

Secretary:.....

House Committee on Communications Transport and the Arts

RECEIVED

27 OCT 2000

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT
AND THE ARTS

RADIO INDUSTRY INQUIRY

Submission

by

Western Australian Aboriginal Media Association (Aboriginal Corporation)

House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Communications,
Transport and the Arts

Submission No: 150

Date Received: 27/10/00

Secretary: Janet Holmes

This submission addresses in part the following Term of Reference:

The effect on individuals, families and small businesses in non-metropolitan Australia of networking of radio programming, particularly in relation to local news services, sport, community service announcements and other forms of local content.

The networking of radio programs via satellite to non-metropolitan areas has reduced employment and career opportunities in both the commercial and government funded national radio broadcasting sectors.

The commercial networks that supply programs to non-metropolitan areas broadcast material, including commercial advertising and community announcements, which are usually for a selective audience and are of no interest or benefit to all listeners at the same time because of their widely separate geographical locations and cultural differences.

The benefits of local news, community activities and a strong sense of localism generated by locally produced programs broadcast by local people, are not satisfied by non-local networked programming.

Despite its drawbacks satellite networking is considered a useful method of supplying a commercial or non-commercial radio service to those areas which are deemed not to have the population to make a local service viable.

However, there is a tried and proven method of supplying a radio service delivered by satellite to the smallest of communities at low cost and for the residents of those communities to include their own locally generated programs and information, at will.

I am referring to the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS), which was developed in 1987 to deliver radio and television services to remote communities.

The Productivity Commission In its Broadcasting Inquiry Report dated 3 March 2000 describes, in section 8.4, the functions of BRACS and its value to the communities it serves.

The Commission sums up the BRACS initiative as follows:

The scheme aimed to give remote communities access to radio and television services delivered by satellite. Further, it enabled communities to control the retransmission of satellite signals, and to broadcast their own programs for local reception. The stations operated under "limited licences" and were funded through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

Most limited licences were converted to community licences when the BSA was introduced. There are now over 100 permanently licensed Indigenous community television and radio stations and a further 40 Indigenous broadcasting groups aspiring for permanent community radio licences. These stations now comprise an extensive Indigenous broadcasting sector that produces and broadcasts a wide range of news, educational and entertaining programming.

A further development in 1997 saw the establishment of the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS), which was set up to provide a "bed" program to which stations can switch when they are not broadcasting their own local programs. The NIRS programs include coverage of special events and programs supplied by stations either "live" or pre-recorded.

The NIRS, funded for three years by the Community Broadcasting Foundation, has been able to help individual stations as well as itself to obtain revenue through sponsorships. Through its ability to attract sponsorship revenue and share the proceeds with its member radio stations the NIRS has developed into a benevolent, not for profit company, which will come to rely less on public grants.

The method of delivering the NIRS programs to the Indigenous network stations is described in Digital Dreaming, a National Review of Indigenous Media and Communications, commissioned by ATSIC and published in June 1999.

The Digital Dreaming Report suggests a "star" system which comprises a centralised network that involves program material being compiled into streams at a central hub, then distributed to receiving stations. This is precisely the method used by the NIRS.

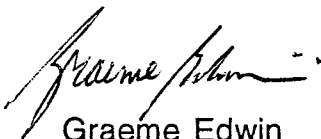
To conclude this initial submission I believe that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts should look closely at the way the Indigenous community has developed its broadcasting network and the contribution that the National Indigenous Radio Service has made and is continuing to make in the development of the Indigenous radio network.

In considering this submission regard should be given to the following:

1. The return of localism to non-metropolitan radio
2. The methods by which so much has been achieved in such a short time by the National Indigenous Radio Service
3. The cost effectiveness of those achievements
4. The potential to become self funding
5. The distribution of sponsorship revenue to network stations
6. The minimal NIRS staff levels

All should be considered as fine achievements and able to be emulated in helping the wider community to establish **local radio stations with programs of local interest, including news, sport and other community activities** with support from a State or National Satellite Radio Service Provider.

Signed on behalf of the Western Australian Aboriginal Media Association
(Aboriginal Corporation)



Graeme Edwin
Director

26 October 2000