



16 March 2006

Mr Anthony Overs  
Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Communications, IT and the Arts  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House Canberra

Dear Mr Overs,

**Re: Inquiry into Community Broadcasting**

Metro Screen is a screen resource organization that has had a long involvement in community television. Almost two decades ago, Metro Television (as Metro Screen was then known) was responsible for one of the first community television test broadcasts. Metro Screen welcomes the inquiry into community broadcasting and the opportunity to make this submission.

Metro Screen is now a partner with the University of Western Sydney and Slice TV in Television Sydney (TVS). TVS launched in November 2005 and is receiving positive feedback from Sydney viewers.

Community television is founded upon and governed by the principles of open access, diversity, localism and independence. It has survived and strengthened over the past decade despite facing an uncertain regulatory future and receiving no regular government funding. In an era of increasing concentration of media ownership, community television provides much-needed diversity. In the midst of increasing networking and syndication by commercial and national broadcasters, community television provides a platform for locally produced content focusing on local issues.

The community television sector has reached a critical stage in its development. The permanent licensing of community television has ensured that there exists considerable stability that has allowed CTV stations to enter into long-term financial arrangements. The growth and development of the sector in recent years means that the community television sector is ready and able to make the next step in its evolutionary journey: the transition to digital broadcasting.

The Government has a longstanding commitment to providing the community television sector with digital transmission, and doing so on a basis affordable to community television broadcasters. The community television sector welcomes the Government's consistent and longstanding commitment to providing free access to digital spectrum.

To ensure the sustainability of the community television sector, a 'must carry' obligation for continuous (ie 24 hour, 7-day-a-week) digital transmission of the CTV channels should be placed on an existing digital broadcaster. If this is not possible, one of the reserved digital television channels could be allocated (for datacasting or other new television services) with a must carry obligation for continuous digital transmission the CTV channels. In either scenario, carriage must provide sufficient digital transmission multiplex capacity to effect delivery of a community television service at a quality and coding system widely accepted as typical for digital television.

The future of community television requires stations to be transmitting on the digital platform within 12-24 months or we will face serious financial hardship due to the steady erosion of potential audiences. In addition, community television broadcasters must be permitted to simulcast in analogue and digital until the analogue switch-off date, set for 2010-2012.

The growth of subscription television also creates an issue for community television in the modern era, being as it is reliant on aggregating audiences in order to satisfy the requirements of sponsors. A "must carry" requirement should be placed on the subscription television providers to ensure that community television, like the other free-to-air broadcasters, has access to all television households.

We request that funding be provided to meet the digital transmission and distribution costs of community television broadcasters over an eight year period.

I would be pleased to be contacted should further information be required.

Yours sincerely,

Christina Alvarez  
General Manager