



ABORIGINAL RESOURCE & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES INC.

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

29 March 2006

Dear Sir/Madam,

Inquiry into Community Broadcasting - Submission

Introduction

Aboriginal Resource and Development Services (ARDS) is an Aboriginal controlled non-profit organisation based in the Northern Territory. For over 30 years ARDS has successfully provided community development/ community education services to benefit the Yolŋu (traditional Aboriginal) people of north-east Arnhem Land. ARDS uses the language of the Yolŋu people (*Yolŋu Matha* – as English is a fifth or sixth language for them) and draws on an understanding of their world-view and cultural knowledge base to ensure that our educational services are able to effectively meet the needs of the Yolŋu people.

ARDS holds a Temporary Community Broadcast Licence for AM radio frequencies in the Northern Territory. The locations of these frequencies are Darwin, and the others in north-east Arnhem Land; Nhulunbuy, Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island), Yathalamarra (located between the communities of Ramingining and Milingimbi) and also Gapuwiyak (Lake Evella).

The Yolŋu people of north-east Arnhem Land live across an area of some 37,000 square kilometres. There are 6 main communities varying in size from almost 2,000 people down to the smallest of about 200 people. There are also nearly 100 homeland centre villages spread across this region. Some are home to just one family and the largest is at times occupied by up to one hundred people. There are also 1,000 Yolŋu people and their descendants living in Darwin.

ARDS broadcasts our radio service (known as *Yolngu Radio*) service in Darwin and across north-east Arnhem Land. The broadcasts are predominantly in *Yolŋu Matha*. The service is an education and information service providing the Yolŋu people and is presented with a *Yolŋu-friendly* listening environment which includes traditional Yolŋu song lines, contemporary Yolŋu music of various genres and other indigenous music from around Australia and the world.

Yolngu Radio has enabled ARDS to take our thirty years of experience in community education and expand it in a dynamic way. Where as before, ARDS conducted our community education services one-to-one or in small groups, through *Yolngu Radio* we can now make this education available to the whole Yolŋu population simultaneously; no matter where they live.

Response to Terms of Reference

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

As ARDS have indicated, we broadcast to our members, the Yolŋu people north-east Arnhem Land. They are a distinct cultural group with specific interests, needs and requirements.

Community broadcasting has enabled ARDS to meet the needs of our members by sourcing licences within the Broadcast Service Band (BSB). For many disadvantaged communities or cultural groups, the opportunity to engage in mainstream media by use of such avenues as the Community Broadcasting regime is one that needs to remain available to allow the same opportunities to exist for all sectors of society in all forms of electronic media.

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

As already stated in our introduction, ARDS *Yolŋu Radio* is a community education and information service providing material in the language of the people. Whilst the service would fall in 'open narrowcast' licence type, it is the fact that ARDS transmissions can be received anywhere within our broadcast area on a cheap, easily accessible radio that makes the Community Broadcasting licence regime so useful and attractive to broadcasters such as ARDS.

To promote, encourage and nurture such diversity is a necessity in a multicultural society as we have in Australia. At the other end of the Community Broadcasting scale is the 'local community' sector which the major and city based networks are not able to meet the need of. Such a local community exists here in Nhulunbuy in north-east Arnhem Land where the local Community Broadcasting station meets the interests and needs of what is an isolated and remote community in many senses of the word. This too adds to the fabric of Australian society and offers diversity in the radio listening environment.

- Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks; and

As already stated, ARDS broadcasts to a north-east Arnhem Land audience that is spread over 37,000 square kilometres, and also to Darwin as well. This has required the establishment of a network of transmission sites across the region to ensure our service can be received by the Yolŋu people where they live. Working within the current legislative framework which requires the use of terrestrial broadcast transmission networks has meant that for ARDS, as a small community sector broadcaster, this has been a logistical feat of mammoth proportions to achieve.

While the terrestrial broadcast network works well along the eastern seaboard with its mountain range and in the major cities, such as Adelaide and Perth, in areas such as north-east Arnhem Land which have small populations scattered over large areas and virtually no mountain ranges to speak of, several transmission sites are required to cover an area that may be adequately serviced by one transmission site in the major centres. A very attractive and available alternative in such a situation as ours is a digital radio satellite system.

In researching methods of delivery for an analogue broadcast signal in this situation, ARDS became aware of a digital radio system that was established to meet needs in Africa and South America and Asia that are very similar to those in northern Australia.

The WorldSpace (www.worldspace.com) satellite-direct-to-radio system is able to cover large geographic areas (e.g. whole continents) from a sole transmission point. This immediately cuts down costs associated with the establishment, maintenance and upgrade of terrestrial systems, be they digital or analogue. Unlike current broadcast systems that rely on one frequency/channel per transmitter, a satellite system allows for multiple channels to be received on one receiver. It also allows the option of channels being set aside for subscriptions services as per other satellite services.

This satellite direct to radio system admirably suits the wide, sparsely populated areas that Australia has. With no need for terrestrial infrastructure, then the ongoing costs to provide a radio signal across Australia with *complete* coverage no matter where people are, comes at an achievable cost – especially for customers on the ground.

As well as the audio that can be heard on the radio receiver (a typical unit is pictured here),



which is at CD audio quality, the WorldSpace system allows an option for data to be passed by the radio to an attached personal computer. This then allows a one-way connection of data to the broadcast area so that a distance learning classroom can be established where students anywhere within the footprint of the satellite can, by using a radio and a personal computer can receive a lesson from a teacher and can carry out a conversation via a telephone conference with the teacher and other students. So even in the remotest part of our vast land, if this type of system is in place and a phone line is available then e-distance learning is a reality for the whole of the population in remote Australia.

Satellite direct to radio digital audio has a role to play for community broadcasting too. For those in a situation similar to ARDS – broadcasting over a massive geographical area – it provides a ‘one shot’ transmission system without the need for multiple transmission sites which are often in remote areas which compounds the expense of establishment and maintenance.

The added advantage for other community broadcasters and aspirants is that if there is any migration to satellite direct to radio broadcasting by the major commercial players, then spectrum within the BSB becomes available for community use. ARDS acknowledge that commercial radio broadcasters are loathe for such a move due to the high financial commitment already made by them to maintain their place in the analogue system.

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

Most of the opportunities and threats that ARDS would wish to comment on are those already outlined above.

As a relatively recent entrant to the community broadcasting regime, ARDS would like to stress that the opportunity for others to do likewise should be a priority for the ongoing Community Broadcasting licensing category.



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