

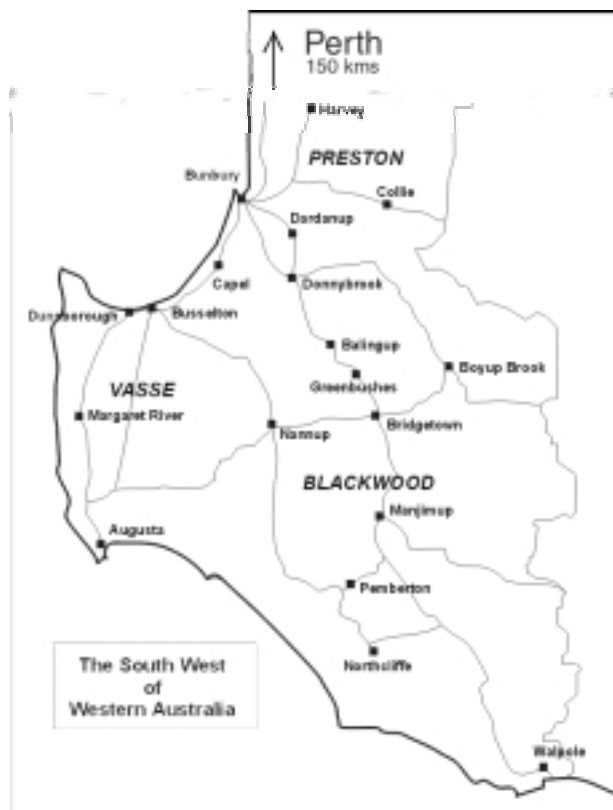
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES RADIO INDUSTRY INQUIRY

SUBMISSION

BACKGROUND

The Western Australian Department of Commerce and Trade has forwarded a submission on the status of radio services in regional Western Australia. Whilst the South West Development Commission concurs with this submission the following comments build

on references to the availability of ABC Radio National (RN) in the South West region of WA.



The South West Development Commission is one of nine regional development commissions in Western Australia. The Commission works closely with the Department of Commerce and Trade on a wide variety of regional development issues.

The South West region covers the twelve shires of Bunbury, Dardanup, Collie, Boyup Brook, Harvey, Bridgetown-Greenbushes, Donnybrook-Balingup, Manjimup, Capel, Busselton, Nannup and Augusta-Margaret River. The South West is the most rapidly growing region in the state with a growth rate of 3.7% (Perth 1.8%) and with a population of 123,000 has the largest population concentration of any region outside Perth.

COMMENTS

As mentioned in the Department of Commerce and Trade submission the South West does not receive ABC RN. Radio National was scheduled with the National Transmission Agency (NTA) for several years, to be installed in Busselton on the 1224 AM frequency. This installation did not proceed due to the privatization of the NTA.

People in the South West have for many years lobbied to receive Radio National and in the Boshe Report (1997) 'Communications Audit – The Needs of Regional Western

Australians', 72.7% of those surveyed stated it would be 'highly desirable' to receive the service.

The regional office of the ABC in Bunbury promotes Radio National on the front of their building as being available on 1224 AM, this is blatantly not the case. Nor would we argue is the service really 'national', for residents of the region Radio National is indeed a misnomer.

CONCLUSION

As shown in the Mansfield Report on the ABC (1996), regional and rural Australians rely heavily on ABC services for information which impacts on all aspects of their lives. For the people of the South West region of WA, the absence of ABC Radio National is a significant gap in access to high quality information across a range of subject areas not available through other radio services. To not have this service, freely accessed by most Australians, in a region of 123,000 people is completely unacceptable.

The Commission has raised this issue for the last 10 years with a succession of ABC CEOs, ABC Board Chairmen and the Federal Minister for Telecommunications and the Arts, Richard Alston. We welcome this inquiry and anticipate outcomes that will improve access for regional Australians, to radio services taken for granted in metropolitan areas.

Whilst this submission primarily focuses on the issue of Radio National, several communities in the South West region, namely Walpole, Northcliffe and Pemberton receive poor or no radio services. There will be many rural and remote communities in a similar situation and we would strongly recommend that improving radio services be included in the federal government's 'Black Spot' and SBS Retransmission programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That installation of a Radio National service in the South West region of WA be given high priority by the ABC and if necessary additional funds be allocated by the federal government to expedite this installation.
- That improved radio services be included in the Black Spot and SBS Retransmission programs.