



**THE CABINET OFFICE
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Submission 116

Mr A Overs
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Overs

The NSW Premier, the Hon. Morris Iemma MP, has received a letter from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, seeking the NSW Government's views on the issues raised in terms of reference for the Inquiry into Community Broadcasting.

Mr Iemma has asked me to provide the attached NSW Government submission to the Inquiry.

Should you have any queries regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Zoe de Saram on (02) 9228 4930.

Yours sincerely

Roger B Wilkins
Director-General

NSW GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY BROADCASTING

Introduction

The NSW Government welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Community Broadcasting.

Community broadcasting is an important element of the media.

It engages a diverse range of communities which are not a specific focus of the mainstream media.

It promotes the principles of access and participation, volunteerism, diversity, independence and localism.

It provides opportunities for training and technical experience for those wishing to enter the music, radio, television and film industries.

Rural and regional people, in particular, listen to community radio for access to local news and information, access to local voices and local personalities and for the opportunity to exchange views.

On the whole, community broadcasting is a key factor in the development of a sense of community spirit.

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

Community Radio

In NSW, there are over 100 community radio stations, with a significant number based in rural and regional areas.

These include Koori radio, based in Marrickville, and 12 ethnic community radio stations broadcasting in a number of languages. For example, 2000 FM broadcasts in 30 languages, 2RRR in 10 languages and 2RES in five languages.

The NSW Government, through the Community Relations Commission, has utilised the community broadcasting network to assist with informing and engaging ethnic communities on Government initiatives. For example:

- The Pacific Islander Youth Partnership program strongly depended on the local community radio network to engage the community in consultation with government; and
- The Drugs and Community Action Strategy utilises community radio to inform communities on actions being taken under the Strategy such as Drug Action Week. Some Community Drug Action Teams have acquired regular time slots on community radio to highlight their work under the Strategy.

The NSW Government is aware of the positive impact of community broadcasting on the development of local music culture, giving local musicians an opportunity of performing for broadcast, and providing airplay and promotional opportunities for local musicians. For example:

- 2MBSFM has a programming policy of broadcasting performances by local musicians. Consequently, a number of young performers have been provided with their first opportunity of performing for broadcast;
- FBi Radio has also provided airplay and promotional opportunities for local musicians since it was established three years ago;
- 2RES in Paddington is a sub-metropolitan station servicing the Eastern Suburbs which specialises in jazz. The station features leading jazz musicians as announcers and is a key media outlet for the jazz community;
- Koori radio plays a vital role in the music industry by presenting a major annual concert, *Yabun*, presenting showcase concerts, developing young talent through the *Young, Black and Deadly* program and developing emerging artists, in association with MusicNSW. Airplay on this station is a key focus for many Indigenous artists who record; and
- In regional NSW, stations such as BayFM in Byron Bay are actively engaged with the local community in promoting local artists and performances and building an active music culture.

The community broadcasting sector's commitment to local content in music is one of its greatest strengths.

The Australian Music Radio Airplay Project program is an excellent example of promoting Australian content by syndicating programming and providing assistance to musicians to more effectively engage with stations.

The sector's other strength is its diversity – the programming of all genres of music across all demographics.

Significantly, community broadcasting provides a training opportunity for people who wish to pursue a radio career.

Community Television

The development of community television is a welcome initiative in terms of further opportunities for exposure of local music and the arts generally.

Community television provides an additional distribution opportunity for short films which would normally only be seen on the festival circuit and training opportunities for those interested in developing a career in television production.

In NSW, there is only one permanent community television broadcast licence, TVS Channel 31. TVS is a not-for-profit company constituted of two member organisations – SLICE TV and ETC TV.

SLICE TV (Sydney Local Information Community Education Television) is the umbrella organisation for community groups, independent producers and individuals wishing to assist TVS.

ETC TV (Education Training Community Television Limited) focuses on education and training for television production, as well as developing innovative and relevant programs that highlight social and cultural issues. It involves the University of Western Sydney, where its broadcast operations centre is located, and Metro Screen, a not-for-profit media production and training organisation based in Paddington.

Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks

At least one permanent data-casting licence should be issued in at least one of the planned 7MHz spectrum allocations in each metropolitan and regional area for use by Government, community and indigenous groups.

The NSW Government has a strong commitment to provide communities throughout NSW with access to a wide range of information services, through a variety of access platforms. Data-casting using the digital television broadcasting medium has always been seen as an appropriate mechanism to provide a substantial number of Government's constituents, particularly those located in rural and regional NSW with cost effective access to Government information and services.

The NSW Government is undertaking a trial of a community information digital television service, *Channel NSW* (CNSW).

As a mass communication medium, television represents a unique opportunity for a direct, unmediated source of official government and public information.

CNSW is easy, personal and user-friendly. A dedicated channel is ideal for providing timely, live community information on, for example, transport, weather events and emergencies. CNSW has gained a large audience, with a current reach of over 250,000 households per month in Sydney. This is forecast to grow to over 1 million households by 2009.

Key milestones in the development of the service to date are as follows:

- Commonwealth grants NSW trial license (December 2003);
- Initial service launched by the Minister for Commerce (March 2004);
- Remote playout operations capability enabled (July 2004);
- Initial audiovisual capability tested (August 2004);
- Block scheduling capability (February 2005);
- First field audience research (October 2005); and
- Interactive TV services lab testing (MHP) (March 2006).

NSW Government agencies currently providing services through CNSW include the:

- Roads and Traffic Authority;
- NSW Health;
- Department of Education and Training;

- State Emergency Service, Rural Fire and Fire Brigades;
- Office of Industrial Relations, NSW Government Jobs Service;
- NSW Lotteries;
- Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, The Rocks, Tourism NSW;
- Art Gallery of NSW, State Records, Powerhouse Museum;
- Department of Environment and Conservation; and
- Sydney Water.

CNSW is a work in progress. Future plans include:

- Live event coverage, eg. Parliament question time;
- Automated whole-of-government announcements service; and
- Resource Show, a hybrid media program about the environment.

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

There are two main issues in respect of developing a diverse and robust network of community broadcaster - access and funding.

Regarding access, both television and radio are upgrading to digital mode in the near future. As set out above, the NSW Government view is that a permanent digital spectrum data-casting license should be available to government, Indigenous and community broadcasting.

Similarly, in opening digital technology to radio, it would be desirable for community broadcasters to have access to the digital spectrum.

Funding is a key determinant of opportunities for future development of community broadcasting, particularly in relation to the emergence of new technologies.

Rapid growth in the number of stations has led to increased competition for the limited Commonwealth Government funding which is distributed through the Community Broadcasting Foundation.

Concluding Comments

The NSW Government strongly supports the important role played by community broadcasters.

However, the State Government does not have regulatory or financial influence on the sector given that broadcasting is a Commonwealth responsibility.

There is limited scope for the NSW Government to become directly involved in this sector beyond the activities of agencies such as the Community Relations Commission and the Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation, and the potential community-based applications of the digital television network.