## Richmond Valley Radio

The Secretary  
House Standing Committee on Communications, Information, Technology and The Arts  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

I write as Chairman of Community Radio Coraki Association Inc., a licensed community radio broadcaster, operating on the Far North Coast of NSW. We are 2RBR FM, known locally as 88.9 FM. Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the parliamentary inquiry into Community Broadcasting.

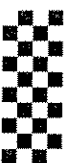
If the Committee were to invite myself or members of this association to appear at one of the Committee's hearings, we would relish the opportunity.

I believe I am well qualified to provide comment because I have been Chairman of Community Radio Coraki Association Inc. since inception, October 1995;

88.9 FM is extremely popular in the area circumscribed by Iluka - Casino - Lismore - Ballina - Evans Head - Iluka;

I spent most of my working life in the kindred television and film industries;

I have a passion for social justice.



The following facts and statistics may be of interest to the committee:

88.9 FM is a "generalist" station. Politically, we are very *grass roots*.

The 88.9 FM membership register shows more than 200 members.

88.9 FM's studio is more than 30 kilometres from the nearest population centres of Lismore, Casino and Ballina, which is why we have only 15 active members.

Nothing is broadcast that would offend people of the highest moral standing.

We are not members of the CBAA.

Every worker at 88.9 FM is a volunteer.

We have forged a strong alliance with an all-volunteer community newspaper - the Richmond River Sun. Together we are "partners in community media."

The station can broadcast 24/7 for a month without mains power.

We guarantee all emergency services direct or telephonic access to the station 24/7.

The duty station manager carries the station's satellite phone 24/7 for this purpose.

Every worker and every piece of essential equipment has a viable backup, including a transportable cyclone-proof studio.

Technologically, we are state-of-the-art.

88.9 FM's assets exceed \$400,000.

Of this amount, less than \$50,000 has been via government grants. The balance has been supplied by the community.

We should turnover \$180,000 this year. We are indebted to no-one.

Some of our expenses per month:

Power: \$700; Communications: \$800; Rent: \$450; Insurance \$240; Motor vehicles \$90;

99% of the volunteer labour time is supplied by people receiving government support income - pensioners and work-for-the-dole people. We couldn't possibly operate without this support. This would be the case at most regional stations.

We broadcast in mono to make our signal travel twice the distance. We also broadcast vertically polarised rather than vertically and horizontally for the same reason.

## The Scope & Role of Australian Community Broadcasting across broadcasting technologies:

### Scope

We are just average Aussies with good high school education and tertiary self-education. When I look at what we have achieved, the barriers we have overcome, and the technological heights to which we have ascended, I am sure that with good training, Australian community broadcasters are capable of using any broadcasting technology.

### Role

There are many different opinions about the role of community radio stations. There is the CBAA and the CBF who are fond of the phrase "diversity, access and equity". Many community stations each have their own opinion - and we are no exception. Our policy is "to serve and entertain with diversity, access, equity and trust".

For us there are other questions about our role. Are we in competition with the other local stations - community, national and commercial?

With a licence area population of only 12,000 people within the licence area of two high-powered commercial stations and three high-powered national stations, and within the "fortuitous reception area" of three other community stations, one of whom is a high-powered station, it's survival of the fittest.

And we have survived - well. We must compete.

The role of community broadcasting needs to be clearly defined by the legislators, not by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, nor by the Community Broadcasting Foundation.

Perhaps that definition will arise out of this inquiry into community broadcasting.

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

### Music

90% of the music played between 6am and 6pm is by request. When analysed, the request archives show that this community asks for 40% Australian music. The current obligatory level of Australian music is only 25%. An increase appears to us to be appropriate.

### Poetry

Bush poetry - modern and historic - is only 2% of requests, but it is entirely Australian.

### Anzac Day

Anzac Day is treated with great reverence on 88.9 FM. We run our own dawn service, complete with the Ode and Reveille for those who can't, or *won't* attend the services in our towns and villages. We play the music which befits the occasion because our listeners request it so.

Anzac Day brings us our greatest accolades. This was the best of all:

At 6:30 am on 25 April 2004, a lady with a North American accent rang and told our operator that she had returned only recently to Australia, after many years in the USA. In between the tears, she thanked us and said she was so moved by our piece on Vietnam, that she would ring her brother in the USA, and thank him for serving in Vietnam. No one had ever shown him gratitude.

An even more sobering incident occurred a year ago, but not on Anzac Day. It's worth reporting here, because it demonstrates the power of music and the responsibilities it creates for radio stations:

Late one Sunday afternoon, an ultra light fell into a cane field near the studio, killing both occupants. At 4:20 the following day morning, the husband of one the occupants left this very sad request for his departed wife: "I lost my wife yesterday afternoon. Please play Petula Clark's *the wedding song*. It was our wedding song. All I have now is our two little girls." We cried.

At the husband's request, we also supplied the music at her funeral.

There are many more similar incidences.

In the early days of our station, I had recognised the need to be careful with people who make requests for departed relatives. There are many of them. Music can have strong emotional influence on people. I wondered why and asked a psychologist.

She said: Peoples' strongest nostalgic links are created by music, second is poetry, and third is the spoken word - hence the emotion.

We have learnt that our listeners trust us with their minds, souls, and wallets. We have a big obligation to our community.

---

One of our more important policies concerns Indigenous people. Kooris - their own word - are part of 88.9 FM. Two of our 30 founding members are Kooris. We have forgone all the indigenous funding available, because to do so means specialist Koori programmes.

We believe that those sort of programmes underline any perceived differences between black and white people. Kooris enjoy the same music that we all do. It is our contribution to reconciliation.

An elderly Koori gentleman once told me that because the studio is adjacent to a bora ring - a place of much religious significance - "there is religious connection between 88.9 FM and us Blackfellas."

We had moved out of Coraki to Bora Ridge to escape the white trash in the village.

### Technological opportunities to expand community broadcasting networks:

Networking in community radio needs definition. When networking means one station supplying big chunks of programme to other stations as do the commercial and national stations, then one needs to consider the effect on the community. We are opposed to that sort of networking - it excludes local access. Witness the JJJ network. It is devoid of local input.

Emergencies such as flooding exposes the inadequacies of networks. The two local commercial stations (2LM & 2ZZZ) are reluctant, especially on weekends and overnight, to broadcast emergency information. Emergency services, such as the SES, are forced to ring 2SM Sydney and beg for coverage of an emergency.

Networking in the above sense flies in the face of the spirit of community broadcasting because it significantly reduces local focus and access.

However, when networking means the exchange of ideas between stations and personnel, networking is good.

The internet is the best and most economical method of networking. A good example is our 4.5 minute national hourly news service.

We access it via an ftp1 website in Melbourne at 15 minutes to the hour. It downloads in less than two minutes. We are very pleased with its accuracy, and our listeners love it. It is inexpensive - \$250 per month. Its great advantage over the cumbersome CBA satellite live news is that you can run our National News early or late - i.e. up to two minutes before or after the hour and no-one minds.

Timing out to the last second with live satellite news is fraught with difficulty and great anxiety, and often faulty.

---

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

### Opportunities:

Community radio is not about money. Community radio is about people. Of course money is certainly needed to broadcast, but it is only the means to the end.

Opportunities are not dependent on money. Even so, we recognise the monetary value of the piece of the spectrum which we use. The federal treasurer stated a few years ago "I believe that each community station's share of the spectrum is worth \$220,000 annually."

We also recognise that commercial stations pay hefty annual licence fees. This is probably the reason that government shackles community stations with low-powered licences and only five minutes of revenue-raising per hour. The CBF grant system is not the answer. The system is demeaning, very time consuming, frustrating and little help with revenue-raising.

What would help us is not funding from government, but a higher powered licence. More transmission power equals more listeners and therefore more advertising revenue. We would be totally self-sufficient.

An odd licence power situation exists in our market. 2NCR, the second oldest community station in Australia, is struggling to survive and has done so since Southern Cross University withdraw all funding several years ago.

However, it is licenced to broadcast at a power of 3000 watts - three times our licence power. We are reliably informed that it broadcasts at only 500 watts to minimise its power costs. We could work miracles with 3000 watts.

---

Lots of lateral thinking is done at 88.9 FM. This has created many opportunities to increase interaction with the community, and to increase revenue. We have marketed the station well.

For example - anyone who has seen the movie *The Blues Brothers* will recall the wonderful music, the tongue-in-cheek comedy and most importantly (for us), The Bluesmobile - a 1974 Dodge black and white Chicago ex-police car. During the film, the heroes attach a large public address speaker to the car, and harangue the public to advertise a concert.

Radio has nothing visual about it. We just had to have our own Bluesmobile. It's a very similar shaped Valiant, dressed up the same as the Dodge, but with a more sophisticated PA system. It's a hit wherever it travels, and has opened many doors for our sales manager. More importantly, it makes people smile.

---

The opportunities to become integral with the community, and therefore to be a worthwhile broadcaster are endless. We produce almost 800 community service announcements per annum. Our Public Liability insurance has been used to partly cover another community organisation's Australia Day celebrations.

---

We use a police radio scanner (with their blessing) to keep an ear on police and other emergency services news. Four of our active members are active members of the NSW RFS.

---

New ultra high frequency digital radio technology has put micro-wave links within financial reach of small stations. We have just engaged a local firm to install several links which will allow us broadcast high quality programmes from several places within our licence area.

The same links will also allow us to receive and transmit a new broadband internet service. Our previous broadband service and its fate is dealt with under the heading



of threats. The link also allows us to monitor our transmitter, its UPS, its backup batteries and its automatic mains-fail generator from the studio.

Again - the opportunities are endless if one thinks long enough.

Finally, what if the Federal Government were to increase the sponsorship announcement per hour from five minutes to six minutes. That would provide stations with a potential 20% revenue increase.

88.9 FM would rather a 20% increase in production workload than to continue begging from the Community Broadcasting Foundation.

### Threats:

Telstra. They are ruthless.

We once had an excellent radio broadband and telephone service. Several years ago, a not-for-profit organization, Norlink - a recipient of several million commonwealth dollars - offered us radio broadband.

Telstra had been unable to supply a viable ADSL broadband service, so we joined forces. We also signed up to Norlink's telephone service.

Telstra made life very difficult for Norlink. They squeezed them very hard for a long time. Telstra brought them to their knees. Norlink was forced out of the telephone business.

But that wasn't good enough for Telstra. Norlink is gasping for breath as Telstra continues to strangle them.

We are now back to a dead slow copper wire technology internet service, whilst we wait for the Telstra monolith to connect ISDN. Our new independent wireless broadband service is still several weeks away. The ISDN service will backup the wireless broadband service, just in case Telstra squeezes the life out of our new service.

Telstra still can't supply an ADSL service "because of excessive transmission losses" between our studio and the Coraki exchange. We are reliably informed that it's not the distance, but faulty fibreglass cable that is causing the excessive transmission losses. Telstra have forced us into ISDN which is twice the price of ADSL at a quarter of the speed because they have not properly maintained their infrastructure.



Are you aware that even though it offers significant line rental discounts to not-for-profits, Telstra's wholesale charges to other telcos prevents discounts to not-for-profit organizations? Now that we use Telstra telephone services, the difference for 88.9 FM, with seven phone lines, is a \$120 per month reduction.

## Other threats

Richmond River Broadcasters - 2LM and 2ZZZ - commenced a campaign against 88.9 FM and 2PAR - Ballina's community station in September 2005.

Richmond River Broadcasters (RRB) recorded both stations' breakfast programmes from 6am to 9am, each on two separate dates and made serious accusations that both stations had exceeded the 5 minute sponsorship announcement limit, and had broadcast advertisements on both of those days.

RRB, knowing that our programme logger holds sound files for only six weeks, made the complaints about us six weeks after each recording date, leaving us with no evidence to prove our innocence.

However, we have been able to prove that RRB, in an effort to incur the wrath of the regulator on 88.9 FM, manipulated the recordings which they sent to ACMA. It's a messy business, and is still unresolved.

I note that the regulator, in its correspondence to us refers to their "investigation into advertisements/sponsorship announcements in excess of five minutes." They should use the word *alleged* when writing about the complaint, otherwise we are guilty until we are able to prove our innocence.

We would of course make all correspondence in this matter available to the inquiry. We recently allied ourselves with 2PAR and took joint legal advice.

We note that ACMA found that 2PAR had breached the act when it broadcast sponsorship announcements in excess of 10 seconds and 13 seconds on 13 September 2005. 10 seconds excess where a 5 minute limit applies corresponds precisely to 62 kilometers per hour in a 60 K zone. The ACMA website lists all breaches by all stations.

We are very reliably informed that the manager of 2LM/2ZZZ has sworn to "continue the campaign until both stations lose their licence."

The Australian Performing Rights Association (APRA) and The Phonographic Performance Company of Australia Ltd (PPCA).

Both of these organizations continue to squeeze millions of dollars annually from community radio. The CBAA should have struck a better deal with these stooges for the record companies.

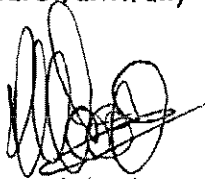
We have battled with these organizations for years, refusing to accede to the CBAA's generous offer made to APRA on behalf of its members. We have made them a fair offer, but they continue to write letters threatening us with court and cancellation of our broadcasting licence.

Amendments to copyright legislation could tame these organisations who already have too much money. Are you aware that according to the CBAA agreement, government grants are included in their calculation of tax?

---

Thanks again for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours faithfully



Roger Wood  
CHAIRMAN