

17 October 2000

C/o Myrtleford Caravan Park
Lewis Ave.
Myrtleford 3737

Mr Gordon Neil
A/g General Manager
Licensed Broadcasting
Dept. of Comm., IT and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
Canberra 2601

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts	
Submission No:	211
Date Received:	13/11/00
Secretary:	Jane Holmes

Dear Mr Neil

I would firstly like to thank you for your letter of October 10 regarding my request for the Federal Radio Industry Inquiry.

I commend your department for undertaking this, as shortcomings in the area of regional radio programming have, compared with metropolitan areas, existed for quite some time.

One of the principal problems in this area is the lack of – as my letters to ABC Triple J FM indicate – a station or stations which transmit a range of really diverse, quality selected music and other programs which provide a true alternative to that being provided by commercial stations. In particular, I place an emphasis on the type of material which is not normally heard at all on commercial stations.

This has of course partly come about by the lack of public access stations such as 3PBS (St Kilda) in Melbourne and others such as 3WRB (Western Suburbs radio). As such stations normally rely on public subscription, this is not surprising given the economic demographics found in areas such as North East Victoria.

Please find enclosed two letters which were sent to Triple J FM recently pointing out the deficiencies in the station's programming, and a request to the effect that this might, and needs to be changed. In the upper Ovens Valley area as well as many similar areas across the country, stations such as Triple J are the only 'alternative' station often received. Yet, the station's programming does not meet the criteria of the transmission of diverse, quality material, particularly during the daytime and early evening. The letters to the station's manager – particularly the second – should explain this in some detail.

In addition to programming which focuses on a highly diverse range of quality selected music, I would like to add an example of innovation which gave insight into personal selection, as experienced a few years ago probably on 3WRB.

Either this station, or a counterpart in Melbourne, had a program in which individuals could spend an hour or so playing selected tracks from their own record collection. In this particular case, I was not only singularly impressed by both the selection and the 'host' but observed that

the program differed so much from the usual highly formatted programming observed on commercial stations and on stations such as Triple J. I realise that not all listeners would have felt this way, however this is the case with virtually any personal selection. Such programming tends to allow the chance of listening to music which is, once again, not often heard on 'normal' radio.

A further consideration is the issue of station prepared documentaries or taped documentaries which have either been pre recorded by the station, or which may have been acquired from, in particular, overseas sources and which deal with material which is not normally - if ever - covered by commercial radio. If you will excuse the subject, I can recall hearing a documentary on what I believe may have been UFO sightings and which was probably aired by 3PBS when I was living in Melbourne several years ago. Unlike, for example, documentaries heard on a station such as Triple J, which seem to be largely live and of seemingly short duration, the types of documentaries I am trying to outline are detailed and may last an hour or so.

For a more exact specification of the type of programming that I have discussed in this letter, and which clearly needs to be provided to regional areas which currently do not have such transmitted material, one of the most appropriate moves would be to obtain a copy of the programming schedule from a number of public broadcasting stations such as 3PBS, in order to apply such a schedule to either an existing station(s) funded by the ABC, or to oversee a very similar schedule for new public broadcasting stations.

Before proceeding any further, you will have noticed that I have made virtually no comment on stations such as regional 3LO, and the ABC station operating out of Wodonga. There is no doubt that stations such as these have a quite wide listener base, however, they tend to be more oriented to regional 'talkback' subjects and often cover local topics such as agricultural agendas. Therefore, they do not cover the diverse range of, in particular, music programming that stations such as PBS and 3WRB cover.

Clearly therefore, there appear to be three principal options available to the Federal government to improve public broadcasting in regional radio.

Firstly, to oversee changes in the programming of an existing ABC run station which has a wide transmission coverage (such as Triple J) in order that the station meets diverse, quality programming needs

Second, to arrange for the creation of a completely new station or stations funded by the ABC which have a similar wide transmission coverage to regional Australia

Third, to ensure funding exists to create new, independently operated public broadcasting stations which meet the required programming specifications and which may also be partly funded by public subscription.

I trust this letter genuinely assists cover the needs of regional programming which are not being met either by commercial, Federally funded (ABC) or public subscription funded stations.

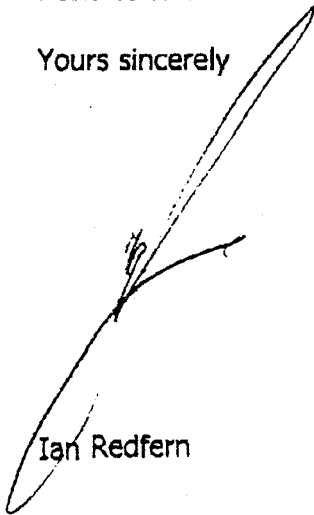
I look forward to both hearing the conclusions reached by this enquiry, and, very hopefully, positive and constructive results arising from it. I hope you will excuse me for stating this, but

the sooner I am able to avoid listening to some of the rubbish repetitively broadcast by Triple J and listen to some decent material, the better.

It was hoped that I might receive a second response from Mr Stuart Matchett – programming director of Triple J – so that this could be enclosed with this submission. This had not arrived by the time this letter was being prepared, so I will attempt to send it if it arrives within a short time of the required date.

Should you require any further clarification of the matters discussed in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Redfern'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'I' that extends upwards and to the right, crossing over the rest of the name. The name 'Ian Redfern' is written in a simple, sans-serif font directly below the signature.

Ian Redfern

7 September 2000

C/o Myrtleford Caravan Park
Lewis Ave.
Myrtleford 3737

The Programming Manager
Triple J FM
700 Harris St.
Ultimo 2007

Dear Sir

Earlier this year, I wrote to you over concern at the station's daytime programming, but regret I did not receive a reply. My point was over the concern that the station – which is one of the only 'alternative' stations receivable in regional areas - repeatedly plays commercial material. The material aired may be slightly different to some of the other well known commercial stations, but it is still, nevertheless, commercial material which is played quite – and in many cases excessively - repeatedly.

I would also like to point out that this perception is certainly not exclusive to myself, but has been voiced by several others I've recently spoken to.

The question is, considering that there are a considerable number of commercial stations already existing at present - both in Melbourne and Sydney – and also in regional areas where there are few if any real alternative stations existing – why JJJ FM with its area of transmission should also play quite commercial and repetitive material.

As I am unsure of the range of non commercial stations in Sydney, may I use the example of 3PBS in Melbourne. This truly alternative station plays a wide range of selected material ranging from electronic to contemporary folk to rockabilly – just to name a few of the types transmitted. The material is selected on the basis of the quality and diversity it offers.

I would therefore like to ask why JJJ, as a publicly funded FM station, should not play a similar range of quality alternative material rather than the commercial material played. Is it because the station gains royalties from playing this material in order to survive – royalties it would not gain if it played more esoteric material?

May I add that the current daytime programming material does not a good standard set for up and coming musicians. Much of it gives the distinct impression that the writers need to study music properly. Again the point is that there is so much material – both produced recently and in the previous forty years that could be used with so greater a value.

I would therefore be very grateful if you could possibly explain as to why the station plays much of the commercial the material that it does, and whether there is any possibility of JJJ FM becoming the alternative station it really should; very similar to 3PBS and the like.

I look very much forward to your prompt reply.

Yours sincerely

Ian Redfern

Adelaide 105.5fm • Adelaide Touch 95.9fm • Albany 97.7fm • Albany 97.7fm • Alice Springs 94.9fm • Ararat 101.1fm • Ballarat 107.1fm • Bega 100.1fm • Bendigo 90.3fm • Brisbane 107.7fm • Broken Hill 102.1fm • Bunbury 94.1fm • Cairns 107.5fm • Cairns North 97.1fm • Canberra 101.5fm • Coffs Harbour 91.5fm • Cootamundra 90.7fm • Darling Downs 104.1fm • Darwin 105.5fm • Derby 107.5fm • Devonport 101.1fm • Fremantle 102.1fm • Geelong 102.1fm • Gold Coast 102.1fm • Griffith 102.1fm • Hobart 102.1fm • Invercargill 102.1fm • Launceston 102.1fm • Mackay 99.5fm • Melbourne 102.1fm • Newcastle 102.1fm • Northam 98.1fm • Orange 101.9fm • Perth 99.3fm • Renmark 101.9fm • Rockhampton 104.7fm • Roxby Downs 101.1fm • Spencer Gulf 102.1fm • Sunshine Coast 89.5fm • Swan Hill 105.1fm • Sydney 105.3fm • Tamworth 102.1fm • Tasmania 102.1fm • Townsville 102.1fm • Ulmarra 102.1fm • Warrnambool 102.1fm • Wodonga 102.1fm • York 102.1fm

triple j

gpo box 9994
in your capital city

21 September 2000

Ian Redfern
C/- Myrtleford Caravan Park
Lewis Avenue
MYRTLEFORD VIC 3737

Dear Ian,

Thank you for your letter regarding music played on Triple J.

It would appear we did not receive the letter you sent earlier this year and I am unable to explain its non-arrival.

I should start by saying that I often have a problem knowing what people mean exactly when they call music "commercial" and "alternative". Having a look at the national charts I wonder why Powderfinger have the number one mainstream album and the single from it is number one on the alternative singles chart. Or why Red Hot Chili Peppers and Fuel are mainstream and Foo Fighters, Shihad and Richard Ashcroft are alternative.

That aside, I know what your overall point is but I don't agree that Triple J plays the same music as commercial radio. I listen to both and find the difference in music to be obvious. Maybe I'm listening at the wrong times or to the wrong stations.

Triple J has deliberately positioned itself between commercial radio and community stations like 3PBS. The reason for this is to try to provide greater variety of choice for radio listeners across the country. Also as many of us at Triple J (including myself) come from community radio we are unwilling to stray too much into their musical territory because these stations rely on listener subscriptions for their survival and if we started sounding like say, 3PBS then we might effect their financial viability while at the same time reducing the number of choices listeners have.

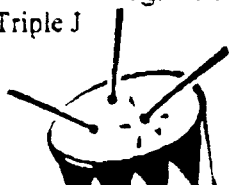
Just to allay your fears, Triple J receives no money for playing particular music. On the contrary, we pay quite large sums to the composers of the music we play through the Australian Performing Rights Association.

I hope this goes some way to explaining why we play what we play. I know that you and your friends would prefer it to be more like 3PBS but hey, this way you can switch between us to get what you like.

Yours sincerely,



Stuart Matchett
Network Program Director
Triple J



www.abc.net.au/triplej
access triple j - 1900 155 444

28 September 2000

C/o Myrtleford Caravan Park
Lewis Ave.
Myrtleford 3737

Mr Stuart Matchett
Network Program Director
Triple J FM
GPO Box 9994
Sydney 2000

Dear Stuart

I would like to thank you for your response of September 21 to my earlier letter of September which raised a number of questions in relation to the station's programming. You have made several notable comments on the station's programming format which I will now address. Whilst waiting for your response, a thought occurred to me which would well solve the problems existing.

Initially however, I need to comment on the points you have made concerning the definition of 'commercial' and 'alternative' programming material. It would probably be more accurate if I referred to the quality of the material rather than focus on the definition of whether the material is of either the categories mentioned. My letter - in retrospect - primarily concentrated on the station's daytime and early evening programming. For the record, I have been trying to think of applicable music which would quite rightly be classified as 'alternative'. In this respect it would be necessary for me to go back a few years; ironically this is at least partly as there is no real non commercial 'alternative' radio station operating in this area that I am aware of, so I haven't been able to keep up with truly recent works from the type of groups I am attempting to describe.

Much of the work by groups such as the Mahavishnu Orchestra comes to mind, as does a substantial proportion of the material from Todd Rundgren (with his group Utopia), a substantial proportion of Mike Oldfield's material, material from, in particular contemporary (and not so contemporary) local/international jazz/rock fusion groups or international contemporary jazz groups. At the moment, the only Australian alternative group that comes to mind is the Hungry Ghosts, although the two groups Ute and The Dirty Three would also apply. Again, this rather unfortunate inability to name and identify - in particular local groups falling into some of these categories - is due to there being no local source broadcasting such material that I know of. You may be somewhat critical of my selection here, but there are many groups in categories such as contemporary folk that would classify as well. I'm trying to recall the exact description, but I think PBS runs one slot called "continental drift" that plays substantially instrumental material in this category that, in more commercial stations, you would just not hear. Would it not be true to say that there is so much material in these general categories, that it might be possible for at least one other station to use some of it carefully without 'treading on the toes' of other alternative stations?

Much of the daytime/early evening material that Triple J broadcasts - as I pointed out in my last letter - possesses certain characteristics. Firstly, it is poorly written; in other words, it demonstrates a real lack of understanding of qualities such as harmonic structure and chordal juxtaposition. Secondly - and I believe you could not possibly dispute this - it is played quite repetitively. Not perhaps as repetitively as some other commercial stations, but nevertheless still repetitively. The particular selection of the most played tracks seems to exaggerate this. I

have noticed that over time, some of the material played (and the actual programming undertaken) has improved during periods. It has then lapsed back to what it was prior, as though a programmer(?) who possesses more initiative and ability has come and gone. It appears that this is due to one primary reason; the incoming material is simply new, not necessarily good or well selected, but new.

Putting aside whether the material is classified as commercial or alternative Stuart, the main problem is that a substantial proportion is simply - in general - not quality, really diverse music. A second problem is that some of the station's announcers give the impression of being either somewhat hyperactive, or shallow or both, particularly in relation to their equivalents at a station such as 3PBS. A curious departure also exists in one of the commercial stations in Melbourne, and that is the rather experienced and musically historically knowledgeable staff member Billy Purnell (Pinnell?). I believe I have misspelt his surname, but I would assume you are aware of him. This apparent 'hyperactivity' may be a consequence of the nature of working in a city station such as Triple J where certain targets have to be met. I'm not sure.

As another thought in relation to attempt classification - and please excuse me if I need to limit this to comparing Melbourne stations - if I was to classify 3PBS, 3RRR, and Triple J in the order of alternative to commercial (or 'alternative/commercial'), I would classify them in that order. I recently read an appraisal which placed the stations in much of that order; to point out I'm not the only one who feels this way.

My comment on the possibility of your station receiving royalties was one reason - I felt - which would explain why it plays some of the material it does. As you have confirmed, I suspected that this was not the case though. The comment about the possibility of your station crossing into and affecting subscriptions of some of the truly alternative stations is very valid. The main point here is, that areas such as the local north east area have no such stations that might be affected that I'm aware of, and I would naturally assume that there would be a substantial number of such regional areas around the country which would also fall into this category as they are simply not served by stations broadcasting diverse, quality and truly generally non commercial material.

The thought which occurred to me recently, after discussing the matter of another jazz oriented ABC station which I was informed apparently does not broadcast into this area, is the possibility that the ABC could establish a new station altogether which does play material of a diverse quality nature. I realise this would not be cheap to do, but it would mean that your station would not have to change its programming.

The question is, if the ABC is not able to afford this option, why did it establish Triple J which does not broadcast the type of material I have been focussing on when there are so many outlying areas which really need such programming?

May I finally again make one very important point; there is so much really worthwhile material in existence - much of which rarely ever gets transmitted - which has been produced over the last 40 years, that it would take a long time to play through much of this. As a consequence, as well as many radio listeners rarely ever getting a chance to hear it - whether it be recent material or the LP they heard briefly in 1968 but which has simply disappeared into time - I believe that with careful selection I could state again that there is generally enough material to 'share around' without one alternative station encroaching on another.

I trust this reply might open the way for new possibilities to be opened, and I look forward to your response. If you feel this letter could be answered by another staff member - perhaps in the general administrative area of ABC FM, I would be pleased for you to pass it on to them.

Looking very much forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely

Ian Redfern