



Submission 30

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology, and the Arts
House of Representatives
Parliament House
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Introduction.

3WAY-FM welcomes the setting up of this inquiry, and is pleased to tender the following submission.

3WAY-FM grew out of a broadly based community group that was formed in the 1980s called Community Radio Endeavour Warrnambool Inc (CREW) in an attempt to gain a licence and operate a station. The station, now known as 3WAY-FM, received its licence in 1990 and has operated continuously since then. Following submission in 2004 of form ABA66, our licence has been renewed for a further five years until September 2010.

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

3WAY is part of an extensive and dynamic community broadcasting sector, a sector that has undergone substantial growth and community support over its lifetime. 3WAY is a generalist local station, with a wide range of programs and musical styles. It is operated wholly by volunteers; it has no paid staff. Our membership of 125 includes individuals, businesses, other organisations and not-for-profit community groups. We have approximately 100 presenters, ranging in age from primary and secondary school students to octogenarians. Our elected Committee of Management is representative of our community of interest and has a fifty-fifty gender balance. Three of our four office bearers are female (President, Vice-President and Treasurer) All of the station's operations are carried out by volunteer co-ordinators and/or sub-committees.

We have positive relations with local government, and conduct regular in-studio interviews with the Mayor of the City of Warrnambool (every fortnight) and periodic telephone interviews with the mayors of neighbouring shires (Moyne and Corangamite) about local and district issues of the day and services provided by councils. We also interview council staff about specific topics on a regular basis.

Many local businesses and other organizations provide various forms of support to our operations.

In a typical year we would provide free entry-level training in the regulatory framework and program preparation and presentation to approximately 20 people, meaning we have trained several hundred people since gaining our licence. Several of those have moved on to employment in the commercial or National media. We also provide in-service training to members in the use of such technologies as sound editing software, recording and outside broadcasting equipment, computers, telephone interface equipment and use of the Internet.

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

Our four programming seasons coincide with the official seasons, providing an opportunity each 13 weeks for aspiring new presenters to be allocated program time after training. Our music programming includes popular, country, electronica, reggae, rock, blues, roots, Celtic, jazz, easy listening/nostalgia, musicals, classical, world, folk, dance, avant-garde, metal; with at least 25% being Australian composers and musicians, and strong exposure and promotion of musicians from the local area. This includes frequent interviews and live performance opportunities for local musicians, as well as airplay of their recordings, and promotion of their gigs.

We provide access to numerous individuals and groups in the local and district community including people with disabilities, senior citizens' groups, schools, TAFE, artists and arts groups, youth support groups, environmental groups, municipal councils, sporting bodies, churches and ethnic community groups.

We have 3 hours per week of Dutch language and two hours per week of German language programming, and are exploring ways of re-introducing an indigenous program as well as seeking to involve the recently arrived and growing Sudanese community.

Many not-for-profit community organizations in the district make use of our "Community Calendar," whereby free messages about their forthcoming events and fundraisers, meetings, performances and services are put to air several times a day.

In 1998 the local commercial AM station 3YB (operated by ACE Radio) discontinued live coverage of local Hampden League football matches in favour of taking a networked coverage of AFL matches. In response 3WAY took up the challenge and has broadcast local football successfully since 2000, winning some Victorian Country Football League media awards along the way. Through strenuous fundraising activities, we were able to extend our listening area so that all communities in the football league's area of interest could receive our signal. This involved the purchase and installation of a new transmitter and associated equipment on top of a nearby mountain. We have had enthusiastic feedback from listeners, including residents of retirement homes, dairy farmers and others unable to attend matches, as well as many spectators who listen in their cars while watching the play. This is an example of the way in which a community station is able to respond to locally perceived needs, and provide access to groups who otherwise have none.

Currently we broadcast locally produced programs live to air from 7 a.m. to midnight each day, (119 hrs per week) using the Community Radio Network programming via satellite over night (49 hrs per week). Our station has much more local content than any of the other stations in our area. The local ABC has a local/regionally flavoured early morning program, and the locally based commercial stations have some local content as well as networked content. RPH (Radio for the Print Handicapped) has an hour each weekday of live readings from local newspapers and other publications, while the balance of its programming is from networked sources.

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

We are relieved that the coming digital revolution is not seen as a replacement technology, as our location and resource base will probably mean we are a considerably long way from being able to make the change. We are fairly firmly rooted in the analogue mode into the immediate future.

Earlier in this submission, mention was made of our having expanded our listening area, largely in response to the wishes of our (then) potential football audience. The expansion was done through the Licence Area Plan process, and, as already mentioned, a major local effort to purchase and install the relevant hardware. Since that was completed we have discovered an unintended consequence. While our signal is now picked up successfully in areas where it was inaccessible in the past, (mainly to the North and East of Warrnambool) we find that there are sections of our traditional, core Warrnambool listening area where the quality of signal has deteriorated, probably through distance and/or "shadow" effects. (mainly West Warrnambool, Koroit and Port Fairy) This state of affairs was brought home to us dramatically when in a recent thunderstorm our new transmitter was temporarily disabled, and we once again broadcast from our older Warrnambool based transmitter as an interim measure. We were flooded with calls from the Warrnambool area and points West saying how much better the reception had become. The situation was reversed following repairs to the new transmitter when we received another flood of calls complaining about degradation of reception.

Our original submission to the (then) ABA's Licence Area Planning process was for maintenance of our Warrnambool based transmitter with provision for a repeater (or translator) on Mt Warrnambool, near Panmure, approximately 25 Km direct (East) from Warrnambool. However this request was not granted, and we were required to proceed with a single, primary transmitter site on the mountain. We are now in the process of negotiating with the relevant ACMA personnel for permission to operate simultaneously from the new transmitter and the older, Warrnambool based transmitter, preferably on the same frequency, but on a discrete one if that is what is necessary. We have widespread community and listener support for this approach, and are optimistic about receiving a favourable decision from the authority.

As mentioned above, we feel somewhat remote from becoming involved in digital radio. This applies also to podcasting and various forms of audio streaming, although these modes may emerge as more accessible in the future. As much of our programming is local, many of us feel these emerging technologies may not be immediately relevant. Having said that, we have received calls at football finals time from ex-locals now living interstate asking whether they can get our coverage on the Internet!

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

Financial considerations are probably our greatest constraint. Our annual turnover of about \$40,000 is derived from 4 main sources: Membership subscriptions, Fundraising activities, (including donations), sponsorship and grants from such bodies as the Community Broadcasting Foundation, local, State and/or Commonwealth sources, providing our submissions are successful. In a typical year successful CBF grants total about \$12,000, which equates to Federal Government support of about 30% of our overall income.

Among the major items of expenditure are insurances, equipment purchases and maintenance, rent, telephone (installation, line rental and call charges associated with our football coverage is a large item) and utilities.

As explained in the section above, we are very keen to enhance the quality of reception throughout our entire listening area, and this is the subject of ongoing representations to the authority regarding the possibility of simulcasting from two transmission points.

We are planning a move to networked in-studio computers equipped with appropriate play-out software, and possibly with broadband (ADSL) Internet capability as or if resources become available. Similarly, we would like to be in a position to obtain two CODECS to enable huge improvement to our outside broadcast capabilities, including football, festivals and other community events. We currently use an entry-level analogue system of telephone hybrids.

While our rented premises provide sufficient and suitable space, we would one day like to acquire our own premises. We hesitate to make necessary structural improvements to rented premises, and the landlord is naturally not as enthusiastic about such improvements as we are!

We see increasing interest among community members in becoming involved in the life of the station. This applies particularly to young people. Several of the local secondary colleges, at least one of the primary schools and the Institute of TAFE are taking steps towards exposing groups of students to training and applying for programs. We welcome the advent of additional training funding accessible via submission to the CBF, and will be exploring ways of tapping into this new resource.

We would be happy to provide any further information the committee may need, and we look forward with interest to the release of the report and recommendations.

Yours faithfully,

John G. MacInnes
Secretary
Committee of Management
3WAY-FM