



THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT
HOUSE COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND THE
ARTS COMMITTEE
MEDIA RELEASE

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Are You Being Served?
The adequacy of radio services in regional Australia

'Radio services in regional Australia are in dire need of a tune up' said Mr Paul Neville, Chairman of the House of Representatives Communications Committee. 'Submissions from regional Australia strongly suggest that all is not right in the bush. Our inquiry will explore a range of issues and put the industry under the spotlight'.

The House Communications Committee will hold its first public hearing on Friday 8 December in Canberra. The witnesses for the day include the peak industry organisations, the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters (FARB), Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA), Australian Association of Independent Regional Radio Broadcasters (IRRB), and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). This will be the first of many public hearings to be held in all parts of Australia.

'Changes in the regulatory environment and developments in technology have led to substantial changes in the ownership of radio. One of the main developments has been the growth of commercial radio networks. The heart of this inquiry is on how these developments are affecting program content and quality in non-metropolitan Australia.'

'We want to discuss a range of issues with the peak industry organisations' said Mr Neville. 'A fundamental issue facing the inquiry is the impact of networking on the provision of local content. We have received an enormous amount of conflicting evidence on this issue and it is critical that we get to the bottom of it so we know exactly what is going on'.

'A key question of this inquiry is whether the Broadcasting Services Act has been successful, or whether changes need to be made. Also, we need to build up a picture of what regional radio should "look" like, how it should be regulated and what form that should take. Another important issue is ensuring community access to emergency information. The recent floods in NSW graphically highlighted the importance of providing accurate and immediate emergency information'.

'We will be asking the ABC to provide details on the possible impact of news and current affairs funding cuts and organisational changes on regional services, the extension of Parliamentary News Network (PNN) services to regional listeners and the reception difficulties faced by listeners in many parts of Australia. Everyone should have access to the national broadcaster'.

'This is a very challenging inquiry. There is a tension between industry viability and providing for local requirements. We need to find ways to ease this tension'.

'The level of ownership, the size of networks, the extent of networking and the degree of localism are seminal to the focus of the inquiry. We want to test the evidence, explore initiatives and ensure people in regional areas are provided with the best service possible'.

For comment, please contact Mr Paul Neville MP on 02 6277 4940 or 07 4152 0744.

For information, please contact Janet Holmes, Inquiry Secretary on 02 6277 4601, facsimile 02 6277 2067, or at janet.holmes.reps@aph.gov.au.

Public hearing program attached.